



Supporting Innovation for Businesses in South West Manitoba:

Summary of Consultation Event

PURPOSE

On March 24th, 2017, RDI hosted a consultation event with service providers in Southwest Manitoba as part of the Rural Innovation in Manitoba project, funded by *Growing Forward 2*. The aim was to have an afternoon of productive discourse on RDI's research on the gaps in services and barriers to commercialization, and to discuss the viability and desirability of an inventory of supports to address these issues.

IN THE ROOM

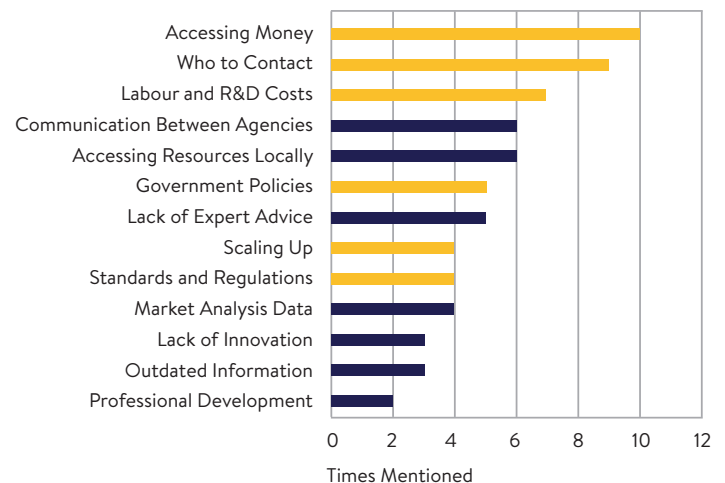
In attendance were 16 leaders and key stakeholders from organizations that provide services and support for businesses (listed below). With the intent of mapping a social network of people in the room, participants were polled about who they knew or worked closely with. This revealed strong connectivity among participants in the room, as each person identified at least one other organization with whom they share or refer clients to.

Brandon University	Futurpreneur
Catalyst Credit Union, Dauphin	Manitoba Agriculture
Community Futures Parkland	Manitoba Food Development Centre
Community Futures Westman	Royal Bank of Canada
Economic Development Brandon	Southwest Regional Development Corporation
Economic Development Neepawa	Women's Enterprise Centre
Entrepreneurship Manitoba	

GAPS AND BARRIERS

Participants reported the most prominent gaps and barriers they experience as practitioners in the commercialization sector. The graph below shows their responses with amount of times a single theme was mentioned. Unsurprisingly, their responses were highly consistent with RDI's research findings. Gold bars in this graph represent themes that are mentioned in RDI's research.

Gaps and Barriers

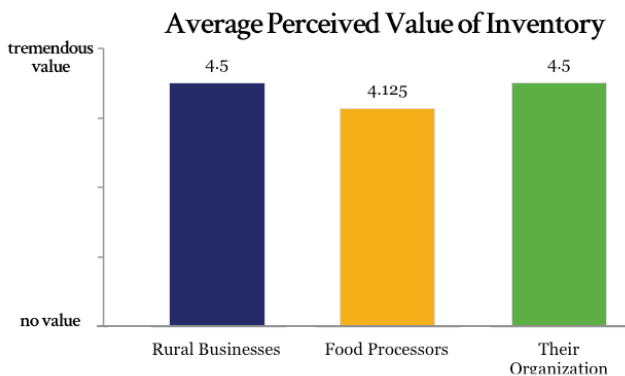


INVENTORY OF SUPPORTS

Rooted in our research findings on the gaps and barriers to commercialization, the second phase of this event was to explore the idea of an “asset map” or an “inventory of supports”. With the intent of addressing one of our more prominent findings – fragmentation of services – an inventory would improve awareness of available supports and networking, and would aid in linking clients to the right people. Our proposed inventory contains information on nearly 100 services and organizations. Below is a list of the kinds of information contained in the inventory.

- Organization Title
- Contact Information
- Contact Person
- Are Online Resources Available?
- Commercialization Step (Finance, Planning, Promotion, etc.)
- Innovation Category (Marketing, Organization, Product, etc.)
- Do they host Events, Training, Workshops?
- Do they offer Equipment?
- Do they offer Money?
- Financial Guidance details
- Marketing and Selling details
- Planning and Business details

Participants rated the potential value of this inventory to rural businesses and food processors in Southwest Manitoba, and the value to their own organization. As made clear by the graph below, the perceived potential value of this inventory is very high.



With the desirability of this inventory made apparent, the viability was the next matter to be discussed. Participants outlined these key questions and concerns with moving forward with an inventory.

- Is there any relevance to this project if the information isn't regularly updated?
- Who will update the content?
- Should organizations be responsible for their own data?
- Will service providers be patient enough to adopt this inventory?
- What is the ideal platform for this inventory?

The most popular platform suggestions for this inventory were the use of a web page, social media and a smartphone app. Other platform suggestions included in-person services, emails and newsletters, phone-based services, and conferences.

A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

Overall, the consultation event was a large success. All participants were actively engaged in discussion and problem-solving. There was a great deal of interest in RDI's research to date and our work on the inventory of supports. Through the use of an exit survey, we found that many organizations intend on contributing to the development of this tool. The level of contribution ranged from pilot testing and contributing data, to potential financial assistance, hosting the service, and marketing the product.

SOME QUOTES FROM OUR PARTICIPANTS

“I appreciate that an organization is doing research to help improve the economic landscape in Manitoba for entrepreneurs!”

“I appreciate the breadth of robust resources in this room and the enthusiasm for change!”

“I am leaving with a better understanding of the gaps and barriers for businesses!”