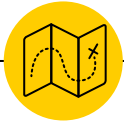


Connecting the Dots:

**Building Rural Ontario's Future through
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.

TIMELINE: 2018-2021

FUNDING

Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance

RESEARCH TEAM

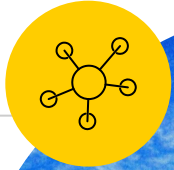
Ryan Gibson - University of Guelph (Lead Investigator)
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More information about this research initiative can be found at www.ruraldev.ca/infrastructure or by contacting Ryan Gibson at gibsonr@uoguelph.ca, or Ashleigh Weeden at weedens@uoguelph.ca

**Canada's COVID-19 recovery plan
will need to shift from
shovel-ready to shovel-worthy.**

“

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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**?

*Now: **what happens to the connection between rural infrastructure and economic development in response to 'shocks' like COVID-19 and anticipated future crises?**

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Case Study Examples: Green Infrastructure

- Resiliency through repurposing of existing infrastructure
- Academic partnerships encourage practical and innovative ideas
- Partnerships build internal capacity



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Surveying rural Ontario:

- 265 completed surveys with 237 communities represented in responses
- 152 participants identified as staff, 104 identified as elected decision makers
- Majority (203) respondents represented lower tier municipalities, communities with a population density under 50 people per square kilometer (169), and/or a population under 15,000 (154)
- Most (approx 86%) believe they understand current infrastructure needs & deficits and most (approx 84%) are actively planning for their future infrastructure needs
- Most (approx 79%) believe decision makers in their municipality have access to the information they need to make good decisions about infrastructure
- Almost everyone believes infrastructure is connected to community well-being and economic development - but find putting that belief into action challenging when addressing technological change, climate change, demographic change, and economic change

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What you told us:

- “As a small rural municipality when funding is competitive it also becomes very political. Our needs are as important as large municipalities and we contribute equally based on our assessment base.”
- “While big cities have big budgets and can fund their 50% to 10% share, small communities do not have the spare revenue to take advantage of these funds. The project is shelved and another advancement is missed,.
- “Funding applications are somewhat prescribed as what infrastructure will be funded is decided by the funder. Municipalities need some flexibility in deciding what their priorities are.”
- “Any funding received should be consistent and sustainable. That would include \$0 if that is what it takes to be consistent. You cannot plan long term with fluctuating revenue and lottery style grants.”
- “Policy decisions related to funding or program development made by Ministries associated with education (for example) affect or influence a rural community differently than urban communities. The impact of these decisions may not be seen immediately, however in the longer term the rural communities suffer as a result. The infrastructure decisions a local rural municipality makes are then affected or delayed in some way as a result.”

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Supporting rural communities through high impact partnerships:

- OGRA has estimated that the overall infrastructure deficit for roads and bridges is \$34.7 billion – learning more about the context for this deficit is important for support policy change and leadership across all communities
- Partnerships between organizations like OGRA, the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, and the Ontario Government are critical for supporting community-engaged research and evidence-informed policy
- **There are still many opportunities for your community to participate in this project & to help us craft evidence-informed recommendations for leaders across all orders of government. Get in touch!**

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Learn more:

Visit www.ruraldev.ca/infrastructure

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