



**RPLC**  
RURAL POLICY LEARNING COMMONS

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**CAPR**  
COMMUNAUTÉ D'APPRENTISSAGE  
DES POLITIQUES RURALES

# CRRF-RPLC CONFERENCE “ Building Vibrant Rural Futures”

## Summary of Sessions

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### **Welcome and Keynote: Thursday Oct 13, 2016 8:30am**

This event was an engaging, challenging, and inspiring introduction to the conference. Award-winning documentary film-maker Andrée Cazabon told us the story of her 10-year relationship with the community of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig in Northwestern Ontario as they strive to connect with those in other parts of Canada. She was joined by Angelica McKay, a grade-11 student at Queen Elizabeth School in Sioux Lookout. Angelica told us of the trips organized by community youth leaders for Canadians to spend a week in the family homes in the community. Their energy and initiative has led to four such trips where more than 40 people have spent time in the community to experience their culture, see their pride first hand, and become friends in the process. The success of these initiatives has led to visits from the Countess of Wessex and the Premier of Ontario. You can learn more about this inspiring community via <http://kilands.org/>.

### **Feeding ourselves: food systems management in rural regions**

If you are interested in food, then be sure to check out the webcast via <https://www.facebook.com/RPLC.CAPR/videos/536889983171025/>.

In it, you will learn about the distribution and characteristics of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in much of Canada from John Devlin. He discusses the characteristics of CSA initiatives, their advantages and challenges as perceived by their leaders, and some of their needs as reflected in their national survey. Matteo Vittuari will inform you about the relationship between food waste and energy in the European Union. His work contrasts linear food systems that rely heavily on fossil fuel resources but produce high levels of waste along the way – with circular food systems which use renewable resources for farming, processing, and distribution. By building circular systems we can significantly reduce energy waste. Phil Loring takes us to the case of Alaska and Northern Canada to examine the challenges of food insecurity and the options for people to take control of their food security. He points out the various ways in which this is being done – from social media and innovation in delivery to control over the narrative of food security as it is manifested in the north. Finally, Terri Macdonald provides insights from her study of regional food systems in the Kootenay region of southeastern BC. This work demonstrates the growing interest for local food, the extent of unused land and other opportunities, and some of the innovations that have emerged in both policy development and action. This session provides a rich array of issues, insights, and options from many different contexts. I particularly appreciated the extent to which each speaker provided specific, reliable, and informative information about those issues with strong regional and local perspectives.

### **New Researches' Forum**

Bring your questions, observations and concerns about research so they can be discussed. Continuing a tradition at the CRRF national conference, RDI hosted and facilitated discussions with students and those interested in research. What is the difference between reliability and validity, what about sample size, and what really are lessons learned? Drawing on experience around the table, this breakfast session offered an opportunity to share perspectives and learn from others about the range of research methods used in rural research. For upcoming conferences RDI with the Rural Policy Learning Commons hopes to continue this tradition.

## **Including regional in local economic development**

On the heels of municipal amalgamation across much of Manitoba, a recent strategy calls for economic development to be more regional. This presentation takes a step back to consider what might be required to include regional aspects in otherwise local initiatives. Presented as an idea experiment, this session consider such pressing topics as: the geographic footprint of a livable region where people currently live and work; enhancing and sustaining relations with public, private, and NGO sectors; enhancing multi-municipal governance options while maintaining local autonomy; all the while understanding the region and implications to such practices as business retention and expansion, attraction of new investments, and promotion of innovation. The enabling roles of various provincial agencies were also central to success, yet it may take a generation.

### **Community Foundations impact the economy**

Community foundations in Manitoba invest in hundreds of projects in many different sectors from education, health, social services, environment, recreation, and arts and culture. Such funding results in direct and indirect impacts. In addition community foundations also provide seed money to leverage funds from other organizations. This study created a snapshot using 2014 data to calculate any changes in economic impacts to the community. This report adds to other studies completed by the Rural Development Institute in the area of community foundations and philanthropy.

### **Regional and Rural Broadband in Canada: A longstanding dilemma with unfettered optimism**

This panel presentation was set up as a question and answer with the moderator using a journalistic style. The three panel members talked about their perspectives and experiences regarding rural broadband in Manitoba, Ontario and Newfoundland. The discussion revealed that in regards to rural broadband, Canada has significant ground to cover to catch up with our OECD peers. A prime example is that many countries have targets of 25 or 30 Mbps for rural areas while Canada has a target of 5 Mbps. National and provincial leadership on improving and using rural broadband is an essential element in increasing the quality and impact of broadband in rural regions. Panelists stated that local leadership is key to successfully moving beyond the expensive and slow quality broadband offered by most ISPs in rural Canada, but with that leadership it was possible. Key takeaways from the panel:

- 1) Policy makers at all levels needed to give attention and leadership to this issue of rural broadband as Canada is falling further behind our OECD counterparts and rural Canada even more so.
- 2) Regional broadband initiatives in Canada can be successful with the right leadership and data and can achieve much more significant broadband speeds and quality than rural Canada is settling for
- 3) Policy makers cannot stop at connecting rural Canada - the wide range of benefits of rural broadband will only be realized when rural communities have digital capacity and are effectively using that broadband

### **Rural Open Data**

This session provided a wide range of perspectives regarding how to use data in rural development. The data discussed in this session spanned a specific remote locality at the entrance to Algonquin Park to large regional data in BC and Ireland. The presentations also ranged from discussing data collected as individual narratives to employing layered maps and quantitative data. The session provided an overview of how data of all types and at all levels is important for rural development – for example, understanding why individuals in a small town are not utilizing online governance tools requires specific contextual and local data whereas examining the employment patterns across a whole region demands detailed statistics that can be mapped. Key takeaways from this session are twofold:

- (1) Data at all levels and of all types can be essential for rural development but you need to ensure that you are collecting the right type of data – this is especially important when analyzing rural policy. Researchers, either in the development phase or evaluating its implementation, need to ensure that they are collecting and using the right data at the right scale.

(2) Data access and capacity to use that data can be barriers for effective policy development or implementation. It was clear that the necessary data is not always available to researchers and policy developers and that sometimes when the data was available, it was not understood or used correctly. Rural policy researchers need to increase awareness of the type of data that is needed for different uses and to assist policy makers and practitioners in understanding and using that data if necessary.

### **Assessing the effects of corporate social responsibilities on beneficiaries.**

The provision of the infrastructure through CSR has contributed to increased quality of education and income generation, reduction in sanitation related diseases, reduction in the time spent in fetching water, among others. The major challenges identified were the unsustainable nature of projects as a result of lack of partnership; absence of fund for project maintenance; and lack of long-term planning approach. It was recommended that the companies intensify public-private partnership; setting of fund for project maintenance; developing a well-resourced monitoring and evaluation portfolio and developing a long-term planning approach in order to help ensure the sustainability of projects and consequently, achieve the purpose for which such projects are implemented.

### **Bridging the Knowledge Deficit: Infrastructure Renewal for Rural Canada**

The panel talked about the state of infrastructure in rural Canada with emphasis on challenges and solutions to the deficit on knowledge and infrastructure provision. The issue of low population density, distance and limited institutional capacity (finance, human resource etc) hinders the ability of rural areas to provide, maintain and upgrade infrastructure. Capacity building of human resources, joint partnerships, setting targets and provision of adequate financial resources are key to improving rural infrastructure.

### **Using ‘Living’ Green Infrastructure (GI) to Combat Climate Change & Build Resilient Rural Communities**

The study examines the use of green infrastructure to reduce the impact of climate change and enhance resilience in rural areas. Climate change has presented several environmental challenges to Ontario such as reduced water levels, warmer weather and infrastructural damage. This has hindered the resiliency of rural communities in various ways including population retention, job creation and infrastructure access. Among the approaches to integrating GI into rural municipalities include source water protection, local food growing and others. The discussion revealed that planting of trees has been used as a means to mitigating the impacts of climate change, enhancing agricultural soil and water in rural areas. Moreover, economic development and community education have proved to be efficient in building rural resiliency. The use of GI can help in reducing the impacts of climate change through adaptation and mitigation mechanisms and as a base for building resilient rural communities.

### **Recreation Infrastructure Sustainability and Rural Population Retention and Migration in South West Manitoba.**

A student in the Masters of Rural Development program at Brandon University, presented a poster on his research proposal for his thesis titled, “Recreation Infrastructure Sustainability and Rural Population Retention and Migration in South West Manitoba.” The proposal focuses on rural community with a population between 1,000 – 5,000 people. It uses a mixed methods approach of analyzing quantitative data such as population growth, municipal expenditures on recreation and external support from external sources such as Provincial grants. The project is broken down into four stages: 1. initial regional scan, 2. selection of two comparable communities, 3. Qualitative public surveys, 4. Quantitative external funding scan. After completing stage 1, the initial regional scan seems to indicate a relationship between population growth and proximity to larger regional centre. It also highlights the disadvantages in costs per capital for operating recreation facilities. Further research may support an argument for municipalities to partner towards regionalization of recreation facilities to compete with larger centres that benefit from economies of scale.

## **Digital Communications for Organizational Development: the case of rural networks**

A panel of Rural Policy Learning Commons (RPLC) members shared insights and experiences in developing a rural network with ever changing digital communications. Several technologies were discussed which help the RPLC operate:

**Webinars** – The RPLC has used technology (zoom.us, adobe connect) to deliver webinars (online workshops) to facilitate learning and knowledge exchange of rural participants – not only for those that are able to attend live, but also to view recordings posted to RPLC YouTube channel.

**Social Media** – It is good to ensure balance when managing communication content - between original produced content, forwarding related content, and boosting content to drive exposure. The other interesting consideration with social media is that different platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) tend to attract different audiences and for some, due to working policies, are prevented from using. As such, the RPLC takes a multi-platform approach in cross-promoting RPLC activities with various successes.

**Podcasts** – variety of interviews with rural experts can be distributed via podcast applications and is also broadcast through several established rural radio stations in Canada.

**Virtual Meetings** – Perhaps the best example of organizations utilizing technology is through use of meeting platforms, such as zoom.us, to allow members to serve on committees and working together. This has helped support international participation and has allowed for an efficient and cost effective means of decision making and moving the organization forward.

Other considerations for rural participants in using technology include; limitations on local internet service, privacy, trust and accountability. Technology can work for you – delivering multiple tasks and reaching multiple audiences – that otherwise would not be possible by email alone and some applications can be pre-programmed to deliver multiple tasks with only a single entry.

## **Entrepreneurship; a Financial Support Approach**

Increasingly, emphasis has been made on entrepreneurship as a prudent alternative to alleviating poverty, enhancing economic growth and development, as well as improving on the social conditions in rural areas.

For microfinance to be a panacea for economic development, it should be done with a financial support approach which targets ‘unbankables’ who do not have collateral and formal information to access capital. This approach advocates for the provision of loans rather than providing grants to micro-entrepreneurs by the government and other donor agencies. This is because, providing loans rather than grants the micro-credit provider can become sustainable by recycling resources over and over again; hence micro-credit serves to deliver the ‘holy trinity’ of outreach, impact and sustainability.

Microfinance has given and revived the opportunities available in rural spaces for the exploitation of both natural resources and human capital in rural Ghana. With the help of microfinance institutions, women and rural youth are able to combine natural resources such as land into agriculture and the adding of value to agricultural produce in Ghana.

## **Panel - Crossing Streams: An Interdisciplinary Panel on Rural Water**

With the increase in pollution and destruction of water sheds due to climate change and physical development, there is a clarion call on municipal and regional governments to devise strategies and stringent measures to protect water resources.

Discussions on sustainable water resources for rural places in Canada has being to devise water management systems rather than paying much attention to the scarcity of water in rural Canada. Policy alternatives advanced by community or municipal governments have been to enforce strong legislation and stringent standards to water treatment, increased regional collaboration, the importance of external or federal support to community water systems, promoting good stewardship practices such as wetland conservation and a comprehensive water source protection program.

These water resource management methods are pertinent for sustainable development, respective of the importance of water resources in aboriginal transformation issues, the services it provides and its related community economic development benefits.

## **Rural Water & Recourse Governance Session: First Nations Water Security and Pathways for Collaboration**

This presentation brought forward the importance of the old expression, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” in relation to the challenges and opportunities related to water source protection in First Nation communities. Primarily, it is important to acknowledge the First Nations perspective in the treatment of water. It cannot be “water management” but rather we need to manage how we relate to water. Also, different communities have different water treatment systems with different options available to them – top down “cookie cutter” plans simply will not work. Furthermore, collaboration is key to improvements and success. Whereby, relationships are built between communities, officials, governments, etc. in advance of water emergencies, so that they are already well established during any time of strain. There was also a call for improved drinking water standards, as well as increased management of water and land use activities (ex. agricultural runoff near First Nations water intake) surrounding watersheds. Again, improved collaboration and relationship building is very important, and will continue to be important going forward, if water security goals are to be achieved.

### **Panel: Partnerships in Aboriginal Education, Labor Force and Economic Development.**

Aboriginal communities’ development has been a pressing issue as regards to the development of rural communities in Canada. The increase in the aboriginal populations in Canada has necessitated educating aboriginal children to incorporate them in the labor force and developing vibrant rural aboriginal communities through education and entrepreneurial programs.

To develop policies in capacity building in aboriginal communities, discussions are centered on emphasizing strong partnerships and collaboration in education, promoting entrepreneurship, developing human capital to have positive impacts on aboriginal labor markets, enhancing of aboriginal cultural values in education and assets.

Efforts made in these policy directions are believed to help resuscitate aboriginal communities in their bid in the transitional support for skill training, and also employment services.

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For more info visit : <http://guelph2016.crrf.ca/>



