

Dialogue Summary Report – St. John’s

September 14, 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 – St. John’s

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

St. John's is located in the Avalon Peninsula which according to 2007 regional population demographic statistics has a population of 246,371.¹ There are 188 communities that make up the Avalon.² Nearly half of the population of the province lives in the Avalon Peninsula with 36.4% in the greater St. John's (CMA).³ Two sessions were held in St. John's. There were 41 participants at the dialogue sessions held in St. John's on September 14.

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. After which 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/RSR5.asp

³ Population urban and rural, by province and territory (Newfoundland and Labrador). Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1851-2001.

Breakout Group 1

Common Ground

- There is common ground in the following values: salaries that are competitive with other places and allow for a comfortable lifestyle (e.g. leisure, extras) and not just necessities; job security (permanent and long-term); job quality including benefits and incentives, and job availability in a variety of respective fields.
- Participants value St. John's as it currently is, including its size, population, green space, amenities and safety – it should not develop or grow further. Rather, there should be investment to develop other centers (i.e. regional hubs) to catch up to St. John's.
- Safety and access to the environment and green spaces throughout the province were identified as important.
- Value was put on openness to diversity and the positive effects on lifestyle, cultural experiences, and new ideas that newcomers offer.
- There should be more investment in entertainment and leisure activities for youth and young adults in the hubs outside of St. John's. Solutions need to be practical and considerate of the province's limited financial resources.

Areas of Difference

- There was no agreement on the urban-rural divide in determining what is urban and rural; where to invest more resources (urban or rural).
- People value different aspects of quality of life (urban or rural amenities).
- Divergence was expressed on how attracting newcomers will impact job availability and culture in the province.
- The final area of difference for this group was regarding entrepreneurial risk versus job security (i.e. salary, benefits, and pension).

Breakout Group 2

Common Ground

- A common value identified is an income to adequately support a middle class lifestyle where wages are connected to education level and inflation.
- The group agrees on improving the quality of environmental sustainability services and programs like recycling.
- Participants value having accessible and improved health, social and housing services and, desire an affordable and accessible mass transportation system across the province and to the mainland.
- Cultural diversity in the province with an emphasis on attracting new immigrants is important.
- Participants call for incentives to encourage post-secondary education graduates to stay in the province. These should include student debt relief and entry-level jobs. There is a need to revamp the high school education system to include both an academic and trade focus.

Areas of Difference

- The group could not agree on the allocation of resources between rural and urban areas.
- There was disagreement on what would attract young people to the province: is it improved health and social services or entertainment and vibrant centres.

Breakout Group 3

Common Ground

- Participants put significance on protecting the environment, for its own value and as an important economic resource through tourism and the use of natural resources.
- Innovative technological advances and investments can be used as a way to help sustain rural areas.
- Participants value the province's quality of life, especially the sense of community and safety (i.e. the sense of familiarity).
- Diversity and openness were viewed as important. Newfoundland and Labrador should not just be treated as an entry point to the rest of Canada but rather as a destination for long-term settlement.
- There is value in a diversified economy that would provide more job opportunities and is not dependent on a single resource.
 - Offering job benefits and incentives to youth including competitive wages needed for a decent standard of living to promote long-term retention was advised.

Areas of Difference

- There was some tension on the viability of social services (e.g. health care and education) across rural Newfoundland and Labrador.
- The group disagreed on the extent to which former Newfoundlanders and Labradorians could be given priority in attraction strategies (as well as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in general with regards to new employment opportunities).

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.

- All groups raised the issue of job salary and security, the sustainability of the environment and the urban-rural divide.
- Also raised was the value of the groups to diversity and thought that they would have a positive effect on the province.
- The need for improved transportation within the island, the extent to which rural NL should be given a priority, innovative technological advances as a way to sustain rural areas, the importance of trade/apprentice courses in high-school to help guide students who are not interested in academic careers and the issue of linking salaries to cost of living were each only raised by one breakout group.

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. Level of Salary:

- What would keep you here and at what point would you consider leaving?
 - Many participants are considering going away for the following reasons:
 - To pursue post graduate studies in an area that is not available in the province.
 - No availability for moving up at work in terms of skill, salary and responsibility.
 - The need to pay off student debts.
 - To travel and experience other cultures.
 - Many mentioned the cost of living in St. John's is high and wages are not enough.

2. Urban versus Rural:

- Where would you invest money urban or rural areas?
 - Most participants would invest in urban and regional hubs like Gander. This will encourage people to stay in rural areas and create employment opportunities.
 - If the focus is on retention, investing would be best in regions. If the focus is on attraction, investing in urban areas would be best.
 - Half of the participants thought the focus should be on retention and half thought it should be on attraction.
 - When investing in rural areas it is important to preserve the natural beauty.

3. Diversity:

- Participants believe that culture evolves naturally. It would be enriched by newcomers and not be lost.
- Aspects of the culture which are key include: the language, music and entertainment.
- Participants want to maintain the wilderness aspect of the province. They do not want to lose the natural beauty of the province, as cities grow to accommodate the population.
- The majority of the group (two thirds) agreed that jobs should be open to all. The main reason was to be a comparable to other provinces. It would be a double standard to say that jobs should not be open to all while most of our people that have moved away have gotten jobs in other provinces. Some participants believed that jobs should be given to Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans first.

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.

In this dialogue, participants were encouraged to identify a key idea that would not relate to the issue of high student debt. Bold actions in the first sessions had focused on this issue and it was important to identify a range of other bold actions. This does not mean that high student debt was not an issue, as seen in the other suggestions in Appendix C.

1. Make NL the recycling capital of the world by: developing NL's recycling infrastructure to be the best in Canada and offer new incentives for using green items; decreasing property taxes for building green; developing and testing new green methods (wind and solar); offering educational opportunities creating new jobs; and recycling manufacturing industries.
2. Entrepreneur Program – program developed for entrepreneurs to provide security and eliminate risk by covering 30% of startup cost (grant); teaming up with insurance companies to provide benefits at lower rates; providing the individual with bankruptcy salary protection – 100% salary first year, 80% second year, and continual decrease from there, until individual gets back on their feet; free child daycare or offered at a lower cost; and if the business runs for two years 15% of 30% grant is to be paid back.
3. Profit Sharing/Shareholder Program which will include: government stocks – government reimburses stockholders if province is prosperous; stocks for various industries that the government could invest in; and long time residents could receive discount.
4. Isolation pay/income supplement or incentive for youth to come to NL. This would be an attraction and retention that would include diversity.
5. Change the high school education system by revamping it to include more programs/courses to give students a better understanding of what is available or offered in post-secondary institutions.

6. Reduction and subsidy of mortgage rates for post-secondary graduates to encourage them to purchase property and stay in NL.
7. Greener Energy that benefits the people: harvest wind energy, utilize hydro electric, use renewable resource to give back to residence of the province (lower energy bills), could be used to attract new residence.
8. Implementing an economic diversification strategy to attract employees/employers in new/different industries. Employee: government-sponsored RRSPs, reduce/free child care, tropical escape from NL winter, rebates for employee “green” initiatives (carpooling, telecommute, hybrid). Employers: tax breaks/exemptions, set-up assistance, employer green (alternative energy, reduce paper).
9. Contracting people to move to new hubs where services are increased (i.e. signing a contract for three years).

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