

NRE² BUILDING RURAL CAPACITY IN THE NEW ECONOMY

Knowledge Mobilization: The NRE Experience

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- Introduction to the NRE – in NRE Lab
- Welcome
- NRE Project
 - 8 years
 - 20+ researchers
 - 11 universities
 - Multiple partners
- Key features
 - Arose out of 12 years of collaboration between researchers, policy-analysts, practitioners, citizens
 - History of workshops and conferences (see map)
 - Network of Centres across the country (see map)
 - 32 systematically selected rural sites (see map)
 - Multiple bases of support:
 - 1st 3 years: government
 - 2nd 3 years: SSHRC Social Cohesion strategic grant
 - 3rd 3 years: SSHRC Initiative on the New Economy grant

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Rural Revitalization

- Drivers and processes
- Building Capacity
- Findings
 - Key economic, social, political processes
 - Relative importance of economic and social processes
 - Capacity-building processes
 - Social capital, networks, social cohesion, community capacity

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- Focus is on rural revitalization
 - Drivers and processes (First 6 years)
 - Building capacity – local, regional, national (last 3 years)
 - Understanding the processes and positioning rural communities for the future
- Findings/contributions
 - Extensive identification and documentation of the economic, social, and political processes that got us here
 - Identification and elaboration of the relative importance of economic and social dynamics
 - Elaboration of the processes relating to local capacity-building (with framework)
 - Key insights regarding the role of social capital, networks, social cohesion, and community capacity
 - Organized in
- Focus today on the KM side of our work



- Start with Knowledge Mobilization
- KM is about generating and moving knowledge among users (including researchers as users)
- Therefore it is important
 - Who is around the table
 - Will they keep coming back if they are not satisfied during the process?
- Start with an examples of KM as we understand it – citizen/practitioner focus
- Tweed
 - Researchers: Using our techniques we had been convinced of the importance of collaboration and bridging social capital for community capacity-building (our language)
 - Looking for a place to hold our conference
 - Itself the result of previous learning – where we discovered the value of going to our users (KM)
 - Invited to Tweed – but weak capacity
 - In order to meet the challenges – suggested inter-community collaboration (but a history of competition)
 - Eventual collaboration
 - Developed into “Comfort Country”
- These are many examples of successful KM – but for our purposes today I will focus on 2 questions
 - What have we learned about KM?
 - Give you an example of what it means ‘on the ground’
 - How we have dealt with the challenges that arise
 - What implications does it have for granting agencies?



- Clearly identify the target audiences with which you wish to engage.
- In the case of the NRE Project, these are:
 - (S) Researchers (including students)
 - (S) Policy-makers (at all levels of government)
 - (S) Practitioners (including public and private entrepreneurs), and
 - (S) Citizens (primarily rural-based but extending to urban citizens in strategic ways).
- The traditional target audience for our work is academics – KM pushes this to include the other groups
- For this we need to pay attention to new groups and interests and develop new skills

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Engagement and Dialogue

- Engage early
- Multiple venues of communication
- Appropriate means of communication
- Building trust is target-specific

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•Ensure early, extensive, and continual engagement with these target groups.

•(S) Engage early

•Our research shows: Municipal Councils that include their citizens in the discussions of the issues, formulation of options, and action are much more capable of dealing with the challenges they face

•The NRE built it on the extensive collaboration established by CRRF (10 years of conferences, workshops, consultations).

•This meant that the key players were already involved and guided NRE development and expansion over the period of the grant.

•(S) Utilize multiple means of communication – cast the net wide

•(S) Utilize appropriate means of communication and engagement

•E.g. Internet patchy in rural; Internet doesn't work alone

•Research shows that Internet engagement requires a large pool and specific focus

•Add to that the building of trust – face-to-face, opinion leaders, technical support

•(S) Use venues and provide materials in format that target audiences trust

•*Policy-makers and practitioners:*

•*Require quick responses on rapidly changing issues*

•*Look for new, challenging perspectives on these issues (buzz factor)*

•*Few markers for success in communication – can be frustrating and discouraging – especially in the short term*

•*Citizens*

•*Initially – have very practical concerns*

•*Require extended engagement to build confidence and trust*

•*Eventually they began to understand what we were doing, became enthusiastic about the long-term and comparative vision we introduced, and made significant contributions to our work*

•*Made good use of examples from other sites*

•*E.g. Introduced Japanese approach to out-migration (not circle the wagons)*

•Seek ways to blend interests: Eg.

•Researchers: Generalists, Comparisons (strategic), needed local detail re processes

•Policy-makers and practitioners: Problem solving

•Citizens: local issues

•NRE Solution: strategic comparisons of case studies

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The NRE Sample Frame

			High Capacity		Low Capacity	
			Lead	Lag	Lead	Lag
Global Exposed	Fluctuating	Adjac.	175	27	46	15
		Distant	251	13	124	44
	Stable	Adjac.	4	26	8	19
		Distant	5	16	18	30
Local Exposed	Fluctuating	Adjac.	4	5	4	9
		Distant	12	16	5	13
	Stable	Adjac.	12	100	7	45
		Distant	15	99	16	56


- We identified 5 key comparisons that were critical to the future of rural Canada
 - Whether the site was strongly connected to the global economy or not
 - Whether its economy was fluctuating or stable
 - Whether it was close to or far away from major urban centres
 - Whether it had a lot or little amount of institutional capacity nearby (schools, hospitals, or other services)
 - Whether it was leading or lagging with respect to a number of socio-economic characteristics
- We classified all the rural census subdivisions in Canada into their appropriate cells and randomly selected one from each cell

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Build on Existing Capacity

- Use existing organizations and networks
- Identify and respect their interests
- Identify and accommodate their norms

Mackenzie, BC



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• **Use existing organizations and networks.**

•(S) Many groups are already mobilizing around the issues we investigate – with networks and a wide variety of approaches.

• *But they may not always meet your needs or expectations*

•(S) Identify who they are, what are their interests, and how they relate to your research and personal interests

• Match responses and strategies accordingly

• E.g. Our research revealed the critical importance of local governance for community vitality

• Sought out an alliance with FCM since they are well connected to municipal governments and related organizations

• Directed our research to rural churches after we identified them as an important contributor to social capital

• Our collection and analysis of information about rural newspapers and editors served as a basis for eventual dissemination of our results.

•(S) Remember that the social capital of these volunteer groups does not always rest on the same basis as researchers.

• Volunteers – they are in it for the shared interest. Therefore we must meet and support that interest in order to compete with the other demands on peoples' time (e.g. provide child care)

• Granting agencies need to be aware of this in their program design

• Requires time


• Requires funds for freeing up volunteers (transportation, child care, accountability) (e.g. CURA adjustment)

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Bear the Burden

Liaison Officer

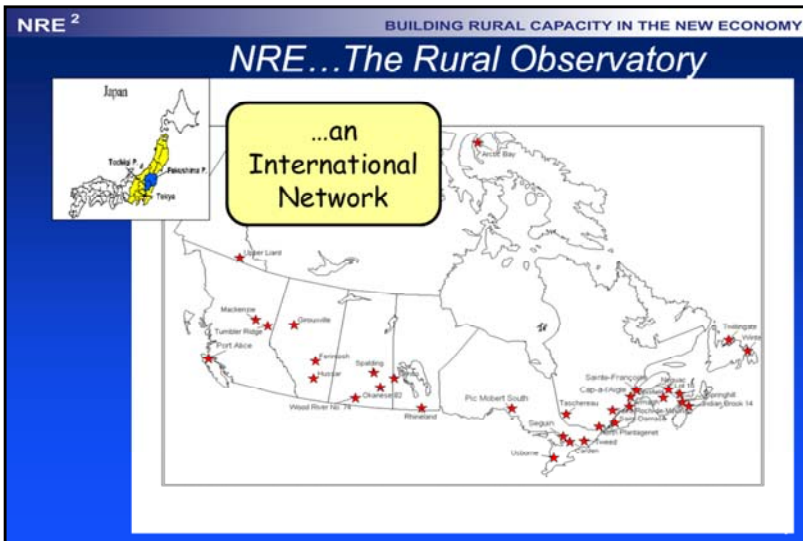
- Multiple demands on all partners
- KM means bearing the burden
 - Proactive liaison
 - Intelligence gathering
 - Telephone or face-to-face
 - Positive
 - Not researcher responsibility



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•Bearing the burden

- All participants in KM are burdened with multiple demands
 - Researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, citizens
- Thus KM becomes one more demand on our time as we try to get things done
- Governments and funding agents must bear the burden of KM if they want it done
 - They are the most powerful in the relationship
 - Governments and researchers can seldom be equal partners with practitioners, volunteers, and communities in spite of the rhetoric of partnership
 - They should use their additional resources generously to achieve KM
- This becomes a major issue with volunteer groups (the backbone of our KM with practitioners and communities)
 - Grant writing, competition for grants, accountability demands are all very onerous for voluntary groups
 - The legitimate concerns for fairness and accountability conflict with the norms that bring people together in volunteer groups: a common interest.
- Therefore the most powerful member in the partnership must bear the burden
 - Letter of intent with support for full proposal stage
 - Secondment and staff support for training, grant-writing, and finances
 - Go to them:
 - (S) Our practice of holding our meetings in rural places has done much to convince our partners of our interest in them and at the same time provide support for the local economy, and create a valuable opportunity for policy-makers to meet directly with local citizens and experience rural life.
- Researchers: Provide collection of insights (provide grist for the KM mill)
 - KM requires me to stop what I am doing, write something, attend a meeting, speak to someone, fill out a form
 - Even if I am committed to KM I may not know what it is about my work that is of interest to the various target audiences or how to package it to the best advantage (what story to tell)
- KM means taking on this burden
- We find that phone calls and 'press interviews' are often the best way to collect that information – least burdensome, most interesting (researchers like to talk)
 - (S) Devote KM resources (not research resources) to Liaison Officer
 - Doing research on our own researchers and partners (intelligence gathering)
 - Developing a long-term relationship
 - Telephone or face-to-face – non-critical, exploratory, positive
 - Frequent 'how's it going' calls
 - Briefing notes and inventories of key insights
 - Multiple levels of detail
 - Go back to the researchers for comments and responses
 - Feed back results so they can use them in promotion, tenure, lobbying, etc.
 - Proactive Liaison Officer (anticipates admin. problems at the same time)
 - Recommend this to Granting agencies as well
 - Build into mid-term and final reports
 - Drafts, follow-up calls, and press releases
 - Note that I am not recommending this be done by researchers
- This same principle applies to researchers' relations with their partners




- Identify and organize collaboration across disciplines and spheres but with respect to common, strategic foci.
- (S) Problem: How do we get people with diverse backgrounds, competing demands, and different commitments to talk to one another?
 - Find a common interest that cuts across as many as possible
 - Our selection of geographically defined field sites and locations has served us well in this respect: they bring diverse interests together to address a common object of research.
 - A common cause may also serve this function
 - Regional nodes
- (S) We identified 32 rural sites which we have referred to as the Rural Observatory
 - Went to people in each of these sites and asked them if they would like to work with us
 - As a result, we have worked with most of them over 9 years
 - Community profile data (every 2 years)
 - Household survey (1995) households in 21 sites (2001)
 - Collaboration with community members through local meetings, give-backs, exchanges, and invitations to our events (cf. people here today)
- Our Japanese colleagues were very impressed with this approach and asked us if we would collaborate with them to do the same thing in Japan
 - (S) With our help they selected 2 sites in Japan and ran a parallel and comparative project with ours
- This design allows us to not only understand the dynamics within each site, but allows us to make comparisons across sites – thereby separating out characteristics unique to each site from those that are due to contextual conditions

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Structural Biases

- KM not part of promotion, tenure, grants
- Reorganize
- Strategic planning
- Challenge the institutions



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•Provide the means whereby junior faculty and researchers can meet their institutional demands for their careers, while contributing to KM.

- This principle arises because of the reluctance of our educational institutions to recognize KM contributions in the awarding of merit, promotion, and tenure.
- As a result it is necessary for our junior faculty to publish in academic peer-reviewed venues to maintain or advance their careers.
- This jeopardizes the renewal process within our research community and often makes the extra demands of KM unattainable.
- Responses explored in the NRE Project
 - Accommodate internal to the project (Spread the burden)
 - The NRE Project organized mentoring and publishing opportunities for junior faculty
 - shifted administrative demands to senior faculty members,
 - Shift the burden of rewriting and reorganizing academic products for non-academic audiences to senior faculty members in exchange for junior people to publish and build credibility for the project
 - We were able to do this because we had both research and KM activities integrated in the same project
 - Prepare for the future
 - Mentoring junior faculty in KM activities and skills
 - Challenge the institutions
 - Merit, promotion, tenure, granting agencies downgrade KM activities
 - Legitimately question the quality of these activities
 - Therefore need to develop the criteria for quality
 - E.g. Draft proposal for Concordia
 - SSHRC Workshop Grants don't make it easy to include local people

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Inclusion-Exclusion Tension

- KM must be inclusive
- Research must be exclusive
- Form strategic alliances



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- (S) KM must be inclusive (people with a wide variety of interests can feel comfortable)
- (S) Research must be exclusive (to meet professional and organizational criteria for quality and credibility)
- (S) The relationship between CRRF and the NRE Project has demonstrated how this can work to the benefit of all.
 - CRRF and more recently, the National Rural Research Network (NRRN) provide the open, public venues and our research Centres
 - NRE researchers and Partners provide the more exclusive projects required for academic research.
 - CRRF provides a forum to test new partners and for new partners to build confidence in the researchers.

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Continuity

- KM is long term
- Plan for replacement and recruitment
- Celebrate



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The image shows two women in a meeting room. One woman is seated at a table with water bottles and a map, while the other stands behind her. A framed sign on the wall reads 'The Role of Education in Rural Areas'.

- **Prepare for future recruitment and support.**
- (S) Since KM requires a long term investment
- (S) It is critical to plan for new participants
 - to support the project during periods of high demand
 - to contribute new ideas, and
 - to replace key personnel as the need arises.
- Since participation in such networks is essentially voluntary, the principles for mentoring and supporting all participants apply.
- (S) This includes the necessity for celebration (with finances to support it)

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Lessons for Councils

- Long term view
- Bear the burden
- Recognize broader accomplishments
- Develop criteria for quality KM
- Lobby for KM (all levels)
- Publicize KM (but bear the burden)

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- What are some of the lessons for Councils that emerge from these experiences?
- Need long term view where researcher – non-researcher relationships are involved
- Seek ways to bear the burden
 - Support for non-academics and volunteers (including transportation, child care, celebrations)
 - Letter of intent – support – full proposal sequence better
- More imaginative view of accomplishments: include anecdotes, policy supports, program inspiration
- Develop criteria for quality KM
- Lobby for KM
 - Granting committees
 - Supporters
 - Universities
- Popularize results – but bear the burden
 - Journalists
 - Multiple media

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Impacts

- Researchers
- Policy-makers
- Practitioners
- Citizens

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Impacts

- Challenges since they are multiple levels (individuals, groups, society) and highly time-dependent
- Researchers
 - Traditional venues: journals, books, presentations – over 200
 - 2 Canada Research Chairs in 2 rural universities
 - Groups in Japan, Australia, USA adopting our theoretical and methodological framework to construct programs similar to our Rural Observatory in their countries
- Policy-makers
 - Eg. Senate Sub-Committee (7 out of 16 witnesses are NRE-related)
 - Influential in moving agenda from sector-focus to rural-focus
 - Model integrated into IISD (International Institute for Sustainable Development)
- Practitioners
 - Tweed: community collaboration initiated and supported
 - Seguin: integration of seasonal homeowners into governance
 - Site that failed multiple times but in those failures developed the networks and skills to take initiative for community development (Tumbler Ridge, Mackenzie)
- Citizens
 - Woman in our site who was inspired by our conference to open a library, then run for mayor
 - Site that marketed themselves as a conference centre after putting on one of our conferences