

Manitoba Rural Broadband: A Capitals Assessment in Rural Communities

This joint research project between the Rural Development Institute at Brandon University and Function Four Ltd., a private research and development company, focuses on the impacts of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) on rural communities. CDEM and EcoWest are also stakeholders with an interest in the project and its outcomes.

The project's main goal is to determine how effectively broadband is being used for economic and social purposes in Rural Manitoba communities. We will use a community capitals framework for this assessment. A secondary goal is to explore how rural communities in Manitoba can increase economic and social benefits through better use of broadband.

We will use a participatory, community-based research approach. This means we will engage community members throughout the research process from design, data collection, analysis and dissemination as well as recognizing community ownership of data. Eight different communities from

southern Manitoba will be included in the study. The communities will include municipalities, bilingual municipalities, and First Nations.

This project incorporates mixed research methods with three different research activities taking place in each community:

- The **Research Design (RD)** includes establishing Community Research Working Groups, discussing community research priorities with respect to broadband use, determining the tools to be used in two qualitative research activities, and identifying key stakeholders or groups to be involved in the remaining research activities;
- The **Community ICT Pathways (ICTP)** involves using the tools identified by the Community Research Working Group to collect qualitative data on the ways broadband technologies are used in the communities, as well as an assessment of how effective these uses are in increasing economic and social benefits to the rural community; and

- The **Digital Technologies Assessment (DTA)** is a door-to-door survey to collect and analyze quantitative data on types of ICTs being used and how, who is using ICTs, and their skill level.

The project will employ Masters students and Post-Doctoral Fellows to conduct the research activities and assist in sharing the findings, including publications and conference presentations. The project will be supervised by the Project Leads, who include:

William (Bill) Ashton, Director,
Rural Development Institute, Brandon University

Wayne Kelly, Research Associate,
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Bruce Hardy, President,
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