



Rural Policy Learning Commons:

Building Rural Policy through International Comparative Analysis

Brandon University has been awarded a 7-year, \$2.5 M SSHRC Partnership grant to support rural policy and its implementation. This project, housed at the Rural Development Institute, will bring an international view to policy discussions and research from other development countries to inform rural policy across Canada, support new and established researchers, and contribute insights for new theory.

We aim to enhance Canadian prosperity by identifying and analyzing policy options relevant to rural and northern places, evaluate these options in the context of national and international policy innovations, and build leadership capacity among rural and northern researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners.

Rural Policy Challenge:

The welfare of rural and northern Canada is critical for the prosperity of urban Canadians. Rural places and people provide the timber, food, minerals, and energy that aid in urban growth, and they are stewards of the water and other resources upon which urban people depend. Rural and northern places also process urban pollution, refresh and restore urban populations, and maintain the heritage upon which much of our Canadian identity rests. In return, urban Canada provides the markets for rural goods and employment, technology, financial capital, consumer goods, and much of its media-based culture (Reimer 2013). Developing and implementing good policy requires a clear recognition of this functional interdependence. However, too often the pressing demands of metro places mean the unique circumstances of rural and northern places are overlooked or misunderstood by urban-based policy-decision makers.

Project Partnerships and Collaborations:

The RPLC rests on 25 years of collaboration among researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and citizens within the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF), the Rural Development Institute (RDI), and the International Comparative Rural Policy Studies program (ICRPS). For 25 years, CRRF has been holding annual conferences and workshops, initiating research, and engaging with policy-makers regarding the conditions in rural and northern Canada (<http://crrf.ca>). In concert with CRRF, RDI has been conducting community-focused research, meeting with regional leaders, and publishing rural-relevant materials (<http://www.brandonu.ca/rdi/>). For the last ten years ICRPS has organized a two-week Institute where about 30 graduate students and practitioners



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meet with about 20 faculty members from 12 trans-Atlantic partner institutions to study the challenges of rural policy and explore options for its improvement (<http://icrps.org>).

Our 7-year project builds on the strength of these organizations to create a **Rural Policy Learning Commons (RPLC)** wherein multiple stakeholders can engage in a range of activities to generate new policy insights, strengthen comparative research collaboration among faculty, students, practitioners, and policy-makers, and develop innovative initiatives to advance policies that result in more prosperous communities and regions.

Project Status:

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Partnership) has funded this seven year, \$2.5M project with Dr. Bill Reimer (Adjunct to Brandon University) as Project Director. This project is centred at Brandon University with Zoë St. Aubin as Project Coordinator, Dr. Bill Ashton (Director, Rural Development Institute) as Manager, and one of three regional liaison officers providing organizational support.

Project Objectives: The RPLC will

- Add to research knowledge regarding rural, regional, and northern conditions;
- Increase insights regarding the nature and process of rural-related policy development;
- Build a cohort of highly qualified policy analysts and community leaders;
- Increase the mobilization of this knowledge to the wider population; and
- Strengthen networks and institutional capacities to increase prosperity in rural, regional, and northern areas.

Activities:

The RPLC will be organized as a cross-cutting network of four policy theme teams and seven knowledge mobilization teams. Our initial selection of policy themes will include *Human capital and migration, Natural resources, Governance, Infrastructure and service*. The themes and activities will be assessed over the duration of the project to be responsive to our partners’ interests and positively impact rural communities.

The Knowledge Mobilization Activities include: *Research and Exchanges, Institutes, Policy workshops and conferences, Distance Learning Activities, Publications, a Digital Information Hub, and Social Media* tools (webinars, video clips, blogs).

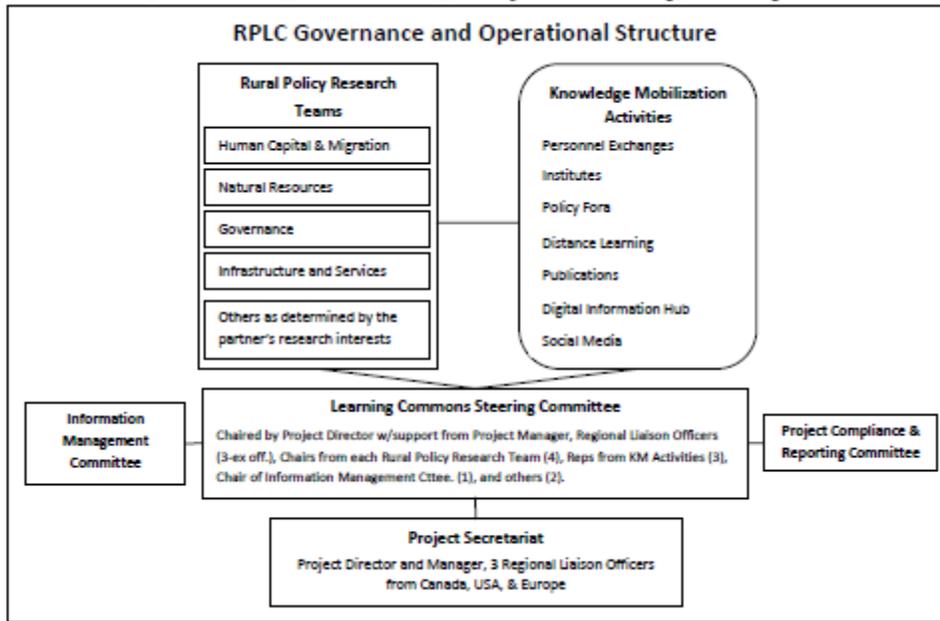
We will also train a new generation of analysts and rural policy specialists by developing a new Graduate Certificate in Comparative Rural Policy; facilitating collaborative research and exchanges among international researchers and academic institutions; collaborating with national and international research centers; integrating a web-based platform for cross-national comparative research methods and findings, teaching tools, and internship opportunities; strengthening existing international comparative research networks; and expanding the RPLC partnership to institutions and agencies from among additional countries.

Project Governance:

A *Learning Commons Steering Committee* (LCSC) will provide strategic direction for the project. The Project Director will chair the LCSC with logistical support from the Project Coordinator. The LCSC will provide strategic direction for the RPLC, assure the delivery of project commitments, ensure financial accountability to SSHRC, attract new project partners, build a financially sustainable plan for the project, establish the evaluation task force committees, establish a project dispute resolution protocol, and approve recommendations. The *Project Secretariat* acts as the administrative core of the project, assisting the LCSC with the implementation of plans and assisting the Rural Policy Research Teams and Knowledge Mobilization activities.

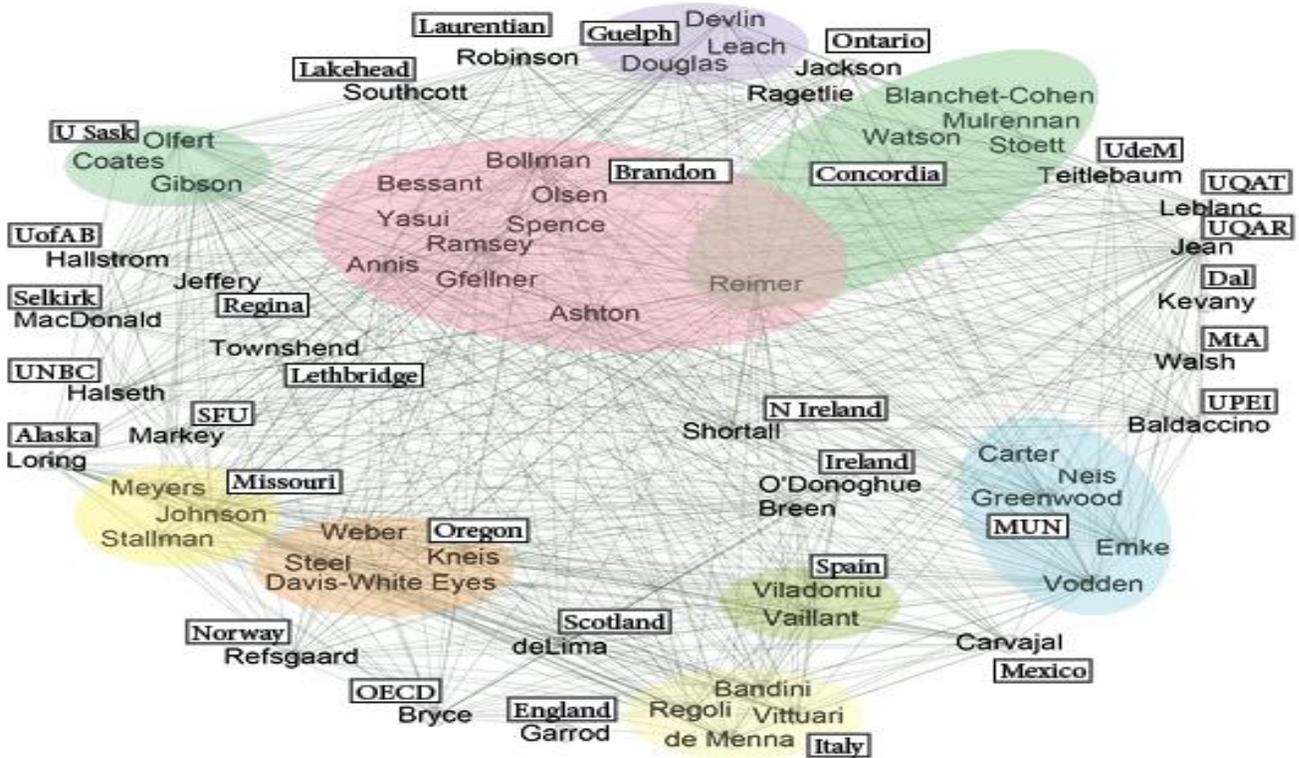
The key research activities of the project will be coordinated through the *Policy Research Theme Teams* (PRTT). Each of the four teams will have 5-12 members based on expertise and interests. The project’s key dissemination and engagement objectives will be facilitated through the *Knowledge Mobilization Activities Teams* (KMAT). The *Information Management Committee* (IMC) will provide logistical support for the collection, distribution, and archiving of the project’s deliverables. A *Project Compliance & Reporting Committee* (PCRC) will assist in the reporting requirements of the project throughout its 7-year term.

Rural Policy Learning Common governance and operational structure



Financial Contributions:

With over two dozen partners, this RPLC has attracted over \$1M in cash and \$2.1 M of in-kind over the seven years. When combined with the SSHRC funding this project is valued at \$5.6M. While drawing from an international array of partners, the Canadian partners include Universities such as Brandon (host), Alberta, Concordia, Dalhousie, Guelph, Lakehead, Memorial, Saskatchewan, SFU, and UNBC, along with government agencies such as the Manitoba Agriculture, Food, and Rural Development and Rural Secretariat Newfoundland, and NGOs like the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, the Ontario Rural Forum, and Solidarité rurale.



Becoming a Project Partner:

Institutions, organizations, government agencies, or NGOs active in the field of rural policy development and implementation are encouraged to become project partners. Details about the project and the process of becoming a partner can be found on the Project website via <http://rplc-capr.ca>.

For more information about this project, visit <http://rplc-capr.ca> or contact:

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RPLC
RURAL POLICY LEARNING COMMONS

CAPR
COMMUNAUTÉ D'APPRENTISSAGE
DES POLITIQUES RURALES

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