



Centre for Innovative &
Entrepreneurial Leadership

Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)

Phase Two Focus and Action Report

Castor, Alberta

February, 2008

Hosted by: Paintearth Economic Partnership Society



Funded by:



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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.

On November 13, 2008, twenty-six people attended the Phase 1 session of the BVI in Castor. Larry Davidson selected and invited the community participants on behalf of the community sponsor, the Paintearth Economic Partnership Society (PEPS). These participants were to be 50% business people, 25% local leaders and 25% citizens, representing a diversity of interests, ages and perspectives in the community.

Phase 1 used focus groups and a survey to assess the community's small business potential.

Castor Phase 1 Assessment Results

In the Assessment Session, participants were asked to give three words to describe their community. The majority of responses were positive. According to respondents, Castor is a *friendly, safe, pretty community*. When participants were asked to identify key strengths, the top responses were *community involvement/spirit, health services, and the caring and cooperative nature of its citizens*.

When participants were asked why they live in Castor, *country lifestyle, work, and family* were mentioned most. When participants were asked to provide directions for improvement for their community, increased community participation and beautification of the town were mentioned most often.

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

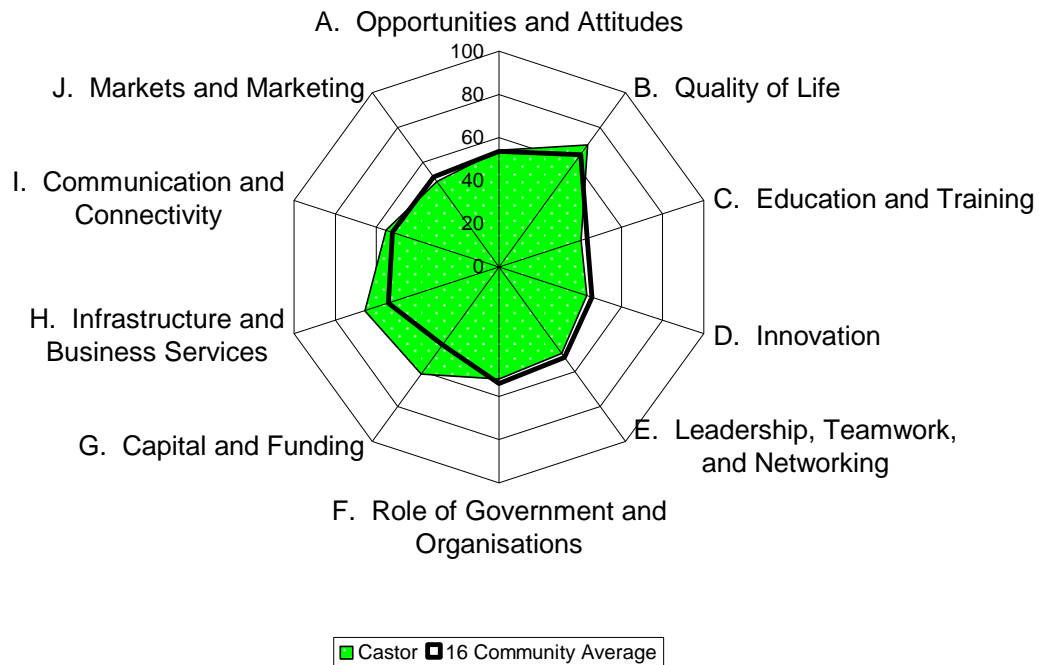
Section Scores

The Castor Phase 1 Assessment Report also goes into much detail about the scores for each section of the BVI. From highest to lowest, section scores out of 100 were as follows: Quality of Life (70), Infrastructure & Business Services (65), Capital & Funding (61), Communication & Connectivity (55), Opportunities & Attitudes (54), Government & Organizations (52), Leadership Teamwork & Networking (49), Markets & Marketing (49), Innovation (43), Education & Training (40). Castor's total score for all sections was 54.

In five of the ten sections, Castor scored equal to or above the average of 16 communities that have undertaken the BVI. A particular strength for Castor was its score for the 'Quality of Life' section of 70 (8% above the 16-community average), which was the highest scoring section of the survey. Also notable is that Castor's score for the 'Capital and Funding' and 'Infrastructure and Business Services' sections were much higher than the community average—37% and 21% respectively. The lowest scoring section of the survey was section C, 'Education and Training' which had a score of 40 (7% below the community average).

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

Castor and All-Community Section Scores



Castor Phase 2 Results

The Phase 2, or Focus and Action Session, held on February 5, 2008, 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 Report, were presented. The community was then given a series of possible courses of action, derived from focus groups and questionnaire responses (and the group was asked to add their own suggestions to that list) to improve the community's environment for business. All of the actions were posted on sheets of paper throughout the room, and participants were given 5 votes to identify their top priorities. 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		Votes
<i>Shaded items were chosen as priorities and became the subject of action groups.</i>		
Capacity Building	▪ Strategically publicize available business niches & possibilities (Bakery, plumber, web design, etc.)	27
	▪ Opportunity identification forum for young people to identify business, education, social and recreation opportunities	5
	▪ Youth entrepreneurship initiatives (e.g. entrepreneurship in schools, Junior Achievement, etc.)	8
	▪ Business incubator	22
Marketing	▪ Main street beautification (also clean up commercial & residential clutter)	18
	▪ E-commerce, business start-up, financing and other basic courses offered	3
	▪ Better, more strategic use of newspaper to communicate Castor events to community and beyond	2
	▪ Apprenticeship options/info sessions	1
Networking	▪ Business association or chamber; networking sessions amongst businesses, council and others	17
	▪ More social and community events (possibly building on farmers' markets with fair or rodeo, etc.)	1
	▪ Resurrect interagency meetings	1
Research, Admin, & Planning	▪ Research adult education demands and online learning possibilities	3
	▪ Business succession initiative (e.g. matchmaking, mentoring – possibly to introduce youth/young families to opportunities)	10

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. Business Incubator	
Action Group Members: Kerry Pickles, Troy Slemp, Lonny Nelner, Gary DeVloo, Dennis Filipenko, Marilyn Weber, Patrick Kelly, Ken Perrault	
Question	Answer
Success —Describe what the successful action might look like.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bring needed trades to the community ▪ Increase population growth ▪ Develop the space and develop the business ▪ Research what has been done in other communities ▪ Business Link presentation
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To bring in needed tradespersons to fill identified service gaps (e.g. plumbers, electricians, appliance repair)
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"> ▪ Meeting among group with invitations strategically directed
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"> ▪ Troy, Kerry, Lonny, PEPS, Pat, Larry more names ▪ Business support
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"> ▪ Meet within one month (mid-March) ▪ Monies available ▪ Time Fall 2009
Finances/ Resources – What, if any, financial resources do we need to tap into? Are there any	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community Adaptation Communities Grant ▪ PEPS

organizations that can assist this action? Any other resources?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Town of Castor ▪ Private sector
Your recommendation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Get more info before starting ▪ 2. Take Action
Next Steps	Tuesday evening (not 2 or 4)

Reality Check 2. Main Street Beautification

Action Group Members: Michael Yakielashek, Mike Bain, Castor Community Enhancement Society, Dale Emmett, Shelly Pals, Randy Kary, Gordon Nichols, Wendy Anhorn, Elaina Davidson

Question	Answer
Success —Describe what the successful action might look like.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No empty boarded business buildings ▪ Product display in windows of empty buildings ▪ Existing business common theme ▪ Enhanced pedestrian experience
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve the aesthetics to attract business and to show a vibrant community
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"> ▪ No! ▪ Communities in Bloom—use as a starter
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"> ▪ Business organization or group ▪ Resurrect the Business Association ▪ As many downtown businesses as possible
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"> ▪ One year—cleanup ▪ Five year—infrastructure ▪ Ten year-businesses to upgrade
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"> ▪ Yes ▪ Grants ▪ BRE ▪ Enhancement Society/ provincial govt
Your recommendation	Take action
Next Steps	March 5, 2009, 7pm, Town Office

Reality Check
3. Strategically Publicize Available Business Niches

Action Group Members: Melanie Robertson, Phillip Pals, Anthony Holland, Shari Hagstrom

Question	Answer
Success —Describe what the successful action might look like.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build relationships with post-secondary institutions ▪ Advertising—paper, PEPS, web, billboards
Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fill the gaps
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
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"> ▪ Cathy, Rod, Melanie, Merv, PEPS
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"> ▪ Phase A—one month
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"> ▪ Rural Community Adaptation Grant ▪ PEPS, Town (?) ▪ Community Futures
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 February 5th.

Possible Long Term Actions (actions taking more than 12 months to complete)	
Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community leadership program (Top 10, E6) ▪ Develop post-secondary presence in town to increase education, innovation (e.g. forums introducing ideas) – (Section D) ▪ Ongoing physician recruitment/retention program (Section B) ▪ Business recruitment & retention strategy/program (Focus Groups, Improvements)
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop and market Castor brand capitalizing on advantages & unique qualities identified in BVI (e.g. cost, safety, schools, health facilities, rec. fees, outdoor recreation, etc.) - (Themes, Focus Groups, Various sections, J5) ▪ Commercial real estate strategy that looks to increasing available land (including recovering contaminated land) and land inventory (Section H) ▪ Better, more strategic use of newspaper to communicate Castor events to community and beyond (Focus, Groups, Section I)
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional networking & cooperation strategy with Coronation and beyond (e.g. working with Coronation Chamber) - (Section E) ▪ Strategy top market goods & services from region co-operatively (Section J, J9, J10) ▪ Buy local strategy (Section J)
Research, Admin. and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop community vision and plan with much local consultation (Themes, A1, Sections E & H) ▪ Twinning Highway 36 (Focus Groups, Section I) ▪ Investigate feasibility of year-round sports facility (Section B)

Appendix 1: Attendance List

Garry DeVloo
Richard Froese (Newspaper)
Michael Yakielashek
Elaina Davidson
Marilyn Weber
Patrick Kelly
Lonny Nelner
Dale Emmett
Catherine Wylie
Anthony Holland
Shelly Pals
Phillip Pals
Kerry Pickles
Mike Bain
Wendy Anhorn
Melanie Robertson
Gordon Nichols
Kimberley Dunkle
Randy Kary
Shirley Hewitt
Shari Hagstrom
Ken Perreault
Troy Slemp
Sylvia Wold
Dennis Filipenko

Appendix 2: Examples of How Some 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 a non-profit organization 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.