



THE MONIESON CENTRE

TRANSFORMING BUSINESS IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

Discovery Workshop Report Northumberland County

May 13, 2009

INTRODUCTION

This report is part of The Monieson Centre's Knowledge Impact in Society (KIS) Project, a three-year endeavour to connect academic knowledge with economic development needs in Eastern Ontario. The report is a summary of information collected at a 3-hour workshop in Cobourg, ON. Fifteen community leaders and business people from the Northumberland County gave feedback on their community's economic development needs and research questions. This information, along with similar information gathered in 14 other communities in Eastern Ontario, will guide the research pursued over the course of the KIS project.

The workshop was hosted by Wendy Curtis, Executive Director, Northumberland Community Futures Development Corporation, and Lynn Phillips, Business Development Manager, Northumberland CFDC. Dr. Yolande Chan, Director, The Monieson Centre, and Jeff Dixon, Project Coordinator, The Monieson Centre, introduced the KIS project and Erik Lockhart, Associate Director, Queen's Executive Decision Centre, facilitated the workshop. The KIS project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. For more information, visit www.easternontarioknowledge.ca.



QUESTION 1

What are the pressing issues, challenges and needs with respect to rural economic development and making Northumberland County a vital community (economic, social, health)?

Top Issues:

1. **Youth retention.** We need to provide more opportunities for youth.
2. **Lack of diversity.** We lack diverse and sustainable business development.
3. **Transportation.** There is a lack of transportation within the county and to points beyond the county.
4. **Farm aid.** We need to help farmers grow, develop, and feel more a part of the community so they can explore sustainable opportunities.
5. **Poverty.** We need to understand answers to who, why, and where regarding poverty.
6. **Aging population.** Our demographics create numerous issues surrounding the aging population (health care and fixed income issues).
7. **Jobs.** We need to discover the opportunities for our workforce.
8. **Business attraction.** We need to understand what attracts new business.
9. **Centralization of services.** We need to figure out the right balance of centralization vs. decentralization.
10. **Training.** We must have accessible and responsive post-secondary resources that best meets industry and community needs.

QUESTION 2

If you had access to our researchers for a year, what would you ask them to study? Given the immensity of the research “wish list” and scarcity of available resources, what are your research priorities?

1. **Growth sectors.** What are the high growth sectors in the county?
2. **Youth retention.** Is there another model of successful youth retention?
3. **Rural employment.** How can we support the development of rural jobs?
4. **Farm sustainability.** What alternatives are researchers looking into for farmers?
5. **Poverty.** Is there any research to help communities deal with hidden poverty?
6. **Transportation.** How do we overcome rural transportation issues and optimize the existing transportation infrastructure?
7. **Aging population.** How are other counties dealing with the aging population and addressing needs such as access to health care, social services, etc.?
8. **Balanced portfolio.** What is the best business mix to ensure that the county has a sustainable economy?
9. **Tourist experience.** What is the tourist experience in the county as it relates to customer service, satisfaction, etc.?

QUESTION 3

What local resources (organizations, reports, past work etc.) might contribute to addressing the issues identified above? What in-kind support can you contribute (office space, personnel, etc.) for research?

1. **Growth sectors.** What are the high growth sectors in the county?
 - Workforce Development Board: Gord Evans
 - Integrated local labour marketing plan: Gord Evans
 - Northumberland Manufacturers' Association: Brad Roberston, Charlene Smith
 - Globe and Mail: Gordan Pitts
 - University of Ontario Institute of Technology: Mike Szarka

2. **Youth retention.** Is there another model of successful youth retention?
 - Campbellford: Andrew Redden
 - Carolyn Campbell Report: Paul Macklin and Doug Galt
 - Kawartha Pine Ridge studies on Centers of Independent Study (CIS) Enrolment issues
 - Northumberland Youth Advisory Council: Jane Simmons

3. **Rural employment.** How can we support the development of rural jobs?
 - Ontario in the Creative Age report: Richard Florida, Martin Prosperity Institute
 - University of Waterloo – Economic Development Association of Canada: Sharon Jones

4. **Farm sustainability.** What alternatives are researchers looking into for farmers?
 - Farmer's Market representative: Bob Churney
 - Junior Farmer's Northumberland: Amy Meeks
 - University of Guelph agriculture research division and Kemptville College
 - Northumberland County Agriculture Action Plan (www.proudlynorthumberland.ca): Trissia Mcall
 - OMAFRA

5. **Poverty.** Is there any research to help communities deal with hidden poverty?
 - Poverty Action Committee, Legal Aid: Lois Cromarty
 - Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge board of health statistics on senior poverty as it relates to "new" energy matters: Lynn Noseworthy
 - Habitat for Humanity Northumberland
 - Poverty Reduction Action Committee: Lois Cromarty, Chair
 - Poverty issues in Northumberland County: Lou Rinaldi, MPP

6. **Transportation.** How do we overcome rural transportation issues and optimize the existing transportation infrastructure?
 - Northumberland Community Care: Trish Baird
 - Ministry of Transportation
 - 407 ETR
 - Transport 2000 model
 - Via Rail

7. **Aging population.** How are other counties dealing with the aging population and addressing needs such as access to health care, social services, etc.?
 - United Way
 - Simcoe and Essex Counties, Economic Development department

8. **Balanced portfolio.** What is the best business mix to ensure that the county is a sustainable economy?
 - Business Retention and Expansion Report: Brenda Otto, Trent Hills

9. **Tourist experience.** What is the tourist experience in the county as it relates to customer service, satisfaction, etc.?
 - Premier Ranked Tourism Destination Report Team (Northumberland Tourism)
 - Ministry of Tourism
 - Chambers of Commerce administrators
 - Northumberland County Tourism Director: Eileen Lum

QUESTION 4

If this project is to be successful, what are the things that you would see in place in the next two years? What must happen in order to ensure that the KIS project makes a positive impact on your community?

The following suggestions fit within the scope of the KIS project and may be completed if identified as a priority across Eastern Ontario:

- Helping municipalities work together towards an implementation plan for county-wide transportation
- Creating a website or blog for major players in communities to gather and exchange information regarding community issues
- Developing models for addressing issues that are accessible to the community organizations
- Performing user-friendly summary of literature searches on 2-3 top research questions provided to Northumberland community leaders
- Generating ideas that can be implemented in the foreseeable future under the current economic circumstances
- Learning how to create a green industry friendly community (a tool-kit guide)
- Working with businesses to improve recommended areas of service
- Identifying sustainable and diverse sectors that Northumberland can build upon and can be used for developing strategic plans for the county and lower tier municipalities
- Creating a list of graduate students interested in working doing research in rural communities

The following are beyond the scope of the KIS project, but may be completed if the KIS project is expanded through additional funding:

- Getting information regarding how many youth are staying in the area
- Providing statistics on county wide poverty by 2011
- Providing statistics on agriculture production for the region
- Identifying benchmarks on population increases, tax collection increases, and infrastructure growth
- Performing county wide asset mapping
 - *KIS already has a Knowledge Synthesis on asset mapping on www.easternontarioknowledge.ca*

The following are beyond the scope of the KIS project, but may be completed if an external partner provides leadership:

- Presenting results to a large, broad, cross-section of the community to inspire grass roots momentum which can drive more central action

The following are beyond the scope of the KIS project, but may find helpful strategies and ideas through the KIS project's information resources:

- Developing a transportation plan that is ready for implementation
- Creating a mechanism for communication between the general public agriculture-business owners and U of G research teams to learn upcoming agriculture food trends
- Creating partnerships between youth and small businesses to encourage youth to live and work in our communities
- Promote county wide tourist co-operation in such areas as advertising in two years
- Develop longer term directional ideas

- Create a more responsive post-secondary education sector
- Get the community members working in collaboration

Appendix A – Rough Ideas for Question 1

What are the pressing issues, challenges and needs with respect to rural economic development and making the Northumberland region a vital community (economic, social, health)?

Voting Results

Multiple Selection (maximum choices = 5) (Allow bypass)

Number of ballot items: 18

Total number of voters (N): 16

| Votes | Rank | Issue | Comments |
|-------|------|---------------------------------|--|
| 8 | 1 | Youth retention | Opportunities for youth – Youth leaving our communities |
| 8 | 1 | Business development | Need more diversity in business development |
| 7 | 3 | Transportation | Lack of transportation within the county and points beyond the county |
| 7 | 3 | Agricultural diversity | Need to help farmers grow, develop, and feel more a part of the community |
| 5 | 5 | Poverty | Need to understand answers to who, why, and where regarding poverty |
| 5 | 5 | Demographics | Our demographics create numerous issues surrounding the aging population (health care and fixed income issues). |
| 5 | 5 | Employment | We need to discover the opportunities for our workforce |
| 5 | 5 | Business Attraction | There is a lack of understanding about business attraction requirements |
| 4 | 9 | Centralization | Must figure out the right balance to serve the community |
| 4 | 9 | Educational resources | There is no standard for resources that best meet the needs of industry and local requirements |
| 3 | 11 | Urbanization | Lack of young families moving to the community |
| 3 | 11 | Social services | Accessibility to social services |
| 3 | 11 | Infrastructure | Commercial and municipal infrastructure |
| 3 | 11 | Technology | Impact of technology on smaller and owner operated businesses |
| 3 | 11 | Succession planning | The aging workforce and lost expertise – lots of older people are leaving the community |
| 3 | 11 | Model for Municipal governments | Determining the right model for governments and getting help they actually need in terms of new ideas and innovation |
| 2 | 17 | Business Attraction | There seems to be more focus on attracting larger companies rather than focusing on small and medium-sized ones |
| 2 | 17 | Anti-development segment | Some in the community want us to stay how we are |

Appendix B – Rough Ideas for Question 2

Question 2: If you had access to our researchers for a year, what would you ask them to study? Given the immensity of the research “wish list” and scarcity of available resources, what are your research priorities?¹

Note: prior to voting, the group brainstormed questions. Below is the result of selecting top questions

Voting Results

Multiple Selection (maximum choices = 7) (Allow bypass)

Number of ballot items: 22

Total number of voters (N): 15

| Votes | Rank | Question |
|-------|------|---|
| 12 | 1 | What are the high growth sectors in the county? What can the community do to attract knowledge based industry |
| 11 | 2 | Is there another model of successful youth retention? If a youth chooses to stay in a rural area, what has kept them there? What desire is there for young people to return to the community? What aspect other than jobs attracts youth and middle aged people to rural areas? How can you attract a young ethnic population into an area with a long history of Eastern European descent? |
| 11 | 2 | How can we support the development of rural jobs (agriculture-based and otherwise)? What types of jobs are most easily retained in rural areas? |
| 10 | 4 | What alternatives are researchers looking into for farmers (new crops/technologies, new uses for farm resources)? What alternative land uses to agriculture are there? |
| 7 | 5 | Is there any research to help communities deal with hidden poverty issues? |
| 6 | 6 | How do we overcome rural transportation issues? How do we optimize existing transportation infrastructure? |
| 5 | 7 | How are other counties dealing with the aging population? How can we service the needs of the aging population? How do demographic changes impact on economic development planning? |
| 5 | 7 | Where is the older population spending their money and on what? |
| 5 | 7 | What is the best business mix to ensure Northumberland County is a sustainable economy |
| 4 | 10 | What is the tourist experience in the county as it relates to customer service and satisfaction? |
| 4 | 10 | How can we assist the many business chambers of commerce? Are there more efficient models? Best practices? |
| 3 | 12 | What is the best economic development model to assist 7 communities |
| 3 | 12 | How efficient are municipalities at implementing initiatives and taking advantage of their resources? Are our communities successful in implementation? Do we evaluate our effectiveness? Are our resources being used efficiently? |
| 3 | 12 | How do we attract health care professionals? How can accessibility to healthcare be improved? |

| | | |
|----------|-----------|---|
| 2 | 15 | How can we strengthen social services? |
| 2 | 15 | How does government-mandated green or growth space impact our community? |
| 2 | 15 | What is the financial return available to investors in industrial/commercial development? |
| 2 | 15 | How do we engage the business community on how important technology is? |
| 2 | 15 | How do you strike a balance for the centralization of services when population density is focused in the South but areas in the North pay equal or greater taxes? |
| 1 | 20 | Is there a best practice model for technology training in communities where user levels range from “first time user” to intermediate? |
| 1 | 20 | Is there a best practices model for re-building a community after it has lost its hospital and school and there is no prospect of re-attracting and keeping them sustainable within 20 years? |

Appendix C – Session Overview

The **purpose** of the workshop was to engage community leaders and academics to collaborate in order to:

- Identify Eastern Ontario knowledge needs and resources
- Prioritize research needs and opportunities
- Share experience and knowledge
- Build lasting relationships and communication channels
- Serve Eastern Ontario

Discovery workshop groups **explore four topics**:

1. Burning issues. What are the challenges and needs with respect to rural economic development and making Northumberland County a vital community (economic, social, health)?
2. Research wish list. If you had access to researchers for a year, what would you ask them to study? Given the immensity of the research “wish list” and scarcity of available resources, what are your research priorities?
3. Local capacity. What are the local resources (organizations, capabilities, past work etc.) that might contribute to addressing the issues identified above?
4. Defining success. If this project is to be successful, what are the things that you would see in place in the next two years? What must happen in order to ensure that the KIS project makes a positive impact on Northumberland County?

Appendix D – Methodology

Information Gathering and Community Consultation process

The community consultation process included an information gathering component composed of a series of interactive workshops using facilitators from the Queen's Executive Decision Centre. The purpose of this component was to get input from a broad cross section of community stakeholders.

The consultation was conducted using a group decision support system also known as an electronic meeting system (EMS), an innovative facilitation process developed from research at the Queen's School of Business. The Queen's EMS, called "the Decision Centre", combines expert facilitation with a state-of-the-art group decision support system to enable groups to rapidly accelerate idea generation and consensus building. This facility consists of a network of laptops accessing software designed to support idea generation, idea consolidation, idea evaluation and planning. The tool supports, but does not replace, verbal interaction; typically 25% of interaction takes place on the computers. Feedback from groups who have used the Executive Decision Centre process includes: meeting times can be cut in half; participation goes way up; better idea generation and alternative evaluation; a more structured process; and automatic documentation of deliberations.

Over 500 organizations around North America use the Centre for meetings such as: strategic planning, visioning, annual planning, focus groups, team building, budgeting, program review, project planning, risk assessment, job profiling, 360 degree feedback, alternative evaluation, new product development and a variety of other meeting types.

In the consultations, participants were asked, for example, "What are your region's burning issues with respect to economic development". Participants typed in ideas on the laptops all of which appeared on a public screen at the front of the room. These ideas were then discussed and categorized into common themes. The group was then asked "if we could only address five of these in the next year, which ones are most critical?" Individuals selected his/her top 5 and the overall results were then displayed to the group and further discussed.