



Centre for Innovative &
Entrepreneurial Leadership

Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)

Phase Two Focus and Action Report Smoky Lake, Alberta

November 2011



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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 Smoky Lake 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 Smoky Lake Chamber of Commerce and the Town of Smoky Lake which selected the participants. The local project coordinator is Mark Watson, Councillor in the Town of Smoky Lake.

Smoky Lake is the twenty-seventh community in Canada to take part in the BVI, in addition to five communities in Australia.

Smoky Lake Phase 1 Assessment Results

On October 6, 2011, 22 people attended the BVI session held at the Curling Club where a questionnaire and focus groups assessed the community's small business resources and potential. CIEL wrote a 75-page report on that session and a nine page summary report.

In that Assessment Session, participants were asked to give three words to describe their community. The responses were equally positive and negative. According to many respondents, Smoky Lake is a *friendly, small and stagnant* community. When participants were asked to identify key strengths not used to potential in the community, the top responses were *people, location, affordable real estate, and youth*.

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, tourism, new businesses, agriculture*. When asked about untapped business opportunities in the community, *recreational facility, value-added agriculture and tourism* were the top three responses.

When asked for suggestions on how to improve Smoky Lake, the top responses were *more jobs, cooperation and trust, and a recreational facility*.

More detail can be found in the Smoky Lake *Phase 1 Assessment Report*.

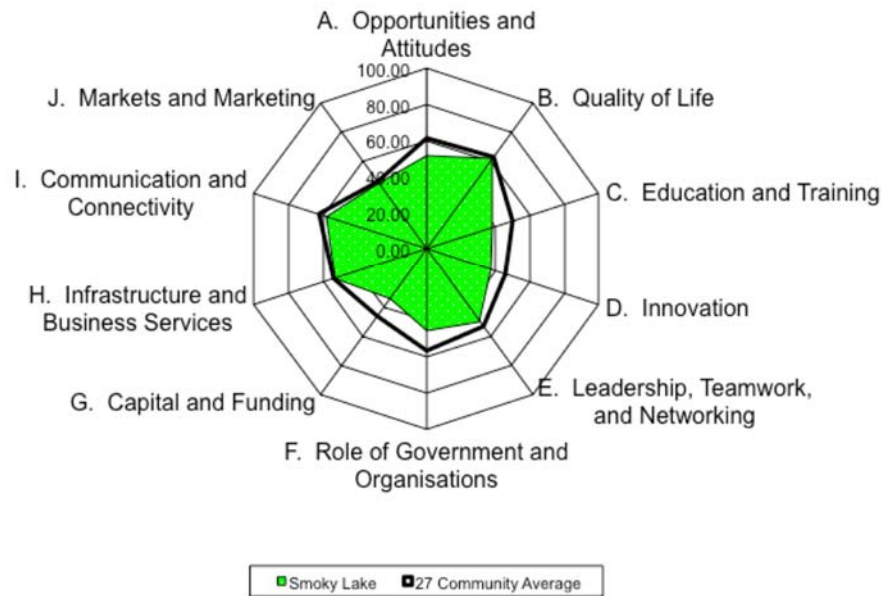
Phase 1 Section Scores

From highest to lowest, section scores reported in the *Phase 1 Assessment Report* were as follows:

Section Scores out of 100	
A. Opportunities & Attitudes	52
F. Role of Government & Organizations	62
D. Innovation	38
C. Education and Training	37
E. Leadership, Teamwork, Networking	50
B. Quality of Life	46
I. Communication & Connectivity	34
H. Infrastructure & Business Services	53
J. Markets & Marketing	58
G. Capital & Funding	45
Overall score (The 26-community average is 54 out of 100)	48

Overall, Smoky Lake had a full survey score of **48 out of 100**. The average for the 27 communities that have undertaken the BVI is 54.

The radial graph below contrasts the Smoky Lake 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 the Smoky Lake score, and the greater the business friendliness.



Smoky Lake Phase 2 Results

The Phase 2, or *Focus and Action Session*, held on November 24, 2011 at the Seniors' Drop-In Centre, was open to the entire community with the purpose of setting priorities for improvement and jump-starting the community to action

During that session, the assessment scores and other results, as described in the *Phase 1 Assessment Report* and summarized above, were presented.

The participants were then given a series of possible courses of action. CIEL had derived these from focus groups and questionnaire responses from the Assessment Session in April. The group on November 24 was invited to add further suggestions to that list.

Those suggested courses of action were placed on the wall and participants voted on them, each person placing a sticker on his or her top 5 priorities. The point was to identify the suggestions that had the most support in the room.

Possible Short Term Actions

Shaded items were chosen as priorities and became the subject of action groups. **Votes**

Possible Short Term Actions		
<i>Shaded items were chosen as priorities and became the subject of action groups.</i>		Votes
Capacity Building	▪ Workshop series to educate and change attitudes (e.g. lenders forum, capital, innovation, technology, customer service, profiling communities that are thriving, etc.)	2
	▪ Youth mentoring and entrepreneurial development project	2
	▪ Buy local project (e.g. local coupons, identifying customer and business gaps, identifying and recruiting for specific labour needs, etc.)	2
	▪ Incubator for eco-businesses especially agriculture/tech. businesses (<i>added at the Phase 2 session</i>)	2
	▪ Asset mapping and inventory	0
Marketing	▪ Signage project – links to downtown, what's where, street maps of business	5
	▪ A uniting signature event(s) that builds networks and markets in community/region – e.g. build on Pumpkin Festival &/or something new	4
	▪ Beautification & cleanliness project (e.g. begin with storefronts, offer incentives, streets & sidewalks, link highway to downtown, etc.)	3
	▪ Targeted recruitment for specific businesses & needs mentioned (e.g. coffee shop with 'specialty' coffees, youth hostel, hardware store, etc.)	2
	▪ Research, marketing, package, strategy, and person to target possible new businesses/ residents	6
	▪ Regional tourism project (Identify partnerships, identify experiences, co-ordination, packaging) (<i>added at the Phase 2 session</i>)	11
Networking	▪ Business welcome program	3
	▪ What's happening business communication project – explore better ways to improve Town to business, Chamber to business, business to business, community to business communication including forums and other forms of communication	1
	▪ Tradeshow/business forum	0

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth involvement Project (e.g. PhotoVoice, career school visits, etc.) <i>(added at the Phase 2 session)</i> 	9
Research, Admin, & Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore continuing education and other training options; extra space in schools (especially with extra space in schools) 	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investigate water options and capacity building <i>(added at the Phase 2 session)</i> 	3
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research service to replace Greyhound and look at other transportation issues 	1

Short Term Actions and Action Group Summaries

Following the priority setting exercise, BVI participants formed three discussion groups in order to assess the viability of the three courses of action that achieved the most votes (indicated by grey shading). Participants joined the group for the action that most personally motivated them.

Reality Check

1. Regional Tourism Project

Action Group Members: Brain & Leesa Jones, Noreen E., Therese Taschuk, Corrine Card, Angela Shaske, Wayne Taylor

Question	Answer
Result —Describe what the successful action might look like.	ID Partnerships ID Experiences Coordination/Packaging
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bring People to the Community ▪ Repeat Tourists
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"> ▪ Kalyna Country, businesses + council, citizens ▪ Committed
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"> ▪ Wayne & Noreen ▪ Economic Development reps ▪ Outfitters ▪ Local People who will provide outdoor excursions (i.e. horse back riding) ▪ Trail Twisters
Time Frame – How long will it take to accomplish? Are there any political, economic or funding factors which might hurt/help the timing?	6 months
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"> ▪ Advertising ▪ Incentive to attract coordinator or contract someone
Your recommendation	Take action
Next Steps	

Reality Check

2. Youth Involvement Project (Photo/ video, etc. Career school visits)

Action Group Members: Dean Pickering, Renee C., Therese Taschuk, Corinne Card

Question	Answer
Result —Describe what the successful action might look like.	Photo/Video etc, Career School Visits
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth engagement and involvement— start early > Jr.> Sr. ▪ Youth <> Adults <> Businesses ▪ Youth <> Seniors <> Community <> Leadership Teachers <> Counsellors <> Administration <> Help select leaders/difference makers
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"> ▪ Businesses – work exchange – students ▪ Counsellor in the school—target kids ▪ Get a recreation/sports/fitness enthusiasts to teach or show kids
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"> ▪ Coaches – hockey, archery, basketball, soccer, dance >Youth Church Programs ▪ Business leaders ▪ Teachers/counsellors/principal ▪ FCGS Volunteers Lions, Kinsmen, Jr. Forest, Cadets, 4H, Brownies
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"> ▪ June 2012/start Feb 1st – work experience/job Feb/March – Youth leadership day, camp summer
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"> ▪ Town Resources – recreation programming, youth leadership ▪ FCSS – Mom & Tots, Youth Centre ▪ Town – STEP –6 – 8 kids ▪ Business youth mentoring – job
Your recommendation	
Next Steps	

Reality Check

3. Regional Strategic Plan

Research marketing, package, strategy, promotion, eco. planning

Action Group Members: Hank Holowaychuk, Mark Watson, Jacalyn Lewicki, Wade Lambkin, Bob Bezpalko, Noreen Easterbrook

Question	Answer
Result —Describe what the successful action might look like.	Light industry development with resulting population growth
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	Get information that would give us a starting point
Commitment – Can we get commitment and energy from the town and community to undertake this? If not, what do we have to do?	
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?	
Time Frame – How long will it take to accomplish? Are there any political, economic or funding factors which might hurt/help the timing?	
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?	
Your recommendation	
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 for Smoky Lake 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"> ▪ Community leadership program involving youth and community members ▪ Buy local program ▪ Continue to research and pursue seniors housing options ▪ Research college &/or industry satellite training for forecasted growth areas <p>Learning challenge to change attitudes around learning and innovation</p>
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Downtown/town beautification & cleanliness program ▪ Brand development and promotion <p>Improve access/signage/awareness around downtown businesses from highway</p>
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Business directory
Research, Admin. and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of infrastructure to be upgraded (ensure business consultation) (e.g. recreation facilities) ▪ Investigate incentives for people wanting to invest in property, businesses ▪ Investigate Business Revitalization Zone ▪ Investigate high speed internet speeds; follow up with service providers ▪ Commercial land and business inventory ▪ Research strategies for housing affordability

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.