

Dialogue Summary Report – Ottawa

October 5, 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 – Ottawa

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 44 participants at the dialogue in Ottawa on October 5, 2008.

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.

Breakout Group 1

Common Ground

- Participants value competitive wages, and diversity in work and educational opportunities for career advancement. They think it is important to bridge post-secondary education and long-term employment. Participants feel that there needs to be better promotion of the opportunities that exist in the province in terms of employment.
- Access to entertainment, culture and recreation is important to participants as they value the urban lifestyle.
- Participants value cultural diversity and new ideas. They think the province should welcome newcomers, and should have a strong plan for immigration strategies.

Areas of Difference

- There was a difference of opinion on the value of the culture and heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador, and how much change is needed.

Breakout Group 2

Common Ground

- Participants value opportunities that aid in the transition from education to jobs, for example through entry-level job opportunities. A diverse range of education and training opportunities are important.
- Quality jobs are crucial; jobs with competitive wages, a healthy work/life balance, training opportunities, and job security.
- Participants value family support systems. They feel safety and security, education and health care, and social programs are important for children and youth.
- Development must be sustainable, diverse, and environmentally friendly. Economic development must stick to these principles and go beyond the development of oil and other primary resources.
- Participants value open-mindedness and an attitude that encourages innovation rather than the traditional self-defeating attitude common in the province.
- Participants value diversity but there are tensions around accepting newcomers to the province.

Areas of Difference

- There were differences of opinion on the need to attract newcomers versus the need to look after their own first. Some participants feel that they are welcoming to people from away, and that newcomers bring important jobs and new ideas. Others are worried that newcomers will dilute their strong cultural pride, and that the province should focus on bringing back educated people who are living away. The group couldn't agree whether prejudice towards newcomers exists as a barrier to people coming and staying.
- Some participants value the slower pace of life in the province and emphasize the need to keep that culture, whereas others feel the slower pace of life is outdated and the province needs to modernize.

Breakout Group 3

Common Ground

- Participants want access to affordable travel opportunities as they value having different experiences outside of the province and making connections to the greater world.
- Participants appreciate a diverse range of entertainment and cultural activities and therefore value access to such options. They enjoy the standard of living that they have found out of province and would look for a comparable standard of living back home in order to return to the province.
- Jobs are important but not for salary alone. Participants value jobs where employers appreciate, challenge and reward their employees.
- Being open-minded is important. There needs to be a focus on changing mindsets in Newfoundland and Labrador so that the province is more open to change.
- Participants advise that in order to attract people back and attract newcomers to the province, there will need to be a better promotion of what Newfoundland and Labrador has to offer, and a change away from advertising the province to the rest of Canada as a place of cheap labour.

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.

- Groups 1 and 2 value competitive wages and jobs with opportunities for advancement. Group 3 values jobs that are challenging and rewarding.
- Groups 1 and 2 value an easier transition for youth from education to work.
- Group 2 values family support. Social services are important to them, such as health care, education, social programs for youth, etc.
- Groups 1 and 3 value a diverse range of recreational activities/entertainment, and an urban lifestyle. Group 2 had divergence on the value of the slower pace of life in the province.
- Groups 1 and 2 value cultural diversity but group 1 had a difference of opinion on how much change to their culture would be acceptable, and group 2 had some tensions around prioritizing the needs of locals before newcomers. Groups 2 and 3 value being open-minded and open to change.
- Groups 1 and 2 value what they know Newfoundland and Labrador has to offer but they feel that there needs to be better promotion of what opportunities exist in the province, particularly in terms of jobs.
- Group 2 values sustainable, environmentally friendly and diverse economic development.
- Group 3 values access to affordable transportation within and in/out of the province.

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 what trade-offs they would be willing to make financially to go back to Newfoundland and Labrador.
 - A few participants feel that they would return to the province and perhaps accept slightly less pay depending on what other job benefits were offered, and if the services they need were available there.
 - The majority of the participants feel that it is not worth it for them to return home if it means earning less. In fact, they feel that they would have to be offered more than they are currently making to make it worth while, as they have already created roots here in Ottawa and it would be difficult to leave.
 - Furthermore, many participants feel that as Newfoundland and Labrador becomes a “have” province, employers should be paying wages that are competitive with the rest of Canada. They feel that the attitude needs to change that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will accept less.
- Participants were asked to consider a trade-off between services and jobs; if all the services they needed were available in Newfoundland and Labrador would they move back there, even if the jobs were not as desirable as here in Ottawa.
 - Some participants feel safer in more urban areas with better emergency services and don’t believe this will change in rural areas. Similarly, some feel that where they are from is just too isolated to ever have the services they want and need.
 - Most participants feel that services have to be coupled with quality jobs. Jobs are what will attract people to the province but then you need the services to get them to stay.
- Participants place a high value on services but they realize that you can’t expect the same level of services in every small town as you find in St. John’s.
 - Many feel that the province should invest in services in hubs across the province, so that there are services available close by wherever you live in the province.
 - Some participants feel that those who decide to live in hubs will have easier access, but those who decide to live in rural areas outside a hub are choosing for themselves to make that trade-off.
 - Others feel that just because you were born in or happen to live in a small place doesn’t mean that you don’t deserve basic services that are necessary to life. For example, Labrador does not receive a fair share of investment in services. Some participants want an equitable distribution of services.
 - There should be “arms reaching into smaller communities” from the service hub. There are some services that should be in every community, like at least one family doctor. Some areas are isolated, such as the Change Islands and need their own emergency services because it takes too long to get to a hub.

- Although most participants would not be willing to move back to their home towns, and would most likely move to St. John's if they were to move back to the province, they did not think St. John's should be prioritized for investing in services.
- Participants value diversity but there was some discussion around trade-offs between the traditional culture and lifestyle to accept change.
 - To some participants it is about protecting jobs for locals. They agree that if the best qualified person is from away, then he/she should be hired. But if there are two people who are equally qualified, the Newfoundlander and Labradorian should be hired over someone from away.
 - To many participants quality of life in Newfoundland and Labrador is closely related to the rural lifestyle, but the culture will have to evolve in this era of urbanization. Multiculturalism will increase naturally and enrich our culture. If the province tries to resist change then all it will have is the traditional culture, which will die out. Culture needs to evolve to survive.
 - The province needs cultural education in order to be acceptant of diversity. One participant expressed that she was teased by peers for having a different cultural background.
 - Retention and attraction should be one and the same. Whatever we do to improve the province for young people, will make it more attractive to locals and newcomers alike.

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. Promote progressive transport planning within the province and in/out of province travel to lessen the rural/urban divide through high speed efficient networks and cutting edge technology.
2. Industry should come up with innovative and renewable uses for resources so that the province can be environmentally and economically strong.
3. Promote labour market innovations through investing in cross appointments (allow people to move their seniority and benefits across sectors/provinces/countries) and create labour market awareness through job websites, training in schools and in communities to educate people on choices/opportunities and trends.
4. Develop green economy in the province through wind, solar and water energy. This will diversify economic resources, develop leadership and initiative, and encourage current and future education and skills development.
5. "Newfoundland Eco Plan": Stimulate green sustainable technologies to shift tax cuts from polluting industries to eco-friendly businesses. This will encourage sustainability and the creation of eco-friendly environments.
6. "Meeting your Career Aspirations": Provincial and federal governments, post-secondary institutions, business groups and NGO's should be involved in removing barriers and making links to facilitate transition from school to work and career advancement.

7. Take positions that already exist outside of NL and bring employees back to NL for career development by providing incentives for companies to move existing positions to the province.
8. Government should provide incentives and enforce wage and benefit equity and accountability. Industry should recruit and participate actively.
9. Government should improve infrastructure: a) taxation structure – lower taxes to entice businesses; b) communications – expand high-speed internet to allow people to work in rural areas; and c) transportation – rapid transit system on the Avalon.

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