

# CO-CREATING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH PHYSICAL LITERACY FOR ALL NEWCOMER CHILDREN AND YOUTH (CO-PLAY)

## STRATEGIC PLAN

2025-2030



Prepared By CO-PLAY Co-Directors:  
Dr. Matthew Kwan  
Dr. Gavin McCormack  
Jennifer Konopaki  
Kabir Hosein

[www.co-playnetwork.ca](http://www.co-playnetwork.ca)



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



# Message from Network Leadership



**Dr. Matthew Kwan**  
Tier 2 CRC, Brock University  
Nominated Principal Applicant  
& Co-Director of Research



**Ms. Jennifer Konopaki**  
VP Sport, WinSport  
Director of Operations



**Mr. Kabir Hosein**  
Director Strategic Initiatives, Sport  
for Life  
Director of Engagement



**Dr. Gavin McCormack**  
Community Health Sciences,  
University of Calgary  
Co-Director of Research

Newcomer children and youth arrive in Canada with remarkable resilience, strengths, and aspirations. As Co-Directors of the CO-PLAY Network, we have seen first-hand the creativity, leadership, and potential that young newcomers bring to their communities. Yet we understand the persistent structural, social, and environmental barriers that limit equitable access to opportunities that support healthy development, belonging, and long-term wellbeing.

Physical activity, sport, and play hold immense promise – not only for physical and mental health, but as powerful platforms for social connection, confidence, and community integration. Too often, however, these opportunities remain out of reach for families navigating settlement in a new country. CO-PLAY emerged from a shared belief that this inequity is not inevitable, and that meaningful change requires bringing the right people together around a common purpose.

The development of the CO-PLAY Network has been both powerful and deeply encouraging. Across regions, we have seen communities, researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and newcomer youth come together in ways that move beyond isolated programs toward collective action. This Network represents more than collaboration – it represents the critical foundation needed to implement evidence-based, culturally responsive programs and practices that can be sustained, scaled, and embedded within the systems that shape young newcomers' lives. Together, we are excited lead these efforts in laying the groundwork for inclusive, evidence-informed approaches that support newcomer children and youth not only to settle in Canada, but to truly belong and thrive.



## **CO-PLAY was established to address this growing national priority.**

The network was founded on the recognition that physical literacy extends far beyond sport participation or motor skill development. It is a foundational contributor to confidence, mental health, social connection, and meaningful participation in community life.

For newcomer children and youth, physical literacy is closely linked to settlement outcomes, including social inclusion, language development, identity formation, educational engagement, and pathways to employment and leadership.

As a national community–academic network, CO-PLAY brings together community organizations, researchers, policymakers, and newcomer youth to co-design, evaluate, and mobilize evidence-informed approaches that support wellbeing and belonging. Through long-standing partnerships and equity-centred practices, CO-PLAY works across sectors to strengthen community capacity, improve the inclusivity of programs and systems, and ensure that newcomer voices are embedded in decision-making and knowledge generation.



## **This Strategic Plan sets the direction for CO-PLAY from 2025 to 2030.**

Building on the foundations of the SSHRC Partnership Grant, the Plan positions CO-PLAY as a sustainable national platform for systems change. It aligns research, practice, and policy to advance physical literacy while supporting broader settlement, health, education, and community development goals.

Why this work matters is clear. When newcomer children and youth have equitable opportunities to move, play, and belong, the benefits extend well beyond individual health. Communities become more inclusive, social cohesion is strengthened, and settlement systems are better equipped to support long-term integration and wellbeing.

By embedding physical literacy within settlement and community-based systems, CO-PLAY contributes to a future where newcomer youth are not only supported during transition but empowered to thrive and lead in Canada.

# Executive Summary

The **CO-PLAY Network** is a national community–academic partnership focused on advancing equitable physical literacy development, wellbeing, and settlement outcomes for newcomer children and youth in Canada. While sport, recreation, and play offer powerful opportunities for health, social connection, and belonging, access to these experiences remains uneven for families navigating settlement. CO-PLAY was established to address this gap by strengthening community systems and embedding equity, cultural safety, and newcomer voice into programs, policies, and practice.



CO-PLAY is grounded in the understanding that physical literacy development extends beyond participation in sport and recreation. It is a foundational contributor to confidence, mental health, social inclusion, and meaningful engagement in community life. For newcomer children and youth, these experiences are closely linked to broader settlement outcomes, including language development, educational engagement, leadership opportunities, and pathways to employment and civic participation.

Building on the foundations of the SSHRC Partnership Grant, this Strategic Plan (2025–2030) sets out a clear and coordinated direction for CO-PLAY’s next phase of development. The Plan positions CO-PLAY as a national platform for systems change, aligning research, practice, and policy to support inclusive, evidence-informed approaches across sport, recreation, settlement, and community sectors. The Strategic Plan is organized around five interconnected strategic pillars that guide collective action across the Network:

1. Strengthening and sustaining a cohesive, high-trust national network;

2. Generating and sharing high-quality, community-engaged evidence;

3. Mobilizing knowledge to inform practice, policy, and public discourse;

4. Building a sustainable, future-ready infrastructure; and

5. Expanding settlement pathways through engagement in sport, recreation, and physical literacy.

Each pillar articulates a clear objective, a focused set of strategic actions, and measurable indicators of success. Together, they emphasize collaboration, co-design, managed growth, and accountability – while allowing hubs to remain responsive to local contexts and newcomer lived experiences.

Progress will be tracked through a network-level performance framework that prioritizes outcomes over activities and supports learning and adaptation over time. **Through this Strategic Plan, CO-PLAY commits to strengthening inclusive systems and supporting newcomer children and youth not only to settle in Canada, but to belong, participate, and thrive.**

# CO-PLAY VISION

**A Canada where newcomer children and youth thrive through movement, connection, and sense of belonging.**



# CO-PLAY MISSION

**To harness the strength of communities to empower newcomer children and youth to build physical literacy, foster meaningful connections, and achieve their full potential.**

# CO-PLAY Network Values

- Share resources, tools, and lessons learned with other members.
- Reach out proactively to check in with partners.
- Give credit and celebrate others' contributions.
- Prioritize collaboration over duplication or competition.

## Partnership



## Impact



- Ask: **“What difference is this making?”** before reporting outputs.
- Use data to show progress and share back with communities.
- Reflect as a team on what’s being learned, not just what’s being done.
- Celebrate both small wins and long-term outcomes.

# CO-PLAY Network Values

## Engagement



- Begin projects by asking newcomers what matters most to them.
- Involve youth and families in co-design and evaluation.
- Use plain language and accessible formats in communications.
- Respect and value cultural diversity in everyday interactions.

→ Ask “**what if**” and test new approaches, even if small.

→ Encourage colleagues to bring forward ideas without fear of judgment.

→ Reflect on what worked and adapt quickly.

→ Stay curious and open to learning from diverse sectors.

## Innovation



# About this plan

The **CO-PLAY Strategic Plan (2025–2030)** outlines a shared roadmap for advancing equitable physical literacy, wellbeing, and settlement outcomes for newcomer children and youth across Canada.



The Plan is structured around **five strategic pillars** that reflect CO-PLAY’s core purpose as a national community–academic network: strengthening community capacity; advancing co-designed research and evaluation; embedding equity and cultural safety in systems and practice; mobilizing knowledge for action; and supporting sustainable pathways for youth participation, leadership, and belonging.

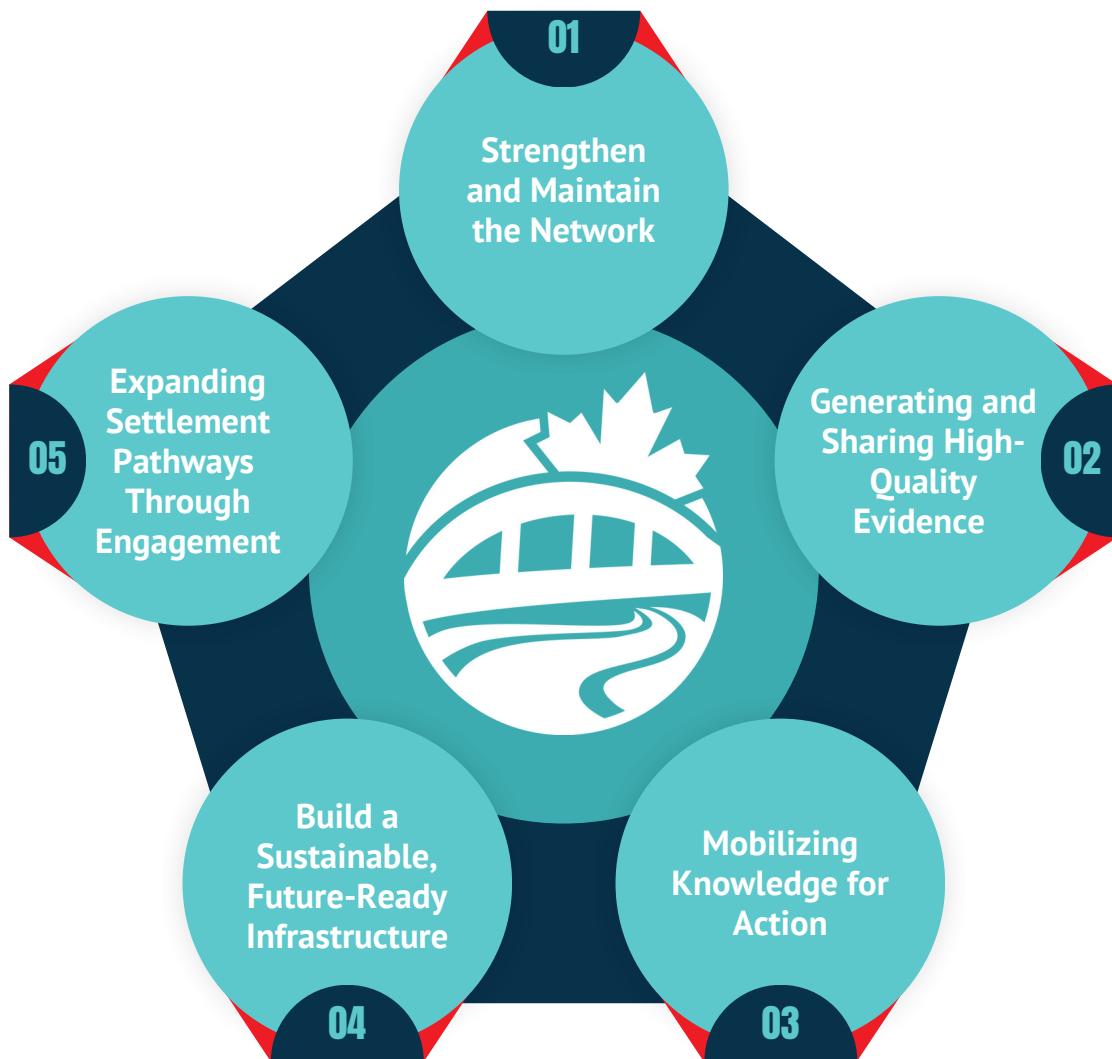
Together, these pillars guide how CO-PLAY works across sectors and regions to align research, practice, and policy in ways that are responsive to community priorities and newcomer lived experience. They emphasize collaboration, co-design, and implementation at scale—extending beyond sport and recreation to support broader settlement, health, education, and social participation goals.

Each pillar includes **clear objectives**, the **strategic actions** that support them, and **measurable indicators of success** to track progress, learning, and impact over time. Cross-cutting enablers – including governance, partnerships, equity and inclusion, youth engagement, and sustainable operations – support the implementation and long-term success of the Plan.

Through this framework, the CO-PLAY Strategic Plan provides a transparent, accountable, and adaptable approach to systems change – ensuring the Network remains responsive to emerging evidence, community needs, and opportunities to strengthen settlement and wellbeing outcomes for newcomer children and youth.

# CO-PLAY

## Strategic Pillars



# Pillar 1. Strengthen and Maintain the Network

## Strategic Objective:

Our objective is to build and sustain a cohesive, high-trust national network that advances newcomer children and youth wellbeing through collaboration, shared learning, and collective accountability.

## To achieve this objective, we will:

- Establish shared governance and co-leadership structures that reflect strong community-academic partnerships;
- Grow participation across sport, recreation, settlement, education, and municipal sectors in a deliberate, mission-aligned manner;
- Create regular structures for cross-hub planning, learning, and accountability;
- Develop and maintain digital network maps to support coordination, transparency, and strategic growth.



CO-PLAY's impact depends on the strength and quality of its relationships. As a distributed national network, success is not defined solely by growth, but by the depth of trust, clarity of roles, and alignment across hubs. This pillar provides the foundation for all other strategic priorities by ensuring the Network remains connected, intentional, and responsive to local contexts.

The actions outlined emphasize managed growth – expanding participation while protecting the relational and operational capacity of hubs. Shared and representative governance, regular communication, and common performance indicators enable partners to work collectively while retaining local autonomy.

Progress under this pillar will be reflected in sustained annual Network growth, strong partnership quality, and increased community capacity to deliver responsive programming for newcomer children and youth. When making decisions about partnerships, initiatives, or expansion, individuals should look to this pillar as a guide for prioritizing alignment, reciprocity, and long-term Network health.



# Pillar 2. Generating and Sharing High-Quality Evidence

## Strategic Objective:

Our objective is to generate rigorous, actionable evidence that informs inclusive practice, policy development, and systems change in newcomer settlement, physical literacy, and community wellbeing.

## To achieve this objective, we will:

- Implement flagship research projects that address shared Network priorities;
- Support co-developed hub-level research that responds to local needs while contributing to national learning;
- Apply a shared evaluation framework across community programs;
- Consistent communication to enable learning and timely translation into action;
- Prioritize culturally responsive and EDIA-informed research practices.



Evidence is the core engine that drives CO-PLAY's contribution to systems change. By embedding research and evaluation within community practice, the Network ensures that knowledge reflects lived experience and directly informs decision-making. This pillar reinforces CO-PLAY's commitment to evidence that is not only methodologically sound, but also applicable to community partners, ethical, and responsive to diverse newcomer experiences.



Flagship projects create coherence across hubs, while locally co-developed studies allow innovation and responsiveness to community priorities. Shared evaluation tools ensure that learning is cumulative rather than siloed, enabling partners to adapt programs and policies based on emerging insights.

Success under this pillar will be demonstrated through growth in co-developed research, increased program evaluation and adaptation, and clear pathways from evidence to action. Individuals should use this pillar to guide decisions about research focus, evaluation design, and data use – prioritizing relevance, equity, and impact over volume alone.

# Pillar 3. Mobilizing Knowledge for Action

## Strategic Objective:

Our objective is to translate evidence into accessible, credible, and impactful knowledge that informs practice, policy, and public discourse.



## To achieve this objective, we will:

- Produce high-quality knowledge mobilization products tailored to diverse audiences;
- Create meaningful opportunities for youth-led knowledge mobilization;
- Utilize the Newcomer Research Library as a platform for shared resources and learning;
- Convene regular learning, policy, and community engagement opportunities;
- Disseminate knowledge through community, media, academic, and practitioner channels.

Knowledge mobilization is central to CO-PLAY's role as a national convener and trusted source. Evidence achieves impact only when it is accessible, timely, and relevant to those shaping programs and policies. This pillar ensures that research generated through the Network is translated into forms and languages (e.g., French) that resonate with practitioners, policymakers, communities, and newcomer youth themselves.

By combining traditional and innovative dissemination approaches – including by centering youth and community voices – CO-PLAY strengthens the credibility and reach of its work. The national digital platform and regular convenings serve as anchors for shared learning and dialogue across sectors.

Progress under this pillar will be reflected in sustained growth of knowledge products, increasing engagement, and demonstrable policy and practice influence. When deciding how findings are shared or where to invest communication efforts, individuals should use this pillar to prioritize clarity, inclusivity, and strategic reach.



# Pillar 4. Building a Sustainable, Future-Ready Infrastructure

## Strategic Objective:

Our objective is to ensure CO-PLAY's long-term viability through strong governance, efficient systems, sustainable funding, and a national leadership pipeline.

## To achieve this objective, we will:

- Strengthen governance through clear operating procedures and succession planning;
- Build efficient project management systems that support coordination and accountability;
- Implement a national trainee and leadership development strategy;
- Grow partnerships aligned with long-term impact and system sustainability;
- Develop long-term partnerships with social enterprise and foundations that have key strategic alliances.



To function as a permanent national platform, CO-PLAY must move beyond reliance on time-limited grant funding. This pillar focuses on the organizational foundations that allow the Network to sustain impact, adapt to change, and steward partnerships responsibly over time. Strong governance and efficient systems reduce administrative burden and enable partners to focus on impact. Investment in trainees and emerging leaders ensures that capacity is built not only within the Network, but across broader sport, recreation, and settlement sectors.

**Success will be demonstrated through diversified funding, leadership continuity, and clear evidence of return on investment for newcomer children and youth. Individuals should look to this pillar when considering sustainability, staffing, governance decisions, and long-term commitments.**



# Pillar 5. Expanding Settlement Pathways Through Engagement

## Strategic Objective:

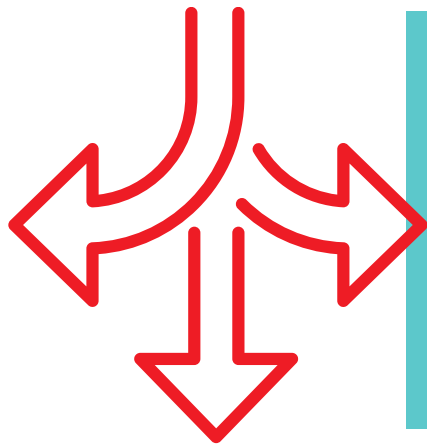
Our objective is to leverage sport, recreation, and physical literacy as intentional entry points to broader settlement pathways that support wellbeing, belonging, leadership, employment, and civic participation.



## To achieve this objective, we will:

- Support inclusive, culturally safe program design through co-design and shared learning;
- Promote policies and practices that improve newcomer access, representation, and retention;
- Embed leadership, volunteering, mentoring, and employment opportunities within hub initiatives;
- Strengthen environments that support belonging, mental health, and social connection;
- Align sport and recreation initiatives with broader settlement and municipal systems.

**CO-PLAY recognizes that sport and recreation are not endpoints, but platforms for broader settlement outcomes. This pillar explicitly operationalizes CO-PLAY's commitment to moving beyond participation toward meaningful social, economic, and civic inclusion for newcomer children and youth.**



**By embedding settlement pathways within programs and policies, the Network ensures that engagement in sport and recreation contributes to long-term wellbeing and opportunity. Collaboration with settlement and municipal partners strengthens alignment with wider systems of support.**

**Progress will be reflected in expanded inclusive programming, increased newcomer representation, and consistent articulation of settlement pathways across research and knowledge products. Individuals should use this pillar to guide decisions about program design, partnerships, and advocacy – ensuring that settlement outcomes remain central to CO-PLAY's work.**

# Strategic Pillar Alignment with Key Performance Indicators

Strategic Pillar	KPI Domain	Key Indicators	Performance Measures
Pillars 1 & 4: Network Strength & Building Sustainable Infrastructure	<b>Partnership Engagement &amp; Sustainability</b>	Active partners by hub and sector; Partner retention rates; New partnerships annually; Partner feedback on trust and collaboration	10–15% annual growth; High retention; Strong collaboration scores
Pillars 2, 3, & 5: Evidence Generation, Knowledge Mobilization, & Expanded Settlement Pathways	<b>Co-Developed Research Projects</b>	Number of co-developed projects; Geographic and thematic diversity; Proportion of EDIA-focused studies	4–7 projects Year 1; 12–15 projects by Year 5
	<b>Capacity Building &amp; Trainees</b>	Trainees engaged annually; Diversity of trainees; Leadership transitions	10 trainees Year 1; 30% annual growth
Pillars 2 & 4: Evidence Generation & Building Sustainable Infrastructure	<b>Program Adaptation &amp; Evaluation</b>	Evaluation framework adoption: Programs evaluated annually; Programs adapted using evidence	Capacity building Year 1; 25% program adaptation annually
Pillar 3: Knowledge Mobilization	<b>Knowledge Mobilization Outputs</b>	KMb products produced; Policy contributions; Event attendance and digital reach	8–10 products Year 1; 20% annual growth



## Contact Details:

Email: [info@co-playnetwork.ca](mailto:info@co-playnetwork.ca)

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