

1. Summary of Planned Activity

This proposal is for a national network of researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and citizens with a common interest in the well-being of rural Canada. The Canadian Rural Research Network (CRRN) will support and build high quality rural research capacity; bridge cutting-edge research into the policy, practitioner, and public spheres; and establish a self-sustaining structure for rural research and knowledge mobilization.

Rural people and places have borne a major burden of 19th and 20th century industrialization. Major increases in rural productivity freed labour for urban growth but left rural places with diminished human and institutional capacity to cope. New functions for rural people and places – as stewards of the environment and heritage, energy production, amenities for recreation, and protectors of sovereignty – are emerging with little knowledge or capacity to manage these new conditions.

CRRN will provide a critical resource for responding to these changes. Its national scope will link researchers and practitioners currently isolated by distance and diverging demands, its strong ties to governments at all levels will ensure that insights will be relevant to ongoing policy issues, and its track record of productivity and collaboration will ensure increased research capacity into the future.

To accomplish these objectives we will make use of the many research, government, NGO, and citizen networks and Centres currently focused on rural-related issues. They include research on governance, service provision, rural-urban relations, sustainable development, and climate change as well as practical experience with community development, volunteer organization, co-operatives, and entrepreneurship. Our objective is to maximize the synergy from these networks for all Canadians.

The CRRN will deliver research results and mobilization through the following activities.

- *Conferences and Workshops* will bring partners together in both urban and rural locations. This will involve contributing to existing meetings as well as initiating new ones.
- *A Rural Information Internet Gateway* and a *Data Repository and Archive* will link rural web sites and serve as an inquiry portal and data source for academic and non-academic users.
- *Research Priority-setting and Support* activities will identify strategic topics and assess research capacity, integrate new researchers, and guide initiatives for research grants, contracts, publications, special issues of peer-reviewed journals, conference, workshops, and other activities.
- *Knowledge Mobilization Best Practices* will be identified and made available via the Internet.
- *Capacity-building Internships* for students, local government employees, volunteers, and other people will be established with university, government, and non-government groups.
- *Liaison and Network Opportunities* will be developed for well-established and low-capacity groups.
- *A Rural Research Clearinghouse* will be created to ‘translate’ academic research products to users and to identify key research needs of those users.
- *The Rural ‘Voice’ in Research and Policy* will be supported through ‘broker’ services between researchers and policy or public groups requesting input.
- *Receptor Capacity* will be increased through strategic alliances with municipal organizations, provincial governments, Aboriginal Peoples, voluntary groups, and the private sector.
- *International Partnerships* will be expanded, building on the networks established by our partners.
- *A Rural Research Endowment Fund* will be explored and implemented.

CRRN will be organized in a distributed manner. Building on the success of the 10-year New Rural Economy Project (nre.concordia.ca), it will have its administrative centre at Concordia University, with most of the network activities taken on by research Centres in various parts of the country. Each Centre will be responsible for activities in which it already excels – thus creating conditions where the strengths of each are contributed to the whole network.

CRRN will advance rural research and ensure that the insights gained will be relevant and useful to decision-makers at all levels. It will increase the capacity of Canada to better position itself for the new rural conditions in a sustainable and productive fashion.

2. Detailed Description (Note: Attachment 8.1 includes a Glossary of Acronyms)

Cluster activities and impacts

Rural Canada is crucial for the economic, environmental, and social sustainability of Canadian society, yet its people face major challenges from chronic out-migration, economic restructuring, declining local services, and environmental stresses (Reimer and Bollman, 2006). At the same time new rural-based opportunities are arising in renewable energy, local and organic food production, and heritage-focused initiatives. High quality, comprehensive research is essential if we are to develop evidence-based policy options to address these challenges and opportunities. Such research is generated in many of our education and government institutions, however, it needs to be communicated and integrated with local, provincial, and federal decision-makers to make it understandable and useful.

Research, collaboration, and communication are particularly challenged in rural places. Research and education institutions are smaller, have limited access to graduate students, and must work in more isolated conditions. The local regional focus of these institutions requires more inter-disciplinary approaches in spite of the fact that the pool of personnel is smaller. Finally, the distances involved make face-to-face collaboration time consuming and expensive.

The proposed Canadian Rural Research Network (CRRN) will directly address these issues. We will build on the network and lessons learned through the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation's 20 years of research and education in rural Canada. Specifically, CRRN objectives are:

- to support and build high quality rural research capacity;
- to bridge cutting-edge research into the policy, practitioner, and public spheres; and
- to establish a self-sustaining structure for research and knowledge mobilization.

To **build research capacity** we will:

- establish and support stronger links among the university and government-based rural research Centres by sharing information and activities;
- enhance existing networks by supporting their exchanges, workshops, and conferences;
- identify, champion, and support strategic research agendas and tools on a continual basis;
- develop a *Rural Information Gateway and Archives* to share data and information;
- support new researchers and students with 'Researcher in Residence' and training programs;
- add disciplines usually underrepresented in rural research; and
- initiate and integrate international research and policy insights through exchanges and collaboration with foreign networks and Centres.

To advance **knowledge mobilization** we will:

- enhance the ability of existing networks and groups to organize workshops and conferences;
- facilitate networking through newsletters, chat rooms, webcasts, podcasts, the rural media, and other venues;
- develop a *Rural Research Clearinghouse* to transfer research insights;
- build a *Rural Information Gateway* to link rural research, policy, and practitioner communities;
- identify and evaluate knowledge mobilization best practices and communicate them through web-based and traditional venues;
- give local government representatives, volunteers, and students the opportunity to participate in rural studies Internship and 'Researcher in Residence' programs;
- extend the rural 'voice' in research and policy debates by supporting speaking and media opportunities by CRRN members; and
- build the receptor capacity of rural-related groups currently underrepresented in rural research networks through targeted partnerships and collaboration.

To build a **self-sustaining structure** we will:

- extend our partnerships with government, NGO, and private groups with interests in rural issues;
- seek funding opportunities via partner research and knowledge mobilization (KM) activities; and
- design and implement an Endowment Fund for the support of rural research and its knowledge mobilization over the long term.

Knowledge mobilization

CRRN is particularly well suited to meet the KM objectives of the SSHRC Strategic Cluster Programme. As a result of extensive experience within the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF) and the New Rural Economy Project (NRE) (cf. Attachments 8.2 and 8.3), we have identified the following principles for effective KM.

- *Clearly identify your target audiences.* For CRRN, these will be researchers (including students), policy-makers (all levels of government), community activists (including public and private entrepreneurs), and citizens (primarily rural-based but including urban citizens in strategic ways).
- *Ensure early, extensive, and continual engagement with these target groups.* CRRN will build on the 20-year track record and network of CRRF and the NRE. Many are already involved.
- *Equalize relations of power and maximize mutual respect as much as possible.* CRRN will continue and extend the CRRF practices of holding conferences and workshops in rural places, participating in radio talkbacks, town forums, and chat rooms, and inviting citizen participation.
- *Use existing organizations and networks.* In keeping with this principle, CRRN builds on many networks and organizations which in turn have extensive links regionally, nationally, and internationally (cf. Attachment 8.4 and 8.5).
- *Identify and organize collaboration across disciplines and spheres but with respect to common, strategic foci.* Our focus on rural Canada as an object of study forces an inter-disciplinary approach to research and KM while our policy and practitioner partners require last minute insights on unpredictable topics. To meet these demands we will maintain an up-to-date inventory of researchers and topics while we focus our resources with an annually updated 3-year plan of strategic research topics.
- *Provide the means whereby new faculty and researchers can meet institutional demands for their careers, while contributing to KM.* This principle arises because of the reluctance of our educational institutions to recognize KM contributions in the awarding of merit, promotion, and tenure. In response, CRRN will organize training and publishing opportunities for new faculty, shift most of the administrative and KM demands to senior faculty members, mentor new members in KM practices, and develop guidelines for evaluating the quality of KM activities.
- *Organize for flexibility and adaptation.* The distributive nature of the CRRN governance structure provides the flexibility for new partners, issues, and objectives to meet changing conditions. Frequent communication and meetings among all members will ensure maximum feedback and quick responses (e.g. conference, workshops, e-mails, conference calls, cross-partner meetings).
- *Provide the means whereby organizational structures that are inclusive (to meet expansion objectives) are closely allied to those that are exclusive (to meet professional criteria for quality and credibility).* CRRF and the *National Rural Research Network (NRRN)* will provide the open, public venues to integrate new personnel while our research centres and research teams will provide the more exclusive projects required for academic research (cf. CRRF letter of support).
- *Prepare for future recruitment and support.* CRRN will actively solicit new members through conferences, workshops, partners, and student forums. The poster sessions, new researcher forum, student web site, and alumni network established under the NRE project will also be expanded.

Our KM plans for CRRN are constructed to follow all these principles and to build on the experience they reflect. This means getting rural issues and research discussed within existing channels where the need exists (e.g. community newspapers and newsletters, websites, radio broadcasts, town meetings, blogs, policy journals and documents) as well as creating and filling KM channels where they do not exist (e.g. teleforums, online conferences, podcasts, chat rooms).¹

The following **activities** will move us toward our objectives. Responsibility for them will be assigned to particular Centres according to their strengths and resources.

Conferences and Workshops

CRRN will use the conference and workshop experience of our partners to reach a wide audience for research development and KM. The CRRF Annual Conference, for example, has a 20-year tradition which has been augmented by the participation of NRRN over the last 3 years (cf. Attachment 8.6). Both of these events bring together researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and rural citizens in a forum of presentations, round tables, local tours, and working groups. We meet in and with rural communities to ensure local engagement. We will also attend and report on other partner workshops and conferences to identify and disseminate their key issues, recraft those issues as research questions, and then put them to the cluster members as potential research projects. Innovations in conference organization will be undertaken – such as ‘reverse research fairs’ (where users of research present issues and propose questions to the researchers), conference radio broadcasts, and ‘matchmaking’ activities among researchers, policy-makers, and activists. CRRF and NRRN have accepted primary responsibility for the conference activities while the Rural and Small Town Programme (RSTP) at Mt. Allison University and the Community Development Institute at UNBC (CDI) will serve as key Centres for advancing our workshop activities.

Rural Information Gateway

CRRN will create and manage a Rural Information Gateway website as a focal point for those interested in rural topics. Experience has shown that maintenance of a single ‘all encompassing’ website is logistically and financially impossible to sustain over the long term. Instead, the approach will be to provide links to the existing array of websites being maintained in Canada and internationally and to ‘populate’ those web sites with material generated from among our research network. These websites will address public, private, policy, and educational sectors.

A second component of the Rural Information Gateway will be an inquiry page. This will allow researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, and citizens to submit a query to CRRN. In turn, CRRN will disseminate the query to the partners.

Data Repository and Archive

Closely associated with the Gateway will be the maintenance of a data repository and archives for rural-related data, tools, and information. This is a response to three primary needs of the research community. First, the Repository will provide information on data and tools available for rural research. In many cases, this will simply mean the provision of brief descriptions and links to those sources since the conditions for access to the data will vary considerably. Second, the Repository will provide data and documentary materials directly when they are made available by our partners. The NRE Project, for example, has created a wealth of research data, information, and reports (<http://nre.concordia.ca>) that may be made available under certain conditions. Third, the Repository will act as an archiving site for data generated by various projects – thereby making it available to future generations of researchers.

The Concordia Rural Research Group (CRRG) will lead the Gateway and Repository activities – building on the server and support infrastructure established by the NRE Project.

¹ NRE research shows that Internet access and use remain limited in many rural areas (Emke and Woodrow, 2003). For this reason we must include traditional media in our KM activities.

Research Priority-setting and Support

The SSHRC Strategic Knowledge Cluster Programme is not a research grant program in the traditional sense. Yet it depends on a vibrant and productive research community to generate the insights that will drive many of the KM activities. CRRN will support these research activities by its conference, workshop, and exchange activities, but many rural issues will also need more proactive attention. To this end, CRRN will establish a Research Sub-Committee to discover and reflect on emerging issues, identify strategic opportunities, seek research results, encourage research support, find new researchers, and initiate communication. This committee will annually prepare a 3-year strategic research plan to focus resources. Sub-clusters of researchers and organizations will be identified and mandated to encourage these strategic directions. This will be done through support for conferences, workshops, journals, and theses as well as more innovative venues such as media surveys, bibliographic scans, internet chat rooms, podcasts, webcasts, and other multimedia activities.

One of the first tasks of the Research Sub-Committee will be to identify topics for the first 3-year plan. Topics such as governance (especially the role of local or regional groups), service provision, rural-urban relations, sustainable development, health, and the impacts of climate change are likely to form the basis for such a plan since there are already sub-clusters in our network involved with these topics. These topics will be promoted through special issues or guest editorships of relevant journals, travel support for conferences, partnerships with organizations such as Statistics Canada or Health Canada to sponsor events where academic papers are required, and materials for venues such as the *Rural and Small Town Analysis Bulletin*, the *Journal of Community and Rural Development*, and *Forum*.² These activities will be led by the CDI with backup from the Rural Development Institute (RDI) at Brandon and Statistics Canada.

KM Best Practices

We will establish an ongoing program to identify, organize, evaluate, and communicate examples and insights of KM activities both within and outside CRRN (e.g. CMHC, CHSRF, Harris Centre all have innovative KM programs). They will be integrated into the Gateway and Clearinghouse activities to ensure wide distribution by web and traditional media. Part of this work will be to identify criteria for high quality KM activities and practices to serve as a basis for encouraging universities, granting agencies, and other organizations to recognize and support KM via hiring, promotion, funding, and other decisions. The Harris Centre at Memorial University will champion these activities with the CRRG providing backup support.

Capacity-Building Internships

CRRN will facilitate a range of individual capacity-building activities for students³, local government employees, volunteers, and other people interested in rural studies. These capacity-building exercises will include exchanges, internships, Post-Doc and 'Researcher in Residence' opportunities with organizations in the university, federal, and provincial government arenas. For example, Statistics Canada, will host intern and co-op work placements and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research have a series of research training symposiums for training and capacity building. Our partner organizations (such as the Rural Secretariat's Canada Youth Forum, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' (FCM) Rural Caucus, and the rural Centres at Canadian universities) can nominate individuals for these capacity-building internships. The Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit (SPHERU) will lead these activities with support from the Rural Secretariat.

Rural Research Clearinghouse

CRRN will manage a clearinghouse for rural and small town policy materials in collaboration with our policy and practitioner partners such as the Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-Food

² Statistics Canada produces the first, the NRE project initiated the second, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities produces the third. These are all partners in the CRRN. The list of such partners and venues will be extended.

³ Since many rural institutions have no graduate programs, these internships will be open to undergraduates as well.

Canada, the Centre for Innovative and Entrepreneurial Leadership (CIEL), the Harris Centre, the FCM, the RDI, 'Rural Women Making Change' and the Rural and Small Town Programme (RSTP). RSTP will act as the lead Centre for these activities, supported by the RDI.

The Clearinghouse will bridge the gap between the academic products of our faculty researchers and the more accessible materials necessary for a non-academic audience. Rather than require this 'translation' to be part of the researcher's responsibility, we will provide writers and venues to reorganize the academic materials and make them more accessible.

The Clearinghouse (integrated with our Rural Information Gateway) will also provide a venue for dialogue among researchers and local governments. We will work with organizations such as the FCM to identify core needs for research, evaluate the results, and ensure that our research and policy partners receive the information. The RSTP will be the lead institution with RDI acting as support.

The Rural 'Voice' in Research and Policy

One of the key lessons from the NRE Project is that there is considerable demand for researcher and practitioner participation in conferences, workshops, dialogue sessions, consultations, popular media, and other venues where a rural voice or perspective is desired. Responding to these opportunities from academic, policy, and general interest forums will be an important part of CRRN's activities. These are often last-minute requests that relate to specific issues with which CRRN participants and partners have expertise. In the past, this has included appearances before parliamentary and senate committees, participation in government workshops, consultations with government or NGO groups, media appearances, and requests from municipalities. CRRF will be the lead partner for these activities and Solidarité Rurale du Québec (SRQ) will provide support.

Liaison and Network Opportunities

CRRN begins with an extensive network of well-organized groups and organizations but there are many others that may benefit and contribute to its objectives. CRRN will, therefore, continue to seek and identify those with common interests to explore further KM opportunities. As the network grows, the demands for regular and frequent communication will also grow, requiring more attention to communication and nurturing activities. CRRN will establish a Liaison Officer to ensure that these activities are maintained and emerging challenges and opportunities are identified. These activities will be led by the CRRG with support from the Institute for Northern Ontario Research and Education (INORD) at Laurentian University.

Building Receptor capacity

Not all rural groups are currently integrated into active networks. For them, KM often requires capacity building as well as links to research networks. We have identified five such groups at this point: municipal organizations, provincial governments (including regional colleges), Aboriginal Peoples, volunteer groups, and the private sector.

Municipal organizations are the first to respond to local opportunity and crisis. They often have qualified individuals who are well-connected in their local communities but with low capacity to respond to crises. They need key information from the research and policy arenas to inform their local decision-making (Hagens et al., 2006). We will respond to these challenges by the translation of findings from research and the preparation of training modules developed from those findings.

CRRN will work to develop receptor communities within provincial governments as well. We will seek opportunities for collaboration with provincial and territorial governments and their associated organizations such as community and regional colleges. Our partnerships with the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, the FCM, the Centre de recherche sur le développement territoriale, and the Rural Secretariat will provide leadership to this end.

Aboriginal Peoples have strong connections with rural issues. For this reason, it is critical that CRRN develop relationships with Aboriginal groups – to guide the research agenda, structure the KM activities, and build local capacity in research and action. We will work with the recently established

DIALOG cluster to enhance the rural aspects of their network. The Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit and the BC Coastal Communities projects will provide leadership in this regard.

A fourth area of interest to explore is the voluntary and service sectors. These sectors act as front-line delivery agents coping with the challenges and opportunities of change in rural places (Halseth et al., 2004). However, they have little capacity to translate academic research into a form that will assist them in the delivery of their services – and they lack the time and organizational structure to influence the research agenda. CRRN will seek additional participation with these sectors by working with existing networks and representatives (such as those established under the SSHRC CURA programs) to identify possibilities for critical knowledge exchange. The CDI will serve as the lead Centre to mobilize this part of the cluster with CIEL as support.

Integration of the private sector also needs attention. The recent expansion of oil and gas activities across northern Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia, for example, has been limited by the availability of rural and small town services to meet the needs of workers, especially management, staff, and their families. Our research insights regarding services, manufacturing, commuting, and the value of collaboration among the private, public, and civic sectors (Jean and Épenda Muteba Wa, 2004) all point to opportunities for economic vitality. CRRN will build connections with the private sector to disseminate research findings on such issues, identify strategic foci for research, and jointly create frameworks which support rural and small town viability as well as economic development. The Canadian Rural Economy Research Lab and Solidarité Rurale du Québec will provide the leadership to these ends.

International Partnerships

CRRF and the NRE Project have developed a large number of international connections with research and policy-based organizations. At the moment, these are mostly focused on OECD countries such as Scotland, England, Ireland, France, Sweden, the USA, Japan, and Australia (cf. Attachment 8.4). CRRN will extend these networks to maximize the opportunities for knowledge transfer, exchanges, and collaboration wherever they occur. Our partnerships with such organizations as The International Rural Network, the Institute of Policy Research in Remote and Rural Regions and the Scottish Academy of Rural Policy Project in Scotland, the Rural Policy Research Institute in the USA, and the Victorian Universities Regional Research Network in Australia provide a strong basis for international collaboration and expansion. The CRRG and IRN will lead these activities.

Rural Research Endowment Fund

To ensure the continuation of CRRN we will explore two major directions. The first is increased institutional funding via research and KM partnerships with government, NGO, and private sector organizations. The CRRF-NRRN partnership is an example of this type of arrangement. Second, we will investigate the establishment of an Endowment Fund to support KM and research activities related to rural issues. Concordia University has agreed to assist us with such explorations and contribute its experience and resources to this end. The CRRG and CRRF will lead this initiative.

Knowledge impacts

The 20 years of experience within CRRF and 10 years experience with the NRE provide well-grounded examples of the likely outcomes for CRRN. These impacts will be felt within all our target groups: academics, policy-makers, practitioners, and citizens.

Academics

CRRN partners have a strong and consistent track record of impacts within the academic sphere. Over the 10 years of the NRE Project, for example, they have contributed to the production of 8 books, over 100 refereed articles in academic journals, over 200 book chapters, reports, and other documents, given more than 200 presentations to academic audiences, and been invited to numerous meetings and consultations. In the process, project members have become recognized leaders in generating knowledge on the transformation of rural Canada, capacity development, social capital,

governance, service delivery, gender, communications, resource dependency, the informal economy, environmental impacts, and rural-urban relations (cf. Participant CVs).

This level of productivity will be significantly augmented by the participation of the other network members. In Canada, this includes expertise in coastal and resource-based communities, climate change, health, child development, and Aboriginal issues. The effects of this collaboration promise to be felt, not only in the dissemination of more research products and a wider variety of knowledge, but in the increased sophistication of the research questions and analysis conducted.

These types of impacts are felt on the international level as well. The NRE Rural Observatory, for example, is recognized internationally as a unique and useful innovation in methodology and analysis of community-related issues. This is evident in the Japanese replication of the NRE design (<http://cse.naro.affrc.go.jp/mamoda/cj-p/index.htm>), similar replication in Australia (<http://www.vurnn.com/>), and the American proposal for a 'Sentinel Communities Project' using the key principles from our Observatory (<http://www.rupri.org/default.asp>). A workshop organized by RIMISP-Latin American Center for Rural Development in November 2007 will be discussing a similar project in 20 Latin American countries. CRRN will continue to provide leadership on data-sharing and knowledge development as these types of opportunities continue and are expanded.

CRRN will also have a significant impact on student interest, learning, and careers. The NRE Project, for example, integrated students into all aspects of its work – from problem formulation and research design to field work, data analysis, administration, communication, and collaboration. More than 150 students have benefitted from its 10 years of work – supporting over 30 theses. They have developed the ability to function in professional settings: collaborating with peers and superiors, and managing research and analysis in a comprehensive manner. The value of these skills is reflected in the types of activities our 'NRE alumni' have taken on subsequent to their time with us. It includes working for NGO's in England and Central Africa, for NATO in Sarajevo, doing research and teaching at US and Canadian universities, working as Analysts for Health Canada, Statistics Canada, and Heritage Canada and completing MAs and PhDs at institutions across the country (cf. Attachment 8.7). CRRN will continue to champion and support student integration at all levels so that as it grows, the pool of competent and highly motivated researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners will expand.

Policy-Makers

From CRRF's beginning, we have formed alliances with government personnel at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels. They have frequently sought our research insights on specific policy issues and invited us to participate in workshops, meetings, and consultations on policy issues from rural development, health, housing, Aboriginal peoples, and community development to rural-urban relations. As shown on the attached CVs, our members have advised Cabinet Ministers, presented reports to Parliamentary Committees, and worked with many government agencies. In the recent Senate Hearings on rural poverty, for example, 9 of the 28 invited witnesses were from the CRRF network (most others were government or political presenters) (Fairbairn, 2006).

The CRRF annual conferences provide a key venue for KM with policy-makers (cf. Attachment 8.6). Since we always meet in rural areas, we have a direct and significant impact on the municipal decision-makers and the local economy. Some of our host sites, for example, have subsequently marketed themselves as conference venues as a result of their experience with us. Provincial and federal policy-makers are influenced through personal contacts, the content of the material discussed and the opportunity to visit rural locations.

Community Activists and Entrepreneurs

CRRN activities will empower community activists and entrepreneurs by providing insights, contacts, and opportunities for directing our research agendas. The CRRF annual conferences will be key venues for this to happen. They are supplemented by alliances with constituent networks such as the FCM, CIEL, the RDI, and the RSTP. These alliances have generated research projects (FCM,

CRRF), workshops and think-tanks (NRRN, CRRF, RDI), and increased local social cohesion in many of the NRE field sites (cf. Attachment 8.8)

Citizens

Finally, we will have impacts on citizens, both rural and urban, through exchanges and conference participation among rural leaders, internships, youth workshops and forums, and visits in addition to the media such as radio, TV, the Internet, and the written press. Over the 10 years of similar activities in the NRE project we have heard many anecdotes from rural people about how the experience has changed their view and approach to local challenges and opportunities (cf. Attachment 8.8). Citizens have also contributed to our research and policy agendas – providing valuable critiques and suggestions that guided our focus of attention over the years. This will continue with CRRN.

Cluster participants, governance and budget

Director

The PI has a strong record of intellectual leadership and project management built over a 20-year period. He has served as President on two National Organizations (CSAA and CRRF), as Research Director for the NRE Project from its inception, and as organizer for the CRRG at Concordia University. He has been a key contributor to the design and implementation of the NRE Project, building it from a modest research initiative to a \$4 million collaborative program involving researchers from across Canada and many other countries. This program involves more than 20 academic researchers from a wide variety of disciplines, more than 13 institutions, and numerous students, policy-makers, rural activists, community leaders, and rural citizens – all working in a multi-faceted and collaborative manner (cf. Attachments 8.2 to 8.8).

Participants

The CRRN participants have an excellent mix of new to senior personnel (8 with PhDs in last 6 years). They are also very multi-disciplinary – including researchers from anthropology, communications, development, economics, education, agriculture, forestry, geography, health, history, management, psychology, and sociology. Several of the core participants have a 20-year record of working together within CRRF and a 10-year record of collaboration in the NRE Project.

As summarized in Attachment 8.4 the participants demonstrate a remarkable breadth of experience, substantive knowledge, collaboration, and accomplishments. Over the last 10 years, for example, the NRE team alone has produced more than 100 refereed publication, 8 books, 200 documents and trained more than 150 students. They have held annual workshops and conferences, met with policy-makers from Federal Cabinet Ministers to Mayors and Municipal Councillors, and produced public materials for distribution through academic, policy, practitioner, and popular media venues. This includes both English and French-language networks.

Partnerships

This project includes a core of partners with a strong track record of collaboration and productivity within the CRRF, NRRN, and NRE projects. Concordia University has been the NRE administrative centre for more than 13 universities and colleges across Canada. The network includes government agencies at federal, provincial, and municipal levels, national and international research centres and institutes, and NGOs at national, regional, and local levels. These relationships will in turn provide us with the contacts and credibility that ensure further expansion.

As shown in the participant's CVs, we have served the needs of these groups by sitting on advisory boards, preparing special reports, presenting materials to working groups and organizations, consulting on special issues, and commenting on current topics and issues.

Our record also reflects the extensive international collaboration that is part of our networking activities. Individually and collectively we have working relationships with groups or institutions in more than eight countries and are in the process of developing additional ties with several more.

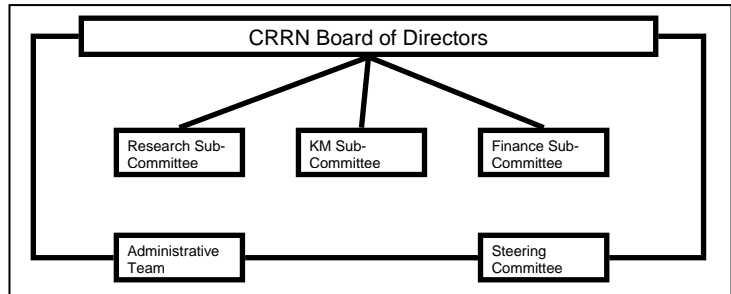
In spite of these rather extensive collaborations, there is still much to be done. We have identified the five groups mentioned above as priority directions for the expansion of CRRN and will continue to target new groups as they arise.

Students and new researchers

Over the years of the NRE we have paid particular attention to the mentoring and development of students and new members of our network. To date, this has included more than 150 students. This has paid off through their career successes⁴ and desire to continue participation in our activities (cf. Attachment 8.7). CRRN will continue this approach and expand it through our conference, workshop, internship, community college, exchange, and experiential learning programs as outlined above. New researchers will be encouraged to participate in our cluster through conferences, workshops, strategic solicitation, and KM activities. Requests for formal membership in the cluster will be welcomed. One of the key elements of our plans for international expansion will be to develop opportunities for student exchanges and joint programs as reflected in the International Comparative Rural Policy Studies consortia organized among 9 universities in 7 countries by CRRF members (www.icrps.com).

Governance

CRRN will be administered out of Concordia⁵ but will have many of the tasks and activities distributed to appropriate Centres in other locations. Additional financing for specific activities will be generated and managed by the various Centres. Distributing the activities in this manner will permit us to take advantage of local strengths, build the capacity of multiple Centres, and increase the flexibility of CRRN to respond to new issues and insights. The distributed nodes will be allocated the authority and responsibility to initiate and maintain tasks relevant for the whole network by a CRRN Board of Directors. Specific governance structures will be decided as one of the first tasks of CRRN, but the basic elements and personnel for this process are outlined below.



CRRN Board of Directors

CRRN will be directed by a Board of Directors. It will focus on strategic decision-making, approval of CRRN directions, and acceptance of formal cluster members. In addition, the Board members will be expected to bring their experience and networks to the table to identify and build new receptor communities and broaden the connectivity of CRRN. For the purposes of managing meetings, and for more routine liaison the Board will self-select a Chair on an annual basis via a simple majority vote. Nominations and elections for Chair will be managed by the CRRN Manager.

The CRRN Board will explicitly reflect the linkages to partner organizations and associated networks. It will include representatives from rural research, policy, and practitioner communities. It will also include regional representation. In particular, linkages will be made to the boards of CRRF and representatives from university-based research Centres, federal regional development agencies,

⁴ NRE students are co-authors in more than 155 documents and they have produced 30 theses to date.

⁵ The administration office will be locally supported by a group of more than 15 Concordia faculty members with an interest in rural issues. This group has an ongoing program of collaboration around common substantive issues.

provincial governments, municipal governments or related organizations, voluntary sector organizations interested in rural Canada, the private sector, and international partners.

The CRRN Board will be voluntary but will have expenses supported by CRRN. Initial members of the Board are: David Douglas (SEDRD), Rob Greenwood (Harris Centre), Judy Guernsey (Atlantic Rural Centre), Greg Halseth (UNBC), Kate Humpage (HRSDC), Tom Johnson (USA), Susan Irwin (FCM), Bill Reimer, and Robert Summerby-Murray (MtA).

The Board will establish three standing Sub-Committees that reflect the primary objectives of the Network: Research, KM, and Finances. Chairs of these Sub-Committees will be chosen from among the Board members. Nominations for Sub-Committee members can be brought to the CRRN Board by any member of CRRN, providing that the nomination has the endorsement of at least two members of the existing Sub-Committee. Sub-Committee members need not be members of the Board.

The Research Sub-Committee

The role of the Research Sub-Committee will be to identify existing and emerging research needs, provide commentary on research issues, and where appropriate, lend support to research activities. They will prepare a 3-year research plan with annual updates to facilitate the strategic planning of the Board. The Sub-Committee will provide guidance for workshop and conference topics and themes, establish mechanisms to communicate with partners and those broadly engaged with rural community topics, and seek funding opportunities for strategic research topics. In addition to these functions, the Committee will provide a quality control audit function by acting as a body of review readers for draft CRRN products.

The Research Sub-Committee will also serve as a dispute resolution panel during on-going CRRN operations. Under the direction of the CRRN Director, five members of the Sub-Committee would be expected to hear and discuss a dispute from within CRRN if the parties involved wished to have it resolved in this manner. The five members will provide a majority decision on the dispute. In cases where the CRRN Director may be involved in the subject dispute, another person will be appointed by the CRRN Governing Team to convene the arbiters from the Research Sub-Committee.

The Research Sub-Committee will involve the voluntary participation of members and would function largely via email. There may be some opportunity for face-to-face meetings of the Research Sub-Committee in connection with other rural research conferences or events. Initial members of the Research Sub-Committee will be: Ray Bollman (Statistics Canada), Greg Halseth (UNBC - Chair), Bruno Jean (UQAR), Judith Kulig (U. of Lethbridge), and Rosemary Ommer (U. of Victoria).

Knowledge Mobilization Sub-Committee

The KM Sub-Committee will identify and support opportunities for communication, partner engagement and expansion, dissemination, and evaluation of network materials and insights. This includes the preparation of proposals for future conferences and workshops, media opportunities, speaker engagements, the Rural Research Clearinghouse, and partner development. They will prepare a three-year plan with annual updates to facilitate the strategic planning of the Board. They will also draft, implement, and oversee an ongoing Evaluation Program for CRRN – to monitor and make recommendations for continual improvement in its KM objectives. The Liaison and Communications Officers will serve as ex-officio members of this Sub-Committee.

The KM Sub-Committee will involve the voluntary participation of members and would function largely via email. There may be some opportunity for face-to-face meetings of the KM Sub-Committee coming in connection with other rural research conferences or events. Initial members of the KM Sub-Committee will be: Bob Annis (RDI), Diane Martz (SPHERU), Patrice LeBlanc (UQAT), Mike Stolte (CIEL), and Robert Summerby-Murray (MtA - Chair).

Finance Sub-Committee

The Finance Sub-Committee will identify new funding opportunities and develop the plan for endowment development in collaboration with Concordia University. They will prepare a three-year plan with annual updates to facilitate the strategic planning of the Board. The initial members of the

Finance Sub-Committee will be: David Douglas (SEDCCD), Brett Fairbairn (U. of SK), Rob Greenwood (Harris Centre - Chair), and a representative from Concordia University.

Administration

CRRN tasks and activities will be distributed among participants and partners according to their relative strengths and interests. Each task assignment will be given to at least two Centres: with one Centre designated as the lead assignment and another Centre as support. The two Centres will work closely with one another, thereby facilitating cross-Centre communication and at the same time providing support for one another to accomplish the tasks. The following table identifies initial assignments as illustrations. Final decisions regarding this allocation will be made at the first meeting of CRRN should the Strategic Cluster Award be granted.

| Task | Lead Centre | Support Centre |
|--|--|--|
| Annual Conference | CRRF | NRRN |
| CRRN Workshops | The Rural and Small Town Programme, Mt. Allison U. | UNBC Community Development Institute |
| Rural Information Gateway | Concordia University | The Rural Development Institute, Brandon U. |
| Data Repository and Archives | Concordia University | The Rural and Small Town Programme, Mt. Allison U. |
| Research Stimulation and Guidance | UNBC Community Development Institute | The Rural Development Institute; Statistics Canada |
| KM Best Practices | The Harris Centre, MUN | Concordia University |
| Capacity-Building Internships | SPHERU, U. of SK | The Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada |
| Rural Research Clearinghouse | The Rural and Small Town Programme, Mt. Allison U. | The Rural Development Institute, Brandon U. |
| Extending the Rural Voice | CRRF | Solidarité Rurale du Québec; The Ontario Rural Council |
| Liaison and Networking Opportunities | Concordia University | Institute for Northern Ontario Research and Development |
| Municipal and Provincial Participation | School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, U. of Guelph | Centre de recherche sur le développement territorial, UQAR |
| Voluntary and Service Sector Participation | UNBC Community Development Institute | Centre for Innovative and Entrepreneurial Leadership |
| Aboriginal Peoples Participation | SPHERU, U. of SK | Coastal Communities Network |
| Private Sector Participation | Canadian Rural Economy Research Lab (C-CRERL), U. of SK | Solidarité Rurale du Québec |
| International Partnerships | Concordia University | International Rural Network |
| Endowment Fund | Concordia University | CRRF |

The *CRRN Administrative Team* will be responsible for the overall coordination and support of these activities. Coordination tasks will involve the CRRN Manager, a Liaison Officer, a Communications Officer, and an Administrative Assistant.

- The CRRN Manager will serve in the role of a Project Manager under the CRRN Director and will be responsible for directing day-to-day activities of CRRN. Post-Doctoral candidates will be encouraged to apply for this position. Concordia will provide office space and equipment and will

support the administration and payroll. The primary strengths of the CRRN Manager will be in project management. Familiarity with the academic and research milieu is essential along with knowledge of the needs of the policy and practitioner communities.

- The CRRN Manager will be supported by an Administrative Assistant who will, in addition to support duties, be responsible for tracking CRRN budget expenditures. It is expected that the Administrative Assistant will have office and budget management experience, and will have a resumé with executive assistant experience of not less than three years.
- Based on experience from the NRE Project, there is a critical role for a Liaison Officer within CRRN. The Liaison Officer will serve three basic functions. The first is to maintain routine contact with partner groups and their constituent contributors, the second is to identify opportunities and challenges and to expand the network. The third is to provide logistical support for the organization of CRRN workshops and meetings. The Liaison Officer must have a demonstrated track record of professional responsibility in coordinating and managing group or network activities. The Liaison Officer is expected to be highly organized, task-oriented, and have demonstrated the capacity to remain on time with activities and deliverables.
- In addition to the Liaison Officer, CRRN will be supported by a Communications Officer. The Communications Officer will assist the KM function by providing newsletter development and distribution, new media design and implementation (e.g. podcasts, e-newsletters, chat rooms, blogs), and preparing regular materials to update partner websites regarding rural research opportunities and insights. The Communications Officer will also be the focal point for maintenance of the Rural Information Gateway Website. Finally, the Communications Officer will support initiatives emerging from the KM Sub-Committee. Principal among these activities will be rewriting of cutting-edge rural research work for communication to rural and small town municipal governments, local service providers, and voluntary sector organizations. The Communications Officer is expected to have a minimum of two years of experience with communications activities such as newsletter or website management. Given KM demands, the position will also require an individual whose writing skills allow them to communicate research products in lay language. The position is best suited for someone comfortable in a variety of venues including public presentations, video, television, and radio.

Management Steering Committee

A Steering Committee to support and guide the CRRN Manager with ongoing challenges will be formed from among the Lead Centre representatives. This Committee will communicate regularly (via e-mail and conference calls on at least a monthly basis) with the Administrative Team in order to exchange updates on Centre and management activities, provide advice, and facilitate communication. Members will be chosen annually by the Board of Directors on the basis of nominations made by the CRRN Director. Regional representation will be maintained. Initial members of the Steering Committee will be: Rob Greenwood (Harris Centre), Greg Halseth (UNBC), Kate Humpage (HRSDC), Bruno Jean (CRDT), Diane Martz (SPHERU), and Robert Summerby-Murray (MtA).

Dispute Resolution

As mentioned above, the Research Sub-Committee will also provide the membership for a dispute resolution panel during on-going CRRN operations. Under the direction of the CRRN Director or designate, five members of the Sub-Committee would be expected to hear and discuss any dispute arising from within CRRN if requested by the parties involved.

Leverage

The history of the NRE Project provides an excellent illustration of the ability of this team to leverage funding and support. In 1997 the project was initiated on the basis of a \$25,000 contract with HRDC for a workshop and some related research work. For the first three years of the project it

survived on project-based funding from government partners such as the HRDC, the Rural Secretariat, Health Canada, FEDNOR, ACOA, and Statistics Canada. For the next 3 years primary funding came via SSHRC's Strategic Grant on Social Cohesion and for the final 4 years we have relied on a SSHRC INE Grant entitled "Building Rural Capacity in the New Economy". Over the 10-year period the total funds involved are more than \$4 million (excluding conferences) with much more in-kind support.

CRRN is organized to draw upon the considerable research activity already reflected in its partner Centres. The nature of this support is difficult to measure since it includes funds that are directly administered by the Centres as well as the amounts to which it has access through its networks and partners. RDI, for example, records more than \$1 million in currently committed 'hard' research funds over the 2007 to 2010 period. This figure does not include the research funds in its network over which it does not have administrative control. This pattern is repeated in most of the other research Centres in our cluster. We anticipate that each Centre and Partner will search for additional opportunities whereby specific cluster activities are supplemented with funds for research, meetings, conferences, materials production, distribution, and travel. At the same time, CRRN researchers will have more time available for research activities since many of the administrative functions will be supported by CRRN. This will produce a significant increase in research grants for rural research and exceed our current level of productivity for academic, policy, and public documents.

CRRN will attract considerable in-kind support as well (over \$2 million in the current proposal). As with the NRE Project we will likely receive our in-kind support in the form of office space, access to students, institutional infrastructure, and voluntary time contributions from all of our target groups. One of the valuable consequences of our decision to meet in rural areas, for example, is the vast amount of good will, time, and energy we receive from local people as they host our activities.

Long-term viability

During the early period of the NRE, most of the leveraged support came from government sources and participants' institutions. These are usually provided in the form of project-based contributions with rather specific outputs, little 'core funding' and short time-frames, however. As a result, we will seek to supplement such income with foundation funding through one or more of the major granting agencies operating in Canada and the USA. At the same time, we will explore the possibility of establishing endowment funding specifically for KM activities as outlined below.

In collaboration with Concordia University the PI is exploring the option of an Endowment Fund for rural-related research and education. This Fund would be used to provide core support for CRRN over the long term. Initial materials regarding such a Fund have already been drafted and are undergoing development with a plan to launching in 2008 or 2009. By the time that the CRRN period is complete, we expect to have an Endowment established to ensure both the institutional continuation of CRRN along with additional funds for research and education initiatives.

The current list of co-investigators makes clear that there is a strong basis for the future leadership of the cluster. We have good representation from all career levels and are proactive in the recruitment and mentoring at all of these levels. Our distributed structure allows us to draw upon a deep pool of talent in spite of the limitations of small institutions.

Budget rationale

Networking and KM activities require resources, both financial and in-kind. Finances are required to meet, produce materials, communicate, and develop linkages. Unfortunately there are very few sources for such funding. The current government climate requires project-focused funding with specific (non-infrastructure) outcomes, the private sector has shown little interest in supporting social science research that is not directly related to their specific product or service, and granting agencies favour traditional research projects with specific objectives rather than the long term, more open, and flexible programs required for KM objectives.

Rural research is particularly in need of long-term, national funding since both research and collaboration demand extra resources because of the dispersed nature of personnel and the travel required for grounded corroboration. The institutions involved are necessarily regional-focused so are unable to support the national and international liaisons required for research and KM.

The Strategic Cluster program funding will provide us with the type of support necessary to overcome these challenges. With it, we can assemble research teams across large distances, make existing research available to a wider audience, maintain a consistent and long-term collaboration among partners to build trust, and discover new ways to exchange and operationalize our insights. It will also free researchers from the administrative duties that take them away from research and allow us to explore innovations in KM that were not previously possible when all our resources were designated for more traditional research activities.

Budget Justification

Personnel costs

Student salaries and benefits/Stipends (22%)

Student assistants will be used for most of the cluster activities, including the Conferences, Workshops, Information Gateway, Data Archives, Research Products, Best Practices, Internships, Clearinghouse, Rural Voice, Receptor Capacity, and International Partnership activities. As a result, they will be directly involved in project development, data preparation and interpretation, communication, collaboration, and liaison activities. Since the activities will be distributed among the various Centres of the cluster it will also provide them with opportunities for exchange and comparison across many locations. We estimate the student support across all Centres as the equivalent of 2 undergraduate and 2 MA students at \$16,500/yr (incl. benefits) and \$18,600/yr respectively.

Non-student salaries and benefits/Stipends (46%)

The core administrative and liaison activities of the cluster require the commitment of staff over a relatively long period of time. In most cases, student careers do not make this possible since their primary objective is graduation. As a result, we will allocate these core activities to non-student or Post-Doc personnel with some occasional student support. This includes the Network Manager, Liaison Officer, Communications Officer, Administrative Support staff, and support for the Director of the RSTP at Mt. Allison U. The latter amount is necessary since RSTP depends on external funding.

RTS requested (SSHRC portion) (<1%)

We are requesting 1 time release allocation to free time for Bob Annis, the Director of the RDI. In order to commit the time to the cluster he must cover his costs since the Institute depends on external funding. The use of time release subsidies has worked well in the past to make this possible.

Travel and subsistence costs

Applicant/Team member travel (19%)

Since distance is a key element of what we mean by 'rural', travel is inevitably a major part of our budget. These funds will primarily be used to bring team members and target groups together for Conferences and Workshops, Internships, Liaison, Clearinghouse, Rural Voice, Receptor Capacity, International, and Administrative activities. Some of these funds will be used to support the travel of non-academic partners through the Internship activities.

Student travel (4%)

Students will travel as part of our Conference, Workshop, Research Products, Internship, and Receptor Capacity activities. We have found that having the opportunity to meet with academic and non-academic partners from many parts of the country has been extremely valuable for building understanding, sharpening the analysis, opening opportunities, and motivating young scholars interested in rural issues. The 'alumni' activities of the NRE Project, for example, have gone a long way to ensuring the capacity built during the project is maintained after the students have moved to

other stages in their careers (cf. Attachment 8.7). Their first-hand experience with places and people from across the country has contributed a great deal to the maintenance of these contacts.

Other expenses

Professional/Technical services (3%)

3% of our budget is allocated for technical support in two major areas: translation and journalism. The former is necessary to maintain the important links we have established between English and French-speaking partners and participants. This is especially important for the analysis of rural issues since the policy approaches among the provinces are so different and the networks of researchers tend to be language-specific. We will also hire writers with journalism experience to support the issue identification and rewriting that is necessary in order to make academic insights more understandable and appropriate for public audiences. These funds will be spent mostly within our Gateway, Data Archives, and Clearinghouse activities.

Supplies (5%)

Supplies for communication, media, meetings, administration, and publicity materials both internally and externally will be necessary for all activities.

Non-disposable equipment (<1%)

Computer purchases in years 1 and 4 (\$2,500 per computer) and the purchase of a video camera in year 3 (\$1,250) will be made to support the Clearinghouse activities.

Time Line and Milestones

Year One: This year will be devoted to the establishment and organization of the core governance structures, formalization of the working relationships, and implementation of the central activities – including discussions for the Endowment Fund and other fund-raising options. It will include network expansion and consolidation. By the end of this year, the structures will be in place, the Centres will be operational, key research issues and projects will be identified, and the network will have grown.

Year Two: This year will emphasize network-building and expansion. Programs for collaboration with the five special target groups will be developed and the initial steps taken toward implementation. By the end of this year, we should have established working arrangements with all of these target groups and increased our network partners substantially. Research products will be widely distributed.

Year Three: This year will emphasize the consolidation and the preparation for evaluation of our activities. If feasible, the Endowment plan will be finalized. By the end of the year, we will have evaluation plans from all the Sub-Committees and an endowment strategy in place in addition to the products and events generated by our many activities.

Year Four: This year will focus on the evaluation of our cluster, the identification of possible reorganization, and the launching of the Endowment project. By the end of the year we should have a new strategic plan in place and the Endowment or other funding underway in addition to the many research products and activities of the cluster.

Year Five: This year will emphasize the implementation of the new strategic plan. By the end of the year we should have a revised organization in place (if necessary) and the initial stages of the Endowment and future funding activities completed in addition to our other activities.

Year Six: This year will emphasize capacity-building among our partners and self-reflection on the future options for rural research and KM. By the end of the year we should show increased capacity among our partners and the outlines of a plan for the use of our post-SSHRC funding.

Year Seven: This year will be devoted to the documentation and evaluation of our activities, celebration of our accomplishments, and preparation for the future of the Cluster. By the end of the year we should have an extensive record of research achievements, our Endowment funding in place, a plan for the long term, and an organizational structure to reflect this plan.

3. List of References

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8. Supporting Documents

- Attachment 8.1: Glossary of Acronyms
- Attachment 8.2: CRRF Introductory Flyer
- Attachment 8.3: NRE Introductory Flyer
- Attachment 8.4: List of Participants, Institutions, and Fields of Expertise
- Attachment 8.5: CRRN – 2007 Network
- Attachment 8.6: List of CRRF and NRRN Conferences and Workshops
- Attachment 8.7: NRE Alumni activities
- Attachment 8.8: Letter from Tweed, ON