

# Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)

## Phase Two Focus and Action Report

### High Level, 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 High Level 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 sponsors were the Town of High Level and Community Futures Northwest Alberta.

High Level is the twenty-second community in Canada that has taken part in the BVI, in addition to five communities in Australia.

## High Level Phase 1 Assessment Results

The Phase 1 or Assessment Session of the BVI was held in High Level on May 4, 2010.

In the *Assessment Session*, participants were asked to give three words to describe their community. The majority of responses were positive. According to many respondents, High Level is a *friendly, busy and vibrant* community, and there are also some concerns about the appearance and morale of the town. When participants were asked to identify key strengths not used to potential in the community, the top responses were *tourism, the people, and recreational opportunities*.

When participants were asked to name their predicted top economic drivers for the community in the next five years, the most common responses were *oil and gas, lumber/forestry, small business, and agriculture*. When asked about untapped business opportunities in the community, *value-added agriculture, tourism, and Tim Hortons* were the top three responses.

When asked for suggestions on how to improve High Level, the top responses were *beautification of the town, fewer street people, and more retail businesses*.

More detail can be found in the High Level 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	59
Infrastructure and Business Services	55
Role of Government and Organizations	55
Quality of Life	48
Education and Training	46
Leadership, Teamwork, and Networking	46
Innovation	46
Capital and Funding	41
Markets and Marketing	41

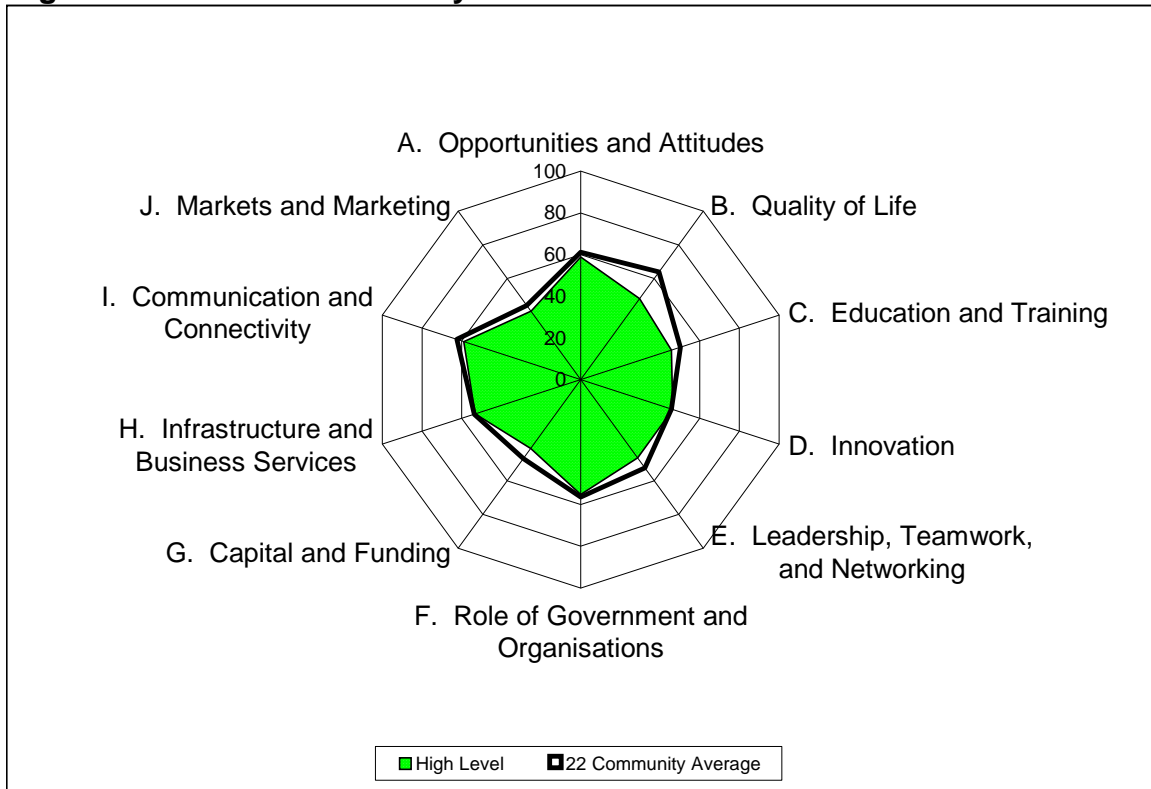
Overall, High Level had a full survey score of 50 out of 100, 7% below the 22-community average of 54.

The BVI section results as shown on pages 3 and 4 show that particular strengths for High Level are its two highest scores in the *Opportunities and Attitudes* and the *Communication and Connectivity* sections.

The lowest scoring sections of the survey are *Markets and Marketing* and *Capital and Funding*.

The radial graph below contrasts High Level'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 High Level's score, and the greater the business friendliness.

## High Level and All-Community Section Scores



## High Level Phase 2 Results

The Phase 2, or Focus and Action Session, held on June 8, 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 May 4, to improve the community's environment for business. The group on June 8 was asked to add further suggestions to that list.

From that point, the High Level session proceeded differently from most BVI Focus and Action sessions. Usually, all of the actions are posted on sheets of paper throughout the room, and participants are given 5 votes to identify their priorities and select actions that they are interested in investing their time and energy into. The results are then presented in this report with the number of votes for each (the chart presenting the list of possible short-term actions appears below). The 12 participants decided to leave voting on the actions until

the Fall of 2010 when a larger representative group could be assembled. Therefore, no vote numbers are included in this chart.

<b>Possible Short Term Actions</b> <i>Shaded items were chosen as priorities and became the subject of action groups.</i>		<b>Votes</b>
<b>Capacity Building</b>	▪ Volunteer recruitment (“Beyond the same 10 people”)	
	▪ More basic business training (Business start-up, financing, accounting, etc.)	
	▪ 'Buy Local' Initiative	
	▪ Youth & young adult opportunity identification session(s) to identify recreational, educational, and business opportunities	
	▪ Specific service skills upgrading programs to improve front line service	
<b>Marketing</b>	▪ Downtown beautification initiative (e.g. building appearances, filling vacant buildings/lots, lower highway through town.	
	▪ Community brand to differentiate, promote town (tourism, physician recruitment, etc. – consider assets like First Nations, Vegas theme, Northern Lights, Gateway to NWT, etc.)	
	▪ Publish/promote unfilled niches (e.g. Tim Horton’s, ladies clothing, Canadian Tire, business service centre, etc.)	
	▪ More promotion of local businesses in local media (awards, features, profiles of start-ups, etc.)	
<b>Networking</b>	▪ A signature festival or special event .	
	▪ “What’s happening?” – Communications initiative to increase communication effectiveness of business to business, Chamber, Town, NGOs, to citizens.	
<b>Research, Admin, &amp; Planning</b>	▪ Investigate EDO or economic development function to promote, attract, etc.	
	▪ Regional tourism opportunity identification to objectively examine assets (like First Nations, Vegas theme, Northern Lights, Gateway to NWT, etc.)	
	▪ Research/assess value-added agriculture opportunities.	

## Next Steps

After High Level votes on actions and completes a Reality Check in the Fall of 2010, 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 others to invite to the Fall meeting who will help bring success to the action groups that will form to complete the top 3 actions. 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 for High Level in the Phase 1 Assessment Report. Long term actions are not normally voted on in the Focus and Action session.

Possible Long Term Actions (actions taking more than 12 months to complete)	
Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer recruitment strategy</li> <li>• Buy Local Program</li> <li>• Skills training &amp; education strategy and ongoing initiatives (e.g. more localized training for trades, etc.)</li> </ul>
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown beautification strategy</li> <li>• Cultural event strategy</li> <li>• Physician incentives and recruitment</li> <li>• Identify &amp; package winter recreation activities</li> </ul>
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategy to get youth/young adults involved in building community &amp; community spirit</li> <li>• Broad community/regional leadership program beyond the elected representatives to build capacity/ links/ collaboration with Town, County, business, NGOs, First Nations</li> </ul>
Research, Admin. and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performing arts/cultural centre &amp; museum feasibility study</li> <li>• Research co-gen potential</li> <li>• Sidewalk/paving strategy/plan</li> <li>• Research regional tourism strategy</li> </ul>

## Appendix 1: Attendance List

- Shane Lloyd
- Mary Gramson
- Monica Longard
- Margaret Carroll
- Simone Wiley
- Katie Dutove
- Cheryl Ernst
- Adam Clarkson
- Lindsay Thompson
- Debbie Warmen
- Steve Macintyre
- Jan Welke

## 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.