



THE MONIESON CENTRE

CREATING VALUE THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

Discovery Workshop Report Valley Heartland January 20, 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 Smith Falls, ON. Twelve community leaders and business people from the Grenville region 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 John Doherty, Executive Director Valley Heartland Community Futures Development Corporation. Dr. Yolande Chan, Director, The Monieson Centre, introduced the KIS project and Erik Lockhart, Associate Director, Queen's Executive Decision Centre, facilitated the workshop. Special thanks belong to Jeff Dixon for coordination of 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 challenges and needs with respect to rural economic development and making Smiths Falls a vital community?

Top Issues:

1. **Leakage of young talent.** We lose many of our young people, who represent our workers of tomorrow and are a significant talent pool.
2. **Public relations problem.** We must build pride in our community and overcome the poor outside public perception of our region.
3. **Investment and entrepreneurship.** We must communicate that we are open for business. We must attract private sector investment and create an entrepreneurial climate that tells the world we are ready to assist in any way to help them conduct business in our town.
4. **Transportation.** We need efficient transportation links with nearby Ottawa, Kingston, and Brockville as well as within and between smaller communities.
5. **Creative economic planning and thinking.** Our thinking needs to move outside the conventional economic box. We need to change directions in terms of economic development targets and sectors, for example, cultural industries.
6. **Strategy development.** We have no long-term, sustainable economic development plan and need to start with a strategic plan that has a commitment to accountability and measurable action plans.
7. **Economic downturn.** Smiths Falls has suffered a long-term decline in its industrial base, compounded by the current, unprecedented economic downturn which has hit us hard.
8. **Limited labor pool.** We need the capacity to identify our current workforce skills, gaps and opportunities to upgrade skills.
9. **Downtown improvement.** We have a struggling downtown core that is not as well developed as other local communities.

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. **Success stories in similar sized communities.** If we were to switch our emphasis from major manufacturing employers to a broader, more diversified economy, what businesses would be most likely to succeed in a small town environment?
2. **New directions in economic development.** Can Smiths Falls benefit from expanding into the IT sector or the arts and culture industry?
3. **Tourism.** What are the real economic benefits of tourism and how do we quantify them? What are the benefits of the recent designation of the Rideau Canal as a UNESCO World Heritage site and how do we maximize our return on the Rideau Canal?
4. **What attracts people to rural communities?** We need research into what we have now that is attracting and keeping families here. What specific needs do health care professionals have?
5. **Planning implementation.** How do we best get the community together, build momentum and make things happen?
6. **Regional collaboration.** Is there some value in working more regionally towards economic development? For example, should Smiths Falls look at working with nearby communities towards regional economic development, rather than more narrowly on economic development in Smiths Falls exclusively?
7. **Economic trends.** What trends (changes, needs, patterns), both nationally and internationally, can we exploit?
8. **Marketing and promotion best practices.** What is the best of the best? What initiatives would our community support and encourage that would improve our public image both within and outside our boundaries?

QUESTION 3

What local resources (organizations, reports, past work etc.) might contribute to addressing the issues identified above?

1. Success stories in similar sized communities ...If we are switching our emphasis from major manufacturing employers to a broader, more diversified economy, what businesses would be most likely to succeed in a small town environment

- Smiths Falls Town Hall staff has copies of all previous studies. {#65}
- Smiths Falls Downtown Business Association office, etc {#68}

2. New directions in ED.

• How can SF benefit from the expanding information society?

• New Technology:

- Where is it?
- Who's doing it?
- How do we talk to them?

• Cultural Community Planning information: sample communities, implementation, studies (artists, music, theatre etc)

- Valerie Hudson, Smiths Falls Downtown Business Association, Office {#50}
- Hershey Study {#58}
- Rideau Regional Study {#61}
- Smiths Falls Community development Officer - Chuck Hudson {#62}

3. Tourism:

• What is the real economic benefits

• How do we quantify them?

• What have been the benefits of the recent designation of the Rideau Canal as a World Heritage site?

• How do we maximize our return on the Rideau Canal

- Street smart report - Downtown Revitalization
- Smiths Falls Waterfront revitalization
- Best practices (Guelph / Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMFRA)) First impressions {#40}
- Rideau canal museum study on "west mill and water treatment plant" cultural centre {#41}
- Contact Rideau Heritage Route Tourism Association {#45}
- Premier Ranked workshop - Jonathan Harris Ministry of Tourism - Chuck Hudson {#49}
- Irv Mazurkiewicz - Parks Canada contact {#51}
- Smiths Falls First Impression Study with OMAFRA {#52}
- Robert Peters {#54}
- REAL Environmental Action; Peter Au; Barb Hicks, Valerie Hudson {#56}

4. What attracts people to rural community?

- **Research into what we have now that is attracting families here**
- **How do we encourage doctors to come and stay in SF**

- On doctors – David Donovan, Queen’s Policy Studies, is currently doing some consulting for the Merrickville & Smiths Falls District Community Health Centres around the issue of attracting health care professionals to the local area. The research is in its early phases, but I could be a contact going forward {#46}
- Hospital Board may be able to communicate what they have found when recruiting medical professionals (Dr Peter Roney chair board)
- Local real estate brokers may provide input on why people are moving into town {#47}
- All Real Estate Agents - Tim Lee {#60}
- There might be a possible collaboration re: rural development with the Centre for the Study of Democracy @ Queen's - the Chair, Tom Axworthy has written on the issue (local food, etc...) Dave Donovan will get in touch with him {#66}

5. Implementation. How do we best get the community together, build momentum and make things happen?

- Community Development in rural communities is different; Peter Au, {#63}

6. Is there some value in working more regionally towards economic development? For example, should Smiths Falls look at working with nearby communities towards regional economic development, rather than more narrowly on economic development in Smiths Falls exclusively?

- Valley Heartland CFDC - John Doherty
- Eastern Ontario CFDC Network - John Doherty {#44}
- Montague Township has an Economic Development Board, perhaps other local municipalities also have similar Boards which could be consulted {#55}

7. What trends/changes/needs/services both Nationally and internationally can SF cash in on?

8. Marketing and Promotion Best Practices.

- **What is the best of the best?**
- **What initiatives would our community support and encourage that would improve our public image both within and outside our boundaries?**
- Branding exercise - Chuck Hudson, Carol Miller at Heritage House, Chamber of Commerce, Brian Ritchie, Bruce Moore (OMAFRA) {#67}

9. Government programming specifically tied to economic development in rural and small communities.

- **What's out there?**
- **What's the easiest way to get it?**
- **What tax incentives or other "carrots" could be used by small towns to attract private sector business development?**

- The Canadian Real Estate Association has been lobbying for years for Capital Gain Tax Rollovers for the sale and purchase of commercial properties. They have accumulated substantial research data on this project. (Contact Tim Lee, realtor in Smiths Falls) {#57}

10. How do we quantify the benefits of a transit system to major centres as well as a regional transit system?

- Busing system for Lanark county - Chris Cummings (Smiths Falls Councillor)
- Regional transit system (mayor of Smiths Falls) {#42}
- Chris Cummings 613-284-7729 {#43}
- Some work has been done in small communities east of Ottawa (Casselman, Alexandria) in conjunction with VIA Rail - Chris Cummings {#53}
- Smiths Falls Mayor Staples has attended regional meetings on this issue {#59}

11. Demographic study --

- **Who do we have?**
- **Where are they headed?**
- **What are our current demographics?**
- **What is our market base - not just in Smiths Falls but in surrounding townships?**
- Residential real estate statistics (both current and historical) may be available to not-for-profits from the local Real Estate Boards - (contact Tim Lee) {#48}

12. Exactly what is the impact on jobs lost to actual residents of our community?

- Carleton University Study in progress "effects of job loss on community at large"
- Ottawa U study
- Valerie / Rob Peters {#64}

QUESTION 4

If this project is to be successful, what are the things that you would see in place in the next two years?

Areas where KIS can contribute:

1. Better cooperation in the implementation of projects in Smiths Falls between all 3 levels of government.
 - KIS can provide strategies that other similar communities are using to cooperate more effectively.
2. Because there are so many completed studies, supply an analysis and a number of ways to initiate practical solutions. Provide at least 1 action/deliverable/idea of this group that is adopted and acted upon. Identify the biggest collective priority and implement with success.
 - KIS can provide information on how communities have successfully implemented economic development plans.
3. A policy in place which gives our community an "edge" in attracting new citizens to our community.
 - KIS can provide research on in-migration attraction.
4. Provide information/direction that helps community decision makers, and political and business leaders move in directions and make decisions not previously considered.
5. A source of accurate, current and relevant information that would help us to make knowledge-based decisions with confidence and efficiency.
6. Provide access to a virtual point/portal where the town and this board can find information about best practices/lessons learned.
 - KIS already has this at easternontarioknowledge.ca
7. Provide a clear set of best practices across various categories relating to economic development, such as retaining skilled workers, tax incentives that work, etc., that communities could use to implement changes in their own communities.
 - This information is being developed in our Knowledge Syntheses
8. Materials and resources for cultural planning. Different facets of cultural activity. Information on communities who have had successes.
 - We have partnered with Dr. Betsy Donald to develop a blog that will address issues of the cultural economy at www.easternontarioknowledge.ca.

Deliverables KIS Can't Achieve:

1. Increase our tax base by 50%.

Appendix A – Rough Ideas for Question 1

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

Voting Results

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

Number of ballot items: 16

Total number of voters (N): 13 teams at the computers

Votes	Rank	Issue	Findings
8	1	Leakage of young talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of young people (workers of tomorrow) and therefore talent pool
8	1	Public relations program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must build pride in community Poor outside public perception
8	1	Investment and entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need private sector investment Creation of entrepreneurial climate that tells the world we are ready to assist in any way to help conduct, pursue business in our town
7	4	Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linkages to major centres (Ottawa, Kingston, Brockville) as well as to smaller communities
7	4	Creative economic planning and thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rethink business development targets Change direction for business development (i.e., cultural industries)
6	6	Strategy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-term sustainable economic development Lack strategic plan that has commitment to accountability Require measurable action plan
4	7	Economic downturn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of employment Long-term decline in industrial base is compounded by current economic downturn
3	8	Limited labour pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited labour pool Limited capacity to upgrade skills Must identify current workforce and how they can be re-skilled
3	8	Downtown improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Struggling downtown core
2	10	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior/retirement opportunity/life style
2	10	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future impact of loss of certain sources of municipal revenue
1	12	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culture of apathy, negativity and perceived lack of openness and transparency on the part of Municipal staff and elected officials
1	12	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we think incentives are the answer to business retention? What are the incentives available to us?
0	15	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare for infrastructure program (Federal budget readiness)
0	15	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unbalanced distribution of socio-economic groups (compared to other local communities). I.e., social services recipients

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 = 6) (Allow bypass)

Number of ballot items: 16

Total number of voters (N): 12

Votes	Rank	Issue	Findings
12	1	Success stories in similar sized communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we were to switch our emphasis from major manufacturing employers to a broader, more diversified economy, what businesses would be most likely to succeed in a small town environment? • Public sector jobs are often more stable over the long term than private sector jobs that are subject to economic downturns/cycles (assumption) - have there been any successes on the part of rural communities to attract new public sector jobs?
9	2	New directions in economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can Smith Falls (SF) benefit from the expanding info society? • Where is it, who's doing it and how do we talk to them? • Cultural Community Planning information: sample communities, implementation, studies (artists, music, theatre etc)
7	3	Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the real economic benefits? • How do we quantify? • What have been the benefits of the recent designation of the Rideau Canal as a World Heritage site? • How do we maximize our return on the Rideau Canal - one of our strongest community-owned assets? • How can we sell Smiths Falls and the region as the new go-to eco-tourism destination point in the world? • What other United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) heritage site has the "clean" environment we have right here in our back yard?
7	3	What attracts people to rural communities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research into what we have now that is attracting families here with a directive to keep doing it / expand on it • How do we encourage doctors to come and stay in SF? • How do property values in our community compare to those in the city. Does the difference encourage people to relocate?
7	3	Planning implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we best get the community together, build momentum and make things happen?
6	6	Regional collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there some value in working more regionally towards economic development? • For example, should Smiths Falls look at working with nearby communities towards regional economic development, rather than more narrowly on economic development in Smiths Falls exclusively?

5	7	Economic downturn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What trends/changes/needs/services both nationally and internationally can SF cash in on?
5	7	Marketing and promotion best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What initiatives would our community support and encourage that would improve our public image both within and outside our boundaries?
4	9	Government programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government programming specifically tied to economic development in rural and small communities • What's out there, what's the easiest way to get it? • What tax incentives or other "carrots" could be used by small towns to attract private sector business development?
3	10	Transit System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we quantify the benefits of a transit system to major centres as well as a regional transit system
2	11	Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do we have, where are they headed? • What are our current demographics? • What is our market base - not just in Smiths Falls but in surrounding townships?
2	11	Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exactly what is the impact on jobs lost to actual residents of our community?
0	15	Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How acute is the requirement to re-skill in our community?
0	16	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we create a long-term strategic alliance with Queen's so that its graduates feel that they can do business in our Town?
0	15	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we convince the Ministry of Education that the trades need to be part of the high school curriculum again?

Note: prior to voting, the group brainstormed ideas and then merged the similar items. Below in non-bold are the merged items. These items are ordered as they were originally brainstormed (i.e. not as they were ranked by the group). Items that did not have any ideas merged are not included.

7. what attracts people to rural community ...- research into what we have now that is attracting families here - keep doing it / expand on it ...how do we encourage doctors to come and stay in SF ...how do property values in our community compare to those in the city. Does the difference encourage people to relocate?

Are there comparative advantages available in Smiths Falls that are not being fully utilized?

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 Smiths Falls 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 Smiths Falls?

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.