

Dialogue Summary Report – Fort McMurray

September 27, 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 – Fort McMurray

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.

Agenda

There were 10 participants at the dialogue session in Fort McMurray that was held on September 27, 2008.

The day started with introductions and a presentation of the dialogue process.

Three approaches were presented for discussion (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 then explored the choices and trade-offs that they would be willing to make and 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 in one breakout group for this exercise. Below are their common grounds and areas of difference.

Common Ground

- Access to rural lifestyles which for them entail a reasonable commute time and a slower pace of life were viewed as important. Participants were willing to give up some wages in order to recapture the NL lifestyle, but the wages would need to be comfortable.
- Participants value the diversification of the population. They think that it should be managed by government and that newcomers that do migrate should be willing to adapt to and be respectful of NL culture.
- Participants value long-term economic planning and development that creates stability and opportunities so that NL is less dependent on short-term projects. There should be an emphasis on financial sustainability and high wages.
- Participants placed high value on having a strong sense of community (including having community support and trustworthy neighbours), safety and security for themselves and their families.
- Participants advise the NL government to link education to incentives to staying in the province.

Areas of Difference

- Opinions differed with respect to attracting newcomers versus maintaining NL culture and repatriating NL's first.
- There was disagreement on wages specifically with regard to which they preferred: a high Fort Mac wage versus a comfortable wage in NL.

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.

1. Competitive versus comfortable wage

- There was some consensus that people would return if they were paid a living wage, where they could cover the cost of living and have a little bit extra. They said they would be willing to go down by half of their current income in Fort McMurray to have a living wage in NL.
- Higher sales taxes in NL (13% compared to 5% in AB) are a deterrent.

2. Is salary alone going to bring you back?

- Most agreed that salaries are important.
- Employers in Fort Mac provide job security, good wages and benefits; the same would have to be available in NL, but the wages would not have to be as high as they are in Fort Mac.
- Short-term booms are what the NL economy is based on participants would need guaranteed long-term employment to go back.
- People come to Fort Mac to get work experience, because in NL no experience means no work. There needs to be more entry level jobs available in NL.
- Unions are important. It is difficult to find a unionized job in NL, and this would be a reason I would not return.

3. Would you sacrifice rural life in order for new development to occur?

- It depends on pace and type of development. The government needs to have a hand in pacing development in order to maintain quality of life. Look at Fort Mac as an example once government took the reins off it went crazy.
- Some were comfortable with new industries coming to NL even if it means sacrificing lifestyle.
- It was agreed that NL's are too proud to relinquish core values/traditions for the sake of industries developing.

4. Who should have job priority, NL's or newcomers?
 - Would welcome newcomers to fill labour gaps that are left unfilled by NL's, but they are mostly in the service industry.
 - Some felt that NL's should not be given priority if there were two candidates, the position should go to the more qualified person.
 - Most feel that NL's should be given priority when they are qualified for the job.
 - There was recognition by the group that for the province to grow they need new people as the population is declining.
5. What impact will newcomers have on culture?
 - If it's a gradual integration, it gives people time to adapt and adjust.
 - Language barriers will be an issue when working with immigrants (are an issue in Fort Mac) especially if there is an influx. Immigrants would need to be better integrated particularly when it comes to language.
6. Do you think that the strong identity and culture of NL will be a barrier to diverse people coming (immigrants, women or homosexuals)?
 - No, Quebec and BC have their own identity and many immigrants move there.
 - The barrier to immigrants is that opportunity is limited in NL.
 - Mentality and attitude might be a factor in NL to attracting people; there are too many close-minded.
 - Gender barriers exist in NL. One participant discussed how she could not get a job in heavy equipment machinery because she was a woman.
 - Depends on where you are; there is less discrimination in urban than rural areas. People leave small towns to feel more accepted in large towns like St. John's.
7. During the discussion of approach three, it arose that NL's face a lot of intolerance in Fort Mac. The following question was explored in plenary: Is the prejudice you face as NL's in AB a motivating force for you to go back?
 - Are harassed a lot at work for being from NL, down talked a lot even though we are all here just to make a living.
 - NL's run Fort Mac; we make up 73% of the workforce, and have built and ran this place.
 - Harassment can be an extra push for some to go back but many tolerate it because they have heard it so much.

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. Foster immigration which will draw immigrant to NL through advertising internationally which will help diversify the population.
2. Create employment incentives to attract people to Newfoundland and Labrador. Ideas include: decreasing taxes, offering Living Outside Allowance benefits (LOA), education (training/upgrading), health plans, and bonuses. This would lead to higher wages and long-term stability.
3. Taxation reform in order to reduce taxes for businesses but make it mandatory that 75% of the tax reduction go toward increasing wages. This will aid in increasing wages and long-term economic opportunities and stability.

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