- Contributions of many groups and individuals
  - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
    - Especially their INE initiative with Industry Canada
  - Concordia University – and all universities in our network – we need and appreciate their support
  - The Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada
  - Statistics Canada
  - CRRF
  - NRE Research Team
  - Rural Citizens in our field sites

- Reach of Networks

- Speak to the Rural Cluster proposal to SSHRC

- Discussion on NRRN's past, current, and future networks

- Mapping networks

- Explore why networks are important in general terms – but focus on what I see as a primary objective of this meeting: justifying the existence of NRRN and looking forward to its future objectives and possibilities.

- The value of networks

- Depends on the nature of the networks and the objectives

- Lessons from the NRE

- Networks serve to:

  - Build cohesion and collective action (glue)

  - Increase trust and reduce transaction costs (oil)

  - Connect and integrate people, information, goods, services, finances (web)

- The relative mix of these functions will vary according to types of participants and objectives

- We are looking at a network of researchers

  - With some attention to the application of the research results for researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and citizens

- Thus we need to pay attention to

  - The nature of the network we are creating

  - What we have learned from our experience

  - What we have learned from the literature

- Will discuss these recognizing the other element of this meeting: what have we accomplished (the value of NRRN and the RS)

•Major strength of NRRN is that it has connected and worked with existing networks rather than try to establish its own (S4)

  •This is a major learning of the Rural Secretariat – wasn't the impulse 10 years ago.

  •NRRN is indistinguishable in many ways from the history and connections of CRRF

  •This is the way it should be: recognizes one of the most important features of our types of networks

  •If you want a functioning, vibrant network – don't try to set it up from zero

  •Instead – look around for those that are already functioning, find the common interests, and build upon them

  •Supported by research on networks (note the history of the internet)

•However – must recognize the special features of the existing networks

  •Our NRE work provides sensitivity to this: looks at the different normative demands of the partners

  •RS: bureaucratic demands – fairness and accountability

  •Volunteer groups (Associative) – common interest trumps fairness and accountability – or at least is more important – especially for motivation

    •Many competing interests and buying them out is not always compatible with those interests

      •E.g. researchers are volunteers – can't pay our salaries

  •Thus – must learn to work with these different norms, be flexible, recognize interests, find ways to meet them

    •E.g. student support and data liberation in the case of researchers

    •travel, time release, support for fairness and accountability in the case of volunteers

    •training in the case of the private sector.

- Nurtured communications
- (S) Through conferences and workshops – bringing people together
- But – more important is to maintain those contacts
- We have learned the importance of continual liaison – especially for a researcher network
  - Many competing demands, many forms of communication
  - Often we are seeking time to reflect, read, integrate – or focus on a small detail of a larger picture
- Can easily lose touch without initiatives of low level contact
  - Skulkers are important
  - The power of weak ties
  - Timing is critical – in the meantime need regular contact and nudges
- Social capital literature shows us the importance of bridging and linking networks
  - Those that connect across groups and networks that are diverse or don't necessarily share the same objectives or methodologies
  - For researchers this means multidisciplinary
  - For gov't (RS) this means connecting with work that does not necessarily have a practical or identifiable outcome or those that are critical of policies or programs
  - In general it means searching for new and excluded persons
- Our partnership between CRRF and the NRE (and now NRRN) is critical
  - NRE (research) is exclusive: for credibility and support
  - CRRF/NRRN is inclusive: for building knowledge and confidence of each other (testing each other out)
  - Much of it goes on between conferences – below the radar
    - Emerges in alliances, new research directions, new opportunities
      - (S) FCM and Rural-Urban linkages
      - (S) Health contacts with NETHRN (TRU), eventually Australia
    - Need funding and institution to maintain this
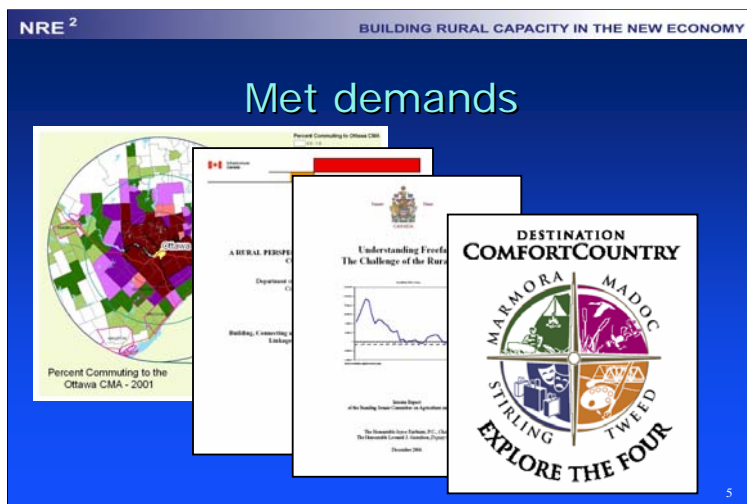
•Met Demands

•Responding to demands from practitioners and policy-makers is a challenge for researchers

  •Policy-makers must respond quickly to issues laid upon them

  •Practitioners must respond to client-defined issues (sometimes poorly defined)

  •Researchers build knowledge over the long term – often from investigations that have no obvious practical application

•Best way to organize this is by establishing and maintaining a long-term, diverse pool of researchers into which one might dip for specific issues

  •(S) Rural-urban linkages is a case in point. We are only at the beginning of a framework for understanding them. This means building new connections among research that has been oriented to other objectives, translating them for the new purposes, and organizing research in the gaps

•NRRN has already a good track record in this – building upon the CRRF/NRE connections

•(S) Minister Godfrey: came to our network when faced with the issue of the Communities agenda

  •The workshop led to many other encounters where policy-makers made use of our expertese (Rural Caucus; Rural-Urban linkages; still ongoing – I received call from consultant Moira Winch of the FCM)

•Senate Sub-Committee on rural poverty: Look at the witnesses (almost all of the researchers are CRRF/NRE/NRRN-related). Report reflects this contribution. When the committee began a search for places to meet, they contacted us. Not visible, but critical to the outcomes of the process.

•Citizens often make effective use of our network and expertise:

  •(S) Tweed – developed Comfort Country on the learnings from NRE/CRRF/NRRN.

  •Benito – library grant built on knowledge and connections through NRE/CRRF/NNRN

•Currently we are collecting our 'impacts' inventory and exploring ways to make it visible to:

  •Our academic institutions (as they process merit and promotion)

  •Our policy people (NOTE: they were most critical in our conference evaluation)

  •Our practitioners and citizens

- Leveraged new initiatives
- (S) I have already mentioned the establishment of work on commuting patterns that was nurtured by NRRN meetings and participation on rural-Urban relations
- (S) Immigration workshop – has produced a number of media, research, and other connections (e.g. Diverse Cities issue on immigration and rural Canada)
  - Good example of the role of a research pool. I was able to draw upon the results and people from the NRRN workshop
- (S) Student posters – recognition of new researchers and the value of rural research
- (S) Cluster proposal – support by NRRN and RS is critical for both the credibility of the application and for its future success.
- The Network lessons from these accomplishments are
  - That they cannot be done alone
  - A preoccupation with 'branding' would get in the way of their accomplishment
- We can all claim these as accomplishments

- Built research capacity
- Workshops and conferences bring people together
    - Health, education capacity increased as a result of the Twillingate and Gatineau events
- Research grants and institutional support from our universities and colleges are critical to our work and careers (we are volunteers)
    - Requires attention to theory, high quality research, publications in peer reviewed journals, student training
    - Little credit given to applied research, consultations, policy development
    - (S) NRRN can open opportunities for academic collaboration – build research capacity
        - Soliciting on behalf of rural issues to our institutions and students
        - Getting people together who would not normally have a chance to do so
        - Mediate and negotiate for funding (contracts and grants) and other support (student internships)
        - Lobby educational institutions to legitimize issues and applied research
        - Recognize commendable activities (letters for career support, applications for honorary awards, etc.)
- New projects help to answer important questions
    - Rural-urban linkages
    - Rural poverty
    - Immigration
- (S) Support for students ensures the future generation
    - Gatineau event was organized by NRE alumni (many of them presenters at Twillingate)
    - (S) Poster sessions highlight useful work and motivate students
    - (S) New researchers forum
    - Even if they go to urban jobs (which many of them have) we maintain the connections:
        - Looking for opportunities
        - Providing a channel of knowledge to urban people and organizations

NRE²   BUILDING RURAL CAPACITY IN THE NEW ECONOMY

To Do

- More of the same
- Strategic Target groups
  - Researchers
  - Policy people
  - Citizens
- Alliances with educational institutions
- Entrench core funding
- Record and document impacts

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- What could NRRN do in the future?
- More of the same
- Strategic foci
  - Target groups
    - Research disciplines: Political scientists, health, education, economists (all have different modes of operation – therefore need special approaches)
    - Policy people
      - Health, education, industry, sectors, urban, HRCD, DIAND: need research on their interests and development of appropriate responses
      - Provincial and municipal policy-makers
    - Citizens
      - Aboriginal peoples
      - Volunteer groups
      - Private sector
    - Often the research and contact work will not take place without additional resources since we are generally preoccupied with other demands
  - Develop understanding and liaison with educational institutions
    - Primary source of researchers (is a research network) but we need more imaginative approaches to encouraging them to participate
      - Careers rest on academic publications
      - KM lays the burden of 'translation' on researchers
      - Therefore need resources to make it happen
      - Students need opportunities
        - Search them out
        - Provide them wherever possible
        - Jobs and awards championing
  - Entrench core funding
    - Long term perspective is critical
  - Record and document impacts
    - Make them visible – especially those that occur among individuals of all types

- Contributions of many groups and individuals
  - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
    - Especially their INE initiative with Industry Canada
  - Concordia University – and all universities in our network – we need and appreciate their support
  - The Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada
  - Statistics Canada
  - CRRF
  - NRE Research Team
  - Rural Citizens in our field sites

NRE²   BUILDING RURAL CAPACITY IN THE NEW ECONOMY

CRRN - 1

- Support conferences and workshops
- Rural Information Gateway
- Data repository and archives
- Research stimulation and guidance
- Knowledge mobilization best practices
- Capacity-building internships
- Liaison and network opportunities
- Rural research clearinghouse

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•The CRRN will organize knowledge mobilization through the following activities.

•*Conferences and Workshops* will be supported that bring partners together in traditional and non-traditional venues. This will involve contributing to existing meetings as well as initiating new ones. [conferences: CRRF and NRRN] [workshops: RSTP and UNBC]

•A *Rural Information Internet Gateway* will be established to link rural web sites and serve as an inquiry portal for academic and non-academic users. [Concordia and RDI]

•A *Data Repository and Archive* for rural-related data and information will be maintained. [Concordia and RSTP]

•*Research Stimulation and Guidance* will be supported through initiatives for publications, events, and solicitation of materials. [UNBC and RDI]

•*Knowledge Mobilization Best Practices* will be identified and made available via the Internet. [Harris Centre and Concordia]

•*Capacity-building Internships* for students, local government employees, volunteers, and other people will be established with university, government, and NGO groups. [Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence and Rural Secretariat]

•*Liaison and Network Opportunities* will be identified and developed for both well-established and low-capacity groups. [Concordia and Centre de recherche sure le developpement territoriale, UQAR]

•*A Rural Research Clearinghouse* will be established to 'translate' academic research products to users and to identify key research needs of those users. [RSTP and RDI]

•*The Rural 'Voice' in Research and Policy* will be supported through 'broker' services between researchers and policy or public groups requesting input. [CRRF and FRL]

•*Receptor Capacity* will be increased through strategic alliances with groups that are currently relatively isolated from rural research networks. These include municipal organizations, provincial governments, Aboriginal Peoples, voluntary groups, and the private sector.

   •*Municipal organizations* [U of Guelph and UQAR]

   •*Provincial governments* [U of Guelph and UQAR]

   •*Aboriginal peoples* [Chair in Early Intervention, Three Rivers U Kamloops and PWHCE, Coastal Communities]

   •*Voluntary groups* [UNBC and CIEL]

   •*Private sector* [C-CRERL and CFS]

•*International Partnerships* will be expanded, building on the networks established by CRRN Partners. [Concordia and IRN]

•*A Rural Research Endowment Fund* [Concordia and CRRF]

NRE ²   BUILDING RURAL CAPACITY IN THE NEW ECONOMY

KM Learnings - 1

- Identify target audiences
- Early, extensive, continual engagement
- Equalize power
- Use existing organizations and networks
- Organize across boundaries on common interests

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• *Clearly identify the target audiences with which you wish to engage.* In the case of CRRN, these will be researchers (including students), policy-makers (at all levels of government), community activists (including public and private entrepreneurs), and citizens (primarily rural-based but extending to urban citizens in strategic ways).

• *Ensure early, extensive, and continual engagement with these target groups.* CRRN will build on the extensive collaboration established by CRRF and the NRE. This means that many of the key players are already involved and contributing to the project design.

• *Equalize relations of power and maximize mutual respect as much as possible.* Our practice of holding meetings in rural places has done much to convince our partners of our interest, provide support for the local economy, and create a valuable opportunity for policy-makers to meet directly with local citizens. CRRN will continue this practice wherever possible, seeking innovative ways to include groups and individuals with limited resources.

• *Use existing organizations and networks.* In keeping with this principle, CRRN builds on many networks and organizations which in turn have extensive links regionally, nationally, and internationally.

• *Identify and organize collaboration across disciplines and spheres but with respect to common, strategic foci.* The field sites provided the NRE with common objects of research – thereby encouraging collaboration among multi-discipline based interests. CRRN will continue this approach through the selection of research, workshop, and conference sites.

•*Provide the means whereby junior faculty and researchers can meet 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. This jeopardizes the renewal process within our research community and often makes the extra demands of KM unattainable. CRRN will deal with this institutional challenge by organizing training and publishing opportunities for junior faculty, shifting most of the administrative and KM demands to senior faculty members, mentoring junior members in KM practices, and developing guidelines for evaluating the quality of KM activities.

•*Organize for flexibility and adaptation.* The distributive nature of the CRRN governance structure provides the flexibility for new partners, issues, and objectives to meet changing conditions. New people, organizations, and ideas will continue to be welcomed with interest and openness within flexible governance structures.

•*Provide the means whereby organizational structures that are <u>inclusive</u> are closely allied to those that are <u>exclusive</u> (to meet professional criteria for quality and credibility).* 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 will provide the more exclusive projects required for academic research (cf. CRRF letter of support).

•*Prepare for future recruitment and support.* Since KM requires a long-term investment, it is critical to plan for new participants to support CRRN 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. CRRN will seek to provide the extra support required for volunteers in our activities.