

Dialogue Summary Report – Corner Brook

September 6, 2008

*Making Newfoundland and Labrador a
Province of Choice for Young People*

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About CPRN

Canadian Policy Research Networks creates knowledge and leads public dialogue and discussion on social and economic issues important to the well-being of all Canadians. Since its beginning in 1994, CPRN has provided advice to Canada's leaders on the issues of our times and produced policy options to move Canada forward.

CPRN carries out its mission by:

- Having experts do original research in all major socio-economic areas;
- Conducting Canada-wide dialogues and roundtables to discuss policy issues, raise awareness, and align outcomes with public attitudes and expectations; and,
- Broadly disseminating its research to promote the engagement of Canadians in policy issues.

CPRN specializes in outreach to young Canadian leaders, helping them develop their skills and encouraging them to participate in public issues and policy development.

These approaches have made CPRN one of Canada's most recognized sources of high quality, social and economic policy ideas, as well as a leader in civic engagement.

For further information on this and past dialogues, please visit CPRN's website at www.cprn.org.

Dialogue Summary Report – Corner Brook

Introduction

Many young people are leaving Newfoundland and Labrador to seek opportunities in other Canadian provinces. This long-term trend of out-migration has had a significant impact on families and communities throughout the province. Recently there have been more people moving into the province, but the number of young people leaving is still greater than those coming in, causing a net loss of young people.

On June 5, 2008, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador announced the development of a *Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy* to counter the negative impacts of youth out-migration, strengthen the labour market and support the economic development of the province.

Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), on behalf of the government, conducted a series of deliberative dialogues with young people from Newfoundland and Labrador aged 18 to 30. In total, 13 dialogues were held, 11 in centers across the province and two outside, in Fort McMurray, Alberta and Ottawa, Ontario, where many young people have relocated. At least one in-province dialogue was conducted in each of the nine Rural Secretariat regions with three in the Avalon Peninsula.

The goal of the dialogues was to help identify ways to encourage young people to stay, live and work in the province. The project's findings and recommendations will inform provincial government policy development and decision-making. It will provide the government with an understanding of the trade-offs and choices young people are prepared to make and which they expect to be considered by government, business and communities in setting future directions for the province.

Dialogue Process

CPRN's well established deliberative dialogue method was used to engage young people in a day-long process. The purpose was to bring the voices of young adults into a conversation about how to address the outflow of young people. Participants examined, discussed and worked through critical issues, learning from each other, gaining an understanding of different perspectives and identifying ways to move forward. The dialogue process offered participants the chance to use their knowledge and experience of the province to reflect on some of the difficult choices that could be taken to reduce net out-migration among young people.

Participants were recruited using various methods, including random selection, referrals by family members and friends, various communication networks and through media blitzes.

About the Region

The population of the Corner Brook – Rocky Harbour Rural Secretariat region is 45,908 according to 2007 statistics.¹ The region includes the surrounding area of Corner Brook and White Bay South to Jackson’s Arm extending north to, but not including, River of Ponds.²

There were 38 participants from all parts of the region at the dialogue in Corner Brook on September 6, 2008.

Agenda

The day started with introductions and a presentation of the dialogue process. Participants were then divided into three breakout groups of 10 to 15 people.

Three approaches were presented for discussion within the breakout groups (see Appendix A). The approaches reflect different values, perspectives, assumptions and experiences. The participants worked through each approach, identifying what they liked and disliked about each approach. They then determined what their common ground and areas of difference were.

Participants returned to the plenary to further explore the choices and trade-offs that they would be willing to make. Afterwards, they were divided into smaller sub-groups in which they identified bold actions that could be implemented in the future.

Common Ground and Areas of Difference

Common ground is defined as the set of values, principles and strategies that the group thinks is important and represents what they really care about in moving forward on the issue of youth retention and attraction.

Areas of difference, divergence or tension represent matters on which the group could not agree, or where there was some level of agreement but the group identified tensions and challenging trade-offs between values.

The participants were divided into three breakout groups for this exercise. Below are their common grounds and areas of difference.

¹ Demography Division, Statistics Canada; Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Finance

² www.exec.gov.nl.ca/rural/RSR3.asp

Breakout Group 1

Common Ground

- Participants feel that entry-level job opportunities that do not require experience are crucial to enabling youth to stay in the province rather than leave to gain employment. There is a need for better cooperation between the school system and various employment opportunities. Gaining access to jobs is as important as having high wages.
- Participants strongly believe that wages have to be higher and competitive with wages elsewhere in Canada to get youth to stay. It is not enough to have a comfortable wage in relation to the cost of living; young people should not have to settle for lower wages and deserve to be paid as much as in other parts of Canada.
- Student debt is a big issue as young people are often forced to leave the province to seek higher paying jobs because they have high student debt.
- Participants expressed skepticism about the oil boom and the potential for job creation. The focus should be on developing the economy and jobs for the long term not just for the current boom because job security for the long term is important.
- A top priority is making a home here for youth to stay and to attract newcomers. “Home” includes all aspects of quality of life: safety, services, health care, transportation, affordable housing, quality education from kindergarten to post-secondary education, entertainment, mental health care, etc.
 - There is a trade-off that to achieve this quality of life there has to be a regionalization of services, with a basic level of service accessible within a reasonable distance.
- Participants feel an attitude of acceptance to diverse groups needs to be cultivated to be welcoming of newcomers.

Breakout Group 2

Common Ground

- Jobs are the top priority. Permanent, year round, full time employment is essential.
- Job security, a safe work environment with benefits (i.e. health and dental) and comfortable wages relative to the cost of living in the province are equally important to participants.
- Entrepreneurship is valued; participants want to see more opportunities for young entrepreneurs. There should be a focus on attracting new companies to the province as well as skilled professionals.
- Participants value diverse education programs in the province.
- Quality of life is important with health care as the number one priority.
- The focus should be first on attracting displaced Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and secondly on attracting others.
 - To attract any youth to the province, Newfoundland and Labrador needs to be marketed as a place attractive to young people. Currently it is only marketed as a tourist destination.
- The provincial population is not educated enough on tolerance and diversity.

Areas of Difference

- There are differences of opinion in this group in relation to the questions, “Are we ready for immigration?” and “What is most important a career versus a job?”

Breakout Group 3

Common Ground

- Jobs are a top priority. Participants want to make a comfortable living which means having satisfactory wages, job satisfaction, and job security.
 - There should be fair competition for jobs to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities for employment.
- Quality of life is very important; a sense of community, a sense of personal safety and security, and being able to enjoy the physical environment.
 - Participants value maintaining the rural lifestyle and not letting the small town, community culture die out.
- Reasonable access to services for all; including health care, recreational activities and entertainment, housing, good education, and child care. Participants recognize that all services cannot be accessible in every place.
- Cultural adaptability should be encouraged to welcome people of diverse backgrounds and to integrate the province into a global environment through education and infrastructure.

Comparison across Breakout Groups

In the plenary session, participants presented their common ground and areas of difference. They were asked to identify key similarities and differences among the groups.

- There was general agreement on prioritizing jobs. Group 1 emphasizes entry-level opportunities, group 2 focuses on job security, and for group 3 job satisfaction is most important.
- Group 1 differs from groups 2 and 3 on the issue of wages. Group 1 feels that no matter what, people in the province should not have to settle for lower wages than in the rest of Canada. The other groups desire wages that allow them to live comfortably for the cost of living here.
- Quality of life is important, particularly education opportunities and health care. Groups 1 and 3 also value child care and affordable housing for a good quality of living.
- Groups 1 and 2 feel it is important to cultivate an attitude of acceptance towards diversity and people with diverse backgrounds. Group 2 feels that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians should be given priority for job openings, and group 3 thinks there should be fair competition for jobs.

Exploration of Trade-Offs

The participants then further discussed some issues where there seemed to be tension between different values and perspectives or contradictions between common grounds. They explored trade-offs that may have to be made to maintain or achieve what they value most.

- Trade-offs between having competitive wages or comfortable wages (enough to cover cost of living with some left over) was explored. Some participants stated that they can live comfortably in Newfoundland and Labrador for less pay than what they may earn elsewhere. They are willing to make that trade-off because they value the way of life in the province.
- On the other hand, there is concern that “comfortable” wages will not attract people here. Competitive wages are needed to convince people to move to the province who do not have the cultural roots and family ties to attract or keep them in the province. Participants feel that for too long people in the province just take what they can get and accept working for less than they deserve.
- About two-thirds of the participants said they value a comfortable wage and one-third said a competitive wage is most important to them.
- In exploring the trade-offs between valuing a high level of services but also valuing rural lifestyle, the group discussed whether it is realistic for services to be available in every community. Participants feel strongly that all medical services and equipment should be available somewhere on the island, if not locally accessible. There is too much centralization of medical services in St. John’s, and Corner Brook or another location on the west coast should be developed as a regional centre for the west side of the province.
- There were tensions within the group on whether or not to welcome newcomers to the province.
 - Some participants feel that the first priority should be to attract back Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who have left before focusing on attracting new people. On the other hand, some participants feel that those who have left are not interested in coming back and we should focus on bringing new people here.
 - There was a strong sense that the province needs to be re-branded as a place of opportunity to get people to stay, come back or attract new people.
- Participants recognized there are cultural trade-offs between the strong provincial pride in local culture and traditions versus being welcoming and open to new cultural influences.
 - Some participants feel a need to protect the culture and the people. New people with different cultures would threaten the traditions and compete with locals for jobs.
 - Other participants feel that “trade-off” had a negative connotation. The province is built on immigration. The culture has evolved over the years and new cultures will only add to this continual evolution.

Bold Actions

Bold actions are creative ideas and strategies that could be implemented to make Newfoundland and Labrador a province of choice for young people. The bold actions identified below are the key ideas identified by the participants that they considered most important and relevant. Other suggestions from individual brainstorming are described in Appendix C.

1. No interest on student loans if you finish your degree in the province. Or do what Ireland did – have free education for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. This would reduce student debt which is a serious issue for the province.
2. Reimburse tuition to relieve student debt within the province.
3. Tax break for youth after college and start up assistance – grants rather than student loans, no interest loans for recent graduates to be able to afford to buy cars, houses, etc. Paying off student debt will free up funds for other life expenses.
4. Provide basic amenities, such as food, shelter and health care, etc. for people who come here to work. This will increase quality of life, attracting different people and different cultures to enrich our communities, make people want to stay, and encourage entrepreneurship.
5. Free tuition for college and university students. An educated population creates a stronger economy and a more diverse culture. The provincial and federal government should work together to bring tuition down to zero.
6. Stipend for staying in province – must sign a contract. This will attract and retain people to the province. Create an advertising campaign to promote this stipend.
7. Lower the interest rates to zero on student loans. This will free up money for students so they won't have to move away to pay off their loans. Find a way to lower the interest rates.
8. Increase accessibility to province with creation of affordable high-speed ferry service. This will provide reasonable access to services, encourage cultural adaptability and accessibility. Trading partners and residents must demand service from government. Government must lobby research and provide to meet demands.
9. Creation of an employment opportunity board. This allows for the regulation of employment for a comfortable living. A joint federal and provincial council would regulate employment conditions, i.e. wages, security across national industries.
10. Government-run community daycare centres for child care, recreation and entertainment, and local employment. This addresses reasonable access to services for all and quality of life – child care, recreation, entertainment, employment, and education.

Next Steps

Participants were told that they will receive a copy of the session report. A Provincial Summit will be held in St. John's on November 14-15 with 160 participants randomly selected from the dialogues and 40 decision-makers.

Appendix A. Summary of the Three Approaches Used in the Dialogues

Approach 1: Making a Living in NL – Focus on the Economy

Strengthen and diversify our economy so that it can support a skilled and educated young workforce.

Most young people do not want to leave Newfoundland and Labrador. They leave because they have to pay off student debts quickly, find jobs they cannot get in the province, or earn a salary they can live on. Once they leave and make their life in another place, it is hard for them to return.

Approach 2: Enjoying Life in NL – Focus on Quality of Life

Build on Newfoundland and Labrador's strengths and ensure that the quality of life in the province is second to none.

People have stayed in Newfoundland and Labrador even during tough times because of the quality of life here. They enjoy the environment, the slower pace of life, the rural lifestyle, the sense of belonging to a community, and the rich cultural life and heritage. But we are not keeping up. Our programs and services (social, health, environmental) cannot keep up with the need, especially in rural areas. There are not enough programs and services for young people or young families such as entertainment, recreation, programs for youth-at-risk, public transportation and communication. Big city problems such as crime, urban sprawl and differences between rich and poor are growing in the Northeast Avalon. Young people no longer believe the province has the best quality of life around.

Approach 3: Opening NL to the Rest of Canada and the World – Focus on Diversity, Tolerance and In-Migration

Attract newcomers, especially young people, to Newfoundland and Labrador and help them to stay.

The population loss in Newfoundland and Labrador will continue even if our young people stay. Some say “Newfoundland and Labrador has existed in its own bubble for too long.” In the age of globalization, we must be open to outside influences and to immigration, without losing our sense of what makes us different. We are already a friendly people, but some of our views are too close-minded and narrow. We are not always open to different lifestyles and attitudes and we are not always welcoming of people of different races and cultures. If people do not feel their differences will be accepted they will not move here or stay.

Appendix B. Dialogue Agenda

Breakfast, Registration, Initial Questionnaire

Welcome, Opening, Introductions

Presentation of Key Information

Overview of the Process

Breakout Groups: Discussion of Personal Experiences

Breakout Groups: Dialogues Using Three Approaches

Breakout Groups: Elaboration of Common Ground and Areas of Difference

Plenary: Report Back on Common Ground and Areas of Difference

Plenary: Exploration of Trade-Offs

Small Work Groups: Bold Actions and Strategies

Plenary: Report Back on Bold Actions

Closing Comments

Final Questionnaire and Evaluation