



**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
LIBRARIES AND SMART COMMUNITIES:
A CONFERENCE SUMMARY
JUNE 15-16, 1999, TORONTO, ONTARIO**

Attended by:
Trina A. Innes, R.P.F., M.F.
Southern Interior Forest Extension & Research Partnership

This document may be referenced as:

Innes, T. 1999. Economic Development, Libraries and Smart Communities: A Conference Summary.
Southern Interior Forest Extension & Research Partnership. File Report 99-4. 8 p.
<<http://www.siferp.org/info/fr/fr99-4.pdf>>

1 Conference Highlights

Attended by over 160 delegates, this major international conference was largely focussed on examining the role of libraries in community economic development. Participants from Canada, the United States, Australia and Europe represented a variety of sectors. While largely comprised of public and specialty librarians from urban and rural centres, federal, provincial and municipal government representatives, economic development planners, the information technology industry, public policy experts, information science schools, community networks, and groups working with information and smart communities also attended.

Over 30 speakers presented in a combination of plenary and concurrent sessions. Topics presented at this conference included: contributions of special libraries, creation of regional networks, development of rural information services, techniques for providing and marketing information services, the development of smart communities, opportunities for federal government funding, strategies for building partnerships and methods/techniques for measuring the impacts of information initiatives.

The papers represented an exceptional collection of thoughts, experiences, and approaches. Proceeds of the conference will be published and made available by the Canadian Library Association.

Keynote speakers and concurrent sessions focussed on the experiences of using technology in communities, introducing and innovating smart communities, highlighting sources of available funding, and promoting economic development. They presented papers that discussed the important role and links between librarians, libraries, technology and communities.



An overview of the main issues, experiences and opportunities identified in this conference are outlined in the following sections. Highlights of important points and internet addresses from selected presentations are also provided.

2 Role of Libraries

Libraries were identified as the focal point of communities. They are a place for meeting and sharing ideas. Libraries are considered leaders in the area of economic development. This is of great importance to the Partnership because in British Columbia natural resources drive the economy.

Organizations interested in providing an information service should build partnerships with their local libraries. Librarians are natural leaders in building partnerships in communities. Keeping librarians informed is key to meeting the information needs of the community.

2.1 Speaker Notes:

Mark Deacon, President of SMART Toronto, Toronto Ontario

- Virtual reference libraries are the book mobile of the next millennium, and computer technologists are the “mailroom staff” of the next millennium
- **People are the ultimate search engine. It is important that we do not separate service and human support from technology.**
- Small rural communities often don't have technology. There is a need to place technology in these locations and ensure the training is provided to use it wisely. There are many opportunities to access funding through federal initiatives. The following web sites were provided as introductions and starters:

3 Ensuring an Effective Information Service.

Many presenters shared their experience in adopting, adapting and implementing information services in their community. Smart communities are generally ‘plugged in’ to technology so the bulk of the ideas and approaches are related to the provision of web sites.

The best information services ensure links and participation from a variety of partnering organizations. They have a strong sense of their users information needs and know the strengths of their partners. They demonstrate that they “know information”, and that they can be trusted to support and deliver on information requests.

The best source of assistance is youth that are closer to technology. Further, there are many government funding opportunities in place to subsidize their work.

Information services should focus on providing service and support to partnering agencies, and while libraries are often considered the ultimate search engine, specialization of purpose lends itself to better results. Effort must be placed in tracking the volume of use, participation and trends in usage over time. This requires dedication, but the costs of this work produces results that can be used to demonstrate effectiveness.

Ideas and approaches under several topic areas are outlined below:

Publicity

- Take all opportunities to promote your service
- One of the main keys to ensuring an effective information service is publicity. Building networks, involving the community and providing opportunities for interactive feedback is critical.
- Providing a space for testimonials about the service on a web site helps build publicity and demonstrates the usefulness of the service.
- Partnering with an organization with a widely recognized logo can assist with drawing people to your service.
- Publicize unusual business activities (if it is a good story, put it on the net)
- Marketing, training and education on how to use these systems are considered equally as important as content on the web site

Service

- To be effective requires active servicing of user needs.

Attractions

- Multiuse sites, let people do more than one thing

Partnerships

- Lone rangers will fail
- Building partnerships with other organizations will help ensure both the quality of your site and its survival. Some suggested partnering with universities or using students and Industry Canada grants to maintain your site at low cost.
- Keep partners involved. Circulate draft documents for their information.
- Vision is essential (partners best involved in the development of a vision)
- Only bring supporters to the table.
- Advisory group roles must be clear
- Be alert to opportunities, write proposals, record agreements
- Recruit moderators to assist you
- Allow for fair remuneration of partners, some things can be billed to the project

Sustainability

- Revenue is often critical to sustainability. Building revenue-generating schemes into the service will be of benefit. Consider building and hosting web pages for other organizations for a fee.

Training

- Internet training should include: email, discussion groups, ftp, and web authoring
- Building First Nations capacity is important in some rural areas.



- Offer mini-conferences that address: content (information services, systems, and products), speakers (government, industry and commercial). Conferences should be designed for all sorts of people including industry, consultants, academics, students, extension officers and librarians. Conferences should demonstrate how to use technology.

Non-Connected Customers

- Prepare packages to direct to people who are not connected
- Deliver information to desktops of those who do not have access to the internet by CD-ROM (e.g., copy technical notes and distribute to key organizations at low cost)
- Make copies available to libraries. Librarians, aware of the availability of this information can make it available to their clients.

Interaction

- Online request forms will ensure that you get feedback regarding your site. This feedback ensures that your site is constantly changing. Change attracts clients.
- Next wave in the information world is not about giving information, but about creating opportunities for interaction and reaction. Discussion groups and other opportunities for information exchange and feedback should be explored.

Purpose

- Put purpose into short sound bites

Leadership

- Keep visionaries
- “Visionaries can often be identified by the arrows in their back”

Specialize

- Staff need skills and knowledge (money must be made available for professional development and conferences)
- Staff can bring back summaries of conferences and give results to organization

Security

- Use the universities if security is an issue. Colleges often best dealing with these issues because they must keep the smart students out of their system.

3.1 Speakers Notes

Ken Roberts, PIC Hamilton

- Group items on your web site by service, not institution
- Develop a shared mall where each agency has a shop
- Insist on introducing a mature site



Allan Wilson, Chief Librarian, Prince Rupert Public Library, Prince Rupert, British Columbia

- Resource economy=knowledge economy
- Add value beforehand (before asking for money to support your project, make sure is has something substantial to see and say)
- STUMPERS-file the hard to get information so others have access to it
- First Nations oral histories, file them online (they can be digitized)
- Provide referrals documents, brief bibliographies and customized information products

Cathy Campbell, Manager, Library Services, Queensland Department of Primary Industries, Queensland, Australia

- Provide initiatives such as internet training in rural communities, web services (provide a framework for sharing information, and operate an information supermarket)
- Consider a mobile training room (portable laptops)
- Provide web services support in content development, information infrastructure, technical infrastructure
- Provide online forms for searches, and consider a small fee for service

Wendy Newman, Brantford Public Library

- CHANGING a model for building a smart community
 - Challenge-attending meetings in other cities, communities
 - Honour Partnerships
 - Alliances-build them
 - Needs and Vision (work together on this)
 - Goals and Outcomes (promoting involvement, sharing resources)
 - Identify Roles and responsibilities
 - New directions
 - Go forward

Dr. Todd Sands, Regional Networks for Ontario

- Suggests that organizations such as non-profits use secondments from partnering organizations

Brenda Herchmer, Niagara Centre for Community Leadership

- Provide one stop source for information in specialized area
- Bell Canada is a good partner, even for the logo (grabs attention)
- Human Resources Development Canada seems to have a lot of money
- Key to obtaining funding is building community capacity

Greg Salmers, Estevan Public Library, Saskatchewan

- Information is extracted from Knowledge
- Knowledge is anything that is known



4 Smart Communities Initiative

The World Foundation for Smart Communities is a non-profit educational organization founded to promote the concept and facilitate the implementation of "smart communities" which are leaders in the use of communication and information technology. The Government of Canada is very interested in using our current industry-leading skills in these areas to place Canada as a world leader in the concept of smart communities.

The Smart Communities Demonstration Projects initiative is a nation-wide competition designed to select one "world-class" Smart Communities Demonstration Project in each province, one in the North and one in an Aboriginal community. Created and administered by Industry Canada, the goal of this program is to help Canada become a world leader in the development and use of information and communication technologies for economic, social and cultural development.

The Government of Canada plans to invest \$60 million over the next three years in support of this project. Announced June 9, 1999, communities, through a local or new non-profit organization, are invited submit a letter of intent by August 3rd, 1999.

More information on the Smart Communities initiative, both nationally and internationally can be found through the following links:

- www.sto.org
- www.a4s.org
- smartcommunities.ic.gc.ca
- www.multimediator.com
- www.smartcommunities.org

5 Government Initiatives / Funding Sources

Several programs are in progress that may be a source of funding for introducing training and technology into local communities. Programs offered by Industry Canada include:

- Connecting Canadians and the Smart Communities Demonstration Project
- Community Access Project
- Rural Access Project (soon)
- VolNet

Human Resources Development Canada was also identified as a major source of federal funds. Speakers stressed that applications stressing partnerships and capacity building, as well as focussing on services rather than technology, are most successful in obtaining funding.

6 Measuring the Impacts of Information Initiatives

Dr. Charles R. McClure, Frances Eppes Professor of Information Studies at Florida State University gave an excellent paper covering methods for measuring the impacts of information initiatives. Readers are encouraged to consult McClure's web site for additional



background on this topic (<http://istweb.syr.edu/~mcclure>). McClure highlighted that gaining political visibility is one of the most effective tools for ensuring the survival of a site. Visibility and quality measures of impact will attract continued support for the project.

It is very important to have measures for measuring performance. If expected levels of performance can be defined by an organization (e.g. response time), it can make it easier to measure performance.

McClure stresses that it is “better to collect bad data and use it wisely than collect no data at all”. Further it is best to collect data that will sell your initiative (E.g., contact hours, invitations to do work by others, inquiries, number of and type of collaborations with other organizations, revenues generated, attitude changes). To be effective, everyone in the organization must be dedicated to effective record keeping.

Measures may include:

Extensiveness

- Counts, how many (e.g., web page visits, number of inquiries)

Efficiency

- Track the costs and time related to providing services
- Very important to count volunteer hours included in provision of services.
- Account for all in-kind contributions

Effectiveness

- Degree to which program meets objectives

Service Quality

- Measure how well service activity done (E.g., percent of transactions in which users acquired the information they needed)
- Consider using Likert scales

Usefulness

- Degree to which service is appropriate to user
- Have you designed something that meets with user needs?
- Relevance is more important than access
- Relevance = smart (not wired)

Impacts

- Describe how service has made a difference in some activity or situation



7 Growth Opportunities for Partnership

The Partnership plans on exploring or implementing the following ideas and initiatives based on the Economic Development, Libraries and Smart Communities conference:

- Developing enhanced measures for assessing the information service
- Improving interactivity of web site
- Building Partnerships with libraries throughout the southern interior of British Columbia
- Offering support for any community in the southern interior interested in submitting an application to the Smart Communities Program
- Investigating identified and other funding opportunities for funding of technological infrastructure and training
- Improving use of Partners in information service