



Project Overview

Designing Capacity Building Pathways for Rural Community Development

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT?

RDI's applied research projects focus on building community well-being through development and collaborations with research teams, community service and non-governmental organizations, government agencies as well as regional and community leaders. This project seeks to establish how the experiential learning acquired when engaged in such projects can be reframed as one element within a series of capacity building pathways to enhance rural community development. The overarching goal is to design and tailor these pathways to address each community's distinct realities and priorities. These pathways will serve as opportunities to identify and strengthen the knowledge, skills, and community capitals essential for rural and community development.

WHO ARE THE PROJECT PARTNERS?

There are exploratory discussions with many of our project partners about the importance and role of capacity in community projects and development. At present, RDI is discussing this project within its existing networks of rural organizations and researcher partners, and collaborators. RDI welcomes the opportunity to engage organizations and communities that are interested in partnering to develop and test the pathways for rural capacity building.

WHY IS THIS PROJECT IMPORTANT?

Capacity has been recognized as a critical issue by rural organizations, provincial and federal governments, and RDI's project partners. This claim was affirmed in the Government of Canada's 2023 report "[Rural opportunity, national prosperity: an economic development strategy for rural Canada](#)". The report emphasized that digital connectivity, data specific to rural regions, inclusive collaboration, and capacity are essential for advancing rural economic development and community well-being.

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Significantly, the report stressed that rural-based organizations and rural communities have differing levels of capacity since these organizations and communities rely on limited staff or volunteers to design, implement, and assess the impacts of community-led projects. Those involved may not have the specialized resources, knowledge, and skill sets required to undertake such projects. Consequently, rural organizations and community leaders often turn to external consultants to manage these projects. This reliance reduces the involvement of community members in development projects and excludes their input in building a vibrant and thriving community. The other reality facing rural communities is that without the capacity to undertake the projects or resources for external consultants, they are often limited in the opportunities they realize or the needs they address.

WHAT ARE RDI'S CURRENT ACTIVITIES IN THIS PROJECT?

RDI has two main roles in this project. The first is to develop a matrix that (1) profiles the job descriptions, roles, and competencies of community development practitioners, such as economic development officers, municipal government leaders, and directors of community organizations and (2) outlines education and training programs required by or available to those involved in rural community development. This exercise builds on RDI's earlier curriculum mapping study to identify gaps in post-secondary programming specific to rural research and policy. This matrix will help to understand the capacity challenges individuals and organizations experience when involved in rural development projects and suggest options to resolve this deficit. The second is to explore how Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) principles and practices can be adapted to the context of community development and identify the resources, knowledge, and skills required by individuals, organizations, and the community at large to engage in rural community projects.

HOW IS RDI CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROJECT?

RDI's expertise in community participatory research where partnerships and collaborations can affect meaningful change in a community's well-being will help to build social, human, and cultural capital leading to increased cooperation and coordination in community development projects. RDI will organize a suite of organizational and community assessment tools and processes that facilitate the recognition of experiential learning acquired through community development. RDI will apply these tools to gauge its organizational capacity as well as the learning and achievements of its staff.

NEXT STEPS

- Develop assessment tools and processes to help identify specific capacity requirements and realities for communities and programming for communities.
- Explore opportunities to apply these pathways with partners and communities to better understand their applicability and functionality in community development.
- Explore the relationship between capacity and responsibility for community well-being.
- Develop credit-bearing courses, non-credit modules, as well as skills recognition through digital badging to address gaps in the pathways.

For more information
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