NRE²

Initiative on the New Economy

Communication Tools and Resources in Rural Canada:
A Report for Ferintosh, Alberta

Diane Martz
St. Peter's College
Muenster, Saskatchewan

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Highlights

This report provides a comparison of the presence of various communication tools and resources in Ferintosh, Alberta with those present in the other research sites of the New Rural Economy Project across Canada.

Ferintosh has limited Internet service provision, in comparison to the other Canadian sites, with only one Internet service provider. It is anticipated that the community will receive high speed in 2004.

There is no public Internet access available to Ferintosh citizens. There were supposed to be two or three terminals set up in the recreation centre but the plan fell through.

Ferintosh does not have a local newspaper but citizens do have access to four regional newspapers and two provincial, the Edmonton Journal and the Edmonton Sun.

Ferintosh citizens have access to one local newspaper distributed by the Playground Committee. The school in New Norway also has a monthly newsletter available to Ferintosh residents.

Ferintosh has 6 prominent bulletin boards – average for the sites across Canada. Community events and commercial advertisements comprise the majority of postings.

Ferintosh has access to three informal gathering places, two outdoor gathering place, two halls for public meetings, and two halls for social events. Annual events include: a church supper, trade fair, skidoo rally, a cancer fundraiser tea, and a flower show in August.

Ferintosh has limited communication tools and resources available to its citizens, organizations, local government, and businesses in comparison to other communities located across Canada. The exception is that Ferintosh does have ample meeting spaces although the community is feeling the pressure of keeping their community hall open.

Initiative on the New Economy- About the Project

The **Initiative on the New Economy** (INE) project of the Canadian Rural and Revitalization Foundation (CRRF) works closely with residents, service providers, voluntary organizations, business organizations, and decision makers to identify factors that contribute to building capacity in rural and small town places across Canada.

Capacity is the ability of people residing in a place to mobilize their assets and resources to cope with stress and transition, or to capitalize on opportunities. Such capacity is built from trust and relationships grounded in institutions, organizations, businesses, and services alike. The **Initiative on the New Economy** (INE) project is built on four key themes to explore capacity including *local governance, communications, services, and the environment*. This report explores the relationship between communications and capacity.

The Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF) has been conducting research in 32 rural and small town sites from across Canada since 1997. These sites form a type of "rural observatory" in which aspects of the **Initiative on the New Economy** (INE) project may be examined. The sites participating in this project reflect the diversity of the Canadian landscape, and include forestry and mining towns, farming communities, and tourism towns. Furthermore, some of these places are located adjacent to metropolitan areas, while others are more isolated.

A map showing the location of the communities is attached to the end of this report. Five dimensions relevant for rural communities were used in selecting the sites:

- the extent of exposure to the global economy;
- the relative stability of the local economy;
- the adjacency to large metropolitan centres;
- the level of social and institutional infrastructure (high or low capabilities);and
- the extent to which the site is lagging or leading on a number of socio-economic variables (including incomes and employment).

About the Communications Inventory

In the summer of 2003, researchers visited 22 sites across Canada to collect information on the various communication resources, tools and technologies present in each community (a communication inventory).

This extensive exercise has resulted in an inventory of the various communication resources, tools, and technologies in each community, as well as information about the community's identity and images used to represent itself. This inventory will be repeated again in the summer of 2005 to determine if there have been changes in the availability of these resources.

Data were collected of the following items:

- Cable television and community programming
- Direct broadcast satellite
- the 22 communities across Canada;
- the 8 communities in Western Canada;
- the 9 communities which have leading economic outcomes;
- the 13 communities which have lagging economic outcomes;
- the 15 communities which have high levels

of capacity for taking action;
- the 7 communities which have low levels of capacity for taking action.
- Internet service provision and access
- Public Internet access (CAP sites) and usage
- Community websites
- Local, regional, provincial and national newspapers
- Community newsletters
- Community radio
- Community bulletin boards
- Interpersonal communication (gathering places, events, meetings)
- Community identifiers (symbols, slogans)

In this report we provide a comparison of the presence of various communication tools and resources in Ferintosh, Alberta with those present in the other research sites across Canada. Specifically, each table includes a comparison with:

In terms of the rural observatory and for the purposes of comparison to other communities in it, Ferintosh has relatively lagging economic outcomes (such as lower incomes and lower levels of employment) and relatively low capabilities for taking action.

Availability

Copies of all site reports on the communications inventory were distributed to participating sites. Additionally, copies have been posted on the INE website (http://nre.concordia.ca) and on the Communications Theme Group website (http://www.mta.ca/rstp/nre.html).

Copies of various presentations and working papers resulting from the information collected in the communication inventory are also available on these websites.

For further information about this report or other information about the communications inventory please contact David Bruce, Communications Theme Leader, or one of our theme team members:

David Bruce
Director, Rural and Small Town Programme, Adjunct Professor, Department of Geography
Mount Allison University
315 Avard-Dixon Building, 144 Main St
Sackville NB Canada E4L 1A7
(506) 364-2395
dwbruce@mta.ca

For further information about other INE reports, please contact:

Bill Reimer
Initiative on the New Economy
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
1455 boul. de Maisonneuve O.
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec H3G 1M8
(514) 848-2424
reimer@vax2.concordia.ca
http://nre.concordia.ca

Booklet Contributors: David Bruce, Lindsay Lyghtle, Ivan Emke and Carla Stevens

Communication Theme Group Contacts

David Bruce
Rural and Small Town Programme
Mount Allison University
144 Main St.
Sackville, NB E4L 1A7
Ph: 506-364-2395
Fx: 506-364-2601
Email: dwbruce@mta.ca

Ivan Emke
Social/Cultural Studies
Sir Wilfred Grenfell College
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Corner Brook, NF A2H 6P9
Ph: 709-637-6200, ext. 6322
Fx: 709-639-8125
Email: iemke@swgc.mun.ca

Doug Ramsey
Department of Rural Development
Brandon University
270 18th Street
Brandon, MB R7A 6A9
Ph: 204-571-8514
Fx: 204-725-0364
Email: ramsey@brandonu.ca

Derek Wilkinson
Department of Sociology
Laurentian University
935 Ramsey Lake Rd.
Sudbury, ON P3E 2C6
Ph: 705-675-1151, ext. 4228
Fx: 705-675-4873
Email: dwilkinson@nickel.laurentian.ca

Anna Woodrow
Department of Sociology and
Anthropology
Concordia University
1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd. West
Room MI-02
Montreal, QC H3G 1M8
Ph: 514-848-2171
Fx: 514-848-2322
Email: woodrow@vax2.concordia.ca

Site Description – Ferintosh, AB

Located 125 kilometres Southeast of Edmonton and 20 minutes Southwest of Camrose, the community of Ferintosh is home to 150 residents. The population consists mainly of retirees, but the number of younger households is growing. Strong regional economic growth is enabling people to commute and enjoy the amenities of Ferintosh as home.

Ferintosh experienced many years ago what some places are coping with today. In 1975, the community lost its school and in 1976, two of the three main elevators closed. The third was removed in 1996. These losses have reinforced the trend to shop in Camrose. Several effective volunteer associations help to keep the community together.

Currently, two public utility co-operatives operate from Ferintosh and a fibre optics terminal has positioned the village well for further development. The water supply, sewer system and regional landfill are up to date and the village maintains a financial reserve under prudent management.

Nestled among central Alberta's forested hills on the shores of Little Beaver Lake, Ferintosh has the potential for recreation and leisure activities. Two bed and breakfast businesses have opened and the hotel has been renovated. Citizens have been polled on their priorities for development. A feeling of hope and pride in the lifestyle of Ferintosh has replaced the devitalisation of previous years.

The Importance of Communication in Rural Communities

Communication is an important element when we think about a community's development trajectory. It is not "just" talk; rather, effective communication can mobilize people to take action. For example, many rural communities have difficulty in getting people involved in local politics, in serving on councils, in taking an active role in the public operation of their region. However, by using the right methods of communication delivering an effective message, residents develop into citizens as they become aware of local issues and learn of opportunities for participation.

Communication Metaphors

But what is communication? There are some helpful metaphors we can use to help us understand the role of communication. We can think of communication as the **glue** that holds a community together. Communication within a community can bind the people to each other. A community can "talk to itself", although this does not mean that it will find consensus on all issues. However, in order to facilitate this important process, a community needs to have access to the right mix of communication tools this will allow for further interaction.

We can also think of communication as **oil** that acts as a lubricant for developing community togetherness, or social cohesion. Just as patterns of trust and cooperation are important for economic trade, patterns of communication help to lubricate social relations.

Communication can also be thought of as a **web** - the lines of influence and interaction. The purpose of communication is to build and maintain the connections of trust necessary to link members of the community. The web is the relationships that exist in the community, and the web facilitates an exchange of information. If there is no web, there can be no exchange. The web also includes the types of communication tools available in the community influencing the communications content. For example, a community television program will create a different kind of web than a school newsletter or a community website on the Internet or a bulletin board at the local post office. But they are all webs.

Communication in Action

There are many ways to see communication in action. The transfer of messages or programs (the content) through the use of some type of communication medium is important. This is dependent upon the type of medium used (the local newspaper versus a website), who is sending the message, to whom, and so on. Think about how a municipal council communicates with residents.

Seeing communication as "ritual" suggests that communication is about the maintenance of a community over time. Through communication, communities are created, maintained, and transformed. Communication is a way of reminding us of who we are, of "where is here," of working out problems, of celebrating identity. Think about the ritual of reading your local newspaper every week, and how that reaffirms the images you have of your community.

The audience for communication may be

internal or external. This relates to the intended receivers of the messages and information. Sometimes we are communicating with people in our own community, and sometimes we are communicating with people in other places. The choice of communication technologies may be different for each case, and there may be different intentions (perhaps the local paper for reaching local people, and a website for reaching potential external investors).

Communication can also be inclusive or exclusive. This refers primarily to **who** participates in the communication process and the development of the content. Many forms of mass communication tend to be exclusive, as there are significant barriers to participation in the dialogue. A casual conversation at the doughnut shop, on the other hand, can be much more inclusive.

There are different levels of interaction in communication as well. At one extreme, we see many examples of one-way communication - radio, television, and the newspaper. Interactive communication, such as that at a public meeting, builds into the process a requirement for many to offer their interpretations and arguments.

The number of participants can also vary. Communication can be one-to-one (a chat at the water cooler), one-to-many (a municipal politician speaking to a Rotary luncheon), many-to-one (watching television at home) or many-to-many (a healthy town meeting, whether it is in person or through a webcast, where all participants shift between sender and receiver roles).

Communication Tools and Resources Analysis

Internet Service

One communication tool available to communities is the Internet, which can be used for a variety of communication purposes and functions, such as e-mail communication with others outside the community, posting community or business information on websites aimed at an external audience (such as information about property for sale, festivals, etc.), or posting information for use within the community (such as copies of council minutes and agenda, community events schedules, etc.) The speed of the Internet connection available in a community can affect the kinds of information that can be posted, and transactions that can occur. In addition, having a variety of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) - the companies who sell Internet service - to choose from can help to keep the cost of access to a minimum.

Residents, businesses, and institutions in most communities have a choice of at least two ISPs when considering Internet connection. Communities with leading economic outcomes and those with high capabilities have more choice (Table 1).

Table 1: Internet Service Provision in Communities

	Canada					Western Sites	Ferintosh
	Total	Leading Sites	Lagging Sites	High Capability Sites	Low Capability Sites		
Avg # ISP's per site	2	3	2	3	1	2	1
% with Broadband	45	56	38	47	43	63	No
% with DSL	36	44	31	27	57	50	No
% with Cable	32	56	23	47	14	38	No
% with Modem	100	100	100	100	100	100	Yes
% With Part of Community Excluded from Highest Speed	32	33	31	33	29	25	No

Source: NRE Communications Inventory, Summer 2003. N=22 sites.

Broadband, defined as high-capacity Internet service (capable of transferring large amounts of data including audio and video), is available to 10 of the communities (45%). Almost two-thirds of the Western communities have broadband access, and more of the leading and high capability

communities have broadband access. This suggests that communities which could benefit from high-speed access to improve their economic situation and to take advantage of education and training opportunities over the Internet (lagging and low capacity sites), currently do not have access, placing them at a disadvantage. About one-third of the communities rely on digital switching of lines (DSL) or cable modem service. About one-third of the communities have some portion of their community excluded from access to the highest available speed of Internet service.

Ferintosh has limited Internet service provision, in comparison to the other Canadian sites, with only one Internet service provider. It is anticipated that the community will receive high speed in 2004.

Public Internet Access

Several years ago the federal government launched the Community Access Program (CAP) to provide funding assistance to help most rural communities develop some form of public Internet access. Over time, provinces and territories became funding and delivery partners. Most CAP sites have been located in libraries or schools, and there is a wide variety of programs, services, hours of availability, and fee structures for use, from community to community.

Most communities (82%) have a least one CAP site location, and several have more than one location in the community. However, relatively few (only 43%) of the communities with low capabilities have a CAP site within their community (Table 2). This suggests that perhaps the community was unable to get organized to apply for funding to establish a local CAP site, or that their proposal(s) were not strong enough to warrant funding. This lack of access creates a disadvantage for residents and others in the community who are unable to afford access at home, or who do not have access through school or work. It limits their choice of communication tools.

On average, most CAP sites have four computers available for public use. But CAP sites in high capability communities have an average of five computers while CAP sites in low capability communities have an average of only three computers. Another measure of access is "persons per public computer". There is some variation across different types of communities. CAP sites in both lagging and low capability communities have a smaller number of persons per public computer, suggesting that they would be able to provide greater frequency of access for interested citizens. However, when we look at average number of users per week, we see that the greatest demands on CAP site usage are found in communities with leading economic outcomes and those with higher capabilities. This suggests that more needs to be done in other communities to attract potential learners and users to make use of the communication resources offered by the CAP site.

CAP sites in Western Canadian communities have a lower number of computers than the national average, a lower persons per public computer ratio, and higher number of average users

per week in the summer, but lower number of average users per week in winter months.

Table 2: Public Internet Access

	Canada					Western Sites	Ferintosh
	Total	Leading Sites	Lagging Sites	High Capability Sites	Low Capability Sites		
% with Public Access	82	78	85	100	43	75	No
Avg # of Public Computers in Site	4	4	4	5	3	3	n/a
Avg # Persons per Public Computer	435	604	317	444	391	411	n/a
Avg # Users per Week, Summer	53	71	43	63	17	58	n/a
Avg # Users per Week, Winter	43	40	44	50	13	40	n/a

Source: NRE Communications Inventory, Summer 2003. N=22 sites.

There is no public Internet access available to Ferintosh citizens. There were supposed to be two or three terminals set up in the recreation centre but the plan fell through.

Newspapers

The presence of a local newspaper (usually a weekly publication) is an important communication tool in a small community. In most cases, the entire community receives the paper in one way or another, and it therefore becomes an important tool for sharing local news, social events, results of sports and school activities, and advertising for local businesses. When a local weekly paper does not exist, communities may be dependent on other weekly newspapers as a communication tool - a column or a page about the community may appear in a neighbouring community's newspaper, for example. Without a local news avenue, it is rare that sufficient local news and information is carried in larger regional and provincial papers.

Only 27% of the communities have a local newspaper, and these are more likely to be found in communities with leading economic outcomes and with high capabilities (Table 3). In most cases these communities also have larger populations which can sustain or support the needed circulation to pay for the costs of producing the paper. Almost all communities have access to at

least one regional newspaper.

Table 3: Presence of Local and Regional Newspapers

	Canada					Western Sites	Ferintosh
	Total	Leading Sites	Lagging Sites	High Capability Sites	Low Capability Sites		
% with at Least One Local Paper	27	44	15	33	14	25	No
% with at Least One Regional Paper	96	89	100	93	100	100	Yes

Source: NRE Communications Inventory, Summer 2003. N=22 sites.

Ferintosh does not have a local newspaper but citizens do have access to four regional newspapers and two provincial, the Edmonton Journal and the Edmonton Sun.

Newsletters

Community newsletters can also play an important role as a communication tool, especially in the absence of a local newspaper. These are often produced infrequently or only a few times per year, usually by a volunteer group, and usually free of charge. Two-thirds of the communities across Canada have at least one newsletter, and these seem to be important in communities with lagging economic outcomes (Table 4). In fact, nine communities which do not have a local newspaper report having at least one community newsletter (and eight of these were communities with lagging economic outcomes). In addition, about three-quarters of communities with high capabilities report at least one community newsletter, suggesting that they have managed to find the resources and interest from within to develop a forum for sharing local news and information, often (in the case of seven high capability communities) in the absence of a community newspaper.

Some communities also benefit from the availability of community newsletters which originate in a neighbouring community but which also contain local items. This is the case for 27% of the communities, and for many of the low capability communities. This outlet thus becomes important if the resources to produce a newsletter locally are simply not present.

Table 4: Presence of Community Newsletters

	Canada					Western Sites	Ferintosh
	Total	Leading Sites	Lagging Sites	High Capability Sites	Low Capability Sites		
% with at Least One Newsletter	68	56	68	73	57	63	Yes
% with Newsletters From Other Communities	27	22	31	13	57	25	Yes

Source: NRE Communications Inventory, Summer 2003. N=22 sites.

Ferintosh citizens have access to one local newspaper distributed by the Playground Committee. The school in New Norway also has a monthly newsletter available to Ferintosh residents.

Bulletin Boards

Bulletin boards located throughout the community are also an important communication tool. They serve as an option for reaching people with short quick notices in relatively high traffic areas, such as in post offices, grocery and convenience stores, libraries and other locally appropriate locations. They are typically populated with notices about coming events, or have business cards from local businesses or notices about items in the "informal economy" (babysitting, items for sale, etc.). These bulletin boards are especially important communication tools when other tools (such as local newspapers) are not available in the community.

Communities have an average of six bulletin boards. This is also the case for Western Canadian communities, but the average is higher in communities with lagging economic outcomes (these communities generally have fewer communication tools at their disposal) and in high capability communities (Table 5). There are generally fewer postings of every type found on bulletin boards in Western Canadian communities; however, commercial (business) postings, and informal economy postings are the most common. Commercial postings and community event postings are much higher in sites with lagging economic outcomes.

Table 5: Bulletin Boards and their Contents

	Canada					Western Sites	Ferintosh
	Total	Leading Sites	Lagging Sites	High Capability Sites	Low Capability Sites		
Avg # Community Bulletin Boards	6	5	7	7	6	6	6
Avg # Commercial Postings	35	23	43	32	42	31	8
Avg # Community Event Postings	29	16	37	28	32	14	45
Avg # Informal Economy Postings	24	23	25	25	21	20	4
Avg # Personal Postings	5	7	3	5	4	2	4
Avg # Voluntary Sector Postings	4	3	4	4	3	3	1
Avg # Fund Raiser Postings	3	2	3	3	3	1	1
Avg # Church Postings	2	1	2	2	1	1	0

Source: NRE Communications Inventory, Summer 2003. N=22 sites.
Note: Avg # Postings refers to the total number of postings (of that type) on all bulletin boards in the community.

Ferintosh has 6 prominent bulletin boards – average for the sites across Canada. Community events and commercial advertisements comprise the majority of postings.

Meeting Spaces and Community Events

Places where people can gather to meet and talk formally and informally, and to celebrate the life of the community and its citizens and organizations are extremely important as a communication tool. Without places for people to gather, there are limited opportunities for sharing. These may be places which are used for other purposes (such as restaurants, bars, the post office) but where people communicate with one another while doing something else. These may also be more formalized places like community or church halls, which are booked and reserved for planned

meetings or events. These places may also be outdoor spaces which by their design or location facilitate communication.

Equally important are community events, which ritualize the life of the community and offer an opportunity for the community to present images of itself - an annual festival, an annual parade, an annual church supper, etc. These provide ways for the community to express who and what they are. By extension, the act of celebrating provides a venue for participants from the community to interact with one another and with visitors.

Most communities have a variety of formal and informal meeting spaces - on average there appears to be a similar amount of places to meet in Western communities, in communities with lagging economic outcomes, and in communities with high capabilities (Table 6). On average, communities have six annual events, with those in lagging and low capability communities reporting a slightly higher number of events on average.

Table 6: Meeting Spaces and Annual Community Events

	Canada					Western Sites	Ferintosh
	Total	Leading Sites	Lagging Sites	High Capability Sites	Low Capability Sites		
Avg # Informal Gathering Places	3	3	3	4	2	3	3
Avg # Outdoor Gathering Places	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Avg # Halls for Public Meetings	4	2	5	4	3	3	2
Avg # Halls for Social Events	3	2	4	4	2	2	2
Avg # Annual Events	6	6	7	5	9	7	5

Source: NRE Communications Inventory, Summer 2003. N=22 sites.

Ferintosh has access to three informal gathering places, two outdoor gathering place, two halls for public meetings, and two halls for social events. Annual events include: a church supper, trade fair, skidoo rally, a cancer fundraiser tea, and a flower show in August.

Potential Communication Opportunities

Ferintosh has limited communication tools and resources available to its citizens, organizations, local government, and businesses in comparison to other communities located across Canada. The exception is that Ferintosh does have ample meeting spaces although the community is feeling the pressure of keeping their community hall open.

The key questions that everyone in Ferintosh should be asking of themselves, and of the organizations they participate in, include:

- Are we making maximum use of all of the communication tools and resources available to us?

- Are we effective in developing the content of our messages?

- Are we reaching the right people with our message, or should we look at different communication tools and strategies?

- How can we maximize the opportunities available to us not just from new communication technologies (the Internet), but also from the informal gathering of people throughout the town?

- Are there opportunities to use new forms of communication in our community, such as establishing a community radio station?

There are many opportunities to enhance our communication practices. By assessing your answers to these questions, perhaps new ideas and solutions will become apparent, and provide improved economic and social outcomes for Ferintosh.

Communications Theme Current and Upcoming Projects

Our theme team has a number of ongoing and upcoming projects that might be of interest to you. Please contact the project leaders identified below if you are interested in participating in some way.

Technology-Mediated Learning Project

This interactive learning project is designed to link people and organizations from across the active sites in a participatory learning activity on a wide range of rural and new economy issues. This includes web board discussions, chat rooms, video seminars, etc., on a regularly scheduled basis. A wide range of participants are involved from each site, including elected officials, municipal administration staff, environment groups, tourism groups, newspaper editors, economic development officers, volunteer groups, business organizations, and citizens. Our objective is to build the capacity of rural communities to use various forms of communication technology to learn from one another and to develop and implement new ideas. This project started in the summer of 2003 and runs to early 2006.

Contact:
David Bruce 506-364-2395
dwbruce@mta.ca
Anna Woodrow 514-848-2424 ext 2323
woodrow@vax2.concordia.ca

Communication Strategies and Media Projects

How do organizations communicate with one another in the community? How does local government communicate with the community? In this project we assess how these are done, and are working with four communities to launch innovative communication events. The media projects include things like virtual town hall meetings and special events broadcasts. Other media events and media use training are included. This project started in early 2004 and will finish in early 2006.

Contact:
Ivan Emke 709-637-6200 ext 6322
iemke@swgc.mun.ca
Doug Ramsey 204-571-8514
ramsey@brandonu.ca

Traditional Media in the New Economy

This project looks at the role of and use of community newspapers, radio, cable television, and much more. Focussing on six communities, this involves case study analysis and project development with local media outlets. A key focus is the "institutional evolution" of these media outlets, and how they are coping in the new economy. Also, some of the issues include how they deal with new economy content issues, the capacity to facilitate discussions about the new economy, and sources of information. This project started in 2003 and will finish in mid-2005.

Contact:
Doug Ramsey 204-571-8514
ramsey@brandonu.ca
Anna Woodrow 514-848-2424 ext 2323
woodrow@vax2.concordia.ca

Use of the Internet in Rural Households

The purpose of this project is to examine Internet use among rural households in the active NRE research study sites. It will be an Internet-based survey across all 22 communities and will examine a variety of

issues, including: What do people use e-mail and the internet for? How many and which rural households use the Internet? How many and which adults in those households use the Internet? For how long have the being using the Internet? Where do they use the Internet? And much more. This project began in early 2004.

Contact:
Derek Wilkinson 705-675-1151
derek@nickel.laurentian.ca
David Bruce 506-364-2395
dwbruce@mta.ca

Sources of Interest

Books

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Statistics Canada. www.statcan.ca.