



“RURAL COMMUNITIES AS THE CORNERSTONE”

QUARTERLY REPORT

**Roundtable Discussions
July to September 2004**

Publication # 56819150E
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Cat. No: A114-2/2004-3E-PDF
ISBN # 0-662-38410-5

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For further information on the Rural Dialogue, please call 1-888-781-2222 (toll-free number).

Canada

Message from the Honourable Wayne Easter, Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development

One of the cornerstones of democracy is the opportunity for citizens to express their views and concerns directly to an elected official. This grassroots approach is essential to keeping pace with how government initiatives and policies are playing out on the ground. It also provides valuable insight into where future initiatives should be focused.

Since the introduction of the Rural Dialogue, over 16,500 rural, remote and northern citizens have taken part in this process. The Roundtable series, which began in July 2003 as part of the Rural Dialogue, has visited every province and territory in the country. Many rural, remote and northern Canadians took time out of their busy schedules to share ideas that will help shape government policy. The roundtables were focused on some of the key issues identified through the Rural Dialogue process, such as community capacity building, youth, infrastructure and entrepreneurship.

These roundtables were designed to move beyond simply identifying issues toward strategies that could be undertaken by communities in response to the challenges they face. Participants discussed how their communities can adapt and benefit from the changes affecting rural Canada.

The quarterly report on the three roundtables held in September 2004 in Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island, gives an overview of the discussions that took place and suggests a course of action. The valuable feedback that emerged from the roundtables will be used to shape the program of the 2004 National Rural Conference, which will focus on actions to address priority issues for rural, remote and northern Canadians.

These roundtables are not the end of a process but rather an integral part of turning ideas into action. By continuing with this work, together we will build stronger, more sustainable rural communities.

Wayne Easter
Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development

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**Roundtable Discussions
July to September 2004**

1. FOREWORD

This report is a summary of discussions that took place during the Roundtable Discussions entitled “Rural Communities as the Cornerstone” held in Manitoba, Newfoundland & Labrador and Prince Edward Island in September 2004. In order to present a true report of the free-ranging discussions, recommendations made by participants that fall outside federal jurisdiction are also included. Views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Government of Canada.

2. INTRODUCTION

The three Roundtable Discussions, hosted by Wayne Easter, Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development, completed the series of fifteen cross-Canada stakeholder roundtables which began in summer 2003. The roundtables held in winter 2004 were hosted by the former Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development, George Farrah. The ones held from the summer to the fall of 2003 were hosted by the Honourable Andy Mitchell, the former Secretary of State (Rural Development) (Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario), and presently the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The Roundtable series is part of the Rural Dialogue, an ongoing, two-way discussion between the Government of Canada and Canadians from rural, remote and northern regions. The Rural Dialogue, initiated in 1998, helps the Government of Canada to understand local and regional priorities, and provides rural, remote and northern citizens with an opportunity to influence government policies, programs and services that affect them. Since the beginning of the Rural Dialogue initiative, over 16,500 citizens from rural, remote and northern Canada have participated in activities held across the country. These activities have included regional meetings, national and regional rural conferences, surveys and town halls.

The Rural Dialogue is a key component of the Canadian Rural Partnership, an initiative that supports a horizontal approach to rural development within the Government of Canada. The input from roundtable participants will help inform the Government of Canada on future actions, and contribute to the development of a national rural policy framework that will guide the actions of the federal, provincial and territorial governments. The over-arching goal of this

federal-provincial-territorial collaborative effort is to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of rural communities by creating an environment which will ensure that communities and citizens have access to social and economic opportunities.

Stakeholders at these roundtable events were invited to propose community-based strategies and actions designed to meet specific challenges and advance a number of priorities identified through the Rural Dialogue process. They were also encouraged to suggest the role governments can play in assisting communities to advance priorities and implement some of the strategies and actions. It is hoped that these discussions will be instrumental in determining how rural, remote and northern communities can better position themselves, with the ongoing support of all levels of government, to ensure that they participate in and benefit from local and national prosperity.

The Roundtable Discussions proposed precise objectives in order to facilitate the exchange of information and assist in the identification of community driven development strategies and actions. The objectives of the Roundtable series were to:

- Continue the Rural Dialogue with rural communities by engaging key community stakeholders;
- Discuss key rural priorities identified through the Rural Dialogue and with other rural networks;
- Discuss how communities can position themselves to benefit from changes in the socio-economic base of rural Canada;
- Identify the capacity that communities have to develop strategies and actions, with government and other stakeholders, and to engage their citizens in bringing about local solutions to the challenges they face; and
- Identify strategies and means to be supported by governments to assist communities in adapting to changes and build a sustainable socio-economic base.

This report provides an analysis of the discussions that took place during the final three Roundtable Discussions. It identifies specific strategies and actions that can be implemented by rural communities and includes a suggested course of action. Furthermore, the results presented will serve as a means to assist the Government of Canada in formulating policies and strategic directions that meet the needs of rural, remote and northern communities as they pursue their development.

3. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION TOPICS

Participants were given the opportunity to discuss key rural priorities identified through the Rural Dialogue process (outlined in Section 5, Part 1 topics) and on other issues of regional relevance (outlined in Section 6, Part 2 topics). The following identifies some of the strategies and actions that could be implemented by rural communities, governments or both which were discussed by roundtable participants. These are presented in further detail in Section 5 and Section 6 of this report.

Community Capacity Building

Communities should determine their capacity to coordinate services as this could have a positive impact on their volunteer and employed human resources. However, in order to do this, they require tools to help them define where they need to build capacity and where they need to develop partnerships to fill the gaps.

A strong desire for greater flexibility of government programs and greater autonomy for government officials in terms of allocating dollars for projects developed to respond to community challenges was expressed. Additionally, a resource person should be found within a community to act as a focal point to consult on government regulations and policies. This person should also possess experience in problem solving and the ability to maintain effective collaborative working relationships.

Youth

Earlier interventions are needed to reach all youth in order to create a sense of allegiance to their community. These could be in the form of entrepreneurship studies, work, mentoring and leadership opportunities, as well as vocational training, which should be promoted more broadly. Such measures could lead to the desired outcome, whether that is maintaining a strong tax base or increasing the leadership base within communities. Entrepreneurship studies were noted as key to future economic growth, and the importance of fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment for youth in the community was highlighted.

Infrastructure

Broadband, transportation and housing topped the list for strategic infrastructure investments. Broadband is needed to access new markets and educational opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to rural communities. Transportation infrastructure is needed to support economic growth through business development and expansion. Affordable housing, particularly funding for seniors' housing, is required to strengthen the social capacity of a community.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs often start businesses with simple "grit" and determination, and not a large cash flow. While these are factors that contributed to their success, much work was still required to address regulatory and programming frameworks that impede entrepreneurs and put limitations on financial and human resources. Access to capital is an issue that governments could help address by intervening to bring third party lenders to the table to bridge the gap.

Broadband

Broadband provides possibilities to increase competitive advantages and to participate in the global and knowledge-based economies. Access to affordable and reliable broadband services and support for telecommunications expertise is needed. Communities need resources and the capacity to leverage the new technologies.

Immigration

Communities, along with governments, should develop immigration settlement and attraction strategies that are uniquely suited to rural areas. Communities should welcome newcomers and be open to new ideas.

Intergovernmental Partnerships

Municipalities should work together towards common development goals, and government funding programs should support such collaborative proposals. Success can be achieved in implementing projects where all levels of government collaborate to secure the necessary financial resources and provide technical knowledge and support.

Human Capital

When addressing human capital issues, governments should provide investments that demonstrate an understanding of the interdependency between a community's social and economic capacities. Volunteer capacity is at a breaking point and learning tools were requested to build this capacity. Additionally, communities either lack human resources in terms of paid staff or lack an administrative capacity. The Employment Insurance program should be more flexible in order to address skill shortages and meet the real needs of communities.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 ROUNDTABLE EVENTS, PARTICIPANTS AND BACKGROUND

This quarterly report covers the final three Roundtable Discussions that were held three provinces in September 2004, identified in Table 1 below.

Province or Territory	Region	Type of region	No. of Participants	Date
Manitoba	Grosse Isle	rural-heartland	19	September 16, 2004
Newfoundland & Labrador	Trepassey	rural-coastal	21	September 27, 2004
Prince Edward Island	Stanley Bridge	rural-coastal	14	September 28, 2004

A total of 54 residents from these rural regions participated in the three Roundtable Discussions. To ensure that every community stakeholder could fully participate in the discussions, each Roundtable included between 14 and 21 participants.

In contrast to previous Rural Dialogue activities that solicited the views and input from rural citizens, the Roundtable Discussions involved the gathering of input from key rural community stakeholders. The selection of participants aimed at obtaining a broad representation of major stakeholders involved in rural, remote and northern community development. Roundtable participants included, but were not limited to: representatives of regional rural and youth organizations; academics; community, economic, and social development officers; representatives of First Nations and Inuit organizations or communities; and members of the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments.

4.2 FORMAT OF THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

The three roundtables, either full day or half day events, were structured in two parts. For Part 1, participants were given the opportunity to provide input on four major topics that were identified in previous Rural Dialogue activities as key priorities to be addressed by rural, remote and northern communities with the support of governments. Part 2 of the roundtables dealt with topics that were pre-selected by participants as being relevant issues and preoccupations in their respective communities. All discussion topics were detailed in background material sent to participants in preparation for each roundtable.

4.3 OVERVIEW OF PART 1 TOPICS

The goal of the Roundtable Discussions was to have participants go beyond identifying issues to propose community-based strategies and actions designed to respond to specific challenges and to advance key priorities identified by citizens through the Rural Dialogue. Topics for Part 1 of the roundtables were:

- Community Capacity Building
- Youth
- Infrastructure
- Entrepreneurship

To stimulate discussions on strategies and actions to be implemented by rural, remote and northern communities and community groups, participants were asked to provide answers to a set of questions relevant to each of the four topics discussed. The analysis of the discussions on these topics and questions are outlined in Section 5 of this report.

4.4 OVERVIEW OF PART 2 TOPICS

In the second part of the Roundtable Discussions, participants were given the opportunity to select two to four discussion themes from a list of proposed topics submitted to them as part of their invitation package. Participants were also invited to bring forward other issues of regional relevance that they wanted to discuss. Proposed topics for Part 2 of the roundtables were:

- Broadband
- Immigration
- Intergovernmental Partnership
- Urban/Rural Relationship
- Northern and Remote Issues
- Resource Industries
- Human Capital
- Social Capital
- Recreation and Culture
- Environment

Table 2 provides an overview of selected Part 2 topics for each roundtable.

TABLE 2 – SELECTED PART 2 TOPICS			
Province or Territory	Region	Type of region	Topics Selected
Manitoba	Grosse Isle	rural-heartland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intergovernmental Partnerships• Human Capital
Newfoundland & Labrador	Trepassey	rural-coastal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Immigration
Prince Edward Island	Stanley Bridge	rural-coastal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broadband

Topics selected by participants as priorities for their communities strongly relate to the type of region in which each roundtable was held. The Roundtable Discussions revealed that broadband, human capital, intergovernmental partnerships and immigration remain very important to rural stakeholders, as demonstrated by the choices of participants.

In order to facilitate discussions on Part 2 topics, a series of questions applicable to all topics were proposed to participants. These questions served to define community assets and tools that can be applied to the specific challenges discussed during each roundtable. In addition, participants were asked to identify the types of partnerships and actions that would best address the issues discussed under Part 2. The analysis of the discussions on these topics and questions are outlined in Section 6 of this report.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: PART 1 TOPICS

This section includes the analysis of the five Roundtable Discussions for the Part 1 topics: Community Capacity Building; Youth; Infrastructure; and Entrepreneurship. **An overview of each discussion topic** and questions proposed to roundtable participants are also outlined in this section.

5.1 COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Community capacity building can be described as a continuous process that develops local leadership and encourages participation in achieving a shared vision. It enables a community or region to identify its strengths and weaknesses, to mobilize internal and external resources to meet local challenges, to develop strategies for effective action and to increase its ability to take advantage of opportunities. An integrated and systematic approach to community capacity building will help individuals and organizations better communicate their ideas and goals, and make complex, integrated decisions.

How can governments and communities work together to ensure that rural communities remain vibrant?

Participants expressed a strong desire for greater flexibility of government programs and greater autonomy for government officials in terms of allocating dollars for projects developed to respond to community challenges. It was noted that communities are required to adjust their priorities to meet existing program criteria as opposed to the programs being sufficiently flexible to match the needs of communities. Additionally, they indicated that establishing a funding pool for worthwhile projects could be another solution. Participants further indicated that community leaders, volunteers and development officers are faced with dual challenges of not only finding appropriate programs that may have dollars to fund projects but also finding the time and persons with the capacity to write and re-edit proposals to suit the various funding streams. They also suggested that increasing funding for human resources to assist with project development could enable communities to seize opportunities.

- Communities should determine their capacity to coordinate services as this could have a positive impact on their volunteer and employed human resources. However, in order to do this, they require tools to help them define where they need to build capacity and where they need to develop partnerships to fill the gaps.
- Federal and provincial governments should commit to measuring the effectiveness of technical advice, and financial, program, policy and regulatory support they provide to communities. This could be done via targeted dialogues, over a period of time, where progress could be demonstrated to citizens in a highly transparent manner.
- Government should work to ensure that program resources are channelled more strategically, and in a timely manner, to communities.

When the fishery collapse occurred in the Trepassey region in 1991, the government's intervention served as a catalyst for community members to rally around a long-term visioning and planning process. This intervention was seen as an opportunity for the community to re-build from the ground up, and the government funding prompted local collaboration. Participants from this region emphasized that only local stakeholders could undertake such an initiative to develop local assets and plans that would be acceptable to the community.

- Communities should take responsibility to communicate to government the types of interventions that would conform to local circumstances.

Many participants expressed the need for an intermediary to provide assistance with matters related to programs, regulations and policies. Participants frequently indicated that needing to "ask the right questions" increased their level of frustration, and having access to an intermediary was often proposed as a solution. Additionally, they suggested that a resource person should be found within a community to act as a focal point to consult on government regulations and policies. This person should also possess experience in problem solving and the ability to maintain effective collaborative working relationships.

- Governments should pursue more locally situated staff that can work with communities to build on the solutions found and to research available funding programs.

How can communities renew their leadership base?

Communities recognized that many of the determinants of a healthy community are also the determinants of a healthy leadership base. Therefore, creating cultural, social and economic opportunities for community members is of the utmost importance to nurturing, attracting and retaining strong and skilled leaders. Particular effort is needed to address the consequences of marginalized communities and citizens, such as Acadians, Aboriginals and First Nations and immigrants, to ensure they realize their full potential. Participants recognized that additional volunteers could be attracted by increasing communication about what is going on in communities. They further expressed that additional support, combined with patience, is needed to pursue successful collaborative relationships.

- Communities could benefit from being more inclusive with respect to their leadership base and who they partner with. Increased effort is needed to include women, youth, Acadians, Aboriginals and First Nations to take advantage of new ideas and innovative approaches to community capacity building.
- Communities and governments should find ways to support partners to increase their capacity for participation by offering resources for training and providing assistance.

What can communities and organizations do to welcome, empower and actively engage citizens?

Municipal governments, educational institutions, public interest groups, community clubs, and citizens should get involved, contribute resources and form working partnerships. Participants noted that the roles of community partners are being redefined, new ways of coordinating and

implementing plans are continually being explored, and exciting models of good citizen engagement are available. Successful models shared in the roundtables often promoted a sense of belonging and allegiance for residents. The Irish Loop Development Board, established in 1997 to promote and foster economic growth in the geographic area of the Avalon Peninsula (Newfoundland), has worked hard to pool resources, with a concerted effort placed on utilizing and developing the region's assets.

- Communities should communicate their plans with a variety of partners inside and outside the community. Partners should create opportunities to engage community members in developing community plans and in working on the implementation phases.

5.2 YOUTH

Rural youth have expressed that they want to be more involved in their communities, but they need support to do so. Youth want educational opportunities (either real or virtual) in their own communities or, at a minimum, better access to education. They also want the opportunity to apply their learning locally or find employment in their own communities so that they do not have to move elsewhere. They would like their voices to be heard and respected, and to have their potential recognized.

What are the assets and skills that young people can bring to rural communities?

Rural communities recognized the potential for the renewal of their leadership base as youth can bring new and engaging perspectives, innovative ideas, and skills and knowledge acquired through formal education, training, and life experience to a community. It was noted that youth can ask a lot of a rural community, not only in terms of time and resources in support of their demands around children and housing, but also in increasing social and economic opportunities.

What actions can communities take to fully benefit from these assets and skills?

Participants felt that earlier interventions were needed to reach all youth, not only those attending college/university, and create a sense of allegiance to their community. These could be in the form of entrepreneurship studies, work, mentoring and leadership opportunities, as well as vocational training, which should be promoted more broadly. Such measures could lead to the desired outcome, whether that is maintaining a strong tax base or increasing the leadership base within communities. It was noted that entrepreneurship studies were key to future economic growth, and the importance of fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment for youth in the community was highlighted.

- Educational systems should offer courses in entrepreneurship and provide support to guidance counsellors to inform them about job opportunities in the region. Communities and local educational institutions should collaborate to fill the gaps where no job shadowing, entrepreneurship courses or cooperative programs exist.

- Communities should work on creating a sense of allegiance for youth while they are attending school in the community. This could be done by providing opportunities to become a member of a community group, to volunteer and to be mentored.
- Communities should create opportunities for youth to put their ideas forward.
- Communities should work together to provide youth with meaningful contacts with employers, and with the skills required to work in positions located in the community.
- Government cycles should be respectful of school cycles when allocating funding for youth projects, thereby increasing the funding's effectiveness.
- Government should accept applications to youth programs from persons up to 35 years of age.

What are some of the models you have come across that represent a good example of youth engagement?

Participants identified the following youth engagement models:

- “Place aux Jeunes” is a model originating from Quebec that has spread to many communities including some in Manitoba. It provides youth options of rediscovering their communities, meeting its leaders and establishing contacts that enable them to explore concrete employment or entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency’s (ACOA) Seed Capital ConneXion Program for Young Entrepreneurs helps to address some of the greatest obstacles facing young entrepreneurs: access to capital and sound business advice.
- Many communities have undertaken surveys to determine levels of youth engagement. The Youth Inclusion Project, led by Emerging Leaders Manitoba, assists communities in identifying areas of youth inclusion and levels of youth participation within a community. This tool can be used in conjunction with others to assist youth in building capacity to begin projects in their communities or in going through the process of returning and finding work in their communities. The Acadian community of Rustico and the Parkland Community Futures Development Corporation have undertaken surveys and attempted to formally support youth in this manner.

How can governments and communities increase the economic, social and cultural options for youth in rural, remote and northern communities?

There were two distinct, yet complementary, approaches suggested to address how to increase social and cultural options for youth: one was directed at youth who continued to reside in the community, and the other dealt with ways to attract youth back to the community. For youth within the community, it was emphasized that more effort is needed to provide local educational opportunities and to create strong allegiances. Forging linkages between business and educational sectors was also identified as a key priority. In terms of attracting youth after

post-secondary education, participants indicated that student debts and low salaries were impediments to getting them back into communities. Many participants identified the need for increased connection between economic, social and cultural sectors.

- Communities should recognize and support their economic, social and cultural assets, such as schools, community centres, libraries, and family resource/drop-in centres, as focal points in their community.
- Governments should pursue investments in education that demonstrate an understanding of the interdependency between educational attainment and the workforce. This could take into account rising costs of tuition, provision of data collection and dissemination of types of skills and experience needed to fill positions.

5.3 INFRASTRUCTURE

Creating opportunities for rural communities to maintain and develop infrastructure for community development is a priority for Canadians living in rural, remote and northern regions. Basic traditional infrastructure is needed for successful community development and diversification. Through the ongoing Rural Dialogue, rural Canadians have told the Government of Canada that the lack of reliable and affordable transportation is a key barrier to community development. This challenge impacts on other priority areas, such as access to education and health care facilities and services.

Investment in modern infrastructure is also vital to the quality of life and the long-term sustainability of rural, remote and northern Canada. New transportation and communication infrastructure in rural, remote and northern Canada is critical for participating in the global and knowledge-based economy. Access to technology and the information highway is viewed by rural Canadians as an essential element that can help address other priority areas, such as opportunities for youth, capacity building and access to education, health care and programs and services offered by all levels of government.

How can communities collaborate to access and lever infrastructure funds for mutual benefit?

It was noted that there was still work to be done to change mind-sets in terms of sharing, managing and strategically planning for infrastructure amongst communities. Participants highlighted the challenges of co-locating and maintaining services such as schools, hockey arenas and hospitals. Participants indicated that affordable housing is needed to strengthen the social capacity of a community as this has become an impediment to its growth.

If you were to choose one area for infrastructure investment in your region, what would that area be?

Participants identified the following as key infrastructure investments in their regions:

- Grosse Isle – **Broadband** is needed to access new markets and educational opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable to rural communities.
- Trepassey – **Transportation, housing** and **broadband** were all identified. Transportation infrastructure is needed to support economic growth. Federal and provincial governments should get back into the game of affordable housing especially with respect to funding for seniors' housing.
- Stanley Bridge – **Transportation infrastructure** is needed to support business development and expansion. Improved **broadband** and telecommunication infrastructure is needed to assist in exploring the potential of and fully participating in the tourism and resource sectors. Affordable **housing** is required for seniors.

5.4 ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Some of the many qualities of an entrepreneur are creativity and innovation. Research shows entrepreneurs fare better in supportive communities with dynamic business support organizations. Entrepreneurship can help to improve the quality of life of rural, remote and northern communities.

What are some creative ways to enhance public and private partnerships to increase investment in rural communities?

Participants mentioned that investment in value-added processing was an area that needed to be increased through public and private support, but they also expressed that access to capital is a significant barrier. Participants felt that governments should intervene with financial institutions as they are key lenders that need to be brought to the table. Participants identified liability insurance as an impediment to attracting and retaining volunteers in communities, and on boards especially. They felt that government should use their legislative power to cover financial risks, such as expensive liability insurance, as these risks are beyond the control or comfort level of one volunteer, a group or a community.

- Communities and governments should partner to explore and better capitalize on investment opportunities.
- Governments should examine the impacts of regulations on communities as they impede on the flow of money into communities and on their ability to attract financial investments.
- Governments should use their legislative power to cover financial risks such as liability insurance for a volunteer or a community. They should also use their influence to bring financial institutions and key lenders to the table.

What can communities do to attract and retain businesses? How can communities help existing businesses expand?

Participants emphasized the need to create opportunities within communities to share ideas about entrepreneurship and have them be received in a supportive environment. A number of entrepreneurs among the participants voiced that the funding climate in smaller communities was such that “grit” and a receptive environment was more important than reliance on banking. It was mentioned that entrepreneurs often started businesses with simple “grit” and determination, and not a large cash flow. While these are factors that contributed to their success, it was noted that much work was still required to address regulatory and programming frameworks that impede entrepreneurs and put limitations on financial and human resources.

Participants cautioned that attracting new businesses should not be at the expense of supporting and expanding local businesses. For instance, big box retailers were identified as potential threats to existing businesses. Very large outlets often succeeded by siphoning off several stores in nearby towns. Participants indicated that value-added processing was an area for expansion in most communities; however, they expressed that the regulatory environment was often not conducive for embarking on these types of initiatives.

- Governments, along with communities, should conduct a SWOT analysis (Strengths /Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats) with respect to regulations, policies and funding mechanisms that present themselves as challenges to the limited financial and human resources of communities.

How can governments help communities turn their ideas into action?

Access to capital is an issue that participants felt governments could help address by intervening to bring third party lenders to the table to bridge the gap. They also indicated that broadband was a way to leverage local assets and build the economy; however, they felt more resources are needed in the form of technical training and access to technical services – especially with respect to knowledge-based economies.

- Government should intervene with financial institutions to improve access to capital.

6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: PART 2 TOPICS

This section includes the analysis of the three Roundtable Discussions for the Part 2 topics, presented according to the number of times participants pre-selected the topics they were most interested in discussing. In order to facilitate discussions, questions applicable to all topics (listed below) were proposed to participants. These served to define community assets and tools that can be applied to the specific challenges discussed during each roundtable. This section also includes **an overview of each discussion topic** and the types of partnerships and actions that would best address the issues discussed.

What are the resources (human, financial and natural) and tools available to communities, internally and externally, which they can use to advance these priority issues?

What are the necessary skills and expertise communities must develop to help them take advantage of opportunities and develop local solutions to local challenges?

What are the strategic partnerships that need to be created within the community, among communities, with governments and the private sector to help address these priorities?

What are the actions to be taken by the various players involved (governments, stakeholders, communities and individuals) in the process?

6.1 BROADBAND

Broadband is a data and communications transmission technology which enables a great volume of messages and data to be communicated simultaneously. Broadband can stimulate innovation and improve the quality of life of Canadians. It is not simply about getting quicker e-mails, but enabling citizens living in rural, remote, northern and First Nations communities to have access to essential services, such as education, healthcare, lifelong learning and a competitive business environment.

Participants expressed that access to affordable and reliable broadband services and support for telecommunications expertise is needed. It was noted that in rural areas, broadband provides possibilities to promote the community, to increase its competitive advantage, and to pursue new investment and economic opportunities, thereby, fully participating in the global and knowledge-based economies. Communities need the capacity to leverage the new technologies, as well as the resources to purchase computers and to access new infrastructure. Participants indicated that many rural households cannot afford a personal computer.

6.2 IMMIGRATION

Immigrants enrich the socio-economic and cultural fabric of Canada and can help ensure the long-term sustainability of rural, remote and northern communities with new skills and knowledge. Formulating strategies to promote the benefits of rural living, and building the supporting mechanisms, resources and amenities that would encourage new Canadians to locate outside metropolitan areas, are challenges facing rural communities.

Participants felt that communities should welcome newcomers and be open to new ideas. They see the benefits that new Canadians could bring and feel immigrants could contribute to the renewal of communities as well as address serious skill shortages.

- Communities, along with governments, should develop immigration settlement and attraction strategies that are uniquely suited to rural areas.
- Governments should remove barriers to enable communities to engage in targeted immigration.

6.3 INTERGOVERNMENTAL PARTNERSHIPS

Intergovernmental partnership refers to joint or collaborative actions involving the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments. With communities as a cornerstone, the Government of Canada is committed to working more closely with provincial, territorial and municipal governments to help create an environment where rural Canadians have access to economic and social opportunities.

Participants expressed a preference for strategic support from government that is informed by local processes. They frequently emphasized that some circumstances within a region require particular responses delivered in certain ways. They stated that examples of strong, coordinated partnership approaches, which worked and which identified specific barriers, exist in every province and include a pooling of resources between governments.

It was also noted that municipalities should work together towards common development goals, and that government funding programs should support such collaborative proposals. They expressed that success can be achieved in implementing projects where all levels of government collaborate to secure the necessary financial resources and provide technical knowledge and support.

- Governments should provide better information and improve their out-reach services when sharing details about new and existing programs to communities, as well as provide assistance during the program application process.
- Governments should recognize that an election can impact the delivery of programs and allocation of grants and funding, and, as such, should empower regionally-based government officials to make key interim decisions.
- Governments should organize targeted dialogues to discuss the progress they have made in responding to needs of communities.

6.4 HUMAN CAPITAL

Human capital refers to individual people in a community, who, given their training, skills education and experience, are considered an important resource. Such individuals form the labour market available to communities. They also provide leadership and mentoring abilities to youth, local businesses and volunteer organizations, and help to motivate the community's members to develop and execute their plans. Human capital contributes to a community's capacity to plan its future, and to identify social, economic and cultural opportunities for the community and its members in order to achieve self-reliance and long-term sustainability.

Participants indicated that addressing human capital issues requires an understanding of the interdependency between a community's social and economic capacities. Therefore, governments should respond with investments that demonstrate such an understanding. They further expressed that volunteer capacity is at a breaking point, with some communities "feeling lucky" for the support and willingness of volunteers to be overworked and over-extended. In order to build this capacity, participants requested learning tools. Additionally, communities either lack human resources in terms of paid staff or lack an administrative capacity.

Many participants indicated that the diversity of voices should be cultivated within communities. Women, First Nations, Acadians and youth were pointed out as important groups to be at the table when discussing any long-term sustainable community development strategy.

Participants expressed concern about the variety of skill shortages that were predicted for the future. They indicated that immigration settlement and attraction strategies and tools are required, and suggested that attracting newcomers to address this shortage as one solution. Participants recognized training as integral to being able to not only to address skill shortages but also to build capacity. It was noted that educational systems should be more active in meeting future shortages by adapting their education curricula and promoting vocational streams. Participants also voiced their discontent with the Employment Insurance (EI) program and its deliverer, and expressed that the program should be more flexible in order to address skill shortages and meet the real needs of communities. They also found the program disjointed and noted that the focus of the EI funding, especially in the area of training dollars, could not make a difference locally given the nature of the program.

- Governments, along with communities, could play a role in developing and disseminating technical data on the types of skills and experience needed to meet future labour market needs.
- Governments should increase flexibility within the Employment Insurance program to ensure more people can become eligible for training and transition programs that could fill jobs and, consequently, address skill shortages.

7. CONCLUSION

This quarterly report of the final three "Rural Communities as the Cornerstone" Roundtable Discussions has highlighted important solutions and actions that rural communities identified to respond to their challenges.

In terms of community capacity building, participants expressed that communities are creating their own development plans and assessing their ability to realize them. As communities work to coordinate their existing resources, they should develop a more inclusive leadership base and clearly communicate their needs to government and external partners.

While attracting youth to rural communities after their post-secondary studies is important, it is also important to develop their sense of community allegiance while they attend school as this can create a sense of belonging and a welcoming environment for the future. Participants indicated that communities and local education partners should collaborate to provide work, leadership and entrepreneurship opportunities, as well as support economic, social, and cultural options.

With regard to infrastructure, participants expressed that the most critical infrastructure need identified by all communities is affordable and reliable broadband services as it is a support for many aspects of community development. It also enables them to fully participate in the global and knowledge-based economies. Affordable housing and transportation infrastructure are also key strategic infrastructure investments.

On the topic of entrepreneurship, they mentioned that entrepreneurs' sheer grit and determination were factors that contributed to their success; however, much work was still required to address regulatory and programming impediments. Access to capital is an issue that requires assistance from government to encourage involvement of financial institutions and investors by becoming partners.

Participants indicated that immigration settlement and attraction strategies should be adapted to suit rural communities. They also advised that communities should strive to be open to new ideas and to newcomers.

When discussing intergovernmental partnerships, participants expressed that municipalities should work together towards common development goals, and government funding programs should support such collaborative proposals. All levels of government should collaborate to secure the necessary financial and/or technical knowledge and support. They also indicated that government should improve communication on and provide support for its programs.

Participants expressed concern about the future skill shortages predicted, and suggested attracting newcomers to address this shortage as one solution. Educational systems should adapt their education curriculum as training is integral to not only address skill shortages, but also to build capacity. The Employment Insurance program should be more flexible in terms of eligibility for training and transition programs to address such shortages.