rdi quarterly update

March 2014

Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan is complete. RDI’s mission is to support informed decision-making by Columbia Basin-Boundary communities through the provision of information, applied research and related outreach and extension support. Strategic priorities for the next three years include:

* Consolidate, identify gaps and build regional knowledge
* Undertake applied rural development focused research
* Support the access, use and application of RDI and rural development research and tools
* Support meaningful collaboration amongst educational institutions and Columbia Basin Trust

The RDI will release the three-year strategic plan in April. An accompanying video will be featured on the RDI website.

Digital Basin

The Digital Basin houses over 100 indicator and asset data layers. The Digital Basin includes cadastral parcel data obtained from the Regional Districts and municipalities. RDI is currently securing multi-year data sharing agreements with local government to allow the cadastral parcel data to be available to the public on the Digital Basin web-based platform. Development will be complete by the end of March. A ‘soft launch’ is planned for early April. RDI advisory members will be sent an invitation to participate in ‘beta testing’ in early April. Beta testing will conclude by the end of April. A series of six Digital Basin community workshops will be hosted in early May.

State of the Environment Project

The BC Real Estate Foundation provided $50,000 in funding to expand the scope of the State of the Basin’s environmental indicator research and development efforts, including funding for an expanded suite and online geospatial mapping of environmental indicators. This project began in January 2013 and will conclude mid-May 2014. The State of the Environment advisory committee met in mid-February to review project status, discuss State of the Basin environmental indicators, view a demonstration of the Digital Basin, and discuss project wrap up and related extension activities. Fifteen new environmental indicators will be added to the Digital Basin portal and released in early May.

Employment Lands

The Employment Lands Inventory and site selection tool have been integrated into the Digital Basin. Pending signed data sharing agreements with local government, investors, planners, economic development practitioners and existing companies will be able to access the inventory and site selection tool online and will be able to explore the inventory alongside over 100 economic, social, cultural and environmental indicator and asset data layers. Initial findings from the Employment Lands project will be presented at the Association of Kootenay Boundary Local Government Conference in early April. The Employment Lands final report will be released in late April and a series of six forums across the region will be held in early May. Representatives from local government (elected officials and staff) and economic development practitioners will be invited to the forums to discuss findings and possible next steps.

Adopting Digital Technologies Pilot Project

The National Research Council-funded Adopting Digital Technologies Pilot project took place between January 2013 and February 2014. The project focused on the provision of technology training, advisory services, and direct support to companies and drew heavily on the technological expertise of faculty and students from the Geographic Information Systems programs, the Selkirk Geospatial Research Centre and the Digital Arts and New Media program at Selkirk College. The RDI provided ongoing project management support. The ADT project team included a College-Industry Liaison Officer, a Project Coordinator, a Project Outreach Assistant, 4 Co-Op students, and 11 faculty members. A total of 2901 hours of training, advisory services and direct support was provided to 222 SMEs and 16 non-profits, including a total of 171 hours of outreach, 1301 hours of training, and 1429 hours of advisory and direct support. Selkirk College partnered with the College of the Rockies and Okanagan College in the delivery of this project and will continue to explore partnership opportunities for the continuation of related training and applied research activities moving forward. This project will be featured as a national success story on the National Research Council’s website.

Business Retention and Expansion (BRE)

The number of communities participating in the Columbia Basin-Boundary BRE pilot project continued to grow this year.

The Slocan Valley BRE project is now complete and has been reviewed by the BRE Steering Committee (including representatives from the Slocan Valley Economic Development Commission and Slocan District Chamber of Commerce). The final [Slocan Valley BRE report](http://www.cbrdi.ca/communities/slocan-valley/) has been posted on the RDI website. Two BRE community presentations will take place in the Slocan Valley in early April. Kimberley and Sparwood are currently in the data collection phase of their BRE projects, interviewing businesses using the regional BRE survey tool. A BRE information presentation was provided to the Columbia Valley Community Directed Funds Committee. A BRE information video was created and is now available on the RDI website. The RDI continues to pay the annual licencing fee for the Executive Pulse data and client management system. The RDI will explore opportunities to expand the use of this tool to support referrals across the business support provider network (i.e. colleges, Community Futures, skills training centres, Basin Business Advisors, industrial technology advisor, etc.)

A Case Study of State of the Basin Climate Change Indicators (research in partnership)

The RDI is providing research support to Columbia Basin Trust’s Communities Adapting to Climate Change Initiative (CACCI) in its review of State of the Basin indicators. The project began in October 2013 and will conclude in December 2014. The purpose of the project is to assess the ability of indicators to measure the effectiveness of climate adaptation, with a primary focus on the sectors of energy, health, infrastructure, flood management and transportation. Results of this assessment will enable improvement of the indicators to better document and measure community climate adaption efforts. Both the CACCI and RDI research teams have evaluated indicators independently. A full-day joint-indicator assessment workshop is schedule for late March.

Student Research Internships

The RDI will continue to provide project management and research advisory support to the Teck Serv student research internship. In its fourth year, the Teck Serv Internship is funded by Teck Metals Ltd. Trail Operations. Building on the Teck Serv model, the RDI is funding and supporting a student research internship in partnership with the College of the Rockies this year. One organization in the West Kootenay sub-region and one organization in the East Kootenay sub-region will receive up to $10,000 to cover the costs of a summer research intern.

Resources Database

The [RDI Resources Database](http://www.cbrdi.ca/resources) now houses over 140 research and planning documents specific to our region on a web-based platform. This database allows users to search for documents by community, corridor and / or theme (economic, social, cultural, environmental). Additional search functionality has been added to allow users to search by topic area. This additional search functionality will be fully operational by early April. The consolidation of knowledge is one of the ways the RDI aims to support information sharing and encourage regional collaboration. The RDI Resources Database allows communities (geographic and communities of interest) to learn from each other and points to opportunities where communities might come together around shared research interests.

Research Team

The Regional Innovation Chair (RIC) in Rural Economic Development, 1 full time equivalent (FTE) researcher and project specific consultants staffed the RDI in its first few years of operation. Now, aside from the RIC who serves as the RDI’s senior inaugural officer, an RDI coordinator and a team of Masters level researchers (3 FTE) with expertise in diverse areas such as resource management, public policy, land use planning, economics and education staff the RDI. This interdisciplinary team, with the support of faculty from other post-secondary institutions in Canada and consultants as needed, is well positioned to manage topic-specific indicator portfolios, provide research advisory services to community-based research projects, to collectively address pressing regional research needs and opportunities, and to mobilize knowledge generated from RDI research efforts and lessons learned from similar rural regions elsewhere.

National Research Partnerships

The RDI is listed as a partner on 3 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada partnership grant proposals submitted in mid-February. First, the University of Alberta’s partnership grant entitled *Rural Sustainability: Context, Complexity, Planning, Policy and Implementation* aims to link a series of established community-university relationships across Canada focused on improving rural sustainability. The project aims to explore both what constitutes sustainability in diverse rural contexts, how integration between and across pillars can actually occur, how different community-based approaches to sustainability plan implementation affect community capitals, and how rural communities are transforming the vision and wide-ranging goals set out in their planning processes into measurable, justifiable and meaningful actions.

Second, Athabasca University’s partnership grant entitled *Social Economy Intermediaries and the Transition to Sustainability: Scaling Innovation* builds on the Regional Innovation Chair’s involvement with the BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance (BALTA). BALTA's overall goal for this research project is to understand, communicate, and animate research and learning that will increase the capacity of social economy intermediaries to scale sustainability innovations. The project rests on two assumptions: (1) Proven social economy innovations at the niche level, if scaled, will significantly contribute to the robustness and durability of the transition to sustainability; (2) Social economy intermediaries bring together multiple stakeholders and other assets in a way that is essential to the spread of proven innovations and the scaling of their impact. The research design will build on an existing approach of balancing practitioner and academic leadership and participation in themed research clusters. These clusters are: 1) Food Security; 2) Affordable Shelter & Alternative Land Tenure; 3) Energy Use & Carbon Reduction; 4) Finance; and 5) Cooperative Place-Making.

Third, Brandon University’s partnership grant entitled *Rural Policy Learning Commons: Building Rural Policy through International Comparative Analysis* aims to enhance Canadian prosperity by identifying and analyzing policy options relevant to rural and northern places, evaluating these options in the context of national and international policy innovations, and building leadership capacity among rural and northern researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners. Initial policy themes include human capital and migration, natural resource development, governance, and infrastructure and services.

New Applied Research Projects

A number of possible areas for future interdisciplinary regional applied research were identified through the fall RDI Evaluation, consultations with the RDI advisory and governance groups, one-on-one consultations with regional stakeholders, and Selkirk College and Columbia Basin Trust consultation processes. Research proposals are being developed around the themes of regional food systems, collaboration in the non-profit sector, and watershed governance. A decision-making matrix is now in place to assist in the selection of future regional applied research projects as RDI capacity allows. It is expected proposals will be evaluated against the matrix in early summer following the launch of Digital Basin and Employment Lands project findings and tools. A number of other research themes (i.e. place-based development, workforce development, impacts of climate change, business-government relations, poverty reduction, seniors housing needs, sector-specific supply sourcing) are also being explored, some of which may begin to be addressed through knowledge briefs this upcoming year.

Data Requests, Referrals and Research Advisory Services

In an effort to support community-based research in the region the RDI will be offering a new research advisory service this year. Advisory services will focus on research ethics, design and related data collection instruments. Organizations will be invited to complete a Request for Advisory Services submission form that will then be referred to a member of the RDI research team for a follow-up phone consultation. Feedback will then be provided to the organization(s) to best position the research project to address its stated goals and objectives. The RDI will continue to respond to data and referral requests, although it is anticipated the Digital Basin will build the capacity of organizations to now easily access the data they require to support their community-based research projects. This year the RDI will formalize mechanisms to receive, respond and track data, referral, and research advisory requests. Referral requests will aim to connect organizations with faculty and student research projects at our regions’ colleges and with other organizations with similar research interests.

Fiscal Year End and Next Fiscal Planning

The RDI Annual Report, 2013/14 Financials, 2014/15 Budget, 2014/15 Operational Plan, 2014/15 Evaluation Plan, and 2014/15 Work Plan will be provided to the RDI Governance Committee in late-April and discussed and finalized at the May RDI Governance meeting. A series of background briefs are also being developed to guide decision-making and implementation of applied research projects, research advisory services, and outreach and extension efforts.

Communications and Knowledge Mobilization

The Fall RDI evaluation highlighted the need to improve communication efforts. Quarterly updates will be provided to RDI Governance and Advisory Committees in March, June, September and December and will be posted on the RDI website. An RDI structure and function document has been produced and will be posted on the RDI website. E-Newsletters will be released in April, July, October, and January to the over 250 RDI e-newsletter subscribers.

Outreach and extension activities will increase this year to support the mobilization of knowledge related to applied research projects. The focus this year will be on releasing a series of Trends Analysis Briefs and encouraging the use of the Digital Basin, releasing Employment Lands research findings and encouraging the use of the Employment Lands Inventory and site selection tool to support investment and job growth, sharing lessons learned from the Adopting Digital Technologies project with leaders at our regions’ colleges and exploring opportunities for research collaborations, and continuing to provide training and research support to business retention and expansion projects across the region. A series of Knowledge Videos will be produced and posted on the RDI website to further disseminate research findings.

This year, the RDI will also be releasing a series of Knowledge Briefs accompanied by regional webinars in an effort to share innovative approaches to rural development, lessons learned from other jurisdictions and build a common regional understanding of key rural topics. The webinars will enable RDI researchers to present the highlights from Knowledge Brief and create an opportunity for regional discussion around each topic.