



“RURAL COMMUNITIES AS THE CORNERSTONE”

QUARTERLY REPORT

Roundtable Discussions
October to December 2003

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1. FOREWORD

This report is a summary of discussions that took place during the six Roundtable Discussions entitled “Rural Communities as the Cornerstone” held in four provinces and one territory from October to December 2003, as well as in the Northwest Territories in May 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 six 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 six 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

Community capacity building is recognized as being a long-term and ongoing process, which requires developing and sustaining networks among community stakeholders, Aboriginal peoples and different levels of government. Emphasis should be placed on developing community capacity building initiatives, and designing innovative programs that enable communities to address issues from an integrated socio-economic perspective. Follow-up, appropriate support for these initiatives, and readily accessible and flexible programs will better equip communities to address and respond to their changing realities and be successful over the long-term.

Regional strategic planning is a valuable opportunity through which the goals, mandates and roles of the rural leadership base could be more clearly articulated. The strategic planning process could also be used as a mechanism to identify gaps in leadership knowledge and to develop a long-term plan to address those gaps.

Youth

Youth can provide a fresh, innovative perspective, and energy and enthusiasm to contribute to community affairs, as well as bring their extensive skills acquired through education, work experiences and travel outside the community. Rural communities should focus on encouraging youth to return to and settle as well as encouraging them to stay in rural regions. Real opportunities and venues for young people to make use of their skills and experiences must exist within rural communities to draw them back.

Proactive communication efforts should be undertaken to inform youth of opportunities available to them, as well as to raise awareness of viable career options within the community or in rural areas. A community level shift must occur to encourage youth to value and strive for a university education as well as value local opportunities and training.

Infrastructure

Efficient and reliable infrastructure was identified as being key to the sustainable rural livelihoods. It was acknowledged that small, rural, remote and northern communities cannot financially support the infrastructure needed for their areas given their limited tax base. Therefore, communities should be strategic in their decisions on infrastructure investments, as funding for infrastructure is limited and is challenging to access for smaller municipalities.

Public-private partnerships offer a potentially effective approach to infrastructure development mutually beneficial both for communities in need of infrastructure investments and for companies looking to expand their customer base.

Entrepreneurship

Recreation and culture was an area with possibilities for creative public and private partnerships as there is often a shortage of these kinds of facilities in smaller communities. Partnering in this area could provide much needed recreational, social, and cultural services to community members, particularly youth.

Rural communities should increase business investments, through increased economic ties with other rural and Aboriginal communities, and should sustain rural entrepreneurship. Participants considered diversification of the rural economy to be key to the revitalization and sustainable development of rural businesses. Business development strategies and business planning should be coordinated at the community level, in order to provide an overall strategy that attempts to mitigate the economic cycles often associated with resource-based economies. Ongoing networking and business support should be facilitated by governments to help communities take their entrepreneurial ideas and translate them into action.

Broadband

Broadband plays an important role in rural, remote and northern communities in terms of their connectivity to the global exchange of information and their ability to compete in the increasing global marketplace. Furthermore, broadband access is also seen as a critical infrastructure requirement for rural communities in terms of their long-term sustainability and viability, their access to services such as banking, health care and distance education, and their ability to build networks and connections among communities.

Immigration

Immigration strategies and tools for rural, remote and northern communities are required and should focus on inclusiveness as well as on attracting newcomers to come and settle in these areas. Strategies should be well-developed and also focus on receiving, welcoming and integrating newcomers into the community.

Changing local attitudes and achieving a greater understanding and acceptance of differences, whether those are of language, race, religion, age or socio-cultural background, is considered to be the key step in attracting new residents to rural, remote and northern communities.

Intergovernmental Partnerships

Intergovernmental collaboration should be a more integrated and cohesive process, particularly with respect to policy development and program delivery. Governments should better manage and communicate the information and tools available as rural communities need these for sustainable community development.

Up-to-date intergovernmental pathfinders are critical to effective intergovernmental work from the community point of view. Pathfinders that group information on programs and services available from different levels of government on particular issues, would provide citizens with a clearer understanding of what they could access through which level of government.

Urban/Rural Relationship

An effective strategy to raise awareness of the fact that rural and urban communities have different issues is required since government policy and program development work often occurs in urban centres. Effective communication strategies should be developed to gain a better understanding of the interdependence of rural and urban, bridge that divide, and determine the ways they can work together for mutual benefit.

Competition between urban and rural communities, with respect to the visibility of their issues and limited funding available, benefits neither type of community. In fact, it makes it more challenging to develop a mutual understanding and build alliances. A more integrated approach is needed, where strategic investments address both rural and urban in their interdependence.

Northern and Remote Issues

Resource development in the North is a significant contributor to the economy of the North and of the country as a whole; however, profits from investments are largely channeled south, out of local communities. Governance issues for northern communities are a priority and should be addressed to ensure decisions are being made in their best interests. Structures for governance should be put in place so that northern communities see the benefits from the development of local resources, heritage and culture.

Resource Industries

Rural, remote and northern communities recognize the importance of the natural resource base they have available to them. Developing opportunities and industries based on the natural resources of the area, while being ecologically sensitive, was a challenge faced by these communities. The development of water resources was identified as a potential new area of investment to diversify the primary industry sector in northern communities.

Human Capital

Leveraging of greater human capital within communities is a priority. Strategies should be developed that encompass skills development and training geared towards ensuring a continual renewal of the leadership and volunteer base, as well as strategies to involve new people in community affairs and to mitigate the level of burnout experienced by already engaged community members.

Social Capital

Communities often have the potential social capital they need. Developing programs and strategies that would enable communities to effectively work towards mutual goals, was identified as a challenge. Volunteerism as one of the major challenges faced by rural communities in terms of the mobilization of social capital. Partnerships were acknowledged as being key to building social capital both within communities as well as between communities.

Recreation and Culture

Recreation and culture is an area of community development frequently seen as secondary to economic development and, as a result, is often less supported. Due to the maintenance costs of recreational and cultural facilities, more cooperative ventures should be explored to share spaces and share the costs of construction/maintenance of multi-use facilities.

Accessible and affordable recreational and cultural opportunities are critical to people in small towns and rural communities. Strategies should be developed to create recreational and cultural opportunities that would increase community participation and cohesion, develop volunteerism and leadership skills, and engage young people to stay and build their lives in their communities.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 ROUNDTABLE EVENTS, PARTICIPANTS AND BACKGROUND

This quarterly report covers the six Roundtable Discussions that were held in four provinces and one territory between October and December 2003, as well as in the Northwest Territories in May 2003, identified in Table 1 below.

Province or Territory	Region	Type of region	No. of Participants	Date
Northwest Territory	Yellowknife (with Business Coalition & NGOs)	northern	25	May 23, 2003
Northwest Territory	Yellowknife	northern	7	October 4, 2003
Quebec	Val D'Or	rural-heartland	19	October 17, 2003
Ontario	New Liskeard	rural-heartland	18	October 17, 2003
New Brunswick	Sackville	rural	12	December 4, 2003
Nova Scotia	Truro	rural-heartland	9	December 5, 2003

To facilitate participation of community stakeholders, invitations for each roundtable were normally limited to between 20 and 25 people. For these latest Roundtable Discussions, a total of 90 residents from the above rural regions participated.

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 six 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
Northwest Territory	Yellowknife (with the Business Coalition & NGOs)	northern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergovernmental Partnerships • Human and Social Capital • Northern and Remote Issues
Northwest Territory	Yellowknife	northern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergovernmental Partnerships • Broadband • Resource Industries • Northern and Remote Issues
Quebec	Val D’Or	rural-heartland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadband • Immigration • Intergovernmental Partnerships • Resource Industries
Ontario	New Liskeard	rural-heartland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern and Remote Issues • Immigration
New Brunswick	Sackville	rural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergovernmental Partnerships • Urban/Rural Relationship • Human and Social Capital • Recreation and Culture
Nova Scotia	Truro	rural-heartland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergovernmental Partnerships • Urban/Rural Relationship • Human and Social Capital • Recreation and Culture

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 human and social capital remain very important to rural stakeholders, as demonstrated by the choices of participants. These are followed closely by northern and remote issues, broadband, immigration, urban/rural relationships, recreation and culture, 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 governments and communities work together to ensure that rural communities remain vibrant?

Community capacity building is recognized as being a long-term and ongoing process, which requires developing and sustaining networks among community stakeholders, Aboriginal peoples and different levels of government. Emphasis should be placed on developing community capacity building initiatives, and designing innovative programs that enable communities to address issues from an integrated socio-economic perspective. Follow-up, appropriate support for these initiatives, and readily accessible and flexible programs will better equip communities to address and respond to their changing realities and be successful over the long-term.

- Communities should have more flexibility, autonomy and more responsibility for tailoring opportunities specific to their needs when implementing community capacity building projects, and government should provide more support for such projects.
- Governments should move from talking and theorizing about community capacity building to actively engage citizens in local issues that are of interest to them and matter on a personal level.

Participants indicated that in order to plan successful and appropriate community capacity building and community development strategies, up-to-date research and data on key socio-economic indicators at the community level is required. It was also noted that social implications of community development are critical considerations in addition to, and in coordination with, economic issues.

- Communities and governments should collaborate as communities have the expertise in knowing what kind of data would be most useful to community planning and in what format it would be most transferrable and governments have access to such data.
- Communities, governments and other organizations should also form partnerships as each have an important role to play in facilitating successful community capacity building that encompasses both social and economic considerations.

It was expressed that the government currently focuses only on maintaining and ensuring that all communities remain vibrant; however, this focus may not necessarily reflect the day to day realities of community residents, their needs and aspirations for the future.

- Governments should provide “palliative care for communities” to assist and support communities who make the difficult decision to “wind down” and residents who must move to other communities where they are faced with new circumstances.

How can communities renew their leadership base?

Participants indicated that the challenges experienced by volunteers in rural areas should be acknowledged, and concrete steps taken to mitigate them in order for community leadership and volunteerism to become more attractive arenas of community involvement. Increased recruitment, recognition and skills development opportunities should be provided and geared towards youth and newcomers, as well as to existing leaders within the community, to promote personal development and, at the same time, reduce leadership burnout.

- Skills training and development programs specifically geared towards the conditions and needs of people in northern Canada should be developed, as these were identified as being important.
- Conflict resolution, leadership, board of directors training and human resource management skills were identified as key in building a renewed and more effective leadership base. These types of skills for strengthening citizen-engagement, if made more widely available, benefit the whole community by enabling more people of diverse backgrounds to contribute actively to all aspects of community life.

Participants mentioned that regional strategic planning is a valuable opportunity through which the goals, mandates and roles of the rural leadership base could be more clearly articulated. The strategic planning process could also be used as a mechanism to identify gaps in leadership knowledge and to develop a long-term plan to address those gaps, through training, mentoring and education for example. A grass-roots or bottom-up approach to rural community development and leadership development is seen as the most desirable approach and the one that would have the most local buy-in and impact over the longer term.

- Communities should assess existing leadership development and rural development models to determine which ones could be adapted to their particular circumstances.

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

Participants highlighted the important role communities should play in creating inclusive and welcoming communities by encouraging broader citizen participation and engagement. It was noted that inclusion is not a passive concept, but rather an active one that should ensure meaningful opportunities exist for all citizens to become involved in the governance and development of their communities. The distinct identity and the diversity of particular rural, remote and northern regions should be recognized and celebrated in such a way that the voices of all citizens are heard and they are all able to make a contribution to the community.

- Communities and local organizations should work on becoming more inclusive of the differences within the rural landscape, whether those are of language, race, religion, age or socio-cultural background.
- Rural communities and neighbouring Aboriginal communities should increase their relationship-building efforts as well as their partnerships.

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?

Participants felt that youth in rural communities can provide a fresh, innovative perspective, and energy and enthusiasm to contribute to community affairs, as well as bring their extensive skills acquired through education, work experiences and travel outside the community. This is particularly evident in the areas of skills for technology and the knowledge-based economy. Youth expressed that they want their skills and experiences to be taken seriously and utilized in the day to day management of community affairs, regardless of where those skills have been gained.

- Greater efforts should be undertaken to address the perception of both youth and others that youth who stay in their rural communities rather than leaving to acquire different experiences, lack ambition and knowledge to make valuable contributions.
- Communities should actively recruit youth in issues that matter to them and involve them by drawing in their skills and expertise.

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

Participants expressed that rural communities should focus on encouraging youth to return to and settle, as well as encouraging them to stay in rural regions. Real opportunities and venues for young people to make use of their skills and experiences, as well as a well-developed sense of belonging to, and involvement in the community, must exist within rural communities to draw them back.

Furthermore, proactive communication efforts should be undertaken to inform youth of opportunities available to them, as well as to raise awareness of viable career options within the community or in rural areas, and of lifestyle choices. This could encourage youth from the area to stay and/or return and could also contribute to attracting youth from other areas and new immigrants to come and settle in the area.

It was also stated that a community level shift must occur to encourage youth to value and strive for a university education as well as value local opportunities and training. Consequently, more varied and locally applicable vocational training, internships and trades apprenticeship opportunities should be provided to youth in their communities. This could, in turn, encourage youth entrepreneurship and involvement in the local economy and community life from a longer term career perspective.

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:

- The partnership agreement reached between the Université du Québec (Rouyn-Noranda) and the local First Nations communities was developed to accept youth from these communities, at their current level of completed education, into university. Their education level is brought up to the standards in any areas that may be lagging through a mentoring and tutoring program, after which they are integrated into the regular academic system. When they graduate, they have not only a degree, but also a more complete skill set through the mentoring process, and are better equipped to enter the job market.
- The Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Development's (FedNor) Youth Internship Program for Northern Ontario post-secondary graduates, is considered an ideal example of the promotion of youth engagement in rural areas. Valuable new opportunities for youth involvement in the community could be provided if the program was expanded and adapted to different regions of the country.

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

Participants expressed that all levels of government have an important role to play, although not an isolated one, in increasing economic, social and cultural opportunities for youth. The following outlines specific actions being recommended:

- Governments and communities should actively involve young people in their recreational and cultural initiatives and in their skills and economic development opportunities.
- Governments and communities should provide ongoing support to youth for the implementation and follow-up stages of any initiatives undertaken.
- Governments and communities should play a role in facilitating entrepreneurship and supporting long-term mentoring and career development opportunities for young people in rural communities.
- Governments and communities should more actively promote the return of youth and young families to rural communities by developing incentive programs for such activities as buying a home or opening a new business or service in rural, remote and northern areas of the country.

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?

Participants identified that efficient and reliable infrastructure is key to the sustainable rural livelihoods. They also highlighted the importance of having locally managed infrastructure investments to ensure appropriateness to local contexts and conditions, and that these mutually benefit all community stakeholders.

- Communities and governments should strategically plan and manage infrastructure development together rather than address it on a crisis management basis.
- Government should consider key infrastructure investments in a horizontal manner, and ensure these are integrated and better coordinated.

Participants acknowledged that small, rural, remote and northern communities cannot financially support the infrastructure needed for their areas given their limited tax base. Communities should be strategic in their decisions on infrastructure investments, as funding for infrastructure is limited and is challenging to access for smaller municipalities. As well, communities in the North face seasonal challenges and a level of degradation of local infrastructure not encountered by most other municipalities.

- Communities should co-locate services in order to more efficiently utilize existing or planned infrastructure, as well as encourage community linkages and viability.
- Governments should provide assistance, financial and otherwise, to ensure equitable levels of basic infrastructure for all Canadians, regardless of where they live.
- Government should review its per capita funding formulas for infrastructure to ensure these respond adequately to the needs of small, rural, remote and northern communities who have a smaller population base but greater geographic area to cover with fewer resources to lever.

Participants expressed that public-private partnerships offer a potentially effective approach to infrastructure development mutually beneficial both for communities in need of infrastructure investments and for companies looking to expand their customer base. In regions with Aboriginal communities, tripartite arrangements, in conjunction with rural communities and private enterprises, have proven successful in fostering long-term collaboration.

- Northern communities should create or expand municipal management boards as a means to improve cooperation on infrastructure development among those communities.

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:

- Yellowknife - Access to adequate and affordable **housing infrastructure** was identified as the most important investment need in northern communities since current options for public housing are inadequate and the costs of private housing are often prohibitive.
- Val D'Or - The most challenging infrastructure issue for the region is the establishment of modern **telecommunications infrastructure** to support ongoing industrial development and ensure the continued vitality of the region.
- New Liskeard - **Transportation infrastructure** was identified as the key investment need in northern Ontario to support current industry, attract new businesses and improve linkages with the rest of the province.
- Sackville - While no single infrastructure need emerged, the consensus was that **flexibility** in terms of **infrastructure funding** would make the most significant contribution to infrastructure development in this region.

- Truro - The development and maintenance of **local roads** was highlighted as being key in this area. Two particular issues were identified: lack of funding for local roads and highways bypassing rural communities rather than providing access for local residents and encouraging people to visit.

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 indicated that recreation and culture was an area with possibilities for creative public and private partnerships, as there is often a shortage of these kinds of facilities in smaller communities. Partnering in this area could provide much needed recreational, social, and cultural services to community members, particularly youth. This partnership effort could consequently provide opportunities for entrepreneurship, increase citizen engagement and develop skills through leadership and mentoring.

Participants agreed that their communities should increase business investments, through increased economic ties with other rural and Aboriginal communities, and should sustain rural entrepreneurship.

- The creation of “centres of excellence” in rural areas could provide a venue to highlight, research and further develop local strengths, such as the natural resources industries of a particular region, into broader entrepreneurial opportunities. This, in turn, could attract other spin-off investments to the area, creating jobs and revitalizing the economy.
- Rural communities should work more closely and create additional entrepreneurial opportunities and joint ventures with Aboriginal communities in their areas.
- Communities within a region should collaborate to take advantage of the entrepreneurship potential for tourism development that exists in many regions. Existing tourism operators should better coordinate their efforts, and a branding and promotional strategy to market the area to the rest of Canada and abroad should be developed.

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

Participants considered diversification of the rural economy to be key to the revitalization and sustainable development of rural businesses. Diversification includes the exploration of innovative possibilities such as: the production of value-added agricultural and natural resource products; cold weather crops; and the establishment of slaughter houses in rural areas.

- Rural communities and regions should assess themselves against other comparable areas and recognize their strengths and successes, prioritizing their economic activities and investments accordingly.
- Rural areas should make a concerted effort to promote themselves, based on their competitive advantages, as areas for viable and desirable investment opportunities.

It was mentioned that business development strategies and business planning should be coordinated at the community level, in order to provide an overall strategy that attempts to mitigate the economic cycles often associated with resource-based economies.

- Governments should support small and medium-sized enterprises as these are engines of growth in rural, remote and northern communities and are ideally suited to the rural economy given their flexibility.
- Governments and others should provide assistance to improve the export-readiness of enterprises, promote export development strategies at a regional level, and apply new technologies in connectivity and information management.

How can governments help communities turn their ideas into action?

Participants felt that ongoing networking and business support should be facilitated by governments to help communities take their entrepreneurial ideas and translate them into action. They expressed that various types of support for entrepreneurship development of rural, remote and northern communities are needed. The key ones mentioned were: increased funding with better regulatory and funding processes; long-term support of development opportunities; the creation of partnerships; flexible mechanisms; and the sharing of expertise, tools and strategies.

- Governments should provide more funding to economic development agencies as these were identified as a key means of supporting business development in rural communities. This would enable the agencies to have an adequate number of staff, to ensure core funds are available to support community business planning, and to better support entrepreneurship development programs.
- Governments should adapt their regulatory processes to facilitate the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, and streamline their funding processes to ensure businesses receive the needed support in a timely fashion.
- Governments should provide support for systematic, detailed and action-oriented rural think tanks to address community issues, including entrepreneurship, as this was suggested as a more effective long-term strategy.
- Governments should play a key role in facilitating entrepreneurship development and supporting long-term mentoring and career development opportunities in rural communities. This was identified as particularly important to retain youth and attract the needed skilled professionals and tradespeople to come and settle in rural areas.

- Governments should work in partnership with communities and provide more flexible mechanisms that support community level decision-making on new business projects in their areas. Examples of successful steps in this direction include the Northern Innovation Fund and the “pacte rural” component of the Government of Quebec’s rural policy, which enables community members to collectively decide how to allocate their funding.
- Governments should play a role in sharing expertise. For example, making economic development consultants available to communities who are looking for business planning advice, disseminating tools to help communities and providing branding and marketing strategies to new businesses.

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 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 indicated that broadband plays an important role in rural, remote and northern communities in terms of their connectivity to the global exchange of information and their ability to compete in the increasing global marketplace. Broadband access is also seen as a critical infrastructure requirement for rural communities in terms of their long-term sustainability and viability, their access to services such as banking, health care and distance education, and their ability to build networks and connections among communities. This is particularly important for Aboriginal communities in terms of the promotion of youth engagement and education opportunities.

- A strategy should be developed to establish the necessary infrastructure in rural, remote and northern locations as it was identified as the most essential requirement at this time.
- Communities, governments, non-government organizations and private enterprises, with the telecommunications expertise, should collaborate to support the development of affordable broadband services.

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 expressed that immigration strategies and tools for rural, remote and northern communities are required and should focus on inclusiveness as well as on attracting newcomers to come and settle in these areas. Strategies should be well-developed and also focus on receiving, welcoming and integrating newcomers into the community, whether they are youth, young families from neighbouring regions, immigrants arriving from other countries or residents of other towns and cities.

Changing local attitudes and achieving a greater understanding and acceptance of differences, whether those are of language, race, religion, age or socio-cultural background, is considered to be the key step in attracting new residents to rural, remote and northern communities. This cultural shift would include recognizing newcomers as contributing members of the community.

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 felt that intergovernmental collaboration should be a more integrated and cohesive process, particularly with respect to policy development and program delivery.

- Federal and provincial/territorial governments should clarify the divisions of responsibility and better coordinate their programs and priorities. Currently, there is confusion about this at the community and individual levels.

It was mentioned that up-to-date intergovernmental pathfinders (both on the Web and in print format) are critical to effective intergovernmental work from the community point of view. Pathfinders that group information on programs and services available from different levels of government on particular issues, would provide citizens with a clearer understanding of what they could access through which level of government. As well, they would provide communities with much needed continuity and a means of navigating through the continually shifting government bureaucracy.

- Governments should better manage and communicate the information and tools available as rural communities need these for sustainable community development.

Participants expressed that community development programs tend to be evaluated by the funding level of government based on short-term results and measurable outcomes. While accountability is important, it was noted that a short-term deliverables approach does not consider and allow for the community to build its capacity, maintain due process and achieve long-term sustainability. Participants further indicated that these soft outcomes, while critical to community development, are difficult to measure and as a result, undervalued by government funding programs.

Participants indicated that well-developed networks have already been established in some parts of the country (notably in northern Quebec) between government, academic and private enterprises. It was noted that lessons learned from these cases could be transferred to other areas facing similar challenges, in particular, lessons regarding the flexibility of networks and the decentralization of government services.

6.4 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 indicated that an effective strategy to raise awareness of the fact that rural and urban communities have different issues is required since government policy and program development work often occurs in urban centres. While they recognized the differences between rural and urban communities, they also noted that they share common needs such as: accessible and affordable housing, efficient transportation services, sustainable livelihoods.

- Governments should include a section on “rural implications” on their forms and applications to ensure rural implications and issues are discussed during program and policy development.

They expressed that there is a need for a better understanding of urban-rural interdependence, particularly with respect to: the economic impact of primary industries; the urban understanding of food cost, food security and drinking water; the value of the rural landscape and amenities; and the contribution of rural Canada to the protection and enhancement of the environment.

Participants noted that competition between urban and rural communities, with respect to the visibility of their issues and limited funding available, benefits neither type of community. In fact, it makes it more challenging to develop a mutual understanding and build alliances. They indicated that a more integrated approach is needed, where strategic investments address both rural and urban in their interdependence. The basis of this shift lies in the recognition that investments and improvements in larger urban centres within a region will also have spin-off benefits for the smaller towns and rural communities in the area.

- Effective communication strategies should be developed to gain a better understanding of the interdependence of rural and urban, bridge that divide, and determine the ways they can work together for mutual benefit.

6.5 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.

Participants expressed that the transfer of services to the community level has had a negative impact on the ability of northern, remote and rural municipalities to achieve sustainable development over the long-term. They further noted that the measures required to balance fiscal responsibilities, combined with the higher costs of infrastructure and service delivery in the north, often means that funding for allocation to recreation, culture and broader development goals is insufficient.

- Government should make a commitment to begin meeting the specific infrastructure needs of northern and remote communities, as these are unique and significant challenges are faced in the development of infrastructure in this context. Local infrastructure is degraded and requires priority investments for maintenance and new construction.

Participants recognized that resource development in the North is a significant contributor to the economy of the North and of the country as a whole; however, profits from investments are largely channeled south, out of local communities. Governance issues for northern communities are a priority and should be addressed to ensure decisions are being made in their best interests. Structures for governance should be put in place so that northern communities see the benefits from the development of local resources, heritage and culture.

- Strategies should be developed that enable the rewards of investments and developments made in the North to remain in the North, where they would be reinvested and thereby contribute to a higher degree of long-term community sustainability.
- Northern and remote communities should strengthen their marketing to focus on the high quality of life and the economic and cultural assets they have to offer in order to attract both new immigrants as well as residents of southern communities and larger cities.

They expressed that commodity marketing regulations in areas such as slaughter house licensing, forest access and agricultural marketing boards are imposing structural barriers to development in northern and remote communities. Participants suggested that regulations should be reviewed and revised to consider the unique conditions faced in the North in order to facilitate the development of value-added product industries and the diversification of the northern economy.

Participants indicated that a broader range of tools are needed to begin to access the total wealth of the natural resources and heritage of northern and remote communities. Product development in value-added industries and tourism could be of great assistance to northern and remote communities in their movement away from a solely natural resource commodity-based economy.

6.6 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 noted that rural, remote and northern communities recognize the importance of the natural resource base they have available to them. They expressed that developing opportunities and industries based on the natural resources of the area, which will be viable and sustainable over the long-term, while being ecologically sensitive, was a challenge faced by these communities.

Participants identified the development of water resources as a potential new area of investment to diversify the primary industry sector in northern communities. Furthermore, water resources are recognized as being a public good and, as a result, require careful planning and management in order to create responsible and sustainable livelihoods from this resource.

It was stated that resource industries in the North are undergoing an evolution, moving towards larger scale industries and previously untapped resources such as diamonds, oil and gas. In order for people in the North to play an integral part of the process of developing these new resources, opportunities for training and education in the skills, trades and management of these emerging industries, are needed. Additionally, human and social capital should be mobilized, in an integrated manner, along with the natural resources.

6.7 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 identified that the leveraging of greater human capital within communities is a priority, rather than relying on participation of the same individuals in all aspects of community life. Diversification and renewal of the leadership and volunteer base within communities was recognized as a benefit to everyone, as it engages a broader citizen base, mitigates volunteer burnout, transfers skills and knowledge, and increases the participation of youth and newcomers, preparing them to become the next generation of community leaders.

- Strategies should be developed that encompass skills development and training geared towards ensuring a continual renewal of the leadership and volunteer base, as well as strategies to involve new people in community affairs and to mitigate the level of burnout experienced by already engaged community members.

They further indicated that there is a need, at the same time, to redefine the utilization of human capital within communities. Given the limited funding for community projects, volunteers are too often called on to fill the gaps by providing free labour and leadership, and without being given adequate support, tools and training and recognition for the multiple roles they play in fulfilling expectations in their households and communities.

It was expressed that training in the skills and the application of new technology was also a key component of future human capital development in rural, remote and northern communities. Given the increasing availability of new technology and its importance to both the global economy and the everyday modes of communication, more attention should be paid to ensuring that people in rural areas have adequate and timely exposure to and training in these new technologies.

Participants mentioned that the human capital of rural areas needs to be on par or better than urban areas in order to attract and sustain new investment in the local economy. Technology should also be used as a means to involve and engage young people, who are often more likely to have the technology skills and aptitudes, and demonstrate that viable options exist for them in the local area. As well, leveraging human capital around new skills and new technology can be a means of community revitalization by attracting new people to a given area.

6.8 SOCIAL CAPITAL

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 while communities often have the potential social capital they need, too much of the collective energy ends up being directed towards keeping up with shifting government processes to fit the current molds of funding applications, rather than mobilizing that social capital towards community development goals. Developing programs and strategies, with government and/or outside expertise support, that would enable communities to effectively work towards mutual goals, was identified as a challenge.

It was noted that to more effectively mobilize social capital towards community initiatives, a stable, funded, local organization is needed, such as a community foundation. This type of foundation can provide the assurance of ongoing funding and space where community members can organize activities and network, as well as the opportunity to develop a sense of collective authority and responsibility. Through such an organization, communities have the autonomy to manage themselves as well as the responsibility and accountability that goes along with that. As a result, communities are able to devote their skills and abilities towards collective action on long-term community sustainability and viability.

Participants identified volunteerism as one of the major challenges faced by rural communities in terms of the mobilization of social capital. The few people that do volunteer are often asked to participate in everything. As a result, burnout rates are high and the social capital that is built up needs to be constantly replenished. In addition, when the same individuals are involved in all aspects of community life, it means that a broader, more representative community voice is not necessarily being heard.

Participants acknowledged that partnerships are key to building social capital both within communities as well as between communities. In particular, it was noted that partnerships should be forged and strengthened between rural communities and Aboriginal communities to improve the viability of communities in a specific region, who are often dealing with the same geographic and resource challenges, but from different perspectives.

6.9 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 expressed that recreation and culture is an area of community development frequently seen as secondary to economic development and, as a result, is often less supported. However, residents of rural, remote and northern communities, recognize the value of recreational and cultural infrastructure and services to their communities as well as the spin-off effects of these types of activities.

They further indicated that due to the maintenance costs of recreational and cultural facilities, more cooperative ventures should be explored to share spaces and share the costs of construction/maintenance of multi-use facilities. The co-location of services, such as day-cares in recreation facilities, schools or retirement homes, was provided as one example of potential collaboration.

Participants mentioned that accessible and affordable recreational and cultural opportunities are critical to people in small towns and rural communities. In particular, it is important to have activities targeted at youth, young families and seniors. Furthermore, the availability of these types of facilities within a community helps both to attract and retain residents as well as to provide opportunities for volunteering, community engagement and capacity building.

- Strategies should be developed to create recreational and cultural opportunities that would increase community participation and cohesion, develop volunteerism and leadership skills, and engage young people to stay and build their lives in their communities.

They also noted that the value of small-scale activities and small groups is often overlooked, despite the fact that research has proven the value of small group dynamics to individuals and to building social cohesion. Participants indicated that bigger is considered better in terms of having a critical mass to justify the need for recreational and cultural services and the cost-effectiveness of programs in rural, remote and northern communities.

Participants expressed that a balance in public sector rules and regulations, in terms of recreation and cultural activities, is needed. On the one hand, public health and safety considerations should be paramount; but at the same time, the entry of private enterprises, providing pay per use recreational facilities and activities, should be facilitated. Participants outlined the importance of ensuring that regulations are less stringent and more flexible so that private enterprises can provide much needed recreation and culture programs and services that would otherwise be unavailable.

7. CONCLUSION

This quarterly report of the six “Rural Communities as the Cornerstone” Roundtable Discussions has highlighted important solutions and actions that rural communities identified to respond to their challenges. Participants indicated that dialogues such as the Roundtable Discussions are valuable in bringing diverse people together to network and discuss common community issues.

In terms of community capacity building, participants expressed that a grass-roots approach to community and leadership development would be the most effective and most sustainable way to address their capacity concerns. With regard to infrastructure, they indicated that financial assistance is required from government as small, rural communities have a limited tax base. Furthermore, the creation of public-private partnerships was identified as a potentially effective approach to infrastructure development which would also be beneficial to both investors and communities. Finally, on the topic of entrepreneurship, they indicated that governments should work in partnership with communities and provide them with the tools, expertise, long-term support, and increased funding. Additionally, governments should make the provision for more flexible mechanisms that support community level decision-making and ownership of local development initiatives.

When discussing intergovernmental partnerships, participants expressed that communities place little importance on which level of government is delivering a program or service since what matters is that the programs and services are being offered and are accessible and appropriate to the communities they serve. They also indicated that better coordination is needed among all levels of government and service providing agencies. This would facilitate program and service delivery, and ensure there are no duplication efforts or conflicts. Ideally, communities would appreciate the establishment of a central clearinghouse for government information and program delivery in their area. Furthermore, participants identified that up-to-date, integrated, intergovernmental pathfinders (both on the Web and in print format) would help communities navigate through the different programs and services available from all levels of government and through the continually shifting government bureaucracy.

Participants felt that youth and newcomers, immigrants or otherwise, are the future of rural communities. Participants indicated that emphasis should be placed on the development of a sense of pride and belonging to the community, to encourage young people to return to and settle in rural communities rather than simply focussing on their retention. They expressed that viable job prospects, along with concrete opportunities for involvement in community affairs, are means of drawing youth back to apply the skills and experience they gained elsewhere to the needs of their communities. Creating a vital and vibrant community to live in and valuing the knowledge people bring with them will also contribute to encouraging newcomers to settle in rural, remote and northern areas over the long-term.

Participants mentioned that leveraging human and social capital within communities was a key challenge to long-term sustainable development. They further indicated that residents of rural, remote and northern communities need the tools and training to more effectively recruit, engage and retain local volunteers and leaders.