



Project Announcement

The 2025 Rural Development Institute Cooperative Experience

WHAT IS THE PROJECT?

This summer (2025), the Rural Development Institute (RDI) will be working with the Department of Rural Development to provide a Spring-Summer Practicum Experience for the Master of Arts in Rural Development students. Through this Practicum, enrolled students will have the opportunity to collaborate with RDI staff members to engage in community-based projects with participants across the Westman region. These hands-on projects were designed to ensure that enrolled students also gain experience with regard to the following skills:

- Project Management
- Leadership
- Community Engagement
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Communication
- Knowledge Mobilization

WHO ARE THE PROJECT PARTNERS?

Each project will be designed alongside different communities, meaning we will be working with partners and community leaders from across the Westman Region of Manitoba. In addition to the myriad of partners we will be working with, this Summer Practicum will be conducted under the supervision and mentorship of Dr. Wayne Kelly, Dr. Gary McNeely, and Nicole Breedon (MA).



Project 1

Asset Mapping



The Rivers Asset Mapping project is a community-driven initiative aimed at identifying, organizing, and celebrating the diverse assets within the town of Rivers, MB. Through a collaborative and participatory approach, community members and local leaders will be invited to participate in conversations and interviews to create an Asset Map using the Community Capitals Framework. Following the development of this map, community members will validate findings to ensure it reflects the full range of social, cultural, environmental, economic, and built resources in Rivers.

Final Project Deliverable: Rivers Asset Map

Project 2

CED Initiatives



This project is designed to explore and analyze the range of Community Economic Development (CED) initiatives supported by Community Futures (CF) organizations, with the goal of identifying common strategies, capacity needs, and outcomes across diverse contexts. First, students will conduct a literature review to assess CED typologies, then work to review the 15–20 existing CF-supported projects to identify recurring themes, required community capacities, and observed impacts. Based on this analysis, the project team will develop a CED project map that connects the identified themes to broader capacity-building goals and CED strategies.

Final Project Deliverable: CF-CED Project Typology Brief

Project 3

The RDI Podcast



The Small Towns, Big Stories podcast will be designed for community members to share their insights on local capacity building, the use of emerging technologies in community, and how communities are working to instill local data sovereignty for local policy design. Through this projects, students will work with the project lead to organize and conduct meetings for podcast recording and then utilize technology to edit all content. As knowledge mobilization is a primary pillar in action-focused research, the skills developed through this production will not only allow for new insights on community work, but equip them with new digital competencies.

Final Project Deliverable: *Small Towns, Big Stories Podcast*

Project 4

Local AI Uses



This project will explore how artificial intelligence (AI) can be used to support community economic development (CED) initiatives. By understanding the building local understanding and capacity through collaborative planning, applied research, and practical tool development, enrolled students will identify how AI is currently being used within community, and outline new potential strategies for utilizing AI in the community setting based on the identified digital literacy and capacity. Findings will be synthesized and aligned with existing CED strategies to ensure practical and community-centered use of digital technologies.

Final Project Deliverable: AI Guide and Toolkit for CED