

Rocky Mountain House BVI Assessment Summary

March 2011

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 Rocky Mountain House 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 the Town of Rocky Mountain House, which selected the participants. The local project coordinator is Dean Schweder, the Tourism and Economic Development Coordinator for Rocky Mountain House.

On February 9, 2011, 47 people attended the BVI session held at The Lou Soppitt Community Centre in Rocky Mountain House where a questionnaire and focus groups assessed the community's small business resources and potential. CIEL has written a 70-page report on that session, and this document summarizes it.

The phase 2 or *Focus and Action Session* will be open to the entire community with the purpose of setting priorities for improvement and jump-starting the community to action. That session will take place on Wednesday, April 13 at the Lou Soppitt Community Centre.

Rocky Mountain House BVI Section Scores out of 100		<p>Describing the community Participants were asked to give three words to describe their community. The most common words given were beautiful, busy, and friendly.</p> <p>Strengths Participants were asked to name three strengths not used to potential. The most common responses were tourism, youth and Main Street/downtown.</p>
A. Opportunities & Attitudes	66	
I. Communication & Connectivity	63	
C. Education and Training	62	
E. Leadership, Teamwork, Networking	61	
B. Quality of Life	59	
F. Role of Government & Organizations	58	
H. Infrastructure & Business Services	48	
D. Innovation	46	
G. Capital & Funding	44	
J. Markets & Marketing	44	
Overall score , compared to the 24-community average of 54 out of 100	55	

Participants were also asked about...

Predicted top economic drivers in the next 10 years?	Untapped business opportunities?	How to improve Rocky Mountain House?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oil and gas ▪ Tourism ▪ Forestry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tourism ▪ Light industry ▪ Aboriginal inclusion and tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community cohesion ▪ Revitalize downtown ▪ Activities to attract tourists

The Assessment

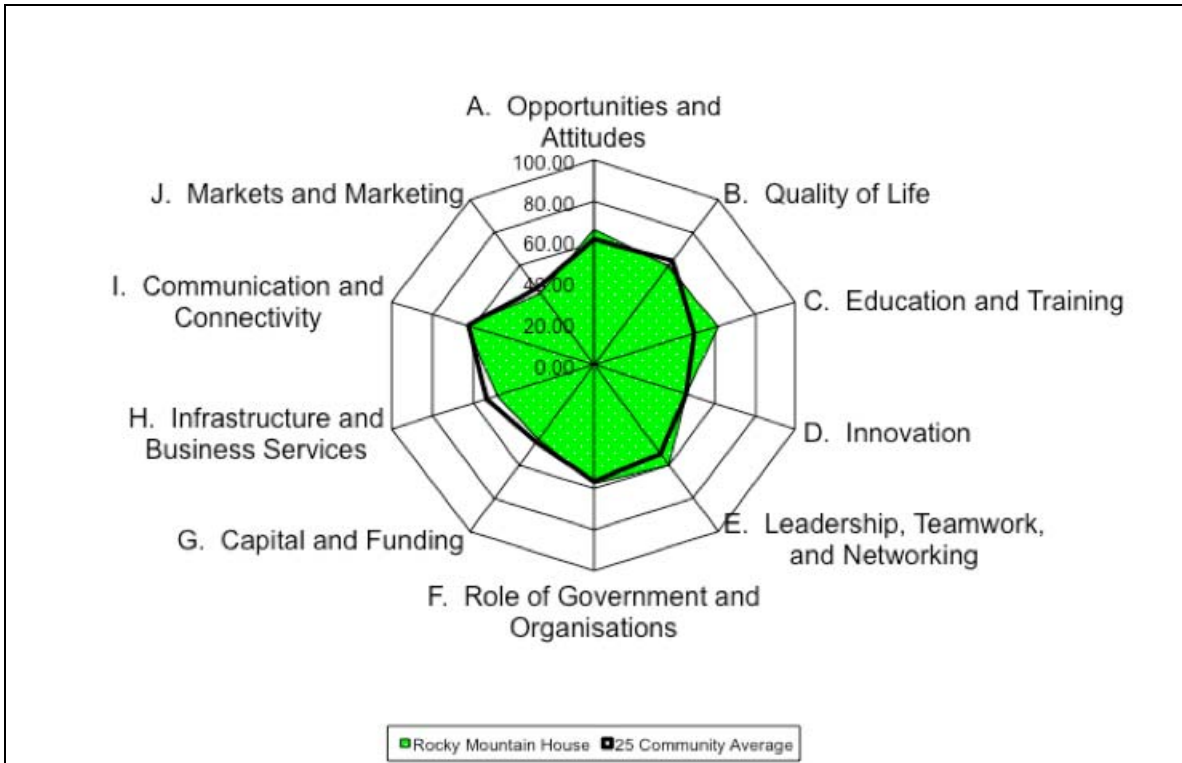
The multiple-choice section of the two-part questionnaire asked the participants to rate their community by agreeing or disagreeing with a series of statements related to entrepreneurial capacity. Each statement was framed in a positive context (e.g. *marketing services in my community are affordable and accessible*). Participants were asked to rate the statement with one of the following: *completely agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, completely disagree, or don't know*.

If all respondents *completely agreed* to a positively worded statement, the question score would be 100. If all respondents *completely disagreed* with the statement, the question score would be 0. A neutral response (*neither agree nor disagree*) would be scored as 50. A score over 50 would indicate that there is a perceived good capacity, while a score less than 50 would indicate a perceived lower capacity.

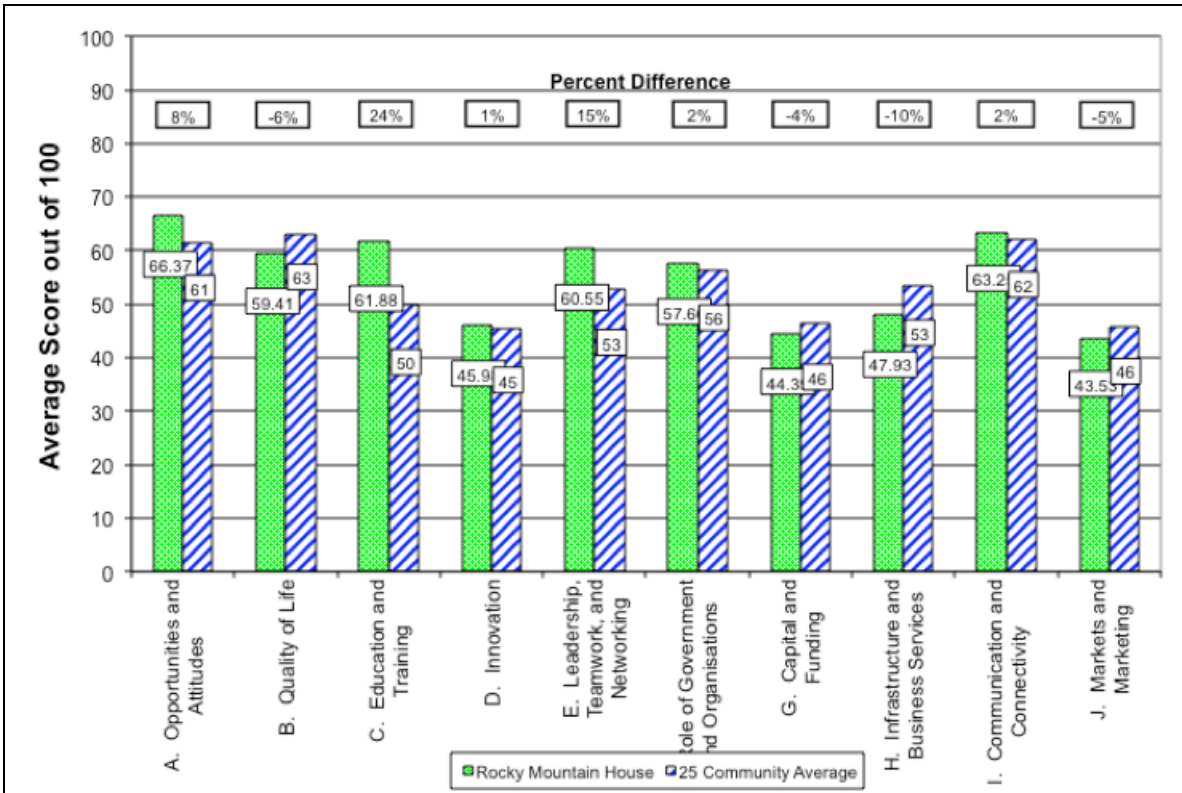
Rocky Mountain House and the 25-Community Average Section Scores

In the full report on the Rocky Mountain House BVI, CIEL has analyzed the ten BVI sections, illustrated by charts and graphs such as the ones on the next page.

The radial graph below shows the score out of 100 for each of the ten BVI sections. The area circumscribed by Rocky Mountain House's scores is shaded. The darker black line connects the 25-community average scores. The bar graph below it gives the same information in a different format.



Rocky Mountain House and 25-Community Average Section Scores



Recurring Themes

The qualitative (written answer) section of the questionnaire collects information about the issues, strengths and weaknesses within the community. (e.g. *What are 3 words or phrases that describe your community? What is your community's greatest strength in terms of its markets?*), as well as additional comments in each of 10 sections. The following themes were particularly prominent throughout those sections of the Rocky Mountain House BVI.

- "Potential" was a word identified throughout the BVI
- Youth, tourism (including aboriginal) and downtown are the greatest assets not used to potential
- Oil & gas and tourism seen as predominant drivers of economy over next 5 years
- Connecting residents seen as top way to improve town followed by downtown improvements and increasing tourism activities
- Desire for more responsiveness from town with applications, processes and communications
- Few high quality cultural experiences (theatre, music, dancing, dining, retail) limit quality of life and opportunities for meeting people
- Youth issues top of mind (things, to do, participation, business opportunities)
- Greater inclusion of First Nations and Metis identified repeatedly in variety of areas (e.g. tourism, tolerance, culture, hiring)

Recommended Short-term Actions

On April 13, 2011, Rocky Mountain House residents will be asked to select priorities from the list below, and form working groups around specific actions.

Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth and young family opportunity identification session - e.g. youth council, etc. ▪ Buy Local project (e.g. poll for consumer and business needs/wants, shopper reward program, education, etc.) ▪ New technology and innovation forums (e.g. guest lecturers, profile innovative businesses, etc.) ▪ Celebrate entrepreneurs through stories and awards (e.g. business, community entrepreneur/builder, innovators)
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Downtown facelift program (e.g. start with vacant building(s)) ▪ A uniting event(s) that builds networks and markets community – suggested ideas include dance, mosaic, parade, farmers' markets
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mentorship program involving successful business for new businesses, youth ▪ Project to encourage more FN participation and cross cultural awareness ▪ More networking events (e.g. Meet & greet BBQs, Chamber luncheon topics)
Admin. Research, Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Business/local government committee to review existing town processes (e.g. development application processes) with view of making more client friendly, facilitating expansion streamlining, etc. ▪ Review ways of getting better turnout and engagement for town planning and development processes ▪ Review of public transportation options (e.g. community van, community action bus) ▪ Ongoing inventory of space for business needs

Recommended Long-Term Actions

Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Innovation strategy (e.g. Town/County lead by example) ▪ Buy Local program ▪ Determine business training needs and the effectiveness of the marketing of those currently offered ▪ Volunteer recruitment, coordination, recognition and retention program (e.g. Beyond the same ten people)
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Downtown beautification program with revitalization strategy (e.g. trolley, access, ramps, review of hours of operation, etc.) ▪ Review of tourism themes for ensuring RMH seen as 'destination' vs. 'a stop' ▪ Research Rocky brand from outsiders perspective
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Investigate ways to identify angel investors &/or create invest local program ▪ Strategy to build on vibrant and cultural community theme ▪ Strategy to encourage First Nation and Metis participation and cross cultural awareness
Admin. Research, Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Innovation strategy (e.g. Town/County lead by example) ▪ Buy Local program ▪ Determine business training needs and the effectiveness of the marketing of those currently offered ▪ Volunteer recruitment, coordination, recognition and retention program (e.g. Beyond the same ten people)

The 10 Highest Scoring Questions

Question		Score out of 100		
		Rocky Mountain House	25 Community Average	% Difference
C6	There are quality elementary and secondary schools in the area.	85	78	9%
B1	A quality health care facility is accessible, well serviced and within a reasonable distance.	83	70	19%
A6	The area is facing a significant economic opportunity.	80	63	28%
A4	Successful businesses want to remain in the area.	79	82	-3%
F1	The governing bodies (town councils, regional district) recognize that businesses are important and valuable for the development of the area.	79	73	7%
H4	Existing infrastructure (e.g. local roads, water, power) is of good quality, well maintained, serviced, and modern.	77	68	13%
I1	Informal business communication (word of mouth) is highly effective.	76	85	-11%
I3	Quality communication services (phone, cell phone, high speed internet, etc.) are adequate for business.	71	62	15%
B2	There are no significant environmental pollution issues here.	71	78	-9%
E6	There is a pool of talented leaders with diverse skills, cultural experiences and backgrounds who are available for leading area initiatives.	69	66	5%

The 10 Lowest Scoring Questions

Question		Score out of 100		
		Rocky Mountain House	25 Community Average	% Difference
I4	Public transportation within the area is adequate.	20	31	-36%
H1	There are vibrant, active downtown areas or community cores.	24	46	-47%
J4	Businesses in the area /region jointly market their products and services as a group, locally and in other regions.	29	31	-8%
G4	Local business can access informal local investors.	33	42	-23%
D3	Local businesses demonstrate creativity and innovation in seeking new customers.	37	51	-29%
J3	The area has a distinctive or unique brand or marketing image.	39	41	-5%
H6	Affordable rental space is available to accommodate business needs.	39	45	-12%
D2	Support and assistance for innovative business research and development is available.	40	45	-11%
F5	Local regulations, policies, rules, bylaws and zoning are easily understood by business people, making it easy/reasonable for businesses to expand or start up.	41	48	-15%
B6	Quality residential accommodation is available and affordable.	42	59	-29%

The “Gut Check 12”

The following 12 questions provide a snap-shot of a community’s business vitality. These key questions can be used to inform future efforts aimed at improving business friendliness. They are taken from the 60 BVI questions.

Question		Score out of 100		
		Rocky Mountain House	25 Community Average	% Difference
A6	The area is facing a significant economic opportunity.	80	63	28%
B5	Young adults (25-34) consider the area to be a desirable place to live.	47	49	-3%
A4	Successful businesses want to remain in the area.	79	82	-3%
C4	The education and business communities work together to provide convenient training for businesses.	51	41	22%
A3	Citizens are motivated to learn new skills and to develop existing ones.	56	52	9%
F1	The governing bodies (town councils, regional district) recognize that businesses are important and valuable for the development of the area.	79	73	7%
H1	There are vibrant, active downtown areas or community cores.	24	46	-47%
J2	Products and services are reasonably priced in comparison to regional and big city competitors	46	56	-18%
J5	People prefer to purchase local products and services.	45	42	9%
D3	Local businesses demonstrate creativity and innovation in seeking new customers.	37	51	-29%
E6	There is a pool of talented leaders with diverse skills, cultural experiences and backgrounds who are available for leading area initiatives.	69	66	5%
G1	Lenders are willing to take chances based on individual character and good business ideas	50	46	8%