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“RURAL COMMUNITIES AS THE CORNERSTONE”

QUARTERLY REPORT

**Roundtable Discussions
July to September 2003**

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Canada 

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“RURAL COMMUNITIES AS THE CORNERSTONE”

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**Roundtable Discussions
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1. FOREWORD

This report is a summary of discussions that took place during the five Roundtable Discussions entitled “Rural Communities as the Cornerstone” held in three provinces and two territories from July to September 2003. 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 five Roundtable Discussions were part of a series of stakeholder roundtables hosted by the Honourable Andy Mitchell, Secretary of State (Rural Development) (Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario) held across Canada in 2003-2004.

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 16,000 citizens from rural, remote and northern Canada have participated in activities held across the country. These activities include 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 five Roundtable Discussions. It identifies specific strategies and actions that can be implemented by rural, remote and northern 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

It was acknowledged that rural communities can no longer rely solely on outside influences to oversee or nurture community development. Much of the discussions dealt with the importance for communities to undertake strategic planning to define common goals and to identify actions that meet their specific development challenges if they are to remain vibrant. It was further agreed that governments can play a key role in assisting communities by adopting a holistic and longer term approach to rural community development.

Additionally, it was recognized that leadership development is at the heart of a community's capacity to respond to challenges and seize opportunities. Suggestions on strategies and processes to renew leadership focused primarily on increasing the number of potential leaders that may already be present within rural communities. First Nations were identified as a significant potential source of community leadership, and successful models for leadership development were identified as being at the root of a newly established and solid First Nations leadership base. These models could be adapted to the challenges facing a broader range of rural communities.

Ongoing citizen engagement was viewed as essential to maintain the social well-being of rural communities. In this context, discussions centered on identifying actions to involve citizens in enhancing the quality of life in rural, remote and northern communities.

Community Development Readiness

It was noted that community development readiness, an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of a community in terms of its capacity building capabilities, varies significantly from one region to another. While readiness evaluation tools may exist, they are not readily available in a format for communities to use. Governments could facilitate the identification and dissemination of community readiness assessment tools.

Technical Assistance for Community Capacity Building

Rural communities should strive to integrate capacity development as a major component of all their development activities. The Government of Canada could play a role in lending technical assistance to rural communities by providing mechanisms that can support the development of rural community expertise.

Research and Innovation

The need for early identification of economic opportunities was expressed. Communities need tools that can help them define their specific rural comparative advantages. Governments could assist by identifying, developing and disseminating tools and data that help rural communities to identify emerging trends and evaluate potential opportunities.

Youth

Youth are viewed as representing the future of rural, remote and northern communities. The adaptability of youth, their innovative ideas and their skill sets, which are well suited to the knowledge-based economy, were considered to be significant assets youth could bring to rural communities.

Rural communities should be more pro-active in developing services and economic opportunities for youth in order to retain them. The focus should change from retaining youth to attracting youth into their communities. In this context, discussions revolved around the need to establish a connection with youth to better identify their needs, the role they want to play and the type of community they would choose. This process would enhance the attractiveness of such communities as places that offer youth opportunities to further their development.

It was noted that entrepreneurship development and youth should go hand in hand. Business development strategies should concentrate on encouraging the creation or attraction of small to medium-sized businesses, as these are more suited to integrating youth in their workforce.

Infrastructure

Rural communities are increasingly aware that planning of infrastructure development on a regional basis should be undertaken. Such planning could provide an opportunity for rural communities to pool their resources to maximize infrastructure development.

Access to telecommunications is still considered essential for rural communities to benefit from potential economic diversification opportunities offered by the knowledge-based economy. Telecommunications, transportation and housing were identified by participants as key infrastructure investments in their regions.

Entrepreneurship

Communities should develop tools that will support innovation and product development based on the inherent economic advantages available to them. Equally, they need tools to identify new economic opportunities and synergies for them to pursue their business development. Communities should increase economic ties with other rural communities that can complement their economic activities, and determine what their economic comparative advantages are in order to invest in business attraction and retention strategies. It was noted that access to capital is still the most significant barrier to entrepreneurship development in rural communities.

Centres of Excellence and Rural Innovation

It was proposed that communities direct their attention towards research, product development and innovation as a creative approach to sustaining rural entrepreneurship. In addition, this effort should be specifically aimed at the research and development of value-added products and technologies to diversify commodity-based economies. The creation of "centres of excellence" or "incubators" was proposed to encourage rural innovation and to provide opportunities, notably for youth and entrepreneurs.

Intergovernmental Partnerships

It was expressed that the Government of Canada should favor an integrated approach to rural community development, and that collaboration and working partnerships are needed both within governments and between each level of government in order to implement a cohesive and integrated process to community development.

Rural community development should be viewed as a long-term process in order to be successful, and government support, through partnerships, should be reflective of this. It was noted that such partnerships could facilitate access to programs and services by rural citizens, and were equally important in the development of an overall rural policy that could adequately address rural issues and preoccupations. Furthermore, partnerships are needed not only for launching new collaborative or common policies and programs but are also necessary to sustain them over time.

Rural Lens Revisited

The need for governments to adapt their policies and programs to better respond to the realities of rural areas was often expressed. It was also noted that communities may not necessarily have the capacity, in terms of human and financial resources, to take advantage of programs even if they are adapted to rural regions. The Rural Lens tool may need to take into account such capacity issues.

Existing programs and policies may need to be reviewed through the Rural Lens as these were perceived to be impediments to community development, particularly if they target industry development or environmental quality.

Broadband

Access to broadband remains a key issue for rural, remote and northern communities. Improved telecommunications could serve to mitigate the elements of isolation and distance by providing improved services, particularly in health and education and in remote and northern communities. Furthermore, it was stated that communities were experiencing difficulties in finding resources, skills and expertise to form strategic partnerships for improving broadband access.

The real social and economic benefits to rural areas that broadband can generate was recognized. However, communities need technical assistance in order to better plan to maximize the potential benefits of broadband. Governments could play a role in providing research and technical assistance for broadband development to rural communities.

Immigration

A study of Canadian immigration history shows a settlement policy that was beneficial to developing rural and remote communities. Aspects of the settlement policy should be reviewed and adapted to attract immigrants to rural areas. Communities should partner to promote their rich, rural communities and the opportunities that exist for new Canadians in rural Canada. Communities and governments should work together at removing barriers that prevent new Canadians from settling into rural communities.

Human and Social Capital

It was expressed that communities should be more inclusive of all segments of their population to benefit fully from the skills, training and experience that is available individually and collectively within their communities. Communities should consider First Nations and Inuit populations as active partners and contributors to rural, remote and northern community development and should also tap into all individual and social resources found within their communities.

Urban/Rural Relationship

An improved urban/rural relationship is needed as community development is a common theme for both urban and rural communities. It was felt that greater understanding of common needs should be promoted as a first step to the development of partnerships toward joint community development actions.

A particular concern of rural communities with regard to urban and rural relationships had to do with urban driven agendas that were perceived as having a negative impact on rural development. Debates on genetically modified organisms, industrial farming, resource management, firearm registration, etc., are generally felt to be initiated by urban populations but ensuing policies and programs are judged to have an immediate impact on rural communities. It was noted that the application of a rural lens would help identify the true impacts of urban driven initiatives on rural development.

Northern and Remote Issues

The importance of considering the distinct characteristics of northern communities in terms of cultural values and relationships to the land when developing policies and programs for these communities was stressed. Resolution of negotiations for the self-government of First Nations and Inuit populations were viewed as the key to enhancing and sustaining the development of northern communities.

Resource Industries

It was stressed that rural communities should have more say with regard to policy directions and management trends of natural resources. This was judged to be essential to define and implement strategic actions that would stimulate community economic development.

Recreation and Culture

Quality of life and cost of living are considered to be distinct advantages for rural communities. The development of cultural and recreational infrastructure within communities would enhance those advantages.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 ROUNDTABLE EVENTS, PARTICIPANTS AND BACKGROUND

This quarterly report covers the five Roundtable Discussions that were held in three provinces and two territories between July and September 2003 identified in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1 – ROUNDTABLES BETWEEN JULY AND SEPTEMBER 2003				
Province or Territory	Region	Type of region	No. of Participants	Date
Ontario	Greater Peterborough Region	rural-heartland	19	July 24, 2003
Saskatchewan	Prince Albert Region	rural-heartland	17	Sept. 2, 2003
Yukon	Dawson City Region	northern	22	Sept. 3, 2003
British Columbia	Port Alberni Region	remote/resource-based	29	Sept. 4, 2003
Nunavut	Iqaluit	northern	23	Sept. 29, 2003

A total of 110 residents from these rural regions participated in the five Roundtable Discussions. To ensure that every community stakeholder could fully participate in the discussions, each Roundtable included between 20 and 22 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 five 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
Ontario	Greater Peterborough Region	rural-heartland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadband • Immigration • Intergovernmental Partnerships • Urban/Rural Relationship
Saskatchewan	Prince Albert Region	rural-heartland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration • Intergovernmental Partnerships • Urban/Rural Relationship • Recreation and Culture
Yukon	Dawson City Region	northern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern and Remote Issues • Resource Industries
British Columbia	Port Alberni Region	remote/resource-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource Industries • Broadband • Human and Social Capital
Nunavut	Iqaluit	northern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern and Remote Issues • Human and Social Capital • Intergovernmental Partnerships • 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 intergovernmental partnerships and broadband remain very important to rural stakeholders, as demonstrated by the choices of participants. These are followed closely by immigration, human and social capital, urban/rural relationships, northern and remote issues and resource industries.

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 government and communities work together to ensure that rural communities remain vibrant?

Participants acknowledged that rural communities can no longer rely solely on outside influences to oversee or nurture community development. Much of the discussions dealt with the importance for communities to undertake strategic planning to define common goals and to identify actions that meet their specific development challenges if they are to remain vibrant. To be successful in this planning exercise, participants indicated that communities should:

- Utilize the formal and informal knowledge base that is available in all sectors and elements of the community for the identification of common objectives and for the development and implementation strategies.
- Identify methods to recruit and involve citizens in strategic planning for community development.
- Ensure that community development action plans can lead to attainable results and can be efficiently implemented based on available resources.

The majority of participants further agreed that governments can play a key role in facilitating the development and implementation of community development strategic plans. Participants, however, noted that governments would be most supportive if their interventions were guided by the following principles:

- Strategic planning should remain a bottom-up or grass roots process to ensure community buy-in to the exercise.
- All levels of government should work together, in partnership with communities, and encourage a horizontal or holistic approach to rural community development.

- The Government of Canada should adopt a longer term approach to community development as a whole. This would apply not only to policies and programs aimed at assisting rural communities, but also for those that impact on the sustainability of communities, such as environmental and resource management.
- The Government of Canada should find ways to evaluate the full social costs to rural regions when they propose to gain efficiencies by closing rural offices and consolidating services in urban areas.

How can communities renew their leadership base?

Participants recognized that leadership development is at the heart of a community's capacity to respond to challenges and seize opportunities. Suggestions on strategies and processes to renew community leadership focused primarily on increasing the number of potential leaders that may already be present within rural communities.

- Leadership development should start with youth, and communities should strive to develop mechanisms to integrate youth in community development decision processes.
- Communities should promote rural regions to immigrants and enlist citizens from different cultural groups in order to take advantage of new ideas and innovative approaches to conducting community development.
- Communities could benefit from being more inclusive in their partnership and leadership base by including women, seniors, immigrants, youth and First Nations.

It is important to note that First Nations were identified as a significant potential source of community leadership. Participants indicated that successful models for leadership development were at the root of a newly established and solid First Nations leadership base. These models, viewed to be largely successful as a result of increased control and empowerment by First Nations of natural and community resources, could be adapted to the challenges facing a broader range of rural communities.

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

Ongoing citizen engagement was viewed as essential to maintain the social well-being of rural communities. In this context, discussions centered on identifying actions to involve citizens in enhancing the quality of life in rural, remote and northern communities.

- Increasing access to economic opportunities and key services, such as health care, education and housing, was considered an essential part of improving quality of life in rural communities.
- As part of opportunities to engage citizens, it was suggested that the role of volunteers be recognized and valued both within the community and within senior levels of governments. Participants proposed that increased volunteer recognition would lead to further engagement of citizens in community development.

- Communities and organizations should seize every opportunity to inform citizens of community development initiatives and involve them in community development processes. This was judged to be particularly important for community strategic planning in order to build a wider consensus around a future course of action for community development.
- Communities should protect and enhance the “fabric” or “building blocks” of rural communities. This fabric, which can include schools, community halls, post offices or grain elevators, is judged to be important as it promotes a sense of belonging and allegiance for citizens of a given community.

In discussing community capacity building, the following themes emerged and are explained further below: community development readiness; technical assistance for community capacity building; and research and innovation.

Community Development Readiness

The roundtables provided an opportunity to understand that community development readiness, an evaluation of the strength and weaknesses of a community in terms of its capacity building capabilities to undertake their development, varies significantly from one region to another. Questions that may be researched as part of an assessment of the level of development readiness of a community are:

- What is the scope of leadership that is available in a community?
- What are the socio-economic barriers to community capacity building?
- What are the human, natural and financial resources available for community development?

While readiness evaluation tools may exist, they are not readily available in a format for communities to use. Governments could facilitate the identification and dissemination of community readiness assessment tools geared towards:

- Defining the barriers to rural community capacity building.
- Developing community readiness indicators and parameters.
- Developing community resource management best practices.

Technical Assistance for Community Capacity Building

While participants recognized the importance for rural communities to increase their abilities to respond to challenges and seize opportunities, the process of community capacity building is not being implemented as a systematic approach to development within most communities. Community capacity building should not be an intuitive process, rural communities should strive to integrate capacity development as a major component of all their development activities. In this context, the availability of technical knowledge at the community level could go a long way in facilitating the development of concerted leadership and capacity building strategies as an

integral part of community development initiatives. The Government of Canada could play a role in lending technical assistance to rural communities by providing mechanisms that can support the development of rural community expertise to:

- Undertake strategic planning exercises.
- Develop feasibility studies, business plans and financial strategies.
- Evaluate community development initiatives.

Research and Innovation

Many participants expressed the need for early identification of economic opportunities as a means to pursue development strategies on a proactive basis. Communities need tools that can help them define their specific rural comparative advantages. Currently, most data collected by rural communities is used for the development of profiles. These are useful to a certain extent, however, profiles only provide a portrait of a community at a specific time. Governments could assist by identifying, developing and disseminating tools and data that help rural communities to identify emerging trends and evaluate potential opportunities, such as:

- Economic impact analysis tools that measure multiplier effects (i.e., one dollar invested in agriculture will result in two additional dollars invested in the overall economy) for sectors of rural economic activities.
- Econometric analysis (X number of population with X \$ of revenues will result in X \$ of retail activity) tools that can provide projections of rural economic activity.
- Sectoral and rural adapted economic data such as manufacturing data, service and retail/wholesale data, employment data and updated natural resources inventories.
- Year to year and smaller geographic unit profiling data, such as employment, income levels and economic dependency ratio data.

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?

The vast majority of participants viewed youth as representing the future of rural, remote and northern communities. The adaptability of youth, their innovative ideas and their skill sets, which are well suited to the knowledge-based economy, were considered to be significant assets youth could bring to rural communities.

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

Participants felt that rural communities should be more pro-active in developing services and economic opportunities for youth in order to retain them.

- Improved access to a quality post-secondary education and skills development facilities should be available to youth within rural, remote and northern communities.
- In northern communities, education curriculum that would assist in preserving cultural and northern values for First Nations and Inuit population should be developed.
- Communities should provide valuable work opportunities for youth, especially within their primary sector economies, to retain them.

Participants, however, moved away from the traditional notion of developing a strategy based strictly on the retention of youth within rural communities. It was suggested that youth need to seek out new insights and learn through discovery and that consequently they would be bound to leave their communities. The focus should change from retaining youth to attracting youth to remote, remote and northern communities. In this context, discussions revolved around the need to establish a connection with youth to better identify their needs, the role they want to play and the type of community they would choose. This process would enhance the attractiveness of such communities as places that offer youth opportunities to further their development.

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

Models that create rural economic opportunities for youth and promote their participation in community development were most often cited as excellent means of encouraging youth engagement in rural communities. Some examples include the:

- Northern Medical Program;
- New Graduate Program;
- Youth Internship Program;
- Youth Community Volunteer Program (credited as part of Ontario's high school curriculum); and
- First Nation Bursary Program (for post-secondary education).

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

Participants felt that entrepreneurship development and youth should go hand in hand. Business development strategies should concentrate on encouraging the creation or attraction of small to medium-sized businesses, as these are more suited to integrating youth in their workforce.

- Communities should identify economic opportunities for youth, notably in value-added businesses that could diversify the existing commodity-based economies of rural areas.

- Communities and governments should strive to provide a business climate that leads to that “first job” for youth, as it has been demonstrated that youth will often settle in the region that offered them their first work opportunity.
- Governments and communities should promote trades as viable and interesting career choices through the education system.
- In northern regions, governments and communities should find ways to assist First Nations and Inuit youth in becoming the builders of the social and cultural bridges, as these are important prerequisites to advancing northern development.
- Governments and communities should partner together to provide northern youth with outlets that focus their energies and facilitate the development of social, cultural and economic linkages between northern and southern values.
- Governments should adapt apprenticeship programs to be more responsive to rural needs by making them more aligned with rural economic realities. Rural, remote and northern communities view trades and apprenticeship programs as key complements to their economic vitality.

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 and remote 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?

Rural communities are increasingly aware that planning of infrastructure development on a regional basis should be undertaken as this could assist them in properly assessing current and future infrastructure needs. Such planning could provide an opportunity for rural communities to pool their resources to maximize infrastructure development.

- Communities should improve their expertise in planning for infrastructure. Technical and financial tools should be developed to assist rural communities in leveraging new technologies and best practises adapted to rural regions as well as funding for infrastructure development.

- Communities should adopt a longer term approach to infrastructure development. Planning should consider future development as well as current needs to gain efficiency in infrastructure investments.
- Communities should partner to better advocate their funding requirements to the Government of Canada with regard to hard infrastructure, such as water and wastewater treatment and transportation. The rural property tax base is no longer sufficient to meet required infrastructure investments.

Access to telecommunications is still considered essential for rural communities to benefit from potential economic diversification opportunities offered by the knowledge-based economy.

- Residents of rural, remote and northern communities should be better informed on the economic benefits of telecommunications. Such a public education strategy should be a key component of telecommunication infrastructure development as it would lead to the creation of a critical mass of users. This increased demand is necessary for communities to develop a business case to lever funds from private telecommunications providers.

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:

- Peterborough - Access to **telecommunication infrastructure** is much needed in that region as demand is increasing and is expected to continue to increase in the future.
- Prince Albert – **Improved transportation** is the major infrastructure need in that region as significant changes to the grain shipping industry have occurred in recent years.
- Dawson City – Transportation infrastructure investments are required to complete links in the Yukon highway infrastructure to support the expanding resource and tourism economy.
- Port Alberni – Investments are needed to improve **transportation infrastructure**, including rail and port facilities, to support tourism development and on-going economic activity in the forestry sector
- Iqaluit – Significant investments are required to resolve an on-going **housing** crisis which is causing serious negative impacts on the social well-being of northern communities.

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 agreed that their communities should develop tools that will support innovation and product development based on the inherent economic advantages available to them. In addition, they should increase economic ties with other rural communities that can complement their economic activities.

- The creation of “centres of excellence” or “incubators” for value-added product research and development, in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, was proposed as a creative approach to increasing business investments in rural communities and sustaining rural entrepreneurship. This effort should also be aimed at the research and development of technologies to diversify current commodity-based economies. Such centres could encourage rural innovation and provide opportunities notably for youth and entrepreneurs.
- Remote communities should consider closer economic ties and undertake joint ventures with First Nations as these strategies could represent new diversification opportunities and increased investments in resource-based regions.
- Communities should promote the establishment of an East-West economic corridor in the northern territories. This trade corridor would lead to increased linkages between northern economies as they would strive to complement each other. The resulting growth in trade of goods and services would offer new synergies and opportunities for northern entrepreneurs and ultimately reduce the dependency on southern imports.
- Governments could research the validity and feasibility of “centres for excellence” which could possibly involve:
 - enhancing access in rural areas to existing business and industrial research assistance policies and programs such as: the Industrial Research Assistance Program, the Canadian Technology Network, and Technology Partnerships Canada;
 - increasing research capacities for existing rural education and training facilities or supporting the development, in rural regions, of post-secondary campuses with research capabilities; and
 - promoting rural research and product development needs and opportunities within existing federal research and development agencies.

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

Participants indicated that communities should develop tools to identify new economic opportunities and synergies for them to pursue their business development. Communities should determine what their economic comparative advantages are in order to invest in business attraction and retention strategies that correspond to their economic advantages.

- Entrepreneurship should be actively promoted within communities. This promotion should specifically target youth by possibly linking entrepreneurship to apprenticeship programs starting in secondary schools.
- Communities should be more supportive of entrepreneurship and break with the traditional attitude that a wage economy is the only valid path to prosperity.

- Communities should strive to foster a healthy business climate through the removal of uncertainties such as access to quality services and infrastructures. Such a strategy could assist in attracting new entrepreneurs to rural communities.

How can governments help communities turn their ideas into action?

Participants repeatedly stressed during discussions that access to capital is still the most significant barrier to entrepreneurship development in rural communities.

- Governments should facilitate improved access to capital and specifically target the development of equity investment mechanisms rather than loans for rural entrepreneurs.
- Governments should develop programs that can assist rural entrepreneurs in developing new markets.
- Governments should continue to provide technical expertise in business development, particularly to educate lenders on rural entrepreneurship and borrowers on risk management.

6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: PART 2 TOPICS

This section includes the analysis of the five 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 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.

In discussing intergovernmental partnerships, participants conveyed that the Government of Canada should favor an integrated approach to rural community development. They expressed that collaboration and working partnerships are needed both within governments and between each level of government in order to implement a cohesive and integrated process to community development.

Participants indicated that rural community development should be viewed as a long-term process in order to be successful, and that government support, through partnerships, should be reflective of this. It was noted that such partnerships could facilitate access to programs and services by rural citizens, and were equally important in the development of an overall rural policy that could adequately address rural issues and preoccupations. Furthermore, participants expressed that partnerships are needed not only for launching new collaborative or common policies and programs but are also necessary to sustain them over time

- Communications and administrative mechanisms could be instituted within governments to mitigate rural policy and program development silos.
- Access to financial resources for rural development should be considered in a rural policy and that redistribution of taxation revenues would be essential to sustain rural community development.
- A rural policy should encourage a grass roots approach to community development and allow for greater community empowerment.
- Governments should not enter into rural development partnerships if they continue to centralize programs and services on a cost efficiency basis only.
- In northern communities, intergovernmental partnerships could facilitate ongoing negotiations on self-government for First Nations and Inuit populations that would result in immediate benefits to the region.

Rural Lens Revisited

Participants often expressed the need for governments to adapt their policies and programs to better respond to the realities of rural areas. They also indicated that communities may not necessarily have the capacity, in terms of human and financial resources, to take advantage of programs even if they are adapted to rural regions. In this context, the Rural Lens tool may need to be reviewed and take into account such capacity issues, including the following barriers to access programs:

- Project proposal development.
- Contribution agreements and financial audits of funding.
- Interim and final reporting of program results and deliverables.

Of equal importance to participants was that existing programs and policies may need to be reviewed through the Rural Lens as these were perceived to be impediments to community development, particularly if they target industry development or environmental quality. The following were suggested for review:

- Agricultural commodity regulations applicable to supply management, transformation and transportation.
- Natural resources regulations for accessibility and management.
- Environmental management policies for water quality, nutrient management, pesticide use and environmental assessments processes.

6.2 **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 noted that access to broadband remains a key issue for rural, remote and northern communities in order for them to fully participate in the knowledge-based economy. They indicated that improved telecommunications could serve to mitigate the elements of isolation and distance by providing improved services, particularly in health and education and in remote and northern communities. Participants also recognized that broadband can generate real social and economic benefits in rural areas.

Participants expressed that communities were experiencing difficulties in finding resources, skills and expertise to form strategic partnerships for improving broadband access.

- Communities should determine ways to aggregate demand for broadband through strategic partnerships as current demand for telecommunications is marginal and will not sustain investments.
- Communities should acquire more knowledge of telecommunications technologies to better determine their requirements and the most efficient technology to meet their needs.
- Communities should focus on the adoption of new information technology through modernization and training as this will lead to increased demand for telecommunications.
- Communities need technical assistance in order to better plan to maximize the potential benefits of broadband. Governments could play a role in providing research and technical assistance for broadband development to rural communities. Some of this assistance could involve:
- Developing an inventory of current telecommunications access and availability in rural regions to assist in determining what infrastructure investments are necessary.

- Researching regulatory issues and mechanisms that could facilitate the development of partnerships with broadband providers in rural communities.
- Providing technical assistance that would allow rural communities to improve their uptake and use of new information technologies which in turn would increase demand and sustainability for broadband.

6.3 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.

A study of Canadian immigration history shows a settlement policy that was beneficial to developing rural and remote communities. Aspects of the settlement policy should be reviewed and adapted to attract immigrants to rural areas.

- Greater cooperation is required within rural regions to develop a climate and quality of life to attract and retain new residents.
- Communities should partner to promote their rich, rural communities and the opportunities that exist for new Canadians in rural Canada.
- Communities should attempt to match new Canadians with economic opportunities within rural regions in the areas of health, education, agriculture and forestry.
- Communities and governments should work together at removing barriers that prevent new Canadians from settling into rural communities. Professional accreditation of immigrants possessing the training for specific professions that are in demand in rural regions could be accelerated.

6.4 HUMAN AND SOCIAL 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.

Social capital refers to the collective abilities, skills and knowledge of the members of a community. There are four key collective qualities that are crucial for communities to grow and prosper:

- **the capacity to develop, maintain and act through networks;**
- **the capacity to resolve local conflicts;**
- **the ability to develop an inclusive approach to local development, demonstrated by the community's ability to listen to all voices in order to achieve consensus on decisions that are vital to its future; and**
- **the ability to lever support and financial or human resources for local initiatives.**

Participants expressed that communities should be more inclusive of all segments of their population to benefit fully from the skills, training and experience that are available individually and collectively within their communities.

- Great strides have been made in the development of capacities of First Nations and Inuit communities and these examples of community empowerment could be applicable to all rural communities.
- Communities should consider First Nations and Inuit populations as active partners and contributors to rural, remote and northern community development. Their adaptability and resilience should be viewed as assets for community development.
- Communities should start thinking of their development as a holistic approach that can tap into individual and social resources found within their communities. To truly harness this human capital, development activities must be viewed as being interconnected.

6.5 URBAN/RURAL RELATIONSHIP

Urban and rural communities are inter-related and inter-dependent. Issues initiated in one community will often impact on other communities. Homelessness, pressures on health and long-term care, unemployment and unplanned growth are examples of topics that affect both urban and rural communities.

Participants stated that urban/rural relationships need to be improved as community development is a common theme for both urban and rural communities. It was felt that greater understanding of common needs should be promoted as a first step to the development of partnerships toward joint community development actions.

- Rural regions should increase the visibility of rural communities within urban areas to facilitate a better understanding and build on commonalities that can be found in issues and opportunities facing both communities. Past Rural Dialogue activities that supported this approach were deemed to be an essential first step.
- Communities should work with governments to limit the centralization of services to urban areas as these are essential to maintaining a higher standard of quality of life in rural communities. This factor is perceived as being largely ignored when calculating the benefits of centralization of services in urban areas.

A particular concern of rural communities with regard to urban and rural relationships had to do with urban driven agendas that were perceived as having a negative impact on rural development. Debates on genetically modified organisms, industrial farming, resource

management, firearm registration, etc., are generally felt to be initiated by urban populations, but ensuing policies and programs are judged to have an immediate impact on rural communities. It was noted that the application of the Rural Lens would help identify the true impacts of urban driven initiatives on rural development. Questions that could be asked are:

- What are the sensitive issues for society as a whole and what are their impacts on rural community development?
- What are the processes and actions that can be implemented in rural regions to align them with mainstream needs and ideals?
- What are the steps that could assist rural communities in developing and promoting a better understanding of their social and economic realities to urban-based populations?

6.6 NORTHERN AND REMOTE ISSUES

Issues faced by Northern communities are magnified by the distance to urban or neighbouring communities, few or non-existent roads, difficult access to socio-economic and educational opportunities, environmental pressures and the cyclical nature of resource-based economies.

Values and relationships were at the heart of discussions in roundtables held in northern regions. Participants indicated that “southern” community development principles and practices might not be entirely suited to the needs and aspirations of northern communities.

- Participants stressed the importance of considering the distinct characteristics of northern communities in terms of cultural values and relationships to the land when developing policies and programs for these communities.
- Resolution of negotiations for the self-government of First Nations and Inuit populations were viewed as the key to enhancing and sustaining the development of northern communities. The implementation of truly northern governance over community development is closely tied to the outcomes of these negotiations.

6.7 RESOURCE INDUSTRIES

Resource industries (fishing, forestry, agriculture, energy and mining) are the economic base of many rural, remote and northern communities. Many of these communities are facing challenges as a result of the cyclical nature of these industries and are developing opportunities to renew their economic and social base which in turn create jobs.

Participants stressed that rural communities should have more say with regard to policy directions and management trends of natural resources. This was judged to be essential to define and implement strategic actions that would stimulate community economic development.

- Communities should undertake to create a greater awareness of the total value of their natural capital and should better promote the sustainable use of natural resources.

- Communities should develop tools to capture the total wealth of their natural resources assets. Product development in value-added industries and tourism could be of great assistance for communities to move away from a commodity stream that requires volume over margins.

6.8 RECREATION AND CULTURE

Recreation, entertainment, cultural, social and educational facilities are key amenities which help to attract and keep citizens, especially youth and immigrants, in rural, remote and northern communities. Culture encompasses the arts and other intellectual activities and manifestations regarded collectively.

It also includes the customs, civilization, and achievements of a particular time or people. Recreation and culture are part of the quality of life and identity of our communities. They are crucial to keep communities vibrant and alive.

Participants stated that quality of life and cost of living are considered to be distinct advantages for rural communities. The development of cultural and recreational infrastructure within communities would enhance those advantages.

- The work of volunteers is an important element that supports the development of recreational and cultural activities in rural communities. It is essential that the significant investments of volunteers be recognized and valued.
- Communities should consider recreational and cultural infrastructure to be as important as other infrastructure requirements and plan for their development accordingly.

7. CONCLUSION

This quarterly report of the first five “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 identified that rural communities should develop and implement integrated strategic planning of their development as they can no longer afford to simply respond to pressing issues on an individual basis. Rural, remote and northern communities all recognized that youth have to be considered as significant contributors to community development. Ways should be found to provide opportunities for youth to actively participate in the decision-making processes that guide the destiny of their communities. With regard to infrastructure, participants again suggested that rural communities should undertake joint planning of their infrastructure needs and development. This planning process would ensure the best use of limited resources that can be invested in infrastructure development. Finally, on the topic of entrepreneurship, rural communities identified strategies that target research, product development and innovation as key community actions to diversify their economies and sustain entrepreneurship.

In discussing topics of specific regional relevance for each Roundtable, the notions of rural, remote or northern values and relationships were pointed out as important premises to be considered in undertaking community development. Stakeholders mentioned that rural communities have distinct characteristics and that rural community development must be adapted to these distinguishing features. However, it was often pointed out that rural communities must play a greater role in promoting their values if they are to develop working relationships with partners that can assist in their development.

Participants identified that governments can play an important role in supporting community driven strategies that respond to the challenges dealt with in the roundtables. In all roundtables, rural stakeholders called for integrated or horizontal policies and programs that are adapted to their reality. It was also noted as a caveat that governments cannot truly support rural regions if they are, at the same time, centralizing access to programs and services in the name of efficiency. Finally, rural stakeholders suggested that governments have an important role in sustaining rural communities as they strive to increase their capabilities to respond to challenges. Stakeholders specifically called for the research and development of tools and best practices that could be undertaken by governments to assist rural community development.

From the input provided to date, the Roundtable Discussions are attaining their goal of identifying both community strategies for their development and the role of governments in supporting communities respond to their development challenges. Participants at these events are expressing clear messages. They are proud of their communities and are optimistic as to the future of rural, remote and northern regions of Canada. They also want to pursue their own development, with governments as major partners. Participants did value the Roundtable Discussions as a forum to directly exchange ideas and avenues of interventions for rural development with governments.

There was a sense that the roundtables were a constructive step towards developing an overall strategy that can address rural, remote and northern community development challenges. In this context, further work is needed to flesh out the solutions identified through the Roundtable Discussions. Moreover, further dialogues could assist in refining and validating strategic actions that ensure rural, remote and northern communities can participate in and benefit from local and national prosperity.