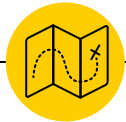# Building the **Future**:
Rural Infrastructure & Regional Economic Development

Building the Future:
Rural Infrastructure & Regional Economic Development

SNAPSHOT

Are rural Ontario communities capable of responding to infrastructure pressures and opportunities? How does that capacity – or lack thereof – affect a community's current and future long-term economic development? This research initiative will examine these questions and develop recommendations for addressing these issues through both immediate and long-term policy alternatives.

FUNDING AGENCY

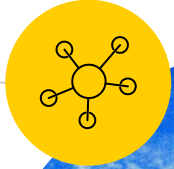Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs

RESEARCH TEAM

Ryan Gibson – Lead Investigator, University of Guelph
Sheri Longboat – University of Guelph
Sean Markey – Simon Fraser University
Ashleigh Weeden – University of Guelph
Karla Uliana – OMAFRA
Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation

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Why study rural infrastructure?

Informing evidence-based policy to support adaptive & effective infrastructure investments

Research Questions:

Are rural Ontario communities capable of responding to infrastructure pressures and opportunities?

How does that capacity – or lack thereof – affect a community's current and future long-term economic development?

The opportunity to invest in infrastructure

has never been greater.

– Unleashing Productivity Through Infrastructure, Government of Canada Advisory Council on Growth, 2016

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Rationale for <mark>this research:</mark>

- Strong and sustainable research is recognized as the backbone of community vitality and economic development & growth.
- Communities of all sizes must balance fiscal realities, changing economies, aging infrastructure, changing demographics, and a challenging climate as they work to manage their core infrastructure assets and accommodate and/or address new infrastructure and service demands.
- Rural communities differ from urban communities – and each other, presenting varying capacities to respond to infrastructure pressures & opportunities
- Investment in productivity-enhancing infrastructure is perhaps the most powerful & critical mechanism for supporting immediate & longterm economic development, innovation, & community resilience
- Adaptive, nuanced rural infrastructure investment frameworks are critical for addressing realities of rural development across all jurisdictions

Objectives for ==this research:==

- ◉ This research will provide evidence-based recommendations for constructing, implementing & evaluating successful rural infrastructure policies & programs
- ◉ This research contains three primary objectives:
  - ○ Examine how rural Ontario communities vary in their capacity to respond to infrastructure pressures
  - ○ Investigate how those varying capacities affect short- & long-term economic development
  - ○ Provide OMAFRA recommendations on how to develop rural infrastructure policy, programming & investments that will build rural community capacity & support economic development & growth

Benefits of this research:

- Understanding the capacity- and regulatory-related pressures and opportunities facing varying types of rural communities is critical for developing effective policy and programming that adapts to the size, type, and context of individual communities, and ultimately, for supporting the current and future economic vitality of rural Ontario
- This research initiative directly addresses priorities identified in the 2017-2018 OMAFRA Research Themes & Priorities, under the theme of Infrastructure & Rural Economic Development (2.3.2). It will generate three key benefits:
  - Enhanced understanding of the diversity & varying levels of rural community capacity
  - Improved & more nuanced public policy
  - Enhanced rural infrastructure development programming

Benefits of this research:
Enhanced understanding of rural community capacities

This research will shed light on the varying capacities of rural Ontario communities to respond to infrastructure pressures and opportunities. The initiative will utilize Reimer's New Rural Economy leading/lagging framework to evaluate and classify rural communities in regards to infrastructure dynamics. This evaluation process will produce insights into how community capacities vary and the short- and long-term economic implications facing rural communities with limited capacity to respond to infrastructure pressures.

Benefits of this research:
Improved public policy

A key intended outcome of this research initiative is to advance rural infrastructure policy and programs in Ontario. There is a critical need for policy attention, as noted in the OMAFRA Research Themes and Priorities document. This research will directly contribute to improving rural infrastructure policy and programs in the province. This research initiative will generate broad municipal engagement through surveys and case study research, and generate public policy recommendations through the development of key evaluation metrics for understanding varying capacities of rural Ontario communities to respond to infrastructure pressures. Special attention will be paid to understanding the economic implications for rural communities with limited capacity to respond to emerging infrastructure pressures.

Benefits of this research:
Enhanced rural infrastructure programming

This research responds to the need to better understand whether current policy, programming, and funding models are conducive to addressing rural Ontario's infrastructure investment needs and capacity development issues. This research will produce recommendations for addressing capacity gaps to support the diverse range of rural Ontario communities in achieving sustainable economic vitality.

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Methods & Deliverables

Generating municipal engagement & public policy recommendations to investigate rural community capacity to respond to infrastructure pressures

Methods & Deliverables

2018 → 2019 → 2020

Year 1

Literature Review

Preliminary Paper

Provincial Survey

Statistical Analysis

Year 2

Case Studies (2-4)

Year 3

Evaluation Metrics

Policy & Program Models & Recommendations

Year 1: Literature Review

- A *literature review* will be conducted to position the research in the context of infrastructure- specific rural economic development capacity, new strategies for approaching infrastructure investment & its economic complements, & ways of conceptualizing differing types of rural from a policy perspective.
- This review will generate a ***preliminary paper*** to provide high-level insight into past & present approaches to understanding rurality as a rich & diverse landscape of different types of communities requiring nuanced policy frameworks & targeted programming.

Year 1: <mark>Survey & Statistical Analysis</mark>

- The project will conduct a ***provincial survey*** of municipalities to understand the degree of multi-community collaboration on infrastructure, local infrastructure stresses, & local capacity to understand & plan for future infrastructure needs.
  - The survey will be supplemented by a series of workshops/meetings to engage key stakeholders & develop channels for knowledge mobilization & strategic linkages
- The project will undertake a ***statistical analysis*** of Financial Information Review (FIR) data & asset management plans of rural Ontario communities, as well as Official Plan and Strategic Plan documents. This review will capture the formal & regulatory context of community infrastructure management, including their content, noting whether the plans were developed in-house or by external agencies, their level of detail, & linkages across strategic plans, policies & community spending.
  - This analysis will be guided by Reimer's New Rural Economy framework to capture various types of rural in data analysis

Year 1: Deliverables

- Year 1 will produce:
  - Preliminary paper based on the literature review
  - Policy briefs & reports based on survey and data analysis
  - High-level reports of activities completed
  - Opportunities for knowledge mobilization through workshops/meeting

Year 2: **Case Studies**

- A series of **2-4 case studies** will be conducted to review successful rural infrastructure initiatives & their linkages to regional economic development for the purpose of generating recommendations for Ontario. The specific infrastructure profiled in each case will be identified through the data analysis conducted in Year 1.
- Case studies will explore the following themes:
  - Leadership, governance, mandates, & capacity
  - Impact of these factors on a community's ability to respond to infrastructure pressures & opportunities
  - Influence of these factors on a community's economic resiliency, prosperity & growth
- Case studies will include **secondary document analysis** and **6-10 key informant interviews** with policy-makers/analysts, local government staff/leaders, and regional entities.

Year 2: Deliverables

- Year 2 will produce:
    - 2-4 case studies
    - High-level reports of activities completed
    - Opportunities for knowledge mobilization through workshops/meeting

Year 3: Evaluation & Recommendations

- ◉ In the final year of the project, insights generated by the case studies will be used **to identify key metrics** and **generate policy recommendations**.
  - ○ In particular, insights into whether current funding, policy & programming models are conducive to building community capacity to respond to current & future infrastructure pressures & opportunities.
  - ○ Evaluation of the case studies is expected to generate recommendations for alternative policy approaches while illustrating examples of the different types & magnitudes of barriers to community infrastructure investment, the position that specific communities found themselves in whether regard to their capacity to address these challenges, & how the way different communities addressed these challenges (or not) impacted their immediate & long–term economic development

Year 3: Deliverables

- Year 3 will produce:
    - vignettes/examples that can be used to illustrate policy alternatives & recommendations
    - Metrics for evaluating community capacity to respond to infrastructure challenges/opportunities
    - Policy alternatives & recommendations

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Partners & Audiences

Working together to address rural infrastructure pressures & opportunities.
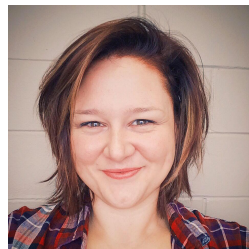
Research Team

Dr. Ryan Gibson, University of Guelph (Lead)
Expert on regional & rural economic development, President of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network

Dr. Sean Markey, Simon Fraser University
Expert on rural infrastructure, lead of Rural Policy Learning Commons Infrastructure Team

Dr. Sheri Longboat, University of Guelph
Expert on Indigenous planning, community collaboration, environmental protection & resource management

Ashleigh Weeden, PhD Student – University of Guelph
Expertise in public policy, rural infrastructure, & community development & engagement

Karla Uliana, OMAFRA
Expert in rural policy, infrastructure programming, liaison to provincial ministries focused on infrastructure

Dr. Sarah–Patricia Breen, CRRF
President of CRRF, national rural organization, expertise in water infrastructure research

Potential Partners Organizations

Knowledge Mobilization

OMAFRA & Provincial Policy Makers

KM/KTT focused on **policy/program/practice change & knowledge dissemination** by enhancing current understanding of rural infrastructure needs, challenges & opportunities. Case study analysis will provide policy & programming recommendations for enhancing rural infrastructure in Ontario.

Rural Local Governments

KM/KTT for rural local governments will focus on **knowledge dissemination & policy/program/practice change.** The creation of new knowledge on rural infrastructure will be a key asset for rural local governments as they wrestle with these challenges & opportunities, creating opportunities to change how rural local governments interact with infrastructure.

Rural Infrastructure Researchers

KM/KTT for rural infrastructure researchers will focus on **knowledge mobilization.** This initiative will make important contributions to our collective understanding of rural infrastructure, its intersection with regional economic development, & guidance for provincial governments in moving forward with both policy & practice.

Learn more:

Visit www.ruraldev.ca/infrastructure

Or contact us at:

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