

Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)

Phase Two Focus and Action Report

Acme, Alberta

June 2010



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The Business Vitality Initiative

The Business Vitality Initiative (BVI) helps communities to assess their capacity to work with and support entrepreneurs, and to foster small business growth. The BVI measures the perceptions of community leaders, business people and citizens about the current business environment in their community and compares the results to an average of other communities to determine possible short and long-term actions the community can undertake to improve its business friendliness.

The Acme BVI was initiated by a partnership between the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and CIEL. The Rural Community Adaptation Program (RCAP) of Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development (ARD) funded it. The community sponsor was a working group organized through the Village of Acme, which selected the participants.

Acme is the twentieth community in Canada that has undertaken the BVI, in addition to five communities in Australia.

Acme Phase 1 Assessment Results

In the Assessment Session, held on April 28, 2010, participants were asked to give three words to describe their community. The majority of responses were positive. According to many respondents, Acme is a *friendly, relaxed, and close-knit* community. When participants were asked to identify key strengths not used to potential in the community, the top responses were *the new community hall, youth, and the Seniors Centre*.

When participants were asked to name their predicted top economic drivers for the community in the next five years, the most common responses were *agriculture, oil and gas, and trucking*. When asked about untapped business opportunities in the community, *a motel, a bottle depot, and a better grocery store* were the top responses.

When asked for suggestions on how to improve Acme, the top four responses were *more businesses and incentives for business, beautification of the town, and street improvements*.

More detail can be found in the Acme Phase 1 Assessment Report.

Section Scores

From highest to lowest, section scores were as follows:

Section	Score out of 100
Opportunities and Attitudes	59
Communication and Connectivity	57
Quality of Life	52
Leadership, Teamwork, and Networking	50
Role of Government and Organizations	47
Education and Training	46
Markets and Marketing	43
Capital and Funding	40
Innovation	38
Infrastructure and Business Services	36

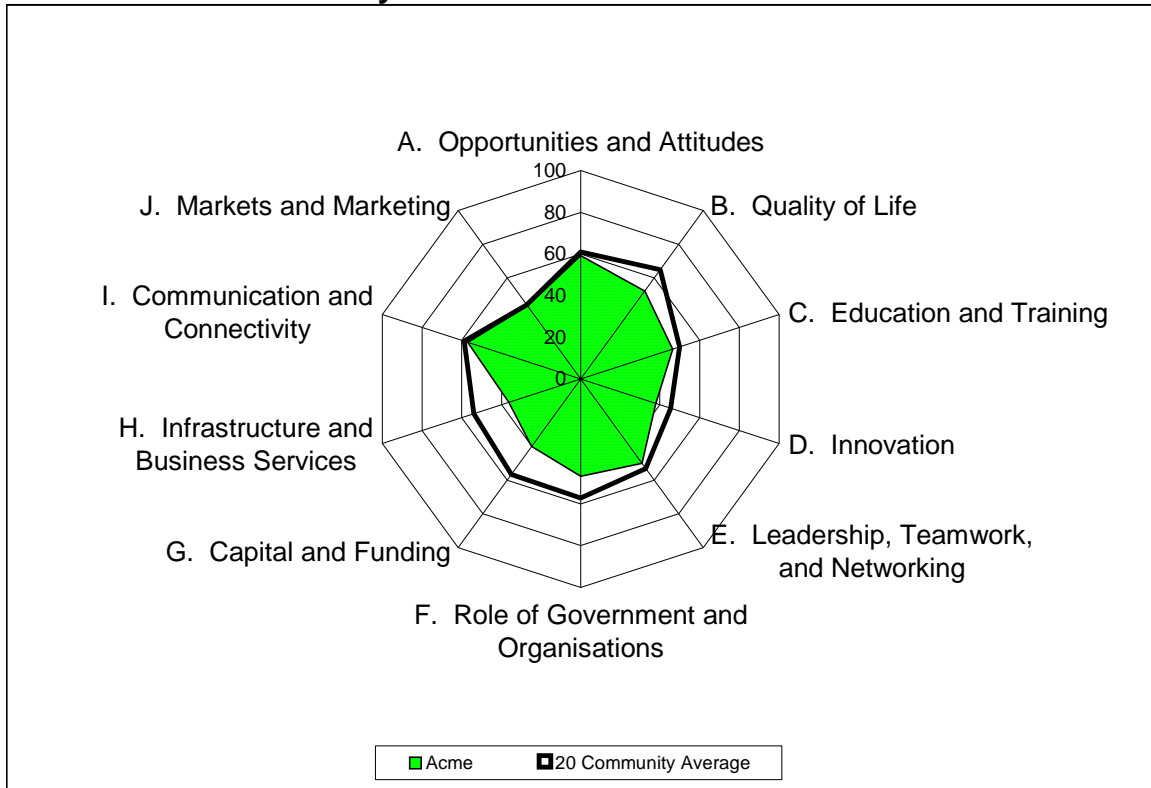
Overall, Acme had a full survey score of 47 out of 100, below the 20-community average of 55.

Particular strengths for Acme are its two highest scores in the *Opportunities and Attitudes* and the *Communications and Connectivity* sections.

The lowest scoring sections of the survey are *Innovation* and *Infrastructure and Business Services*.

The radial graph below contrasts Acme's section scores with the average score for other communities that have done the BVI in Canada. The closer the shaded section is to the outside ring, the higher Acme's score, and the greater the business friendliness.

Acme and All-Community Section Scores



Acme Phase 2 Results

The Phase 2, or Focus and Action Session, held on June 10, 2010, was open to the entire community with the purpose of setting priorities for improvement and jump-starting the community to action. See Appendix 1 for an attendance list.

During that session, the assessment scores and other results, as described in the Phase 1 Assessment Report, were presented. The community was then given a series of possible courses of action, derived by CIEL from focus groups and questionnaire responses from the Assessment Session on April 28, to improve the community's environment for business. The group on June 10 was asked to add further suggestions to that list.

All of the actions were posted on sheets of paper throughout the room, and participants were given 5 votes to identify their priorities and select actions that they were interested in investing their time and energy into. The results are presented below with the number of votes for each. They are divided into four categories: capacity building, networking, marketing, and research/administration/planning.

Possible Short Term Actions <i>Shaded items were chosen as priorities and became the subject of action groups.</i>		Votes
Capacity Building	▪ 'Buy Local' program (first identify what is most often bought elsewhere for residents and businesses)	5
	▪ Work with Community Futures to explain their services including grants, funding opportunities, courses (business start-up, marketing, youth business options, etc.)	4
	▪ Opportunity identification session for youth to identify recreational, educational, and business needs & opportunities	11
Marketing	▪ Look to improve town web-site (start by incorporating BVI positives, business opportunities, council minutes, etc.)	3
	▪ Recognize local businesses (newspaper profiles, awards, etc.)	5
	▪ Entrance or downtown beautification project	19
	▪ An Acme event (could be festival, Farmers Market, etc.)	15
Networking	▪ More Village public open meetings, forums (among issues to be considered would be taxes, business development (use BVI results as starting place))	25
	▪ Business mentorship &/or Chamber breakfast meetings to strengthen ties and build local knowledge/skills	2
Research, Admin, & Planning	▪ Inventory office space availability (supply/demand) with aim of finding provider(s)	8
	▪ Publish and strategize top business opportunities from BVI (e.g. motel, bottle depot, grocery store, etc)	17
	▪ Research trades/skills training options (e.g. partnering with Olds College)	10

Short Term Actions-- Action Group Summary

Following the priority setting exercise, participants formed three discussion groups in order to assess the viability of the three courses of action that were chosen.

The 'Reality Check' exercise revealed that the three initiatives had sufficient energy and resources to proceed. Highlights from the discussion/action groups are outlined below.

Reality Check	
1. More Public Open Meetings and Forums	
Action Group Members: Tanya Nicholas, Serena Nicholas, Glen Hannah, Doreen Ternowetsky, Laurel Pierce	
Question	Answer
Success —Describe what the successful action might look like.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More people getting together to make joint decisions. ▪ More public awareness and cooperation.
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To create more public awareness and public participation.
Commitment – Can we get commitment and energy from the town and community to undertake this? If not, what do we have to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes we can.
Leadership – Who has the skills to lead (organizations, individuals)? Who else do we need to involve to ensure success who isn't in the room right now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual citizens have to take responsibility for themselves.
Time Frame – How long will it take to accomplish? Are there any political, economic or funding factors which might hurt/help the timing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quarterly community information meetings to raise awareness of actions being taken or to introduce new concerns or needs.
Finances/ Resources – What, if any, financial resources do we need to tap into? Are there any organizations that can assist this action? Any other resources?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Representatives from each volunteer organization should be present to share information and ideas for the community.
Your recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take action
Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Try to call a meeting as soon as possible.

Reality Check

2. Publish and Strategize Top Business Opportunities

Action Group Members: Leona Dekoter (Provisional Chair), Stacy Dekoter, William Sadler, Charlene Steinhubl, Cherisse Feldberg, Paytyn Feldberg, Denis Boulet, Sandi Fowler, David Alderdice, Bryce Dekoter

Question	Answer
Success —Describe what the successful action might look like.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government funding for recreation
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New business and create space for it ▪ Council promote retention
Commitment – Can we get commitment and energy from the town and community to undertake this? If not, what do we have to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Small business ▪ Food items ▪ Baking, ▪ Meat ▪ Deli ▪ Thrift store ▪ Consignment store ▪ Stationery
Leadership – Who has the skills to lead (organizations, individuals)? 1 Who else do we need to involve to ensure success who isn't in the room right now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More established businesses ▪ Sharing of knowledge ▪ Banks and business to take a risk ▪ Skilled people
Time Frame – How long will it take to accomplish? Are there any political, economic or funding factors which might hurt/help the timing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two years for government funding and tendering of construction jobs.
Finances/ Resources – What, if any, financial resources do we need to tap into? Are there any organizations that can assist this action? Any other resources?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal and provincial government funding for recreation ▪ Community Futures ▪ BMO
Your recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take action
Next Steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ June 17, 2010, 7pm at Wiley Coyote's

Reality Check

3. Entrance or Downtown Beautification Project

Action Group Members: Melanie Melaka, Lucy Ann Daubert, Darrell Morris, Ziggy Kozlowski, Terri Reimer, Donna Bates, Elaine Sadler

Question	Answer
Success —Describe what the successful action might look like.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To clean up the town and make it more appealing ▪ To improve town sign areas ▪ To fix up recreation areas, signage
Commitment – Can we get commitment and energy from the town and community to undertake this? If not, what do we have to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes—MSP and community members
Leadership – Who has the skills to lead (organizations, individuals)? 1 Who else do we need to involve to ensure success who isn't in the room right now?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We need the Council, Village foreman, MSP
Time Frame – How long will it take to accomplish? Are there any political, economic or funding factors which might hurt/help the timing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two-six weeks ▪ Funding
Finances/ Resources – What, if any, financial resources do we need to tap into? Are there any organizations that can assist this action? Any other resources?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Incentives ▪ Local lodges ▪ Agricultural Society ▪ Kneehill County
Your recommendation	Take action
Next Steps	

Next Steps

The most important element of successfully completing an action is the presence of strong community leadership and energy. The community must identify human resources to champion and lead each action. The facilitator asked that those in attendance identify working group members. The Community Sponsors will also continue to work with the working groups in order to follow through on the identified courses of action. Most working groups made a commitment at the meeting to schedule and attend a follow-up meeting.

Long-Term Actions

The following long-term actions were proposed in the Phase 1 Assessment Report, but were not voted on at the Focus and Action meeting on June 10.

Possible Long Term Actions (actions taking more than 12 months to complete)	
Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Land review and strategy to address shortage concerns▪ A community learning strategy that involves taking advantage of school, community hall (e.g. night courses), local amenities (e.g. trucking, oil & gas, agriculture), local skilled educators (e.g. Community Futures, youth teaching internet, Facebook skills), video conference facilities
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Development of Acme brand + strategy around the brand▪ Long-term strategy to beautify downtown and entrance ways to town

Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Street parties ▪ Volunteer recruitment (“no one to take over from 70 to 80-year-olds”) ▪ Look at public transportation links to other communities (including costs, access, etc.)
Research, Admin. and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research trades/skills training options (e.g. partnering with Olds College) ▪ Investigate industrial sub ▪ Street paving/ improvement review and strategy ▪ Examine tax rate difference & possibly incentives to encourage new businesses

Appendix 1: Attendance List

- Ziggy Kozlowski
- Glen Hannah
- David Alderdice
- Charlene Steinhubl
- Darren Steinhubl
- Allison Thomas
- Bill Sadler
- Elaine Sadler
- Melanie Melaka
- Darrell Morris
- Terri Reimer
- Donna Bates
- Lucy Ann Daubert
- Colleen Herrera
- Ron Cox
- Sandy Fowler
- Laurel Pierce
- Doreen Ternowetsky
- Tanya Nicholas
- Serena Nicholas
- Skyler Nicholas
- Leona Dekoter
- Bryce Dekoter
- Stacey Dekoter
- Cherisse Feldberg
- Paytyn Feldberg

Appendix 2: Examples of How BVI Communities Have Taken Action

Community 1

- Marketing Coordinator for the whole valley (to find emphasis/strengths, facilitate cooperation & networking)
- Make community “Horticultural Centre of B.C.”
- Clean up and develop the downtown area and community core
- “Buy Local” program
- Develop recreational potential (facilities, bike paths)

Community 2

- Formation of a community business group to look at possibilities
- Use community watershed story to create a community “brand”. (Market the story)
- Renovate community hall(s)
- Plan around ideal set-up of community art(isan’s) gallery
- Accommodation and camping facility development

Community 3

- Local economic development organization to offer more business courses in the area around needs of community business
- Opportunity identification session with young people (under 40)
- Customer service training

Community 4

- Create community foundation
- Increase cooperation between business, government, and citizens by working together on a project
- Opportunity Identification Sessions (one for youth and one for broader community)
- Buy local campaign or program

Community 5

- Buy local campaign
- Networking sessions more regularly among community groups and businesses
- “Did you know” citizen ambassador program
- Joint marketing session – best practices - with Chamber as catalyst

Community 6

- Improve cooperation and communication between stakeholders (business, council, residents)
- Promote tourism and cultural assets
- Buy local program

Community 7

- Joint marketing of products and services by business
- Education of community on benefits of new business
- Develop community brand / market the community
- Build community spirit through festivals / projects

Community 8

- Draft some short-term tourism actions & striking a tourism action group specifically around addressing high quality recreational opportunities
- Develop strategy to attract more capital / possibility of cooperative financing for services community identifies as needing / community identifies potential sources of equity in the community/ Meetings between area lenders and businesses to raise awareness of lending options
- Improve telecommunications / develop telecommunications plan (look at cooperative structure for bringing in high speed (fibre optics))
- Develop brand around beauty / work ethic / independent attitude / creativity / seclusion ('find us if you can' where arts & a pioneer spirit meet the mountains)
- Coordinated or cooperative marketing effort for local products or services (i.e. tourism operators, artisans)

Community 9

- Use landfill/methane/waste management as a catalyst for innovation, education & economic development
- Increase presence of night policing
- Work on a beautification/pride project that increases cooperation among business, residents and government
- Create volunteer attraction/retention/recognition and leadership identification program for community to combat burnout
- Improve customer service (training for front-line employees)

Community 10

- Improve the image of the town by revitalizing main areas and entrances starting with beautification and cleanliness.
- Develop a regional event to promote and unify the town.
- Buy local program.

Community 11

- Review and revise promotional strategy and identify local attractions, to increase tourism and population growth.
- Beautify main street (including public toilet improvements), to make the main town centre more attractive to visitors, travellers, and the community.
- Form a committee to consult with major industries to assess what those industries require of the community.

Community 12

- Develop a youth retention and engagement strategy to give youth a reason to return to the community.
- Targeted outreach marketing strategy to attract more people.
- Make the community a commercial hub for the arts, including a dual/multi facility for historical arts precinct and museum and a working space for artists and craftspeople.
- Buy local campaign.

Community 13

- Develop a loyalty shopping program to give consumers a reason and incentive to shop locally.
- Improve town entrance, to encourage highway travellers to visit the community and to create a pride in the town by local residents.
- Develop a marketing package to attract new residents and businesses.
- Revive “heritage river” and “gateway” concepts and provide recreation to the town i.e. fishing, camping, swimming, to get people talking about the town.

Community 14

- Buy local program
- Develop festivals and events, e.g. Italian festival, power boat competition

- Improve streetscape and capital works including parking/roundabout and bridge treatment.

Appendix 3: About CIEL

The Centre for Innovative and Entrepreneurial Leadership (CIEL) strengthens communities by helping them become more business-friendly, more culturally vibrant, and more sustainable. We also assist them in improving leadership and enhancing community involvement.

CIEL is located in Nelson, British Columbia, in a region featuring many communities that are quickly having to make transitions to survive in a fast-changing global economy.

Our early work assisted small communities in the neighbouring mountain valleys. We developed innovative assessments coupled with strategic processes that helped communities focus, leverage assets and energy and, most importantly, jumpstart action. Then our ideas attracted the attention of communities farther afield, and we began working with communities across the rest of B.C. More recently we have been invited into communities across Canada, the U.S, New Zealand and Australia.

Our Communities Matrix – a one page tool for assessing stages of community readiness – has now been used in many countries across the globe. The Government of Canada contracted CIEL to research, develop and build a collaborative leadership program as an effective means of building capacity for rural communities in Canada.

CIEL continues to develop practical, engaging and innovative tools and processes that strengthen communities. In 2008, CIEL won the award for the region's most innovative organization from the Kootenay Association for Science & Technology.

Our network of facilitators and trainers allows us to be responsive to the needs of communities across the world. CIEL's conference presentations have inspired at the local, regional, state/province and international level. Our work has been featured on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Canadian Living Magazine and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Contact us to help build a custom solution to engage your community and move it to action.