



Peace River 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 Peace River BVI is sponsored by the Town of Peace River, Community Futures Peace Country, the Peace River Rotary Club, Northern Lakes College, the Sagitawa Friendship Centre, and the Peace River and District Chamber of Commerce. Norma MacQuarrie, the Chief Administrative Officer for the Town of Peace River, is the primary contact person.

The invited participants were to be 50% business people, 25% local leaders and 25% citizens, representing a diversity of interests, ages and perspectives in the community. On February 10, 2009, forty-two people attended the Phase 1 session of the BVI in Peace River, and thirty-eight of those filled out the BVI survey.

Peace River 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 March 30, 2009.

Key Findings

From highest to lowest, section scores out of 100 were as follows: Quality of Life (72), Infrastructure & Business Services (66), Communication & Connectivity (66), Leadership, Teamwork & Networking (61), Opportunities and Attitudes (59), Government & Organizations (53), Capital & Funding (52), Education & Training (50), Markets & Marketing (48), Innovation (47). The total score for all sections was 58, a score 10% higher than the average for 20 Canadian communities which have undertaken the BVI.

Peace River scored equal to or above the 20-community average in all but two of the ten sections of the BVI. Particular strengths for Peace River are its score for the 'Quality of Life' section of 72 out of 100 (10% above the community average), and its scores of 66 in both Infrastructure and Business Services (17% above average) and Communications and Connectivity (23% above).

The lowest scoring section of the survey was 'Innovation' which had a score of 47 (1% above the 20-community average).

Participants were asked to give three words to describe their community. The majority of responses were positive. According to respondents, Peace River is a *scenically beautiful, friendly, growing, and peaceful* community. When participants were asked to identify key strengths, the top response was *the beautiful river valley location* followed by *the full range of services* and *friendly, supportive people*.

When participants were asked why they live in Peace River the main reasons were *employment* and *business*. When participants were asked to provide directions for improvement for their community, the need for *more activities for youth* and *regional cooperation between municipalities* were mentioned most often.

Sponsored by:

The Town of Peace River, Community Futures Peace Country, the Peace River Rotary Club, Northern Lakes College, the Sagitawa Friendship Centre, the Peace River and District Chamber of Commerce, and the Alberta Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development

Analysis and report by:

The Centre for Innovative & Entrepreneurial Leadership
www.theCIEL.com

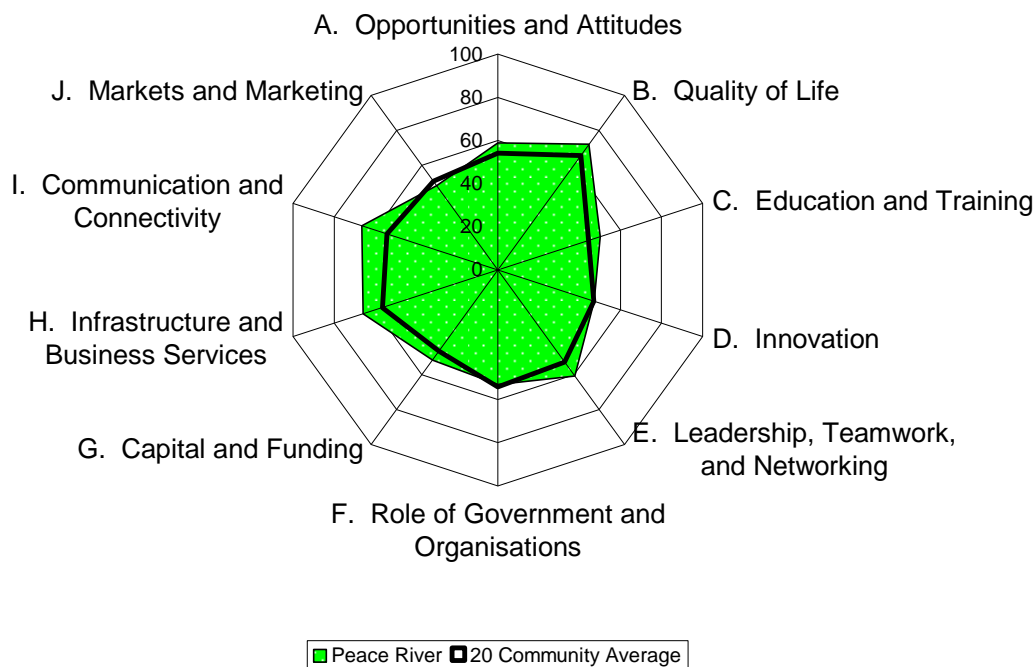
The Assessment

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*.

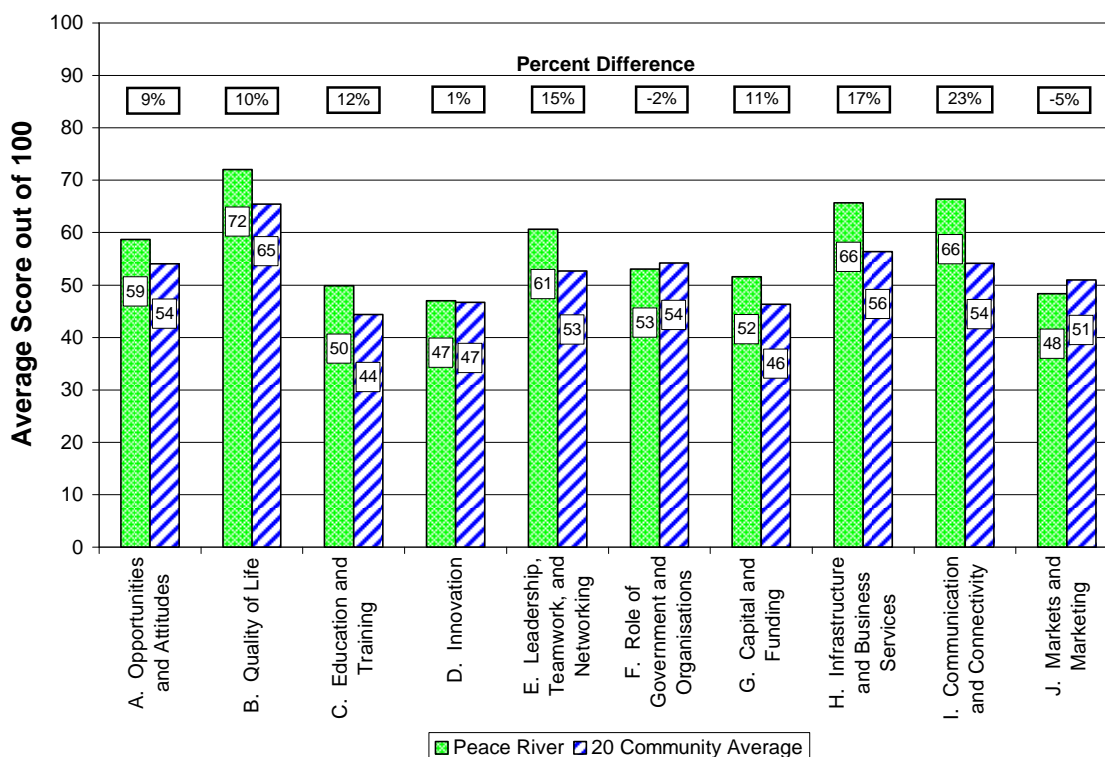
If all respondents *completely agreed* to a positively worded statement, the question score would be 100. If all respondents *completely disagreed* with the statement, the question score would be 0. A neutral response (*neither agree nor disagree*) would be scored as 50. A score over 50 would indicate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

Peace River and 20-Community Section Scores

The full report on the Peace River 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 Peace River's scores is shaded. The darker black line connects the 20-community average scores.



Peace River and 20-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 Peace River BVI.

Strengths

- Beautiful river valley location
- Full range of services
- Optimistic, motivated, independent
- Natural resources

Improvements needed

- Activities for youth
- Regional cooperation
- Town beautification
- Community marketing
- Community plan

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 sessions for youth/young adults to identify untapped business, recreation and education opportunities – start with identifying affordable/accessible activities, BVI, etc. • Entrepreneurial program for youth in schools and other supports for young entrepreneurs • Create a community foundation that harnesses wealth for community building initiatives
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town beautification/revitalization project(s) – begin with reviewing underutilized buildings • Create a positive ‘buy local’ program • Create Peace River brand that resonates with young families, harnesses community amenities/advantages (e.g. “leader of the North”)
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership program with a regional flavour (e.g. participants from Peace River and some from regional communities) that builds strength in the community and appetite for regional initiatives • Link in-town and out-of-town investors to businesses in the community needing ‘angel’ financing • Mentoring, training [successful e-commerce, tools for productivity increases, customer service, etc.] program for businesses • More communication, collaboration, and networking between leaders, businesses and community – [e.g. possible regular roundtable, forum on infrastructure/highways/town development, innovative practices, e-commerce/e-learning/e-health, etc.]
Admin., Research, Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of post-secondary opportunities with view to offer more college and university level courses to area residents [this initiative would also look to improve communication and promotion of what already exists] • Research and survey local R & D issues and opportunities, and publicize them • Research and create a place for youth to gather (e.g. youth centre) activities

**On March 30, 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"> • Investigate incentives [e.g. tax credits, etc.] and other encouragement for businesses • Review public transportation, especially accessibility [e.g. schedule] issues for the young and the elderly • Affordable housing review with eye to impacts on economic and community development
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town beautification/revitalization strategy • Market Peace River brand to target group(s) outside of community • Investigate appetite for joint marketing & other initiatives amongst businesses [e.g. trade show, joint promotion, trade missions, etc.]
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business and employee awards [e.g. customer service] program (to showcase businesses and increase employee motivation) • Continue to build telecommunications infrastructure to build Peace River into a 'leading' telecommunications community [inc. investigate cell phone 'holes', free wi-fi in downtown, businesses/community better using video conferencing opportunities, etc.] • Better communication between business community and training facilities so courses/training fit business needs.
Research, Admin. and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of sport/recreational facilities for current and future needs • Airline affordability review • Investigate feasibility of facility for arts and culture

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Highest Scoring Questions

Question	Score out of 100		
	Peace River	20-Community Average	% Difference
B2. There are quality elementary and secondary schools in the community.	90	81	11%
B6. The community is physically beautiful, and environmentally safe (i.e. pollution, water quality).	89	86	3%
I1a. Word of Mouth is utilized.	88	90	-2%
I1e. Mobile phone services are accessible and utilized.	87	68	28%
I1f. Basic Internet Services are accessible and utilized.	85	84	1%
H4a. Banking services are easily accessible and affordable.	84	84	0%
I1c. Local Radio is accessible and utilized.	84	56	51%
B11. Successful businesses want to remain in the community.	84	83	1%
H4f. Accounting services are easily accessible and affordable.	84	74	13%
I4c. Bus services are available between communities.	83	69	20%
H4b. Insurance services are easily accessible and affordable.	82	83	-2%
I1g. High speed Internet services are accessible and utilized.	82	61	35%
G3b. Credit Unions are utilized for business needs.	81	77	5%
G3a. Banks are utilized for business needs.	81	79	3%
I1b. Local Newspapers are accessible and utilized.	80	74	7%
F1. The governing body (city council, village council, or area director) recognizes that businesses are important and valuable for the development of the community	79	76	5%
I2. Quality communication services (phone, fax, high speed internet) are affordable to business.	78	73	7%
B5. There is a strong community identity, and there are plentiful and varying opportunities for involvement (i.e. arts, athletics, politics, church groups).	78	70	11%
B10. The community is a safe place to live.	78	90	-13%
H4d. Legal services are easily accessible and affordable.	78	66	18%

Lowest Scoring Questions

Question	Score out of 100		% Difference
	Peace River	20-Community Average	
I4d. Train services are available between communities.	6	20	-72%
C3. There is an entrepreneurial development program in elementary and secondary schools (K-12).	22	34	-36%
D7. Skilled and knowledgeable scientists and researchers do academic and/or practical work in my community or region (Not necessarily about the region).	22	29	-23%
C1i. University programs are utilized.	23	33	-28%
D6. Businesses that do research or research facilities are geographically concentrated (clustered) and interact with each other.	28	33	-16%
G4. Business capital is available to anyone committed to a venture, regardless of credit history or any other factors	28	22	26%
I3d. Carpooling system is accessible and utilized within the community.	29	25	16%
D8. There are formal and informal forums (Conferences, Workshops) on technology and technology applications	29	29	0%
C8. A pool of skilled and trained labour is available to local businesses.	30	34	-13%
G5. People who are interested in expanding or starting a business are skilled in raising funds	33	29	11%
J9. Businesses in the community /region jointly market their products and services	34	31	9%
J5. The community has a distinctive or unique brand or marketing image	34	44	-22%
F8c. Mentoring programs and services assisting business people are utilized.	34	42	-18%
F9. Business development programs are effective and efficient, and do not duplicate each other.	36	42	-15%
G8b. Angel funds (informal local investors) are accessible to expand or start a business.	37	44	-16%
A9. A pool of motivated employees is available to meet business needs.	38	46	-19%
I4a. Air (commercial) services are available between communities.	38	26	43%
J8. People prefer to purchase local products and services before those from out-of-area.	39	42	-9%
H9. Quality commercial rental space is available to accommodate business expansion, attraction, or creation.	41	46	-11%
C7. The education and business communities work together to provide convenient training	41	42	-1%

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		
	Peace River	20-Community Average	% Diff.
A2. The community is facing an economic crisis.	47	59	-19%
B7. Young adults (25-34) consider the community a desirable place to live.	55	49	13%
B11. Successful businesses want to remain in the community.	84	83	1%
C7. The education and business communities work together to provide convenient training	41	42	-1%
C11. Citizens are motivated to learn new skills and to develop existing ones.	48	50	-5%
F2. The governing body is committed to recruiting or attracting businesses to the community, and may use strategies or incentives to do so.	61	58	4%
F3. The governing body is committed to help existing businesses or creating new businesses through policy and action.	52	50	5%
G5. People who are interested in expanding or starting a business are skilled in raising funds	33	29	11%
H1. There is a vibrant, active downtown area or community core.	49	51	-4%
J5. The community has a distinctive or unique brand or marketing image	34	44	-22%
J6. People from outside the community see it as a desirable place to live.	63	66	-4%
J8. People prefer to purchase local products and services before those from out-of-area.	39	42	-9%