WHAT MAKES IT

Rural?

THE ONTARIO RURAL COUNCIL

*A process to help organizations
articulate rural 'assets' and rural 'wants'
and 'make their case'
to decision-makers.*

1. WHEN to use this process

When you are undertaking visioning exercises, looking for access to capital, trying to make connections with new groups, planning for the future, preparing policy to support programs, serving clients or deciding investment strategies, this will:

• Help you consider rural Ontario as a place of diversity and opportunity.

• Help you describe the broader experience of 'rural'. Consider rural qualities on a continuum or as reflecting a range of characteristics to share with others the richness of the rural regions of Ontario.

• Help you identify what is valued and should be respected and fostered.

2. HOW to use this process

What Makes It Rural? is organized into six sections. Use those sections that apply to your organization or business, and consider responses that reflect your perspective. The process is simple: consider the statements and questions from the six sections in light of the diverse communities and geography within within rural and northern Ontario. The intent of this process is to provide a starting point to understand the complexity of 'rural' and help you articulate this complexity to others. Consider your audience as you work your way through this process.

3. WHO should use this process?

• Rural organizations

• Organizations with an Ontario-wide mandate

• Funders and fundraisers

• Government representatives and government relations staff

• Rural strategists for business

• Rural constituents who need to describe their 'rurality' to decision-makers

• Other…

WHAT MAKES IT
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A process to help organizations articulate rural 'assets' and rural 'wants' and 'make their case' to decision-makers.

Introduction

4. WHY use this process?

• Mobilize rural organizations and their members to represent rural interests

• Generate consistent application of a 'checklist' by decision-makers

• Solidify ideas about what makes 'rural' rural

• Build knowledge within rural organizations

• Start the rural/urban dialogue

What Makes It Rural? is organized into six sections. Use those that apply to your organization or business.

WHAT MAKES IT
Rural?

Contents

Common Threads

◆ Many residents of rural and northern Ontario have made their living from their local geography ~ from the opportunities afforded by natural resources. While significant restructuring has occurred in primary industries over the past 50 years, many rural and northern people still relate their sense of home and identity to local geography and place.

◆ Ontario's land mass is large and distance is a key factor for many rural and northern residents. On average, rural people have longer journey times and travel further to reach jobs, facilities, clients, volunteer and other opportunities.

◆ Public transportation is sparse or non-existent and there are high levels of 'car dependency'.

The Rural Continuum

◆ 'Rural' can be within easy driving of a large urban centre…*OR* accessible only by air, water or across the ice.

◆ Some rural areas are within a Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)… others are within unorganized townships or regions.

◆ Some rural areas are serviced by urban centres… others are totally resource-based, serviced by hamlets and villages.

(A)

Rural Geography

Rural Geography

Consider the **distance** to a major urban centre.
Consider ways policies and programs are enabling people in isolated communities
to **reach decision-makers** who reside in larger centres.
Will the impact be different than for those close to urban centres?

Consider the **population** size and geographic distribution.
Consider how programs and policies can actively support organizations
in widespread communities to **maintain access** to their constituency.

Consider geographic and/or political **boundaries** that define a community.

Consider how amalgamations have changed workloads and, therefore,
funding and political needs of rural organizations.

Consider how links can be made between **urban and rural** communities and resources.
What are the existing and future opportunities to link?
What meaningful data can be shared?
How can awareness of issues, challenges and assets grow?

➔ **Your discussion points to use with the people you wish to influence…**

Common Threads

◆ Rural distances and smaller or dispersed populations can make it more difficult and costly to provide services to rural citizens.

◆ Rural areas general contain fewer (formal) places to obtain advice and information ~ e.g. libraries, government advisory bodies, public Internet access points.

◆ Private, public and voluntary sector bodies in rural areas tend to be smaller and often struggle to sustain and extend service delivery and reach with reduced resources.

◆ Reliance upon volunteers to provide services that are delivered by staff in urban areas is a critical distinguishing feature of 'rural'.

(B)

Rural Service Delivery & Access

The Rural Continuum

Infrastructure varies in rural communities, *from* those with a wide variety of options regarding information and communication technologies, transportation systems and energy sources…*to* others with the most basic and limited options.

◆ Some communities enjoy locally-based health and social services, financial services, faith services, information and training services, and government service centres…others must travel long distances for such services or be self-sufficient.

◆ Some communities are served by professional volunteer management centres… others rely on volunteers to manage all volunteer activities.

DIGGING DEEPER

Rural Service Delivery & Access

Consider the **strength** of the infrastructure ~ transportation, telecommunications, gas and hydro. Do policies and programs assume a given level of infrastructure?

Consider an allowance for the **higher costs** of rural infrastructure in funding programs and rural investment policies.

Consider a **'sparsity' factor** in funding formulae. How does sparse service delivery affect less mobile or less connected members of society (youth people, seniors, people with disabilities)?

Consider **access** to health services, emergency service, public transportation and banking. In what ways do existing programs and policies make assumptions about the relative ease of access to these services?

Consider access to **training** and educational opportunities.

Consider **creative ways** in which policies and programs could support training and educational opportunities in communities with limited access.

Consider how policies and programs can be (re)designed to encourage **'made in rural' solutions** to the access gap.

Consider potential **partnerships** with private institutions.

Consider access to **professional skills** to support the work of rural organizations. In what ways can policies and programs assist rural constituents to access necessary skills and expertise to build strong communities?

Consider access to **government service** 'outlets'. Are there best practises in policy and programming elsewhere that could be replicated in rural Ontario to address the declining number of service outlets?

Consider access to **Internet** services. How is access to services, education and training opportunities affected by a lack of reliable, high-speed Internet access?

Consider access to **capital** for small and medium-sized enterprises in rural and remote areas. How is access to capital affected by geography?

➜ **Your discussion points to use with the people you wish to influence…**

Common Threads

◆ Many communities within rural Ontario rely on high levels of volunteerism and community involvement.

◆ Community safety, independence and mutual aid are central to successful communities.

◆ Rural disadvantage may be dispersed ~ not concentrated ~ and therefore difficult to detect or address.

(C)

Rural Culture & Communities

The Rural Continuum

◆ Some rural communities are culturally diverse, with a healthy demographic mix…
others are homogeneous in nature and suffer from out-migration of youth.

◆ Some have a high capacity for organization, mobilization and collaboration within and among other communities, resulting in a strong sense of co-operative living…others rely more on external supports.

◆ Some communities have access to highly skilled and specialized resources to support community goals…
others have limited access to specialized expertise.

◆ Some communities have created an innovative climate encouraging openness, inclusiveness and tolerance…
other communities are more closed, valuing traditional ways of interacting.

DIGGING DEEPER

Rural Culture & Communities

Consider the strength of the **relationships** in the community. Where an expectation of partnership has been included in policies and programs, in what ways is partnership development also being supported?

Consider **alternate routes** in operating in regions where partnerships may not work in the short term.

Consider specific support for **capacity-building**, allowing long timeframes for application and allowing an increased level of public funding or voluntary sector contributions to compensate for limited private sector funding.

Consider the rich knowledge base of long-time residents as a complement to the enthusiasm and energy of younger residents. In what ways are formal and informal **apprenticeship** and **mentorship** opportunities being fostered?

Consider working with other decision-makers to support **cross-sectoral activities**.

Consider the **geographic proximity** of partners.

Consider the **age and cultural profile** of the community. Do policy- and decision-makers take into account differing resources needed for an aging community, compared to those of a younger community?

Consider ways in which the uniqueness of predominantly **Francophone** and **First Nations** rural communities are supported in policies and programs.

Consider the **values** that are specific to a community. Do critical decisions and policies support or penalize the values of an individual community?

➔ **Your discussion points to use with the people you wish to influence…**

Common Threads

◆ Transport and telecommunications infrastructures are generally less developed in rural areas, especially in more remote and northern areas.

◆ Many businesses in rural areas are small and medium-sized, and there are fewer large firms.

◆ Resource-based industries (e.g. agriculture, forestry, fishing and extraction/mining) remain significant employers in certain rural areas.

◆ Rural economies are often equated with agriculture – yet rural economies around Ontario vary significantly and are diverse.

◆ Many youth value rural Ontario but need economic opportunities to enable them to stay.

The Rural Continuum

◆ Some rural communities are flourishing and stable with a mix of resource-based industry, tourism, small and medium-sized businesses…others are more vulnerable in their dependence upon a single industry or traditional approaches.

◆ Some communities have diverse employment opportunities, including well-paying jobs…
others are economically depressed, with few employment opportunities.

◆ Some rural communities enjoy economic advantages associated with proximity to a large urban centre…
other rural communities must create economies locally.

◆ Some communities have created an environment encouraging innovation, creativity and local economic development…
others have not.

(D)

Rural Economies

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Rural Economies

Consider the **economic health** of the community.

Consider whether policies and programs make **assumptions** about the relative strength or weakness of community economies.

Consider ways to support the development of rural communities' capacity for **innovation** in building their local economies.

Consider the **major economic base** of a community and the diversity of the economy.

Consider whether policies and programs reflect and support the **diversity** of rural economies around the province.

Consider whether investors and decision-makers make assumptions about appropriate types of **economic**

development for communities. What efforts are being made to support local realities?

Consider the impact of critical decisions and policies on the major source of **livelihood** for different communities.

Consider the impact on the local economy when a policy or decision is made to change a community's **infra-structure**. How can rural businesses support infrastructure?

Consider how entrepreneurship and small business are being **promoted**, supported and sustained in order to retain people, add valuable services and supplies, and provide economic activity. What apprenticeship opportunities are available to attract young people to rural communities?

➔ **Your discussion points to use with the people you wish to influence…**

Common Threads

◆ Rural countryside, mid-northern lakes districts and northern natural areas not only provide employment for rural people and habitat for diverse animal species but are also valued by Ontarians as recreational spaces and places to get away from urban environments.

◆ Rural people are assumed to be managers or stewards of these local natural assets and areas.

◆ Resource-based industries (e.g. agriculture, forestry, fishing and extraction/mining) have an important impact on the rural landscape, environment and biodiversity.

(E)

Rural Environment & Stewardship

The Rural Continuum

◆ Some rural regions are appreciated as pastoral and scenic retreats attracting the vacationer, artist and cultural tourist… other regions have not developed opportunities related to rural environment or lack the amenities to do so.

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Rural Environment & Stewardship

Consider the specific **natural assets** in your area and the environmental and recreational significance of these assets.

Consider whether policies and programs provide **ample support** to protect and make use of existing natural assets.
What are the implications of policies and programs for the future sustainability of natural assets?

Consider whether policies and programs **over-estimate** ~ and therefore overtax ~ existing natural assets.

Consider the implications for landowners of **over-regulating** environmental or wildlife standards.

Consider creative ways to **balance** the rural constituents' need for livelihoods with the protection of natural assets for all to enjoy.

➔ **Your discussion points to use with the people you wish to influence…**

Common Threads

◆ Rural communities provide 'lifestyle' advantages such as peacefulness, beauty, lack of traffic jams, green space, recreational opportunities and a collective passion for 'community'.

(F)

The Rural Advantage

The Rural Continuum

◆ Some rural areas have a smaller and scattered population, which may not provide a sufficient market to attract the private sector…
others in more densely populated areas are able to attract the private sector.

◆ Some communities have the capacity to supply the workforce associated with new economic opportunities…other rural areas do not have that capacity.

The Rural Advantage

Consider whether a business could extend itself to be a **'province-wide'** service provider or have a province-wide market.

Consider the effect **business closure or centralization** has on rural areas and the disproportionate effect where services are already limited.
Consider the importance of the industry to the local economy.
What are the impacts at the local level?
What value does the industry provide locally?

Consider **innovative solutions and partnerships** for rural communities to work with business.

Consider how **services and products** match rural communities, populations and economies.

Consider how **business development** can contribute to local 'character' and distinctiveness.

➔ **Your discussion points to use with the people you wish to influence…**