Introduction

The **Measuring Rural Community Vitality** (MRCV) initiative includes two projects that involve formal collaborations with selected rural communities in Ontario. These collaborations will see ROI contribute resources (financial and other) to support a current community program or project. ROI intends to select up to four individual communities to participate through a competitive application process. The initiative begins the fall of 2015 and ends by March 2017.

There are *two project streams* of support available. Communities may apply to both streams however they can receive support from only one of the two streams.
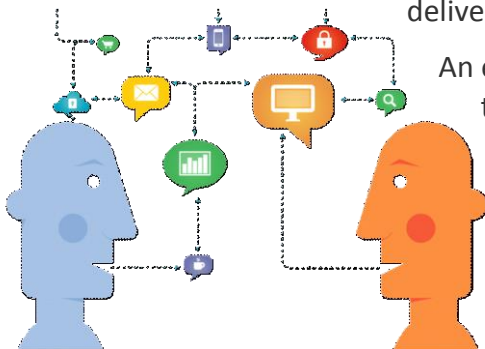
1. Project stream one will support case studies of <u>community evaluation</u> utilizing *Social Return on Investment (SROI), Community Impact* or other similar methodology.
2. Project stream two will support demonstration projects of <u>community well-being type</u> projects utilizing either a *Canadian Index of Well-being* survey/report, or a community *Vital Signs* survey/report, or a CIEL Sustainability study or other similar approach.

For the communities the additional resources should add to their capacity and enable them to accomplish more than otherwise possible. The collaboration with ROI also provides a knowledge translation and transfer (KTT) framework for documenting and sharing the learnings broadly across the province.

This document describes the procedure for identification and selection of communities.

Why is transparent community selection an important component of the MRCV process?

Community selection is a strategic process. The communities selected will have a bearing on ROI's ability to deliver against the overall initiative's objectives. Therefore we employ a multi-level community selection process which identifies those communities that can best deliver on the initiative's mandated priorities.

An effective community selection process will choose those communities which can contribute the most to achieving the MRCV objectives. The right communities are needed to deliver these strategic outcomes.

Keeping the lines of communication open.

Maintaining an on-going dialogue between ROI and

the candidate communities throughout the selection process is vital. Ensuring the transparency of the application and selection procedure is of the utmost importance.

The selection procedure is very clearly set out here, in the application package and also in the related promotional materials. ROI will endeavour to ensure that these are clearly understood. The procedures are important and ROI will strive to apply and be seen to be applying the procedures consistently. I.e. that ROI does what it says it will do and clearly communicates that to all concerned.

Application and Selection Process

Overview

Community selection is a *three-step process* managed by a review panel comprised of ROI staff and three or four members of the MRCV Advisory Committee. Final decisions will be made by ROI in consultation with the Advisory Committee.

Step one is an expression of interest letter signed by the lead partner or municipality. A single call for Expression of Interest will be made in the fall of 2015. The expression of interest is a pre-selection tool used to streamline the decision-making process. It initiates a conversation that will help the community to understand our expectations and see what benefits they can expect in return.

This pre-selection step helps to screen out ineligible proposals before valuable time and resources are wasted. Submissions which are rejected at this stage may be revised and resubmitted. Only those submissions that meet all of the essential criteria in the EOI will move on to step two.

Step two is a detailed Application that gathers technical and qualitative information about the community and their program/project. The completed applications are assessed by a review panel against the selection criteria.

Step three the final step is the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ROI and the municipality of a selected community. The MOU spells out the expectations and the financial terms of the collaboration.

Criteria Types

There are two kinds of decision-making criteria:

1. **Eligibility** criteria for assessing the core aspects in the first step (EOI assessment)
2. **Selection** criteria for the technical and qualitative assessment in the second step (Application assessment).
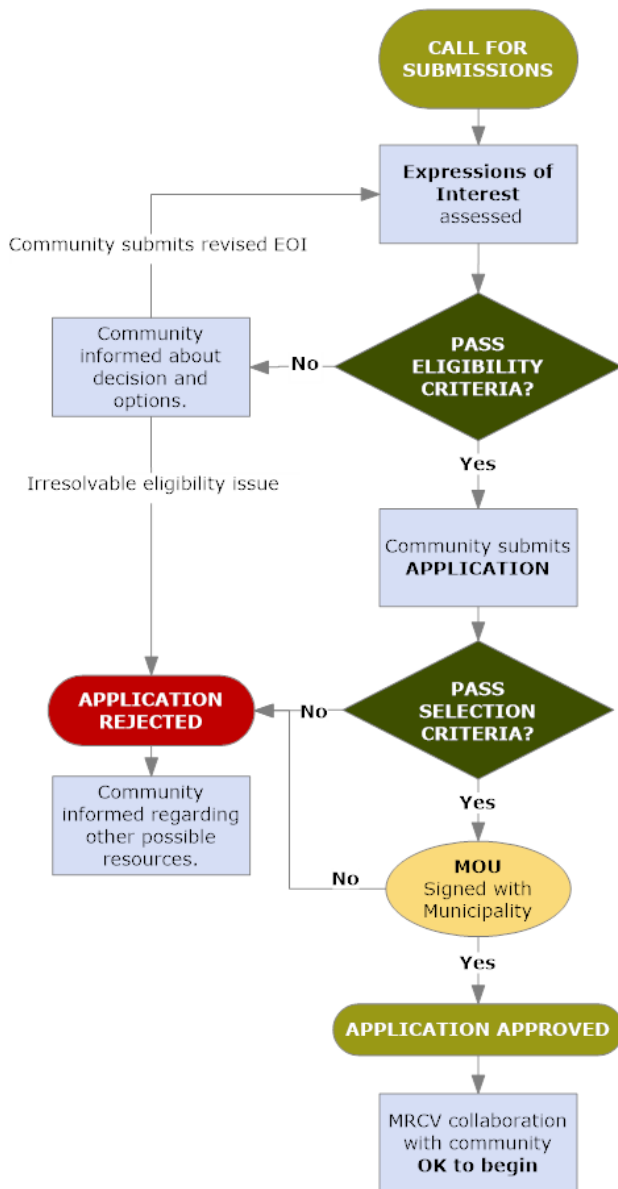
Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility criteria are the essential criteria that all communities must meet in order to be considered. **The following four criteria must be met. If the submission does not meet all the criteria the community will withdraw from the process or choose to resubmit.**

Eligibility Criteria (EOI)

1. Rural (with communities < 100,000 pop.)   3. To be substantially completed by 12/18/2016
2. Municipality is a partner   4. Evaluation reports will be made public

In all cases the eligibility criteria are applied at the first step of the application process. These criteria are clearly communicated in publicity and application materials so that people know the rules.

MEASURING RURAL COMMUNITY VITALITY
Community Selection Process Flowchart

TIMING

2015
- *Sept/Oct - Call for EOI submissions*
- *Oct. 29 - Deadline for submissions*
- *Oct. 29 - Application opens*
- *Nov. 19 - Application closes*
- *Dec. 3 - Notification of selected communities*

2016
- *January - Signing of MOU*
- *Jan/Feb - Project begins*
- *December - Project ends*

2017
- *March - Final Report*

Measuring Rural Community Vitality

Selection Criteria

Technical and qualitative criteria are used at the second step (Application) to assess the fit with the goals and objectives of the MRCV initiative. These selection criteria inform the review panel's decision-making process.

Selection Criteria (Application)	
Benefit (What benefits are anticipated from the program/project?)	• Responds to identified need supported by evidence • Need is established and a solution is proposed • Uses community assets (strengths) • Promotes development and quality of life for community members
Engagement (How is the community involved?)	• Involves, engages and uses community skills in planning and execution • Broad stakeholder and community support and involvement • Supports partnerships (e.g. between existing and new groups) • Builds community capacity
Strategic Focus (Are outcomes broadly transferable?)	• Linked to a local Community Plan/Sustainability Plan/Strategic Plan endorsed by Municipal Council • Supports regional initiatives and is broadly applicable to rural Ontario
Organizational Capacity (Can you manage the project?)	• Capacity to carry out what is being proposed including experience, governance, people and resources • A dedicated project leader assigned (municipal staff or consultant) • A well-developed work plan
Budget (What resources are required and where will they come from?)	• Clearly outlines revenues and planned expenditures • Includes a contribution (in-kind and/or financial) from community partners • Value for money, i.e. the balance of proposed costs and support vs. the outcomes sought
Timeline (Will the project be completed on time?	• There is a realistic project implementation plan with defined milestones • The project will be underway or scheduled to start about January 2016 • Is substantially completed by December 18, 2016.
Administrative Requirements	• Municipality is willing to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with ROI. • ROI shares the right with the Applicant to distribute/adapt the data, materials, concepts, learnings, tools and information for the use of the MRCV initiative, its partners, provincial ministries and agencies.

Targeting

ROI will introduce some element of targeted calls into the application process with respect to:

- Specific MRCV priorities (e.g. a desire to represent diverse geographies, etc.)
- A range of themed priorities (e.g. environment, economic development, etc.)
- Community size and/or scale of projects (e.g. to enhance transferability)

ROI

Proportionality

The selection criteria take account of the different types of community applicants. This is important for small rural communities or community organizations since if a requirement is set too high it may discourage participation. The concept of proportionality must be balanced against the accountability required. The review panel will therefore use the principle of proportionality carefully in the way selection criteria are designed and in their decision-making.

Measurability

The scoring of applications will place numerical values against each of the criteria. A total score is derived and applications are ranked highest to lowest. The values used in scoring consider the following aspects; applicability, consistency and repeatability.

Commitment to Applying the Procedure

Ensuring the transparency of the application and selection process is critical to maintaining the motivation and trust of community applicants and partners. ROI therefore clearly sets out both the process and the criteria that will be used. The procedure and criteria used are also clearly set out in the application package and associated promotional materials.

Although the procedures themselves are important it is essential that ROI does what it says it will do and clearly communicates this to applicants. Effective feedback is important for community applicants so that they may improve or amend their submission and/or understand why another program may be more appropriate.

The end-to-end decision making process for community selection is documented providing auditable evidence justifying the decisions made. This includes showing that the criteria have been used in a way which is robust, repeatable and consistent and that the published procedure has been followed.

Measuring Rural Community Vitality Initiative
Rural Ontario Institute
Guelph Ontario Canada
2015