



Fall 2023 Interim Report

Reporting Months:
April to September, 2023



BRANDON
UNIVERSITY

Message from the Rural Development Institute Director

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Doug Ramsey of the Department of Rural Development for his invaluable support in 2022. During this time, RDI was without a full-time Director and staff. Dr. Ramsey's assistance in keeping the institute open and navigating through the final stages of COVID-19 was truly commendable. Thank you!

To effectively operate, RDI requires a full-time director and staff. In January, 2023, I began my Interim director position, which ran for six months until June, 2023. From January to March of 2023, RDI worked hard to get the institute up and running again. We worked on an Indigenous development project with the Myera group, collaborated with the ESRG group at the University of Winnipeg to initiate changes in the rural initiative, and rebuilt the RDI team.

Those first three months were productive and essential for getting RDI open for full-time business again. However, since April, 2023, RDI has started to run at full speed. We have completed the Myera project and begun research in immigration, capacity-building, tourism and digital rural development. RDI submitted four funding applications, successful on three, and currently are working on three more. All existing staff have contracts extended to March 2024, and two new staff members have been hired.

RDI has introduced new knowledge mobilization tools, such as an updated website, companion blog, newsletters, and branding. The team is also increasing community engagement and supporting homecoming activities. RDI has hosted public lectures, open houses, and supported welcome receptions for the Department of Rural Development and international graduate students. Additionally, RDI has welcomed international faculty and students by hosting visitors from Japan and Brazil.

We are excited for the rest of this fiscal year at RDI, with intentions to initiate successfully funded projects and continue progress on rural development research, concepts, and projects to serve Brandon University, our research partners and the community and people of rural Manitoba.

Dr. Wayne Kelly,
Director

If there are any questions or concerns about the content within this report, please get in touch with Nicole Breedon (breedonn@brandonu.ca).



Rural Development Institute

Brandon University established the Rural Development Institute in 1989 as an academic research centre and a leading source of information on issues related to rural and remote communities. The Rural Development Institute functions as a not-for-profit research and development organization designed to promote, facilitate, coordinate, initiate and conduct multi-disciplinary academic and applied research on rural issues. The Institute provides an interface between academic research efforts and the community by acting as a conduit of rural research information and by facilitating community involvement in rural development. The conducted projects are characterized by cooperative and collaborative efforts of multi-stakeholders, diverse research affiliations, and multiple community and government linkages. The dissemination of information to a variety of constituents and stakeholders makes research information accessible and results in widely available resources for the public. For more information, please visit www.brandonu.ca/rdi

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Introduction

This interim report adheres to the Brandon University Senate's guidelines on Research Centres Policy and Procedures. Covering the period from February to September 2023, it provides insights into our applied research endeavors, financial overview, and knowledge dissemination activities.

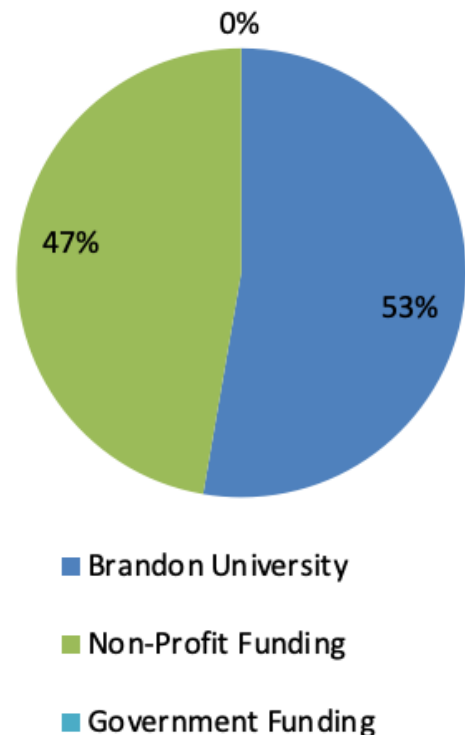
RDI has charted a clear path with five strategic research directions: rural immigration, rural economic development, rural infrastructure, governance and capacity building, and rural innovation. The projects undertaken this year align with these areas, delivering valuable insights pertinent to both individuals in Canada's rural areas and relevant policy-makers.

It's noteworthy that our research initiatives are generously supported by an array of organizations spanning the non-profit sector and governmental bodies. This funding not only aids our research but also fosters invaluable partnerships. Furthermore, RDI remains committed to its mission of knowledge dissemination, with our findings being presented and published both within Manitoba, across Canada, and on the international stage.

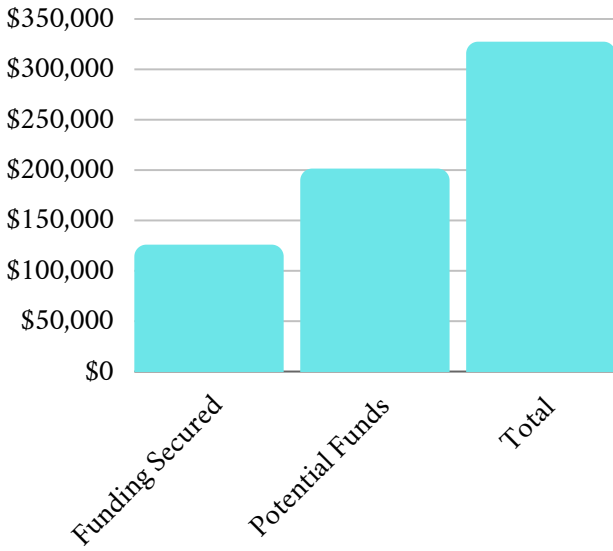
Finance

Feb 2022 - Sept 2023		
Brandon University	\$ 83,616.70	53%
Non-Profit Funding	\$ 75,000.00	47%
Government Funding	\$ -	0%
Total	\$ 158,616.70	100%

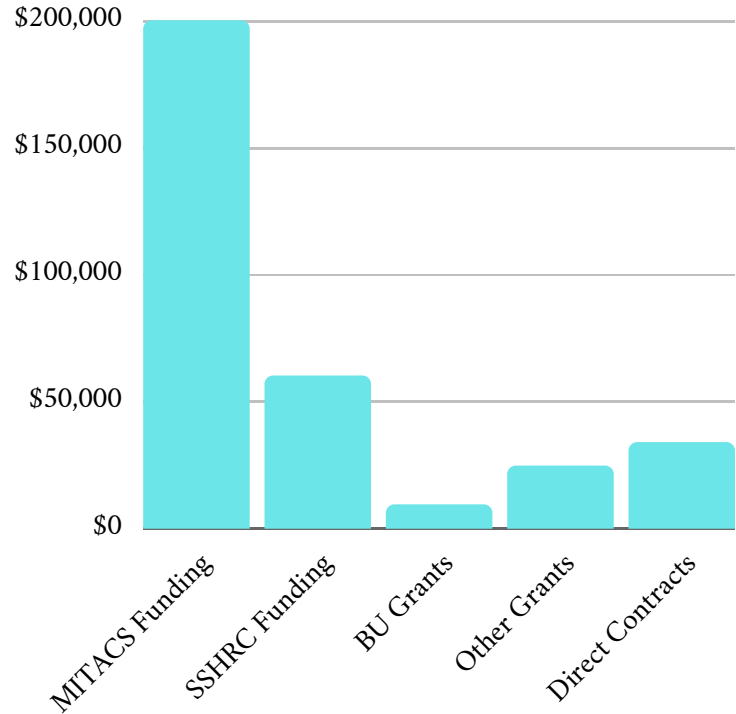
Funding Sources



2023-2024 Funding Secured/Potential	
Funding Secured	\$125,975.00
Potential Funds (Proposals in Development and in review)	\$201,498.00
Total	\$327,473.00



2023-2024 Breakdown (Secured and Potential)	
MITACS Funding	\$199,998.00
SSHRC Funding	\$60,000.00
BU Grants	\$9,225.00
Other Grants	\$24,500.00
Direct Contracts	\$33,750.00



Research Projects

Myera Group Research

Lead: Wayne Kelly

Research Team: Dr. Gary McNeely, Shirlyn Kunaratnam, Glenice Deterville, Iain Cowie, Nicole Breedon

The Myera Group project at RDI was the first significant project that RDI undertook as the institute ramped back up again at the start of 2023. Myera Group, an Indigenous health and nutrition tech company led by President Bruce Hardy, spearheads a project to amplify traditional wild rice protein as a critical crop in community-based regenerative agriculture. The endeavour seeks to establish an infrastructure, capacity, and partnerships centred around Indigenous communities to revolutionize wild rice products and markets. This includes supporting training and community planning to ensure sustainable farming. The project's community assessment and engagement approach is a collaboration between Myera Group, Function Four Ltd., the Rural Development Institute (RDI) at Brandon University, the University of Winnipeg, and the University of Calgary. This initiative aims to achieve Truth and Reconciliation outcomes by fostering capacity, food sovereignty, and economic opportunities. This will promote education, employment, and the well-being of Indigenous youth and communities.

The first phase of the project is being finalized. RDI played a crucial role by co-designing the community assessment and engagement tools with Myera Group, incorporating digital storytelling as a primary community research tool, and refining the E-Index into a comprehensive community assessment framework for Indigenous communities. This framework would evolve from the E-Index, initially designed for assessing ICT technologies in rural and Indigenous areas. For this project, achievements include creating 19 community profiles using AI, crafting procedures for these AI-driven profiles, and preparing additional overviews for communities in Nunavut. The project also led to the formation of "pillar trees" that serve as frameworks for evaluating various community dimensions. Existing tools were researched and identified for several community aspects, and the previous E-Index materials were adapted for community assessment, culminating in a presentation titled "Lens-Based Community Assessment Platform." Furthermore, potential data sources for each pillar tree were determined, detailing the required data types and collection levels.

RDI also contributed to the foundation of a database detailing post-secondary learning outcomes and guidelines for anticipated occupations within a Myera circular farm, sourced from Canada's National Occupational Classification website. Future work will explore Canadian educational programs relevant to farm operations, subsequently comparing them to those in international regions, such as Australia.

As the first phase of the Myera Group project comes to a close, RDI and project partners are discussing and coordinating roles and opportunities for the next stages of this important research project.

Changing Nature of Rural Research:

Lead: Emmanuel Owusu Ansah

The study delves into the transformative effects of COVID-19 on rural areas across the US, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. The pandemic reshaped various dimensions: telehealth services became more prevalent, offering both advantages and challenges for rural healthcare. While rural tourism took a hit due to travel bans, areas like Timaru, New Zealand pivoted to local tourism opportunities. Supply chain disruptions highlighted the vulnerabilities in rural food distribution. Education underwent shifts with remote learning impacting students, especially in health disciplines. Many rural regions saw an influx from urban areas, leading to infrastructure strains. Employment in rural areas suffered, with students particularly affected. Despite these challenges, rural communities showcased commendable resilience, possibly due to their inherent adaptability and close-knit social structures. This study offers a robust foundation for future examinations of post-pandemic rural transformations.

Immigration Research

Lead: Shirlyn Kunaratnam

Immigration has significantly impacted Canada's Brandon and Westman regions, leading to demographic changes and transforming the area into a multicultural hub. The Rural Development Institute (RDI) collaborates with newcomers and service organizations to ensure a welcoming and inclusive environment. However, newcomers face challenges like language barriers, accessing services, and employment. RDI's efforts include analyzing immigration research, which has fostered collaboration and new projects. Specifically, they're examining entrepreneurship among newcomer women in Brandon and collaborating with the Brandon Labour Immigration Partnerships (BLIP) on various research initiatives. These projects aim to identify the needs of newcomers and provide essential insights for service organizations to effectively address these requirements.



Dr. Wayne Kelly (right) speaking with three of the nine students at the RDI Open House



Dr. Wilder Robles and Glenice Deterville together at the Rural Development Reception, where 45 attending students and faculty shared dinner and their experiences



Five Master of Arts, Rural Development Students at the Rural Development Reception, alongside a visiting researcher from Brazil (right)

Tourism Research

Lead: Nicole Breedon

The Rural Development Institute (RDI) is actively engaged in tourism research, collaborating with various institutions. One project, executed with the Tourism Research Center at Brandon University and other partners, focused on rural tourism at the Fortress of Louisbourg in Nova Scotia. This study aimed to understand tourists' motivations for visiting rural Cape Breton and their interpretations of "travelling well" and "responsible tourism." The insights will aid tourism agencies and rural communities in effective advertising to boost tourism and economic growth. Another collaboration between the Tourism Research Center and the Manitoba Hotel Association is underway to assess the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on hotels and community events, supported by a prospective Mitacs grant application.

Capacity Building Research

Lead: Dr. Wayne Kelly & Dr. Gary McNeely

Preliminary Findings from a scan on Rural Community Capacity Building

RDI has initiated a research project on rural capacity building, focusing on identifying tools and processes that amplify the capabilities of rural communities, their residents, and various organizations and enterprises. This endeavor aims to embed capacity building as a central component in RDI's future research. In its early stages, the project is mapping connections between individuals, organizations, and the community, aiming to bolster community vitality. Initial scans have explored the symbiotic interactions among individuals' expertise, organizational roles, and community objectives, emphasizing that recognizing and harnessing collective learning boosts capacity across the spectrum. This initiative underscores the value of continuous learning and the importance of diverse voices in promoting inclusivity in rural communities.

For more information about this project, contact: mcneelyg@brandonu.ca

Recognizing Learning and Achievements at RDI: A Pilot Project on Digital Badges

Under the new leadership of Dr. Wayne Kelly, RDI has emphasized the recognition and dissemination of knowledge acquired from its community-based research projects. Inspired by the Rural Policy Learning Commons (RPLC) Project Evaluation, RDI has initiated a pilot project on Digital Badges to formally recognize competencies in Scholarship, Leadership, Research Management, and Information and Digital Skills. These badges, clickable icons showcasing specific achievements, offer detailed information about the awarding criteria, ensuring their authenticity and making them shareable across digital platforms. As part of the pilot, RDI is setting badge criteria, and providing Brandon University (BU) students opportunities to earn badges through rural research engagements. If successful, this initiative could be expanded across the BU campus, showcasing the accomplishments of students and staff to the broader Westman region.

For more information about this project, contact: mcneelyg@brandonu.ca

Knowledge Mobilization

1. Enhancing the Brand of RDI:

In the spring of 2023, RDI worked to enhance the Rural Development Institute brand. A collaborative effort with the valued graphic designer working with RDI resulted in the updating of the RDI Logo; the development of new, standardized documents (e.g., Formal Project Reports, Internal Project Updates, Highlighting Rural Researchers Series documents, and Event/ Information Posters) and presentation templates; the re-creation of our digital eNewsletter style and structure; the creation of new posters and content for the office; and the updating the workspaces available within the RDI office.

2. Webpage Management and Updating Social Media Platforms:

Since the retirement of the previous Director, Dr. William Ashton, the social media platforms and webpages affiliated with RDI have not been updated or maintained. This includes the RDI page on the Brandon University website, the RDI Zoom account, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and the Imagining Rural Futures Blog. With the hiring of Dr. Wayne Kelly, time and effort have been dedicated to ensuring these platforms are now accessible for knowledge mobilization and are regularly updated with content. As the year continues, we will be populating these platforms more with content in relation to events, as well as previous or ongoing research projects.

3. Student and Faculty Engagement

One goal for RDI is to enhance campus engagement, and facilitate opportunities to build relationships with students and faculty. With the, RDI has established open office hours where during certain time periods throughout the week the RDI doors are open and everyone is welcomed to talk with those working at RDI. The advertising of these time slots may facilitate further conversations, increasing the outreach of research opportunities and overall events that RDI supports.

4. Standardization of Project Knowledge Mobilization: An outline for Knowledge Mobilization deliverables has been created to demonstrate and standardize how knowledge mobilization efforts will be applied to each research project affiliated with the Rural Development Institute. In this outline, it determines that there are seven specific deliverables will be provided for each project. These deliverables include A Project Overview, an Issue in the Highlighting Rural Researchers Series; an Organization Highlight included in an Issue of our eNewsletter; Blog Content; Internal Deliverables (e.g., Reports and Briefs shared through the Research Center); External Deliverables (e.g., academic journal articles and/ or academic presentations); and an Issue in the Project Short Series.

Work is currently being done to share our strategies in knowledge mobilization through collaborative work with BU CARES and the MIRRA Organization. The results of these collaborations are forthcoming.

Blog Posts

- [The newest digital divide for rural: Artificial intelligence](#), written by Wayne Kelly.
- [Using AI as a tool for community development research](#), written by Iain Cowie
- [Outdoor Recreation and Well-Being During COVID-19](#), written by Iain Cowie.
- [Well-Being and Sustainable Development Goals: A Path to a Better Future](#), written by Shirlyn Kunaratnam.
- [The Role of Food Sovereignty in Community Development](#), written by Shirlyn Kunaratnam.
- [Report on the 31st RPL Conference presented jointly by the Indigenous RPL Collective and Loyalist College in Belleville, Ontario](#) written by Dr. Gary McNeely
- [Food Reflections: Attendance to the 3rd Annual Manitoba Sustainable Protein Research Symposium](#) written by Nicole Breedon.
- [Exploring Community Well-Being: Understanding and Supporting Rural Development](#) written by Dr. Wayne Kelly.
- [Moving in, Moving On, and Moving Up: Living Well in Rural Canada – CRRF 2023](#) written by Dr. Wayne Kelly, Dr. Gary McNeely, and Iain Cowie.
- [Rural Community Development and Highlighting Community Assets: Insights into the Interests of Tourists from the Fortress of Louisbourg](#) written by Nicole Breedon.

Presentations

- CRRF Conference: Rural Development and Wellbeing
- Capacity Building: [Building Skills for the Future through experiential rural partnerships: Results from the RPLC project's Capacity Building Evaluation](#): By Gary McNeely & Wayne Kelly
- Community Assessment: [Outdoor Recreation and Well-being during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#): By Iain Cowie
- [Recognizing Prior Learning \(RPL\) is a capacity-building tool for organizations and communities](#). By Dr. Wayne Kelly and Dr. Gary McNeely



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