Capturing the Process:

An Examination of the New Brunswick Rural Youth Dialogue Project

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An Examination of the New Brunswick Rural Youth Dialogue Project

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Introduction

Capturing the Process: An Examination of the New Brunswick Rural Youth Dialogue Project was written as part of an evaluation of the New Brunswick Rural Youth Dialogue Project. The project, called *Unlocking Choices, Unlocking Minds: Rural Youth Take Action*, took place over the winter of 2001. *Capturing the Process* reflects on the challenges and successes of the project by examining two different aspects of its work:

• the dialogue events, from the perspectives of the planners and the participants
• the process of partners working horizontally, or across organizations

How can I use this document?
Capturing the Process can help community groups, youth, and organizations to:

• better understand the processes used by, and the successes and challenges experienced by, those involved in the New Brunswick Rural Youth Dialogue Project (These lessons may be helpful to other community groups or organizations planning to engage youth on a large scale.)
• reflect on their own capacity to effectively engage rural youth
• help those interested in working horizontally on a common initiative while juggling separate agendas

Section One:
What Was The New Brunswick
Rural Youth Dialogue Project?

The New Brunswick Rural Youth Dialogue Project was planned and carried out by the New Brunswick Advisory Council on Youth (NBACY) from October 2001 to March 2002. The NBACY – with funding and support from the Rural Secretariat, Justice Canada's Community Mobilization Program, and Health Canada's Population and Public Health Branch – held three regional consultations followed by a provincial dialogue event. The target audience was rural New Brunswick youth aged 15 to 24 years. The project's main objectives were

- to break down isolation among rural youth
- to promote a more global understanding of rural challenges and opportunities
- to help rural youth to redefine their relationship with their community
- to provide rural youth with an opportunity to initiate meaningful, capacity-building projects of practical benefit to them and to their own community
- to guide policy-makers in creating a more positive and supportive climate for young people living in rural New Brunswick
- to illustrate the link between youth engagement and ensuring the future sustainability of rural communities (i.e., moving beyond one-off, make-work projects toward an ethos of community capacity building)
- to raise the profile of the NBACY

Another key objective of this project was to model and examine how various federal and provincial partners could work together on such an initiative. In June 2002, Human Resources Development Canada and the New Brunswick Federal Council convened a meeting of federal partners working on youth issues in New Brunswick. Following presentations from the Rural Secretariat and Health Canada's Population and Public Health Branch (Atlantic regional office), the group recognized that although different departments approach work with youth with different objectives, many of the goals and desired outcomes – such as engaging youth and strengthening rural communities – are very similar. The group expressed interest in identifying and taking on a piece of work that would model a process that partners could use to work across departments and sectors on a common youth project. It was suggested that the federal departments in New Brunswick, led by the Rural Secretariat and the NBACY, would undertake a project to increase rural youth's capacity to carry out community-development work in their own community.

Partners in the project included the NBACY, the Rural Secretariat, Health Canada, and Justice Canada.

Section Two:
Why Focus On Rural Youth?

The Rural Secretariat, a division of Agriculture Canada, was created in response to the stated feeling among rural Canadians that they have been abandoned by the federal government (Charland, p. 15). Each province has a rural team, which consists of representatives of federal and provincial government departments, to address rural concerns specific to that province.

In March 2001, the Rural Team New Brunswick (RTNB) identified the needs of rural youth as a strategic priority for its work. Its draft document entitled *Rural Youth Strategy for the Rural Secretariat* focuses on the importance of including young people when decisions are made concerning their community. It states that "a young person who feels wanted by his or her community will certainly be more inclined to return after the formative period and accept a number of deficiencies in the quality of life" (Charland, p. 11).

Today's youth in rural New Brunswick face challenges very different from those of previous generations. Canada's population is aging. In New Brunswick, rural areas are already becoming "grey" at a faster pace than urban areas. Although the aging population means some positive opportunities for youth (such as increased job opportunities), this demographic shift will also present youth with some significant challenges in the coming years.

Over the next several decades, youth will bear an increasing responsibility for the economic productivity and viability of their community. This will be challenging. In recent years, rural communities in Atlantic Canada have been in decline. As economic opportunities disappear in rural areas, many youth leave in search of opportunities in more urban centres. Those youth who choose to remain behind shoulder a heavy burden of trying to keep their community viable in the face of ever dwindling opportunities, resources, and support. Those who leave are challenged with making the transition to adulthood away from home, removed from family and community support systems.

Although the responsibilities facing rural youth may be changing, the needs and developmental tasks of youth are not. Young people – regardless of where they live – will always need a solid foundation of self-esteem; self-confidence; coping skills; personal health practices; and positive relationships with their family, friends, and community (Campbell, p. 37). To reach their potential and meet the challenges that our changing society presents, youth need to feel fully included in society.

Governments, policy-makers, and communities are working to recognize and anticipate the impacts that these societal changes are having on the entire population. This will be key to developing healthy public policies to maximize population health, community economic development, and community social development. Equally important is the recognition that demographic, social,

and economic changes will have different consequences for youth than for adults. In order to develop youth-supportive policies, it will be essential to understand the distinct effects of these societal changes on youth. It is also critical that communities develop ways in which to make young people feel welcome and included and provide youth with ways in which to prepare themselves to take on active and meaningful roles in their community (Charland, p. 23).

Section Three:
Developing A Process

The First Steps

After identifying the needs of rural youth as a strategic priority, the RTNB held discussions with the NBACY to determine how the two groups could work together to identify and meet the needs of rural youth.

The NBACY is an organization for consultation and study that advises the government and brings before government and the public matters of interest and concern to young people in New Brunswick. It is composed of 13 New Brunswickers between the ages of 15 and 25, and reports directly to the Premier.

Seed money from the RTNB allowed the NBACY to hire a summer student to gather background information on demographics and social trends in New Brunswick. This background provided a starting point and guided the next steps in the planning process. An unexpected outcome was that this data-gathering phase also launched an increased public awareness of rural youth issues and triggered inquiries and follow-up calls to the NBACY. In this way, the NBACY became publicly positioned as the point of contact regarding matters affecting rural youth.

Engaging Youth:
Creating A Dialogue Model

Engaging youth in decision-making activities can address the needs of both communities and youth. Communities need to develop structures that make their youngest citizens feel welcome and included. Young people need to prepare themselves to play an active role in their community (Charland, p. 23). Getting youth involved needs to be seen as a long-term ambition, rather than something that can be achieved immediately.

Adults and youth do not often have opportunities in which to work together on important issues, and finding the right ways in which to engage youth in these processes can be challenging. While the Rural Secretariat had extensive experience in undertaking dialogue processes in rural Canada, the RTNB had limited experience consulting with youth, and it had some concerns:

- How could the RTNB ensure that the process would be youth developed and youth driven?
- What special measures would be needed to ensure that the process would be inclusive and would capture the input of marginalized youth?
- What could be done to encourage action and post-dialogue follow-up?
- How would continuity be built into the process, given the transient nature of youth leadership?

Potential benefits of engaging young people in decision-making processes include

- the development of new skills and support in applying these skills in new situations
- increased self-confidence and self-esteem
- increased confidence in one's ability to have a positive influence on one's own community
- increased community capacity (Wade, Lawton, and Stevenson, p. 3)

Concerns such as these should play an important role in designing the process to be used to engage youth.

In addition, there are other questions that a group should ask when planning to involve youth in a decision-making process:

• Whom do we want to involve?
• Who will set the agenda?
• What will be the benefits for all involved?
• What steps will we take to include disadvantaged or marginalized youth?
• Are the adults in this project ready to listen to and learn from young people?
• Are there skills that each group needs to learn prior to and while working together?
• How will we manage the expectations of both adults and youth?
  (Wade, Lawton, and Stevenson, p. 4)

Once these questions have been considered, a group can choose the most appropriate method of consultation, which may be

• group discussions or focus groups
• individual interviews
• questionnaires/surveys
• on-line communication
• longer-term structures (e.g., councils, forums, committees)
• interactive events
  (Hill, p. 18)

In the case of the Rural Youth Dialogue Project, an interactive event was chosen as the most appropriate way in which to engage rural youth in New Brunswick.

The Dialogue Design

As the concept of the Rural Youth Dialogue Project developed, the emerging plan entailed a three-phase process: regional pre-dialogue events to bring youth together in smaller groups to identify issues and concerns, a province-wide dialogue event to explore the common themes and to develop problem-

solving approaches, and post-dialogue funding of community-based, youth-driven projects aimed at implementing solutions.

Pre-dialogue sessions were held in Mactaquac (in English), Chipman (in English), and Bathurst (in French). These sessions were hosted by community agencies that have worked in their community to build community capacity to support and engage youth. The three pre-dialogues were geared to help youth participants flush out concerns about their respective community. The main purpose of the pre-dialogues was to identify common themes that could then be focused on more closely during the province-wide dialogue, held in Miramichi. More than 70 youth representing 11 communities attended the pre-dialogue sessions.

The Miramichi dialogue, held in March 2002, brought together rural New Brunswick youth to explore innovative and realistic responses to the issues they had identified during the pre-dialogue events. The themes and issues chosen for the Miramichi dialogue included racism, youth unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, violence and personal safety, and community involvement and inclusion.

During the Miramichi dialogue, eight youth action teams were formed - from Stanley, Burnt Church, the Acadian Peninsula, Nackawic, Saint-Quentin-Edmundston, Doaktown, Woodstock/Hartland, and Neguac. Three other communities - Hampton, Eel River Crossing and Bouctouche - also were represented. Each team was paired with a facilitator who had experience working with youth and in the community. Facilitators were to ensure that the youth could interact and be heard, supported, and kept on track.

The Rural Youth Dialogue Project was designed to be interactive and to engage youth in meaningful ways in their own community.

In a seminar on holding consultations with children and youth, Malcolm Hill of the University of Glasgow identified certain drawbacks and advantages of interactive events:

Advantages
• usually enjoyable
• enable a group to engage many youth at once
• cost effective

Drawbacks
• may be an unfair representation, depending on how the young people are recruited to the project
• resentment from those who do not take part
• not a good mechanism to engage shy or marginalized youth
• often not enough time for everyone to be involved
(Hill, p. 19)

As will be discussed in the following sections of this document, the Rural Youth Dialogue Project experienced many of these advantages and drawbacks.

Section Four:
Managing Multiple Expectations

When designing any process to engage youth in decision-making policies, planners may find that each partner comes to the process with a different set of expectations. It is difficult, if not impossible, to design a process that meets the expectations and needs of every partner. In the case of the Rural Youth Dialogue Project, even though there was a wide range of stakeholders, the dialogue planners did not always anticipate the wide variety of expectations to be encountered and the challenges that those expectations would bring to the success of the process.

NBACY Members
The expectations
Over the summer months of 2001, when NBACY staff were developing the Rural Youth Dialogue Project, a new slate of council members was appointed. In the fall of that year, they were still in the early stages of forming as a group. When the Rural Youth Dialogue Project was presented to the council members, they recognized an important opportunity to bring together rural youth – a hard-to-reach and statistically significant proportion of the province's youth population. They expected to gain insights into the issues, concerns, and challenges that these young people would identify. With follow-up funding expected from a number of federal government departments, it also appeared likely that some very good community-based, youth-driven project work could be achieved as a result of this process. The NBACY would emerge better informed and better able to speak to the provincial government on behalf of rural youth.

The realities
The outcomes of the Miramichi dialogue suggest that the NBACY's expectations were met. However, certain realities, and the process itself, made the project challenging for those involved in the planning.

Because the council members were new, and work on the Rural Youth Dialogue Project was already well under way when they joined, their inclusion in the planning process was minimal. Although staff at the NBACY had taken the lead on the task of planning and carrying out the project, council members themselves may not have felt adequately informed. As the Rural Youth Dialogue Project grew, it claimed significant staff energy and resources.

NBACY members were expected to act as facilitators at the Miramichi event. A training session for facilitators was held on the last Sunday of the school March break, but few council members participated. This may have been due to less-than-ideal timing during a holiday. A second training session was held for council members immediately before the Miramichi event began, but evaluations reveal that youth facilitators felt inadequately informed and ill-prepared for the process.

The adult educators who designed and would carry out the process felt that the procedure to be followed – one that would be flexible and could evolve and change as the event unfolded – was clear. However, the youth facilitators did not have a great deal of experience with group processes and could have used more information on how the process would work.

Four of the seven participating NBACY members responded to an electronic questionnaire sent to them in April 2003 as part of the Rural Youth Dialogue Project's evaluation. Their responses indicate that they felt "informed after the fact, rather than directly engaged" in the project's decision-making process. Some members found themselves identifying logistical concerns and process shortcomings that might have been identified beforehand if there had been greater information sharing and input sought from the members.

The lessons
- Youth should be involved in the design of the event. This helps to give a feeling of shared ownership among all partners.
- When designing a project or event, planners should not assume that methods that work well with adults will work equally well with youth.
- When the intent is to design and implement a truly youth-driven and youth-focused event, care must be taken to ensure that all aspects of design and implementation are youth driven and youth focused as well. This means ensuring that planning meetings and training sessions are scheduled at convenient times (preferably chosen by the youth), in convenient places, and in youth-friendly venues.

NBACY Staff
The expectations
When discussions were first held between the RTNB and the NBACY, the council's staff recognized a valuable opportunity to learn more about the province's rural youth population. An especially appealing aspect of

the work was the prospect of post-dialogue work in rural communities, with multiple federal government departments contributing funding to enable the implementation of community projects developed by the participating youth. The staff felt that these follow-up projects would have the potential to make positive contributions to rural communities and rural youth while also raising the profile of the NBACY.

In particular, the NBACY hoped that the dialogue process would result in the active engagement of youth in shaping the future of their community, increased community awareness of the active roles that youth can play in rural community development and sustainability, greater awareness of the realities faced by rural youth, more accurate data about rural youth demographics and quality of life, and increased community capacity to respond to the identified needs of rural youth.

The realities
The dialogue process was wide in scope and ambitious. The human resources that could be devoted to the project, on the other hand, were much more limited. This led to some challenges in communicating information and ensuring proper follow-up after the Miramichi event. Staff turnover in the months following the Miramichi dialogue resulted in a loss of momentum as well as difficulties with communication and the co-ordination of ongoing work.

The lessons
- Ensure that adequate human resources are devoted to the project.

- Keep thorough project records so that all information can easily be located and shared in the event of staff turnover.

Funding Partners

The expectations

Members of the RTNB approached the project with a desire to understand the needs, issues, and concerns of rural youth. They also expected to learn creative ways in which to support youth in developing and implementing their own responses to these challenges. They were committed to supporting a youth-centred and youth-driven process and expected that they would be able to deliver the financial resources to allow this to happen.

Beyond that generic agreement, different funding partners had different expectations and preoccupations. The Rural Secretariat anticipated that youth concerns would focus on education, the economy, and employment opportunities. The participating youth, however, were much more interested in social issues such as racism, stereotyping, lack of healthy recreational choices, substance abuse, and early sexual activity. The expectations of Health Canada and Justice Canada were more closely in line with the issues that the youth participants brought forward. The funding partners all expected that the dialogue process would result in time - and resource- limited projects of six to 12 months.

The realities

Although the ideas expressed by the participating youth were similar to the expectations of most of the funding partners, some of the ideas generated by the youth were on a grander scale than funders could execute. Some ideas would have been expensive and taken many months to implement.

It took much longer than expected to put funding in place to support the post-dialogue project-development phase.

The lessons

- Funding partners should clearly state their expectations, as well as what they expect to contribute, prior to entering into a partnership on a project.
- Funding partners need to be aware of the need for short turnaround time when working with youth. Any delay in moving from dialogue to action may be seen as a lack of will to act on what the youth have suggested. Funding partners should also clarify and co-ordinate, as much as possible, their funding timelines to ensure that funds are available for youth projects in a timely manner.
- When working with youth, timelines are critical. A year's delay can lead to apathy or to the loss of youth who have moved on to university, work, or other interests. In some cases, these delays will necessitate starting over from scratch.
- Youth should be given enough information to understand the nature of funding programs and what funding partners consider to be a "realistic" project.

Accompanying Adults And Pre-Dialogue Hosts

The expectations

Private transportation was used to bring youth participants to the pre-dialogue events. This resulted in a number of adults, who were only loosely involved in the process, being on-site during the day's activities. Their role was intended to be only to provide transportation.

The location of these events was determined, in part, by where reliable and enthusiastic hosts could be identified in a short amount of lead time. The hosts saw their role as assisting with participant recruitment and helping to ensure that local site logistics were well planned.

The realities

At the first pre-dialogue event, some of the accompanying adults joined (and in some cases took over) the youth discussions. At

subsequent events, they were encouraged to stay on the periphery and to hold their own informal discussions as observers. However, no process or framework had been planned to structure this; therefore, their discussions were not captured or reported.

The event planners had envisioned that the hosts would serve as mentors for the youth participants. However, that expectation was not communicated to the hosts, and they did not see mentoring as part of their role.

Recruiting and preparing youth delegates proved to be a greater challenge than anticipated. Tight timelines made it difficult to recruit an optimal number and diverse group of participants in time for the pre-dialogue events. Some delegates were added to the Miramichi dialogue, even though they had not participated in the pre-dialogue events. This created some disparity in the expectations, understanding of the purpose, and readiness to participate.

The lessons
• Communicate clearly the expectations of roles of all people involved in a process, no matter how small a role they are to play.
• Ensure enough time to recruit and prepare participants.

Section Five:
Rural Youth Dialogue Project Outcomes

Although there were challenges, the youth, NBACY members, adult hosts, staff, and funders all saw great value in the dialogue process. The project was effective in bringing together rural youth from across New Brunswick to share their experiences, issues, concerns, and hopes. The dialogue process provided a forum through which youth could recognize similarities as well as cultural and regional differences.

The Successes
Increased awareness of rural youth needs
The dialogue process provided partners with a wealth of new information about the needs and concerns of rural youth. As a result, the partners are now better positioned to advocate on behalf of New Brunswick's rural youth.

Public visibility of rural realities
Extensive media coverage of the Rural Youth Dialogue Project may have contributed to an increased public awareness of the realities and concerns of rural youth and the communities in which they live.

The Challenges
Ensuring diversity
Ensuring diversity had always been a key goal of the recruitment process. While there was diversity in terms of maturity level and socio-economic background, the majority of the participants were high-school-age students. Within this group were highly involved student leaders, marginalized students, students who were struggling to stay in school, and youth who had dropped out of school. There were also young adults who had graduated and who were enrolled in post-secondary education or employed in the workforce. Finally, there

was a small group of at-risk youth who were struggling with significant challenges such as substance abuse, sexual abuse, family breakdown, developmental delays, poverty, and racism.

The differences in the concerns and interests of this wide range of realities and ages were vast.

In the final analysis, the number of older, marginalized, or at-risk youth participants was so very small that it was a challenge for them to have a meaningful voice at the dialogue. In fact, the process may have further marginalized and silenced these youth.

Building viable working groups
In some cases, due to the difficulty in recruiting an optimal number of participants, youth were brought together from neighbouring communities. These youth were expected to be open and comfortable sharing with one another, but they had no shared context (such as attending the same high school). With age, life experiences, and interests greatly different, it was difficult for the groups to develop a shared commitment to any one course of action.

To make this process more viable in the future, it would be necessary to recruit a sufficient number of participants from each community to ensure the comfort of the participants and ease of follow-up.

A bigger challenge is to predict any group's ability to reach a consensus about, and make a solid commitment to, a plan of action to address an issue of common concern. In

future, it would be advisable to have a youth leader or adult mentor take responsibility for making arrangements for the group to meet, co-ordinating the tasks to be done, and keeping the work on target.

From projects to community capacity
It is easy to try to use short-term projects as solutions to social problems. It is more challenging, however, to develop a community's capacity to make real social change and to shift the focus of the work from problems and deficits to community strengths and assets. In the Rural Youth Dialogue Project, the ideas generated were sometimes too grand in scope. Capacity building needs to be included in this type of youth engagement process so that young people and their mentors better understand how to use their assets to work toward longer-term change.

Maintaining full participation among partners
Few members of the RTNB attended the pre-dialogue and dialogue events, even though the project developed out of a need identified by the RTNB.

It remains a challenge for partnering organizations to commit the necessary human resources to work horizontally, or across organizations. This work is often seen to be a secondary part of an employee's work and is often not included in the employee's work plan or performance evaluation. The success of the work often depends on the commitment of the individuals involved, as opposed to the commitment of the partnering organization. If those individuals are unable to continue participating, the entire partnership may fall apart.

Another significant challenge of sharing work across organizations is the need to negotiate the various policies, programs, and procedures in each organization.

Section Six:
Key Learnings

- **Define the age range and demographics to be included.**
Arriving at a common definition of the age range for youth projects is a challenge. Various agencies and services define the age range of "youth" differently. Additionally, one must consider how wide a range of age and demographics will impact a group's ability to bond. In order to ensure effective working groups, planners should consider how wide a range of age and background would be practical to try to encompass.

- **Address the special challenges of including marginalized youth.**
Considerable effort was made to reach youth who might not typically participate in such events. Although each gathering began with ice-breaker exercises, these types of activities are not typically enough to encourage the full comfort and participation of marginalized youth. The meeting facilitators reported that at each event, there was an initial period of awkwardness until the participants began to feel more at ease with one another. For marginalized youth, this discomfort was likely more pronounced and lasted longer. For some, the group interaction may have felt more isolating than affirming.

Special care needs to be taken not just to recruit youth who might not typically participate but also to consider how the process chosen will encourage participation or how the experience may further isolate and marginalize. Planners should also consider how the choice of venue may contribute to youth feeling marginalized.

- **Understand the transient nature of youth involvement.**
Most high-school students graduate, and many rural youth leave their home community for further education or employment. If developing youth-led, community-based projects is a goal, funding and other support must be available immediately. Otherwise, the core group of participants will be lost.

- **Expect some barriers when developing projects.**
During the dialogue event, some groups were able to develop detailed plans for a community project. Other groups were not able to reach a consensus about a project focus or felt that developing a project idea was not an urgent priority. For still others, project ideas were developed but there were not enough delegates in their geographic area to ensure follow-through. The lack of adult mentors in certain areas also reduced the likelihood of work continuing after the dialogue.

- **Consider the scale of the event when planning staffing and volunteer needs.**
In retrospect, the three-part design for the dialogue project was very ambitious and may have been beyond the scope of a small staff to carry out. Had adequate human resources been dedicated to the project, some of the communication and follow-up challenges might have been better met.

- **Plan an adequate amount of time to get the work done.**
The dialogue process was an ambitious one and likely needed more time to be developed than was allotted. Each phase would have benefited from less arduous scheduling.

More time was needed to recruit and prepare the youth participants and adult mentors, to fine-tune the dialogue design based on the actual delegate profile, and to ensure that facilitators were appropriately trained. Finally, more time was needed to plan for the post-dialogue phase and for partners to clarify their respective roles, funding capabilities, and timelines.

• **Ensure clear and ongoing communication with youth participants.**
The youth participants did not have a good understanding of how the dialogue process would unfold because clear descriptions of the three phases were not given to them. Ideally, the participants would have had a role in developing the process itself. When youth participate in all phases of a project (design, implementation, and evaluation), they typically feel a sense of ownership of the work and are more committed to working toward a successful outcome. At the minimum, sharing the objectives for each stage of the process would have given the youth a better sense of how the three phases fit together and of the importance of their own role in the overall project.

• **Clearly define the roles of all involved in the process.**
The project would have benefited from clearly articulated roles and expectations, with written "job" descriptions for youth facilitators, pre-dialogue site hosts, accompanying adults, chaperones, and adult mentors.

When organizing youth events such as this, it is also important to establish ground rules for the behaviour of the participants, including the expectation of full participation during the event itself, the expected behaviour during leisure times, and the roles and responsibilities of chaperones. Again, it would be ideal to develop these ground rules with the youth participants themselves. While few problems occurred during the dialogue event, it is important to have clear protocols in place in the event that difficulties do arise.

• **Funding departments must define and clarify what each means by "partnership."**
Good will is an important starting point for establishing partnerships. Without question, this project had the commitment and moral support of each of the participating federal government organizations. However, beyond shared good intentions, there are many practical details that must be worked out when entering into a partnership – details such as developing a work plan with well-defined success indicators and outcomes, deciding which department will take the lead on the work and which will be responsible for specific tasks, determining how any potential conflicts will be managed, and ensuring that all partners will share in timely and ongoing communication about the project.

It is also important to ensure that each partnering organization fully supports the work, as opposed to having the support of an individual departmental representative. Without full organized support for horizontal work, the project may be considered of secondary importance or seen as being someone's "pet project." The partnership may, therefore, be put in jeopardy if a representative from a partnering organization has to withdraw from the project.

Without clearly defined roles at the outset, questions may arise as to who "owns" the project and where decision-making and responsibility ultimately rest. A key part of successful community-development work is building and nurturing solid partnerships. Most funding partners involved in this project expect community groups applying for funding to demonstrate their ability to work in partnerships. Funding partners entering into horizontal partnerships should model that ability.

- **Ensure access to timely follow-up funding and support.**
One of the biggest challenges in carrying out the follow-up work on the dialogue project was the fact that funding programs are typically not youth friendly. Rural youth and their communities were expected to work with multiple funding strategies, all of which have their own application procedures and funding schedules. Each has its own limitations on the type of organization that can be funded, the amount of funding available, and the type of work that can be supported. As well, applicants to most funding programs must go through a rigorous review and approval process, which can sometimes take as long as three months.

A process for how the multiple funding strategies were to be co-ordinated and accessed should have been developed well before the start of the dialogue event. Funding partners working on this type of initiative may find that the inflexibility of their particular programs makes normal funding routines impractical. Funding partners need to work together to find creative ways in which to help youth access funds in a timely and youth-friendly manner.

Section Seven:
Advice To Groups Planning
Dialogue Processes With Youth

- **Work out partnership details at the beginning.**
Building solid partnerships is a process and takes a significant amount of time. Therefore, the dialogue process must include adequate time to establish good communication, trust, and flexibility among partners.

- **Assess the relative merits of the local and provincial dialogue components.**
Most community-development work occurs at the local level. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to plan for follow-up at that level rather than to invest the time and resources required for a more complicated provincial event. On the other hand, there may be value in bringing the local groups together at a later stage in the process, to share their successes and challenges.

- **Allow adequate time for planning.**
Ideally, planning for such a process should begin at least 8 to 12 months before the pre-dialogue events are scheduled to begin.

- **Build broad-based commitment.**
Develop a good understanding of the participating communities. Work with schools and community groups to ensure a good understanding of what the process is intended to achieve and what implications it has for youth, adults, and the community as a whole.

- **Make it a priority to recruit adult mentors in each of the participating communities.**
Take steps to ensure committed and ongoing adult support at the community level. Provide these individuals with training and opportunities for structured face-to-face interaction, and help them to form an ongoing discussion and support network to assist them in post-dialogue follow-up.

- **Be clear about the target group.**
Bear in mind that "rural" covers a wide spectrum, as does "youth." If the intention is to reach at-risk or marginalized youth, then they need to be the primary focus of the work. If these youth find themselves included, but in the minority, the experience can be painful for them. Consider carefully, too, how wide an age span is reasonable to include within a single event.

- **Keep the participants' demographics in mind when planning activities.**
The better you understand the participants, the better you will be able to design an effective program. The best way in which to do this would be to have youth themselves participate in designing the event. Be sensitive to cultural, socio-economic, age, gender, and other differences, and try to ensure that these differences are also reflected in the support people who participate in the process (e.g., adult mentors, chaperones).

- **Begin delegate recruitment early.**
Focus on a manageable number of communities, and concentrate on achieving critical mass in each one (i.e., enough committed participants to ensure viable post-dialogue youth action teams if post-dialogue projects are to be part of the plan).

- **Define clearly what all participants are expected to do.**

Offer "job" descriptions that explain the expected roles and responsibilities. Share information about the process with delegates as soon as possible so that they know what to expect.

- **Build the capacity to ensure meaningful community projects.**

There is often a tendency to leap to costly, ambitious, and large-scale projects (such as creating a youth centre) when smaller, incremental steps might play a better role in creating meaningful, lasting change. It is important to encourage initiative and creativity while not generating impractical and unachievable expectations. Understanding realistic and meaningful projects is a key part of community capacity building. Capacity building needs to take place before youth are asked to design community projects. Youth need to develop skills to research, develop, manage, sustain, and evaluate a community project. Involving them in all aspects of the dialogue project is one way in which to help develop these skills.

- **For a large provincial event, hire trained facilitators, recorders, and security people.**

Skilled people are needed to keep the process moving and to maintain accurate written records of group discussions. Ideally, these people should be skilled in working with youth. Safety issues are better addressed by professional staff than by volunteers who are multi-tasking.

- **A hotel may not be the most appropriate venue.**

Low-cost retreat or recreational facilities may be more suitable and more conducive to the focus of dialogue events. Hotel settings are often more expensive and more difficult to control and are not necessarily youth-friendly venues.

- **Ensure that the details of post-dialogue project funding and staff support are finalized well in advance.**

Funding should be committed, the application process should be fully developed, proposal-evaluation criteria should be established, application forms should be ready, and the procedure and timeline for processing applications should be established well before the dialogue process begins.

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Notes