



REGIONAL
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
Workshop



Regional Economic Development (RED) Workshop 2023: Setting A Course

Public Report



The Preface

In response to concerns from members and others about service gaps and challenges around community and economic development efforts, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador (MNL), the NL Association of Community Business Development Corporations (CBDC) and The Harris Centre established the Regional Economic Development Task Force (RED Task Force) in 2022. The mandate of the Task Force was to explore options and models to effectively support regional economic development in the province. After nine months of consultations and deliberations, the Task Force produced a comprehensive report.

In mid-2023, the original partners recognized it was important to re-engage a broader set of stakeholders in order to continue the momentum and act on the Report's recommendations. In response, (and with the Community Sector Council of NL as a new partner), a full day workshop was held on December 11, 2023.

This event brought together members of the RED Task Force, municipal leaders, economic developers, provincial and federal government officials, industry association representatives, not-for-profit organizations and researchers with interest and expertise in regional development. Using the Report's recommendations as a starting point, participants engaged in working sessions designed to develop strategies for advancing regional economic development practices in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Process

The workshop began with a panel discussion featuring Rob Nolan (Municipalities NL), Roseanne Leonard (NL Association of CBDCs), Kim Crosbie (Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development) and Colin Corcoran (Community Sector Council NL). All panelists stressed the importance of a grassroots, collaborative approach to regional economic development that are led through collaborative efforts of different organizations and sectors specific to the context of each region.

A premise of the Regional Economic Development Task Force was that examples of cooperation between multiple towns and other stakeholders already exist. Participants were broken into smaller groups to address the following two questions:

1. Can you describe one or two examples from within your region, or in areas where you work, of communities already beginning to work together?
2. Are any of these already focused on or leading towards more “integrated regional economic development” in your region? In what ways?

Each small group share an example that generated the most discussion in response to the 2nd question. Some brief examples of these are:

- **Northern Gros Morne communities** – responding to concerns over budgets and staffing capacity, eight towns in the northern Gros Morne region around Cow Head have signed an MOU to work together on shared services. The towns are currently in the process of hiring a regional maintenance person, and are also looking at waste management services.
- **Killick Coast** – in response to grants with tight deadlines and increasingly seeing the potential benefits of a proactive regional approach, town managers began to meet on a quarterly basis; if/when there is a grant announced, they are ready to go. Discussions have served to generate ideas and see opportunities from a regional perspective.

Participants familiarized themselves with **Six Specific Functions Necessary for Effective Regional Economic Development**.

A foundational presumption of the Report is that most of the assets necessary for effective regional economic development already exist in one form or another across the province.

Workshop participants were asked the following questions:

1. What assets, resources and activities already exist that we can use and build upon to develop more effective regional economic development planning and practices?
2. What actions can we take now to activate, integrate and support these assets and resources for regional economic development?

A list of available assets and resources was generated as were a list of action items. Again, each small group shared one or two ideas from their discussions, such as:

- Look for ways to identify, develop and activate community-focused purpose-driven businesses and enterprises. Culture as an integral part of economy; consider starting here by finding ways of lifting up our “place-based economies” (eg. intangible heritage skills) and aligning the deeply local with the widely global.
- Start getting serious about exploring new approaches for funding this work; eg.
 - Taking percentage of HST for municipalities – empowers people and brings towns/communities to the table.
 - Plan and play in order to get paid → tie funding at local level to participating in regional economic development processes.

The Potential

The intent of the workshop was to build from the recommendations developed by the RED Task Force while exploring other actions to advance the practice of regional economic development in NL. Again in small groups, participants developed goals/desired outcomes related to the following areas:

- Identify, adapt, or (if necessary) create regional organizations or structures that can coordinate and support RED efforts.
- Identify, adapt, or (if necessary) create regional organizations or structures that can coordinate and support RED efforts
- Identify, collect and share best practices, resources and other relevant information supporting RED
- Develop, coordinate and engage a provincial network of organizations interested in a more integrated approach to RED.
- Encourage, support and build the capacity among diverse organizations for working together at the community or regional level on RED
- Develop or secure more flexible funding that can be used to support the day-to-day operations and community/regional engagement needed for integrated RED
- Develop and deliver RED training programs, regional and provincial workshops, orientation materials, “how-to” guides, etc. for professional and volunteer practitioners.
- Look at the harnessing DEI and multiculturalism to increase engagement and economic growth and development.
- Develop a process to enable municipalities to manage and realize the economic development potential of community land supply

All individual participants made personal commitments to action items discussed at the workshop. The four organizing partners, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, the Association of NL CBDCs, the Community Sector Council and the Harris Centre, all reinforced their commitment to find new approaches to regional economic development that meet the needs of NLers and respond to the challenging times we live in.

There is a role for everybody to play.

The sustainable regional economic development of our province is the collective responsibility of all citizens and we need input from everyone in order to make it our collective success.

