

FOSTERING COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

A Case Study of Castlegar's
Labour Mobility in a Rural
Setting Project

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HEATHER DOUGLAS

RYAN GIBSON



UNIVERSITY OF
GUELPH

Background

Workforce development is a critical challenge confronting rural economies throughout Canada. As part of the *Addressing Labour Shortages through Newcomer Attraction* initiative, a series of innovative approaches were identified. This report is a case study of one of the innovations identified. The case study identifies the innovative approaches, goals of the initiative, successes, and transferability to other rural communities. This report is part of a series of rural innovative workforce initiatives as part of the *Addressing Labour Shortages through Newcomer Attraction* initiative.

Further case studies and additional information on the research initiatives can be found at <https://ruraldev.ca/lсна/>.

Introduction

Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting was a project conducted by the [Castlegar and District Community Services Society](#) in partnership with the [Homeless Partnering Program](#) in Castlegar from 2019 to 2020 and was funded by Work BC, the Province of British Columbia, and the Government of Canada. Castlegar and District Community Services Society provides a variety of supports to the people of Castlegar and area including counselling, housing projects, a women's centre, and a senior housing program (Castlegar and District Community Services Society, n.d.).

The project explored labour mobility in Castlegar, British Columbia and looked at labour mobility and economic development beyond structural and financial challenges. It considered the factors that impact the decision to move for employment opportunities, particularly social and family concerns, i.e. housing is expensive or a spouse/child not wanting to move. The project investigated the relationship between community dialogue and economic growth and labour mobility. The project considered the various factors related to labour mobility including youth outmigration, interprovincial mobility, and the ability of workers to change roles within the community.

Initiatives like this are not particularly common in rural communities like Castlegar, and there is limited data and statistics available for the community. Information from BC Housing Surveys and Statistics Canada is often outdated or not specific to Castlegar but rather the region (McGillivray, 2020). As a result, the descriptives used in the Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting project were pulled from the Castlegar's 2018 Housing Needs Assessment.

Innovative Approach to Addressing Labour Shortages

The Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting Project adopted an inductive approach centered around community dialogue. The community dialogue was generated through an online survey. The target respondents of the survey were youth, property owners, businesses, institutional, which refers to residents who work in the social service field, and general, which refers to residents over the age of 29 who did not own property or a business.

The survey took an indirect approach to gain deeper insights rather than asking more direct questions, as it was recognized that direct questions often yielded cautious responses. The questions focused on community perceptions, values, and narratives surrounding economic growth, barriers, and stigma towards marginalized groups, particularly those experiencing homelessness, poverty, food insecurity, or mental health issues. The intention of the indirect approach was to prompt genuine dialogue that uncovers deeper perceptions that impact economic activity. In addition to the survey, a focus group, referred to as a “crowd-sourcing analysis” and conversations with key influencers were conducted. Facebook was also used as a secondary source for interaction.

Goals and Objectives

The core objectives of the Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting were to:

- Identify the multiple factors that influence economic growth and labour mobility.
- Create and report on an open-ended dialogue with the people of Castlegar about employment and labour mobility.
- Explore the larger issue of labour mobility within the provincial setting through the specific lens of a rural community.
- Shift the conversation from traditional, often stigmatizing, views of unemployment and poverty to a focus on productivity and labour mobility as problem-solving exercises.

Success in Achieving Goals

The Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting project generated interest and dialogue surrounding economic dynamism and labour mobility in Castlegar. The project successfully highlighted key factors impacting labour mobility such as housing shortages, limited employment opportunities, and stigma towards marginalized groups, particularly those experiencing homelessness, poverty, food insecurity, or mental health issues. It revealed that many residents empathize with marginalized groups but feel powerless to initiate change. The research fostered dialogue and raised awareness, laying the groundwork for future community-driven initiatives.

Challenges and Future Prospects

Key Challenges

While the Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting project was successful in meeting its objectives, there were challenges and limitations identified.

- **Timing:** At the time of the survey two initiatives were taking place: “[Point in Time](#)” and “[Coldest Night of the Year](#)”. These initiatives may have influenced with the survey results, as respondents might be more aware of the issues due to those initiatives, which in turn could affect how they responded.
- **Methodology:** While the indirect survey approach was warranted in this project due to people’s hesitancy to speak about issues related to labour mobility, a more involved approach is necessary. More transparency about the survey process, i.e. how it was created and what it is being used for, is important and there should be greater effort to disseminate the survey beyond Facebook posts.
- **Capacity:** The research team for this project was limited to just one person and a tight budget. A larger research team could allow for further efforts and more responses and respondents.
- **Community Influences:** Projects such as Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting hold political value, and current political landscapes can influence the project. It would be important to address the political and institutional landscapes in future projects.

Future Prospects and Advocacy

The Castlegar & District Community Services Society recommends the following measures as next steps:

- Leverage community dialogue to drive policy changes and further investigate factors influencing labour mobility and economic stability
- Conduct further research into the impacts of community dialogue on local economies
- Foster empathy and reframe discussions of homelessness and poverty to look at the core issues, helping to destigmatize.
- Investigate how internal competition impacts economic activity and help businesses develop skills to compete with businesses outside the province.
- **Effective Labour Management:** At the provincial level, focus on effective management of labour and ensuring the best placement of the right people, recognizing labour mobility, innovation, and productivity as new languages of progress.

Uniqueness and Transferability

Distinctive Elements

What makes the Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting project unique is its use of an indirect approach and focus on community dialogue. Many other studies focus on structural or financial factors and their impact rather than the impacts of dialogue on economy. Additionally, the project used a multi-cohort approach, including diverse voices. By prioritizing dialogue, it captured deeper insights into community dynamics and highlighted that dominant perceptions and narratives have a major role in economic development and labour mobility.

Factors Supporting Transferability

The approach and insights gained can be transferred to other rural communities facing similar challenges. The Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting project found that the economy is sensitive to local dynamics and culture. Internal dialogue cannot only uncover dynamics and social disturbances but can be change the narrative and be used to manage the community's growth. Additionally, the inductive approach can be adapted to different contexts to gain further insights on barriers for growth such as housing or stigma.

Potential for Broader Application

Following the success of the Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting's project there is the potential for broader application. It can address key issues in rural communities across Canada and generate engagement and dialogue to uncover useful information. Its inductive, indirect approach can be tailored to be implemented in different settings for policy development, community engagement, addressing key issues, and building economic resilience.

Conclusion

The Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting project in Castlegar, British Columbia, highlights the effects of a community's internal dialogues, social cohesion, and housing market are on its economic prosperity and labour mobility. The results of the surveys and discussions underlines the importance of a change in perspective, advocating for community-centric approaches that prioritize affordable housing, reframe social issues as problem-solving exercises, and engage in productive dialogues to help rural communities prosper and become resilient.

References

Castlegar and District Community Services Society. (n.d). *Programs and Services*.
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McGillivray, H., 2020. Labour Mobility in a Rural Setting. Labour Market Partnership project, CDCSS; <https://cdcsc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Labour-Mobility-in-a-Rural-Setting-CDCSS.pdf>

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