

Toward a Sustainable Rural Ontario

Summary Report
Rural Ontario Summit
March 3, 2014
Cobourg, Ontario



Event hosted by:
The Rural Ontario Institute
www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca
In partnership with the Government of Ontario

From Minister Jeff Leal

Ontario Minister of Rural Affairs

Ontario's future prosperity depends on the success of all its communities.

The type of communities in which everyone has an opportunity to achieve success and work collaboratively to create a stronger, more competitive Ontario. Rural communities have an important part to play.

As a whole, rural Ontario's economy contributes \$106 billion in economic output – or nearly 20 per cent of the province's GDP. It's also home to innovative industrial hubs. From advanced auto production, mining and forestry to an award-winning wine industry and a growing retail sector, rural communities are an important driver of economic growth.

But rural Ontario is now facing an increasingly competitive global economy – with that comes challenges, as well as opportunities. That's why, over the past year, I've travelled across Ontario to meet with experts in business and economic development as well as municipal governments. It's also why, in partnership with the Rural Ontario Institute, we organized the first-ever Rural Ontario Summit in March 2014.

With participation from academia, business and economic development, municipal governments and the broader public sector in attendance, we discussed the social and economic issues that will shape rural Ontario's future both in the short and long-term.

The discussions that stemmed from this Summit – and the informed courses of action recommended by the attendees – are succinctly summarized in the following report.

Going forward, it's my sincere hope that the Summit and the dialogue it sparked will continue to resonate. And in the process, build a strong foundation that will ensure rural Ontario is well prepared for the economy of the future.

Your government understands that good public policy must be collaborative and focus on your ideas, needs, challenges and opportunities. We took many of the Summit's discussions to heart when we recently released [Ontario's Rural Roadmap](#). This report outlines a number of priorities for the next year.

These priorities will serve as building blocks for the provincial government's long-term rural planning. We now have work to do as government, and it is our commitment to continue the dialogue with rural communities, their residents, businesses and municipal leaders, as we continue to identify priorities, capitalize on opportunities and implement solutions to the challenges we collectively face.

The Honourable Jeff Leal
Ontario Minister of Rural Affairs

From Janet Horner

Chair of Rural Ontario Institute

The Board and Staff of the Rural Ontario Institute were proud to host the Rural Ontario Summit on March 3, 2014 in collaboration with the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs. At the Rural Ontario Institute, we believe a strong, vibrant rural Ontario is critical to the success of a strong and vibrant Ontario and the energy, commitment and leadership of rural stakeholders to that principle was evident throughout the Summit.

This ground-breaking event was an opportunity for diverse individuals and organizations to share successes, learn how other jurisdictions are approaching rural development and discuss their ideas surrounding important matters facing rural Ontario. In addition, hearing about the initiatives, programs and plans of the Ministry of Rural Affairs directly from the Minister was a key motivation for participating that we heard in feedback about the value of the day.

The role of our Institute was to convene a neutral, constructive dialogue among various sectors and with government about the

priorities and strategies for fostering success in rural Ontario. At the forefront of our effort was the desire to design a process for the Summit that was relevant for participants.

Our mandate is to develop leaders, initiate dialogue, support collaboration and promote action on issues and opportunities facing rural Ontario. The Rural Ontario Summit exemplified that. Still, this report can only capture some of the vibrancy and insight that participants brought to the process and a single day event can only accomplish so much and we also know many of the issues are long-term and complex.

That's why it's important that these conversations don't end with the Summit. We've made some suggestions on ways to stay connected at the end of this report. Let's continue the discussion and continue to work toward a sustainable, vibrant rural Ontario!

Janet Horner
Chair
Rural Ontario Institute

Table of Contents

About this Report	5		
About the Summit	6	Stories from the Field: Rural Ontario Success	32
Purpose	7	Rural Café	36
Agenda	9	Workforce Skills	40
Opening Remarks	10	Rural Health and Aging	46
The Experience	12	Job Creation	52
In-room participants	14	Investment Ready Communities	58
Graphic recording	15	Continuing the Conversation	62
Online participants	16	Stay Connected	65
What people said	18		
The Speakers	20		
The Honourable Jeff Leal, Minister of Rural Affairs	21		
Dr. David Freshwater	24		
Dr. Rob Greenwood	26		
Participant questions	29		

About this Report

This report captures the diverse views and opinions of the participants at the Rural Ontario Summit. It represents a direct record of the day's events including a summary of the opening presentations by the Minister of Rural Affairs and guest speakers. Captured in a graphic recording format are highlights from all of the opening sessions. These works of art are a tremendously rich source of information and visual interpretation of the comments made by the speakers and the participants.

Photos record the numerous experiences from the Summit as well as provide a documentation of the facilitation process. Comments emerging from the various sessions such as the Rural Café are a reflection of the participant dialogue.

Finally, this report records the participant suggestions for continuing the conversation.

About the Summit



Purpose and Context

On March 3, 2014, the first ever Rural Ontario Summit was held in Cobourg, Ontario. Recognizing that Ontario's future prosperity depends on the success of all its communities, including those in rural Ontario, the Rural Ontario Institute in collaboration with the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs sought the help of diverse rural stakeholders in developing strategies aimed at creating a healthier, more competitive and more prosperous rural Ontario.

Residents of Ontario, regardless of where they live, deserve equitable access to government programs and services. However, some small and rural communities have faced challenges related to the delivery of such things as health care, skills training, infrastructure investment, and local economic development, all of which are key elements to the vitality of any community.

At the same time, there have been many examples of success in rural Ontario that we can all learn from, and build upon through good public policy, developed in consultation with our small and rural communities.

In this context, the Summit was organized to provide an opportunity to discuss the social and economic infrastructure issues that will shape the future of rural Ontario, including the

promotion of innovative business development initiatives and creation of investment-ready communities; the opportunities to enhance the rural workforce, including youth and new Canadians; the challenges rural communities face with respect to promoting sustainable economic growth and job creation; and the importance of rural health to support strong rural communities.

Participants were invited to provide insight to inform how success is measured in rural Ontario. Rural stakeholders representing many diverse sectors and regions of rural Ontario took the opportunity to participate in person in an important dialogue about the social and economic infrastructure of rural Ontario. The Honourable Jeff Leal, Minister of Rural Affairs, highlighted the importance of rural Ontario within the provincial context and shared his understanding of the opportunities and priorities in rural communities, as well as a number of examples of how programs are being shaped to address the unique challenges facing rural Ontario. Academic leaders in rural development shared international perspectives to stimulate new thinking. Participants shared stories about successful initiatives in their communities.

Purpose and Context continued

In addition to the stakeholders in attendance, an invitation was openly extended across Ontario and beyond to experience the full Summit program virtually. This approach set a new standard for engaging rural Ontario via social media and live streaming. Rural stakeholders registered for the webcast to hear the presentations and participate in the speaker panel. The discussion dialogue was also captured through live streaming. Both in-person and online participants contributed to the live chat and Twitter comments.

Throughout the Summit, participants took full advantage of the opportunities to network, share their perspectives and success stories, and to develop new linkages.

Agenda

8:00-8:45: Registration

8:45-9:00: All Participant Kick-off

9:00-9:15: Welcome and Opening Remarks

Linda Thompson, Warden
Northumberland County

Reese Simpson, Economic Development Officer
Alderville First Nation

Jim Whaley, Vice-Chair
Rural Ontario Institute

9:15-9:35: Opening Keynote

The Honourable Jeff Leal, Minister
Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs

9:45-10:15: Speaker

Dr. David Freshwater, Professor of Agricultural Economics,
University of Kentucky

10:15-10:45: Break

10:45-11:15: Speaker

Dr. Rob Greenwood, Executive Director, Leslie Harris Centre
for Regional Policy Development, Memorial University

11:15-11:30: Q and A with Drs. Freshwater and Greenwood

11:30-12:15: “Stories from the Field: Rural Ontario Success”

12:15-1:30: Lunch and Networking

1:30-3:15: Rural Café: A Facilitated Dialogue

Social Infrastructure

- Workforce skills development for youth and new Canadians and rural residents
- Rural health and aging

Economic Infrastructure

- Job creation through entrepreneurship and economic development
- Investment ready communities

Continuing the Conversation

3:15-3:45: Break

3:45-4:30: Rural Café Report Out

4:40-5:00: Concluding Comments

5:00-6:00: Reception - “Taste of Ontario”

Opening Remarks

Welcome to the Summit, and to the Region

Linda Thompson

Warden, Northumberland County

In her remarks, Reeve Thompson outlined numerous successful initiatives including health care, downtown revitalization and business incubators such as the Port Hope Idea Hub and the Agri-food Venture Centre. She emphasized “the key is encouraging collaboration and engaging stakeholders.”



Reese Simpson

Economic Development Officer, Alderville First Nation

Reese Simpson shared stories of his community’s accomplishments that demonstrate their commitment to honouring the past and embracing the future including the just completed 100% First Nation-owned solar farm. He reminded the audience that “we need to work together” adding “Alderville is open for business.”



Opening Remarks

Jim Whaley, Vice-Chair, Rural Ontario Institute

Jim Whaley welcomed Summit participants on behalf of the organizing partners noting that a strong rural Ontario is the key to a strong province. “We need strong local leadership. The Rural Ontario Institute has a role in facilitating stakeholder dialogue and engagement and bringing people together to build action plans.”

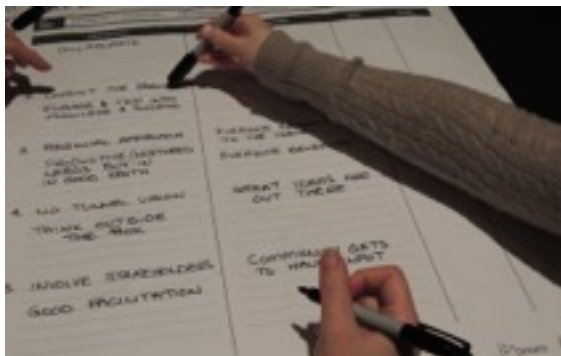


Jim Whaley's presentation is available for viewing here:
<http://ruralontarioinstitute.ca/rural-ontario-summit/>

The Experience

Continuing
the
Conversation

THE EXPERIENCE



In-Room Participants

Right from the opening kick-off activity, the energy and engagement of the participants signaled that this Summit opportunity to have a dialogue about rural Ontario was welcome and timely. Two rounds of the introductory exercise “One-Two-Four-All” connected participants and stimulated an enthusiastic conversation.

Keynote speakers Jeff Leal, Minister of Rural Affairs for the province of Ontario; Dr. David Freshwater, Professor of Agricultural Economics, University of Kentucky; and Dr. Rob Greenwood, Executive Director, Leslie Harris Centre for Regional Policy Development, Memorial University, St. John’s, Newfoundland, shared experiences and examples from other jurisdictions, inviting new thinking about rural paradigms and perspectives. Graphic recording of the key presentations created a further focal point for stimulating discussion among the participants throughout the day.

All participants, including those attending via live stream, submitted questions to the speaker panel. A summary of their

comments and the question themes are included within this report.

The stage was set for the highly participatory, facilitated Rural Café experience that followed. Small group brainstorming and priority identification was combined with report back sessions. Participants shared their personal and community experiences on five key themes related to rural development. Using their interest to guide their participation in a table discussion group allowed them to explore more deeply the social and economic aspects of their chosen theme. The facilitated dialogue resulted in the identification of priority actions and identified options for continuing the conversation. These collaborative activities created the content for this document.

A ‘gallery walk’ creating a visual path of the discussion outcomes coupled with the opportunity to vote for the most important themes and actions drew the Summit to a conclusion. Minister Leal joined the key note speakers to provide final thoughts and outline the next steps, and fittingly, the Summit ended with a ‘Taste of Ontario’ reception.

Graphic Recording



Photo: Liisa Sorsa of The Moment, Inc. captured content and stories

Online Participants

In order to mitigate the challenges of geography and distance, and to broaden engagement, several on-line tools were incorporated. A significant effort was placed on engagement through live streaming and Twitter, and the response was strong. The use of these platforms demonstrated their value in connecting rural stakeholders. The conversation about vibrancy and sustainability in rural Ontario is of great interest to many – far more than we could fit in the meeting room

138 people participated from across Ontario. For those who joined the event via live stream the average duration of viewing was 219 minutes (over 3.5 hours!) per person. The stream was also available in French.



Photo: Screenshots of live feed

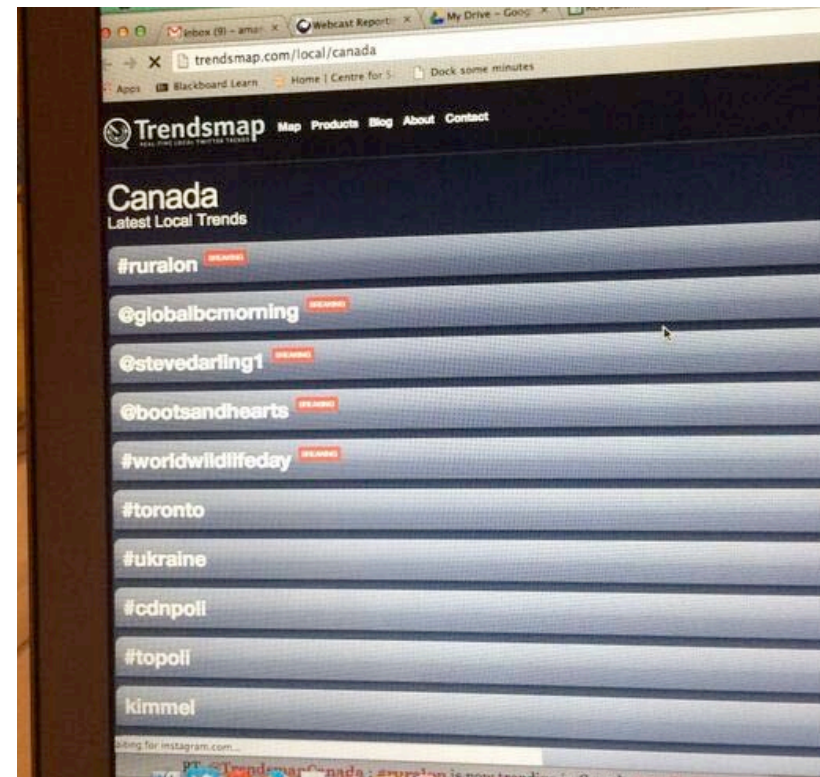
The Experience

Online Participants

Throughout the Rural Ontario Summit, participants in the room were using Twitter to spread information and learnings from the day within their various networks using the hashtag #RuralON. People participating in the live stream event were also tweeting and asking questions. During the facilitated discussion, the Rural Ontario Institute (@ROInstitute) posed questions to the Twitter audience and live stream audience.

All of this activity created a ripple and #RuralON was trending across Canada.

Photo: Image of a computer monitor displaying #RuralON at the top of Twitter Trendsmap list for Canada



What people said

Sample of the Twitter Engagement

@RuralKnowledge: R Greenwood: Rural sustainability depends on ruthless evaluation of strengths and weaknesses #ruralon

Great gathering in @TownofCobourg today for the #RuralON Summit. Great online gathering too - let's keep it trending! #publicengagement

RT @remarkk Greenwood: Stop equating population growth with economic success. High skills, quality of life, more important. #RuralON #ONpoli

SLBDC @SLBDCteam Mar 3

Thank you Dr. Freshwater for endorsing CFDC's. We are proud of our active roles in Rural Ontario, welcome & pursue partnerships! #RuralON



Fusion Youth Centre @FusionYouthCent Mar 3
What level of engagement should a rural community have with their youth stakeholders? #RuralON <http://g.scribbliv.me/qL5uYcc> via @ScribbleLive



Hello Thunder Bay! @HelloTBay Mar 3
[@ChristinaMol1](#): [@ROInstitute](#) How do you encourage your #ruralON leaders to have forward thinking for investment... <http://j.mp/1hYuSbx>



What people said

Samples drawn from Evaluation Survey Results

A sampling of feedback from our evaluation survey:

- Excellent day!
- A very well organized and executed event
- There should be annual regional summits – north, southeast, southwest – around specific themes in order to continue the dialogue and create a best practices document
- Pleased to have heard the Minister’s encouraging remarks
- Where were the northern voices?

What other themes would you have liked to have seen on the agenda?

- Rural housing and transportation
- Tourism and public-private infrastructure investment
- Infrastructure, greater collaboration between Province and Rural municipalities for planning and policy development, leadership development, innovation in service and program delivery including devolution of taxing powers to 3rd tier of government
- Rural mental health
- Branding and identity creation/promotion
- Transportation infrastructure-high speed rail passage
- Science and technology & small town downtowns

Speakers



Minister Jeff Leal

Opening Keynote

In his morning keynote speech, the Minister of Rural Affairs framed the first-ever Rural Ontario Summit as an opportunity to understand that progress goes hand in hand with learning from and building upon partnerships already established in communities across Ontario. These partnerships, between government, business, local organizations and residents, are the foundations for strengthening rural communities.

Issues include:

- Fostering investment-ready rural communities and promoting innovative and sustainable business development;
- Improving rural residents', youth, and new immigrants' skill sets;
- Addressing the ongoing challenges rural communities face in promoting sustainable economic growth and job creation; and
- Working to provide accessible, patient-centred health care.

On the subject of health care, Minister Leal highlighted Community Health Links as a rural-focused innovative initiative specifically targeting seniors and patients with complex conditions, including multiple chronic diseases, mental health,

and addictions. These patients, in turn, receive co-ordinated care from a team of health care professionals that include primary care providers, specialists, hospitals, home- and long-term care, and community agencies.

Minster Leal also highlighted the Ontario government's ongoing efforts to create a more dynamic, innovative business climate. Because of the tax reform measures the government undertook in 2011, Forbes magazine ranked Canada as the best country in which to invest, crediting Ontario's reformed tax structure as a key factor.

In addition, the minister discussed key investment initiatives to create jobs and boost local economies, such as the Rural Economic Development Program (RED) as well as the Eastern (EODF) and Southwestern Ontario Development Funds (SWEDF). Since 2003, Ontario has invested \$167 million in 418 RED projects, generating more than \$1.2 billion in local economic activity and creating more than 35,000 jobs. Additionally, EODF and SWEDF, two regionally-focused economic development initiatives have, combined, committed over \$100 million in funds, leveraged close to \$1 billion in business investment, created more than 3,000 new jobs, and retained close to 20,000 existing jobs.

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Minister Jeff Leal

Opening Keynote continued

Minister Leal's presentation also addressed the need to foster a more competitive, knowledge-based Ontario economy to succeed in today's global economy. To meet this goal, the Minister confirmed that the Ontario government will continue:

- Implementing full-day kindergarten;
- Creating employment opportunities for 30,000 Ontario youth through the Youth Jobs Strategy;
- Investing in jobs skills and training programs;
- Improving access to rural broadband; and
- Investing more in the re-launched Rural Economic Development Program, a community-focused initiative aimed at attracting investment, creating more competitive businesses, and creating jobs.

Minister Leal closed his keynote speech by citing his prominent role in “voicing rural Ontario’s unique needs.” This means ensuring Ontario ministries incorporate a rural perspective when developing or implementing public policy, and continuing the conversation with rural stakeholders to create a stronger, healthier rural Ontario.



Dr. David Freshwater

Lessons learned from International Experiences in Rural Development

- Invest in rural economies – don't subsidize. There is a difference between the two.
- Recognize that the government does not drive economic development but supports investment
- That investment requires evaluation at three levels:
 - Developmental – front end – what results are desired?
 - Formative – mid course – are we on track?
 - Summative – looking back – did we achieve the right results?
- Government should encourage the next generation of local leadership
- A stable policy environment is critical for development – continued change in policies is detrimental to progress and results
- Results take time, money and commitment. Several European experiences demonstrate that rural development policies are expensive, take a long time to garner results, have a high failure rate and require a high degree of commitment.
- Formal rural policies that support rural economic development require the recognition of bottom-up strategies
- Effective rural policies show return on the investment, and are evidence-based
- Important to establish the objectives set out at the outset and then you can determine the evaluation and measure the success
- It is important to focus support on places that are prepared to invest their own resources – not places that are looking for “free money.” Successful partnerships involve all participants having skin in the game.
- The basic question a community has to ask is: if we are not prepared to invest our resources in this action why should anyone else?

Dr. Freshwater's presentation is available for viewing here:
<http://ruralontarioinstitute.ca/rural-ontario-summit/>



Graphic displaying hand-drawn illustration of Dr. Freshwater's presentation

Dr. Rob Greenwood

Experiences in Canada: Are we Making a Difference?

- Linking urban and rural places is critically important – urban needs rural
- Most rural communities and people are within the same regions as urban, and need to understand the types of rural areas, and interdependence with urban
- No ‘one’ rural – need clarity in defining rural aspect – ‘rural adjacent,’ ‘rural non-adjacent,’ ‘remote,’ etc.; different policies and approaches are needed for each type
- Traditional resource sectors are now highly technical and productive but offer less employment; all sectors are now the “new economy”
- Diversification is happening in rural communities – new activities like:
 - aquaculture sector
 - up and down-stream value added bring new opportunities to traditional sectors
 - niche opportunities in small scale manufacturing, etc.
 - new opportunities
- Business Retention and Expansion is a highly valuable tool for understanding the local economy and looking for growth and expansion opportunities, working with existing businesses in the region
- New approaches to local leadership required – move to a role of ‘elected facilitator,’ as local leaders need to be able to enhance coordination and cooperation between local government and NGOs between communities in a region
- Capacity building is required to expand skill base in community and regional development. See Regional Economic Capacity Index.
- Increasing focus on ‘social enterprise’ – opportunity to fulfill a social purpose and generate resources for local organizations, enhancing their interdependence and sustainability
- Universities have a key role in the development of public engagement strategies and the furthering of applied research to help build the capacity of rural citizens

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Dr. Rob Greenwood

Continued

- The quality of life is gaining importance as a defining factor so human and social capital are key investment attractors, e.g. Vital Signs Scorecard initiated by the Community Foundations of Canada
- Population growth does not equal economic development; with aging baby boomers and dropping fertility rates, regions with stable or lower populations may still be prosperous, with improved productivity and innovation in the economy and service provision
- Cannot achieve impact without local stakeholders taking ownership, local leadership buy-in

Dr. Greenwood's presentation can be viewed here:
<http://ruralontarioinstitute.ca/rural-ontario-summit/>



Graphic displaying hand-drawn illustration of key points from Dr. Greenwood's presentation

Participant Questions

Dr. Freshwater and Dr. Greenwood

Working in table groups, participants developed a wide range of questions stimulated by the remarks from Dr. Freshwater and Dr. Greenwood. Individual questions were received from online participants as well.

What are some examples of success for bottom-up?

- Community Futures – locally-based volunteer-run organizations encourage people to cooperate in a functional region. While originally established with a labour-market focus, they are driven by local opportunities. We need local strategies and the Community Future model is crucial for rural areas for this reason.

How much say should communities have in economic development?

- Businesses need to be profitable but communities can provide the ‘readiness’ factor that stimulates and supports business development. Communities and citizens need to articulate what they value as part of the strategy development. Good facilitation for this process is absolutely essential!

What strategies are required to develop ‘elected facilitators’?

- Institutions such as the Rural Ontario Institute and universities are playing a role in leadership development. We also need existing leaders to mentor emerging leaders. Local government must move from grant seeking to pursuing own-source revenue streams.

How do we get urban to recognize rural?

- Better evidence and good communications should be used to showcase urban-rural linkages. Urban and rural don’t compete. ‘One Nova Scotia’ provides a template for the conversation for a potential approach.

Participant Questions

Dr. Freshwater and Dr. Greenwood

Other question themes included:

- Measuring success and sharing best practices
- Flexible rural policies and the need for rural strategy
- Developing rural policies that formalize cross-ministry engagement
- Creating an environment for planning for the ‘long game’ in a very politicized system
- Encouraging the development of local leadership and empowering youth to lead
- The rural definition – adjacent, non-adjacent, rural remote and amenity – understanding and using to inform policy development
- Building collaborations – new governance models and building capacity to support regional approaches
- Partnerships with universities and colleges – developing relevant performance measures
- Engaging local business and supporting social enterprise – leading examples
- Leadership in politics – facilitators and integrators required
-

How do you evaluate programs in a meaningful way in the first year of a 3yr program/project?

HOW DO WE GET SENIOR GOV'T & FOR REGIONAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES?

How do we determine + monetize what urban needs from rural?

How do we reverse the balance of power so rural communities provide policy leadership?

What are 2 or 3 concrete things we can do to break down silos in order to work together more successfully?

Can you recommend best practices around capacity building and governance to support collaboration among municipalities (regional approach)?

How do you define rural & from that develop a broad rural strategy?

How do we get our mayors to be facilitators & integrators?

What is the role of municipalities in rural policy development?

Photo: Participant generated questions (sample)

Stories from the Field



Gathering Rural Ontario Success Stories

Appreciative Interviews

In order to build on participants' personal expertise, knowledge, and experience, and to provide an opportunity to surface strengths, assets, and successes about rural Ontario, a process of appreciative interviews was facilitated. Working in pairs, participants interviewed their partners about their "best rural Ontario story from the last 5 years." They then worked together to create the headlines for their stories. The result was a broad range of headlines including stories from economic development initiatives, youth programming startups and new immigration attraction strategies.

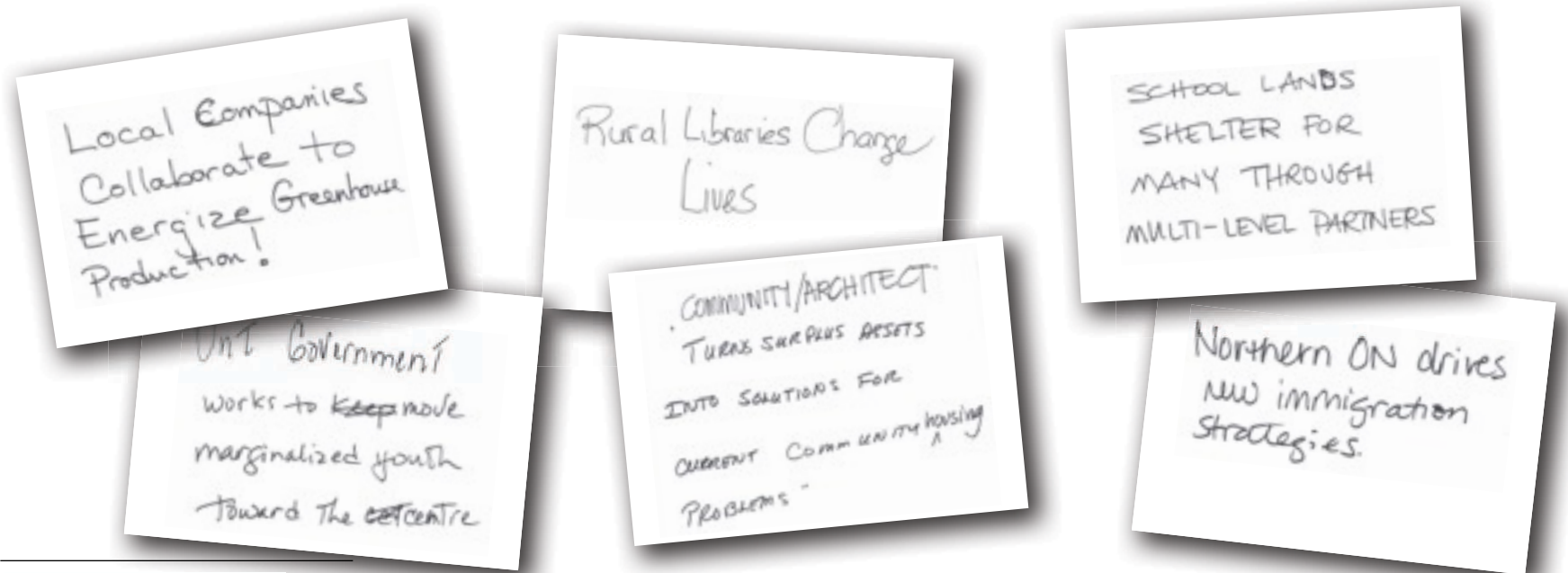


Photo: Examples of headlines created by participants



Photo: Graphic displaying hand-drawn illustrations of participant "Stories from the Field"

Rural Café



Rural Café

What happened?

The Rural Café session solicited ideas for action as well as suggestions that would demonstrate progress or measures of success around four themes. Participants formed self-organized small groups to explore the themes of:

- Workforce Skills for Youth, New Canadians, Rural Residents
- Aging in Rural Ontario and Rural Health
- Job Creation through Economic Development and Entrepreneurship
- Investment Ready Communities

Additional table groups considered strategies and developed priorities for continuing the conversation beyond the Summit and into the future.

Individual brainstorming led to a list of actions deemed necessary for rural Ontario to make significant progress within the theme area. Participants considered a wide range of organizations, e.g. business, community organizations, government, educational institutions, etc.

Sharing their lists, the groups moved to identify the top five ideas and describe these in detail including success indicators and metrics of 'who' and 'when.' Each session's discussion built on the last generating a cumulative wealth of ideas to consider.

At the end of the facilitated sessions, all participants were invited to scan the reports and cast their vote on the key priorities from their perspective. From this collaborative work, themes and observations have been extracted to form the basis of the comments in the sections following each topic area.

Templates

Rural Café Work

Participants “worked big,” capturing their ideas on large-format templates.

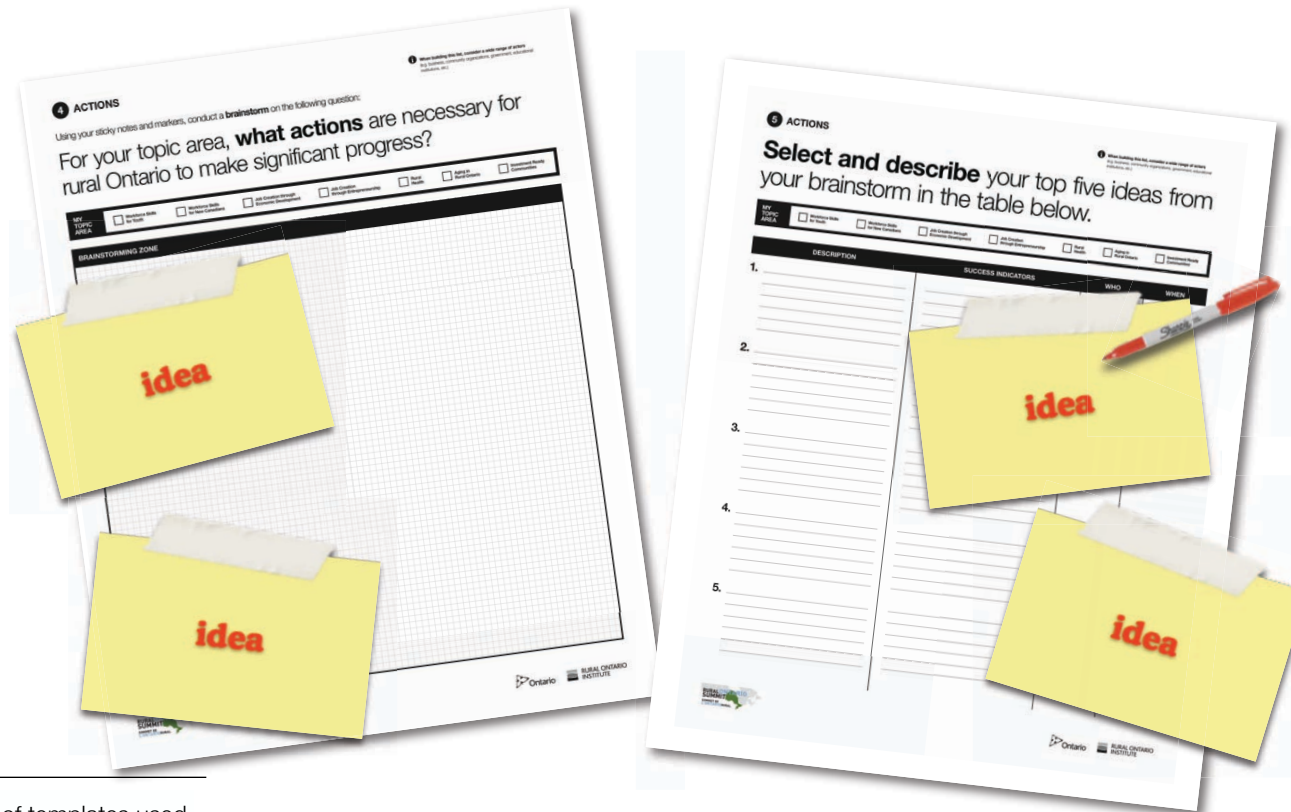


Photo: Examples of templates used by participants

Dot Voting

Which ideas created excitement and support?

Completed template work was displayed in gallery style for participants to view.



After the “gallery walk”, participants dot-voted for their favourite ideas generated by their fellow participants.



Workforce Skills: Youth and New Canadians

What we found interesting

Workforce Skills for Youth and New Canadians

Clearly, youth are a valued sector in rural Ontario and play a critical role in building success for the future. Participants recognized that the skill sets required for today's business environment are changing, but our formal and informal education systems may not be providing the opportunity to develop these new 'soft' skills. Engaging youth is an important aspect of the succession planning to support sustainable businesses and communities in rural Ontario.

Indicators of success include new curriculum streams, greater opportunities to 'test' career choices, and an expanded engagement of professionals within the school system to build awareness of opportunities. A strongly identified need was that of better market data combined with updated labour market indicators. Sound databases assist the educational system to identify trends and make curriculum adjustments. There is also an opportunity for business to assist with the curriculum development for a better match of labour needs and skill bases.

Participants acknowledged that communities, businesses and academic institutions all play an important role in creating a

welcoming experience for new Canadians. Positive experiences and opportunities to utilize the skills that they bring will enhance the retention of new Canadians. There was also recognition that appropriate and affordable housing along with a provision for child care are key components that assist with successful integration into the community.

A variety of partners were identified as leads for the actions. These included municipalities, local schools, both secondary and post-secondary, and a range of non-profit agencies. Access to quality affordable housing is a barrier for young people wishing to settle in smaller rural communities. Similar to the youth discussion, participants noted a need for further training opportunities that would enhance the skill base for new Canadians and improve their opportunities for successful integration into employment or business sectors. The key identified areas of language and 'soft skills' training could be provided through a variety of approaches including employer and non-profit initiatives.

Workforce Skills for Youth

Participant Suggestions for Outcomes: Rural Café Round 1

Priority Outcomes Identified:

- Curriculum in high schools needs to build career/job search content
- Soft skills – employer/youth – better transition between school/work/real world
- Increased connectedness to community – youth stay/return to area, retention and attraction to community
- Funding for youth to start business – generate more jobs/careers
- Awareness of the new work environment (employer/youth) – increased use of WiFi, virtual office, etc.
- Successful succession planning will mean sustainable business in rural areas – family based businesses are needed to sustain economic vitality in rural area
- Increased employment opportunities and incentives – labour shortages, lack of opportunities, succession planning
- Generation gap mentoring in the workplace – knowledge exchange, embrace diversity, company policy established
- Decline in mortality and morbidity rates for youth – increase in health, rural youth engaged in risky behaviour
- Stop out-migration of youth – keep rural areas vibrant and productive, retain e-build innovation

Workforce Skills for Youth

Actions: Rural Café Round 2

**Highest voted priority as identified by participants (bracket amount Indicates number of votes)

- **Idea:** Labour market indicators that are current (14)
Success Indicator: Real time quality data to identify training needs, assist employers with planning, assist job seekers
- **Idea:** Succession planning – job-sharing and pre-retirement – forgivable taxes (training), anonymous and transparent – respectful matching (business owner) (9)
Success Indicator: Number of pairings (job-sharing pre-retirement) – business to business
- **Idea:** Youth support (overall), include in governance, intergenerational connectedness (life cycle), safe places (9)
Success Indicators: Number of youth on boards, number of relationships established
- **Idea:** Youth exploration of career pathways – 2 year ‘CEGEP’ (general and vocational college) model, exchanges, safe/risk free (4)
Success Indicator: Less switching of post-secondary – more completion and employment
- **Idea:** Better support for non-academic learners, better orientation early, review process (3)
Success Indicators: Skilled workers, curriculum change
- **Idea:** Education/Exposure/Awareness of job opportunities, skill needs for employers and youth including soft skills, apprenticeships, all options for employment (2)
Success Indicators: New components and/or change in High School curriculum, number of excursions, professionals in schools
- **Idea:** Mentorship (2)
Success Indicator: Increased number of mentors to increase effectiveness of knowledge transfer

Workforce Skills for New Canadians

Participant Suggestions for Outcomes: Rural Café Round 1

Priority Outcomes Identified:

- Enhanced employer engagement in newcomer retention, training and integration services – employers are first point of contact with newcomers
- Increase levels of recognition that ‘soft skills’/general competencies are important – you can teach specified skills (soft skills are harder to teach)
- Welcoming communities/deeper community connections (regional acceptance of skills/labour market needs) – increase levels of retention, newcomers feel comfortable/welcome
- Enhanced retention of international students (primary, secondary, post-secondary education) – international students have recognized credentials, Ontario experience so they can seamlessly enter Ontario labour market
- Enhanced pre-arrival engagement with potential newcomers (virtual coaching) – newcomers are prepared, reduce integration time, leads to greater levels of retention

Workforce Skills for New Canadians

Actions: Rural Café Round 2

**Highest voted priority as identified by participants (bracket amount Indicates number of votes)

Priority Actions and Success Indicators:

- **Idea:** Communicate with newcomers in rest of Ontario – Radio and TV programming from local area broadcast – skills development through local services – municipal lead (4)
Success Indicator: Broadcast to areas with high immigrant populations
- **Ideas:** International Students recruited for grades 9-12 who then have the language and the Canadian culture already (1), and role for local school boards and CAPSI (Canadian Association of Public Schools International)/OASDI (Ontario Association of School Districts International) to collaborate for recruitment
Success Indicator: More students stay here for post-secondary, and stay to live and work
- **Idea:** Housing
Success Indicator: Safe and affordable housing available
- **Idea:** Child care – better partnerships with education; municipal and provincial funding required
Success Indicator: Expand availability of feasible services
- **Idea:** Language – options for developing language skills delivered through a variety of partners including schools, colleges, private trainers, YMCA, mentors
Success Indicator: Enrollment of newcomers

Rural Health & Aging

What we found interesting

Rural Health and Aging

Increased collaboration and communication among all components of the health sector were identified as the highest priorities for action within this theme. The discussion groups also noted the growing importance and focus on healthy lifestyles for achieving wellness. The conversations documented the shift from focus on disease and illness treatment only to seeing prevention strategies as equally important. Forums to bring together health sector players across agencies and government departments could stimulate creative approaches for addressing access barriers in rural communities.

A complementary theme was the recognition of the role that health plays in economic development and the need to incorporate health planning in economic development plans at all levels of government. Several comments reflected the opportunities that exist for technology to play an even greater role in health care provision. As with other themes, data and evaluation and sound performance measures should guide policy development. New policy development should also consider the local rural context of demographics, geography and travel challenges.

Seniors form a growing percentage of the population base of rural Ontario. Participants strongly acknowledged the important contribution that seniors make to their communities through volunteering and mentoring to all age groups. However, mobility, transportation, housing and health concerns top the list as key challenges facing this sector especially in the context of new goals such as aging at home and home-based care. Multi-sector collaboration is essential to ensure that new policies consider and reflect these needs and approaches should be scaled to a rural Ontario context.

Rural Health

Participant Suggestions for Outcomes: Rural Café Round 1

Rural Health Priority Outcomes Identified:

- Effective communication between funders/government/policy makers and local communities (genuine collaboration, effective and meaningful consultation input) – more tailored approaches to solving problems and increased local engagement
- Coordination between health, education, and social services – break down silos, address social determinants of health, health issues are not just about physical health, build integrated clinics
- Include rural health services in community economic development plans – tangible indication that people see the link
- Decreased distance to health care and specialists – increased accessibility
- Increased access to range of services (e.g. primary care, mental, dental specialists, full continuum of care) – reduce long wait times, reduce strain on hospital budgets, reduce travel to specialists, utilize Telehealth
- In-home care infrastructure – need for in-home palliative care (dignity), take burden off hospitals
- Increased policies promoting healthy lifestyles – political and fiscal priority
- Decrease chronic disease rates in rural (obesity, diabetes, heart disease) to province averages – largely impacted by social determinants of health
- Lowered mental stress – travelling to access care creates stress and more problems
- Better uptake of CHRS – connections to urban centres

Rural Health

Actions: Rural Café Round 2

**Highest voted priority as identified by participants (bracket amount Indicates number of votes)

- **Idea:** Strengthen collaboration/coordination between all health sectors; LHINS/community-based health planning/ Inter-ministry working groups/ministry-front line workers/ communities/health teams – structure rotating location of services (9)
- **Idea:** Evaluation/data analysis; support local action with data, start evaluation early in planning process, require rural specific data to identify measurable outcomes (5)
- **Idea:** Reframing health in rural communities; public interest evolution – concern less about facilities more about lifestyle, connection to economic development, development of local-context specific health promotion strategies (4)
- **Idea:** Create regular forums to bring together health, social and education sectors (3)
Success Indicator: Multi-agency forums and creative solutions cross-ministry, e.g. using school buses to transport elderly to town to see doctors
- **Idea:** Health in all policies; official plans, PPS, supportive infrastructure considering rural context (community workplace), e.g. cycling/pedestrian infrastructure, sidewalks, bike storage, etc. (3)
Success Indicator: Council accepts policies
- **Idea:** Policies that promote application of technology to chronic care
Success Indicators: Cyber surgery; remote check-ups; self-monitoring
- **Idea:** Develop generalist practitioner including support for ongoing training as local needs emerge
Success Indicators: GP training based on community needs, community access to care
- **Idea:** Development of PSW labour market through local training and attention of younger workers
Success Indicators: More PSW's, less ER visits
- **Idea:** Communicate financial benefits of improved health

Aging in Rural Ontario

Participant Suggestions for Outcomes: Rural Café Round 1

Priority Outcomes Identified:

- More supportive housing for seniors financed through innovative pooled investment/locally driven tools
- Transportation options – access to housing and transportation
- Policy and programming that reinforces and maintains social connections and opportunities for engagement
- Financial planning to provide security to end of life
- Community health care delivery where seniors live so they can stay in their communities

Aging in Rural Ontario

Actions: Rural Café Round 2

**Highest voted priority as identified by participants (bracket amount Indicates number of votes)

- **Idea:** Accessing asset value of seniors in community (e.g. mentorship, teaching/volunteer at university, college and network opportunities to enable youth access to jobs) (14)
Success Indicators: Number of mentor relationships; number of classes with seniors teaching/training; number of networks
- **Idea:** Telemedicine support in rural Ontario (5)
Success Indicator: Specialists available in rural communities
- **Idea:** Facilitate creation of safe volunteer transportation networks; support skills to enable seniors to keep their drivers license (e.g. driver simulation training) (2)
Success Indicator: Number of networks (e.g. Network per community)
- **Idea:** Change policy to enable leveraging existing equity in housing; shift from equality to equity (2)
Success Indicators: More seniors housing options (e.g. rentals, ownership, programs, community non-profit); more housing stock; number of house shares
- **Idea:** Multi-party (e.g. provincial government, municipality, organizations) discussion to focus on rural aging issues
Success Indicators: Strategy (local) scaled to rural Ontario; series of tools to enable innovative planning solutions

Job Creation

What we found interesting

Job Creation

Not surprisingly, the twin goals of a diversified economic base and a vibrant community life were identified very quickly as desired outcomes. There was also recognition that resource-based industries such as agriculture offer new opportunities to achieve this diversification through further processing and added-value activities. However, participants cautioned that new developments need to be considered through a region-appropriate lens. There was a strong indication of a need for collaboratively developed, regional economic strategies that include export market development options and the sharing of success stories. The importance of collaboration among all stakeholders was noted in several of the priority actions as was the need to engage all community members including youth and new Canadians. Other important collaborations involve business and post-secondary education institutions.

Participants also highlighted the importance of infrastructure as an underpinning for economic development. Supporting innovation and new business development at the regional level requires investments in transportation and telecommunications infrastructure. Although not a new phenomenon, regional

business incubators are certainly gaining prominence through their role in supporting new business development through facilities, and enabling access to new collaborations, especially with educational institutions, and investors. Incubators can also be instrumental in assisting second stage entrepreneurs take their ideas to reality.

A number of the themes identified under economic development were echoed in the discussions on the role of entrepreneurs in job creation. First and foremost, it was recognized that a mindset change combined with strong community champions, coaching for emerging entrepreneurs, and new collaborative thinking would be required to support real progress in this area. A second strong theme was around the area of red-tape. Governments at all levels should develop concierge services (or one-stop application portals) to help new business understand and meet the requirements for policies, licenses, etc.

Ontario, including rural and regional areas, should be open for business!

Job Creation via Economic Development

Participant Suggestions for Outcomes: Rural Café Round 1

Priority Outcomes Identified:

- Permanent full time jobs – sustainable and living wage jobs
- New jobs created; a mix of entry, part-time, full time living wage – to provide employment for people in the community
- Improved employment rates; decreased social assistance caseloads, should address under-employment especially in immigrant communities – ensures more people are contributing to the community
- Entrepreneurial outlook from the community; innovative, not risk-adverse, active, optimistic – allows community to be resilient, need to recognize that times change, communities need to as well
- Sustainable tax base
- Pride in vibrant community
- Community attractiveness – skilled labour force
- Diversified economic base; primary resources plus value-added opportunities and processing, new opportunities and region-appropriate tourism – leads to increased community health
- Vibrant community life; balanced demography (age, gender, income), diversity encouraged and valued, succession of one generation to the next, volunteerism on the rise – leads to higher quality of life
- Welcoming community

Job Creation via Economic Development

Participant Ideas for Actions: Rural Café Round 2

**Highest voted priority as identified by participants (bracket amount Indicates number of votes)

- **Idea:** Create a collaborative regional economic development plan; develop export market, tell success stories (17)
Success Indicator: Communities (and regions) complete and continue to update plan, living document
- **Idea:** Support Innovation; infrastructure upgrades (transportation, telecommunication), regional incubators (4)
Success Indicators: Implementation of and connection to the plan involving post-secondary, trade schools and economic development businesses
- **Idea:** Collaborate for a globally competitive business environment – taxes (predictable) (1)
Success Indicator: Third party recognition of Ontario as a low cost place to do business
- **Idea:** Regional approach; productive/nurtured needs buy in, in good faith
Success Indicator: Everyone brings something to the table, everyone benefits
- **Idea:** Collaboration
Success Indicator: New partnerships – inter-sectoral and innovative
- **Idea:** Consult the farmers; engage and tap into knowledge and success
Success Indicator: Farmers are involved in Chamber/Board of Trade
- **Idea:** No tunnel vision – think outside the box
Success Indicators: Great ideas are out there, new ideas implemented
- **Idea:** Involve stakeholders, good facilitation
Success Indicator: Community gets to have input
- **Idea:** Attract and retain youth and new Canadians
Success Indicators: Growth in numbers in employment and increased engagement
- **Idea:** Skills development and training for workforce; business sector involvement
Success Indicators: Levels of certification, business attracted to the area

Job Creation through Entrepreneurship

Participant Suggestions for Outcomes: Rural Café Round 1

Priority Outcomes Identified:

- Employment (increased/stable) – key driver of economic growth
- Successful startups (sustainable) – build ecosystem/supply chain, fill the gaps, others may follow
- New startups encourage other new startups, start to see clustering – leads to critical mass, downtown destination shopping, big box is a reality
- Retention of youth – creates local opportunities, succession planning, increases tax base
- Community involvement – mentorship, collaboration, support systems
- Red tape reduction, funding, multiple parts, make it easier to fund team and access – business logic vs. government logic, open for business
- Strong business startup development support incubator; one stop shop/one window for info and funding requests, partnership, everyone puts up money – duplication of agencies fighting for survival and funding, business support
- Financial infrastructure; banking, private capital, Angel/Venture, government – sustainable, predictable funding, investment not subsidy, federal/provincial partner to fund vs. plan
- External/follow on investment – enables sales and jobs and profits
- Human resources; skilled leader, leader of business needs, passion, relationships, networks – broker, connector, fundamental business skills; new Canadians negotiating without networks, knowledge/skill BUT with passion and willingness, brokering business connections

Job Creation through Entrepreneurship

Participant Ideas for Actions: Rural Café Round 2

**Highest voted priority as identified by participants (bracket amount Indicates number of votes)

- **Idea:** Mindset change, willingness to work hard, develop community champions, collaboration vs. competition, local leadership less risk adverse, willingness to embrace failure on path to success, entrepreneurial mentality community wide (13)
Success Indicator: We all have a vote – government, businesses, etc.
- **Idea:** Small scale business entrepreneur support (4)
Success Indicators: Reframe definition of what success is at the community level, support a culture of entrepreneurship
- **Idea:** Entrepreneurship coaching (2)
Success Indicator: Introduce Junior Achievement in all high schools
- **Idea:** Red Tape Concierge service/navigator, stable policies, streamline local/prov/fed requirements (2)
Success Indicator: Office established at Town Hall and/or appropriate location
- **Idea:** “One stop” application process, “Navigation Portal,” explain and link rules and regulations to support small businesses, better support for understanding and navigating the rules (1)
- **Idea:** Infrastructure services, facilities, funding, transportation (1)
Success Indicators: Increased utilization of services, investments (\$), facilities, transportation, more incubation space
- **Idea:** Community Involvement, sponsorship, mentorship, local recognition, local marketing, workforce development (1)
Success Indicator: News stories about local businesses
- **Idea:** Engagement, networking, youth involvement, collaboration and partnerships, bringing external resources home, tap into local (existing) resources (1)
Success Indicators: Establish networking groups/venues, coordinated youth engagement programs, local business partnership success stories
- **Idea:** Second stage entrepreneurs need support, help identify latent entrepreneurs
- **Idea:** Change assessment/evaluate success, we don’t need a “home run” – need lots of “singles” to get on base

Investment Ready Communities

What we found interesting

Investment Ready Communities

What does ‘investment ready’ mean? Participants identified that there is a need for new shared understanding of this concept, especially at the council and municipal level. Leadership that embraces a new vision and approach, and a capacity for innovation will be required to move communities towards progress in becoming investment ready. Those involved in supporting economic development efforts may also need to invest additional time and resources in promoting this concept and assisting communities to embrace the full extent of the meaning and implications.

Other discussion points raised the need for additional data around market intelligence, including the identification of local and regional assets. There was encouragement to collaborate at the regional level, developing strategies and brands to attract new investment and business interests.

A second important theme outlined a more holistic approach for economic development; building a socially inclusive community that works toward improving the quality of life for all residents, and in so doing, becomes a more attractive place for investors, new business and new residents. There is recognition that social efforts such as poverty reduction, provision for accessible and affordable housing, and ongoing efforts to increase overall wellness result in lowered tax costs and greater benefit to society as a whole.

New approaches to economic development, whether at the local, regional, or provincial level, will be strengthened by taking a more inclusive approach.

Investment Ready Communities

Participant Suggestions for Outcomes: Rural Café Round 1

Priority Outcomes Identified

- Socially inclusive community – job creation/poverty reduction/affordable housing/lower health care costs – builds quality of place/life, community becomes more attractive
- Regional approach – regional strategic plan/asset mapping – developing a brand – needs plans in place; regional rather than local approach
- One-window economic development support – one stop shop for permits/grants/land availability, etc. – more efficient
- New leadership – new vision/capacity for innovation – operate at the speed of business, not stuck in the past – world has changed/economy has changed/global environment
- Build capacity and infrastructure/connectivity/services – need to be in a place to attract/retain business

Investment Ready Communities

Participant Ideas for Actions: Rural Café Round 2

**Highest voted priority as identified by participants (bracket amount Indicates number of votes)

- **Idea:** Collective approach, everyone has to be on board, common vision, at “regional” level, enlightened approach (4)
- **Idea:** Market Intelligence, knowing your assets to be able to respond to market, need to establish priorities (2)
Success Indicator: Investment in community
- **Idea:** Information sharing, what it means to be “investment ready,” council/municipality needs to be ready, community and residents need to be ready, vision has to be communicated (2)
- **Idea:** Marrying opportunity to assets, or creating what is necessary, consensus – either to pursue opportunity or to create what’s needed
Success Indicators: Jobs, growth and prosperity
- **Idea:** Work at speed of business, approvals need to be fast and predictable

Continuing the Conversation

What we found interesting

Continuing the Conversation

There was a strong response to the suggestions for a “big picture” strategy through the discussion groups and in the voting process of the gallery walk. This was linked to an identified need for an ongoing conversation; a process of engaging rural Ontario citizens, helping them to identify assets in their communities and regions, developing flexible strategies to build on their asset base and ultimately creating a common vision for rural Ontario. Of note, however, was the strongly supported proposal that the conversation was really about, and for, all of Ontario, and that beginning with a shared vision for the province would create a context for defining goals and policies to shape the rural areas and regions. This theme may be linked to the previously identified concept that urban and rural rely on each other, and together will position the province well for growth and prosperity. A number of references to urban-rural linkages are captured in the specific discussion themes.

While there was no clarity about who should be tasked with leading this process, there was a supported theme of a “third party” to play the role of convener. Further comments identified the requirement to ensure that the engagement process was open to all, and represented business, social, and institutional sectors with an interest in the future of rural and the province.

Furthermore, the development of a comprehensive strategy would equally be about the citizen conversations as it would be about defining the goals and priorities for advancing rural and regional development, and from the outset, would be defined as an ‘iterative’ process.

The discussions during the Ontario Rural Summit clearly outlined a need for ongoing dialogue leading to informed policy development reflecting regional and urban-rural distinctions. It is important to acknowledge however, that the facilitated conversations and the informal networking sessions that were also a component of the agenda identified a multitude of successful programs and approaches already in play across rural Ontario. These demonstrate the leadership, creativity, and problem-solving that exists at the grassroots level. Gathering and sharing these stories provides an opportunity to collect further evidence-based data which can inform and ground the policy development process, as well as provide new ideas for other communities to adapt and initiate.

Rural Ontario is ready to connect, collaborate, and communicate to create a sound future for new generations.

Continuing the Conversation

Top Priority Ideas from Participants

- One Ontario Dialogue –“on-going” (20)
 - Common theme ‘holistic,’ focused on goals/values, evidence-based approach, (assets, functional regions), a living document, roundtables
- Create a vision for people to galvanize action and collaborate around (16)
- Engage a 3rd party convener to “drive it” with partners/ collaborators from across Ontario-supported by government. This is an engagement strategy, a public goal. (5)
- Leadership – Somebody? Someone? Needs to own this and organize it and us (4)
- Strategic Plan (2)
- One central site to store information and communicate (2)
- Define the problem we are trying to address (2)
- Inventory of “actors” and participants and their resources (1)
- Undertake an ongoing Big Picture Ontario Conversation – goals, values to develop a comprehensive strategy that can be used to inform/shape regions of Ontario
 - It’s about policy and vision for rural Ontario in context of all Ontario; common language
- Undertake an ongoing and regular rural conversation about how we fit in the bigger picture
 - SWOT analysis, common language
- Flexible strategies that can be implemented by variety of regions and communities
- No ownership of the document, process is essential part, priorities established throughout (i.e. iterative process), products include social media, transparent product
- Engagement must be ‘open’ to multiple diverse people including various sectors (e.g. agriculture, mining, academia, policy institutes, etc.), forum for civic engagement/open dialogue

*The “Continuing the Conversation” Tables were given different templates than for the other topic areas.

Stay Connected



Staying connected beyond the Summit

It is vital to continue the discussion about issues of importance to citizens of rural Ontario. The one-day 2014 Rural Ontario Summit was a great start, yet there are many more matters important to the future of rural Ontario, and other pertinent perspectives which could not be incorporated into the agenda for the day. There are lots of stories that need to be told, and many great resources out there to share.

Consistent with the Rural Ontario Institute's mandate of initiating dialogue, supporting collaboration and promoting action on issues and opportunities facing rural Ontario, you are invited to stay in contact with other rural stakeholders to help promote a strong and vibrant rural Ontario.

Here are three ways to continue the conversation:

- Use the hashtag #RuralOn to see and contribute tweets about current rural events, comments and happenings.
- To share a "Story from the Field", guest blogs are welcome on the Rural Ontario Institute website (www.RuralOntarioInstitute.ca).

A short couple of paragraphs about your project, initiative or cause with a newsy headline and appropriate links is all that's needed. Email us at info@ruralontarioinstitute.ca.

- There's lots of opportunity to share stories, ideas and thoughts on the Rural Ontario Institute page on Facebook – make sure you 'like' the page so you see updates from others.
www.facebook.com/ruralontarioinstitute

Connect with the Ontario government at www.ontario.ca/rural.

Other ways to be involved:

- Become a subscriber to the Rural Ontario Institute by visiting www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca and clicking on "Subscribe Today"
- Follow ROI on Twitter @ROIInstitute



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The Moment
Explore. Imagine. Create. Together.

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