



## ***RCIP Update Summer 2005***

### **RCIP Comes of Age: A Message from the Partners**

The Rural Communities Impacting Policy (RCIP) Project is in the fifth and final year of its CURA grant (Community University Research Alliance) from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The RCIP project is working with rural communities in Nova Scotia to identify the issues that affect their health and sustainability and using social science research to develop policy change strategies to address these issues.

The partners in the RCIP Project, the Coastal Communities Network and the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre at Dalhousie University, have been assessing the progress we have made to achieve our objectives. We have involved many of our partners from communities, government, universities and colleges in these discussions. For example, AHPRC and CCN co-hosted a strategic planning session in May to ask ourselves how well we have done, what we have learned, and what about our future plans. The results of those discussions have been synthesized into a report called "*The Future of RCIP: Strategic Directions for CCN and AHPRC*", soon to be released to our many partners and participants.

CCN and AHPRC have affirmed our commitment to working together in the future, based on the Collaborative Partnership Agreement that defines the RCIP partnership. We want to work together to build on the work we have done and break some new ground. Our goal continues to be, "Building capacity of rural communities to use social science research for developing and influencing policies that contribute to the health and sustainability of rural communities."

The following is an update on what we will be doing over the next six months, as well as our plans for the future. Over the next six months, activities will be winding down. Our community training workshops will be finishing up in October. We will also be having another Community Training Roundtable to explore future funding opportunities. No Work Group Meetings or other RCIP events are scheduled for this fall. We will focus our activities in three main areas: 1) Knowledge mobilization – writing about what we have learned and publishing it in various formats for a variety of audiences; 2) Evaluation – Completing an evaluation of our work that will be reported to our funder and used for future planning; 3) Grant writing – Looking for funding opportunities to continue the research, community capacity building, training, and policy change work. This summer edition of *RCIP Update* will provide you with more details of what we are doing.

Have a healthy and safe summer!

#### ***RCIP Co-Directors:***

***Arthur Bull***

***Renée Lyons***

***Coastal Communities Network Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre***

## RCIP Objectives 2004-2006

***Objective 1: Maintain and enhance the organizational structure to provide a catalyst for communities to use social science research and for universities to more fully understand the research and policy needs of rural communities.***

***Objective 2: Develop mechanisms for updating data on rural Nova Scotia.***

***Objective 3: Support CCN members to apply data, tools and research to influence policy.***

***Objective 4: Expand opportunities for training students and rural community members.***

***Objective 5: Nationalize and internationalize project processes and tools through broad dissemination.***

### Policy Change Projects

Three policy change projects were launched after the Rural Policy Forum in February 2005 – *Coastal Area Management, Healthy and Sustainable Community Development, and Retention of Health Professionals in Rural Communities*. The RCIP Summer Student Interns are working with project teams to design and carry out research that will contribute to policy development, implementation or change in each of these areas. The research reports will be posted on the RCIP website in September. Partners on the project teams will carry the work forward with policy makers.

### Summer Student Internships

The RCIP Project is sponsoring three Summer Student Interns in 2005.

**Joy Elliott**, M.A. in Island Studies (2005) at the University of Prince Edward Island, is working with a variety of partners on *Healthy and Sustainable Community Development in Nova Scotia*.

**Amelie Lombard**, M.A. candidate in Development Economics at Dalhousie, is working with the Yarmouth Community Health Board, the South West Nova District Health Authority, the Eastern Shore/Musquidoboit Community Health Board, the Guysborough Antigonish Strait District Health Authority, St. Francis Xavier University, and the North Inverness

Community Health Board on *the Retention of Health Professionals in Rural Communities*.

**Corey Toews**, M.A. candidate in Planning at Dalhousie, is working with the Coastal Coalition on *Coastal Area Management in Nova Scotia: Building Awareness at the Municipal Level*.

Following the approval of their research proposals by Dalhousie's Research Ethics Review Board and the South West Nova District Health Authority's Ethics Review Board (for Retention of Health Professionals in Yarmouth), the Interns have been setting up interviews, surveys and focus groups in many communities throughout Nova Scotia. The Mid-Point Meeting, held on July 7<sup>th</sup>, attracted over 20 partners in these projects from communities, government, universities and colleges. The consensus was that all three projects are on track! Data collection in July will be followed by data analysis and report writing in August. The Interns will present their findings at the Final Meeting on August 16<sup>th</sup>. Plans for follow-up on the research findings with policy makers will also be made at that time.

### Community Training

RCIP's Community Training Work Group organized a *Community Training Roundtable* on June 24<sup>th</sup> that brought together groups and individuals that offer training to community groups in Nova

Scotia to discuss efforts for coordination and sustainability. Discussion focused on four main areas of concern: 1) What training do communities need? 2) How can training be made more accessible? 3) How can training opportunities be integrated or linked? 4) Are there opportunities for collaboration? There is much interest and potential for partnerships and collaborations between Anglophone and Francophone groups. There needs to be a commitment to long-term learning and development for community groups.

There is great potential for linking with the Nova Scotia Community College and the United Way's Training and Learning Inventory Project in Nova Scotia. All agreed on the need to meet again in the fall of 2005 to go "deeper" i.e. proposals and action plans. The "*Community Training, Learning and Leadership Roundtable Report*" will be translated into French and distributed as a bilingual report over the summer months. Meanwhile, Erica de Sousa will take over responsibility for delivering community training workshops this fall. Todd Barr, RCIP's other Community Trainer, will focus on refining the workshop guidebook, "*Doing our Homework: Social Science as a Tool for Policy Change*", for publication as a self-guiding training manual.

## **RCIP Project Evaluation**

We are working with Horizons Community Development Associates to evaluate the project. A participatory model is being used to ensure that all participants in the RCIP Project will have opportunities to express their views at Work Group meetings, focus groups and a web survey in September/October. We'll let you know when the survey is available on-line and how to access it. A draft of the evaluation report will be ready in November for review by the Management Committee. The final results of the evaluation will fulfil our obligation to the funder (SSHRC) and provide a foundation for our future work.

## **Knowledge Mobilization**

What have we learned from our work together over the past four years or more? What contributions have we made to rural communities in their efforts to use research to influence policy? How has the community-university partnership worked between CCN and AHPRC? Have we had an impact on policy change? Do we have a better understanding of what makes rural communities healthy and sustainable? These are some of the questions we will answer over the next few months as we write about our experiences in a variety of formats for publication. Each of the Work Groups has discussed what they have learned and suggested topics for papers. Writing teams will be forming over the summer to work on a selection of topics like: *Building Equitable Partnerships between Community Organizations and Universities*; *Training Students to do Research in Rural Communities: An Interdisciplinary Model*; *Forging Sustainable Futures for Rural Communities*; *Rural Communities Influencing Policies: Case Studies*. If you're interested in getting involved in writing about what we've learned, contact the RCIP Project Coordinator, Malcolm Shookner (Call 902-494-1590 or e-mail to [Malcolm.Shookner@dal.ca](mailto:Malcolm.Shookner@dal.ca).)

## **The Future of RCIP**

The partners in the RCIP Project the Coastal Communities Network and the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, held a Strategic Planning Session in May 2005 to determine the future direction of the partnership (RCIP +5). The session had three main purposes:

- 1) To review accomplishments to date and lessons learned;
- 2) To determine the future direction of the partnership;
- 3) To create strategies for continuing current activities and starting new ones.

In a report soon to be released, "*The Future of RCIP*", CCN and AHPRC reaffirm their commitment to working together in the future, based on the Collaborative Partnership Agreement that defines the RCIP partnership. The goal of the partnership is "*to build capacity of rural communities to use social science research to generate knowledge for developing and influencing policies that contribute to the health and sustainability of rural communities.*" We are also open to expanding the scope of the work to Atlantic Canada, with new partners in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

The research question that would be the basis of future research proposals is: ***What are the conditions needed for healthy and sustainable rural communities in Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada?***

The objectives for our work together in the future are:

- 1) To conduct community-based research in rural communities.
- 2) To facilitate knowledge mobilization for improved policies and practices.
- 3) To promote policy development and change to support rural sustainability.
- 4) To improve access to data and information for community-based research.
- 5) To provide capacity building and training for research and knowledge mobilization.
- 6) To model the RCIP Project.

What would Nova Scotia and other Atlantic provinces look like in 5 years if the work of RCIP continues?

- Many rural organizations use social science research to do policy change.
- University/community/government work more deeply together.
- Universities give credit to researchers for doing community-based research.
- Government decisions are made based on evidence in which communities have participated in generating.

- Communities respond to challenges they face by working with universities and governments to plan for their futures.
- Civil society is strengthened by citizens participating in public processes
- Overall policy framework in place to support rural sustainability.

## Next Steps

The RCIP Management Committee has endorsed *The Future of RCIP* report as the framework for the future. It will be used as the basis for discussions with potential funders. Additional steps to be taken include:

1. Develop a communications plan to signal RCIP's plans for the future.
2. Identify potential partners based on these strategic directions.
3. Identify funding opportunities in the short (2005-06) and medium (2006-07) term.
4. Select objectives and activities that relate to specific funding opportunities.
5. Develop activity-related budgets related to specific funding opportunities.

The partners in the RCIP Project, the Coastal Communities Network and the Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre, are excited about the work we have accomplished together with many other partners in communities, governments, universities and colleges over the past 4 years. We are also prepared to face up to the "rural policy challenge" and the work yet to be done to promote the health and sustainability of rural communities in Nova Scotia and the other Atlantic provinces. "*The Future of RCIP: Strategic Directions for CCN and AHPRC*" report is another step along the path to rural sustainability. It will soon be posted on the RCIP website: [www.ruralnovascotia.ca](http://www.ruralnovascotia.ca) and sent out to all project participants. We look forward to working together with our many partners in the future.