

## The Trajectories of Rural Communities in Canada

### 1. Summary of Proposed Research

Rural Canada is undergoing changes that are both complex and pervasive. To understand them, we require macro-level analysis to identify the general trends and micro-level analysis to explain the local responses. This research program will advance the former and create a strong basis for the latter.

The research will describe and analyze the transformation of rural communities in Canada between 1986 and 2006. A longitudinal database will be developed to identify the predominant trajectories of rural communities with respect to population, economic performance, community health, and social cohesion; test several hypotheses regarding the drivers of those trajectories; and propose policy implications arising from the analysis.

The first objective is to prepare census, survey, and institutional data in a form that allows longitudinal analysis of geographical units appropriate for small towns and regions within rural and remote parts of Canada. This begins with census subdivision (CSD) information from the population census and adds health, criminal justice, business, municipal finance, and education data wherever they can be integrated in a way that respects the geographical boundaries of the CSDs. This database will serve as a foundation for classifying the trajectories of both urban and rural CSDs on key outcome variables using clustering techniques to identify regularities over time and place. These trajectories will then be analyzed using longitudinal, econometric, and hierarchical techniques to investigate the interdependence of selected demographic, economic, and social processes.

The theoretical analysis of community trajectories will be guided by a model of community capacity developed within the New Rural Economy Project (NRE) over the last 11 years. Such capacity is defined as the ability of community members to reorganize their local assets to produce the outcomes they desire. It highlights local economic, human, social, and environmental assets, the governance of those assets, and the institutional context in which reorganization takes place as the key elements producing community outcomes. The selection of initial issues reflects past analysis of some of these contextual factors, the relative importance of various local assets, and the governance processes by which the assets are used and reorganized to influence various outcomes.

Four issues will be selected for detailed analysis using this database:

1. *The importance of trade and globalization on rural community population change.* This research will investigate our previous finding that communities well-connected to the global economy are more likely to experience population decline. I will consider: the relative importance of human capital, proximity to metropolitan centres, institutional capacity, and the type of product or service traded as primary contributions to these population changes.
2. *The relative importance of human capital and social capital on population change, employment, and health within rural and urban communities.* This research will contribute both theoretically and empirically to previous research contrasting human and social capital for community outcomes.
3. *The importance of municipal financial autonomy on population change, institutional capacity, health, and employment.* Specific hypotheses will be examined regarding the conditions favouring municipal fiscal autonomy, the ways in which that autonomy is experienced and utilized, and the outcomes produced over time.
4. *Rural-Urban interdependence.* We will identify several aspects of rural-urban interdependence and related indicators that can be used to track them over time.

Results from this research will benefit all Canadians by advancing our understanding of community development and sustainability, providing evidence-based proposals and insights for national, provincial, and municipal policy-makers, and creating a database that allows both comparative and longitudinal description and analysis.

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### 2. Detailed Description

Rural Canada is undergoing major changes. Over the last 50 years it has lost its population advantage to urban areas, felt the challenges of wider global competition, lost many of its social services, and suffered the brunt of collapsing resource industries. At the same time, it has shown considerable resilience as it moves from a primary to a service economy, reorganizes many of its governance institutions, and identifies new products and services to produce (Reimer and Bollman, 2006).

If we are to understand these dramatic and complex changes, we require analysis that is both comprehensive and dynamic. This in turn requires data that reflects the changes over a significant period of time and does so at multiple levels. This research program proposes to develop such a database, and to use it for the exploration of key changes in rural Canada from 1986 to 2006. It builds on a 1986 to 2001 census subdivision (CSD) dataset prepared by the New Rural Economy Project (NRE), extends it to 2006, and adds administrative data to broaden its relevance.

#### Objectives

The proposed research program has five primary objectives, all of which address issues regarding rural and small-town Canada:

1. To prepare census, survey, and institutional data in a form that allows longitudinal analysis of geographical units appropriate for small towns and regions within rural and remote parts of Canada. This will focus primarily on CSD-level information from the population census, and will include health, criminal justice, business, municipal finance, and education data wherever they can be integrated in a way that respects the geographical boundaries of the CSDs.
2. To use these data as a basis for describing the changes in small town and rural Canada since 1986. Many of these changes have been identified in previous analysis by the applicant and others (Reimer and Bollman, 2006). This research program will extend the descriptions to include the institutional data mentioned above, new data from the 2006 census, and create a basis for longitudinal analysis.
3. To investigate hypotheses regarding the factors contributing to key outcomes in rural communities and regions. Population change, economic performance, community health, and social cohesion are some of the outcomes that will serve as initial foci.
4. To create a verified repository of data and indexes relating to key characteristics of rural communities. Economic, social, health, and governance-related indicators will be developed as part of this work, thereby creating resources for other researchers considering both rural and urban characteristics and processes.
5. To propose policy and program implications emerging from these trends and changes. This includes proposals regarding the organization of local governance, municipal, regional, provincial, and federal government initiatives, third sector and non-governmental organization (NGO) activities, rural-urban interdependencies, and strategic choices for rural people and organizations.

#### Context and Theoretical Framework

Although Canada's rural population<sup>1</sup> has remained somewhat stable over time, the general figures mask far-sweeping changes to the demographic, economic, social, and political organization within rural areas. These include the growth of new regional cities, the desertification of remote places in Canada's countryside, the restructuring of services, and the re-evaluation of community assets. Accurately detailing these changes is a first step to benchmark the discussion on appropriate policies and programs.

Considerable work has been completed outlining these changes, but they have largely focused on relatively large geographical regions (Census Divisions or Provinces) or on individuals as the unit of

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<sup>1</sup> The proposed research will use the OECD-based definition of rural (individuals outside the commuting zone of towns with a population density greater than 150 persons per sq. km.) This definition identified over 11 million rural Canadians in 2001 (Mwansa & Bollman, 2005: Table A4).

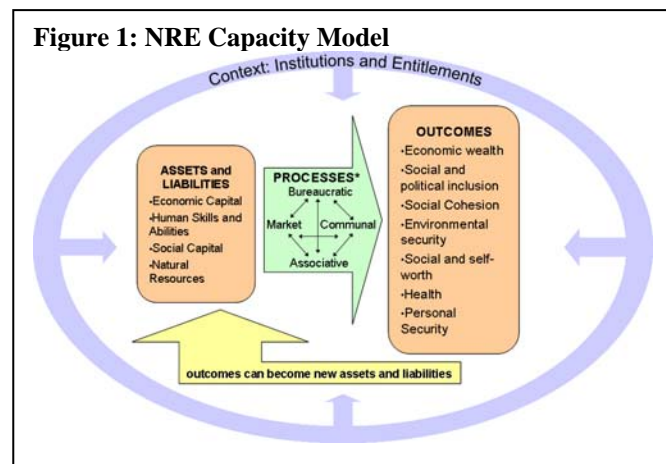
analysis (Bollman and Bryden, 1997; Bollman, 1992; Reimer and Bollman, 2006)<sup>2</sup>. The social and economic processes operating at the level of small towns are usually glossed over by this analysis. However, it is often at these local levels that important differences occur – influencing population, health, education, and economic outcomes (Oxendine et al., 2007; Reimer, 2006; Salamon, 2003; Willms, 2001). The local town or region is also the basic point at which governance occurs – both formally and informally – yet there is little analysis at this level and subsequently limited scientific guidance for municipal and regional decisions.

My first objective, therefore, is to develop a database that integrates local institutional characteristics with census information at the Census Subdivision (CSD) level. I have chosen the CSD because it is the closest approximation to the municipal unit of analysis<sup>3</sup>. This is the level at which many rural issues are faced and managed. It is also a level that best reflects the diversity of rural Canada – both with respect to the impacts of general changes and the responses to them (Reimer et al., 2007).

A second direction of analysis will be to examine the factors and processes underlying these general changes. The community capacity model developed as part of the NRE Project will be used as the central theoretical framework for this analysis (Lyons and Reimer, 2008). As illustrated in Figure 1, this model treats community capacity as the ability of community members to reorganize their local assets to produce the outcomes they desire. It highlights local economic, human, social, and environmental assets, the networks and relationships of the community, and the institutional contexts in which they operate as

the key elements producing community outcomes. The selection of project issues, therefore, reflects the analysis of some of these **contextual factors**, the relative importance of **local assets**, and the **governance processes** by which the assets are used and reorganized to influence various **outcomes**. In all projects I will respect the dynamic nature of the relationships. Outcomes at one point in time, for example, can become assets and liabilities at another point in time. Some examples of the issues to be investigated are outlined below.

- *The importance of trade and globalization on rural community population change.* Considerable research has been directed to the issue of globalization and its impact on rural communities (Pierce and Dale, 1999; O'Toole, 2000; Norcliffe, 2001; Britton, 1996). The NRE analysis has indicated that communities well connected to the global economy are more likely to experience population decline (Reimer and Bollman, 2006) but this lacks the longitudinal analysis that can relate this process to boom and bust cycles, strategies for mitigation, and policy programs (Stedman et al., 2004b; Smith et al., 2001). I will explore this finding in greater depth to introduce these longitudinal aspects and consider the relative importance of human capital, proximity to metropolitan centres, institutional capacity, and the types of products or services traded on population change. All of these variables are related to policy options for governments and communities: education and training for the first (Looker, 2001), place-based approaches for the second (Bradford, 2005), institutional capacity



<sup>2</sup> The Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin Series produced by Statistics Canada has been particularly useful in this regard (<http://www.statcan.ca/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=21-006-X&CHROPG=1>).

<sup>3</sup> CSD regions may include towns, villages, and even unincorporated places since they provide an exhaustive coverage of the Canadian territory.

building for the third (Salamon, 2002), and sectoral approaches for the fourth (Stedman et al., 2004a). This analysis will also build on our previous work developing indicators for the Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (Burns and Reimer, 2004)<sup>4</sup>.

- *The relative importance of human capital and social capital on population change, employment, and health within rural and urban communities.* This analysis will use indicators of social capital based on those developed by USA researchers (Rupasingha et al., 2006) and health-related data to be attached to the CSD census file. It builds on work conducted in Europe that points to the importance of social and institutional factors for understanding rural employment (Terluin et al., 1999). I will also make use of the rich body of work on the importance of social capital for economic development (Franke, 2005; Reimer et al., 2008; Isuma, 2001; Tiepoh and Reimer, 2004a; PRI, 2005). Data from the NRE household survey will be used to test the sensitivity of census-based variables to the more detailed indicators of social capital developed in field sites (Tiepoh and Reimer, 2004a; Reimer, 2002).
- *The importance of municipal financial autonomy on population change, service provision, health, and employment.* This analysis is made possible by NRE work integrating municipal financing records with the CSD database. Information regarding incomes and expenditures of both urban and rural municipalities in all 10 provinces for 2001 will be integrated into the CSD database. Initial analysis using this data has confirmed its utility for examining the relative fiscal autonomy of various locations, so I plan to extend the analysis within this new project (Hagens et al., 2006). I will first examine the relationships among indicators of fiscal autonomy, community characteristics, and specific outcomes as mentioned above. The next stage will be to focus on hypotheses about the conditions favoring fiscal autonomy (Schwartz, 2003; Young and Keil, 2003), the ways in which that autonomy is experienced and utilized (McAllister Mary Louise, 2004; Jacob et al., 2008; O'Toole, 2004; Milroy, 1999), and the outcomes produced over time (e.g. population change, service provision, health, economic change). This analysis will also permit me to consider the role of crises events such as plant closings, floods, and fires on rural communities by linking our database to the Canadian Disaster Database (Kulig et al., 2005; Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction, 1998).
- *Rural-Urban interdependence.* I will examine several aspects of rural-urban interdependence and develop related indicators that can be used to track such interdependence over time. At present, research on this issue has been limited to commuting patterns (Aldrich, 1996; Partridge and Nolan, 2004) and the use of common resources (Tacoli, 2000; Weber, 1998; Rothwell, 2006). I will extend this research to include other indicators of trade and services, institutional integration, and sharing of common environments (Reimer, 2005a). The methodology developed in our research on the integration of Aboriginal communities, for example, will provide a basis for the analysis of relevant census and institutional data (Reimer and Trott, 1997a). In this study, we were able to identify contiguous CSDs using centroid data to examine a variety of inter-relations based on local distances.

The proposed research program will make important contributions to theoretical and practical research, and to the understanding of rural community development, economic development, resource dependency, community health, community crime, and social capital research. It will:

1. Help to clarify the nature and extent of changes in many of the key variables relating to these issues, and will do so using data that are integrated into the same database.
2. Test hypotheses regarding the factors underlying those changes. By linking census and institutional data it will allow me to examine the role of services in those changes, for example, both as contributing factors and as outcomes. It will also provide an opportunity to examine the importance of contextual conditions on the processes and relationships involved.

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<sup>4</sup> Seven indicators were developed by the applicant and others for this contract work: Economic stability, Global exposure and integration, Social progress, Local institutional capacity, Competitiveness, Regional disparity, and Resource reliance.

3. Provide important evidence for policy development and testing. The identification of issues and foci of attention will be driven in large part by a concern for existing and potential policy issues. The identification of issues will be determined through collaboration with policy-makers at all governmental levels and the venues for dissemination of the results will be chosen to maximize communication with policy-makers. The applicant's close involvement with policy-research forums such as the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF) and the National Rural Research Network (NRRN) ensure this will take place on a regular basis.
4. Provide both a framework and data for community-based research in Canada. The database created will be made available to other researchers within the usual conditions from Statistics Canada and other agencies. This means that comparisons and analysis never before available will now be possible. The value of this outcome has been demonstrated in the NRE database of municipal finances, where Statistics Canada personnel have requested the use of it for their own objectives. In addition, researchers and activists with a focus on communities will be able to access the data for case studies and will be able to compare those case studies to other communities in the larger database. This will vastly improve the explanatory power of their work while encouraging comparison and collaboration across sites.
5. Provide a valuable laboratory for student and community learning. The students who will be working on the data will become familiar with the census, survey, and institutional data involved, how to work with it, the policy implications of the work, and how to communicate their findings. Since I will seek to collaborate with other groups, research centres, and organizations, their capacities for analysis will also increase. By linking with initiatives such as the Community Information Database a general mechanism for the dissemination of data to the benefit of rural communities throughout the country will be assured.

### **Methodology**

This proposal arises from my 11 years of work as Research Director of the NRE Project. As part of this project, a database linking CSDs from 1986 to 2001 was constructed. This database (including both rural and urban CSDs) was developed by choosing only those CSDs for which the boundaries show little change from one census to the next. By selecting only those CSDs with relatively constant boundaries we avoid the methodological difficulties of comparing transitions from one census to another where population, crime, services, or other statistics might be influenced by shifting boundaries alone. Examination of this series and the impact of imposing constant boundary limitations on them suggest that the data remain relatively robust in spite of the fact that some CSDs are lost along the way.<sup>5</sup>

This database will be augmented in two ways. First, I will add census information from 2006. Second, I will integrate information regarding health, crime, and municipal finance into the database wherever possible. I am aware that this might not be possible for each of the census years within the database, but preliminary work assures me that at least one or two of the census years come close to the time at which the administrative data was collected. Our experience with these databases has indicated that municipal finances, for example, can be integrated from 2001 and that health and crime data can be integrated from several years. The challenge is often more with the matching of jurisdictional boundaries than finding data for a particular year (Curry, 2006). In the case of jurisdictional boundaries we will use the closest match to the CSD possible.

Matching institutional data to the CSD level will be accomplished through geographical coding provided by Statistics Canada<sup>6</sup> and postal codes where such coding is not provided. We have successfully done this to link hospital and clinical data to CSDs as well as individual records from the General Social Survey (Reimer and Berry, 1993). This has allowed us to calculate estimates for the

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<sup>5</sup> Of the 3939 rural CSDs in 2001, 2421 were retained in the constant boundary file from 1986 to 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada provides 1996 and 2001 data with 1996 or 2001 equivalency boundary files.

availability of the various institutions to particular communities and the proximity of CSDs to each other (Reimer and Trott, 1997b).

This proposal will build on our earlier work by examining the changes in key variables over time and in different contexts. It will involve both descriptive and analytical investigation. As part of the descriptive analysis, we will trace the trajectories of rural municipalities and regions with respect to population, employment, crime, health, education, social cohesion, and several other characteristics linked to community vitality and sustainability (Reimer, 2004). Using a Markov-style approach to changes in these characteristics over time<sup>7</sup>, I have been able to identify the transformation frequencies and probabilities in our preliminary investigations of this nature. The various trajectories will then be classified using clustering and factoring techniques as a means to identify regularities over time and by place (Alasia, 2004). I expect to find such regularities among the variables selected because of their considerable interdependence.

I will then turn to the theoretical issues identified above as bases for more detailed analysis of the CSD trajectories. The importance of trade and globalization (Burns and Reimer, 2004), for example, will be considered – both as a correlate of the various types of trajectory patterns and as a condition for changes in those trajectories. The latter type of investigation will be possible because of the longitudinal nature of our database and the frequent exposure to boom and bust cycles in many of the resource-based communities. A similar approach will be used to investigate the role of human capital, proximity to urban centres, and institutional capacity (Alasia et al., 2008; Reimer, 1999a; Reimer, 2000). This analysis will move beyond the descriptive work to test which of these contextual factors might help to explain the patterns in trajectories. Once we have added the administrative data we will be able to add municipal government regimes and the introduction of public programs for community and economic development to this analysis.

The primary methods of analysis will include multivariate techniques for data reduction (e.g. clustering and factor analysis) associated with event history analysis techniques that are appropriate for the type of data generated by our constant boundary database (Allison 1984). In most cases, it will include regression analysis in linear and log-linear variations depending on the type of data available. The longitudinal nature of the data will permit us to directly address some of the time-dependent causation implicit in the capacity model.

The research will also require analysis at multiple geographical levels. The CSDs approximate municipal boundaries and unincorporated rural places. We will also combine CSDs into larger regional areas – to reflect labour markets (Census Consolidated Subdivisions) and regional administrative areas as they have been defined by provincial decree. Preliminary work using this approach has indicated that the regional characteristics of municipalities can often condition the options and impacts of local choices (Alasia et al., 2008; Reimer, 1999a; Reimer, 2000). Regional indicators such as location quotients will be used to separate local from regional outcomes and hierarchical analysis methods (e.g. HLM) will be employed to identify the relative impacts of local and regional factors.

The research will also make extensive use of maps and GIS techniques for both the analysis and the dissemination of results. The importance of regional and spatial contexts in this analysis makes mapping a useful and effective tool for representing the patterns and trends since it is the most direct way to represent the distribution of characteristics over space. In the case of rural analysis this is particularly important since it allows us to identify anomalous places within the general trends. Once identified, such places become important foci for analysis in order to determine the most critical local conditions.

Our conceptual model recognizes the dynamic nature of the processes related to local development. For this reason a simple distinction between dependent and independent variables is somewhat arbitrary

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<sup>7</sup> A Markov process is a discrete-time stochastic process. It examines the state of a system at one time as a function of the same system at a previous time. The transformations are represented as probabilities of movement from one state to the next (Turner, 2008).

at the conceptual level, but at the operational level it provides a framework for analysis which is more compatible with the methodological techniques. Therefore, we will begin our work by focusing on changes in population (e.g. population growth, age-dependencies, immigration), economic performance (e.g. employment, income, inequity), community health (e.g. age-standardized mortality, self-rated health, hospital occupancy), and social cohesion (e.g. ethnic heterogeneity, voting participation, marital status, crime rates) as four primary dependent variables.

Initially, the independent variables will be identified according to the NRE model as potential assets or liabilities (e.g. education, natural resources, local institutions, local businesses), governance processes (e.g. municipal structure and finances, voluntary association activity, extra-local institutional links), and contextual conditions (e.g. proximity to metropolitan centres, trade relations, administrative regimes, disaster occurrence). The relationships among them and the dependent variables will be examined according to the issues identified above. Once we have identified important relationships using these methods we will turn to the analysis of their more dynamic aspects using techniques from econometrics and structural equation modeling (Goldberger, 1964; Hancock and Mueller, 2006). This will include both synchronic and diachronic analysis.

**Year 1 2009-2010:** This year will be primarily devoted to the gathering and integration of institutional-oriented data into the census database. In the fall of 2009 I expect to have added the CSD information from 2006 into the database as well as the municipal finances, crime, and health information. By that time, I will also have identified the possibilities and limits of integrating other information such as businesses and social agencies. At the same time as the data preparation is proceeding, I will have teams of students assisting with the theoretical development of the four research topics identified above. This will include bibliographical analysis and the preparation of reports regarding each topic.

**Year 2 2010-2011:** Research activities will be devoted to the analysis of the information collected and integrated. It will include the identification of specific theoretical and policy topics for publication and the initial drafting of documents for these purposes. I will be encouraging students to prepare papers and posters for presentation at academic conferences as part of this work.

**Year 3 2011-2012:** This year will emphasize the preparation of materials for dissemination, and will include additional analysis of the data and theoretical developments as part of that work. It will include the presentation of results to academic, policy, and public audiences.

### **Communication of Results**

The communication plan for the proposed research is multi-faceted. Traditional academic venues will be used for communicating results, including: book chapters, peer-reviewed articles, presentations at conferences, posters, web materials, and reports. In addition, the annual conferences, workshops, website, and field visits associated with CRRF and NRRN will serve as important venues for communicating with policymakers, practitioners, other researchers, and rural citizens thereby ensuring that there is high visibility among all target groups.

The applicant and RAs will prepare materials for public media such as local newspapers, radio, and television broadcasters. We will also publish results in professional and trade magazines for such networks as municipal councilors, rural physicians, community libraries, and policy-makers. We have found that government organizations, NGOs, and private trade magazines appreciate articles on research results if they are written in a form that is understandable to the general public.

My long term association with policymakers at all levels often results in invitations for collaboration regarding particular topics or issues. For this reason, I expect to be invited to discuss research results by such organizations as their needs arise. For example, I have served as consultant for organizations such as the Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Statistics Canada, Industry Canada, Health Canada, and several Parliamentary Committees. Finally, communication of research results will occur through collaboration among academic and non-academic and research organizations.

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#### **4. Research team, proposed student training and previous output**

##### **4.A. Description of the research team**

Not applicable

##### **4.B. Description of proposed student training strategies**

Research assistants will be involved in all aspects of the program, including the following activities: problem formulation, research design, analysis, document production, and presentations. RAs will be organized into teams according to substantive topic, for example: population change, trade, social capital, municipal finances, or rural-urban interdependence. Each RA will be assigned a topic or task for which they will be primarily responsible, and a secondary one for which they must act as ‘backup’ to the RA with primary responsibility. In this way, if the demands of school, family, or personal life intervene in the research task for the primary person, there is a backup person who can step in to carry the load until the crisis is resolved. I have found that this is an excellent arrangement to meet the uncertain conditions of university life. It has the added advantage of creating a structure of support for the students as they work through the demands of research.

The RAs will operate under the close supervision of the applicant. This includes a weekly team meeting for most of the year – at which each RA reports on their activities of the past week, challenges they face, insights they have gained, and their plans for the coming weeks. This provides an excellent opportunity to discuss the theoretical, methodological, and pragmatic issues of the work and serves as a support structure for students as they manage the research in the context of their other demands.

I have been employing this system for many years since it has the added advantage of providing a context for me to assess the strengths of new students, who are invited to the meetings, and to reassign projects according to those strengths. New students are given low-demand tasks while we mutually assess each other’s interest and skills. If they are successful with these smaller tasks I move them to those with greater responsibility – eventually giving them ‘backup’, then primary responsibility for specific projects.

My preference is to hire several students on a part-time basis (10-15 hrs/wk), rather than a few on a full-time basis. This is largely for two reasons. First, students tend to have many other demands on their time, making the part-time arrangement more compatible with those demands. Second, I have found that when students work in teams, they are better able to proceed with the project than when they work alone. As a team, they work together to resolve the many detailed issues and decisions that are part of research – without having to come to me for reassurance. In most cases these resolutions are acceptable and the process is more compatible with ‘problem-based learning’ which has been shown to be effective pedagogy. As a result, I expect to work with a team of about four to six students.

Students will co-author papers where appropriate. They will also be encouraged to prepare posters, papers, and presentations for conferences and workshops. Over the period of the NRE, for example, my students have participated at 12 national conferences and workshops and have co-authored 43 papers or reports.

Research assistants will also have the opportunity to meet and work with researchers and students who are part of the work on the NRE Program and CRRF. This will occur through their attendance at conferences, visits to Concordia University which are part of the networking activities of the NRE, and in some cases collaboration on projects including people from these other institutions. Both the NRE and CRRF will be kept informed of the research, and RAs will participate in their activities so that they might make use of the personnel and research resources they represent.

#### 4.C. Description of previous and ongoing research results

The applicant has been the Director of the NRE since its inception in 1997. It is a major national research and education program for rural Canada. It involves over 15 researchers, 11 universities, 40 partners, and 32 rural communities in all parts of Canada. The project has resulted in a national rural database, over 200 publications (including three books and a special edition of the *Journal of Rural and Community Development*), a network of researchers, policy-makers, and rural citizens, all linked by an active Internet server and archive. We have established working relationships with networks and researchers in Japan, the USA, Australia, Great Britain, South America, and several countries in Europe. From 1999-2002 we received \$600,000 from SSHRC to study Social Cohesion in Rural Canada. In 2002 we received \$3 million from SSHRC to continue our research to 2007 under the title "Building Rural Capacity in the New Economy". Over the 10 years of the Project we have been awarded more than \$4 million. The applicant has been the Principal Investigator on all those awards.

We have published extensively in academic journals, made important contributions to policy debates on social capital, social exclusion, rural and urban relations, rural poverty, and community and economic development. Through our program of knowledge mobilization we have had direct impact on rural communities – their opportunities and governance. Major partners on the project include: SSHRC; the Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agrifood Canada; Statistics Canada; Forestry Canada; Human Resources Development Canada; Industry Canada (FedNor); the Ontario Rural Council; Gov't of Alberta; Gov't of Newfoundland and Labrador; Centre for Cooperative Studies; and 11 universities.

As part of my role as Research Director for the NRE Project I am frequently invited to conferences, workshops, and collaboration events to speak on issues related to rural Canada. This, combined with the breath of research taking place in the Project provides a context in which I have become familiar with many different issues, conditions, and processes related to rural Canada. For that reason, the current proposal includes five topics which are extensions of my past foci on social exclusion and social capital as well as those that are more generally tied to my research on community capacity.

My primary theoretical focus of attention has been on the analysis of processes of inclusion and exclusion in rural Canada. This includes the analysis of women's role in farm production, the identification and analysis of poverty in rural areas, the development of a theoretical framework for the analysis of exclusion, and its application to several types of vulnerable groups. The research has resulted in presentations, papers, and publications. It now serves as a conceptual focus for part of the NRE Project – becoming integrated with the analysis of social capital and community capacity issues.

Each of the four theoretical issues included in this program of research have emerged from this work. My interest in trade, globalization, and population change developed as I investigated the major factors contributing to the relative decline in rural vitality (Reimer et al., 1992; Reimer, 1999b). This research also provided the motivation for the design of the NRE project and the Rural Observatory within it (Reimer, 2002).

My interest in the relative importance of social capital emerged from the NRE research. As my colleagues and I conducted research on social cohesion and the local dynamics within our field sites we were struck by the considerable variation in capacity among them. This led to the development of a framework for understanding social capital and its implications for local outcomes (Reimer, 2002; Reimer et al., 2008; Tiepoh and Reimer, 2004b). My current proposal will extend and test some of those insights using macro-level data.

My interest in municipal financing emerged as a results of our close examination of governance processes within rural areas. We noticed how increased autonomy created special challenges for rural as compared to urban municipalities (Hagens et al., 2006). The current proposal will allow me to verify and extend these insights beyond the field sites of the Rural Observatory.

My interest in rural-urban interdependency emerged from a concern with the options available to rural people in the face of continuing urbanization. Following the inspiration of our collaboration within the Japanese team it has become apparent that understanding how rural and urban places are inter-related

and developing strategic options based on such understanding will be of critical importance to the influence of rural people over their lives in the future. An invitation from the Minister of Infrastructure solidified this insight and created an opportunity for me to establish a framework for such an investigation (Reimer, 2005b). This current proposal for rural-urban research will be used to develop and verify the utility of that framework.

All of these topics refer to processes affecting the trajectories of rural communities. For this reason, the development of a community-focused database will provide an efficient and strategic tool for examining these various substantive issues at the same time.

The project focus on data preparation and index development is an extension of my previous work as well. In the process of investigating social exclusion and community capacity it was necessary to develop the quality and extent of community-level data and to construct indicators for concepts such as social cohesion, social capital, and capacity. The pursuit of these goals has meant that I have developed a familiarity with the related methodological and theoretical issues – leading to more invitations for consultation. These consultations have brought me to work with additional agencies such as the Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agrifood Canada as they develop their Community Information Database (<http://www.cid-bdc.ca/>), the Canadian Forest Service as they consider a national community-based survey on social capital, and Statistics Canada as they prepare their GSS materials on social cohesion and social capital.