

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF RURAL



CANADIAN RURAL REVITALIZATION FOUNDATION: FINAL REPORT

2025 Conference

Technology, Data Governance, & Capacity Building

By: Nicole Breedon and Fallon Brook

BRANDON MANITOBA | THE HEART OF THE PRAIRIES

SEPTEMBER 23 - 26, 2025

www.crrf2025.org

Brandon, Manitoba is located on Treaty 2 Territory, the traditional shared land of Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Anishinaabe, and Dene Peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.

As current inhabitants of, and visitors to, this region, we recognize the harmful histories of colonization, and work towards a future with Truth and Reconciliation. We want to continue taking steps forward, and working with the First Nation, Metis and Inuit Peoples in a good way.

We invite you to situate yourself in place throughout your time within this region.



BRANDON
UNIVERSITY



Journal of Rural and
Community
Development

SSHRC  CRSH

THANK YOU, SPONSORS!



**BRANDON
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Brandon University has contributed to the success of this event through a myriad of avenues, including the Office of Research Services and the Faculty of Arts. We want to extend our thanks BU for the event spaces, knowledge mobilization resources and overwhelming support for the conference and the SSHRC project embedded in the conference events and activities.



**Internet Society
Manitoba Chapter**

ISOC-MB has sponsored the event, promoted the conference, and is contributing a hands-on workshop for attendees. ISOC-MB is also research partner with RDI, co-hosting the ConnectedMB podcast and contributing to research and conceptual discussions related to digital in Manitoba's rural spaces. The chapter's workshop will focus on key elements of that digital focus in rural spaces, showcasing internet accessibility, digital inclusion, and community work across the province.



RMED

The Rural Manitoba Economic Development Corporation (RMED) has sponsored the conference and is contributing a workshop for attendees. RMED supports economic innovation and development across rural Manitoba through data tools, strategic planning, and community capacity-building. RMED has emerged as a leader in providing and analyzing local data and is partnering with RDI to deepen the exploration of rural data and realities. RMED will be showcasing their data, toolkits and case studies in their workshop to illustrate how local data can empower municipalities and community leaders.



With the support of Donna Morken - Chair of Rivers Train Station Committee and Co-chair of Riverdale Community Development Corporation - the conference was able to align one of the field trips with an exciting excursion for attendees to witness the unveiling of an international mural commemorating a unique community development story that reaches all the way to Japan. Donna and the Train Station Committee are sponsoring the participation of conference attendees at this special event in Rivers, Manitoba.



THANK YOU!

First, thank you Wayne and Doug. We know that CRRF and this conference mean so much to both of you, so your support in giving this week's events shape has been so greatly appreciated.

We'd also like to extend our gratitude to CRRF, not only for the opportunity to host this amazing week, but for all of your guidance. Sincere thanks to Joshua Barrett, John Dale, Jolena Leader, Samantha Mark, Diogo Olivier, Patrick Brouder, Jessica Becking, and Jeff Reichheld.

Our most sincere thanks to Dr. Fran Shaver for taking the time to attend the conference and present the first Bill Reimer Legacy Award.

From Brandon University, we would like to thank Nick Brown for all of the technical support provided, and Live Streaming key presentations to the remote attendees.

Thank you to our fantastic guest speakers for welcoming conference attendees to Brandon and providing insights into Manitoba. These speakers include Mayor Fawcett, Dr. Gregory Kennedy, and MLA Glen Simard.

We also want to extend our sincere thanks to Dr. Ashleigh Weeden. We are so grateful for both your MC abilities and the amazing keynote you gave at our opening reception.

Thank you to our exceptional volunteers! This group of fantastic humans includes, Shirlyn Kunaratnam, Yusuf Adebawale, Jessica Ehirim, Akua Oesi, Melody Fagelogo, Anna Ramsey, Awall Osebuty, Alexa Nicolle, Kwabena Amoeteng, Roly Russel, Emelia Wokey, Phoebe Yeboah, and Prince Brempong.

And last, but certainly not least, we want to thank all our amazing presenters and attendees! This event could not have been possible without your incredible insights

Sincerely,
Fallon Brook and Nicole Breedon



- Mexico
- Great Britain
- Japan
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe
- Canada

The conference drew 80 participants from all over the world, including Canada, Great Britain, Japan, Mexico, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

For more information, please visit the [Conference Program](#)



Attendance

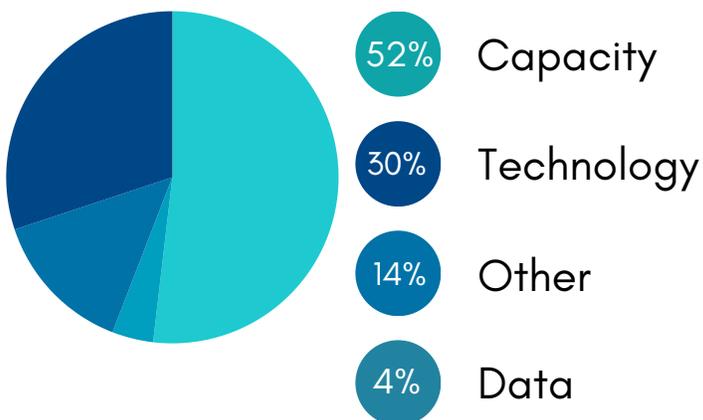
78%

In Person

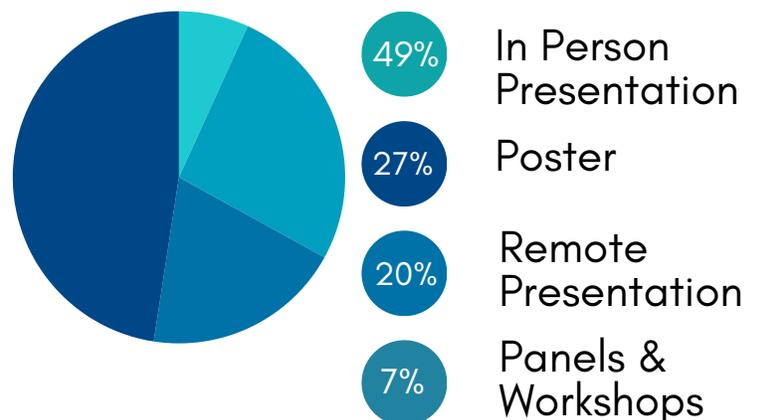
23%

Virtual

Presentation Themes



Presentation Types



RIVERS & RIDING MOUNTAIN EXCURSION

In this excursion, guests visited the community of Rivers where they learned more about the Sekine Bike Factory, as well as explored the Riding Mountain National Park. This excursion gathered international attention with special attendees from Japan joined the group including Drs Junichhiro Koji, Satomi Tozawa, and Tsuyoshi Tokuda as well as Vice Counsel Ms. Yoshiko Okada from the Japanese Consulate in Calgary. See [here](#) for article from the Brandon Sun for more information.

We would like to extend a sincere thank you to Dr. Doug Ramsey for organizing and facilitating this excursion, and Donna Morken for organizing the Sekine Bike Plant mural unveiling!



The excursion group at the pier in Riding Mountain National Park



The grand unveiling of the Rivers, Manitoba Mural at the Sekine Bicycle Plant

DOWNTOWN BRANDON WALKING EXCURSION

In this excursion, participants enjoyed local food, beers and history with stops at the Daly House Museum, Westman Immigrant Services, the Brandon General Museum and Section 6 Brewery.

We would like to extend a sincere thank you to Dr. Gary McNeely for facilitating this community walk and providing key insights into the city of Brandon!



The Daly House Museum in Brandon, Manitoba



Akua Afrakoma Osei

“The opportunity to engage with such brilliant minds who came around my poster and the insights they shared along with similar challenges they were facing was such a heart-warming and eye-opening experience.”

- Akua

- Testimonial retrieved from Linked In - [see their profile here](#) to learn more!



Poster Competition Winners

NADEESHA DISSANAYAKA

Exploring Challenges and Opportunities for Indigenous Engagement in Forest Management Planning

Nadeesha Dissanayaka, Ryan Bullock

Department of Environmental Studies & Sciences, The University of Winnipeg

Introduction & Research Context

A Forest Management Plan outlines strategies and measures to promote sustainable use of forest resources while balancing environmental, social, and economic interests within a specific region. In accordance with the Forest Management Planning (FMP) process, when a Forest Management Plan overlaps with Indigenous Peoples' traditional territories, communities have a legitimate right to engage in the FMP process. However, many Indigenous communities face different challenges in engaging these processes^{1,2}. Therefore, addressing these challenges is essential to increasing meaningful Indigenous engagement in the FMP process.

Research Questions

This case study is guided by a single research question:

1. What are the challenges (barriers) and facilitators (opportunities) affecting Indigenous engagement in the context of FMP?

Study Area



Research Process



References

¹Ward, M. (2018). Forest Management Planning Manual (2nd ed.). Toronto: Ontario Forestry Centre.

²Balick, R., Juhn, M., Ross, M. D., & McArthur, D. (2019). Strategic Options for More Effective Indigenous Participation in Collaborative Environmental Governance. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*.

³Harold, R. W., Thomas, R. L., & Ross, M. D. (2019). Strategic Options for More Effective Indigenous Participation in Collaborative Environmental Governance. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*.

⁴Harold, R. W. (2019). "This would be one year for coffee and a cold consolation": The cultural adaptation of Indigenous communities to Superfund sites. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 49(2), 1573-1582.

Summary of Findings

| Categories | Identified Factors |
|---|--|
| Tools, Techniques and Technologies | Language |
| | Cultural awareness training programs |
| | Supportive culture/Respectful environment |
| | Culturally relevant data collection methods and techniques |
| Person's/People's Characteristics/Capabilities | Communication Modes/Methods |
| | Person's capacity/personal attitudes and perceptions |
| Engagement Process and Surrounding Conditions | Person's economic standing |
| | Financial support |
| | Staff capacity |
| | Interest-based approach |
| Recommendation | Shared decision-making |
| | Timelines |
| | Community interests and priorities |
| | Facilitates for participants |
| Indigenous communities are diverse, each with unique capacities, cultures, histories, and governance systems. Therefore, one-size-fits-all solutions are ineffective ³ . | Supporting Capacities |
| | - Funding |
| | - Scholarship Opportunities |
| | - Training Initiatives |
| True Partnerships | Building Respectful Relationships |
| | Cultural Awareness Trainings |
| Plain Language | Realistic Timelines |
| | Shared-Decision Making |

Conclusion

Indigenous engagement in Forest Management Planning is crucial for legal, ethical and practical reasons. Meaningful engagement guides mutual learning, builds trust, and helps prevent conflicts. It also contributes to capacity-building, economic opportunities, and infrastructure development. Moreover, if properly executed, this supports the government's long-term reconciliation efforts with Indigenous communities.



"This was such an amazing and inspiring experience. The conference provided wonderful opportunities to network with professionals and researchers, exchange ideas, make new friends, and enhance my knowledge through engaging discussions and presentations."

- Nadeesha

- Testimonial retrieved from Linked In - see [their page](#) here to learn more!

"Participating in the CRRF 2025 Conference and touring Rivers and Clear Lake deepened my understanding of how community capitals anchor rural identity and resilience. Through my asset mapping project, I learned that true revitalization begins by recognizing and nurturing the stories, traditions, resources, and shared pride that already exist within our communities."

- Awall



OSABUTEY AWALL MUSTAPHA

Brandon University

RIVERS - ASSET MAPPING

CRRF 2025

Osabutey Awall Mustapha

Introduction / Background

- This project served as a practicum for the summer period of 2025 for students reading Masters of Arts in Rural Development.
- Asset mapping is about looking at what a community already has: the people, places, culture, and resources. It helps see the community's strengths in one document so it can build on them together. It's really just a way of saying: here's how it can use it for its future.
- Asset mapping was related to document and visualize resources, foster community development, and support Rivendale's strategic planning priorities.
- This project is a partnership between the Rural Development Institute (RDI) and Rivendale Community Development Corporation (RDCD) with a focus on community engagement and cultural/tourism development.

What is this project trying to achieve?

- Determine Rivendale's key assets across human, natural/environmental, built, social, cultural, economic, and political categories?
- Determine how cultural resources and tourism contribute to Rivendale's identity and development potential?
- Determine how the asset map can reinforce community identity, support informed decision-making, and align with broader well-being and capacity-building frameworks?



How Did We Do It?

- Students visited RDCD to discuss the asset mapping process with leaders
- Secondary Research - Students did not collect data but instead looked into existing statistics and documents about the RM
- Explored AI as a possible asset mapping tool
- Created initial asset map inventory highlighting key areas

Highlighted Key Findings

Natural / Environmental
Little Saskatchewan River, The Rivers Wetland Centre of Excellence, Lanes Wetlands, Rivers Provincial Park and Rivers Game & Fish Rangers, Daily Beach.

Cultural
Rolling into Rivers Festival of Arts, Heritage buildings - Ukrainian Murals, Heritage Train Station and Murals... Indigenous community presence enriches cultural diversity.

Social
Prairie Capital Library, The Riverside Golf and Country Club, Strong volunteerism and community organizations, Churches, Royal Canadian Legion, SS Park Club.

Built / Physical
Fire Department, Ambulance Services, Health Centre, PTH 25 and PTH 250 highways, Schools, Community centre, RV Park, Millennium Park, Daycare, Housing Development.

Economic / Financial
Local businesses and services - Pharmacy, Groceries, Hardware, Wholesale Credit Union, Agriculture remains a major economic driver.

Political / Leadership
Active Municipal Leadership, RDCD leadership, Rivendale Strategic Plan, Civic Institutions (RCMP, council, CAD office)

Human
Skilled farmers, Teachers, Paramedics, Hip and Kniee Rehab Specialist, Doctors, Accountants, Insurance Agents.

Discussion / Conclusion

- Rivendale has many strengths and resources, and the community can make the most of its cultural and tourism opportunities.
- If Rivendale connects its local assets (like history, culture, and natural places) to tourism, it can bring in visitors, support local businesses, protect our heritage, and build community pride.
- Asset mapping is a useful tool because it shows clearly what Rivendale has in terms of resources, helps guide planning, and brings different groups together to work on shared goals.

"This work is vital to continue moving our community forward and marketing it to others. Showing them what we have here. That it is a great place to live, raise a family and become part of a "we can do anything", community".

Drafted Recommendations / Next Steps

- Create a cultural & tourism plan - Use Rivendale's history, culture, and natural spaces to attract visitors and build pride
- Build simple maps & books - Digital and printed maps to showcase local assets
- Start small with events - Try festivals, walking tours, and local markets to highlight Rivendale's strengths
- Promote Rivendale - Share the community's story through marketing and outreach
- Keep talking to the community - Gather feedback through meetings
- Update & visualize asset map report - Update categories with local stakeholders
- Project progress report - Other students can use as a guide to continue the project

References

1. Harwood, M., & Preece, J. (2018). *Building a Regional Development Plan for a Rural Community*. Winnipeg: RDI.

2. Rivendale Community Development Corporation. (2023). *Rivendale Strategic Plan*. Rivendale, SK: RDCD.

3. Rivendale Community Development Corporation. (2023). *Rivendale Strategic Plan*. Rivendale, SK: RDCD.

4. Rivendale Community Development Corporation. (2023). *Rivendale Strategic Plan*. Rivendale, SK: RDCD.

5. Rivendale Community Development Corporation. (2023). *Rivendale Strategic Plan*. Rivendale, SK: RDCD.

6. Rivendale Community Development Corporation. (2023). *Rivendale Strategic Plan*. Rivendale, SK: RDCD.

7. Rivendale Community Development Corporation. (2023). *Rivendale Strategic Plan*. Rivendale, SK: RDCD.

8. Rivendale Community Development Corporation. (2023). *Rivendale Strategic Plan*. Rivendale, SK: RDCD.

9. Rivendale Community Development Corporation. (2023). *Rivendale Strategic Plan*. Rivendale, SK: RDCD.

10. Rivendale Community Development Corporation. (2023). *Rivendale Strategic Plan*. Rivendale, SK: RDCD.

Applied Research. Rural Innovation. Community Impact.

REFLECTIONS ON THE THEME OF DATA GOVERNANCE

By Shirlyn Kunaratnum

The CRRF conference placed significant importance on data governance and considered it a cornerstone of rural Canada's future. Across multiple sessions and during the panel discussion, the presenters emphasized how rural and remote communities can use the local data to inform policy, strengthen local decision-making, and build capacity.

During the panel discussion on "Immigration, Technology, Data Governance and Capacity Building through Rural Lens: data governance emerged as a critical factor in how rural and small centres respond to immigration challenges. The panellists from Japan and Canada reflected on how building effective data use can strengthen rural communities, newcomer integration, and community wellbeing.

Few sessions drew attention to gaps in rural data infrastructure and to the lack of capacity and training, such as limited access to updated information, lack of community involvement and under-resourced or underdeveloped digital systems, which were identified as barriers to evidence-based decision-making. In the presentation on "Local Governance reform in New Brunswick - How it has impacted the community in Kent County", the presenter emphasized that for governance reforms and policies to be effective, communities must be involved in collective action. However, an important question raised was whether communities have the necessary capacity and skills to engage in such collective processes. This reflection highlighted a broader challenge: without adequate training, resources, and data support, communities may struggle to turn policy intentions into meaningful action.

A common thread across all poster presentations was that rural and Indigenous communities are disadvantaged not only by data gaps but by governance systems that fail to make data accessible, representative and actionable. Effective data governance included collecting localized, culturally relevant data, ensuring equitable access to information, building communities' capacity to use data, preserving institutional memory through archives, and embedding communities' voices in how data is governed.



Rheann Quenneville

"I have never felt like I belong more than I have these past few days in Manitoba at the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation conference."

- Rheann

- Testimonial retrieved from Linked In - [see their page here](#) to learn more!

REFLECTIONS ON THE THEME OF CAPACITY BUILDING

By Gary McNeely

Capacity building was at the heart of RDI's and the Department of Rural Development's decision to host the 2025 CRRF conference in Brandon. Capacity was a common frame of reference throughout the conference's program from the opening keynote address delivered by Dr. Ashleigh Weeden to the broad spectrum of presentations over the two days and the closing breakfast lecture offered by MLA Glen Simard, Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations.

Ashleigh drew attention to the broader conceptual and geopolitical dimensions of rurality and the debates around implementing a rural sensitive "public policy". This disconnect over what constitutes rurality and who can speak for rural spaces casts a shadow over the capacity of rural communities and organizations to be active and involved agents in CED. In closing, she reflected that reframing this discourse by including a broader range of voices and perspectives would be a positive step forward in rural capacity building.

Session presentations on a wide range of topics served notice that capacity challenges and measures to address these factors remain critical for rural communities to become more resilient and responsive to cultural, social, and environmental priorities. Topics ranged from community philanthropy, rural healthcare, climate change adaptation, and co-operatives for housing and childcare to agrifood and agriculture management, data collection and analysis, as well as many others. Each talk offered a frank assessment of the challenges facing rural communities and regions but stressed that building capacity through innovation, informed decision making, and resolve can mitigate and overcome these impediments to rural wellbeing.

Glen Simard's closing remarks emphasized the importance of capacity building as a leading factor for enhancing and sustaining Manitoba's economic productivity and prosperity. Capacity relating to accessing and utilizing rural data was a frequent point of emphasis connecting data with making informed decisions that are essential to planning and implementing rural community economic development projects.

REFLECTIONS ON THE THEME OF AI

By Wayne Kelly

The 2025 [Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation \(CRRF\)](#) Conference, hosted by the [Rural Development Institute](#) and the [Journal of Rural and Community Development](#) at Brandon University, placed a strong emphasis on the role of digital technology in rural development. Across presentations, workshops, and delivery formats, the conference incorporated digital technologies throughout – both as subject matter and as a method of knowledge sharing.

Before the event even began, the [Small Town, Big Stories](#) podcast – produced through a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Connection Grant – offered a pre-conference digital discussion and learning opportunity. This series explored how rural communities and practitioners across rural Manitoba are navigating data, capacity building, and digital transformation, ensuring that anyone interested can listen and learn about these conference topics. By leading with a digital medium focused on digital themes, the conference modelled the kind of integrated digital technology approach that rural and community development can leverage.

During the event, hybrid access was a core design feature. One room was fully equipped for livestreaming keynote sessions, panels, and feature presentations on all three days. A second webinar-enabled room enabled concurrent sessions to be shared virtually, making over half the conference available to online participants. The virtual option to participate proved important: 18 and nearly one-quarter (22.5%) of attendees joined virtually, underscoring the importance of accessibility and flexible participation in rural knowledge mobilization. For those who couldn't attend in person or want to review and revisit the content, the digital conversation continues. Recorded sessions will be made publicly available, and all presenters have been invited to submit their presentation content to be included in the post-conference proceedings – ensuring an enduring and accessible resource.

As one of the core content themes, digital technology appeared throughout the program content. Both conference workshops, one of two full-length panels, and five individual presentations focused directly on digital tools, challenges, or innovations. Topics ranged from school connectivity in northern communities and remote work infrastructure to explorations of how generative AI tools visually interpret “rural” themes. These sessions highlighted both the promise and complexity of digital technology in rural contexts – revealing a digital rural reality that is exciting, challenging, uneven, and always place-based.

A recurring insight was that digital technologies are no longer a niche topic in rural development – they are now central to current and future development. As digital tools continue to evolve, so too does the way rural communities identify, adopt, and benefit from them. Our understanding of these digital technologies, their potential and the supports necessary for using them must also evolve. That is why continued research, place-based experimentation, and knowledge sharing about digital technologies in rural – including at future CRRF events – remains critical. Some of these questions are already being explored in real time. At the Rural Development Institute, our [SSHRC-funded Knowledge Synthesis Grant is currently examining the role of artificial intelligence in local rural governance](#) – investigating both its potential and its unintended consequences. Understanding the potential and pitfalls of AI in rural is critical and we hope to share these findings at future CRRF conferences.

CRRF 2025 continued to highlight that the rural digital landscape is as varied as its communities. Digital tools and rural realities are both changing quickly, making the need for rural-focused, community-based digital strategies more important than ever.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CONFERENCE

By Nicole Breedon and Fallon Brook

When the Rural Development Institute (RDI) and Journal of Rural and Community Development (JRCD) were asked to host the 2025 CRRF Conference, we were truly honored. Members from all three of these organizations have been fortunate to work with and support one another for many years, and it was an amazing opportunity to collaborate on such a special event.

Having practitioners and community members from across Canada and beyond take the time to participate in this event and spend time here on Treaty 2 Territory was incredibly special, and we were fortunate to connect with so many new and emerging scholars.

What stood out to us the most was the people. Seeing practitioners, community leaders, researchers, and students come together in the same space, learning from each other, laughing together, and sharing ideas was incredibly inspiring. There was such a strong sense of community. Many participants spoke about how refreshing it was to be part of a gathering that felt welcoming and open and where new and emerging scholars could contribute alongside more experienced voices. That sense of inclusion is something CRRF has always valued, and it was beautiful to see it come alive so naturally throughout the event.

Looking back, we feel deeply grateful for the incredible team we worked with, the participants who brought their time and wisdom, and the chance to help create a space where learning and collaboration could thrive.



Fallon Brook (L) and Nicole Breedon (R)

This Conference Report was created by Nicole Breedon and Fallon Brook - please direct any questions or comments to conference organizers with the information below.

Conference Organizers and Contact Information

Dr. Wayne Kelly | Director of RDI | kellyw@brandonu.ca

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Fallon Brook | RDI Researcher and Event Coordinator | brookfr12@brandonu.ca

Dr. Doug Ramsey | Chair, Department of Rural Development | ramsey@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 affecting rural communities in Western Canada and elsewhere.

RDI 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. RDI projects are characterized by cooperative and collaborative efforts of multi-stakeholders.

The Institute has diverse research affiliations, and multiple community and government linkages related to its rural development mandate. RDI disseminates information to a variety of constituents and stakeholders and makes research information and results widely available to the public either in printed form or by means of public lectures, seminars, workshops and conferences.

For more information, please visit www.brandonu.ca/rdi

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With partners in communities, agencies, and among academics and students, RDI continues to initiate new outreach activities, research, and learning options. These partnerships also contribute to addressing rural development issues and responding to development opportunities. The Institute builds on a strong history of collaborative activities while enhancing resource capabilities and programming. As a leading source of information on rural areas, RDI continues to deliver new knowledge of rural issues and helps create opportunities for vibrant rural communities and regions.