



Answers to Frequently Asked Questions
NRE² “Building Rural Capacity in the New Economy”

1. What is the New Rural Economy² (NRE²) project?

The NRE² project is a four-year extension of the NRE project (see number 2). It officially began in October 2002 and will be completed in September 2006, thus building on the knowledge, experience and infrastructure of previous work. NRE² examines how general conditions have changed the requirements for various forms of capacity in specific regions, how local people have responded, and the processes by which those capacities might be built. This investigation will take place with respect to four themes: communications, the natural environment, services and social support, and local governance. Integration across the four themes will be ensured by researcher collaboration, workshops, conferences, and joint products for academic, public, and policy audiences. Through the research, it is the objective of NRE² to build the capacity of rural Canadians to understand the changes and challenges they face, identify appropriate options and opportunities for the future, and take action to improve their social and economic conditions. NRE² includes 15 Canadian researchers from all parts of the country, 25 Institutional Partners, and 32 rural sites. Two additional sites in Japan are integrated into the project.

2. What is the New Rural Economy (NRE) project?

The New Rural Economy (NRE) project is a five-year research and education project examining the changes taking place in rural Canada including the challenges they create and the opportunities emerging from them. Since its beginning in 1998, the NRE project has established a network of more than 32 rural communities, 30 partners, 25 researchers, and 18 universities in all parts of Canada. Through the efforts of this network and the cooperation of community members, the NRE is working to help rural communities revitalize. Research gathered over the five-year period will be analyzed and passed along to rural people, policy-analysts, researchers, the business community and government agencies at all levels to identify and address important rural issues. Through its parent organization, *The Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation*, the NRE facilitates annual conferences and conferences to bring together rural people, policy-makers, and researchers from over a dozen countries.

3. What is the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation?

The Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF) is the parent organization of the NRE and NRE² projects. CRRF is now in its 15th year of operation as a non-profit organization committed to revitalizing rural Canada. CRRF recognizes that rural communities are adjusting to the effects of many social and economic changes, which are accelerated by globalization. Committed to helping develop strong rural communities essential to all Canadians, CRRF believes this can be achieved

through education and research in a comparative and comprehensive framework. Its program of research, conferences, and education is designed to facilitate these objectives through collaboration and grounded analysis.

4. Why are you researching rural communities?

Over the past few decades, rural Canadian communities have undergone tremendous changes – most of which are related to economic, demographic, and political restructuring. Technological developments in resource industries have led to stresses on the population, social relations, and natural environments of rural communities. The opening of global markets has introduced new challenges to the traditional ways of doing business, and the continued urbanization of Canada has shifted the balance of power away from rural interests. In the process, some communities have suffered while others have undergone significant changes, or even flourished. In order to plan for these changing conditions, research is fundamental. By collecting more accurate and appropriate information, discussing the issues with those affected, and using social science research tools, rural communities will be in a better position to identify their opportunities and minimize the negative outcomes of change.

5. How did you pick the 32 study sites?

In order to understand the processes affecting rural communities, careful comparison is necessary. The 32 study sites were chosen using strict randomization procedures in order to facilitate such comparisons on 5 critical dimensions: whether they are exposed to global economies, whether they have fluctuating economies, whether they are close to urban centres, whether they have institutional capacity, and whether they are leading or lagging on a number of socio-economic indicators. In 1999, 2 sites from rural Japan were added to enhance comparisons across international regimes. Details of the process of selection can be found on the NRE web site (<http://nre.concordia.ca>) via the ‘Documents’ page. Look for the sample frame file on the FTP page.

6. What does the NRE already know about these communities?

When NRE researchers selected the study sites, they began collecting as much information as possible about the communities. They went into the sites to introduce the NRE to community members, seek collaboration support, and collect information for a site profile. This included information on the community history, its people, institutions, volunteer groups, and municipal organization. At the same time, researchers used census data collected by Statistics Canada to document the demographic, geographical, economic, and population characteristics specific to each community. Since that time, they have added information about small and medium sized businesses, co-operatives, important events, access to services, leadership, and community capacity to the general information. In the summer of 2001, researchers conducted interviews in over 2000 households to understand how rural families are responding to changes in the new rural economy. This information is part of a database that links household and site-level data to global change information.

7. How is this research funded?

The NRE² research is primarily funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council through their Initiative on the New Economy, and is supplemented by hundreds of hours of volunteer work on the part of researchers and rural people. The previous NRE research was possible through funding from a number of sources. These include the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Canadian Rural Partnership program of the Rural Secretariat, the Interdepartmental Working Group on Rural and Remote Canada, the Canadian Agricultural Rural Communities Initiative, Health Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Statistics Canada, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, and 11 Universities throughout Canada.

8. What is the next step in the research?

The NRE project officially comes to an end on December 31st, 2002. In addition to the many articles and documents produced from that work, we are in the process of completing four books: one on Social Cohesion in Rural Canada, the second on the 11 rural priority areas identified through the Rural Secretariat's consultation with rural people (The Rural Dialogue), the third on the major changes in rural Canada, and the fourth on conducting collaborative research on rural issues. The first two books will be published in the summer of 2003 and the second two will be published in the summer of 2004.

9. Why are there only 22 active sites when there are 32 in total?

To date, all 32 field sites have not been fully activated due to financial, researcher, and time demands. General information has been collected on all 32 sites, but more detailed information collection has had to wait in some sites until we can find the resources necessary. The NRE² funding will open up new opportunities in this respect. The value of this work is made apparent through the results emerging from our work in the first 20 sites.

10. How can I get access to research findings?

NRE² will continue in the commitment of the previous NRE project to communicating with people and groups who share our concern with rural Canadians. To date, the research findings are presented in a number of forms, depending on the various people and concerns represented. Flyers, handbooks, web pages, media materials, and presentations are regularly prepared to pass the results and insights to rural people both in and outside the field sites. Local meetings are organized in order to provide opportunities for discussion and clarification of issues arising from those results. The annual conferences and workshops of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation also provide forums for the distribution and discussion of research results. For more academic audiences, the research results are being published in scholarly journals and books, and presented at conferences on a variety of topics. Policy-makers have access to the information through reports, articles, press materials, and conference presentations as well as specific representations to parliamentary committees and organizations. All of these materials are made available through the CRRF and NRE web pages (www.crrf.ca and <http://nre.concordia.ca>).