

*Canadian
Association of Fairs
and Exhibitions*



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Canadian Association of Fairs & Exhibitions

C.A.F.E. Learning Forum FINAL REPORT

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1.0 Project Summary

1.1 Origin of the Project

The Fairs, Exhibitions and Shows sector (FES) has long been considered the backbone of rural culture and community. The sector is a very significant participant in the lives of rural communities across Canada. It is at fairs, exhibitions and shows where the community thrives. It is here that they gather, learn, share experiences and practices around agriculture and farming; and recognize the myriad talents of citizens. It is on their property during the year where communities meet to play sports, watch events, socialize. These events and experiences build and maintain community. It is always a fair, exhibition or show that is at the hub. The FES sector supplies the glue holding communities together. It is therefore crucial that the sector remains a strong community force across Canada.

For decades, the importance the FES sector has been acknowledged at the grassroots level as playing a vital role in rural communities. Since 1924 C.A.F.E. has worked to, among other things, raise awareness of this significant role. C.A.F.E. has recently been recognized by the federal government as having the ability to reach rural communities, through the FES sector. This is demonstrated by federal government support for FES sector initiatives such as Agriculture Canada providing \$1.15 million to C.A.F.E. to deliver training programs to individual FES operators across Canada for reducing the risks of E. coli outbreaks, and Health Canada asking C.A.F.E. to join a not-for-profit coalition to explore ways to support government based medical and social services during a disaster, terrorist event or public health emergency such as a flu pandemic.

C.A.F.E. recognizes that there are real challenges facing rural communities – from urbanization and population decline to the threat of avian flu and climate change – and that there are real opportunities for the FES sector to play a leadership role in facing those challenges (i.e., emergency preparedness, identifying/dealing with community specific problems such as e coli.) The FES sector has a crucial role to play in Community Capacity Building (CCB) by providing leadership, infrastructure and other resources in their rural communities. This sector has the potential to help rural communities identify the challenges they face to their way of life, learn how to face those challenges, and thrive in a climate of increasing challenges and changes. It is also significant that the FES sector has thousands of trained and loyal volunteers across Canada which provides a cadre of stable volunteers in many rural communities that could be called upon to support CCB efforts, such as public education and outreach around a local issue or for a disaster or pandemic response.

C.A.F.E. recognized the FES sector to be an untapped resource in terms of CCB leadership in rural communities and determined that there was a need to begin an ongoing CCB training process aimed specifically at this sector.

1.2 Problem to be Solved

The key “problem” addressed by the Learning Forum is how to train FES sector leaders in CCB skills with the intention that these skills, in turn, will be taught to others in their rural communities. By training the FES leaders, there is a very real opportunity to improve CCB in rural communities. The skills needed include:

- Identification of key CCB issues in rural communities;
- Creation of CCB strategies and plans around identified issues;
- Learning skills necessary to implement CCB plans and communicate effectively with various audiences; and,

- Building networks and partnerships so that experiences and resources can be shared among rural leaders engaged in CCB activities.

1.3 Innovative Solution Devised

In order to train FES sector leaders in CCB skills, C.A.F.E. decided to convene a Learning Forum designed to build practical CCB skills and strategies which could begin to be implemented upon the participants' return to their rural communities. The Forum was designed to build the CCB skills of key FES players who are in best position to take a leadership role in identifying important local issues (already existent as well as emerging) with the intention that these leaders return to their rural communities and strategically establish grassroots information sharing and public engagement systems that can handle issues of relevance to the community, as identified by the community. The participants were leaders of rural communities who have significant influence over the strategic direction the community they are from decides to take.

By training rural community leaders to take the lessons learned back to their communities, the effects of the Learning Forum will be felt throughout the community – well beyond the 20 people who attended the event. Learning these skills is critical to engaging entire rural communities.

1.4 Activities Planned

The Leadership Forum was constructed around the use of guest speakers, presentations, facilitated discussion, breakout groups, and mock scenarios – all designed to create knowledge about CCB issues in participants' communities, determining their role(s) in addressing identified CCB issues (and respond to issues as they arise), developing CCB action plans, and acquiring the skills and confidence to effectively implement CCB plans. Each component of this 2-day event was designed to foster the uptake of the content.

The following specific activities comprised the Learning Forum in its entirety:

Pre-forum Activity: In order to maximize the usefulness of the Learning Forum, prior to the event, participants were engaged and asked to provide insight into what they would like to learn at the Forum as well as to provide insight as to the key CCB issues in their communities.

Guest Speakers: Three guest speakers spoke on a variety of topics which educated and motivated participants. The titles of their presentations were, "*The Current Context of Community Capacity Building in Rural Communities in Canada: Opportunities and Alligators*," "*A Politicians Perspective on being Approached by Rural Communities*," and, "*Practical Pointers on Getting Community Capacity Building Results: How to Engage Politicians and the Media*."

Presentations: There were two major presentations given at the Learning Forum providing specific information about community capacity building planning. The "Community Capacity Building Planning Cycle" module provided a general overview/review of how to plan an organization's community capacity building strategy for short-medium-and long term. The "Lobbying & Media" module provided information and practical examples of how to engage politicians as well as the media in order to further CCB.

Facilitated Discussions: Through facilitated discussion, participants were able to identify key CCB issues facing rural communities across Canada, as well as identify the roles that the FES sector can play in addressing them.

Breakout Groups & CCB Plan Workbook: There were three self-selecting breakout groups, each based on the size of the rural communities they represented (e.g., small, medium, large). Each group chose one of the CCB issues identified in the facilitated discussion. Using the CCB Plan Workbook, each group used the information gathered from presentations, speeches, and each others' experiences to complete a CCB plan for their issue.

Mock Scenarios: In order to help participants learn how to effectively advocate for their issue in various situations and with different audiences, breakout groups participated in a series of simulated CCB situations such as meeting with a politician, being interviewed by a radio program, etc.

1.5 Anticipated Results

The essence of the Learning Forum was to build the CCB capacity of the rural community FES sector leaders so they could take a leadership role in identifying important local issues (already existent as well as emerging) and in creating a plan for solving them. In turn, the FES sector will help their communities build the same community capacity building capacity at a grassroots level. Although the local challenges and solutions will differ from community to community, there are a number of overall short and long-term impacts which will result from the Forum. These include:

Immediately after the Forum, C.A.F.E. hoped that participants would be highly motivated to return home and begin engaging their communities in the process of building networks, identifying pressing community capacity building issues and taking a leadership role in navigating the(se) issue(s).

- **Creating a local community capacity building network:** With the tools, experience, and support resulting from the Forum, participants are well positioned to approach relevant local and provincial players (e.g., community leaders, legislators, grassroots organizations, local industry, etc.) and take a leadership role in working together to create a network of key stakeholders who, together, will form a nexus for community capacity building activities.
- **Building a shared community capacity building vision in local rural communities:** shortly after identifying and engaging a local CCB network, it was anticipated that steps would be taken to create a common CCB vision for the community. Informed by the Learning Forum, the immediate steps would have included:
 - Identification and prioritization of local issues;
 - Agreement on the issue(s) of greatest urgency;
 - Determine specific goals related to priority issue(s); and,
 - Development of an action plan for delivering on the goals.

In 6-12 months after the Leadership Forum, the following results were anticipated:

- **Collection and sharing of resources:** Beginning in the immediate term, and continuing in the long term, CCB resources (i.e., templates of action plans, copies of media releases, best practices, etc.) would be collected and shared among rural communities. C.A.F.E. would play a key role, largely through electronic communication, in this process.
- **Establishment of strong network of CCB leaders in the FES sector:** The Learning Forum was the first Canadian event bringing the FES sector industry leaders together to discuss issues of common interest. It was anticipated that this Forum would continue annually well into the future. It was anticipated that efforts would be taken to ensure the FES sector leaders share information and support each other after the completion of the Forum so that rural communities across Canada could benefit from the varied experiences and expertise of other communities. It was anticipated that C.A.F.E. would serve as the hub for keeping these linkages and networks strong through their website, the creation of a message board, email communication, newsletters, etc.

- **Implementation of decision(s) relating to identified CCB issue(s):** After the initial stage of creating a CCB network and working together to identify key issue(s) and related goals, the community will be in a position to follow through on elements of their plan. It is important to move beyond the planning stage and take action so that the community will see how the work of the community capacity building network results in a stronger community able to deal with local issues with local solutions.
- **Sustainable Funding:** C.A.F.E. anticipates that more than one participant will be able to secure long-term infrastructure funding as a direct result of this event. This funding will enable important changes to take place in their community which would otherwise have been difficult to accomplish without funding such as:
 - Upkeep of facilities where community can meet when not being used for FES sector activities
 - Building a relationship/dialogue with local community by using materials such as local newspaper advertisements, radio public service announcements, etc. This dialogue is crucial to engage the public and to obtain their input/feedback on the community capacity building network's activities.

2.0 Project Description

2.1 Objectives

As outlined in Annexe A of the C.A., the objective of the Learning Forum was to help FES sector participants:

- To identify their community capacity building role; and,
- To teach them how to work with their communities to identify key issues.

The anticipated outcome of this Forum was, "Increased community capacity building skills of the rural FES sector leaders."

The first part of the objective of helping the FES sector leaders' identify their CCB role was realistic and remains relevant. In order to devise any sort of strategy to build community capacity, it is essential that the key players understand what it is they do and why it is important in the context of rural communities. This objective was achieved largely through brainstorming activities which participants discussed the roles their sector plays in CCB.

The second part of the objective of teaching participants how to work with their communities to identify key issues was also realistic and remains relevant. The point of this objective was that although rural communities share many of the same characteristics and concerns, each one is unique. It was important that the Learning Forum teach the skills for each of the participants to go back to their communities and use similar techniques (i.e., brainstorming activities, CCB Plan Workbook, etc.) to engage grassroots stakeholders so as to identify the issues (and strategies for achieving resolution to those issues) specific to them. This objective was achieved through the various components of the Learning Forum:

- *Group Brainstorming:* Participants learned how to identify key CCB issues;
- *Breakout Groups:* Participants chose a CCB issues on which to focus their work. Using the CCB Plan Workbook as a guide, and using the skills/information gathered from presentations, speeches, and each others' experiences, each group completed a Workbook which became a complete CCB plan related to the issue they had chosen.

- *Keynote Speakers*: Participants learned how to successfully work with various levels of government and media to achieve CCB objectives;
- *Mock Scenarios*: Participants learned how to implement CCB skills by placing them in 'real life' scenarios of dealing with politicians and the media.

The Learning Forum successfully taught the participants practical community capacity building skills (i.e., how to identify key CCB issues in their communities; how and when to engage politicians; how to communicate a message effectively within their communities, etc.), but also to gave the participants confidence to implement CCB skills directly or by teaching the same skills to members of their own communities. Feedback from the participants as well as from critiqued "Mock Scenarios" indicates that the Learning Forum was successful in achieving its objectives.

2.2 Activities

Planned Activity	Actual Activity	Differences
<p>Solicitation of Participants</p> <p>Potential participants will be solicited using various materials such as a one-pager describing the Learning Forum and rationale for attending. They will be invited through mail, email and on the C.A.F.E. website.</p> <p>Early September 2006 - Early January 2007</p>	<p>Solicitation methods occurred according to plan. There was significant recruitment that happened through personal phone communication. Solicitation took place until late January.</p>	<p>Because this was the first Learning Forum, and thus and 'unknown', some key participants had to be called in order to personally describe the event's objectives and rationale. This method of engaged solicitation was significant in ensuring engaged and relevant participants.</p>
<p>Solicitation of Speakers</p> <p>C.A.F.E. staff will help identify appropriate speakers for the Forum. Speakers will be secured at least one month in advance of the Forum</p> <p>Mid-September 2006 - Mid-December 2006</p>	<p>Solicitation methods occurred according to plan. The recruitment of speakers did not begin until November.</p>	<p>The only difference was when the solicitation began. This was due to uncertainty around the project's approval for funding.</p>
<p>Logistics</p> <p>All logistics relating to the event (e.g., registration, venue location, audio-visual needs, catering, accommodations, travel, etc.) will be determined and appropriate action initiated in early September. Logistics will be an ongoing activity until just prior to the event on January 22, 2007.</p> <p>Early September 2006 - Mid-January 2007</p>	<p>Logistics of event occurred according to plan. However, planning did not begin until November.</p>	<p>The only difference was when the planning began. This was due to uncertainty around the project's approval for funding.</p>
<p>Pre-forum Participant Interviews</p> <p>Participants will be contacted and an informal interview will be conducted regarding the purpose of the Forum, their expectations, and entertain any questions and/or suggestions they may have about what they would like to learn</p>	<p>Due to the late nature of the funding for this project, we were unable to finalize participation until just prior to the event. As such, there was no time for personal</p>	<p>Information was obtained during the week prior to the Forum instead of months before the Forum.</p>

<p>over the 2-day event. The Project Manager will also be asking the participants to provide a sense of what are the key issues their community is dealing with currently, and any future concerns.</p> <p>Early-October 2006 - Early-November 2006</p>	<p>interviews to be conducted. Instead, the same information was solicited through an online questionnaire.</p>	
<p>Learning Forum</p> <p><i>See Application Question 11 for full details of the content of the Forum</i></p> <p>January 22, 2007 - January 23, 2007</p>	<p>All components of the Forum were carried out according to plan.</p>	<p>No differences between the planned and actual activities.</p>
<p>Post-forum Activity</p> <p>After the Forum, all participants will be contacted via email and asked to fill out an online survey. The purpose of the survey will be to gauge the level of activity taking place and to identify the participants which may need more personalized support. Some individual support will be given to participants where requested.</p> <p>Mid-February - Mid-March</p>	<p>This has not occurred.</p>	<p>Enough funding was obtained to carry through on all planned activities up to, and including, the Learning Forum. There was not adequate funding to provide post-forum follow-up and support.</p>

3.0 PROJECT Results

3.1 Deliverable & outcomes

The following are the “anticipated results” of the Learning Forum as listed in Annexe A of the C.A. as well as responses to the questions posed in the Final Report template provided by Agriculture Canada:

Anticipated Result: The web page will be the central location of all resources provided by rural community capacity building networks arising from the Forum.	
Did you achieve the anticipated results (or exceed them)? If so, how?	Yes. C.A.F.E. has a web page with all the information provided at the Forum. There is capacity to add information from individual participants as needed.
On what did the success or failure of the project depend?	Not at all. The main focus of the project was to teach participants CCB skills.
What obstacles had to be overcome in order to achieve the results?	None.
Are you satisfied with the results you obtained? Why or why not?	Yes. The result of creating the web page was achieved.

Anticipated Result: Experiences of specific communities will be shared in C.A.F.E.'s as well as provincial/territorial association and FES sector newsletters.	
Did you achieve the anticipated results (or exceed them)? If so, how?	Yes, C.A.F.E. did achieve some of our anticipated results. We have published the results of the workshop in the C.A.F.E. Fair News and the provincial/Territorial have share there experiences by linking to our article on their websites. We also provided all participants a CD of the documentation so they could share the information with their counterparts back home. We did this by providing a program that the participants could use the skills learned and apply them to their own community stakeholders to build a better understanding of how the fair and exhibition agricultural societies, the municipal and provincial infrastructure can work together creating community strategic planning. We would have had greater participation if our members had had time to plan to attend. The length of time for funding approval, continual changes to the personal handling our file were definite barriers to reaching out and getting our members aware of the workshop.
On what did the success or failure of the project depend?	On how comfortable the participant felt in his or her capability to articulate their learning experience in a manner that would be heard at the local level. To assist the transfer of knowledge we created the CD to provide a toolkit that they could follow to stimulate strategic planning at the local level that was user friendly. It also depended on the turn around time from the funder so that adequate lead time could be taken to inform the membership that the program was actually proceeding. The project was successful because the Executive Director used her contacts to be speakers and to be facilitators. They held their availability open for her as we waited to hear if funding had been approved. We would have had greater numbers if there had been appropriate lead-time.
What obstacles had to be overcome in order to achieve the results?	Turn over of funders human resources, transportation costs, speaker availability due to tentative funding to the last week.

<p>Are you satisfied with the results you obtained? Why or why not?</p>	<p>Yes because those in attendance were extremely impressed and felt that they would like more Learning Forums such as this. We have heard from the participants that they have used the skills and have experienced success.</p> <p>No because we put a lot of work into the content and did not get the numbers due to the late notice that the Learning forum was actually occurring due to last minute funding. Our members are volunteers and they cannot drop everything at the last minute to attend but rather require approval from their community boards, which may meet once every two or three months.</p>
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Anticipated Result: Overall progress will be shared at conferences and general meetings of C.A.F.E. and other associations.

<p>Did you achieve the anticipated results (or exceed them)? If so, how?</p>	<p>Yes we have exceed them. We have scheduled a workshop at our Annual Convention in November 2007 in Toronto to share with all our members the lessons learned through the Learning Forum. The Participants felt that we needed to let the folks that were unable to attend hear about value of the toolkit which is accessible online through C.A.F.E. website. The Executive Director has shared this experience of the benefits of the Learning Forum with the Provincial Associations of Agriculture Societies at their Annual Conventions across Canada.</p>
<p>On what did the success or failure of the project depend?</p>	<p>The project was successful because we had the capacity through another project the funds to create a bulletin board for sharing of ideas and lessoned learned. We have also sent broadcast emails to notify folks that the materials were available on the website and that we could now host discussion about the workshop on our new C.A.F.E. Bulletin board.</p>
<p>What obstacles had to be overcome in order to achieve the results?</p>	<p>We used the provincial associations of agriculture to access the emails of the provincial fairs to let them know of material availability. What we found is that many forget to update their contact information so it makes it difficult to be sure all are informed.</p>
<p>Are you satisfied with the results you obtained? Why or why not?</p>	<p>More assistance for travel and accommodation costs would have increased participants as our audience are not working for corporations but rather volunteering for nonprofits that do not personally nor organization wise have the revenue to send their folks off for a weekend learning experience.</p>

Anticipated Result: Targeted broadcast emails to beneficiaries and main targets will keep members of the FES sector engaged in this community capacity building work. It is also planned that C.A.F.E. will establish a discussion forum in which community capacity building issues can be shared closer to 'real time'.

<p>Did you achieve the anticipated results (or exceed them)? If so, how?</p>	<p>Yes as stated above we have created through another funding stream the capacity for community bulletin board. The problem is that we now need the human resources to maintain and monitor and update the website on a continuous basis, which we do not have at this time.</p>
<p>On what did the success or failure of the project depend?</p>	<p>Funds to hire the expertise to create the technology for the bulletin board and to have the necessary human resources to monitor the program.</p>
<p>What obstacles had to be overcome in order to achieve the results?</p>	<p>Revenue, time human resources multi tasking</p>
<p>Are you satisfied with the results you obtained?</p>	<p>No Now that we have the bulletin board up we now have to spend resources</p>

Why or why not?	to educate our members empowering them so that they have a higher comfort with utilizing this type of communication tool. C.A.F.E has planned to have a cyber C.A.F.E. at our national convention to familiarize our members with the positive uses that an on line bulletin board can offer. We are satisfied with the results because the anticipated outcomes of increased knowledge and skills to engage in analysis and action regarding FES sector were clearly achieved.
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Anticipated Result: Plan and deliver conference with the outputs being a confirmed attendance of 20 participants, meeting agenda, confirmed speakers, and a toolkit package. Anticipated outcomes were increased knowledge and skills to engage in analysis and action regarding FES sector.	
Did you achieve the anticipated results (or exceed them)? If so, how?	Exceeded results. Achieved attendance of 20 people, created meeting agenda, had 3 speakers, and created toolkit package. Created additional materials for participants and usefulness of speaker presentations surpassed expectations of organizers and participants.
On what did the success or failure of the project depend?	A large part of the success of this project depended on this result.
What obstacles had to be overcome in order to achieve the results?	The major obstacle that needed to be overcome was that of securing funding for the project.
Are you satisfied with the results you obtained? Why or why not?	We are satisfied with the results because the anticipated outcomes of increased knowledge and skills to engage in analysis and action regarding FES sector were clearly achieved.

Anticipated Result: Preparation and distribution of final report and evaluation as well as analysis of evaluation results.	
Did you achieve the anticipated results (or exceed them)? If so, how?	Yes. Final report was completed. Evaluations were analysed. However, we did not receive as many completed evaluations as we would have liked.
On what did the success or failure of the project depend?	Not too much. The main focus of the project was to teach participants CCB skills. Receiving more evaluations would have helped in preparing for future Learning Forums.
What obstacles had to be overcome in order to achieve the results?	None.
Are you satisfied with the results you obtained? Why or why not?	We are satisfied with the preparation and distribution of the final report. However, we would have liked to have received more evaluation forms.

Anticipated Result: Increased community capacity building skills of the rural FES sector leaders.	
Did you achieve the anticipated results (or exceed them)? If so, how?	Yes, according to verbal and written participant feedback, they were satisfied with the value of the information provided as well as the relevance of the information to their own communities. Participants expressed motivation to apply knowledge/strategies in the near future.
On what did the success or failure of the project depend?	A large part of the success of this project depended on this result.

What obstacles had to be overcome in order to achieve the results?	Being the first Leadership Forum, the content and methods of delivery had never been tested.
Are you satisfied with the results you obtained? Why or why not?	Yes. We are satisfied because the participants were motivated to take action and learned the skills to do so.

3.2 Impacts

The anticipated benefits of this Forum were that participants would leave the event with key CCB and development skills which include:

- **Networks & Partnerships:** The creation of strong relationships resulting from working closely together and sharing experiences over the course of the Learning Forum. These networks and partnerships will prove to be invaluable to participants upon returning to their communities.
- **Ongoing Learning:** The Learning Forum was designed so that the content is easily adapted for working directly with individuals and grassroots organizations in rural communities. At the completion of the Forum, all participants were asked to make a commitment that they will take what they learned and work with relevant members of their community to move forward on CCB issues of relevance to them. They returned to their communities with a blank CCB Plan Workbook, which they learned to complete over the course of the Forum. This workbook also contains important, easily comprehensible information and resources about all relevant aspects of the community capacity building process.
- **Practical Community Capacity Building Skills:** The Forum was designed in such a way as to not only teach the participants practical CCB skills (i.e., how and when to engage politicians; how to communicate a message effectively within their communities), but to also help them overcome any anxieties about how to actually implement these skills by placing them in 'real life' scenarios (e.g., mock lobbying). These skills were conveyed in such a way (i.e., through presentations and through sections in the toolkit) as to be easily taught to any member of the participant's community who may benefit from them.

Were the benefits of the project as good as anticipated?

According to the verbal and written feedback of the participants, they felt the benefits they received were substantial. The participants clearly learned the skills needed to actively participate, and perpetuate, CCB activities in their rural communities.

Are you satisfied with the current level of benefits of the project? Why or why not?

C.A.F.E. would have liked to have the opportunity to do more follow-up with the participants of the Forum to help encourage and support them in implementing CCB activities in their communities. Unfortunately, there was only enough funding provided to create and convene the Forum, with minimal post-Forum activity.

Are the benefits of the project likely to increase in future? Why or why not?

Yes. Every year this Forum is held, more people will be interested in participating because they will have heard of the benefits from previous participants and, hopefully, have participated in CCB activities inspired by this Forum.

3.3 Dissemination of Results

Attached (electronically) are the following documents that were used to solicit participation in the Forum:

- C.A.F.E. Learning Forum Flyer which was distributed at the C.A.F.E. Annual Convention held in Edmonton November 12-15 2006 to all delegates
- Web address: www.canadian-fairs.ca Article; <http://www.canadian-fairs.ca/docs/fairnews/FairNewsFall06.pdf>

Attached (electronically) are the following documents (tools) that were used during the course of the Forum, and were made available in a binder format to all participants. All these materials are also available on the C.A.F.E. website:

- C.A.F.E. 2005/06 Annual Report
- Participant Package
 - Agenda
 - Speaker Biographies
 - Participant list
 - Evaluation Form
- “CCB Plan Workbook: A Guide for the FES Sector”
- “Effective Strategies for Legislative Advocacy”
- “Understanding the Legislative Process: Working with Politicians”
- “Working with the Media: A Guide for the FES Sector”
- “Developing Effective Media Communications Skills”
- “Interviews: Staying in Control & Answering Hard Questions”
- “Working with the Media: Do’s and Don’ts”

There were no press conferences or other official events associated with the Learning Forum, nor were there any newspaper or magazine articles published (or solicited).

4.0 PROJECT FUNDING

Review the anticipated budget of your project as indicated in Annexe B of the C.A and complete the “*Financial Summary Report*” template attached

4.1 Budget and Financial Partners

- Compare the initial and final budgets;
- Specify the contributions of the financial partners.

5.0 Conclusion

Upon review of the objectives, activities, results and benefits of the Learning Forum (all of which have been expanded upon in this report), C.A.F.E. is extremely pleased with the level of interest, participation and progress that was made in terms of imparting CCB skills to the FES sector. We are confident that should this event become annual, within three years there will be considerable tangible impacts seen in rural communities across Canada.

Lessons Learned

Funding: Most of the lessons we learned have to do with the procurement of funding. We learned that it is essential to obtain a clear picture, early on in the process, of whether or not there is a chance of obtaining project funding. Because of receiving very late notice of funding, we were unable to expend many resources for recruiting participants. Although we were happy with the turn out for the first year, there could have been many other participants who would have, in turn, returned to their communities to take on important CCB activities.

Speakers: We also learned that the calibre of speaker is very important. C.A.F.E. was fortunate in procuring top-notch speakers who had direct experience in CCB in the rural context, who were able to help make the practical connection between CCB theory and its implementation.

Appetite for CCB information: Through the Forum we were able to see that there is a definite need for CCB skills-training. The level and extent of participation from representatives of rural communities all across Canada clearly indicates that there is a desire and need to provide these skills and support for rural CCB initiatives.

Changes in the Future

In terms of how the 2-day event unfolded, we were very pleased with the mix of guest speakers, brainstorming, and skills training. Perhaps there was too much information to cover in two days, and, in future, a longer event could be planned. For future Forums, C.A.F.E. will seek more diversified sources of funding in order to ensure that the project will go forward without fear of needing to cancel due to lack of funds.

Advice for Others

It is important to be clear on the key objective(s) to be achieved and to be realistic about whether or not they can be achieved with the resources available. Perhaps others who are interested in similar endeavours would wish to focus on either building the skills or helping participants implement activities – but not both. Certainly, if funding is unlimited, it would be preferable to do both. But if funding is limited, picking one component to focus on could be beneficial.

Directions for Development

CCB training is an essential component to strengthening rural communities. Leaders need to be trained in how to make change happen and how to engage their communities. It is clearly worthwhile to continue with annual Learning Forums, encouraging more participation from rural communities across Canada. This would mean securing early funding and beginning recruitment early as well. It is also essential that there is support and encouragement for participants upon completion of the Forum and returning to their communities – putting theory into practice.