

Dialogue Summary Report – St. John’s

September 15, 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 15.

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

- Participants share values on the need for a bridge between post-secondary education and jobs in their field. Education is important; it needs to be more accessible and offer a variety of programs that lead to jobs upon graduation.
- There is a need for a balance between resources for essential services in rural areas and continued development of urban areas. Regional hubs would be a good idea to service the smaller rural communities as it is unrealistic to support every rural community. As urban areas expand they suggested being proactive in addressing issues before they get out of hand, e.g. crime and pollution in urban areas is important.
- The government should have infrastructure and services (industrial/social) set up to handle issues arising from the projected boom. They gave the examples of transportation, specifically the cost of travel and the need to fix roads and highways; environmental, social and health services.
- Participants put value on attracting people who have left while wanting to open the province up to the world. It was acknowledged that the population of the province is declining. People who want to come back should be repatriated and immigrants should be brought in as they will aide the economy and help diversify the province.

Areas of Difference

- Participants were divided on the issue of having high paying quality jobs out of the province versus lower paying jobs and quality of life in Newfoundland and Labrador (quality of life was defined as encompassing personal safety, beautiful environment and culture).
- There was also disagreement on how resources should be allocated between rural and urban areas.
- There was divergence on how much is too much, in terms of openness to newcomers versus losing Newfoundland and Labrador culture and jobs.

Breakout Group 2

Common Ground

- Participants advised the government to provide good quality jobs for university graduates. Too many are ending up in non-unionized low paying work like call centres or retail instead of entry level jobs in their trained professions.
- Value was also placed on access to education without fear of financial burdens (large student debts upon graduation).
- The economy should be diversified so that the province is not dependant on a single boom industry. Sustainable growth is important, and related infrastructure needs to be in place for the economy to support the population's needs.
- Participants value the availability/affordability of essential and non-essential social services in having a high quality of life.
- Fine arts are valued as a contribution to, and an expression of, the province's culture; the government needs to put more efforts in building and sustaining this industry.

Areas of Difference

- Disagreement emerged on the importance of strengthening the provincial economy and quality of life before attracting newcomers. Participants felt that a strategy to attract newcomers would come after the implementation of approaches 1 and 2.
- There was a variance of opinion on valuing fairness and equality for all in a competitive job/labour market, and, specifically, if there should be special treatment for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.
- Opinions varied on: what is more important, high salary/low quality of life, low salary/high quality of life? Should rural/urban areas be treated with different economic solutions? Is regionalization a good idea? Should individual communities each expect as much servicing as possible?

Breakout Group 3

Common Ground

- Security in longevity of lifestyle is valued; participants felt that communities with boom industries should be built up and sustainable so that once the industry is gone the community could still survive. They were not interested in band aid solutions.
- A strong economy designed around regional hubs and a strong link between education and the job market were also valued.
- Diversity is valued; specifically in assisting the province's role in the international global market and accepting of other cultures that bring in new ideas and different outlooks, plus fill jobs.
 - Concern was expressed for maintaining the province's culture. The group found common ground for using the unique culture as an industry to attract people.

Areas of Difference

- There was difference on how much focus should be placed in urban areas, and whether urban or rural lifestyle is more attractive.
- There was divergence on whether they should balance all three approaches or focus on approach one and two. Although there was consensus that approach one and two are more important questions remained on whether three would happen after the first two had been implemented.
- With respect to entry-level jobs, the group could not agree on whether it is more important to increase pay and/or availability in certain fields.
- There were questions on how much diversity was acceptable, versus a fear of losing the province's identity.

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 three groups seemed to disagree on more than they agreed upon. They noted the need to strengthen the economy, and the link between education and employment and recognition of education credentials.
- The need to balance rural and urban areas was also shared, as was the issue of making NL more diverse but with a reservation of how much which was linked to the loss of NL culture. The high salary, low quality of life versus low salary, high quality of life was also raised.
- The focus on fine arts was only raised by one group as was the idea of using NL's unique culture as an industry.

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. High Wage Jobs Out of NL versus Lower Wage Jobs in NL:
 - 50% of participants said they prefer lower wages and quality of life in NL. But they need enough money to pay the bills.
 - Many considering leaving in the next year (70%) to pay off student debt or to study in a program outside the province.
2. Urban versus Rural:
 - A good majority (80%) agreed that investing in regional hubs would be a good strategy. It would allow small communities to continue existing when only so much assistance can be given to small communities.
3. Diversity and Attracting Newcomers:
 - The majority of participants consider that a culture is self-perpetuating, always changing and evolving, and therefore can be easily strengthened. The NL culture can be equally expressed and maintained along with the other.
 - There was a sense that the limiting factor in migration is the infrastructure the system cannot support a 50% population increase, it doesn't matter where they are from, it has to be a slower process that enables the government to be able to handle the influx and accommodate all in terms of jobs and available services; and it has to be practical.
4. Retention versus Attraction?
 - Most agree on the need for a balance of both attraction and retention.

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. Offer incentives to new and expanding business owners, i.e. tax breaks, business incubators, salary subsidies, assistance with international trade, in order to support the attraction and retention of youth and economic diversity.
2. Resurrection of Newfie Bullet as an all access public transit system. Infrastructure creates big employment, improves tourism accessibility and lowers cost, e.g. students might not have to leave home to go to school, commuting will be easier.
3. Labour Market Training School (i.e. Grade 13) should include upcoming employment opportunities, financial management (retirement, pension) life skills (CPR, fire safety, first aid, general safety skills) and be made available across NL.
4. Public transit system that is: underground, province-wide, free, wheelchair accessible, mach 3, monorail, connecting all urban hubs, efficient and environmentally friendly. It would provide for an improved quality of life and economic development with businesses opening up at each stop.
5. Opportunities to experience interests before commitments (time and money). Find everyone's best/strongest skills/talents give them opportunity to make an informed career decision and support them with government funding so they can follow their interests into possible careers. Will ensure greater success and less debt and commitment when society is supported as a whole and will allow for more diverse jobs by funding less "practical" careers (athletes, musicians, dancers, etc.).
6. A better working life that would encompass: an enhanced pension based upon years lived in province; one month paid vacation; guaranteed minimum income; free prescription drugs; support for stay-at-home parents (or child care); energy rates based on income; and comprehensive environmental programs (recycling, composting, etc.).

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