

STRENGTHENING
RURAL
CANADA



RENFORCER LES
COMMUNAUTÉS
RURALES DU CANADA

Our people. Our communities. Our future.

STRENGTHENING RURAL CANADA: Summary of Rural Saskatchewan Community Visits



Prepared for the Strengthening Rural Canada initiative by the Saskatchewan Literacy Network and
RESDAC

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Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program



ROADMAP FOR CANADA'S OFFICIAL
LANGUAGES 2013-2018

**EDUCATION
IMMIGRATION
COMMUNITIES**

INTRODUCTION

Strengthening Rural Canada-Renforcer les communautés rurales du Canada is a comprehensive study on the human and social capital dimensions of rural, small town and remote communities in Canada. Using the latest Census and National Household Survey (NHS) data, the initiative is examining the socio, cultural, economic and organizational attributes of the community and population of 28 communities in select provinces across Canada (Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador).

Funders/Partners

Strengthening Rural Canada is funded by the Government of Canada's Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program and in part by the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-18: Education, Immigration and Communities. Partners on the project include Essential Skills Ontario, Decoda Literacy Solutions, Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador, the Saskatchewan Literacy Network and Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences (RESDAC).

How Communities Were Selected

Due to the diversity of rural areas, a common set of criteria was developed across all provinces to select a diverse group of communities for the purpose of this initiative. The criteria examined the following factors: population size, demographics and degree of rurality. For more detailed information please visit www.strengtheningruralcanada.ca/the-initiative/selecting-communities/

Saskatchewan communities selected:

- Fort Qu'Appelle
- Gravelbourg (Francophone)
- Hudson Bay
- Humboldt
- Kipling
- Rosetown
- St. Louis (Francophone)

Communities Visits

Over the past eight months, the Saskatchewan Literacy Network and RESDAC visited seven rural and small communities across Saskatchewan. During our visits we interviewed a wide range of individuals: mayors, municipal representatives, economic development officers, service club members, employers, employment services providers, principles and local residents. Through these visits we were able to gather the information necessary to paint a picture of each community, including its strengths, opportunities and challenges. Each person we met with welcomed us into their community and provided insights we would not have been able to gather without their help.

BRIEF HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF RURAL SASKATCHEWAN COMMUNITIES

All rural and small town communities across Saskatchewan are inherently unique, with different histories, cultures, residents, industries and political backgrounds. Based on our visits, there were however, some common factors between these communities that play a large role in shaping these communities:

- Resource industry communities (oil and gas, potash, lumber and agriculture)
- Communities were established as traditional agricultural and transportation hubs
- Transportation and logistics continue to play a large role in economic development
- Small service hub communities that provide regional services to surrounding rural and remote communities (government, health and retail services)
- Retirement destination communities for residents to access long-term care and medical services
- Seasonal tourism communities attract hunting and outdoor activity enthusiasts
- Artisans and small boutique employers bring varieties of services into the communities and surrounding areas
- Communities are seeking to attract and retain immigrants to Canada to fill employment and workplace skill demands

Although rural and small town communities in Saskatchewan are generally facing an aging and declining population, there is a general sense of optimism amongst residents. Patterns of urban growth are occurring in the province, much like the rest of Canada; however, smaller communities offer benefits that are attractive to many individuals. With cost of living rising in larger cities, rural and small town communities are able to offer housing affordability, safety for young families, and access to employment or entrepreneurship. Traditional small, family farm lifestyles are becoming obsolete, being replaced by larger industries that are bolstering Saskatchewan's economy such as mining and oil production.

While many communities in Saskatchewan continue to thrive, they also face challenges. Rural and small town communities may have a limited tax base to maintain and develop large infrastructure projects that would benefit their long-term ability to attract new residents. Additionally, many potential residents evaluate access to services such as shopping and health care before deciding to move to a new town. This can be a 'catch-22' situation, where a higher population is needed before new businesses will take the financial risks necessary to open in the area. Physical location of the communities around Saskatchewan can also play a large role in potential for future growth. Transportation hubs within one to two hours of an urban centre are more likely to attract new residents than communities in more remote locations.

Based on numerous conversations with rural residents, business owners and municipal representatives, it was clear that community planning and development is being discussed on local levels. The communities we visited have often worked with consultants to develop a formal community plan and are looking for ways to execute their long-term goals for infrastructure development, investment and attracting newcomers.

Francophone Communities

Based on our visits, there were some common and interconnected factors between these communities that play a large role in shaping rural Francophone Saskatchewan communities:

- Francophones are a group often in decline due to mixed marriages between Francophones and Anglophones.
- In predominantly Anglophone communities, Francophones speak the language of the majority for work as well as socially, and French is often only spoken at home. There is a new phenomenon that has been identified by researchers that was conducted with high school students on identity. It was discovered that most of the younger generations don't necessarily identify themselves as Francophone or Anglophone, but rather identify as bilingual.
- There are less educational opportunities for Francophone youth than Anglophone youth, therefore Francophones often must leave their communities to pursue education and career opportunities.

COMMON THEMES AND LEARNINGS

There were a number of common themes that recurred through our visits to rural communities across Saskatchewan. Of major prominence was the outmigration of youth, with many relocating to larger urban centres to pursue post-secondary education, employment, or both. Although some of these youth have been choosing to return to their home communities after post-secondary education, there are not enough young families to ensure future population expansion. Those who return with education and skills that match the local economy often receive the benefits of stable employment in their fields, opportunity for upward mobility in their career and lower overall costs of living.

Community leaders and businesses have been focusing on recruiting immigrants to Canada to fill the population and skill gaps in under-populated areas. Both temporary foreign workers and permanent residents of Canada are encouraged to seek employment and settle in rural and small towns in Saskatchewan. Newcomers, however, typically seek employment opportunities in urban centres first or have a desire to move to a larger centre if there are a lack of services and recreation options in smaller communities. Establishing a critical mass of newcomers and services to make settlement an enjoyable process are key to retention of immigrants in smaller communities. This is currently being executed successfully in some communities in Saskatchewan, while others are still working towards attracting and retaining immigrants and their families.

There were also some other issues that were expressed by community members, including:

- Sustaining a large enough tax base to keep up with providing existing services and infrastructure costs
- Planning appropriately for community change
- Changes in school facilities and lack of available education and training opportunities
- Lack of consistent social service access and support
- Challenges providing health care and transportation services
- Few quality rental units available
- Need to expand recreation options
- Some immigrant settlement support is available, but more is needed including language classes and connections to community members and events

Other learnings that occurred through our visits and interviews:

- Communities can be revitalized: small actions and initiatives can have big impacts
- Human capital is important for rural communities: it is critical to have people with the skills, ideas and experience to come up with creative solutions to solve and address local issues
- Communities can create larger impacts if they work with neighbouring communities in their regions
- Newcomers and/or people who have left the community and come back can be crucial assets for communities they often bring different skills, have different perspectives about the community, and can often bring about change

Francophone Communities

There were a number of issues that recurred through our visits to rural Francophone communities across Saskatchewan, which included:

- Lack of employment opportunities in these rural communities is difficult for Francophones, causing them to look outside their community for work
- It is increasingly difficult to attract youth to leadership positions in Francophone communities – they often do not have the same priorities and concerns as senior leaders in these communities do
- Many youth who grew up on family farms do not want to take over the family businesses – and are moving to larger urban areas for jobs. It is also becoming more difficult to attract young entrepreneurs who want to help sustain these small towns – most look to larger, more populated areas to set up businesses.

Other learnings that occurred through our visits and interviews:

- To help preserve the French language in rural communities it would be beneficial if there were more activities that are bilingual
- There is the possibility of creating business opportunities for immigrants in smaller communities with the aid of local mentors already in business themselves
- There are tax rebates for young entrepreneur for the first two years of operation – as an incentive to set up shop in these areas

RURAL SUCCESS STORY

Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan has been the home of Mayor Elvina Rumak for many years. Before taking on the role of Mayor, Elvina worked in the town's lumber mill industry. Wood production is the primary industry in the area and has faced some trials in recent years, with the closure of two major mills during her career. Weyerhaeuser, an internationally recognized symbol of timber production has now invested in the Hudson Bay operation and continues to operate an OSB wood mill. This contributes to sustaining the economy and the prosperity of the region surrounding Hudson Bay.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS MOVING FORWARD

Through our community visits and interviews, we have concluded that the following key considerations be taken into account when moving forward in these rural communities:

- Economic development plans need to tie in human capital strategies at local and regional levels.
- Ways of creating viable education and training opportunities for youth and adults that includes training for older adults with low levels of educational and training, small business training and apprenticeship training.
- An increase in distance education options could help to retain youth in communities after high school graduation.
- Initiatives in place to attract new immigrants to rural and small towns.
- Support existing community plans for growth and development.

Francophone Communities

- Funding is needed to develop the health, tourism and manufacturing sectors to attract new people to these rural communities
- More activities for youth need to be in place
- Greater efforts should be placed on keeping Francophone customs and traditions alive

To read the profiles of the rural Saskatchewan communities we visited, please visit:

www.strengtheningruralcanada.ca/communities/saskatchewan/