



Centre for Innovative &
Entrepreneurial Leadership

Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)

Phase One Summary Report

Hinton, Alberta

January 2009



Financially supported by:





Hinton Assessment Summary

The BVI

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 Hinton BVI was sponsored by the Town of Hinton, Community Futures West Yellowhead, and the Hinton and District Chamber of Commerce. It was organized by Renée Laboucane, the Economic Development Manager for the Town of Hinton. She selected and invited the participants, who were to be 50% business people, 25% local leaders and 25% citizens, representing a diversity of interests, ages and perspectives in the community. On November 19, 2008, forty-three people attended the Phase 1 session of the BVI in Hinton.

Hinton is one of four Alberta communities selected to participate in a pilot of the BVI funded by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD). ARD has partnered with CIEL to deliver the BVI to assist with economic development in rural Alberta.

This report summarizes the Phase 1 or *assessment* phase of the BVI. The phase 1 session used a survey and a focus group to assess the community's small business resources and potential. 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. The date of that session is February 11, 2009

Key Findings

From highest to lowest, section scores out of 100 were as follows: Quality of Life (71), Communication & Connectivity (69), Infrastructure & Business Services (66), Leadership Teamwork & Networking (59), Government & Organizations (59), Innovation (58), Opportunities & Attitudes (57), Capital & Funding (56), Education & Training (56), Markets & Marketing (45). The total score for all sections was 60, a score 12% higher than the average for 17 Canadian communities which have undertaken the BVI.

Hinton scored equal to or above the 17-community average in 9 out of 10 sections. A particular strength for Hinton are its score for the 'Quality of Life' section of 71 out of 100 (9% above the community average), which was the highest scoring section of the survey, and its score of 69 (31% above average) for Communications and Connectivity.

The lowest scoring section of the survey, and the only one which fell below the community average, was 'Markets and Marketing' which had a score of 45 (12% below the 17-community average).

Participants were asked to give three words to describe their community. The majority of responses were positive. According to respondents, Hinton is an *active, energetic, progressive* community in a *beautiful, scenic* setting. When participants were asked to identify key strengths, the top responses were *geographic location, the diversity of resource industries, and the wilderness*.

When participants were asked why they live in Hinton, *employment, family, and quality of life* were mentioned most. When participants were asked to provide directions for improvement for their community, the need for post-secondary education and retail diversity, along with the need for less dependence on resource-based industries, were mentioned most often.

Sponsored by:

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Analysis and report by:

The Town of Hinton, Community Futures West Yellowhead, the Hinton and District Chamber of Commerce, and the Alberta Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

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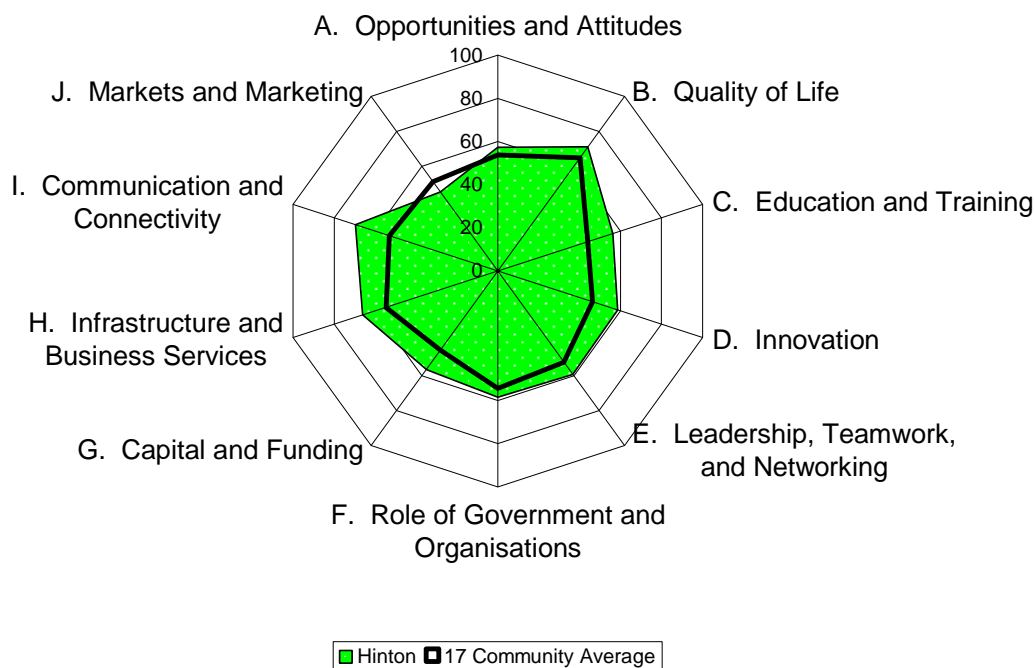
The Assessment

The quantitative 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*, *don't know*.

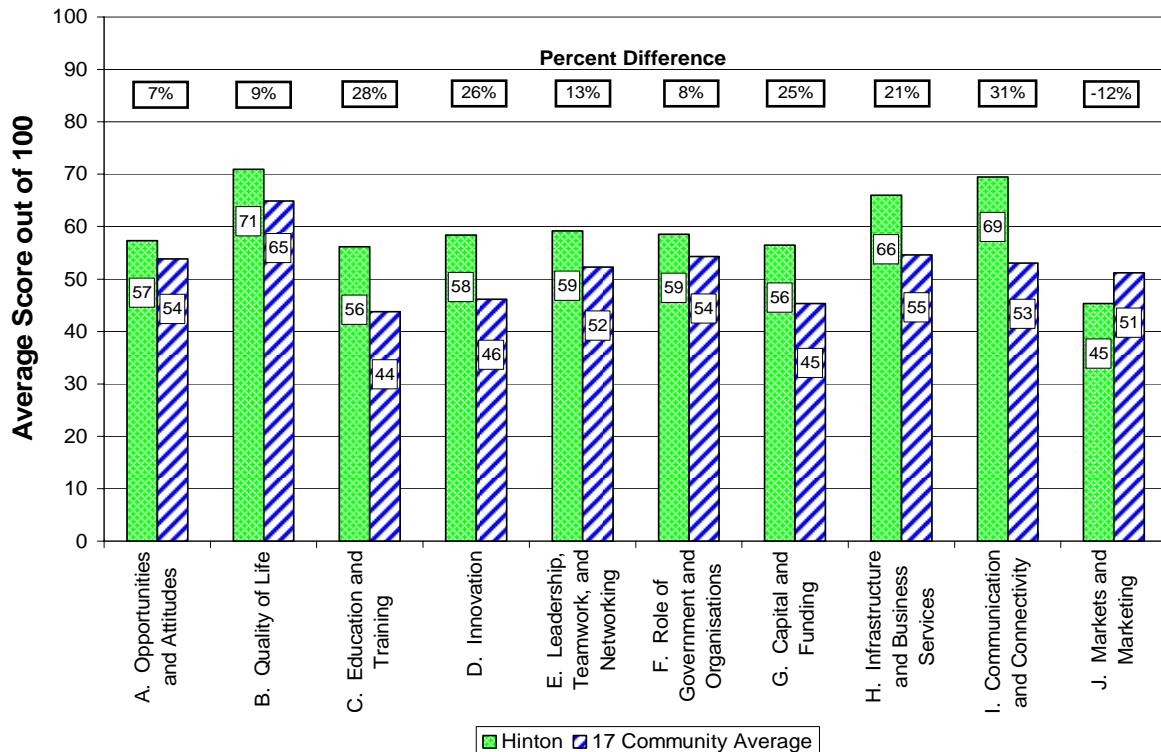
If all respondents *completely agreed* to a positively worded statement, the question score would be 100. If all respondents *completely disagreed* with the statement, the question score would be 0. A neutral response (*neither agree nor disagree*) would be scored as 50. A score over 50 would indicate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

Hinton and 17-Community Section Scores

The full report on the Hinton BVI consists of 92 pages of analysis of the ten BVI sections, illustrated by charts and graphs such as the one on the next page and the one below which shows the score out of 100 for each of the ten BVI sections. The area circumscribed by Hinton's scores is shaded. The darker black line connects the 17-community average scores.



Hinton and 17-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 Hinton BVI.

Strengths

- Diversity of resource industries with high wages
- Progressive attitude
- Outdoor recreation
- Location on transportation corridors
- Strong municipal government
- Many business opportunities

Improvements needed

- Post-secondary education
- Less dependence on resource industries
- Appearance of town
- Marketing for tourism potential
- More industrial land needed
- Business mentoring and networking

Recommended Short-term Actions

The following are some possible courses of action that the community could undertake to improve business friendliness, derived from feedback and results.

Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity Identification Session for youth to identify untapped business, recreation and education opportunities • Lenders forum introducing businesses & potential businesses to finance and needs of lenders • Events to build cooperation and improve community (e.g. highway clean up, summer or winter festival, 'Celebrate Hinton' event, etc.) • Youth entrepreneurship program/initiative in schools. • CF West Yellowhead to take a higher profile
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and expand tourism development initiatives, especially marketing of Hinton. • Highway appearance and signage review • Publish and promote BVI results, especially untapped opportunities – e.g. - bike store, restaurant, etc • Local products and services showcase or event that would also encourage joint marketing
Network- ing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business mentoring program • Shop local initiative • Initiative to encourage more business and community collaboration, possibly using speaker series, events, educational forums - e.g. finance, start-up, doing business online, etc.
Admin., Research, Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review commercial and industrial land bylaws and available land with a committee involving local business people • Housing affordability review

**On February 11, 2009
residents will be asked to select priorities and form working groups
around specific actions.**

Recommended Long-term Actions

The following are some possible courses of action that the community could undertake to improve business friendliness, derived from feedback and results.

Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Strategy for creating a venue or venues for performance, art, etc. •Air service strategy •Sport facility review •Strategy to support volunteers and start-up of community groups (e.g. a meeting venue, assistance with recruitment of volunteers, training, accessing finance, etc)
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Branding review to correct image of Hinton as a desirable community - especially for young adults - using opportunities & unique characteristics referenced in BVI (e.g. abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, etc.) •Community beautification strategy - e.g. downtown cleanup, outdoor stewardship, addressing sprawl, etc.
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Outreach, communication and participation strategy to reach out to broader community •Develop new business welcome program &/or new resident welcome program •Strategy to increase production and joint marketing of local goods and services
Research, Admin. and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Corridor plan completed •Post-secondary strategy (involving research) so that Hinton becomes innovative adult education community (the strategy should also address trades training) •Housing affordability strategy involving business community (to look at this as an economic development issue) •Commercial land and building strategy – e.g. increase land base •Coherent land-base plan that addresses competing issues of needing to increase the land base for business with the desire to centralize and reduce sprawl

**On February 11, 2009
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Highest Scoring Questions

Question	Score out of 100		
	Hinton	17-Community Average	% Difference
B9. There are many high quality recreational opportunities in the area (i.e. ski hills, lakes, hiking trails, parks).	94	82	15%
I1a. Word of mouth is utilized.	89	90	-2%
I1f. Basic Internet services are accessible and utilized.	87	83	5%
B11. Successful businesses want to remain in the community.	86	83	4%
B1. A quality health care facility is accessible, well serviced and within a reasonable distance.	85	69	25%
H4a. Banking services are easily accessible and affordable.	85	83	2%
H5. Existing infrastructure (i.e.. Power, water) is good quality, well maintained, serviced, and modern.	84	71	17%
I1g. High speed Internet services are accessible and utilized.	84	57	48%
I4c. Bus services are available between communities.	84	68	23%
I3a. Public Transportation services are accessible and utilized within the community.	83	34	147%
H4b. Insurance services are easily accessible and affordable.	83	82	1%
I1e. Mobile phone services are accessible and utilized.	82	65	27%
G3a. Banks are utilized for business needs.	80	79	2%
I3c. Special Transportation Services (i.e.. Seniors, People with disabilities) are accessible and utilized within the community.	80	53	50%
G3b. Credit Unions are utilized for business needs.	80	77	4%
B2. There are quality elementary and secondary schools in the community.	80	79	1%
C4. There is an organization through which training and educational programs/opportunities can be offered.	79	63	25%
H2. Parking near core business areas is accessible and affordable.	79	81	-2%
I6. Regular & frequent shipping to major centres is accessible and utilized.	79	70	12%
H4d. Legal services are easily accessible and affordable.	78	64	21%

Lowest Scoring Questions

Question	Score out of 100		
	Hinton	17-Community Average	% Difference
I4a. Air (commercial) services are available between communities.	12	28	-57%
C3. There is an entrepreneurial development program in elementary and secondary schools (K-12).	22	34	-37%
J9. Businesses in the community /region jointly market their products and services	22	31	-29%
I3d. Carpooling system is accessible and utilized within the community.	30	26	17%
C8. A pool of skilled and trained labour is available to local businesses.	30	35	-14%
G4. Business capital is available to anyone committed to a venture, regardless of credit history or any other factors	32	21	51%
J8. People prefer to purchase local products and services before those from out-of-area.	34	42	-19%
H8. A variety of real estate is available to accommodate business expansion, attraction, or creation.	35	56	-38%
H9. Quality commercial rental space is available to accommodate business expansion, attraction, or creation.	36	47	-25%
B13. Quality residential real estate opportunities (both purchase and rental) are available and affordable.	36	61	-41%
C1i. University programs are utilized.	37	35	5%
I4b. Air (private) services are available between communities.	37	47	-22%
G5. People who are interested in expanding or starting a business are skilled in raising funds	37	28	32%
A9. A pool of motivated employees is available to meet business needs.	40	48	-16%
J5. The community has a distinctive or unique brand or marketing image	40	44	-8%
F9. Business development programs are effective and efficient, and do not duplicate each other.	41	43	-4%
D6. Businesses that do research or research facilities are geographically concentrated (clustered) and interact with each other.	42	32	31%
F6. Local regulations, policies, rules, bylaws and zoning are easily understood by business people making it easy/ reasonable for businesses to expand or start up.	42	48	-11%
H1. There is a vibrant, active downtown area or community core.	43	50	-14%
A2. The community is facing an economic crisis. 8	43	61	-28%

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 100 BVI questions.

Question	Score out of 100		
	Hinton	17-Community Average	% Diff.
A2. The community is facing an economic crisis.	43	61	-28%
B7. Young adults (25-34) consider the community a desirable place to live.	57	50	15%
B11. Successful businesses want to remain in the community.	86	83	4%
C7. The education and business communities work together to provide convenient training	52	41	26%
C11. Citizens are motivated to learn new skills and to develop existing ones.	56	51	9%
F2. The governing body is committed to recruiting or attracting businesses to the community, and may use strategies or incentives to do so.	67	58	15%
F3. The governing body is committed to help existing businesses or creating new businesses through policy and action.	55	50	11%
G5. People who are interested in expanding or starting a business are skilled in raising funds	37	28	32%
H1. There is a vibrant, active downtown area or community core.	43	50	-14%
J5. The community has a distinctive or unique brand or marketing image	40	44	-8%
J6. People from outside the community see it as a desirable place to live.	48	67	-29%
J8. People prefer to purchase local products and services before those from out-of-area.	34	42	-19%