COLUMBIA BASIN RDI
RURAL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

Principle Researcher(s) & Affiliations

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Research Field

Workforce
Education & Training
Economic Development
Network Analysis

Partners & Collaborators

The RDI will work closely with the Kootenay Regional Workforce Table (KRWT) through all phases of the project. KRWT steering committee members will act as key project partners during the impletation of pilot approaches to workforce development. The RDI will also work closely with sub-regional groups that have identified workforce development as a priority. The RDI will also work closely with the new economic development practitioners network.

Funding Sources

Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition

Columbia Basin Trust (RDI Funder)

SIBAC

Project Period

From: November, 2014

To: December, 2017

Funder Contribution:	$15,000
RDI Contribution:	$70,000
Partner In-Kind:	$30,000
Total	$115,000

Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development

November 2014

Informed Decision-Making, Networks & Piloting Best Practices

Introduction

The purpose of this research project is to advance innovation in regional workforce development through the facilitation of informed decision-making, the weaving of related networks, and the piloting of best practice approaches. This regional 3-year project conceptualizes workforce development in terms of creating globally competitive industries, building an entrepreneurial region, developing a workforce with 21st Century skills, and weaving supportive civic networks.

The project is designed to address three key objectives. The first is to collect, compile, and mobilize available labour market data in order to equip our region's decision-makers with the information they need to make informed decisions related to the workforce and economy. The second is to assess the state of network relationships linking workforce development and economic development practitioners. This baseline account will allow network members to engage in strategic efforts to improve collaboration. The third objective involves piloting innovative, best practice approaches to workforce development. Selected interventions will consider regional priorities, opportunities and lessons learned from elsewhere. This applied research project is well positioned to mobilize efforts aimed at fostering experiential learning, strengthening our learning region and more purposefully positioning the region's colleges as active partners in the Basin-Boundary economic development landscape.

Research Rationale & Target User Groups

Many regions are witnessing a growing gap between the types of skills that are available in the workforce, and those that are required by employers. Researchers have acknowleged that this challenge primarily stems from the failure of workforce development services to keep pace with the increasingly complex and dynamic needs of the modern economy. This challenge is evidenced in the Basin-Boundary region by the Business Rention and Expansion pilot project, which found that many employers are experiencing difficulties recruiting workers with the skillset required by the business.

Target user groups include educational institutions, industry associations, governments, economic development practitioners, employment service providers and policy-makers. The project is designed to complement the Regional Skills Training Plan that was released in 2013 as a result of work undertaken by the Kootenay Regional Workforce Table (KRWT). Participants in the KRWT will be key project partners, alongside sub-regional groups that have identified workforce development as a priority.

Selkirk College

Primary Research Questions

1. What types of information and knowledge mobilization approaches best support informed workforce and economic development decision-making in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region?
2. How can workforce and economic development networks be strengthened to support desired outcomes?
3. How can workforce development best practice approaches most effectively be applied in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region?

Methods

The research will employ a mixed method approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Statistical and geospatial analysis will be used to better understand regional labour market data. A participatory, embedded case study-social network methodology will be used to better understand the mobilization of knowledge, role of networks and implementation of best practices. Efforts will be made to involve college students and faculty in this research.

The Boundary region will serve as an initital pilot area to connect and mobilize labour market data, informing future related efforts across the Columbia Basin-Boundary region.
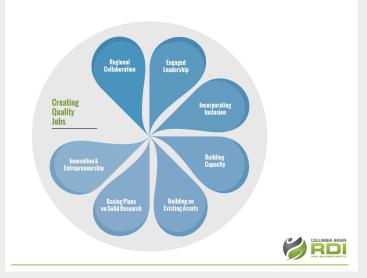
Key Activities

The collection and mobilization of labour market data is expected to include interviews with industry association representatives, compilation of data from major statistical agencies and available local data, an assessment of the capacity and capabilities of the regions' colleges to meet existing and emerging labour force needs, and the development of information products customized to target audiences.

Activities related to the role of networks in regional workforce and economic development will include a benchmark network analysis in year one and a network analysis again in year three. The intention is to understand if, how and to what exent interventions aimed at strengthening the regional network have been effective.

Activities focused on piloting interventions are expected to include the development of a Regional Workforce Innovation in Economic Development Plan (building on the Regional Skills Training Plan), the recommendation of interventions to the Regional Steering Committee based on regional priorities, opportunities and lessons learned from elsewhere, and the monitoring of impacts of interventions on desired outcomes. The role of implementing intervention options will be led by partner organizations involved in the fields of workforce and economic development (in particular, Steering Committee participants). The RDI will provide continued research and information support to implementation efforts, as necessary.

Knowledge Mobilization and Products

Knowledge mobilization activities will be targeted at likely end-users, including the KRWT Steering Committee, colleges, secondary school guidance councillors and teachers, industry associations, Columbia Basin Trust, First Nations, economic development stakeholders, local government, provincial policy-makers, and employment service providers. Knowledge products and outreach and extension activities will primarily follow a 'meet them where they are at' approach (i.e. presentations to College Boards, KRWT Steering Committee, economic development organizations, Regional Economic Development Practitioners Network).

Creating Quality Jobs Framework. International Economic Development Council. (2010). Creating Quality Jobs: Transforming the Economic Development Landscape.