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## ATLANTIC FORUM ON RURAL REPOPULATION

*“Challenge – Reflect – Apply”*

### RURAL DIALOGUE SUMMARY REPORT

**Moncton, New Brunswick  
December 8 to 10, 2005**

Publication # 10146E  
© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2006  
Cat. No. # A114-27/2005F-PDF  
ISBN # 0-662-43120-0

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**Canada**

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# ATLANTIC FORUM ON RURAL REPOPULATION

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### 1. FOREWORD

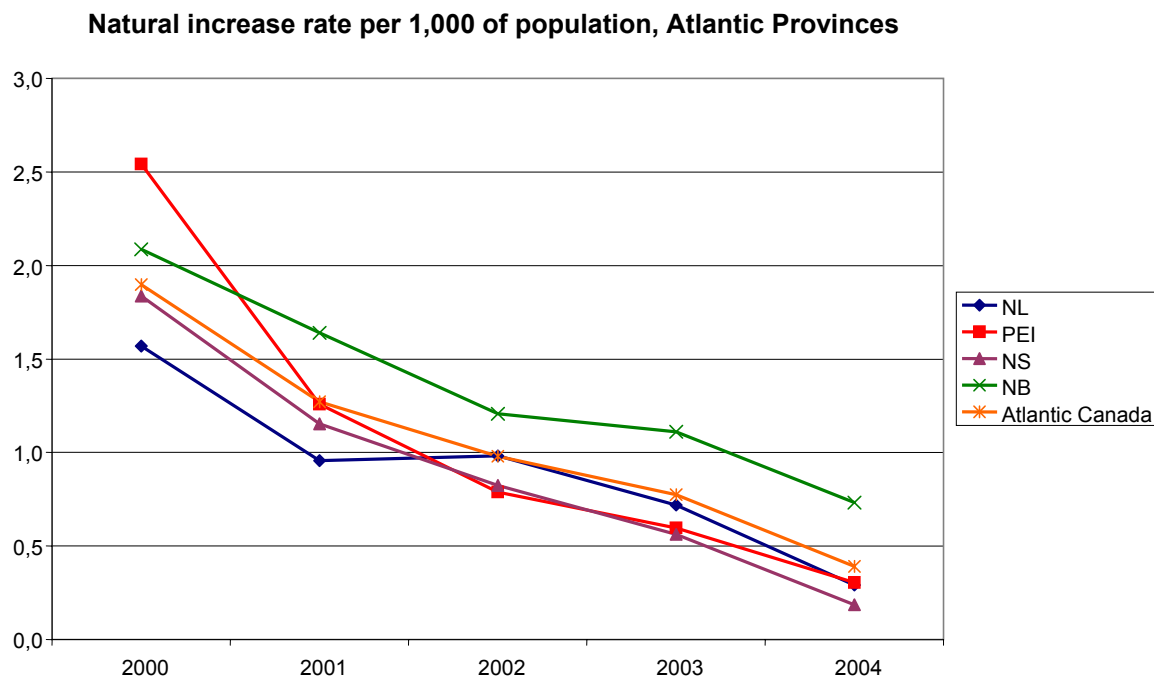
This report is a summary of discussions that took place during the Atlantic Forum on Rural Repopulation, “*Challenge – Reflect – Apply*”, held in Moncton, New Brunswick from December 8 to 10, 2005. No limits were placed on the participants during the discussions. In order to present a true report of 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 Atlantic Forum on Rural Repopulation was part of the Rural Dialogue, an ongoing, two-way discussion between the Government of Canada and Canadians from rural, remote and northern regions. Launched in 1998, the Rural Dialogue is a key citizen-engagement component of the Canadian Rural Partnership (CRP). The CRP is designed to support a horizontal approach to rural development within the Government of Canada that responds to rural, remote and northern priorities. The Dialogue process 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.

The Rural Secretariat – Atlantic Region put rural repopulation at the head of its list of priorities following a November 2003 meeting of its four Rural Teams. This was done because of a finding that the population of the Atlantic Provinces is in decline. Provincial statistics from 2003 show that 20 out of 27 rural counties in the Maritimes (Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia) have negative natural increase rates; that is, the number of deaths is higher than the number of births. In Newfoundland and Labrador, three out of five major rural regions (Integrated Boards) had negative natural increase rates in 2001. According to “Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories (2005-2031)”, published by Statistics Canada in December 2005, the most plausible scenario is that the natural increase rate would become negative in 2008 for the provinces of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, in 2012 for New Brunswick, and in 2022 for Prince Edward Island.

The following graph illustrates the decline in the natural increase rate for the four Atlantic Provinces between 2000 and 2004.



The Pan-Atlantic Repopulation Committee, composed of representatives from each Rural Team, was created in November 2003 to address the important issue of rural repopulation. The Committee agreed that repopulation efforts should focus on three basic elements: Youth Attraction and Retention, Repatriation and Immigration.

The Committee commissioned a study on this issue to get a better understanding of the challenges facing communities. The resulting discussion paper explains the opportunities and challenges of the three aspects of rural repopulation, and analyses repopulation projects implemented in the Atlantic Provinces. The discussion paper entitled "[Rural Repopulation in Atlantic Canada](http://www.rural.gc.ca/researchreports/popresearch/repop_e.phtml)" [http://www.rural.gc.ca/researchreports/popresearch/repop\_e.phtml], prepared by the Rural and Small Town Programme (Mount Allison University) in the spring of 2005, was made available to participants for discussion purposes and was also used as a reference for this summary report.

Aware of the challenges facing communities in implementing their numerous rural repopulation initiatives, the Committee decided to organize a forum where stakeholders from the four Atlantic Provinces could discuss their successes and concerns and examine concrete solutions and potential avenues for collaboration.

The **general objectives** of the Atlantic Forum on Rural Repopulation were to enable participants to:

- discuss and examine concrete solutions and avenues for collaboration;
- think about what their rural communities could become with a successful repopulation strategy; and
- think of ways their communities can show leadership in this area.

The **specific objectives** of each of the three key repopulation aspects were as follows.

#### Immigration

- Examine the positive impacts and problems of immigration in rural communities.
- Identify the tools and resources required to meet these challenges.
- Prepare recommendations on actions for the coming year.

#### Youth Attraction and Retention

- Think of ways to engage young people so that they can become fully involved in the development of their rural communities.
- Identify what these communities have to offer their youth.
- Identify ways of staying in touch with youth who have left and what services should be developed to encourage them to return.

#### Repatriation

- Identify means for promoting the characteristics of rural communities.
- Achieve consensus to ensure that the repatriation issue is an integral part of community planning initiatives.

The organizers expected that the Atlantic Forum on Rural Repopulation would achieve the following outcomes:

- The development of action plans involving federal, provincial and municipal governments, communities and community agencies.
- The development of processes to be implemented by participants when they returned to their communities.
- Participants making individual pledges to take action and participate in the repopulation initiative for rural Atlantic communities.

Of the 112 participants from Canada's four Atlantic Provinces, 60 represented rural communities as: members of regional agencies, municipalities or youth groups; community, economic and social development officers; and representatives of organizations or communities. The remainder included representatives of federal, provincial and municipal governments, representatives of universities, and researchers.

Participants were first asked to participate in **thematic dialogues** (reported in section 4) on the three key elements of repopulation. Each thematic dialogue was preceded by a presentation aimed at stimulating discussion. Questions were asked to facilitate discussion and encourage participants to define concrete actions and strategies, which were presented in a plenary session. Participants then took part in **provincial dialogues** (reported in section 5), where they were asked to identify a priority sector for development in their respective provinces and to identify the resources and leadership required to make that priority a reality. Guiding principles for rural repopulation action emerged from all the dialogues and are reported in section 6.

In her opening speech, Donna Mitchell, Executive Director of the Rural and Co-operatives Secretariats, encouraged the stakeholders to adopt a holistic approach incorporating economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects. The emphasis should be on actions that would be led by the rural communities themselves, with the governments playing a supporting role.

The results presented in this report will help guide the future actions of the Government of Canada in support of rural communities and will contribute to the ongoing development of the proposed National Rural Framework (NRF). The over-arching goal of the NRF, a framework to facilitate federal, provincial and territorial collaboration on rural issues, is to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of rural communities by creating an environment in which communities and citizens have access to improved social and economic opportunities. The proposed NRF is based on five areas of focus that affect community sustainability.

### 3. THE NATIONAL RURAL FRAMEWORK’S FIVE AREAS OF FOCUS

<b>Sustainable Livelihoods</b>	Factors affecting how Canadians can provide for themselves and their families to live in rural communities that are economically and socially healthy.
<b>Environmental Stewardship</b>	Ways in which rural and urban communities can share with governments the responsibility for good management, the benefits of natural resources and a healthy environment.
<b>Innovative Approaches to Rural Infrastructure</b>	Approaches allowing communities, working together with governments, to develop and maintain physical, social and knowledge-based infrastructure that addresses their needs.
<b>Engaged Populations and Institutions</b>	Opportunities for institutions and governments to provide the environment where Canadians can actively participate in making decisions that affect the community.
<b>Demographic Adaptation</b>	Openness to the range of options rural communities may need to consider in order to adapt to ongoing changes in population, economics and services.

### 4. THEMATIC DIALOGUES

While most issues and priorities discussed at this event related to one area of focus (demographic adaptation) of the NRF, some links could be made to the other areas of focus, namely: engaged populations and institutions, and sustainable livelihoods. Proposed actions, strategies and solutions that could address the issues discussed are also included in this section which reports on the thematic dialogues on the three aspects of rural repopulation: Immigration, Youth Attraction and Retention, and Repatriation.

It was noted that communities themselves should initiate repopulation actions, develop strategic plans and identify their priorities. Additionally, they should establish economic and social strategies that ensure sustainable development for healthy rural communities. This could be achieved through measures such as youth integration, wealth creation and the retention of services that make it possible to maintain a critical mass of population.

A presentation was made during each of the thematic dialogue. To receive copies of the three presentations, please contact Jean Lambert, Rural Secretariat – Atlantic Region, by telephone (506-851-3523) or e-mail ([lambertj@agr.gc.ca](mailto:lambertj@agr.gc.ca)).

## **4.1 Immigration**

The population is shrinking in Atlantic Canada's rural regions. Between 1991 and 2001, rural communities in Atlantic Canada lost 74,000 residents, which corresponds to a 6.8% decrease. There was a high rate of out-migration, and the region had trouble attracting newcomers. Some rural communities are considering immigration as a means of reversing this trend. But it will be a challenge given the state of immigration – in 2001, 24,315 immigrants lived in Atlantic Canada, representing only 2.4% of the rural population.

Godfrey Baldacchino, Canada Research Chair in Island Studies and Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Prince Edward Island, presented the following questions to stimulate discussion:

- ◆ Why immigration? The practical aspects of immigration are often discussed, but have we forgotten its human aspect?
- ◆ Which communities? And what do they mean by integration?
- ◆ Are we welcoming? The myth of hospitality: friendliness is not friendship.
- ◆ What jobs? Can the workplace also constitute a “community” for workers?
- ◆ Entrepreneurship: how can we attract entrepreneurs?

### **4.1.1 Summary of discussions**

Immigration has a positive impact on communities. It contributes to the:

- diversity and the enrichment of human and economic capital;
- openness to the world at large and greater acceptance of differences; and
- economic prosperity by maintaining or even increasing services.

Immigration requires communities to meet certain challenges, namely:

- being prepared to welcome immigrants;
- being truly welcoming (friendliness versus friendship);
- overcoming prejudices and myths (about job losses, for example); and
- ensuring the provision of social support and infrastructure required to receive immigrants.

### **4.1.2 Proposed actions**

- Develop promotional tools for Atlantic Canada and distribute them in immigrants' countries of origin.
- Streamline administrative processes for immigrants and the communities who want to welcome them; specifically, expand and improve the Provincial Nominee Program.

- Facilitate access to information on services and programs for immigrants.
- Consider the integration needs of all family members.
- Raise public awareness of the benefits of immigration.
- Implement multiculturalism awareness and education programs starting at an early age.

## **4.2 Youth Attraction and Retention**

Many young people leave their rural communities for education and work opportunities. They gain experience, but they do not return in sufficient numbers to maintain populations in rural Atlantic Canada. Youth express an interest in greater and more meaningful involvement in their communities. Those communities should mobilize to get the commitment and interest required to get young people to return.

The dialogue on this theme was preceded by a presentation by Peter Haeghaert, a Nova Scotia youth, and Brian Braganza, Executive Director of HeartWood Center for Community Youth Development. They highlighted a number of items intended to stimulate discussion:

- ◆ Creating a welcoming environment benefits young people and all members of the community.
- ◆ Youth is an issue affecting everyone, not just traditional organizations (e.g. Scouts, sports teams, etc.).
- ◆ Youth integration requires a change in attitude among adults and a review of the dynamics of power.
- ◆ What if young people were seen as skilled community builders and innovative thinkers?

### **4.2.1 Summary of discussions**

The participants were invited to describe what their communities currently offer youth and what is being done to retain them or bring them back. Resources vary depending on the region. Individual communities feel that they do not offer enough to their youth.

As a group, however, they drew up an impressive list of programs, infrastructure, facilities, resources and services available for youth. There is a need to promote all these resources and make more use of them.

### **4.2.2 Proposed actions**

- Promote existing resources and make more use of existing initiatives and programs.
- Distribute examples of best practices.
- Engage youth in community life, from a very early age.
- Establish youth empowerment programs; identify and encourage young leaders.
- Adapt processes to engage youth more effectively (e.g., participative approach, training for community members, letting young people take ownership of and lead initiatives).



- Explore possibilities of schools becoming community centres.
- Make more use of databases of recent graduates and stay in touch.
- Provide financial incentives (e.g., scholarships, tax credits) and create lending facilities.
- Develop internship, work-study and mentoring programs.

### **4.3 Repatriation**

Rural communities should explore new economic alternatives and promote their quality of life to people who left the region long ago and may think that nothing has changed. Repatriation also involves attracting Canadians from all corners of the country to Atlantic Canada.

Pierre-Marcel Desjardins, Professor of Economics at the *Université de Moncton* and Associate Researcher at the Canadian Institute for Research on Public Policy and Public Administration, presented data on the quantitative socio-economic aspect of interprovincial and intraprovincial migration.

The main points of his presentation were as follows:

- ◆ Atlantic Canada's rural and urban areas are losing residents, but rural areas are not succeeding in attracting many new residents.
- ◆ In the vast majority of rural counties, migrants from all origins represent less than 10% of the total population.
- ◆ The vast majority of people who migrate to the Atlantic Provinces are between 20 and 49 years of age.
- ◆ A very small percentage of people who migrate to Atlantic Canada come from abroad; most migrate within their respective Atlantic province.
- ◆ The majority of migrants who leave Newfoundland and Labrador go to live in another province, while migrants from the Maritime Provinces have a greater tendency to stay in their province of origin.

#### **4.3.1 Summary of discussions**

Specific characteristics of rural communities in Atlantic Canada:

- a quality of life, which includes a healthy environment, a sense of safety, a low cost of living, access to information technologies, etc.;
- an attachment to one's roots and a strong sense of belonging;
- an Acadian culture and other indigenous cultures;
- bilingualism; and
- opportunities for growth.

#### **4.3.2 Proposed actions**

- Develop promotional and marketing strategies.
- Produce information guides and promotional materials.

- Identify target groups.
- Organize national promotional tours and fairs (potential model can be the *Foires des villages*).
- Stay in touch with expatriates (e.g., databases, mailing lists, alumni associations, etc.).

## 5. PROVINCIAL DIALOGUES

The participants were asked to identify a priority sector for development in their respective provinces and then develop an action-based strategy that identified the resources and leadership required to implement the strategy. During the provincial dialogues, participants also made individual pledges to take action and participate in the repopulation initiative for rural Atlantic communities. These are presented in Appendix 1 of this report.

### 5.1 Prince Edward Island

#### ***Priority: Welcoming Communities***

The participants agreed that the three aspects of repopulation (Immigration, Youth Attraction and Retention, and Repatriation) are indivisible and should be addressed at the same time. One of the challenges facing Prince Edward Island is the youth exodus from rural communities. A healthy and welcoming community should be inclusive in the attraction and retention of youth and immigrants.

#### **Summary of discussions**

At first, discussions focussed mainly on immigration. There are numerous existing initiatives, but these are not always well known and are not coordinated. Participants suggested that an inventory of these initiatives be prepared and information on best practices and success stories be distributed.

It is extremely important that the public be made aware of the repopulation issue, and that the media be involved and report success stories. This means developing a communications strategy.

The Prince Edward Island society is very unified, and its strong community spirit is an asset but may be a barrier to integrating newcomers. The crucial importance of communities was stressed; they should be at the root of repopulation initiatives. The province should develop a repopulation strategy; however, each community should also develop its own repopulation action plan.

There was then a lengthy discussion about how to reach and involve young people and help them find their place — “engage the disengaged”. Participants agreed that there is much awareness building to be done, which should also focus on diversity education to support campaigns against racial discrimination. The education community should get involved; however, this is not enough. Working with youth groups and organizations is essential, and a strategy should be developed by and for young people.

## **Action plan**

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Leader</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Resources</b>
<b>All 3 aspects of rural repopulation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a sub-committee. Organize a follow-up meeting in early 2006.</li> <li>• Prepare an inventory of existing initiatives and best practices.</li> <li>• Identify and promote existing resources.</li> <li>• Develop an awareness program (e.g., interactive, participative, generational, focussing on diversity).</li> </ul>	Rural Secretariat	10 participants made commitments.	University of PEI  Researchers  Organizations  Communities  The media  Web sites
<b>Youth attraction and retention</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop awareness programs adapted to youth.</li> <li>• Make presentations to school boards.</li> <li>• Make presentations in the schools.</li> </ul>	Youth  Adults in an advisory role	Youth organizations and networks  Schools  Student councils	

## **5.2 New Brunswick**

### ***Priority: Rural repopulation/Healthy communities***

The New Brunswick group suggested adopting a holistic approach to repopulation, one which integrated the three aspects of repopulation (Immigration, Youth Attraction and Retention, and Repatriation) as well as the language/cultural (French/English) and the urban/rural aspects. The group explained the need to create healthy communities before talking about welcoming communities.

### **Summary of discussions**

The proposed holistic approach should be gradual and participative to ensure that communities take ownership of this issue. Leaders will emerge naturally, but it is important that leadership on the repopulation issue come from the communities themselves. Several models should be proposed to the communities. Community economic development agencies could support communities in their planning activities. There are tools available to help diagnose the status of a community's health. The group focussed on the need for long-term commitment. Participants also expressed that the media should be involved and report positive messages.

## Action plan

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Leader</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Resources</b>
<b>Immigration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide communities with the tools for assessing healthy communities (March 2006).</li> </ul>	<i>Carrefour d'immigration rurale</i>	Same as leader	
<b>Youth attraction and retention</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize annual meetings on youth involvement.</li> </ul>	New Brunswick Advisory Council on Youth	Same as leader	
<b>Repatriation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a database of addresses of New Brunswickers who have left.</li> <li>• Promote the province to New Brunswickers, wherever they live.</li> <li>• Decentralize federal public service jobs.</li> </ul>	Rural communities  Economic development agencies	Same as leader	

### **5.3 Nova Scotia**

#### **Priority: Rural repopulation/Sustainable and welcoming communities**

The participants agreed that the three aspects of repopulation (Immigration, Youth Attraction and Retention, and Repatriation) are indivisible. They felt that emphasis should be on the development of sustainable and welcoming communities.

#### **Summary of discussions**

The participants noted that the death rate had recently exceeded the birth rate and that it is difficult for “distressed” communities to be welcoming. First, they should start by identifying their existing strengths and resources and then strengthen their bases and identify obstacles and needs. These elements could then be incorporated into a strategic plan for sustainable development. The initiative for this development should come from the rural communities themselves. The goals should be to empower rural communities to retain residents, repatriate those who have left and welcome immigrants. The repopulation issue should be included in the province’s strategic plans and in those of provincial agencies. Also, existing policies should be studied and those that negatively impact rural repopulation should be identified.

Nova Scotia has the resources required to do this, but the networking and funding – which currently focus more on the immigration sector than on the other aspects of repopulation – need to be improved. The Community Development Lens of the Nova Scotia Community Development Policy (Office of Economic Development) should be applied to existing and new policies in order to determine the impact on and implications for rural repopulation.

## Action plan

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Leader</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Resources</b>
<p><b>All 3 aspects of repopulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen and prepare communities (strategic planning).</li> <li>Raise awareness of and involve communities.</li> <li>Use and incorporate the existing volunteer planning process.</li> <li>Identify leaders.</li> <li>Study existing policies.</li> <li>Create a provincial group representing all levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal, community).</li> <li>Organize a provincial Forum on Rural Repopulation.</li> </ul>	<p>Community leaders</p> <p>Rural Secretariat could act as champion.</p> <p>Rural Team-Nova Scotia</p> <p>All partners identified could get involved.</p>	<p>Municipalities</p> <p>Community organizations</p> <p>Governments</p> <p>Provincial agencies</p> <p>Rural Secretariat</p> <p>Economic development agencies</p> <p>Community development agencies</p> <p>Schools</p> <p>Community colleges</p> <p>Universities</p> <p>Youth groups</p> <p>Unions</p> <p>Churches</p>	<p>All identified partners</p> <p>Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (Enterprise Cap Breton Corporation)</p> <p>Business Development Bank of Canada</p> <p>Government departments: Tourism, Health, Economic Development</p> <p>Financial resources</p> <p>Media (success stories)</p>

## **5.4 Newfoundland and Labrador**

### ***Priority: Repopulation***

The Newfoundland and Labrador group identified priorities for each repopulation aspect (Immigration, Youth Attraction and Retention, and Repatriation), but stated that all three should be addressed together.

#### Immigration

- Increase the number of immigrants to Newfoundland and Labrador by:
  - marketing the Provincial Nominee Program;
  - increasing the quotas of government-assisted refugees; and
  - encouraging more private and joint refugee sponsorships.

#### Youth Attraction and Retention

- Make youth aware of new job opportunities and economic growth in the province.

#### Repatriation

- During “home coming year”, maximize the opportunities to promote the quality of life, jobs and investment opportunities.

## Summary of discussions

Statistics show that over the last 25 years, the province has lost almost 10% of its population, and 140,000 young people under the age of 25. Nevertheless, Newfoundland and Labrador's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the fastest growing in Canada. Many jobs will become available as baby boomers retire. Communities and youth should be reminded of this reality. To bring those who have left back to the province (whatever their age), the province should promote its quality of life and make communities more attractive. Additionally, it should take more advantage of existing programs and initiatives, such as the Come Home Year initiative or the FINALY (Futures in Newfoundland and Labrador's Youth) youth initiative. Financial aid and tax benefits could also be provided to young people dealing with student debts.

Repopulation initiatives should come from the communities themselves, and the communities should identify their repopulation priorities. The federal and provincial governments and agencies, such as the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, should play a support role.

## Action plan

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Leader</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Resources</b>
<b>Immigration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve key stakeholders to ensure the integration of new citizens and residents in the province.</li> <li>• Create partnerships among the various levels of government, educational institutions and communities.</li> <li>• Organize information meetings/events on immigration issues.</li> <li>• Provide training in multiculturalism.</li> <li>• Offer financial resources.</li> <li>• Implement multiculturalism education campaigns.</li> </ul>	Provincial government, in partnership with key stakeholders  Provincial immigration board	Same as leader	Provincial support for this strategy  Immigration services  Partnerships  Marketing  Education  Additional resources
<b>Youth attraction and retention</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt the FINALY pilot project to engage youth in their community.</li> <li>• Involve youth early on to develop a sense of belonging and a commitment to their communities.</li> <li>• Develop an expanded and inclusive approach for programs that invest in youth.</li> <li>• Develop leadership among youth.</li> </ul>	Youth groups (FINALY) Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment  Economic development agencies  Federation of Municipalities	Same as leader	Partnerships  Champions  Funding  Human resources

Actions	Leader	Partners	Resources
<p><b>Repatriation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devote financial and human resources towards the coordination of marketing tools.</li> <li>• Develop tools and find resources to assist communities in organizing “Come Home Year” events.</li> <li>• Use branding to promote quality of life in Newfoundland and Labrador.</li> </ul>	<p>A joint strategy and coordination among federal and provincial governments.</p> <p>For implementation in communities: Rural Secretariat FINALY Federation of Municipalities Economic development agencies</p>	<p>Same as leader</p>	<p>Detailed database</p> <p>Marketing materials</p> <p>Partnerships</p>

## 6. PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE ACTIONS ON REPOPULATION

### 6.1 Areas of agreement

Common areas were revealed from discussions in both the thematic dialogues on the three aspects of repopulation and the provincial dialogues. These areas can be used to bring to light guiding principles on which future actions should be based and to suggest shared actions that concern all three aspects of repopulation and the four Atlantic Provinces. Agreement was reached on four guiding principles.

<b>Guiding Principles – Rural Repopulation Action</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The three aspects of rural repopulation (Immigration, Youth Attraction and Retention, Repatriation) are interrelated and should be addressed together.</li> <li>• Rural repopulation begins with preparatory work involving sustainable development in order to establish sustainable, healthy, welcoming and liveable communities.</li> <li>• Rural repopulation initiatives should come from the communities themselves, so that they can take ownership of those initiatives. The communities should be supported through appropriate financial and human resources and through partnerships with all levels of government.</li> <li>• Rural communities should identify their own priorities, resources and assets, and develop their own strategic plans.</li> </ul>

The above guiding principles can be validated as they are consistent with those defined in the “Rural Repopulation in Atlantic Canada” discussion paper, specifically in the section entitled: A Process for Developing a Community / Regional Repopulation Strategy. The guiding principles outlined in this paper are as follows:

- the repopulation process must be led by communities or regional agencies;
- repopulation cannot be mandated by government; it has to be locally desirable and sustainable;
- the repopulation process must be linked to a strategic plan for economic development and labour force development.

## **6.2 Common actions**

Through discussion, the following actions common to the three repopulation aspects were identified.

- Inform community members about the benefits of repopulation through awareness and education campaigns targeting all age groups.
- Organize awareness and education campaigns to overcome repopulation myths and all related prejudices. The media should be involved, reporting on successes and best practices.
- Conduct research on the impact of existing policies and tax legislation that may affect depopulation and adversely impact repopulation.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

Overall, participants of the Atlantic Forum on Rural Repopulation were very satisfied with the event and indicated that it had met or exceeded their expectations. For most, the Forum contributed to the creation of partnerships, and the majority of participants gave this aspect the highest points. Several hoped that the report would describe the next steps and actions. Participants also made the following suggestions to ensure that there was follow-up to the Forum:

- organize provincial forums;
- create provincial committees to implement the identified actions;
- organize joint action by governments;
- organize an event specifically for youth; and
- create a network for exchanging and disseminating information and resources.

Specific actions were identified in each of the thematic dialogues on the three repopulation aspects. These actions can be summarized as follows:

<b>Immigration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen and improve local initiatives and existing programs.</li> <li>• Raise awareness in rural communities about the benefits of immigration; encourage rural communities to use the programs in place to facilitate immigration.</li> </ul>
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<b>Youth attraction and retention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve youth early on in community life – adults should also change their ways of doing things.</li> <li>• Establish systems for staying in touch with young people who have left the community.</li> </ul>
<b>Repatriation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop strategies for promoting Atlantic Canada’s rural regions, including producing promotional tools and launching targeted campaigns.</li> </ul>

Although specific timeframes for implementing the action plans were not determined, the evaluations showed that participants left with the intention of implementing their action plans beginning in early 2006, and respecting their individual pledges. The action plans developed during the provincial dialogues can be summarized as follows:

**Prince Edward Island**

- The actions covered all three repopulation aspects but with a specific focus on youth attraction and retention. These actions centred on awareness programs. A committee was formed to see to the implementation of these actions.

**New Brunswick**

- The actions were part of a holistic approach that included the three repopulation aspects as well as the language/cultural (French/English) and the urban/rural aspects. A number of actions related to the sharing of tools and experiences.

**Nova Scotia**

- The actions covered all three repopulation aspects but focussed on the preparatory work related to networking, planning and awareness building. The Community Development Lens of the Nova Scotia Community Development Policy (Office of Economic Development) should be applied to existing and new policies in order to determine the impact on and implications for rural repopulation.

**Newfoundland and Labrador**

- The action plan defined priorities for each of the three aspects and focussed on the strengthening of existing initiatives and on partnerships.

Participants also seemed in favour of holding a new Forum, probably within a year, to continue networking and promote the sharing of information and experiences. They offered the following suggestions for a future Forum on Repopulation:

- hold the Forum in a rural area;
- ensure that more elected officials attend from all levels of government (municipal, provincial and federal);
- ensure better representation of First Nations;
- share more success stories and best practices; and
- find and share examples of best practices that demonstrate how other regions around the world have successfully made the transition from a resource-based economy to a knowledge or manufacturing-based economy.

Participants' expectations are that the Rural Secretariat continues its ongoing work and support to facilitate the work of the provincial groups and to organize the next Atlantic Forum on Rural Repopulation.

The Forum conclusions and proposed action plans show that Atlantic Canada's rural communities recognize the importance of implementing repopulation measures to counter their demographic decline.

## **APPENDIX 1: INDIVIDUAL PLEDGES BY PARTICIPANTS – BY PROVINCE**

During the provincial dialogues, participants made individual pledges (presented below) to take action and participate in the repopulation initiative for rural Atlantic communities.

### **(A) Prince Edward Island**

#### **Rural repopulation**

- Present the information at the town council meeting and follow up with government departments to find out how to keep people in the region and increase the population.
- Invite as many people as possible to the 2006 East Coast Music Awards.
- Try to get young people to stay, and get those who have left Prince Edward Island (PEI) to return to the Tignish area when they retire.
- Get more involved in youth programs and in hosting programs within my community.

#### **Immigration**

- Act as a resource person, share my experiences, and help create a greater understanding of immigration issues.
- Be more welcoming to newcomers.
- Collaborate on the development of the strategic plan for the Evangeline region, and on the *Carrefour d'immigration rurale* pilot project.
- Write a report explaining why people come to and stay in PEI, present the report for discussion, and then disseminate it.

#### **Youth attraction and retention**

- Try to renew and expand the Mobilizing Youth to Deliver Advisory Services (MYDAS) program.
- Help youth find their place in our community.
- Initiate discussion on this topic with my two adult sons (21 and 23 years of age) to get a better idea of what they think of this issue.
- Help coordinate a meeting with student council leaders to explain the goals listed in the report on youth attraction and retention.
- Increase youth involvement in my community to ensure that young people feel they have ties to the community and decide to stay or return later on.

#### **Repatriation**

- Continue e-mailing job offers to friends who have left PEI (current success rate: 1).

## **(B) New Brunswick**

### **Rural repopulation**

- Facilitate efforts, at work and in my neighbourhood, to create sustainable communities by being a better neighbour to all newcomers, by sharing my experience and information with local development groups, and by promoting government flexibility to respond to repopulation efforts by the communities.
- Inform people in my area about the problem and about the importance of repopulation: immigration, repatriation, the exodus.
- Promote actively the repopulation objectives within the various forums and groups in which I work.
- Ensure that repopulation is taken into account in the development and implementation of our agency's programs and services.
- Suggest that repopulation be made a priority of the Restigouche community economic development plan.

### **Immigration**

- Compile information and explain the need for resources on immigrant integration in my community, and share this information with other communities.
- Call René Landry at Radio-Canada and ask him to do a story with the Polish immigrant engineer.
- Recommend the creation of an immigrant welcoming committee, and ensure follow up.
- Contribute actively to giving consideration to Francophone communities in the development of the provincial immigration strategy.
- Encourage Citizenship and Immigration Canada to work in partnership with the Rural Secretariat on immigration initiatives in the four Atlantic Provinces.

### **Youth attraction and retention**

- Promote the initiatives of the New Brunswick Advisory Council on Youth: "Rock the Boat: Healthy YOUth, Healthy NB" (January – March 2006); and the "Big Splash" (provincial conference, May 12-14, 2006), St. Thomas University, Fredericton.
- Identify possible actions that can be taken to help youth get involved and become empowered.

## **(C) Nova Scotia**

### **Rural repopulation**

- Organize a community meeting for newcomers and those interested in attracting newcomers to discuss issues surrounding relocation in Victoria County, with the goal of creating an action committee.
- Establish a partnership with the Nova Scotia Rural Team and Nova Scotia Voluntary Planning (a citizens' policy forum that operates arm's length to the provincial government), and come up with a repopulation vision.
- Continue being an active and positive member of my community.
- Share the information gathered with the town council.
- Continue encouraging Nova Scotia Community Colleges (NSCC) to explore best practices and how NSCC can support rural repopulation.
- Invest in wind energy to support the sustainability of rural communities.

- Identify the rural repopulation needs in my community.
- Involve the public and demonstrate the benefits of immigration and repopulation.
- Use rural immigration research findings.
- Talk about all aspects of rural repopulation, rather than focussing solely on immigration, in awareness-building efforts across the province.
- Share information broadly with my community economic development partners (e.g., best practices, etc.).
- Further the community economic development agenda for the well-being of my community and its residents.

### **Immigration**

- Provide community leadership on immigration initiatives.
- Ask recent immigrants why they chose my community.
- Meet new immigrants in my community.
- Increase opportunities in my community and among Nova Scotia communities for the sharing of information on repopulation issues.
- Help mobilize the media to get the message out to communities via community newspapers, and to report on successful entrepreneurs in the community, immigration and youth out-migration.
- Organize information and discussion sessions on rural immigration within the province.

### **Youth attraction and retention**

- Work to shift the focus from “retaining youth” to “engaging youth”.
- Get an update on the rural youth involvement strategy.
- Talk to more young people to find out how their viewpoints impact our communities.

### **Repatriation**

- Stay involved with families who have moved to my community under the Move to Kings program. Give them the help and information they need to get settled in the community.
- Encourage installation of an effective repatriation information system on the Brand Nova Scotia initiative’s Web site.

<b>(D) Newfoundland and Labrador</b>
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### **Rural repopulation**

- Organize a meeting with leaders of provincial organizations within 90 days of the Forum to discuss the goals, objectives and benefits of repopulation (Youth Attraction and Retention, Repatriation, Immigration)

### **Immigration**

- Support the Association of New Canadians by linking immigrants with employers.
- Report on successful immigrant business owners during Small Business Week.
- Continue promoting the benefits of immigration and our province as a great place to live.
- Invite students from abroad to spend Christmas with my family and encourage other families in my community to do the same.

## APPENDIX 2: PROPOSED ACTIONS – BY THEME

Immigration	Youth attraction and retention	Repatriation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop promotional tools for Atlantic Canada and distribute them in immigrants' countries of origin.</li> <li>• Streamline administrative processes for immigrants and the communities who want to welcome them; specifically, expand and improve the Provincial Nominee Program.</li> <li>• Facilitate access to information on services and programs for immigrants.</li> <li>• Consider the integration needs of all family members.</li> <li>• Raise public awareness of the benefits of immigration.</li> <li>• Implement multiculturalism awareness and education programs starting at an early age.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote existing resources and make more use of existing initiatives and programs.</li> <li>• Distribute examples of best practices.</li> <li>• Engage youth in community life, from a very early age.</li> <li>• Establish youth empowerment programs; identify and encourage young leaders.</li> <li>• Adapt processes to engage youth more effectively (e.g., participative approach, training for community members, letting young people take ownership of and lead initiatives).</li> <li>• Explore possibilities of schools becoming community centres.</li> <li>• Make more use of databases of recent graduates and stay in touch.</li> <li>• Provide financial incentives (e.g., scholarships, tax credits) and create lending facilities.</li> <li>• Develop internship, work-study and mentoring programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop promotional and marketing strategies.</li> <li>• Produce information guides and promotional materials.</li> <li>• Identify target groups.</li> <li>• Organize national promotional tours (potential model can be the <i>Foires de villages</i>).</li> <li>• Stay in touch with expatriates (e.g., databases, mailing lists, expatriate associations, etc.).</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX 3: PROPOSED ACTIONS – BY PROVINCE

Prince Edward Island	New Brunswick	Nova Scotia	Newfoundland and Labrador
<p><b>All 3 aspects of rural repopulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a sub-committee. Organize a follow-up meeting in early 2006.</li> <li>• Prepare an inventory of existing initiatives and best practices.</li> <li>• Identify and promote existing resources.</li> <li>• Develop an awareness program (e.g., interactive, participative, generational, focussing on diversity).</li> </ul>		<p><b>All 3 aspects of rural repopulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen and prepare communities (strategic planning).</li> <li>• Raise awareness of and involve communities.</li> <li>• Use and incorporate the existing volunteer planning process.</li> <li>• Identify leaders.</li> <li>• Study existing policies.</li> <li>• Create a provincial group representing all levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal, community).</li> </ul>	
	<p><b>Immigration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide communities with the tools for assessing healthy communities (March 2006).</li> </ul>		<p><b>Immigration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve key stakeholders to ensure the integration of new citizens and residents in the province.</li> <li>• Create partnerships among the various levels of government, educational institutions and communities.</li> <li>• Organize information meetings/events on immigration issues.</li> <li>• Provide training in multiculturalism.</li> <li>• Offer financial resources.</li> <li>• Implement multiculturalism education campaigns.</li> </ul>

Prince Edward Island	New Brunswick	Nova Scotia	Newfoundland and Labrador
<p><b>Youth attraction and retention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop awareness programs adapted to youth.</li> <li>• Make presentations to school boards.</li> <li>• Make presentations in the schools.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Youth attraction and retention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize annual meetings on youth involvement.</li> </ul>		<p><b>Youth attraction and retention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt the FINALLY pilot project to engage youth in their community.</li> <li>• Involve youth early on to develop a sense of belonging and a commitment to their communities.</li> <li>• Develop an expanded and inclusive approach for programs that invest in youth.</li> <li>• Develop leadership among youth.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Repatriation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a database of addresses of New Brunswickers who have left.</li> <li>• Promote the province to New Brunswickers, wherever they live.</li> <li>• Decentralize federal public service jobs.</li> </ul>		<p><b>Repatriation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devote financial and human resources towards the coordination of marketing tools.</li> <li>• Develop tools and provide resources to communities to organize "Come Home Year" events.</li> <li>• Use branding to promote quality of life in Newfoundland and Labrador.</li> </ul>



## **APPENDIX 4: RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM ON RURAL REPOPULATION IN ATLANTIC CANADA**

A Research Symposium, presented by the Rural Secretariat – Atlantic Region, was held on December 8, 2005 in conjunction with the Atlantic Rural Repopulation Forum. The objective of the Symposium was to reunite researchers, policy analysts and community leaders to learn and share knowledge, and identify new methods and ideas for rural repopulation in Atlantic Canada.

The day involved eight presentations on repopulation issues with time for discussion and questions after each presentation. The knowledge shared during the Symposium contributed to discussions that took place over the following day and a half at the Atlantic Rural Repopulation Forum hosted by the Rural Secretariat.

### **(A) Abstracts of presentations**

#### **(1) The Challenge of Repopulation in Atlantic Canada**

David Bruce, Director, Rural and Small Town Programme, Mount Allison University

Rural depopulation is a feature of most of non-metro-adjacent rural Atlantic Canada, driven by a complex mix of factors related to demographic change, economic restructuring, and global migration of people. This decline threatens the sustainability of many small places, and thus is of importance to all levels of government and to everyday citizens. The presentation examines opportunities for youth retention and attraction, immigration, and repatriation as part of a broader planned approach to economic and labour force development, and ultimately, repopulation. This presentation is based on a discussion paper prepared for the Rural Secretariat in March 2005.

#### **(2) Demographics and Migration in Atlantic Canada**

Pierre-Marcel Desjardins, Economist, *Université de Moncton*

This presentation on demographics and migration is based on a socio-economic profile of Atlantic Canada that relies on census data. It describes population dynamics by presenting data like age, destination, and origin or school attendance of migrants.

#### **(3) Immigrant Attraction and Retention: What works and what is being done in Atlantic Canada?**

Ather H. Akbari, Chair of the Economic consequences of immigration domain of Atlantic Metropolis, Saint Mary's University

Using county level data for Atlantic Canada based on the 2001 Canadian population census, this study estimates an econometric model to test the significance of each county's population size, immigrant population, visible minority population and the unemployment rate on regional distribution of new immigrants. Small areas can still be attractive to new comers if they can build critical mass of immigrant and ethnic communities.

Further enhancement of immigrant settlement and integration services is deemed essential in retaining and attracting more immigrants to form the ethnic critical mass. A review of immigrant settlement and integration services as well as government policies on immigration attraction and recruitment is also part of this presentation.

**(4) Comparative Analysis of Four Rural Francophone Municipalities**

Chedly Belkhodja and Nicole Gallant, “Imagining Integration in a Post-National Environment: Language, Values, and Attitudes” domain of Atlantic Metropolis, *Université de Moncton*

The goal of this research is a comparative analysis of various means of integration of immigrants into rural areas. The means of each municipality have been studied from three perspectives: appeal (How and by who were immigrants identified and drawn to this municipality?); welcome (What measures were taken upon the arrival of the immigrants in the community?); and finally, retention and integration (What paths did the immigrants take once they arrived? How did they meet their needs? How did they build their social network? What do they think of their host municipalities?)

**(5) Settlers to Prince Edward Island: Insights on a Qualitative Study**

Godfrey Baldacchino, Canada Research Chair in Island Studies, University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI)

Over 240 “recent settlers” to PEI have participated in the first-ever qualitative study of its kind on PEI, supported by the Population Secretariat and UPEI. These settlers have shared stories about why they came to PEI, why they have (so far) stayed, and what they perceived as the main challenges for newcomers. The project is coordinated by an immigrant/settler/academic, research interviewers were mainly settlers, and settlers will have a “first cut” on commenting on interim results when these are out in February 2006.

**(6) Migration of Quebec Rural Youth**

Patrice LeBlanc, Professor, *Université du Québec* in Abitibi-Témiscamingue

It is quite common to see rural youth leave their home town. Contrary to popular belief, it is not so much a lack of work that drives this migration as it is a desire to pursue higher learning along with a desire to leave home and make their way in the world. Youth migration must be seen, then, as part of the normal process of achieving adulthood in that it enables young people to experience autonomy and independence from their family environment. Young people leaving their home town, however, do not mean they are rejecting it. Many young people return, and a higher proportion say they are willing to return under the right circumstances.

This presentation highlights the initial findings of a new survey on youth migration conducted with over 2,000 young Quebecers aged 20 to 34 by the *Groupe de recherche sur la migration des jeunes* [youth migration research group]. The survey addressed the reasons for their migration, their relationship with their home region and their actual or potential return. The survey report concludes with a typology aimed at identifying possible avenues for taking positive action on youth migration.

**(7) The Dream Team for Community Youth Development**

Brian Braganza, Executive Director, Heartwood Centre for Community Youth Development

Our communities will only reach their potential as vibrant and healthy places when youth are welcomed as full participating members. Community youth development heralds this potential through a paradigm shift – recognizing young people as assets, problem-solvers and leaders who can serve their communities, as well as being served by them. This shift is occurring in a wide range of places. These bright lights shine from inner city youth centres where young people are key decision-makers, to school-based youth groups that motivate educational reform, to youth-led conservation groups working to preserve the ecological balance (Burgess, 2000; Tolman & Pittman, 2001).

**(8) Voting with their Feet – Youth Depopulation in Rural Newfoundland and Labrador**

Barbara Case, Rural Secretariat, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

This presentation looks at the trends in out-migration of youth since 1971. It examines the impact this is having on the province's long-term demographic outlook and summarizes a survey done on youth that have left Newfoundland and Labrador. The presentation will also highlight some current initiatives aimed at youth to ensure they realize they have a choice – either to stay or to go.

***To receive copies of any of the above presentations, please contact:***

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**(B) Summary of discussions**

This section includes some of the presenters' conclusions as well as some comments made and questions asked by participants during the Symposium. These have been grouped according to the three aspects of repopulation (Immigration, Youth Attraction and Retention, and Repatriation) when possible.

**Immigration**

- One of the main conclusions of Pierre-Marcel Desjardins is that like rural areas, urban areas are losing many residents, but the difference is that urban areas are attracting many more new residents.
- It was asked why tolerance is not a variable when measuring attraction and retention of immigrants in rural communities. It was suggested that a "tolerance index" could contribute to the ability of a community to be welcoming.
- The role of integration services will be very important until a critical mass of immigrants has been reached in rural areas.

- We can expect a significant increase in the number of immigrants next year and that many will need English as a second language training. There is a lack of capacity to meet the needs of immigrants. Thus, many of them will move away in order to obtain essential language training.
- We need to find a balance in welcoming people and we need to develop a strategy or plan in order to personalize the process. According to many participants, there is a need for the majority of the community to participate, and that such initiatives must be community driven as a top-down approach does not work.
- We cannot determine whether illegal immigrants participated in an on-going immigration study in Prince Edward Island. Given that this study was financially supported by the provincial government's Population Secretariat, it leads us to believe that illegal immigrants might have been scared to answer.

### **Youth Attraction and Retention**

- We must provide youth opportunities before they leave their rural communities.
- Women are more mobile than men and leave at an earlier age.
- Youth and adults need reciprocal relationships where both learn together to move forward and adults need training to accomplish that. Relationships between adults and young people need to change.
- Youth should be allowed to be leaders. When you want to know something about youth, such as future research directions, you should ask the youth.
- Youth today do not necessarily want adults preaching to them. They do not necessarily like adult-organized sports (like hockey) or even Girl Guides, which used to be very popular.
- We need new apprentice, internship and cooperative programs for youth so that they have an easier time finding employment.
- The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Newfoundland and Labrador is growing and young people in the province need to hear this good news.

### **Repatriation**

- A repatriation project was described where 500 people came back to Cape Breton in four years. An economic analysis was done and showed that \$85,000 was spent annually in Cape Breton's local economy. There are 13,000 people who have expressed an interest in returning to Cape Breton.
- The pros and cons of different datasets to study interprovincial migration and repatriation were discussed. The use of tax-filer data would simply be complementary to Census data because the two cannot be merged. A longer period of time to observe migration patterns, like 30 years, would be a large scale project with a big budget.

### **Other**

- Rural regions are often resource dependent and so we should make a place for resource management within repopulation strategies.
- We need to adopt a different, more sophisticated approach to valuing creativity.

## **(C) Conclusions: Paths for Future Research**

At the end of the Symposium, participants had the opportunity to make comments and offer suggestions on research approaches and strategies, among other things. These have been grouped under four broad areas: Resources/Tools; Vision/Planning; Youth; and Migration/Immigration.

### **Resources / Tools**

- We have limited resources but we need a new strategy to welcome people. We need to work with the decision makers.
- There is a lack of funding for research.
- Communities need tools and infrastructure to cope with the impacts of economic change. How can we support or fund these needs?
- There needs to be a repository of events like this one for government people in policy and programs to share information.
- We must share our best practices.

### **Vision / Planning**

- We need to ask “where do we want to be?” in each of our communities.
- A sense of community requires a sense of vitality.
- Can we influence the Rural Secretariat and the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF) now?
- We should get away from a “brain drain” mentality to a “brain circulation”. Think movement, not gain or drain.

### **Youth**

- Youth issues require more research.
- We need to find ways to give youth leadership opportunities.
- Give youth a video camera and ask them to assist with research, rather than attend a boring board meeting in some community organization which may not be informed on how to work with youth.

### **Migration / Immigration**

- Many immigrants desire to come to Atlantic Canada but cannot get the government immigration process overseas to move on their applications.
- We should evaluate the Provincial Nominee Program to see where we are at and the implications for provincial strategies.
- There needs to be more awareness of the Atlantic Metropolis Centre; who is working on culture, diversity, migration and immigration.