



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 III – Roundtable Backgrounder**

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## Introduction

This document contains information that informed the second in a series of background resources circulated to participants in advance of the Atlantic Provinces Community College Consortium (APCCC) Roundtable on Competitiveness and Productivity in Atlantic Canada that was held in October, 2005 in Memramcook, New Brunswick. The original background resource was intended to compliment the first resource in the series – a Literature Review (see Appendix IV) – and was specifically designed by the consulting team to trigger ideas in participants and other key observers from both within and outside of the Atlantic community college system so as to better prepare participants for the Roundtable discussions. This document enhances the original background resource by adding an introduction section and reorganizing key content sections so as to better supplement the main Roundtable report, which is intended to support a broader audience.

### ***The Issue: Competitiveness and Productivity in Atlantic Canada***

To continue evolving their role in social and economic development, colleges must understand and embrace the new and emerging realities facing Atlantic Canadians and seek innovative responses to ensure the region remains competitive and productivity levels are high. With this backdrop, the Atlantic Provinces Community College Consortium (APCCC), a mechanism for enhanced interprovincial collaboration and cooperation among the Atlantic public community colleges (see Executive Summary, main report for a complete list of APCCC members), recognized that there were a number of issues that impacted competitiveness and productivity in the region where colleges had the potential to make a positive difference. As such, the APCCC entered into discussions with the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) to explore how the agencies' complementary mandates could be combined to identify practical approaches to improving Atlantic Canada's economy.

### ***Key Action Areas***

To launch this collective effort, the APCCC received funding from ACOA to host a Roundtable. At the outset it was decided to focus the Roundtable on five areas of current concern to a broad range of partners working on economic development issues in Atlantic Canada. The intent was to define projects that could impact some or all of these areas:

- **Literacy / Under-Education;**
- **Aboriginal Needs;**
- **Seasonal Workers / Demographic Changes;**
- **Immigration Needs and Constraints;**
- **Applied Research / Innovation; Technology Adaptation / Adoption; and Commercialization.**

### ***Development of the Roundtable Backgrounder***

In preparation for the Roundtable, interviews were conducted by the consultant with over 25 individuals from the following key stakeholder organizations: the four Atlantic community colleges, 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 initial list of key informants was developed in concert with the Steering Committee for this project, which included the Executive Director of the APCCC and senior staff members of the four Atlantic public community colleges.

Interviewees were briefed on the five areas of interest and the findings from the Literature Review. They were asked to give their views on an appropriate role for the community college system in addressing the challenges of competitiveness and productivity and provided helpful opinions on issues related to community college opportunities, mandates and partnerships. As a result of their input, a specific list of project ideas was generated that appear to be consistent with APCCC member mandates and impact some elements of the five areas of concern. This list, along with the main themes stemming from the key information interviews, formed the content of the Roundtable Backgrounder, which was used as the departure point for discussions at the Roundtable event.

The intent of the Roundtable Backgrounder was to assist participants in moving quickly to the discussion of specific, relevant and practical initiatives which can be supported by the mandates of the APCCC members. Recognizing that the purpose of this document was not to provide a definitive review of the issues identified but rather to stimulate discussion and support the generation of ideas, participants whose input has helped inform this document and other interested stakeholders are encouraged to connect with Roundtable participants (See Appendix II for a complete participant list including contact information) to identify opportunities for further discussion and action on the issues and potential projects identified at the Roundtable.

## **Roundtable Participants**

The participants at the two-day Roundtable session included a solid cross-section of Atlantic Canada Community College staff and members of provincial and federal governments, departments and agencies, including policy and program experts who helped define a practical role for APCCC and its members within the topics explored. (See Appendix II for a complete list of participants).

The Community College system is one of a wide range of stakeholders with an active interest in the five key action areas identified; however, it cannot implement project ideas in isolation. Key observers, including funders, have told us that broader partnerships are critical to success. The focus of the Roundtable, therefore, included not only defining projects but also identifying the potential partnerships required to make them a success.

## **Key Informant Input**

The following section outlines the main themes stemming from the key informant interviews. It provides general comments on key discussion points including, the “community college opportunity,” mandate, partnership and market issues. It also includes a list of potential projects as identified through the various discussions with key informants. This list was used to stimulate discussion at the Roundtable session, which resulted in the generation of specific project list intended as a first step to address the identified five key action areas.

## **General Comments**

### **The Community College Opportunity**

- The critical value that the APCCC system delivers is a *relationship with industry*.
- Too often “innovation” discussion overlooks the community college system. There is a need to elevate an understanding of the role colleges play in impacting our economy. (Return on investment data is available to support this point).
- Must play to community college strengths - can we define a pan-Atlantic approach to closing the gap for industry regarding needed skills? Can we act together at the Atlantic Canada level? Can we cut a new model for connection with industry?

- Stay focused on the demand side of the market - what do employers want?
- Regarding national applied research competitions - can we define niches where Atlantic Canada (APCCC and Association of Atlantic Universities) has a chance in these competitions? Perhaps food sciences, food processing, marine research, forestry?
- Focus on building relationships across the APCCC system - build on this over time.
- All four provinces, Immigration Canada and ACOA are working on various population strategies in response to various demographic issues. Can APCCC members also play a role in these initiatives?
- Businesses sometimes feel they need more responsive research partners than universities. Some examples of very effective applied research partnerships in Alberta include the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology.
- Some of the projects listed appear to have funding potential.

### **Mandate Issues for Colleges, ACOA, and Other Partners**

- Keep project ideas practical and on mandate.
- ACOA business lines include the development of companies, the development of communities and policy/advocacy.
- Be aware that mandate and policy issues make it difficult for the four provinces to work together on some common projects.
- The ACOA role for this project is primarily as a potential facilitator of partnerships as opposed to “funder”. Key funding envelopes are well advanced - Round 3 of ACOA’s Atlantic Innovation Fund is now closed - Round 4 will close in February 2006 and Round 5 in September 2006.
- Community colleges have a role to play in addressing Aboriginal issues; however, this role has not been clearly defined. Any role undertaken by community colleges must include input from the Aboriginal community to ensure that these efforts are responsive to their unique needs. Community colleges should look for opportunities to support the programs and initiatives of governments and other agencies that have specific mandates in the area.

### **Partnership Issues**

- Need to actively seek partnership opportunities with universities.
- Is there a role for Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters in partnership with the APCCC?
- Where can APCCC join existing initiatives with other lead agencies in areas of interest in order to avoid duplication of effort?
- Some funding is available for the types of projects identified but may require a broad engagement of partners before seeking funding. We should not think of these projects as mechanisms to secure funding but first commit to the value of collective work in these areas. There is a need to confirm that APCCC members are prepared to invest their collective energy in this agenda, secure partnerships, sign MOU’s etcetera.
- ACOA can play the role of facilitator on both specific projects and larger more general partnerships – we need to create “multiple” entry points for ACOA to be most effective.

## **“Market” Issues**

- Immigration issues must be employer-driven and supported in communities. In Atlantic Canada, pressure is coming from governments who recognize this demographic issue, rather than from employers. We have to find a way to invert this perspective.
- We may have a business ownership crisis in 10 -15 years as impacts from the aging population are felt. Older business owners may wish to sell their businesses in order to retire, for example, but may not be able to find buyers. We need to prepare young people with trade and business skills so they can buy/take over businesses.

## **Draft criteria for selection of projects**

These criteria, which were reviewed at the Roundtable, have been used to shape project discussion to date:

### Projects we select must:

- Be “on mandate” and play to Community College strengths – i.e., in areas where we have the right faculty and momentum;
- Be issues of regional and perhaps national importance;
- Have collaboration potential;
- Be practical - we can visualize the actions and the people who will do them; and
- Appear to be supportable by APCCC members, funders and other partners.

## **List of potential project ideas**

This list of ideas has passed through two major rounds of input from Community College staff and key informants including some potential funding and operational partners. They are still concepts. The Roundtable will provide an opportunity to shortlist and refine them into specific projects.

### **1) Immigration Project(s)**

#### **Key Elements:**

##### **a) Environmental Scan**

- Define all the partners in the continuum from recruiting to effective placement and retention in a targeted sector for Atlantic Canada.
- Define links to the Atlantic Metropolis Institute (AMI) which is doing immigration research.
- Are our regional policies out of sync with the market? Can we compete with the rest of Canada? Will we develop our own immigration policies like Quebec?
- A “Settlers” study is being done at UPEI now - are there APCCC linkages?
- Identify ways to ready region, in particular, businesses, to accept foreign trained workers.
- Identify ways to engage employers by bringing them into the “immigration agenda.”

##### **b) Programming: Closing the Gap for Immigrants**

#### **Components might include:**

##### **i) Vocationally Focused ESL**

- Successful pilot in PEI with immigrants - roll it out?

- Define link between immigrants and employers in target sectors?
- Define specific immigrant-ready businesses in target sectors?
- Work with select businesses that are “immigrant-ready”?

#### **ii) Upgrading and Bridging**

- There is a perceived gap between the recruiting/settlement stage and the employer/marketplace. Can APCCC members play a role?
- Connect professional and trade organizations to immigrants.
- Target a few sectors with the best sector relationships.
- PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment Recognition).
- Upgrading professional skills to local standards.
- Bridging knowledge and soft skills.

#### **c) Proactive Projects with Industry Sectors**

##### **i) Immigrant Workers to Target Sectors/Businesses - the Manitoba Model**

- Work with sectors or even *specific businesses* that need trained employees.
- Define the actual skills and the target country for workers.
- Define training and knowledge required and define specific certification gaps that apply.
- Pre-approval by Canadian professional technical approval organizations.
- Tailor training to cover the gap.
- Qualify the best delivery process for the export of this training.
- Deliver training, perhaps virtually, during the “nominee” step.
- Evaluate student progress.
- Coordinate with provincial recruiting efforts and settlement agencies.

#### **General Comments Regarding Immigration Projects:**

- ACOA sees potential for broad partnerships, e.g., Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) has authored a document on working with governments to impact immigration issues.
- Current successful MOU’s demonstrate the need for collaboration at the regional and local levels.
- Provinces are already active in many of the project areas listed. We must ensure that provinces are first-level partners in any proposed project work, particularly anything related to immigration.
- The Manitoba model is worth consideration.
- Make the link with the AMI (Atlantic Metropolis Institute) which is focused on immigration research.
- The government should be in support of *employer* driven initiatives. A pan Atlantic Council of Employers could work with actual businesses to define skills gaps, recognize new opportunities and attempt to fill identified gaps. ACOA would be very interested in this type of effort.



- We have much work to do in our communities - if we call other Canadians “Come from Aways”, how will we change attitudes to accept foreign nationals? Should we focus our immigration strategy on other Canadians?

## 2) “Bridge to Work” - Addressing Out-Migration

Successful immigration strategies require industry and communities to welcome and extend support - if we can’t retain our youth, how can we deal with immigration? (The flip side of the immigration issue- demographic/seasonal worker issues).

### **Key Elements**

- Direct linkage of students to employers - the missing link - innovative approaches that actually take youth into companies as interns through mentoring and eventually to ownership.
- Partner with the RDA’s in each province - all are working on youth out-migration?
- The tone is positive action: communities coming together.
- Links to employers during school - internships.
- Rise to “campaign” level to engage broad community.

## 3) Sector Development - New Products (Innovation)

- This has been done in pieces but not as a pan-Atlantic effort. All four colleges have an interest.
- Four colleges come together with industry in a target sector(s) to explore sector development through applied research in **product development**.
- Partnerships can be formed to fund new equipment. This could include colleges, ACOA, governments and industry.
- Target sectors of interest to all are:
  - *Food*
  - *Alternative energy and conservation* including wind power, wave power, carbon storage, solar, natural gas liquefaction, energy preserving construction projects like impacted earth, others?
  - *IT in security sector?* A number of projects around now. Xwave activity, Maritime Helicopter, aeronautics, port security, etcetera.
- Defining the role for the college system – what is the intermediary role between business and university?

## 4) APCCC sponsored Atlantic Canada Employers Council

- Designed to engage both large and small sectors.
- Small sectors often don’t have the voice but they have opportunities and needs (e.g. trucking, construction).
- Major gaps have already been defined.
- Employers and colleges linked in planning, forums, conferences, and collective project work. Host ongoing dialogue around what colleges could do to better understand industry and prevent “speaking past each other”. Current programs are sometimes driven by staff background and interests - not employers.
- Build on strengths like seafood sector, oil and gas, wood/forestry. Association of Technology Industries, to bolster the relationship with industry across the region and across training issues.
- Work with industry to define better ways to package information about real job opportunities and do joint, targeted marketing efforts in Atlantic Canada.

- Challenge colleges to think as collaborators rather than competitors.
- Make links to national partnerships and labor organizations?

#### **5) Engagement/Research - How to Stop the Illiteracy “loop”?**

- Capacity to read, write, function in business has *decreased* - a loop we appear unable to impact.
- How to get illiterate and under-employed to self identify?
- How to get to youth before they drop out? What kind of partnership with the school system would build awareness of options?
- How to create a culture of engagement?
- How to engage employers on broad issues re immigrants and the under-employed?
- Holland College has a concept piece written that may serve as a helpful reference.

#### ***Specific reaction to the list of potential projects***

Among the Community College staff and a cross-section of potential partners interviewed, there was a generally positive response to the immigration, sector development and employer council project ideas, and a sense that there might be a clear and appropriate role for APCCC members to work on these.

Originally, in the key informant interview process, there was slightly less enthusiasm demonstrated for the Engagement Project (number 5 on the above list). However, it is interesting to note that at the Roundtable discussions much more enthusiasm was evidenced by participants, resulting in this project being brought forward as one of the four projects for collaborative action.

#### ***Next Steps***

It should be recognized that the purpose of this document was not to provide a definitive review of the five key action areas identified within it but, rather, to stimulate discussion on specific, relevant and practical initiatives which can be supported by the mandates of the APCCC members. In the interest of continuing the dialogue and collaborative efforts stemming from the Roundtable, participants whose input has helped inform this document and other interested stakeholders are encouraged to connect with Roundtable participants (See Appendix II for a complete participant list including contact information) to identify opportunities for further discussion and action on the issues identified at the Roundtable.