

# Dialogue Summary Report – Gender

September 4, 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](http://www.cprn.org).

# Dialogue Summary Report – Gander

## 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 Gander – New-Wes-Valley region is 46,632 according to 2007 statistics.<sup>1</sup> The region spans from Terra Nova National Park in the East to Lewisporte in the West and includes a 100-plus coastal communities in between.<sup>2</sup>

There were 34 participants from all parts of the region at the dialogue in Gander on September 4, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Demography Division, Statistics Canada; Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Finance

<sup>2</sup> [www.exec.gov.nl.ca/rural/RSR6.asp](http://www.exec.gov.nl.ca/rural/RSR6.asp)

## **Breakout Group 1**

### ***Common Ground***

- Participants emphasize the need for better jobs including job satisfaction, competitive wages, a diversity or choice of jobs, and bridging opportunities from school to work, e.g. internships, co-op work terms, etc.
- Participants believe there is a need to balance wages and quality of life. Although quality of life is dependent on money, what is most important is having enough money and a comfortable wage, to meet the lifestyle you want.
- Priority should be given to hiring Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for jobs in the province before hiring “outsiders.”
- Access to services including social services, recreational services, and health care on par with the rest of Canada is critical. Health care is a top priority: access to facilities and doctors, as well as healthy living options for retirement, and a sense of safety and security knowing the health care services you need are within your region.
- Participants believe a trade-off is needed as all services cannot practically be provided to every community. Services should be “modernized selectively” meaning that services should be upgraded in some regional centres. Likewise, economic development should be focused in selected centres, not all communities.
- Participants feel it is very important to have a formal education that offers all the tools needed to gain employment. For example, apprentice hours to get proper designations are important. Youth need to have the opportunity to transition from school to work within the province so they do not have to leave to do so.

### ***Areas of Difference***

- Differences of opinion emerged in this group on the issue of immigration and to what extent the province needs or wants newcomers.

## **Breakout Group 2**

### ***Common Ground***

- Participants place a high value on quality education, including good instructors and up-to-date equipment.
- Participants value having competitive wages and job opportunities.
  - Job security is important and qualified people should be able to get jobs.
  - Wages should be more competitive with the rest of Canada, because people are willing to move elsewhere if they can make more money there.
- There is a lack of services; particularly in rural areas. However, participants suggest there is a need to be practical in terms of expecting resources to be invested in recreation/entertainment, IT and health care.
- Family and the physical attributes of Newfoundland and Labrador’s environment are what keep people in the province in spite of earning less money; youth make financial sacrifices to stay.

### **Areas of Difference**

- Participants had differing opinions on how welcome or unwelcome the province is, or should be, to immigrants.
  - Some people feel the province will not be able to attract newcomers without being able to offer competitive wages.
  - Others feel that with an influx of new people tensions would arise between Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and the newcomers.
  - This brought the discussion to tensions over the definition of what makes a Newfoundlander and Labradorian? What criteria is it based on?
- Tensions or differences were also expressed on how to best allocate resources in rural areas.

### **Breakout Group 3**

#### **Common Ground**

- Participants value comfortable salaries in relation to their cost of living, not necessarily on par or competitive with other places.
- Choice among diverse jobs and educational programs is important. However, earning high wages is as important as having the diverse choice of jobs.
- To have diversity in choices a practical trade-off must be made by consolidating services in regional rural centres.
- For young people to be able to get jobs, it is important to link educational programs directly to employment opportunities.
- Quality of life is very important to keep young people here, “but jobs will bring them here.”
  - Quality of life includes safety and security, a sense of belonging and community, having adequate health services, and peace and quiet.

#### **Areas of Difference**

- There was some difference of opinion about the importance of recreation and entertainment. Some participants highly value the “slow pace of life”; but for others, it is a reason to leave.
- Participants express a strong sense of value for Newfoundland and Labrador culture and traditions. Some believe being welcoming to others is already part of that tradition.
  - However, there was a difference of opinion on how much change the province should be open to, which participants feel would inevitably come with immigration.
  - Some participants feel the province should focus on retention first, bringing back Newfoundlanders and Labradorians second, and then worry about attracting newcomers, if necessary. They feel there needs to be a change in the assumption that people grow up to leave. “[The question people ask youth] isn’t ‘what are you going to do,’ it’s ‘where are you going to go’?”

## 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.

- Jobs are a key priority. Group 3 prioritizes having a comfortable wage in relation to the cost of living. Groups 1 and 2 initially emphasized a competitive wage but after deliberating the trade-offs decided a balance is needed between wages and quality of life, meaning some people are willing to forego higher salaries elsewhere to stay for the quality of life.
- Education is important. The focus for group 2 is on quality education, whereas for groups 1 and 3 the focus is on linking educational programs to job opportunities.
- Services, particularly health care, are very important, but participants recognize that practical trade-offs need to be made. All services cannot be provided equally in every small community but the population should have reasonable access by providing services in regional centres.
- All three groups have as an area of difference the tension around to what extent Newfoundland and Labrador is/should be open to newcomers. Within each group there was a difference of opinion between participants as to whether or not the province was open to others and whether or not it should be.

## 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.

- Participants discussed the trade-offs between having higher wages and having the quality of life desired.
  - For about half the participants, quality of life is most important. They value the Newfoundland and Labrador way of life and lifestyle over the potential to earn more money elsewhere.
  - About one-quarter of the participants feel earning high wages is most important.
  - Many feel that there needs to be a balance; that the trade-offs depend on the individual and the situation, e.g. health needs, family needs, etc.
- The second challenging trade-off was around protecting Newfoundland and Labrador culture and jobs, versus attracting and welcoming new people from diverse backgrounds to the province.
  - Some participants feel that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians should be prioritized for jobs. They value retaining youth over attracting new youth; within the province locals should be given job priority rather than bringing people in (even from St. John's) to fill upper management positions.
  - Others feel that because the province is founded on immigrants from various cultures, we need to broaden our definition of a "true" Newfoundlander and Labradorian. For example, someone who came here for school and wants to stay to work and live should be part of the retention focus.

## **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. Rural Health Care Reform – Provide small communities with health care professionals thus reducing wait times and dependence on major regional hospitals.
2. Education Incentives – Lower student loans/debt, bring new people here to study and retain current population by reimbursing 20% of loan per completed year of schooling.
3. Develop Education Incentive – Tuition/debt reduction by lowering interest rates to students who stay in the province.
4. Better/More/Diverse Education Opportunities – with more resources spent on a wide variety of education programs there would be more qualified people to fill diverse jobs in the province.
5. Student Loan Reimbursement – Reimburse graduates a percentage of their student loans upon graduation to promote retention of youth within the province.
6. Guaranteed employment program/graduate subsidy – encourage people to obtain a higher level of education and to stay in the province for employment by providing employment opportunities upon graduation and by helping to decrease student debt.
7. Government should fund on the job training and apprenticeships – Train practical skills anywhere in the province for jobs that can be done in the community.
8. Help with student loan debt – Government could enforce harsher laws on assistance for students.
9. Create an education program that ensures employment at the completion of post-secondary schooling. After completion of school, if a person would stay in the province for  $x$  number of years, then they would be helped with repayment of their student loan.

## **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