

the **COMMUNITY RESILIENCE** *Manual*

by the Community
Resilience Project Team

A new resource will link rural revitalization to CED best practice

The origins of the Community Resilience Project lie in the dilemmas of residents of British Columbia's small, resource-dependent towns, that is, places that owe their existence to harvesting, extracting, and processing natural resources like trees, fish, minerals, and farmlands. Battered by dramatic changes in markets, technology, environmental law, and the resource base itself, hundreds of these communities have found themselves presented with a stark choice: change or die. Some have died - abandoned by their people, especially the young. Many limp along on a hope and a prayer. A few, however, have bounced back.

In the face of increasing levels of social & economic volatility, an ability to assess & specify their level of resilience allows communities to identify areas of weakness, & select & implement strategies proven to target those difficulties.

Dissecting this diversity of experience in such a way as to help rural communities avoid errors and replicate successes is what the Project is all about. Funded by the Communities Committee of Forest Renewal BC, a provincial crown corporation, a team from the Centre for Community Enterprise set to work in the fall of 1998. Our task has been to develop a conceptual framework and process through which resource-dependent communities can work to strengthen local resilience. After assessing and analyzing their current level of resilience, they cross-reference its weaknesses with

proven strategies and instruments of rural revitalization. Communities then use this information to achieve more durable and cost-effective results from the time, talent, and resources they invest in local planning and development. As a result of greater resilience, they are better able to control their future in the face of change.

The task has taken us far and wide in the past 14 months. The existing literature concerning definitions and indicators of community health, quality of life, and resilience is immense, not to mention that describing practical strategies for rural recovery. Still more daunting has

been our desire to interpret, clarify, and organize that information so as to create something practicable for small, often isolated communities.

The results of our labours to date are compiled in The Community Resilience Manual, now available in a draft form in portable document format (pdf) from www.cedworks.com. Suitable for storage in a 3-ring binder, the Manual is divided into three sections:

- A guide to a 3-step approach for strengthening community resilience.
- A series of data collection tools and formats that residents can use to develop

a Portrait of Community Resilience and set priorities for local action.

- A catalogue of best practices selected on the basis of their power to address six functions which CED experience indicates are essential to community economic well-being.

We have tested the model and data collection tools in five B.C. communities so far, and more will follow. Residents of the test communities have indicated that the “lens” of resilience evokes new insights and awareness of the link between the local economic, social, and political situation. As a result, new energy has been mobilized for CED and community action.

That being said, we also recognize that we have more to learn in order to ensure the Manual is as flexible, straightforward, cost-effective and meaningful as possible in a variety of rural communities. The fol-

lowing article summarizes its conceptual framework and process as an invitation to you to collaborate in the evolution of the Project, and its improvement and extension to other communities.

WHAT IS SO IMPORTANT ABOUT COMMUNITY RESILIENCE?

A resilient community is one that takes intentional action to enhance the personal and collective capacity of its citizens and institutions to respond to and influence the course of social and economic change.

As communities face increasing levels of social and economic volatility, they are having to adapt. The ability to assess and specify their level of resilience allows communities to identify areas of weakness, and select and implement strategies that have been proven to target those difficulties.

A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF RESILIENCE

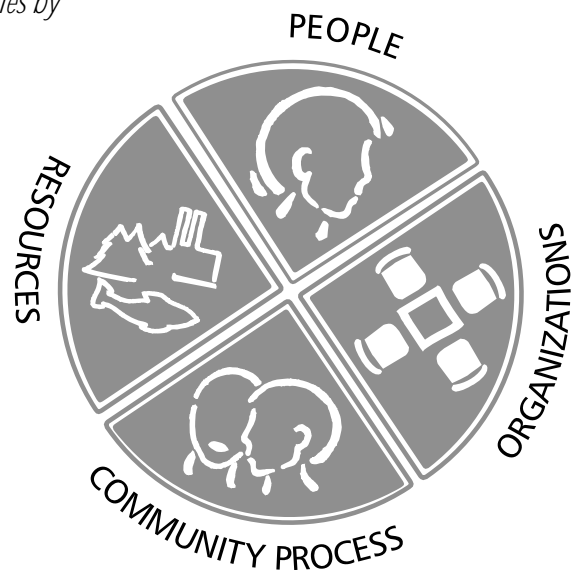
In order to assist communities in strengthening the level of their resilience, we have developed a new conceptual model. It starts with four dimensions:

- *People:* Residents’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour in matters of leadership, initiative, education, pride, co-operation, self-reliance, and participation.
- *Organizations:* The scope, nature, and level of collaboration within local organizations, institutions, and groups.
- *Resources:* The extent to which the community builds on local resources to achieve its goals, while drawing on external resources strategically.
- *Community Process:* The nature and extent of community economic development planning, participation, and action.

The dimensions are the main themes or core components of a community’s social and economic structure. They form a foundation for a detailed analysis of community functions and for the creation of a Portrait of Community Resilience.

“This Tool framed things differently for us. The way the questions were asked & the way the data was presented triggered discussion that did not happen before. It showed us that we could have stronger communities by addressing the characteristics of resilience & taking a more holistic approach to CED.” (Nadina Community Futures)

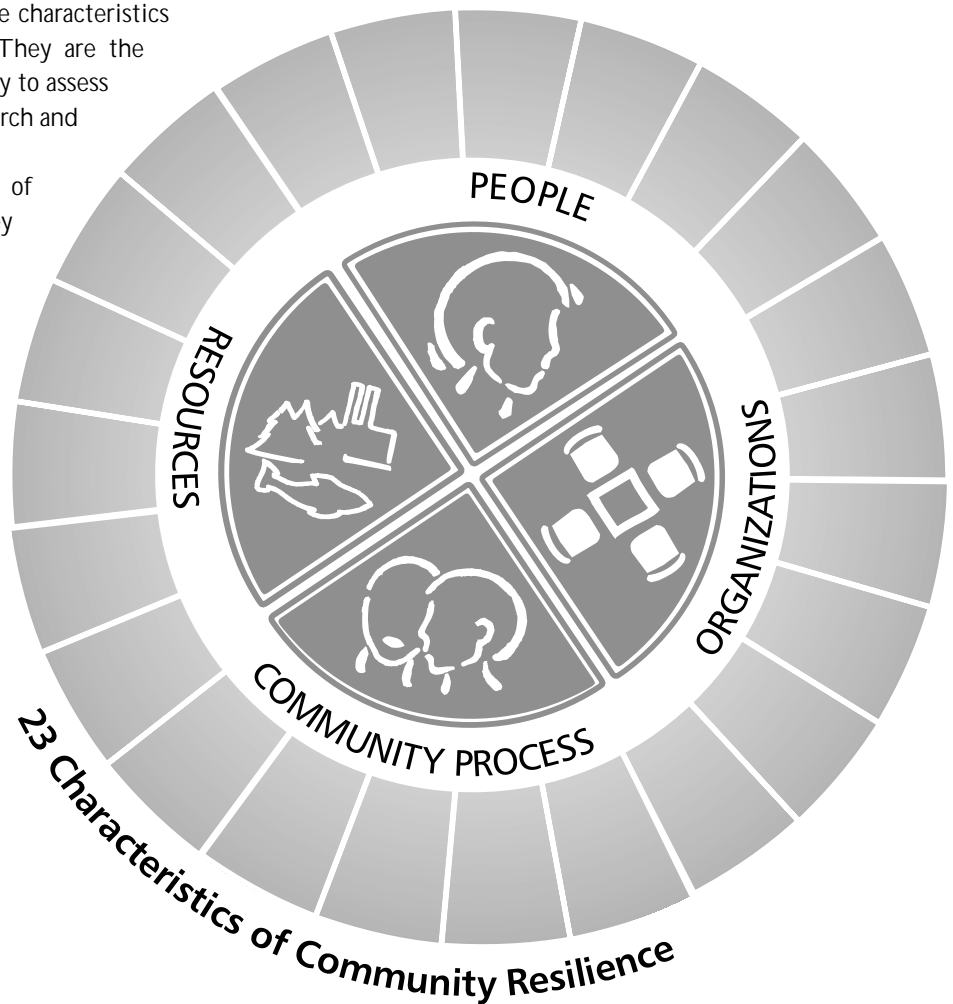
“Even just being a participant in the research stage as one of the test communities we see the benefits. It has been a great reality check. Even for some of us with a long history of CED practice, the results have been instructive. It is a good educational tool & it produces results that can help strengthen communities.” (Revelstoke Economic Development Commission)



ADDING DETAIL TO THE MODEL – 23 CHARACTERISTICS

Each of the four dimensions is described in more detail by a series of characteristics of resilience. These characteristics are more specific than the dimensions. They are the factors that we can examine in a community to assess the level of resilience present. We can research and analyze them.

The characteristics in the model of resilience are not exhaustive. However, they have been chosen because they have proven to be strongly predictive in assessing resilience.



23 CHARACTERISTICS OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

People

- Leadership is representative of the community.
- Elected community leadership is visionary, shares power, and builds consensus.
- Community members are involved in significant community decisions.
- The community feels a sense of pride.
- People feel optimistic about the future of the community.
- There is a spirit of mutual assistance and co-operation in the community.
- People feel a sense of attachment to their community.
- The community is self-reliant and looks to itself and its own resources to address major issues.
- There is a strong belief in and support for education at all levels.

Organizations

- There is a variety of community economic development (CED) organizations in the community such that the key CED functions are well-served.
- Organizations in the community have developed partnerships and collaborative working relationships.

Resources

- Employment in the community is diversified beyond a single large employer.
- Major employers in the community are locally owned.
- The community has a strategy for increasing independent local ownership.
- There is openness to alternative ways of earning a living and economic activity.
- The community looks outside itself to seek and secure resources (skills, expertise and finance) that will address identified areas of weakness.
- The community is aware of its competitive position in the broader economy.

Community Process

- The community has a community economic development plan that guides its development.
- Citizens are involved in the creation and implementation of the community vision and goals.
- There is on-going action towards achieving the goals in the CED Plan.
- There is regular evaluation of progress towards the community's strategic goals.
- Organizations use the CED plan to guide their actions.
- The community adopts a development approach that encompasses all segments of the population.

This collection of resources is neither a quick fix nor a mere research methodology. Instead, it opens up a way of thinking & helps focus community dialogue on key aspects of healthy community functioning that seldom find their way into a community strategic plan.

USING THE MODEL OF RESILIENCE

The Community Resilience Manual uses the concept and model of resilience to help communities through a structured and focussed process of prioritizing and planning. This is a 3-step process.

STEP 1: DRAFT A PORTRAIT OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Data collected for each of the 23 characteristics is documented and analyzed in a Portrait of Community Resilience. Resilience is not static. It changes in relation to internal and external stresses. So the Portrait is important as a way to identify current resilience strengths and weaknesses, and then to track change over time.

Collection of data is streamlined by using indicators that specify exactly what information is needed. Indicators associated with each of the characteristics are included in the Manual. They have been selected because they have proven highly predictive of the characteristics and because they represent information that is relatively easy to access.

The model uses both quantitative indicators (such as population data from a recent census) and qualitative indicators (such as surveying people's perceptions) to identify the extent to which each characteristic is present in a given community. Section Two in the Manual presents a variety of tools and options for collecting this data.

STEP 2: USE THE PORTRAIT TO ESTABLISH COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

The Portrait provides a new perspective on the social and economic structure of a community. Analyzing it can help communities to gain new insights into factors that can increase their capacity to adapt and influence the course of change.

The Manual describes a decision-making process which helps communities to further analyze the significance of the Portrait to their community resilience. The decision-making process suggests ways of involving community members, applying their insights and knowledge and prioritizing resilience weaknesses. The result in all test communities has been one priority that, once addressed, will significantly increase the community's ability to take intentional action to strengthen its resilience.

STEP 3: SELECT APPROPRIATE STRATEGIES & TOOLS

Once community priorities have been established, it is time to decide what actions a community can take to best improve its resilience. The Community Resilience Manual includes a detailed catalogue of a wide range of promising strategies and tools.

The Catalogue has been created by gathering information about community economic development "best practice" from across North America. Described in detail are strategies and tools, who ap-

plied them effectively and how, together with contact information and additional recommended resources.

All address one or more of the six functions essential to community economic well-being:

Access to Equity Capital

The extent to which reinvestment of capital is influenced or controlled by a community affects its ability to influence economic development. Its absence, or the flow of capital from a community, is a major factor in the decline of a community economy. In resource-dependent communities, this can also be influenced by securing greater control over the local resource base.

Access to Credit

Without access to credit, enterprise development is impossible. In communities under stress, traditionally risk-averse, conventional sources of credit tend to dry up. Creating sources of credit that are locally owned and controlled, or are influenced by the community is critical to long-term community survival.

Building Human Resource Capacity

Capacity for intentional action depends on vision, participation, and the skills of local people. It is critical to the creation of new initiatives, whether they concern social, economic, or entrepreneurial development.

Capacity for Research, Planning & Advocacy

Active, on-going research ensures that planning is informed and that local interests can be represented to decision-makers within or outside the community.

Creating Partnerships Within & Outside the Community

Strategic, targeted networking and partnership development focusses on strengthening relationships to solve problems, to create new opportunities, and to mobilize community and outside resources to address local priorities.

Infrastructure

While streets, sewers and buildings are typically in the domain of the City Planner and the City Engineer, it is important to link infrastructure planning to the community's vision and goals.

The Catalogue entries (34 in the current draft; closer to 60 in the coming first edition) represent the actions which communities have taken to address these functions. The chapter entitled "Designing Financial Strategies," for instance, includes explanations and examples bearing on access to equity and/or credit:

- community development loan funds
- community equity investment funds
- community foundations
- community revolving loan funds
- comprehensive development finance institutions
- equity match-making
- individual development accounts
- loan guarantee programs


The chapter "Creating Jobs" features strategies which undertake a number of critical functions by means of entrepreneur support services, self-employment strategies, and venture formation, including:

- business incubators
- entrepreneur network facilitation
- feasibility studies support
- community-owned venture development
- co-operative employment partnership
- joint ventures
- nonprofit enterprise development
- outside entrepreneurial recruitment
- worker-ownership
- business visitation/mentoring
- early warning systems
- succession planning and worker buy-out

To the maximum extent possible, the examples are taken from Canadian small town experience.

CONCLUSION

The Community Resilience Manual will not replace, but rather enhance whatever planning process a small town is currently using. Communities involved in the field testing identified a number of benefits to their local economic development planning process. They reported that the process described by the Manual gathered new information about local attitudes and organizations, and provided a framework for local decision-making and priority setting. Participating communities were also impressed with how the process engaged a broad cross-section of the community in thinking about resilience and its economic impact, and in this way created new energy for local initiatives.

This collection of resources is neither a quick fix nor a mere research methodology. Instead, it opens up a way of thinking and helps focus community dialogue on key aspects of healthy community functioning that seldom find their way into a community strategic plan. The resources provide communities with a means to systematically strengthen their capacity to steer towards the future which they choose. 

The Community Resilience Project Team comprises six Centre for Community Enterprise staff, associates, and affiliates: Michelle Colussi, Mike Lewis, Sandy Lockhart, Stewart Perry, Pippa Rowcliffe, and Don McNair.

Community Resilience

The first edition of *The Community Resilience Manual* is now available free of charge in portable document format (PDF) from The CED Bookshop! All you require is the freeware Adobe® Acrobat® Reader® 4.X or higher.

The Manual details a 4-step process by which small towns can assess and strengthen their ability to identify and act on local priorities.

Now into its second year of field-testing, the Community Resilience process has won significant recognition in rural areas at home and internationally.

Also available: *Tools & Techniques for Community Recovery & Renewal*, a compendium of best CED practices. Over 60 entries each describe a *proven* instrument, structure, or approach, outline its use, and supply contact and resource information.

The CED Bookshop lists print copies of both publications (see "Local Empowerment") for \$37.95 the set.

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