Facilitating Rural Policy Connections
RPLC Policy Fora Team Activities

Ryan Gibson[1] and Logan Horrocks[2]

[1] School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, University of Guelph and
[2] Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Saint Mary's University

Introduction

The Rural Policy Learning Commons (RPLC) is a multi-year partnership striving to enhance rural prosperity by identifying and analyzing policy options relevant to rural areas. The initiative is evaluating these policy options in the context of national and international policy innovations. A key element of the initiative is to build leadership capacity among rural and northern researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners.
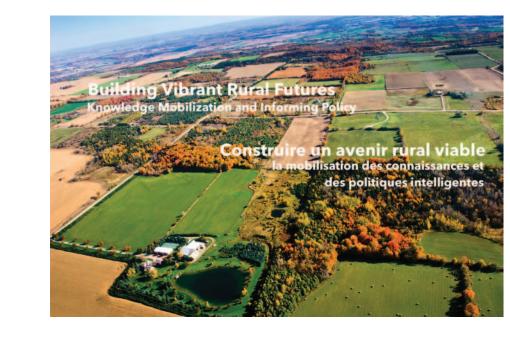
The RPLC partnership consists of partners from across Canada, Europe, Mexico, and the United States. The RPLC partnership is supported by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. RPLC consists of four research teams and seven knowledge mobilization teams. The Policy Fora Team is one of the knowledge mobilization teams.

The Policy Fora Team's mandate is to support the dissemination of rural policy information among academics, practitioners, and policy-makers. The Policy Fora Team is responsible for three key activities:

- facilitating RPLC stakeholders to contribute to rural policy fora,
- supporting the organization of rural policy fora, and
- collecting and sharing information on upcoming policy fora focused on rural issues.

This poster highlights the key activities of the RPLC Policy Fora Team over the past two years, 2014 – 2016, based on the three key activities.

Support for Attending Events

The Policy Fora Team provided financial support to facilitate stakeholder participation in rural fora in both years 1 and 2. This financial support allows rural policy information to be disseminated to larger audiences. In years 1 and 2, the Policy Fora Team provided support to the following rural fora events.

2014 – 2015

- Quebec Lower North Shore-Labrador Straits Regional Development: Towards Regional Collaboration | Blanc Sablon, Canada
- Recognizing Learning: Quality Assurance Practices to Advance Engagement, Employment and Education Futures | Ottawa, Canada
- Rural Development Institute's Rural Policy Think Tank | Brandon, Canada
- Global Growth Agendas: Regions, Institutions and Sustainability | Piacenza, Italy
- Saskatchewan Economic Development Association Annual Conference | Humbold, Canada
- Congrés de l'association francophone pour le savoir | Rimouski, Canada
- Rural Policy Learning Commons Steering Committee Meeting | Toronto, Canada

2015 – 2016

- Water-Food-Energy-Climate Nexus: An Emerging Challenge for Rural Policy | Memphis, USA (2 participants)
- Building Community Resilience: Innovation, Culture, and Innovation in Place | Summerside, Canada (2 undergraduate and 3 graduate students)
- State of Rural Canada Meeting with Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development | St John's, Canada
- Rural Policy Learning Commons Steering Committee Meeting | Montréal, Canada

Support for Rural Events

Over the past two years, the Policy Fora Team has provided funds to facilitate hosting events across Canada and internationally. Below is a list of the events that the Policy Fora Team has supported.

Rural Futures: Annual Rural Education Symposium
March 2015 | Canmore, Canada

A keynote panel was organized drawing together different and diverse research and policy perspectives on education-related dynamics of rural community development. This panel brings together rural researchers from different provinces in Canada to examine the role of institutions, and particularly educational institutions, as catalysts for change and capacity-building in rural communities. Drawing on lessons from different parts of Ontario and Saskatchewan, the panels present a series of perspectives on the importance of youth-related elements of rural development, and how public policy, planning, community development initiatives and youth engagement initiatives can generate both desired and unanticipated outcomes within a community.

Rural Tourism Knowledge Mobilization Project
April 2016 | Umea, Sweden

This workshop brought together international scholars with expertise in different kinds of rural tourism to discuss and address the tensions between tourism and other economic sectors, among different kinds of geographic regions. The workshop examined the issues within varying rural contexts, across international examples, to determine the different policy strategies and assess best practices that may guide the development of tourism in unique rural spaces, thus contributing to the capacity of local and regional leaders and practitioners to address the development of tourism within their communities.

Rural Alberta Innovation and Learning Commons
October 2015 | Edmonton, Canada

Rural Alberta Innovation and Learning (RAIL) Commons is a three-day learning commons focused on rural economic and community development. It is a great opportunity for councilors, mayors, CAOs, EDOs, community development professionals, and students from across the province to engage in various rurally focused topics such as: community and economic development, sustainability planning, social policy, water, continuing care, recruitment and retention, business succession, aboriginal relations and the changing agricultural landscape.

State of Rural Canada 2015 Initiative

The Policy Fora contributed to the production and dissemination of the State of Rural Canada initiative. The report contains chapters on each province and territory and ends with a discussion chapter that offers a synthesis of core themes and a series of recommendations for advancing rural development in Canada. The chapters provide some statistical data, but they are not intended to be statistical reports. Further information on the State of Rural Canada can be found at www.sorc.crrf.ca.

Online Calendar of Events

The online calendar of events is a key mechanism for promoting rural and regional development events. Since the start of RPLC, nearly 200 events have been posted! The online calendar of events can be accessed at www.crrf.ca/events. The calendar includes information on conferences, workshops, webinars, and meetings across Canada, Europe, Mexico, and the United States. Events in the calendar can be downloaded directly into personal calendars.

The calendar of events is populated with events gathered through a variety of sources:

- Automated meta-crawlers searching Internet for conference announcements, conference websites, and conference call for papers.
- Tracking key organizations for their rural events,
- Newsletters and bulletins of RPLC stakeholders and other rural organizations,
- Website users of the online calendar of events can populate details of their own events through the website.

A student based at Saint Mary's University has been engaged to comb through the meta- crawler results and populate the online calendar of events.

From 2014-2016, the online calendar contained 191 events. Each of the events in the online calendar included a brief description, hyperlinks to further information, and logistic details such as city, date, and registration fees. Most of the events were held in-person (77%). A growing number of events, particularly in Year 2 (2015-2016) were held via online platforms, such as Skype, Zoom, and Adobe Connect.

The first year of the online calendar a modest number of events were presented. The number of events ballooned in Year 2 (2015-2016) to a total of 137. Information on Year 3 (2016-2017) is presented for the first quarter. It is anticipated that Year 3 will follow a similar pattern as Year 2.

The events contained within the online calendar come from all corners of the world! Nearly 60% of the events are based in Canada. A strong number of rural events are also captured from Europe and the United States of America. Events in the online calendar are presented in the language of the conference. The calendar has had postings in English, French, Italian, German, and Japanese.

www.rplc-capr.ca