



Atlantic Provinces Community
College Consortium

Consortium des collèges
communautaires des
provinces de l'Atlantique

Atlantic Provinces Community College Consortium (APCCC)

Roundtable on Improving Competitiveness and Productivity In Atlantic Canada

Appendix I – Project Methodology

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Appendix I – Project Methodology

The Project Methodology

Significant advance work was undertaken to ensure that participants were provided with adequate background information in advance of the roundtable to ensure that discussions stemming from the roundtable session would yield relevant project ideas. In order to ensure the full engagement of college staff, partners and observers leading up to the roundtable, the project methodology included the following steps:

Literature review

Approximately fifty studies, strategies and reports were reviewed to establish a base of issues affecting competitiveness and productivity within the five areas of interest outlined above. An enhanced version of the Literature Review including a complete list of the documents surveyed is available in Appendix IV in this report.

Internet searches and references from participants helped to develop the Literature Review list and included provincial, regional and national studies and discussion papers on immigration, literacy, innovation, aboriginal issues and demographics. Relevant background documents from various conferences and reports on education trends and education/training challenges affecting these areas of interest were also reviewed.

The review focused on the definition of key issues. The issues were inventoried by the consulting team who then assembled a list of apparent opportunities for the community college system. Through discussion with the Steering Committee and others, an initial list of project ideas was generated.

The Literature Review was circulated to roundtable invitees and others who were potential key informants - people with special knowledge of the issues, either because they were active in the area or had studied it. Key informants were asked to react to information outlined in the Literature Review to further refine the materials to be used as context for the roundtable.

Key informant interviews

After the Literature Review was circulated, key informant interviews were conducted with many observers from both inside and outside the college system. Some of those interviewed also attended the roundtable. The initial list of key informants was developed in concert with the Steering Committee. Additionally, those interviewed were asked for references to other people they felt had useful information or a useful perspective on the issues. People interviewed by telephone included staff at ACOA (headquarters and all four provinces), Industry Canada, Service Canada, the Atlantic Provinces Chambers of Commerce, the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training, and staff from various provincial departments.

The interviews captured the general views of key stakeholders and their reactions to the information outlined in the Literature Review. Interviewees were briefed on the five areas of interest and asked to give their views on an appropriate role for the community college system in addressing the challenges of competitiveness and productivity. They provided helpful opinions on issues related to community college opportunities, mandates and partnerships. Their input and the results of field visits (Step 3 below) are recorded in the Roundtable Backgrounder also included in this report as Appendix III.

Field visits to the four member colleges

The four community colleges were visited during September 2005 to introduce the project, review the content of the Literature Review, clarify ideas and discuss project opportunities at the college level. The consultant sought to understand actual projects that were underway at the college level. Staff provided opinions on the five areas of interest, the priorities within the five areas, and on specific project ideas.

At Holland College, a PowerPoint presentation was made to a staff group to review the contents of the Literature Review. The staff suggested that considerable skills and knowledge were present at the college with reference to demographics, literacy, and PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition). Various projects at Holland College have focused on literacy and under-employment. The demographics challenge is a big one for PEI as the province is forecasted to be at a crisis point regarding available workers by 2008. This demographics issue, along with issues of under-employment and literacy are therefore of high interest. These issues can be integrated under a theme called “engagement” research which includes consideration of the following issues:

- How to get illiterate and under-employed to self identify?
- How to get to youth before they drop out?
- How to create a culture of engagement?
- How to engage employers on broad issues regarding immigrants and the under-employed?

Holland College has done initial development work which could be used as a departure point for projects that focus broadly on issues of under employment. The college feels that innovation projects in specific sectors also have potential for pan-Atlantic collaboration among APCCC members.

At the New Brunswick Community College, a series of meetings was arranged with college staff and provincial government representatives from aligned departments. Literacy in New Brunswick is handled by an aligned department (Training and Employment Development) which operates training programs. In meetings with the provincial partner departments, there was considerable interest in immigration issues. The government perceives that in the context services to immigrants there is a gap defined as upgrading and bridging training, beyond the settlement services offered by various non profit organizations. These programs could be on the job training and designed to speed up entry at the professional and trade level, perhaps increasing the chance an immigrant would stay in Atlantic Canada.

The New Brunswick Community College is challenged to grow significantly - it anticipates an 80% increase in demand for graduates by 2011. Upgrading of skills in existing sectors (e.g., manufacturing) is an area of interest. The marketing of the community college system is also a concern. How do we introduce the community as a whole to the opportunities that the community college system provides?

At the Nova Scotia Community College, the Literature Review was reviewed and the importance of the five areas for action for Nova Scotia discussed. The seasonal worker issue is less significant in Nova Scotia than in PEI and Newfoundland and Labrador, but demographic shifts are a major challenge because rural Nova Scotia is losing population as Halifax grows. One key area of interest at the Nova Scotia Community College is applied research. It is believed that research activity at the college level is closer to the true definition of innovation research than research carried out at the university level. With reference to the project list outlined in the Literature Review, there was interest in innovations that could be applied to training *existing workers* and in research related to engaging the under-educated in programs and services that would improve their opportunities to earn a good living and to be more productive citizens.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, interviews took place with administration, program development and research staff. The College of the North Atlantic has a specific mandate to conduct applied research and does so under its Office of Applied Research. Innovation and development is a “strategic direction” under the college’s strategic plan providing context for applied research projects in Newfoundland and Labrador. Aboriginal issues are of considerable concern to the college as fully 63% of the population of the

Labrador campus is aboriginal. Staff members stated that seasonal worker issues, aboriginal issues and literacy issues are all linked in the Newfoundland and Labrador experience. For this reason, research into “engagement” issues is a high priority. There is active research work now underway at the College of the North Atlantic in alternative energy and geomatics.

Creation of the Roundtable Backgrounder

This document consolidated the input gathered from telephone and field trip interviews with key informants. It presented a summary of opportunities, mandates, and partner issues as seen by those interviewed. It provided a working list of criteria for the selection of projects and a refined list of project ideas based on the input of the more than twenty-five representatives from the four colleges, ACOA, Industry Canada, Service Canada and various provincial government departments. It was developed to serve as a departure point for discussion at the roundtable. The document was circulated to all invited participants and other key informants who did not plan to attend the roundtable. An enhanced version of this document comprising of its key themes can be found in Appendix III.

The Roundtable

The roundtable gathered participants from provincial and federal departments and agencies, and the four colleges, providing them with a valuable networking opportunity. Presentations and breakout sessions were used to focus discussion and manage input. The facilitator presented the highlights of the project to date via a PowerPoint presentation and then led a high level discussion of the competitiveness and productivity challenge with participants. Smaller teams were formed to define areas of focus and projects that had the potential for impact on the issues and for collaboration across Atlantic Canada.