

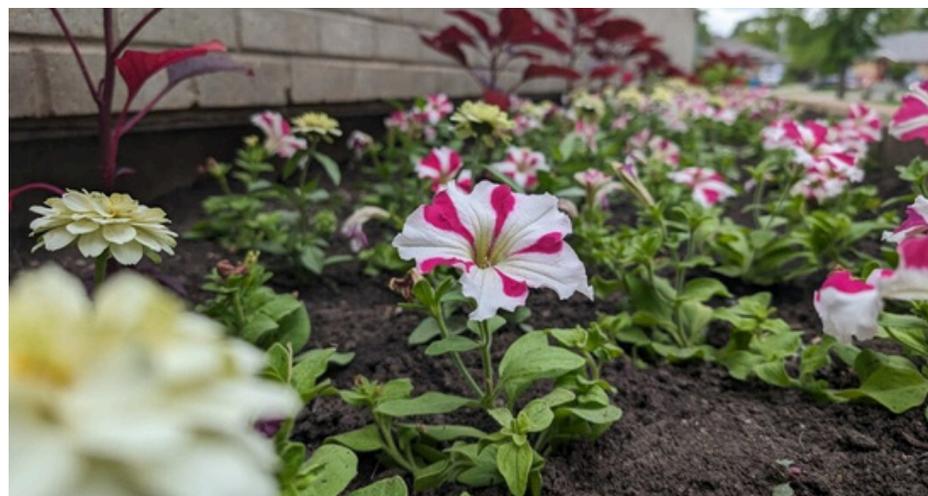


APRIL 2025

# Annual Report

## 2024-2025

Reporting Months:  
April 2024 - March 2025



Rural Development Institute  
Brandon University  
270-18th Street,  
Brandon, MB R7A 6A9

[brandonu.ca/rdi](https://brandonu.ca/rdi)



**BRANDON  
UNIVERSITY**

## Message from the Rural Development Institute Director

The past fiscal year, April 2024-March 2025, has been a busy and productive one! The RDI team grew to 12 staff including myself. For most of this fiscal year, our efforts focused on implementing the eight rural research projects that RDI had underway. However, we also collectively continued the development of new proposals for future research. The financial page below identifies that we have been successful at securing proposals both in quantity (12 new projects) and dollar value (over \$300K for RDI, BU and partners). This success is not possible without the skill, dedication and expertise of the RDI Team, engaged faculty and our partners, along with support from the Brandon University administration, the BU Research Office and the Dean of Arts and Faculty of Arts. Thank you to all of those leading, supporting and contributing to our success this year!

The research projects we worked on this year are outlined below, organized into research pillars. Many of them have just recently finished, so stay tuned for a flurry of research reports, webinars and journal articles to share the findings and impacts! Specifically, RDI has been working on critical rural research issues, including connectivity, immigration, climate change, tourism, community wellbeing and capacity building. The activities, results and next steps for each of the projects are outlined in dedicated project pages below.

The emergence of research pillars as categories for our research areas was also one of the areas of focus this year. Research findings, partner and community input and our evolving understanding of the need and RDI's opportunity for impact in rural Manitoba and Canada have resulted in the emerging focus at RDI on research pillars and a Living Lab approach outlined on pg 1. It is not a finished concept, and I know there will be a lot of evolution of this design and focus in the upcoming year, but as an iterative approach, I felt it was important to include and document its emergence in this report.

Another important outcome that is, while embedded in our research, is also transcending projects, is our increased commitment to community engagement. My involvement and engagement with Manitoba's rural communities is increasing through participation in community boards, events, community visits and ongoing meetings and relationships. The scope of community engagement for RDI's current projects can be found on pg. X. We know at RDI that being directly connected and engaged with communities is critical to ensuring our research and efforts meet the needs of those communities, and we anticipate a growing engagement with rural communities here in Manitoba and beyond.

While I can't highlight all of the exciting things underway at RDI in this message, the final one I want to showcase is our increased commitment to student and HQP engagement at BU and beyond. In addition to supporting the first three BCDI scholars who just completed year 1 in their Masters, RDI has been actively engaging and supporting other students at BU as well, employing two undergrads, four Masters students, one PhD students and three recent Masters graduates. RDI also hosted two PhD students from Brazil this year. In addition we have actively engaged with funder and partners to host two Mitacs Globalinks in the upcoming fiscal year and a PhD student from Italy. In addition to secured international interns, we anticipate an increase in student engagement next as well through more employment opportunities, practicum courses, exchanges and training opportunities.

Again, it has been another fantastic year at RDI and I am very honoured to lead this team and research at Brandon University.

Dr. Wayne Kelly,  
Director

### 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](http://www.brandonu.ca/rdi)

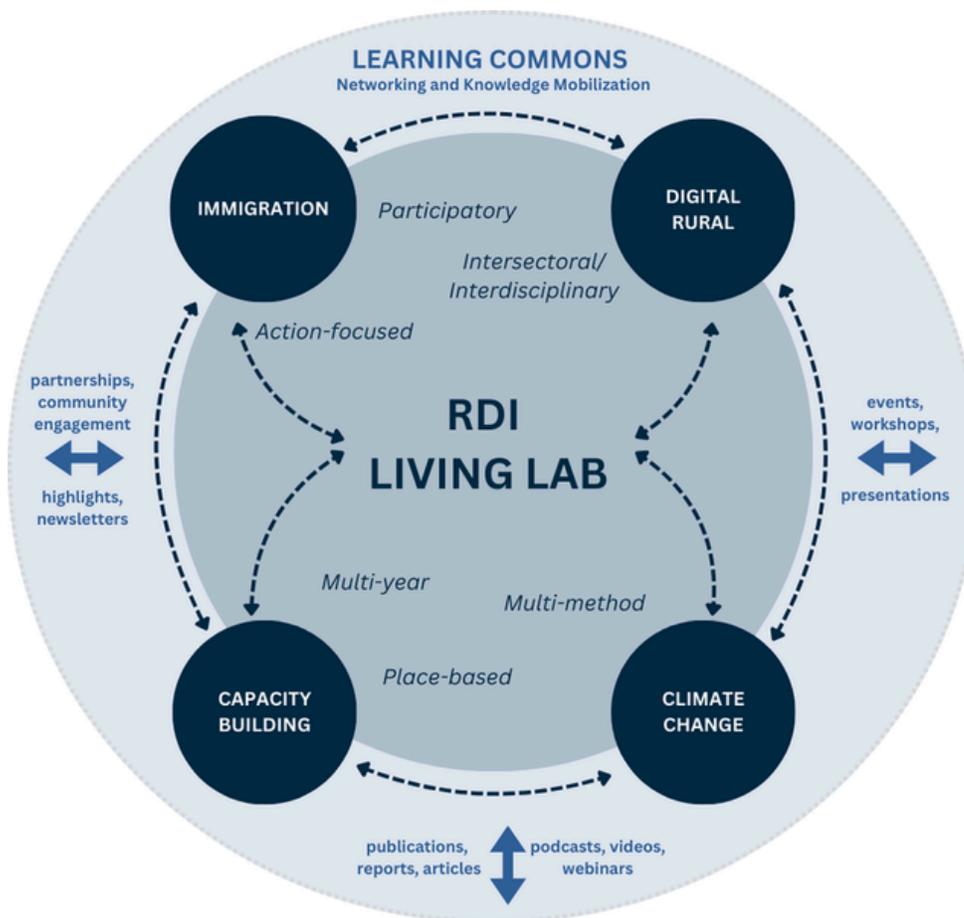
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# Introduction

This interim report adheres to the Brandon University Senate's guidelines on Research Centres Policy and Procedures. Covering the period from April (2024) to March (2025). It provides insights into a review of the Research Centre finances, a review of our applied research endeavors, and knowledge mobilization activities.

Throughout 2024-2025, the Rural Development Institute (RDI) worked to establish a new path guiding research endeavors and initiatives. Developing a Living Lab Approach, RDI will focus on four key Research Pillars:



Though RDI may engage with projects that fall beyond the scope of these pillars, we aim to build on our expertise in the indicated themes - delivering valuable insights pertinent to both individuals in Canada's rural areas and relevant policymakers.

## RDI RESEARCH PILLARS AND PRIORITIES

### Capacity Building



Affiliated Projects:

Co-Creating a Community Well-being Framework

*Capacity Building intersects with all RDI projects as well*

### Climate Change



Affiliated Projects:

Climate Change Initiative

Changing Nature of Rural

### Digital Rural



Affiliated Projects:

ConnectedMB

### Immigration



Affiliated Projects:

Immigration in MB: Entrepreneurship

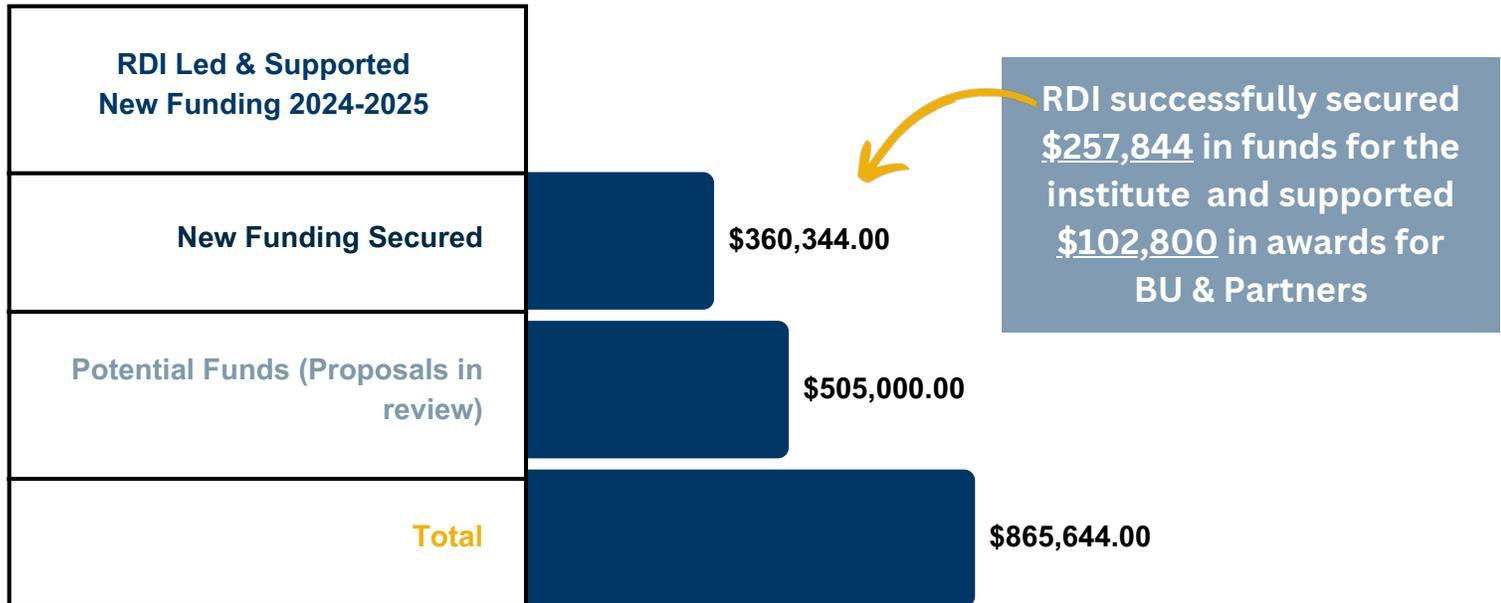
Newcomer Integration Through Community Engagement

All 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 fosters invaluable partnerships. Furthermore, RDI remains committed to its mission of knowledge mobilization, with our findings being presented and published both within Manitoba, across Canada, and on the international stage.



Image 1. Dr. Wayne Kelly (second from the right) attending the World Class Research Event for the September 2024 Brandon University Homecoming week.

# Funding



12 were successful    6 were unsuccessful    2 remain in review

20 proposals were led or supported by RDI, and we were successful in 2/3 (67%) that received decisions for 2024-2025

RDI Led & Supported New Funding Breakdown 2024-2025 (Secured and <i>In Review</i> )		
MITACS Funding	5 projects (3 Accelerate, 2 Globalinks)	\$189,000
SSHRC Funding	3 projects (1 PEG, 2 KSG, 1 Connection) 4 projects (1 PEG)	\$99,019 \$25,000
BU Grants	1 project (BU/BUSU Work Study)	\$2,225
Other Grants	2 projects (ELAP) 1 Project (Invitation to submit to External Grant)	\$22,000 \$480,000
Direct Contracts	1 project (CMCCF)	\$18,000
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>13 Projects</b> 2 Projects	<b>\$360,344</b> \$505,000

*RDI's success in securing all of these funds could not have been achieved without the support of administration and the research office at Brandon University. We would like to especially acknowledge additional contributions and support from the Dean of Arts which made our recent SSHRC applications possible.*

# Research Pillars & Affiliated Projects

## Capacity Building



Image 2. Dr. Junichiro Koji presenting his Japan-based research at the *Small Centre Conversations: Immigration and Settlement Beyond the Megacity in Japan* event.

## Capacity Building Research: Pathways for Rural Community Development

Lead & Annual Report Author: Dr. Wayne Kelly & Dr. Gary McNeely

### Description of Pillar Activities

#### **Capacity Insights from the Endow Manitoba Partnership Project**

Initial steps taken towards drafting a final report for the Endow Manitoba research project conducted with RDI in 2020 highlighted how community foundations' (CF) activities and strategic initiatives aim to enhance community well-being and by doing so also serve as essential capacity-builders in rural Manitoba. The resulting two Knowledge Briefs reinforced how capacity constraints — impacting both individuals and organizations — directly limit CFs success in achieving well-being.

#### **Knowledge Exchange at the 5th Validating Prior Learning Conference**

Preparation for and participation in the 5th VPL Conference in Kilkenny, Ireland, proved to be a turning point in this project's evolution. The presentation design process sparked a deeper literature review, collaborative discussions, and development of practical tools that illustrated how capacity issues emerge at any stage of the community development (CD) cycle. Through visual and analytical aids, roles and tasks were profiled, and resources essential for successful projects were identified — all framed within the context of rural CD challenges.

Feedback from the VPL Conference sparked further work on the Capacity Building Pathways Project during summer 2024, particularly in preparing a peer-reviewed article based on the conference presentation. In response to journal expectations and additional literature scans, the project shifted terminology from "capacity" to "competencies," aligning better with established PLAR frameworks. This shift opened the door to integrating competency frameworks, using recognized scales (novice to expert) to assess and support those engaged in CD projects. The research also led to the inclusion of competency frameworks for CD practitioners and organizations as well as a PLAR assessment process to recognize the competency strengths and gaps of those involved in CD.

### **Educational Program Scan — Training for CD Competence**

Assisted by Victoria Okeke, a recent MA RD graduate, a scan of Manitoba's CD education and training programs was conducted, aiming to assess how well they equip future practitioners. The scan provided valuable insight into existing curriculum strengths and gaps. This initial work set the stage for a Canada-wide scan planned for summer 2025, which will explore whether current training aligns with real-world CD project demands in rural communities.

### **Embedding Capacity into RDI Projects**

Through a series of internal conversations with RDI team leads and project partners, there was a growing recognition that capacity challenges surfaced repeatedly across diverse projects — whether in immigration services, climate adaptation, digital connectivity, or rural tourism. Although capacity was not explicitly built into these projects' designs, its influence is undeniable. This realization strengthened a resolve to make capacity a core lens through which all future RDI community development research is viewed.

### **Capacity Building as a RDI Living Lab Concept**

Reflecting on RDI's internal research capacities while preparing a proposal for the Manitoba Crop Alliance led to a transformative idea — reimagining RDI itself as a Living Lab. This evolving concept would position RDI as both a facilitator and testbed for applied research focused on rural community capacity building, directly connecting research, capacity development, and practical action.

### **Applied Research Proposals and Partnership Development**

#### Three Proposals Linking Capacity to Rural Development

- Manitoba Crop Alliance Proposal: Outlined how case studies of CD projects involving Ag producers and organization could simultaneously build local capacity and validate our framework.
- PrairiesCan Proposal: Used case studies to bring the framework to the Federal Government's attention and demonstrate how capacity challenges play out across the prairie region.
- Community Futures Manitoba Proposal: Focused on developing a typology of CD projects, creating a foundation for a comprehensive, capacity-informed project database.

#### International and Local Networking

- Scotland Collaboration: Discussions with Scotland's Rural University College in December 2024 opened potential collaboration on comparative rural capacity research.
- Japan Connection: Informal conversations with Dr. Junichiro Koji (see Image 2), a visiting researcher at RDI in 2023, highlighted shared rural sustainability challenges between Canada and Japan, reinforcing capacity building as a mutual priority.
- Community Engagement with Riverdale CDC: A January 2025 meeting with Riverdale Community Development Corporation surfaced practical capacity issues such as volunteer shortages and the challenge of balancing ambition with realistic project goals. This reinforced the need for practical, accessible tools and strategies in our framework.

For more information about this project, contact: [mcneelyg@brandonu.ca](mailto:mcneelyg@brandonu.ca)

# Research Pillars & Affiliated Projects

## Climate Change



### Climate Change Initiative

**Project Lead:** Glenice Deterville

**RDI Researchers:** Olamide John Oladele, Adebowale Yusuf, Wayne Kelly

**Affiliated Organization:** Eco-West Canada

**Project Dates:** April 2024 - March 2025

**Funding:** \$90,000 | Equal Contributions from Eco-West Canada & Mitacs

This project evaluates climate mitigation and adaptation strategies across 84 municipalities in Manitoba. The study aims to assess the alignment of municipal plans with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). The research identifies trends, gaps, and challenges in implementing climate action and provides recommendations for strengthening municipal climate resilience.

#### Description of Project Activities

- **Environmental Scan:** Reviewed existing municipal policies, frameworks, and climate action plans to assess their scope and effectiveness.
- **Data Collection & Thematic Analysis:** Conducted surveys and thematic analysis to determine common patterns and challenges in municipal climate action plans.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engaged Eco-West Canada experts to validate findings.
- **Policy Alignment & Recommendations:** Map municipal climate actions to SDG indicators and develop strategic recommendations for municipal climate policies.
- **Knowledge Mobilization:** Preparing reports, policy briefs, and public presentations to disseminate findings to municipalities and other stakeholders.

#### Status of Project & Outline of Deliverables

- **Environmental Scan:** Completed; identified key climate change initiatives adopted by municipalities.
- **Data Collection & Analysis:** Conducted Dec - Feb 2025, with findings structured using the SDG framework.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Awaiting feedback to incorporate into the final analysis from Eco-West Canada.
- **Final Report & Policy Brief:** Expected completion in March & August 2025, respectively.
- **Public Presentations:** Presentations will be planned, and additional webinars/podcasts will be held for municipal stakeholders.

#### Next Steps & Project Findings

- A significant number of municipalities lack dedicated climate change plans, with most climate actions embedded within broader economic or development initiatives.
- The most implemented initiatives include Emergency Plans and Asset Management Plans, while Community Energy and Emissions Plans remain underutilized.
- Limited funding, lack of awareness, and insufficient technical expertise are the primary barriers to municipal climate action.
- Best practices from leading municipalities, such as Winnipeg and Thompson, offer scalable models for other communities.



Image 3. The Climate Change Initiative RDI Team - (from left to right) Yusuf Adebawale, Glenice Deterville, and Olamide John Oladele - on their research trip to St. Francois Xavier, MB.



## Digital Rural



### Changing Nature of Rural Project

**Project Lead & Researcher:** Wayne Kelly, Shilryn Kunaratnam

**Project Partners:** Ryan Bullock and Bryanne Lamoureux

**Affiliated Organization:** Environment and Society Research Group | University of Winnipeg

**Project Dates:** June 2024 - January 2025

**Funding:** \$11,600

This project examines how climate change and adaptation interact with and evolving rural cultures in Canada. Rural communities, shaped by diverse cultural landscapes and strong place based identities, face increasing climate-related disruptions that challenge traditional livelihoods, values, and adaptive capacities. While existing adaptation initiatives address material barriers, cultural dimensions remain underexplored. This project systematically compiles and synthesizes knowledge on rural climate adaptation and explores how cultural shifts influence adaptation strategies.

### Description of Project Activities

This knowledge synthesis study conducted two scoping reviews of peer-reviewed and grey literature. The first, a systematic scoping review, focused on understanding the relationship between adaptation and culture and took a meta-study approach to qualitatively examine the underlying assumptions of the theories and methods chosen by researchers that inform research findings. The second literature review followed an exploratory scoping protocol to map the literature and summarize the key concepts, definitions, types of evidence, and relevant factors available about adaptation and culture in rural Canada. The study also completed a scan of federal adaptation programs and budgets and analyzed funding amounts distributed to support community adaptation. The study followed a decolonial and intersectional approach to understanding the interplay between and among climate change, adaptation and evolving rural cultures.

### Status of Project & Outline of Deliverables

A Knowledge Synthesis Report and an Evidence Brief were submitted to the SSHRC Knowledge Synthesis Grant (KSG). The research team participated in the KSG forum and presented their findings. They are currently working on a plain-language summary report and two journal articles.

## ConnectedMB

Project Lead: Wayne Kelly

RDI Researchers: Fallon Brooks, Kalin Contois

Project Partners: Joel Templeman

Affiliated Organization: Internet Society, Manitoba Chapter

Project Dates: November 2023 - December 2024

Funding: \$69,000

### Outline of Project:

This project takes a comprehensive approach to building broadband connectivity and digital literacy in rural regions of Manitoba. A preliminary literature review will investigate the existing digital infrastructure, community broadband initiatives, digital adoption and capacity-building practices, and digital priorities. An integral part of the study is a podcast series that will share rural Manitoba's digital journey.

### Description of Project Activities:

An environmental scan of Manitoba community broadband initiatives in literature, news, and websites was done.

Develop and air a podcast series that highlights community broadband initiatives, digital community serving organizations and digital adoption initiatives - to disseminate findings in a more engaging format, we will have discussions with representatives from each of the inventories and explore them individually in each podcast using common questions. This narrative approach will allow our audience to understand the current digital realities and digital priorities and opportunities in an easily digestible format.

Content of Podcast was used for analysis. The content of the publicly aired podcasts will be reviewed to assess and identify specific digital challenges and priorities facing Manitoba

### Status of Project & Outline of Deliverables:

Project is complete with the podcast to be release April 2025. With the completion of ConnectedMB, Wayne Kelly, Joel Templeman and Ashleigh Weeden have already begun the second stage of the project.



Image 4. The ConnectedMB RDI Team - (from left to right) Kalin Contois, Fallon Brook, and Dr. Wayne Kelly - recording a meeting with project partner, Joel Templeman, in the Brandon University Knowledge Mobilization Suite.



Image 5. Podcast equipment from the Brandon University Knowledge Mobilization Suite.

## Immigration



## Immigration in Manitoba: Entrepreneurship

Project Lead: Shirlyn Kunaratnam & Wayne Kelly

Project Partners: Westman Immigrant Service

Affiliated Organization: Westman Immigrant Service

Project Dates: March 2023 - March 2026

Funding: \$44,000 |

In 2023, Westman Immigrant Services launched the Entrepreneurship Hub to cater to newcomers and individuals interested in starting their businesses. To enhance this initiative, the Rural Development Institute (RDI) has conducted an in-depth review of the existing immigration research repository and, in 2024, conducted research on immigrant entrepreneurship to understand the challenges faced by newcomers and the entrepreneurial landscape in both Brandon and Manitoba. This research has informed the development of a comprehensive model for the Entrepreneurship Hub, focusing on key areas such as financial accessibility, job opportunities, childcare, infrastructure, skills enhancement, and networking.

### Project Activities & Outline of Deliverables

RDI has conducted an in-depth literature review on the existing immigration research repository. RDI and WIS supported Shirlyn Kunaratnam, the immigration research coordinator, who conducted her master's thesis research on "Exploring entrepreneurship among immigrant women in Brandon, Manitoba." Based on the findings from the literature review and the research provided, RDI has mapped available resources, identified service gaps, and proposed an innovative model for the WIS entrepreneurship hub to support newcomer businesses in Brandon at the end of the first year of the project collaboration.



Image 6. Project Lead, Shirlyn Kunaratnam, defending her Master's Thesis research - which was conducted alongside the project activities for the Immigration Initiative.

## Newcomer Integration through Community Engagement

Project Lead: Shirlyn Kunaratnam

RDI Researchers: Felix Ntenhene, Wayne Kelly

Project Partners: Brandon Local Immigration Partnerships

Affiliated Organization: Brandon Local Immigration Partnerships

Project Dates: July 2024 - June 2025

Funding: \$ 25000

In July 2024, RDI secured a Partnership Engage Grant from SSHRC to research “Newcomer Integration through Community Engagement in Brandon, Manitoba” in collaboration with Brandon Local Immigration Partnerships (BLIP). This project aims to address the evolving needs and challenges faced by newcomer communities in the region, enabling BLIP to align its services and strategies for better outcomes. It seeks to create a more inclusive, supportive, and thriving environment for all residents by prioritizing the

voices of newcomers and immigrants. The project aims to inform targeted interventions that can facilitate smoother integration, ultimately enhancing newcomers’ well-being in Brandon. Additionally, by contributing to evidence-based decision-making, the initiative may empower participants, which is crucial for their successful integration into the community.

### **Project Activities & Outline of Deliverables**

The project has been designed with a participatory action lens, where newcomers will be actively involved. This approach actively involves newcomers in identifying and prioritizing their needs to ensure their well-being. As a first step, focus group discussions will be conducted with said newcomer communities using a simple need assessment tool where the participants can identify and prioritize their challenges and needs. They will also be asked to propose solutions if they have any. Currently, the research team is involved in conducting focus group discussions and hope to finish the focus groups discussions by end of February 2025. The preliminary findings from these community groups will be shared with the newcomer-serving organizations in Brandon through a round table discussion to inform the organizations of the newcomer challenges and their suggestion and get the organizations’ perspectives. The final report will be submitted to BLIP by the end of July 2025. As next step of this research, BLIP will develop a data portal with the research team's support to ensure that all immigration and newcomer-related information is accessible in one digital location.



Image 7. The \_\_\_\_\_ Project Team - (from left to right) Shirlyn Kunaratnam, Dr. Wayne Kelly, Katrina Casulla, and Felix Ntenhene - connecting in the fall.

# Research Beyond the Pillars: Tourism

## Accommodations in Manitoba

RDI Project Lead: Nicole Breedon,

RDI Researchers: Logan Young, Wayne Kelly

Project Partners: BU Tourism and Recreation Research Centre (Dr. Doug Ramsey) & the Manitoba Hotel Association (Michael Juce)

Affiliated Organization: BU Tourism and Recreation Research Centre & Manitoba Hotel Association

Project Dates: January 2024 - December 2025

Funding: \$30,000.00 | Equal Contributions from Manitoba Hotel Association and Mitacs

The ability to host events within communities, as well as provide overnight accommodations, represents a significant opportunity for economic diversification. Through collaborations with the Brandon University Tourism and Recreation Research Centre (BU TRRC) and the Manitoba Hotel Association (MHA), the Rural Development Institute (RDI) worked to explore what the real impacts of accommodations were in communities across Manitoba.

### Project Activities & Outline of Deliverables

This project focused on engaging stakeholders in the tourism sector through Key Informant Interviews to determine highlight their perspectives on rural and remote tourism. Written surveys were also administered to overnight accommodation guests to explore their interests in staying within these locations in Manitoba. Through this project, a Knowledge Brief was created regarding "Accommodation Taxes: Benefits and Challenges in Rural and Remote Communities." This brief outlines why place-based studies are necessary to effectively support communities seeking to build on local tourism. In addition to this Knowledge Brief, a Brochure and RDI Project Update Video were created to outline preliminary findings. Currently, the Project Final Report is in development, and will be shared with all project participants within the coming weeks. It is also the intent to share findings from this project at the 2025 Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation Conference through an in-person presentation.

Project partners have expressed interest in continuing to conduct further studies to better understand the nuances of tourism in rural and remote communities across Manitoba. While we are still exploring these opportunities, it is the hope to further solidify the relationship with BU TRRC and continue strengthening these collaborative relationships.



Image 8. An image taken at Falcon Lake - one of the communities represented in the Accommodation in Manitoba Project hosted through RDI in collaboration with the Tourism and Recreation Research Centre and Manitoba Hotel Association.

## Past and Present Informing the Future

**RDI Project Lead:** Nicole Breedon,

**Project Partners:** Tourism and Recreation Research Centre (Dr. Doug Ramsey), University of New Brunswick (Dr. Amy Scott) & Parks Canada: Cape Breton Unit (Maura McKeough)

**Affiliated Organization:** University of New Brunswick & Parks Canada: Cape Breton Unit

**Funding:** This project was supported by the Rural Development Institute

Executed in collaboration with the BU TRRC, the University of New Brunswick, and Parks Canada - Cape Breton Unit, this project focused on exploring rural and remote tourism at the Fortress of Louisbourg in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

### Project Activities and Outline of Deliverables

This project was designed to engage Parks Canada guests visiting the bioarchaeological site at the Fortress of Louisbourg in a verbal survey to determine their interests in rural tourism. More specifically, for this project we were interested to learn what the motivations of tourists visiting rural Cape Breton were, as well as determine their interpretations of terms such as "travelling well" and "responsible tourism."

This past year, findings from the Past and Present Informing the Future Project have been shared at three different events. First, a poster presentation was conducted at the Skeletal Stories: Bioarchaeological Research from the 18th Century Fortress of Louisbourg event. This presentation informed the Parks Canada Cape Breton Unit on the lack of awareness to the cemetery sites located across Rochefort Point, resulting in the reorganization of the Fortress of Louisbourg Visitor Information Centre. Staff members revised the lay out of the Visitor Information Centre to include more information on the known cemeteries affiliated with Louisbourg. Second, an in-person presentation was conducted at the 2024 Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation Conference, highlighting the lack of common and accessible information on the heritage sites within Canada. And finally, findings from this project were highlighted in the New Brunswick Archaeology Podcast: French Foreign Lesions. At this time, there are no further plans to expand this project, and the final report is in review with Parks Canada.



Image 9. An image of the downtown port at the Fortress of Louisbourg, NS.



Image 10. An image taken at Rochefort Point - the area in which the bioarchaeological work was conducted and Fortress guests were engaged in the recorded surveys.

# The BCDI: 2030 Scholarship Project

**Brandon University Project Team:** Dr. Wilder Robles, Dr. Wayne Kelly, Nicole Breedon, Richard Adu, Dr. Lili Jardine, and Dr. Emma Varley

**Project Partners:** Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (Dr. Ebenezer Dassah)

**Affiliated Organization:** Contributions from Universities Canada, Global Affairs Canada, and Brandon University

**Funding:** \$523, 517.29

Throughout 2023, faculty from the Brandon University Department of Rural Development and the Rural Development Institute (RDI) have been collaborating with the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) (Ghana), Universities Canada (UC), and Global Affairs Canada (GAC) to secure International Student Scholarship Funds through the BCDI: 2030 Project. Through partnerships with UC and GAC, government funding in the amount of \$523, 517.29 has been provided to Brandon University to support the acceptance and enrollment of 10 students from KNUST into the Master of Arts in Rural Development (MARD) program at Brandon University from 2024 to 2028. All BCDI:2030 Project team members - this including Scholarship Recipients, RDI staff members, and Brandon University faculty members - have had a Researcher Highlight created. These Highlights showcase their areas of expertise in research, as well as their efforts in supporting the BCDI: 2030 Project.

The BCDI: 2030 Project was designed so that Canadian Higher Education Institutions can accept and enroll exceptional international students into Graduate Student programs. This project aims to emphasize the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the prosperous endeavors of emerging scholars. After completing their graduate studies, all students completing the MARD program will return to their home countries, where they will re-enter the workforce with new perspectives on community development.



Image 11. Cohort 1 in the BCDI: 2030 Scholarships program after their arrival in Canada - (from left to right) Akua Osei, Kwabena Amoateng, and Melody Fagelogo.

Upon receiving the BCDI: 2030 Project funding, RDI has organized and facilitated the acceptance of 6 students from KNUST into the Master of Arts in Rural Development Program here at Brandon University (3 students accepted for the 2024 Fall semester, and 3 students accepted for the 2025 Fall semester). The first three students arrived in Brandon, Manitoba in September (2024) to begin their graduate studies - this includes Kwabena Amoateng, Melody Fagelogo, and Akua Osei (see Image 11). For the 2024 Fall semester, the BCDI: 2030 Scholarship Recipients were provided accommodations through Brandon University so they could become accustomed to the new community and University itself. For the Winter semester (2025). Since their arrival, RDI has facilitated activities and workshops to ensure the Scholarship Recipients are able to network with and engage other students and academics. They attended one field trip to Clear Lake (see Image 12) with other international students, have received a tour of Brandon, Manitoba, been invited to participate in the “Winter: 101 Info Night,” where they learned about winter safety and activities, and much more. In addition to these activities, Kwabena, Melody and Akua won a Brandon University Student Union (BUSU) contest in their development of international student journeys to Brandon, Manitoba, and Akua ran for class president within BUSU.

This February (2025), the three new incoming students have been selected and are in the process of applying for their Student Visa’s to attend Brandon University. However, as of January (2025), Global Affairs Canada and Universities Canada have revised the budget for this project, ensuring that students are provided additional funds to account for economic inflation and adjust to the cost of living (where the original funding provided was in the amount of \$448, 271.27). These revisions to the project budget have also included: funds to support each BCDI: 2030 Scholarship Recipient to attend and present at a conference related to their work and research interests; the purchasing of a new computer should they need new equipment for their graduate studies; and an additional \$250.00 per month for their living allowance. Unfortunately, due to these budgetary changes, the BCDI: 2030 project has reduced the number of potential Scholarship Recipients from 10 Scholarship Recipients to be enrolled at Brandon University between 2024-2028, to 9 Scholarship Recipients to be enrolled at Brandon University between 2024-2028.



Image 12. Two BCDI: 2030 Scholarship Recipients at the Clear Lake excursion - (from left to right) Akua Osei and Melody Fagelogo.



Image 13. BCDI: 2030 Project Team Member (Richard Adu) with Scholarship Recipients attending a Ghanaian church service in Brandon, MB - (from left to right) Richard Adu, Melody Fagelogo, Kwabena Amoateng, and Akua Osei.

# Knowledge Mobilization

In 2023, the Rural Development Institute (RDI) team worked to ensure there was a strategy put in place to enhance the Knowledge Mobilization of RDI projects, activities and deliverables (see Annual Report 2023-2024). There were four pillars guiding the development of this strategy:

- Enhance the Brand of RDI;
- Manage and Update all Social Platforms (i.e., the website and Social Media Channels);
- Ensure there is Student and Faculty Engagement; and
- Standardize Knowledge Mobilization Activities

In order to assess the results of this new implementation strategy, we have included a comprehensive review of the Knowledge Mobilization activities taking place. This includes an in depth evaluation of RDI social media engagement, a review of publications produced through RDI, a review of events taking place (whether supported by or hosted through RDI, and an evaluation of the RDI eNewsletter engagement.

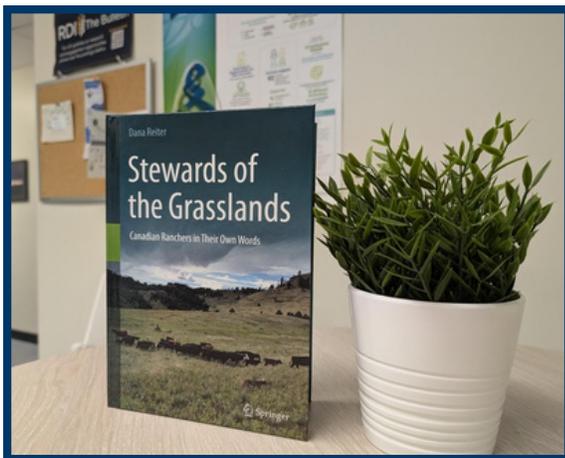


Image 14. An image of the “Stewards of the Grasslands” publication, given to RDI for their support in hosting a public talk event sharing insights on land management.

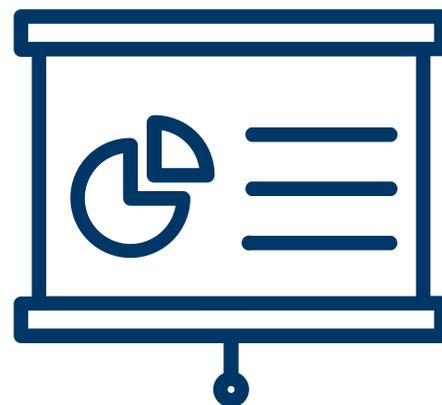


Image 15. RDI staff members outside the office - (from left to right) Felix Ntenhene (Knowledge Mobilization Assistant), Glenice Deterville (Senior Researcher), Richard Adu (Senior Researcher), and Nicole Breedon (Knowledge Mobilization Coordinator).

## KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION: SOCIAL MEDIA EVALUATION

Throughout 2024 and 2025, we here at RDI worked to enhance our presence on the established Linked In channel. Between March 18 (2024) and March 17 (2025), the RDI Linked In Page saw an increase in followers - with 374 of our 443 followers (84%) subscribing to our channel in the past year. Below are the analytics retrieved from the RDI Linked In account from March 18 (2024) and March 17 (2025).

In contrast, and with regard to the established RDI Facebook page, we have found that the majority of our followers and friends on Facebook are not typically engaging with the content shared. In the hopes to ensure our posts are reaching the targeted audience (practitioners, researchers, academics, community organizations, students, and so on) we have focused efforts to first enhance our presence on Linked In (see Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3). However, we aim to reinvigorate our presence on Facebook, as well as begin utilizing an Instagram account in the remaining months of 2025.

374/443  
RDI Linked In  
followers began  
following RDI's  
page in 2024-2025

42, 335 Impressions | 1, 911 Reactions | 139 Comments | 80 Reposts

Figure 1. Post Impressions from the RDI Linked In Page

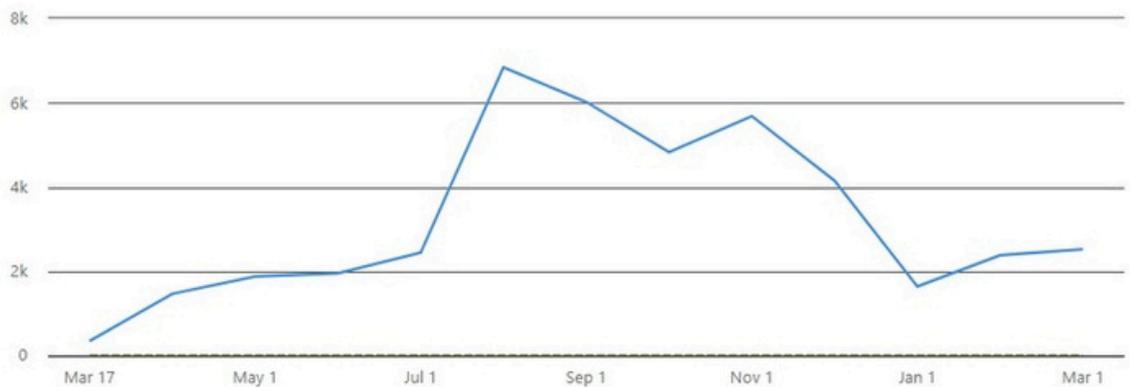


Figure 2. Post Membership Reach from the RDI Linked In Page

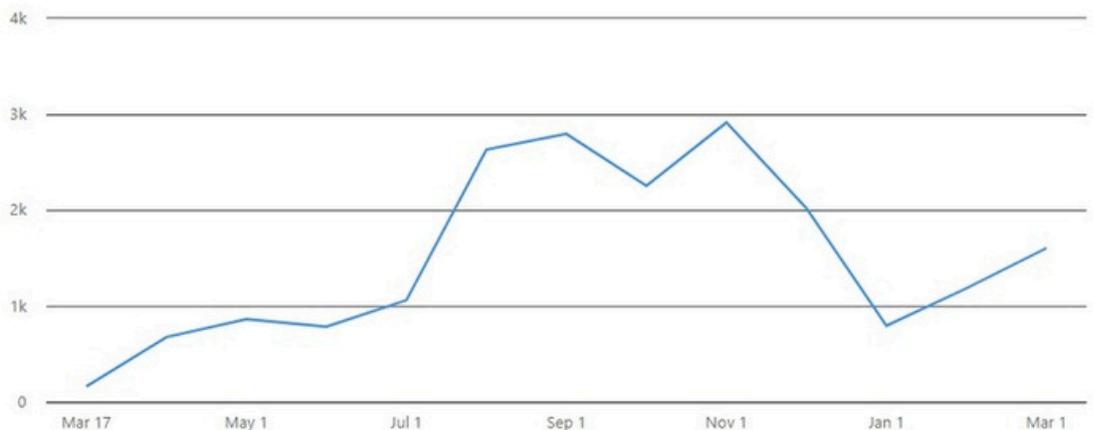


Figure 3. Categorization of Linked In Followers

**Community and Social Services** · 53 (12%)



**Education** · 47 (10.6%)



**Research** · 43 (9.7%)



**Business Development** · 39 (8.8%)



**Operations** · 27 (6.1%)



**Administrative** · 23 (5.2%)



**Consulting** · 12 (2.7%)



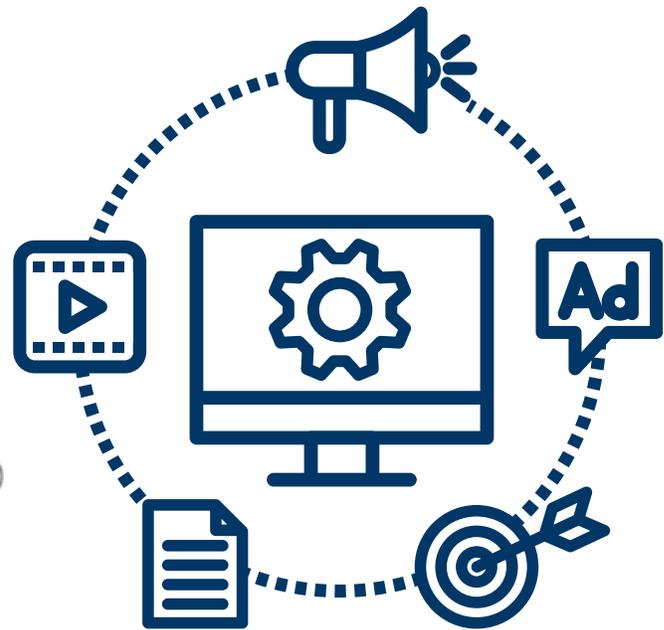
**Program and Project Management** · 12 (2.7%)



**Information Technology** · 11 (2.5%)



**Engineering** · 9 (2%)



We were incredibly excited to see that this year we have seen an increase in the Linked In followers. It was also reaffirming to see that the majority of our followers identify as those working within the field of Community and Social Services - followed by those working within Education and Research (see Figure 3). As many of our projects focus on working with community-based and community-focused organizations, it is valuable to know that the work we do is being shared with these stakeholders in the world of rural development. Moving forward, we would like to enhance our social media connections with community members themselves. This is the motivation to reinvigorate our established Facebook account, as many rural community members have expressed that Facebook is the channel in which they access news within the community.

## Knowledge Mobilization: 2024-2025 Publications



- Published Works
  - 1 Book Chapter:
    - *The State of Rural Canada 5: Manitoba*
  - 2 Journal Articles:
    - *Digital Rural Research Framework to Journal of Community Development*
    - *Sisyphus's Broadband: Exploring models of rural community participation in digital infrastructure and connectivity*
- Publications in Review
  - 1 Book Chapter:
    - *To Prompt or Not to Prompt: Using AI to generate community engagement plans for resource projects*
  - 1 Journal Article:
    - *Recognizing Prior Learning in the context of Rural Community Economic Development*
- 3 Research Briefs
  - Immigration in Manitoba
  - Older Refugee Youth with Interrupted Schooling: The View from Small Communities in Manitoba, Canada
  - Accommodation Taxes: Benefits and Challenges in Rural and Remote Communities
- 13 Blog Posts
  - *Rural Women Addressing Climate Change* (November 27, 2024) by Oladele Olamide John
  - *The Interplay of Climate Change, Inflation, and Political Instability on Agriculture* (October 30, 2024) by Adebowale Yusuf
  - *Experiences at the Rural Development Institute* (September 23, 2024) by Shirlyn Kunaratnam
  - *Are rural communities faring well in climate change activities?* (September 21, 2024) by Oladele Olamide John
  - *Fostering Sustainable Agriculture: Climate Resilience and Mitigation Efforts in Manitoba Municipalities* (August 20, 2024) by Adebowale Yusuf
  - *The Possibilities of AI and Community-Based Research: The Future for Climate Change, Education and Rural Development* (August 5, 2024) by Glenice Deterville
  - *Are adaptation and mitigation ideas enough in the face of climate change?* (July 25, 2024) by Oladele Olamide John
  - *Climate Change and Agriculture: An Inextricable Connection* (July 19, 2025) By Adebowale Yusuf
  - *Experiences at the 2024 CRRF Conference* (June 18, 2024) by Nicole Breedon
  - *Waste Production and Climate Change: Relations and Impacts* (June 12, 2024) by Oladele Olamide John
  - *Reflections on the 5th VPL Biennale in Kilkenny, Ireland* (May 30, 2025) by Gary McNeely
  - *RDI 2023 and 2024 Volunteer Research Experience* (March 17, 2024) by Oladele Olamide John and Yusuf Adebowale



## Knowledge Mobilization: Events

Throughout 2024 and 2025, RDI worked to host 2 Winter 101: Student Info Nights for international students and researchers. These events focused on sharing vital information on how to properly dress and prepare for the winter months, as well as tips on weather and travel safety.

We also engaged in sharing research and projects conducted through RDI at the 2024 Brandon University Homecoming event - World Class Research Event (see Image 1). This included the sharing of insights at one panel discussion and one independent presentation.

With regard to public talks, RDI organized a Book Launch presentation release of the “Stewards of the Grasslands” publication. At this event, Dr. Dana Reiter was accompanied by a local Deloraine rancher to share their insights on sustainable practices to ensure the vitality of natural grasslands (see Image 14). RDI also collaborated with research and project partners from Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO) and the Migration in Remote and Rural Areas Network (MIRRA) in their facilitation of the *Small Centre Conversations: Immigration and Settlement Beyond the Megacity in Japan* event (see Image 2, Image 16 and Image 17). This event took place in September at the Japanese Cultural Association of Manitoba in Winnipeg, MB, and RDI provided advertising and technical support at the event venue.

Finally, RDI supported the hosting of the 2024 and 2025 Rural Development Student Receptions. At these events, students were able to engage with their peers and faculty members of Brandon University - welcoming them to the program and institution.



Image 16. A photo of part of the JCAM event venue taken the day of the *Small Centre Conversations: Immigration and Settlement Beyond the Megacity in Japan* event.



Image 17. The following is an image captured at the post-event (*Small Centre Conversations: Immigration and Settlement Beyond the Megacity in Japan* event) dinner with all honored guests, presenters and key stakeholders in these international partnerships.

## Knowledge Mobilization: eNewsletter Evaluation

Throughout 2024-2025, 13 eNewsletters were shared with over 2,000 Recipients (see Figure 4). The RDI eNewsletter Subscriber list was originally comprised of students, academics, practitioners, organizations and community members who were interested in receiving updates on the Rural Policy Learning Commons (RPLC) Webinar Series. Since the completion of the RPLC project, the number of eNewsletter subscribers has begun to decline. However, we are still maintaining a rate of over 2,000 subscribers, with the number of subscribers gradually increasing. It can be presumed that the consistency in the 2023-2024 RDI Knowledge Mobilization Strategy has continued to interest new subscribers, represented in Figure 1. below.

It is noteworthy that the vast variation in eNewsletter Recipients represented in Figure 4. was due to a technical issue experienced through November and December (2024). This is not a reflection of eNewsletter subscribers, but rather represents this error where not all eNewsletter subscribers were sent the monthly eNewsletter.

Figure 4. eNewsletter Recipients

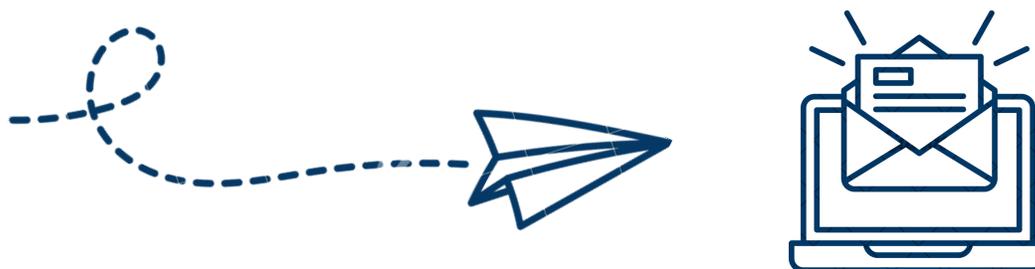
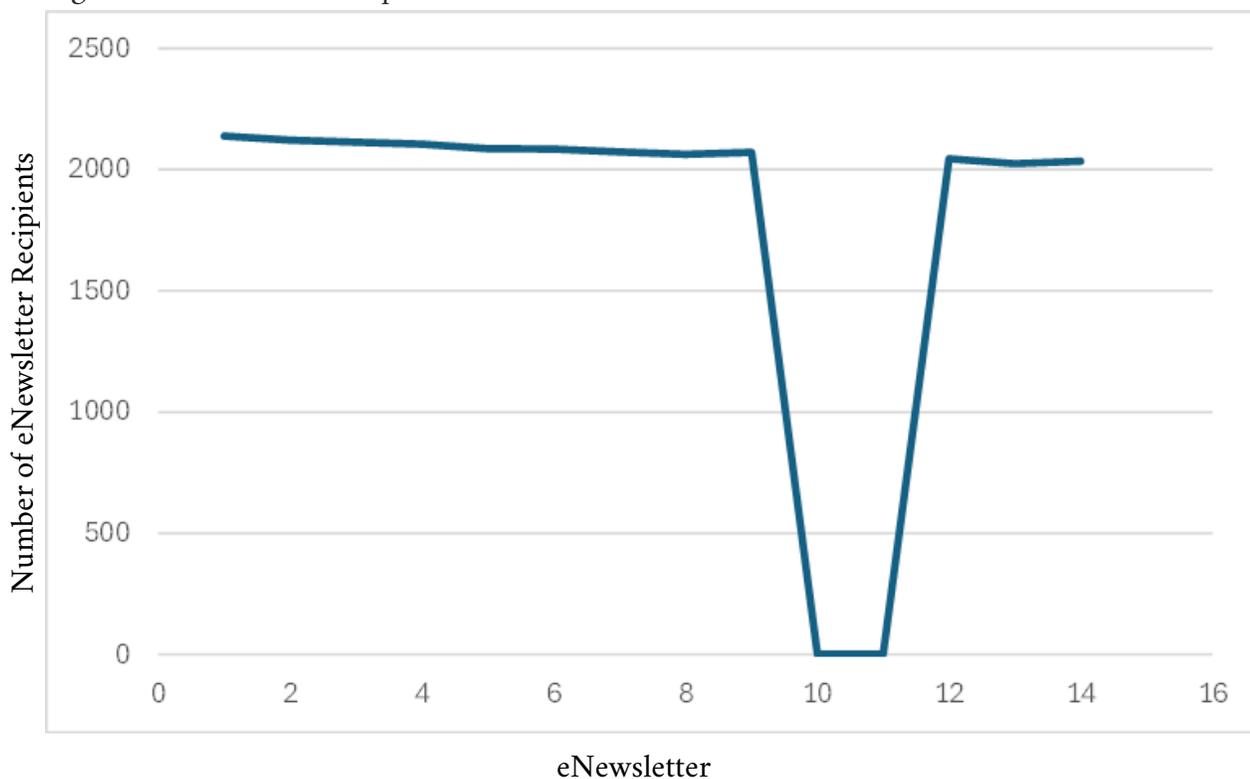


Table 1. Analytics for 2024-2025 eNewsletters

eNewsletter Issue	Month of Issue	# of Recipients	# of eNewsletters Opened	# of Recipients Clicking Links	Most Clicked Hyperlink	# of Clicks
15	March	2138	1300	66	<a href="#">Mental Health on the Prairies Event</a>	58
16	April	2122	1242	81	<a href="#">Mental Health on the Prairies Event</a>	102
17	May	2113	1020	48	<a href="#">Manitoba Immigration Factsheet</a>	25
18	June	2105	1089	28	<a href="#">Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation Webpage</a>	28
19	July	2086	1192	65	<a href="#">Eco-West Webpage</a>	90
20	August	2085	1220	167	<a href="#">Climate Change Blog Post</a>	262
21	BCDI: 2030 Special Issue	2073	1269	41	<a href="#">BCDI: 2030 Project Announcement</a>	101
22	September	2064	1029	100	<a href="#">KNUST Webpage</a>	91
23	October	2071	1173	787	<a href="#">BCDI: 2030 Researcher Highlight for Dr. Ebenezer Dassah</a>	784**
24	November	1481*	445	115	<a href="#">CRRE 2025 Conference</a>	120
25	December	1466*	886	466	<a href="#">CRRE 2025 Conference</a>	103
26	January	2044	692	62	<a href="#">CRRE 2025 Conference</a>	118
27	February	2024	1299	219	<a href="#">Changing Nature of Rural Project Page</a>	372
28	March	2035	1169	150	<a href="#">Adapting Rural Climate Culture Report</a>	145

\* In November and December, there was a technical error where the eNewsletters were not sent to all eNewsletter subscribers. This is not a reflection of a drop in eNewsletter Subscribers.

\*\* The October eNewsletter saw the most engagement, maintaining the highest number of hyperlink clicks of any other eNewsletter (see Table 2. for an outline of the most clicked hyperlinks).

Table 2. Analytics on the Accessing of the BCDI: 2030 Partnership Highlights

Deliverable	# of Clicks
<a href="#">BCDI: 2030 Partnership Highlight - Dr. Ebenezer Dassah</a>	784
<a href="#">BCDI: 2030 Partnership Highlight - Dr. Wayne Kelly</a>	784
<a href="#">BCDI: 2030 Partnership Highlight - Dr. Lili Jardine</a>	774
<a href="#">BCDI: 2030 Partnership Highlight - Dr. Emma Varley</a>	769
<a href="#">Project Announcement - Newcomer Integration</a>	721
<a href="#">Poster - Winter 101: Info Night</a>	720
<a href="#">Highlighting Rural Researchers: Tom Mitchell</a>	720
<a href="#">BCDI: 2030 Partnership Highlight - Dr. Wilder Robles</a>	719
<a href="#">BCDI: 2030 Partnership Highlight - Richard Adu</a>	696
<a href="#">BCDI: 2030 Partnership Highlight - Nicole Breedon</a>	695



Alongside highlights and celebrations of partnered organizations, RDI shared the following internal deliverables through the RDI eNewsletter:

- 4 [Fact Sheets](#) for the Immigration Initiative and 1 [Brochure](#) for the Accommodations in MB Project
- 8 Organization Highlights ([details accessible through each of our eNewsletters](#))
- 5 Project Overviews & Announcements for the following projects:
  - [Climate Change Initiative](#)
  - [Co-Creating a Community of Well-being](#)
  - [ConnectedMB](#)
  - [Digital Horizons: Shaping Manitoba's Integrated Policy Future](#)
  - [Newcomer Integration through Community Engagement](#)
- 11 Issues in the [Highlighting Rural Researcher Series](#)
- 10 [Researcher Highlights for the BCDI: 2030 Team](#)
- 14 Presentations
  - 8 of these 14 presentations have been made accessible through the [RDI Publications Page](#)



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