



strengthening communities

Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)

Community Handbook

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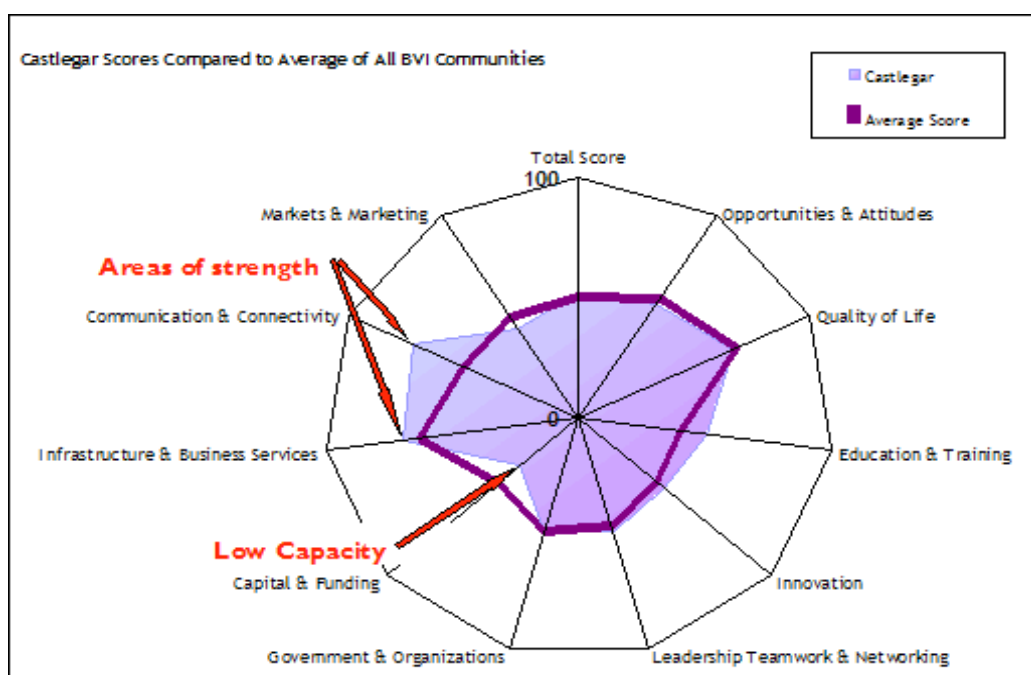
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Introduction

Do young adults (25-34) find this community attractive? Do we have a business-friendly council? Do business & education communities work together to provide timely, convenient training?

If you're not asking these questions, it's unlikely you're maximizing the potential of your community. Communities identifying their strengths, their gaps and their unexplored opportunities-- that is what's behind the BVI, a measurement and action process that helps communities harness their business potential. It has been designed to help communities assess their capacity to work with and support entrepreneurs, and to foster business growth. The BVI has been employed in communities across Canada (and recently in Australia) by a team based in Nelson, BC. The CIEL/BVI Team has been nominated for BC's top award in community economic development and most recently won an award as the region's most innovative organization.

The BVI measures the perceptions of community leaders, business people and citizens about the current business environment in the community and compares the scores to those from other communities using a unique graphical index (the Business Vitality *Index*). Here is an example of one of the graphs used in a BVI report:



Benefits of the BVI

- Diagnoses a community's business vitality in a visual way
- Find gaps and strengths in 10 key areas with an easy-to-read graphical design



- Quantifies 99 indicators important for entrepreneurial stimulation
- Allows community to build common understanding and set priorities for action
- Brings business people, leaders and citizens together to build capacity
- Helps move a community from indecisiveness to action
- Improves a community's business vitality allowing it to maximize business start-up, expansion and attraction

What is the process?

The two-phased process begins with an assessment session involving 20-40 invitees, representing the business sector (50%), community leaders (25%), and a cross-section of citizens (25%). This session consists of a questionnaire administered by the BVI Team, followed by a focus group session discussion on community readiness and responsiveness to entrepreneurs and small business.

Phase 2 is a focus and action session involving the entire community. This session is scheduled within four to eight weeks of the initial meeting, where results are presented to the community. At this meeting, the community is asked to set priority actions – either strengths the community wishes to build on, or weaknesses the community wishes to address – based on the results of the questionnaires and the discussion groups. Following the priority-setting exercise, a “reality check” is performed in small groups in order to determine if current resources, energy and circumstances are in place to move forward with determined actions.

In each community, a steering committee will work as the community sponsor, assisting in the coordination, organization and invitation of the participant survey group (made up of community leaders, business people and citizens). In addition, the community sponsor will be responsible for assisting the community in identifying courses of action. It is expected the steering committee will have representatives from a local economic development organization, municipality, business and other community organizations.

Ultimately, a written report is produced documenting entrepreneurial strengths and areas in which a community could improve. Communities are also considered in relation to other communities that have undertaken the BVI. The BVI is a good starting tool to show communities how business/entrepreneur friendly they are relative to other communities, and to position communities to take action to enhance their business vitality.

The 21st Century has been dubbed “The Entrepreneurial Century”.¹ There is a powerful link between entrepreneurship & economic performance.

Research suggests that entrepreneurs and small business are creating 60-80% of new jobs, representing 99.7% of all employers².

¹ Center for Rural Entrepreneurship. www.ruraleship.org

² Hall, D. (2001). *Jump start your business plan: Win more, lose less and make more money with your new products, services, sales & advertising*. Cincinnati: Brain Brew Books; U.S. Bureau of the Census; SBA Office of Advocacy. (2003). *Small business by the numbers*. www.sba.gov/advo; A Report of the President. (2001) *The state of Small Business*. Washington: United States Government Printing Office. www.sba.gov/advo/stts/stateofsb99_00.pdf

Who's involved and how?

Community participation and continued commitment to identified courses of action is key to the success of the Business Vitality Initiative. Each member of the community has an important role to play, as does the Community Sponsor and the BVI Team. The following section outlines who is involved in the initiative, and how.

Community Members

Community members will be asked to participate in the following ways:

Assessment Session (Session 1)

Involves attending a 3-hour session designed to assess your community's business vitality through a questionnaire and focus group. Approximately 20-30 community members are asked to participate in Session 1.

Focus Session (Session 2)

Involves attending a 3-hour session where results are presented and community members are guided through a priority setting exercise designed to focus on specific short-term actions. A reality check exercise is then used to assure adequate resources (human & financial) exist for the successful completion of actions. The entire community is asked to participate in Session 2. The BVI Team provides informal coaching support to the community following the initial session.

Moving Forward with Action

Based on prioritized short-term actions and the findings from the reality check exercise, community members are asked to join working groups according to interest and related abilities. Continued commitment to on-going short term projects is key to improving the business health of your community.



BC's rural communities often thought of as conservative and homogeneous, are anything but. They harbour an impressive display of talent, energy, community pride and an enormous "sense of community."³



Community Sponsors

The Community sponsor is the group in the community which has agreed to organize the process, work with the BVI team, & facilitate the selected actions ensuring they are completed.

Community sponsors will be asked to participate in the following ways:

Assessment Session

Involves securing the facility, audio-visual equipment, and food and drink for the session. In addition, community sponsors are responsible for selecting and inviting Session 1 participants, as well as informing the larger community through advertising and press releases. Community sponsors are also responsible for taking attendance at the session.

Focus Session

Involves securing the facility, audio-visual equipment, and food and drink for the session. In addition, community sponsors are responsible for distributing the findings from the assessment to Session 1 participants, as well as informing and inviting the larger community through advertising / press releases. Community sponsors will take attendance at Session 2.

Moving Forward with Action

Based on prioritized short-term actions and the findings from the reality check exercise, community sponsors are asked to support working groups on an on-going basis. The sponsor will continue to liaise with working groups and to ensure communication to the larger community on progress through advertising and press releases. The community sponsor will continue correspondence with the BVI team in order to report progress and identify additional resources where applicable.

It brought people together effectively to discuss the community candidly. It was an excellent tool for economic development planning and community to focus on what was most important. The community was pleased.

(Community Sponsor)

It was a realistic process which was beneficial to the community, and as a result business vitality is continually getting better.

(participant)

It brought the community together and pulled out priorities, allowed us to focus. It served as a catalyst for other initiatives. In addition it left the actions up to the community and allowed for whole community to focus.

(Community Sponsor)

The BVI Team

The BVI team will participate in the following ways:

Assessment Session

The BVI team will facilitate the Assessment Session. This involves describing the initiative and its relevance, administering the BVI questionnaire, and facilitating focus groups. The BVI team is also responsible for the analysis of findings and the production of an Assessment Report which the community sponsor will distribute.

Focus Session

The BVI team will facilitate the Focus Session. This involves reporting the findings from the assessment, guiding a priority setting exercise with the entire community, and facilitating a reality check exercise in focus groups. The BVI team will prepare a Focus Report based on the activities and findings from this session which will be distributed by the community sponsor.

Moving Forward with Action

The BVI team will support community sponsors and working groups for 2 years following the initial sessions by plugging in financial and 'how to' resources where applicable. .



Mike Stolte

“The BVI is a tool that helps to build prosperous entrepreneurial communities. There are two elements to entrepreneurial communities:

- *A community's ability to act collectively to take advantage of opportunities;*
- *Presence of a supportive environment that allows entrepreneurs to flourish.”*

Mike Stolte, CIEL Executive Director and BVI co-creator

Examples of how other communities have taken action

Community 1

- Marketing Coordinator for the whole valley (to find emphasis/ strengths, facilitate cooperation & networking)
- Brand community “Horticultural Centre of province/state”
- Clean up and develop the downtown area and community core
- “Buy Local” program
- Develop recreational potential (facilities, bike paths)

Community 2

- Formation of a community business group to look at possibilities
- Use community watershed story to create a community “brand”. (Market the story)
- Renovate community hall(s)
- Plan around ideal set-up of community art(isan’s) gallery
- Accommodation and camping facility development

Community 3

- Regional development agency to offer more business courses in the area around needs of community business
- Opportunities for newcomers to meet old and bedroom commuters to become part of the community
- Opportunity identification session with young people (under 40)
- Customer service training

Community 4

- Community Foundation
- Increase cooperation between business, government, and citizens by working together on a project
- Opportunity Identification Sessions (one for youth and one for broader community)
- Buy local campaign or program

Community 5

- Buy local campaign
- Networking sessions more regularly among community groups and businesses
- “Did you know” citizen ambassador program
- Joint marketing session – best practices - with Chamber as catalyst

Community 6

- Improve cooperation and communication between stakeholders (business, council, residents)

- Promote tourism and cultural assets
- Buy local program

Community 7

- Joint marketing of products and services by business
- Education of community on benefits of new business
- Develop community brand / market the community
- Build community spirit through festivals / projects

Community 8

- Drafting some short-term tourism actions & striking a tourism action group specifically around addressing high quality recreational opportunities
- Develop strategy to attract more capital / possibility of cooperative financing for services community identifies as needing / community identifies potential sources of equity in the community/ Meetings between area lenders and businesses to raise awareness of lending options
- Improve telecommunications / develop telecommunications plan (look at cooperative structure for bringing in high speed (fibre optics))
- Develop brand around beauty / work ethic / independent attitude / creativity / seclusion ('find us if you can' where arts & a pioneer spirit meet the mountains)
- Coordinated or cooperative marketing effort for local products or services (e.g. tourism operators, artisans)

Community 9

- Use landfill/methane/waste management as a catalyst for innovation, education & economic development
- Increase presence of night policing
- Work on a beautification/pride project that increases cooperation among business, residents and government
- Create volunteer attraction/retention/recognition and leadership identification program for community to combat burnout
- Improve customer service (training for front-line employees)

What can I expect from the BVI?

Assess

The assessment of your community's business vitality is based on your perceptions on 99 indicators known to affect business health. The first session is 3 hours in length and involves the completion of an extensive questionnaire, coupled with focus groups. A cross-section of community members will be invited to this session. The assessment phase is an important part of the BVI process because it allows your community to benchmark its current vitality. The assessment is a necessary starting point for improvement efforts as it helps to identify your community's strengths and weaknesses.



Focus

The focus component is also a key part of the BVI. This 3-hour session is open to the entire community where results from the assessment are presented, priorities are set, and a reality check focuses energy and expertise on prioritized actions. By the end of this session your community will have prioritized between 3-5 short-term, specific courses of action to get started on. Working groups will be formed and the community sponsor will be positioned to guide future efforts. You are now ready to move into action!



Act

With working groups in place, the community sponsor will monitor progress and plug in supports where necessary. In addition, the community sponsor will assure groups are on track with the larger community vision, and that successes are shared across groups and to the larger community. The BVI team will also be available to assist sponsors in locating financial and 'how to' resources. Staying positive, conducting effective meetings, following a shared leadership model, and on-going collaboration with other community members will assist in the implementation of successful community-based projects.





Why would our community want to improve its business vitality?

The Context of an Increasingly Competitive Global Economy

A key feature of the new knowledge-based economy is the increased flow of information and goods on a global scale. This opening of markets has the potential to constrain or to enhance a local economy, depending on community vision & action. For example, if you spend your money at the big box store in the closest big city, your local economy loses (this is termed leakage). If on the other hand, you spend your money locally and at the same time export goods from your business to external markets, your economy benefits. The idea is to keep the pipe line open to exports while avoiding leakage. Increased competition is another feature of the new economy, along with a shift from resource-based to knowledge-based. More simply put, resource sectors, such as forestry and mining, are being replaced by knowledge-based industries, often utilizing new technology, coupled with innovative application. With adequate infrastructure to allow the flow of goods and information into and out of the area, the potential for the revitalization of rural Canada presents itself. In addition, a young skilled population looking to raise a family in a safe and beautiful place can be attracted to invigorate rural economies. With careful planning, a community can ensure that the economy works for them.

Studies show that 80-90% of jobs are generated from retaining and expanding business within a community.⁴ Increasingly, research shows entrepreneurs fare better in supportive communities with dynamic business support organizations.⁵

What If We Don't Want Economic Growth?

Some communities may like things just the way they are. Keeping things just the same also takes careful planning and maintenance. In the new economy, doing nothing will not allow you to stay right where you are in terms of economic vitality. In fact, doing nothing to maintain your economic health is much the same as doing nothing to maintain your physical health--eventually lack of care catches up to you. In terms of community business vitality, your local economy will suffer if you don't fertilize the soil.

The BVI team was nominated for the Don McMillan Award in 2003, British Columbia's top community economic development award.

What influences the business health of a community?

The 99 indicators in the BVI questionnaire are based on an extensive literature review of more than 60 studies of business, community, entrepreneurial and economic development, coupled with expertise gained from years of practice in the field of Community Economic Development. The indicators are broken down into 10 sections, as follows:

Section	Definition	Key Elements
<i>Opportunities & Attitudes</i>	The ability of the community and its citizens to recognize, take action, and follow through on available opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Entrepreneurial mindset ✓ Embracing opportunity ✓ Motivated workforce
<i>Quality of Life</i>	The ability of the community to attract & retain businesses & citizens, especially those who are young, skilled workers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Health & education ✓ Arts & culture ✓ Lifestyle opportunities ✓ Commitment to business ✓ Daily services
<i>Education & Training</i>	The ability of the community to develop entrepreneurial skills & attitudes in the non-business population, and to upgrade skills in the business community in order to remain competitive in larger markets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ongoing skills & personal development ✓ Entrepreneurial development ✓ Access to business training ✓ Effectiveness & quality of training
<i>Innovation</i>	The ability of the community to innovate, that is, think of and develop new ideas. Consideration of new ideas increases the ability of the community to adapt to changes, recognize unusual and new opportunities and technologies, and share ideas with like-minded people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Information access ✓ Attitude toward innovation ✓ Innovation in the community ✓ Application of innovation
<i>Leadership, Teamwork & Networking</i>	The ability of the community to take action on an idea or opportunity as a whole group, with good leadership, effective teamwork, and clear communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Community leadership & teamwork ✓ Networking & communication ✓ Leadership development ✓ Opportunities ✓ Attitudes toward community cooperation

<p>Government & Organizations</p>	<p>The ability of local governments and other organizations to work with business to design processes and programs that make it as easy as possible to start or expand a business.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Governing body's attitude toward business ✓ Government assistance & processes ✓ Availability of business support & programs ✓ Delivery of business development support & programs
<p>Capital & Funding</p>	<p>The ability of the community to financially support entrepreneurs through ensuring access to capital, and educating businesses about financial management and supports.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lenders' ability to understand & work with entrepreneurs ✓ Businesses' access to & management of capital ✓ Types of capital
<p>Infrastructure & Business Services</p>	<p>The ability of the community to provide necessary and high quality support services and infrastructure to business at reasonable costs, allowing businesses to be as competitive as possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Presence of a business core (cluster) ✓ Existence of business services ✓ Adequacy of utilities for business ✓ Availability of business space
<p>Communications & Connectivity</p>	<p>The ability of businesses to connect with each other and with outside markets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Methods of communication ✓ Transportation services within community ✓ Inter-community transportation ✓ Shipping & freighting
<p>Markets & Marketing</p>	<p>The ability of businesses to capture and expand markets, both locally, regionally, and outside the region, thus sustaining and building local wealth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Market savvy ✓ Market reputation ✓ Local marketing ✓ Regional marketing

How can we improve our community's business health?

In working with rural communities, the CIEL team has noted a number of common strengths and challenges. Based on these commonalities, the following recommendations, put forward in broad themes, will serve to build prosperous entrepreneurial communities throughout rural Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

Opportunities

Community entrepreneurship rests on the ability of a community to be able to identify and act on opportunities in a strategic manner. Capital, funding, education, and innovation each offer opportunities for improvement.

Capital & Funding – Access to funding has historically been an issue in rural communities. However, issues around capital (i.e. the ability of business to understand and utilize capital, looking at alternative capitalization methods) must be addressed in a meaningful way through education, utilizing mentors experienced in finance, encouraging investors, and promoting forums which allow specific knowledge around capital to be shared and networks to be built, etc.

Education - Future education and training efforts should make use of existing community-based organizations (i.e. colleges, economic development organizations, youth centres, etc.), assure connection to closest college or university, be responsive to local needs, and reflect a diversity of learning and training opportunities & methods. In addition, efforts should be placed on improving attitudes toward continuous skill development and training and lifelong learning recognizing that the provision of opportunities for learning alone will not be sufficient.

Innovation - Promote attitudes that encourage and acknowledge the importance of innovation within the new knowledge-based economy. Communities should be encouraged to identify and utilize key assets as catalysts (e.g. community forests, adding value to agricultural products, or existing innovative businesses within the community) for innovation, education and economic development. More attention needs to be paid to the importance of innovation as a key priority area in all communities.

Attitudes

Believe it or not, attitudes do make a big difference! Youth inclusion, change-readiness, culture & attitudes, and vision each offer possible broad directions for future community-based efforts.

Youth Inclusion - Efforts should be made to include and engage youth in a meaningful way to identify youth opportunities in entrepreneurship, education, and recreation. Entrepreneurial support in rural communities is viewed as an effective way of not only retaining youth, but attracting them.⁶

Change-readiness - A switch in thinking is necessary from 'what's been lost' to 'how can we use our assets for future growth?' to address burnout and negativity, & to build community spirit. This could be accomplished by profiling successful community initiatives, highlighting success stories of residents, or by using other similar communities as role models.

Entrepreneurial Culture - Efforts should be made to create or enhance a culture that encourages entrepreneurs, specifically recognizing and rewarding entrepreneurs, K-12 entrepreneurial programs, accessing mentors from the community to share valuable experiences for 'would be' and existing entrepreneurs. The importance of entrepreneurs and small businesses needs to be recognized within the community as necessary for community and economic growth.⁷ It should be made clear that this is a long-term approach to building sustainable and prosperous communities and that quick economic fixes are unlikely to be found or solve community problems and build capacity.

Access – Focus - Act - Communities should be encouraged to objectively assess their entrepreneurial capacity through instruments like the Business Vitality Initiative in order to build self-sustaining, prosperous entrepreneurial communities. Ideally, communities should aim to effectively self-assess, lay out plans, visions & targeted measures, and take action.

Networking

Having a good attitude and being able to identify opportunity may not be enough to stimulate economic growth. The ability to network, cooperate, and operate under a shared-leadership model are also key to improving your community's business health.

Networking - Encourage the formation of formal and informal networks through forums, community events, and breakfast meetings, etc. between and among businesses, business support organizations, community organizations, government and citizens.



Cooperation - Encourage more cooperation within communities and especially regionally, possibly starting through small trust building projects with little political risk. More incentives should be made available for efforts aimed at creating regional collaboration and co-operation, looking to case studies of regions that have benefited economically through a regional approach.

Shared Leadership - Efforts should be made at renewing leadership in the community through rewards, success stories, mentoring opportunities, tapping into the talent and expertise of new residents and others traditionally not involved. A specific program recognizing and rewarding community entrepreneurs – those people who use entrepreneurial skills to build communities – should be initiated at the national, provincial/state and/or regional/local level.

11 Tips to BVI Success

A comprehensive and accurate assessment is crucial.

Because the assessment is based on perceptions, it is important that you take the time to complete each section of the questionnaire carefully and honestly. An accurate assessment is a necessary starting point for community action.

Stay positive and committed to working together.

Because working together as a community is a necessary component of the improvement of business health, staying positive and committed to working together will assure success. Some compromise may be required and baggage is best left at the door.

Recruit your friends, neighbours and new members of the community.

Session 1 participants play a key role in assuring a good turn out at Session 2, which in turn is key to community ownership, which is necessary for collective action. BVI participants can help by recruiting other community members, especially those not traditionally involved in community initiatives (it is a good way to get some fresh energy and perspective).

Bite off small pieces – keep actions short term and specific.

Keep initial projects small in order to build capacity for the next series of longer-term courses of action. Past participants report that even though they felt invigorated following initial sessions, the reality of already hectic work days dampened projected successes. Starting out with short term specific actions is an excellent starting point.

Stay focused and organized in your working groups.

Make sure you identify a working group member that will communicate group activities to the community sponsor. This will help the community sponsor to assure projects are moving in complementary fashion and overlap is avoided. In addition, open communication encourages collaboration across working groups.

Be open and envision the possibilities.

New ideas are a good thing. Working collectively as a community is a powerful process, one which will allow your community to succeed at projects that once seemed out of reach. The consideration of new ideas is key to an innovative

*It developed capacity building in the community at a time when the community realized it needed to be more independent and less reliant on government.
(Community Sponsor)*

*The process was very beneficial.
The research document has served as a helpful planning and funding tool.
It provides a current assessment.
Moving on action is slower than expected.
(Participant)*

There was much enthusiasm following the BVI sessions and the community was somewhat overly optimistic. We're realized the need to focus on one thing at a time in order to avoid burnout. Also,



the process is ongoing and has proved to take longer than we thought.
(Participant)

future vision.

Stay committed to shared leadership.

Previous participants noted the problem of volunteer burnout. Frustration was expressed over the fact that the same people seem to be the ones at all the meetings. The responsibility here rests on those citizens currently active AND those currently inactive in community life. Those currently active could recruit other citizens, assuring their input would be valued and beneficial to the community. Active citizens could also share leadership positions in order to encourage increased involvement by others. Inactive citizens could rise to the challenge and volunteer their time to a joint community project.

Keep everyone informed and encourage a cross-section of community involvement.

Momentum is built from the initial sessions, but this momentum needs to be nurtured. Formal and informal communication is key to keeping this momentum going. Involved citizens can spread the word on the assessment and working group progress in their everyday interactions, while community sponsors can use advertisements and press releases to assure the community is informed.

Celebrate success and build incentives into meetings.

It is amazing how much community work builds up one's appetite, especially when meetings are held around dinner time. Make sure there is plenty of food, drink, and praise to keep energy and spirits replenished. The community sponsor will assure ample food and drink at the first 2 sessions, the working groups are responsible for food and drink after that.

Change is slow, so reflexivity is necessary.

Remember that change at the community level is often much slower than expected. Recognize change as slow-moving and don't get discouraged. Be ready to revisit action plans as sometimes things change and with that that change comes a shuffling of priorities. This is why keeping lines of communication open with other working groups is key.

Set reasonable expectations

The success of the BVI depends on the energy and commitment of the community, especially following through on identified actions. The BVI is a tool specifically designed to assess business friendliness and to identify short-term courses of action. As such, the tool is not a substitute for comprehensive community planning (see Evolution of Communities Matrix in this manual).

An unexpected result was getting a few businesses that would normally not participate involved in the process. The BVI had an impact in that we were pushed to take a look – and we have people talking about our community. There are always people out there questioning our methods and goals, but it gives us the opportunity to move forward. In terms of advice for other communities, always remain positive even in the face of adversity – don't let the negative people 'get to you', nothing ventured, nothing gained.

(Community Sponsor)

Community Sponsor Resources

Sponsor Responsibilities

Week 1	
1. Pre-Assessment Meeting After the contact has been signed with the community sponsor, there will be a meeting with the BVI Team to review the process, provide orientation to sponsors, review responsibilities, timeline, and plan Session 1 including the identification of participants (see <i>Participant Selection and Invitation Process</i>).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weeks 2-3	
Preparation for Assessment Session (Session 1)	
Distribute <i>Participant Invitation Letter</i> (sample letter in community manual) to identified Session 1 participants (as determined at Pre-Assessment Meeting). It is recommended that identified Session 1 participants are invited in person or by phone	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hall / Meeting room rental	<input type="checkbox"/>
Catering – recommend simply snacks such as sandwiches, veggie & dip tray, coffee, tea and juice – budgeting for \$5 / person)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advertising in local media to inform community of initiative (sample press releases provided in community manual)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrange for audio-visual materials - including LCD projector, screen, flip chart with paper and markers, masking tape, extension chord, attendance sheet, name tags	<input type="checkbox"/>
Follow-up with invited Session 1 participants to confirm attendance.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Produce any necessary materials (e.g. BVI Summary, other relevant community initiatives) for Session 1 participants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Invite local media to Session 1 in order to interview community sponsors / BVI Team (invite approximately 45 minutes prior to start of Session 1)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Week 4	
2. Assessment Session (Session 1) This 3-hour session will bring 20-40 community members together in order to assess business vitality through a comprehensive questionnaire and focus groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assure food and audio-visual requirements are met	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introduce the BVI Team and Community Sponsors	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assure attendance sheets are completed by all participants (including preferred method of communication / distribution of findings)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Week 5-7	
Preparation for Focus Session (Session 2)	
Hall / Meeting room rental	<input type="checkbox"/>
Catering – same as Session 1 (budgeting \$5 / person)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advertising in local media to inform community of initiative, to report findings from the Assessment Session, and to invite the entire community to the Focus Session (Session 2) (sample press releases provided in community manual)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personally invite as many community members as possible to Session 2. Confirm attendance if possible.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrange for audio-visual materials - including LCD projector, screen, flip chart with paper and markers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Follow-up with Session 1 participants to confirm attendance at Session 2 (ask participants to bring at least one other community member with them).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Distribute findings to Session 1 participants	<input type="checkbox"/>
Invite local media to Session 1 in order to interview community sponsors / BVI Team (invite approximately 45 minutes prior to start of Session 1)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Week 8	
3. Focus Session (Session 2) This 3-hour session will bring the entire community together in order to review assessment findings, prioritize short-term courses of action, to assess feasibility of prioritized projects, and to form working groups for moving forward on identified courses of action.	
Assure food and audio-visual requirements are met	<input type="checkbox"/>
Introduce the BVI Team and Community Sponsors	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assure attendance sheets are completed by all participants (including preferred method of communication / distribution of findings)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assist in the formation of working groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Week 9-12 (and beyond)	
4. Follow-up with Action The community sponsor is responsible for assuring the formation of working groups, assuring communication within and across working groups, and providing on-going support.	
Continue to assist in the formation of working groups (connect talent and expertise with related projects). Coach groups on effective meeting strategies / shared leadership in order to avoid volunteer burnout.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure a communication plan is developed and followed between working groups, the community sponsor, and the BVI Team on an on-going basis. Ideally, working groups will remain informed on the progress of other groups (helps to sustain momentum).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check in with BVI Team as necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reassess prioritized courses of action where / when necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assist with evaluation as required.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant Selection and Invitation Process

A key benefit of this process is bringing together people who may have not had the opportunity to network. It gives communities an opportunity to bring new people into the fold, especially people that are relatively new to the community (they may be new leaders).

Invitation Process:

- Review *Community Sponsors Responsibilities*.
- The ideal sample size is 30 individuals. The ideal composition is 50% business owners, 25% community leaders, and 25% citizens (see examples below).
- Contact local media 2 weeks prior to session – provide information on the upcoming sessions (creating a buzz in the community will encourage a solid turnout); invite media to conduct interviews prior to session (at least 30 minutes prior to start)
- Select approximately 40-50 potential participants according to ideal composition, aiming for a sample size of 30.
- Format *Participant Introduction Letter* (insert sponsor's logo, insert community-specific information in highlighted sections)
- Send out invitations approximately 2 weeks in advance via letter, email, or fax
- Follow-up on invitations by contacting individuals approximately 1 week prior to session (via phone or in person); identify individual as a key stakeholder, provide additional information (if necessary), and request RSVP (try to solidify numbers prior to session).

This is an opportunity to recruit new leaders and to introduce sectors of the economy that rarely meet. The ideal composition is:

- **50% Business Owners**, including: 5 top employers, downtown businesses, tourism businesses, Chamber staff &/or directors, tourism association, other local business associations, economic development office, service businesses, retail businesses, manufacturing businesses, knowledge-based businesses, local/regional development staff &/or board, other key businesses in community, small businesses.
- **25% Community Leaders**, including: municipal politicians & staff (responsible for development), provincial/state & federal/commonwealth elected representatives, school district / school representatives, local college / university, principals & other educational leaders, business leaders, culture leaders, recreation leaders, environmental leaders, health & social service leaders).
- **25% Citizens** representing a cross-section of citizens, including: youth / youth association, seniors / seniors groups, museums / art gallery, new arrivals in town, service groups.



Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Is (Name of Community) Business Friendly? The Business Vitality Initiative (BVI) is Coming

(Name of Community)

Do young adults (25-34) find this community attractive? Do we have a business-friendly council? Do business & education communities work together to provide timely, convenient training?

"If you're not asking these questions, it's unlikely you are maximizing the potential of your community," explains Mike Stolte, co-creator of the **Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)** and Executive Director of the **Centre for Innovative and Entrepreneurial Leadership (CIEL)**, based in Nelson, BC, Canada. Stolte asserts that communities must identify their strengths, their gaps and their unexplored opportunities. This is what's behind the BVI, a measurement and action process that helps communities harness their business potential. It has been designed to help communities assess their capacity to work with and support entrepreneurs, and to foster business growth. The assessment measures the perceptions of community leaders, business people and citizens about the current business environment in the community. It has been employed in communities in Canada and Australia over the last five years.

(Names of organizations) are the sponsors of the BVI. An invitation-only Assessment Session will happen on *(date)*. A sampling of local businesses, community leaders and others representative of the community will participate in a 3-hour community meeting, involving a questionnaire and focus group session. A follow-up Focus & Action Session, open to all community members, will be held 6 to 8 weeks later. At this session results will be shared with the community and possible actions for improving business vitality will be decided upon.

Benefits of the BVI

- Diagnoses community's entrepreneurial capacity in a visual way
- Find gaps and strengths in 10 key areas with an easy-to-read graphical design
- Quantifies 100 indicators important for entrepreneurial stimulation
- Allows community to build common understanding and move forward and set priorities for action
- Brings business people, leaders and citizens together to build capacity
- Allows comparison to other communities
- Marries perceptions with hard data to get an accurate reading of community
- Process uses the best features of quantitative, qualitative and focus group research
- Recruits new volunteers
- Helps move a community from indecisiveness to action
- Gets community talking
- Improves a community's business vitality allowing it to maximize business start-up, expansion and attraction



Contact Information:

For further information on the BVI please contact:

Mike Stolte, Executive Director
Centre for Innovative and Entrepreneurial Leadership (CIEL)
Nelson, BC, CANADA
1-250-352-9192 x 221, 1-888-352-9192 toll-free in North America
mstolte@theCIEL.com
www.theciel.com

(Add contact information for local organizer...)



Sample Letter of Invitation

[INSERT SPONSOR and BVI LOGOS]

[insert date]

Dear [insert name],

[insert names of sponsor organizations] invite you to participate in **The Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)** on [insert date, time and location]

Do young adults (25-34) find this community attractive? Do we have a business-friendly council?
Do business & education communities work together to provide timely, convenient training?

“If you're not asking these questions, it's unlikely you are maximizing the potential of your community,” explains Mike Stolte, co-creator of the Business Vitality Initiative (BVI), and the Executive Director of the **Centre for Innovative & Entrepreneurial Leadership (CIEL)** based in Nelson, B.C.

Stolte asserts that communities must identify their strengths, their gaps and their unexplored opportunities. This is what's behind the BVI, a measurement and action process that helps communities harness their business potential.

The BVI has been designed to help communities assess their capacity to work with and support entrepreneurs, and to foster business growth. The assessment measures the perceptions of community leaders, business people and citizens about the current business environment in the community and compares the results to those of similar communities. The BVI has been employed in communities across Canada since its introduction in 2001.

Your community's assessment session will consist of a one-hour questionnaire administered by the BVI team, followed by a short networking and refreshment break. After the break, there will be a one-hour focus group session to discuss your community's readiness for and responsiveness to entrepreneurs and small business. The entire session will last approximately 3 hours.

A follow-up, or Focus Session, will be scheduled approximately one to two months after the initial meeting. At this session, you, along with the rest of the community, will be positioned to set priorities – either strengths the community wishes to build on, or weaknesses the community wishes to address – based on the results of the assessment. A “reality check” will be performed on the priorities at the second meeting to determine the community's ability to carry out priorities given the community's current resources, energy and circumstances.

The third, or Action Stage, will follow. This is where the community takes the reins to move forward on selected actions to improve business friendliness.

Your participation will not only help your community now, but will also provide an important benchmark for the community to use in the future. Please confirm your attendance with (*insert name and deadline*).

Sincerely,

About CIEL

CIEL assists in creating vibrant, vital communities by using unique assessments and community processes to bring communities to action. We develop innovative [tools and services](#) to help communities, organizations, and individuals become more dynamic and entrepreneurial and to foster strong, responsive leadership.



CIEL is a national non-profit located in Nelson, in the beautiful Selkirk Mountains of South Eastern British Columbia in Canada. Years of working with many small communities have enabled us to take the lessons we learned locally to communities across Canada, the US, Australia and elsewhere. The CIEL organizational culture encourages innovation, creativity and inspiration and embraces life-long learning. We apply these characteristics to the development and implementation of our [tools and services](#).

In recent years, CIEL has been called upon to make national presentations to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the National Rural Conference (Government of Canada), and the Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNET).

In addition, CIEL has built custom tools and programs on community vitality, entrepreneurship and leadership on request from the Government of Canada and various provincial, regional and local organizations.

While working at a national level, CIEL has its roots in building practical, cost-effective solutions for organizations and communities. CIEL began as part of a community-based organization, the [Community Futures Development Corporation of Central Kootenay](#). Because of the success of its programs at a community and regional level, it has become a self-sustaining organization dedicated to building entrepreneurship, innovation and strong, responsive leadership in communities and organizations across Canada.

Mike Stolte – Executive Director of CIEL Bio

Mike is the Executive Director of CIEL (www.theCIEL.com) an organization devoted to innovation, entrepreneurship & leadership in communities based in Nelson, British Columbia, Canada. Mike is the co-creator of many innovative strategic planning tools and processes for communities including the Business Vitality Initiative (BVI), the Community Vitality Initiative (CVI), and the Communities Matrix, a model used around the world to determine stages of community readiness. Mike has spent many years working in the field of community, business and economic development, has emceed & facilitated several national conferences and think tanks, and has written many articles and publications in the field.



Over the past few years Mike has made presentations in Australia, the United States, New Zealand and across Canada often speaking on community readiness, and the need for creating entrepreneurial and vital communities. His work has been featured in *Canadian Living* magazine, on the CBC and by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Mike is the current president of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF), on the steering committee of the National Rural Research Network (NRRN) of Canada and is a past member of the Co-operative Development Initiative of Canada. He holds degrees from Carleton University (MA in Public Administration) and the University of Western Ontario (Economics).

During his spare time Mike enjoys photography and videography, and participates in kayaking, running, cross country skiing and hockey with his family.

10 Principles for a Vital Community

Working in community is a little like working with Sybil, the character with 16 very different personalities. It's tough to work with this diversity and diversity of agendas, especially in an era where the cult of the individual seems to be winning out over doing things on a community or collective level. Here's a collection of 10 sound principles to consider in your efforts to inject some vitality into your community.

1. The solutions are yours.

Don't look to senior levels of government to solve the problems of the community. While they can often offer resources, it's the members of the community who are more in touch with the community needs and have the long-term interest in making it a better place to live and work.

2. Small successes.

Too many communities go for the home run without ever having picked up a bat. In order to do large projects or those of a strategic nature, small successes/projects (I would recommend those with low political risk) should be used to build relationships, trust and a track record of success, essential elements for the bigger tasks. Eventually communities should be able to take on strategic projects and evolve to strategic community planning. The metaphor of crawling -walking - running is an effective way of illustrating the concept. Without some successes at the earlier levels, this evolution is impossible.

3. Find the passion in the community.

There's no sense taking on projects or making plans if leaders or community members aren't chomping at the bit to get the actions done. Too many community projects get started because there's funding available. It's better to find the passion. Other resources, especially money, tends to be easier to come by if the community's passions have been identified.

4. Bring leaders and influential people in the community together for a common purpose.

6. Take stock.

Find out where the communities stands or what shape it is in. When one feels badly and goes to the Dr. the doctor doesn't give the patient a pill. He/she runs a battery of tests (cardiovascular health, blood tests, etc.) & objectively assesses what is out of kilter in the patient. Taking stock involves objectively assessing opportunities, assets (Human, physical, etc.), threats and weaknesses. (This is what we try to do with the BVI in a very targeted & graphical way in order to build a common understanding of where the community stands).

7. Focus.

Like almost any other endeavor in life, focus is crucial. Too many communities spread out energy and resources on diverse outcomes.

8. Don't look for silver bullets.

Too many communities believe there is an easy answer. Community building is a long-term process. It's far easier to destroy community than to build it. However, once a strong foundation of community-building success has been developed, a community is much stronger, self-sufficient, and resilient.

9. Look for the catalytic leaders and organizations to assist in leading.

An African study showed that every community champion recruited brought 10 new leaders to the community. Good leaders or influential people, & their ability to work together for the needs of the larger community, are what separates strong

<p>Too often, different sectors of the community do their own thing without ever considering what other community groups may be doing. This 'silo' mentality must be overcome in order to effectively build bridges and build a strong sense of community.</p> <p>5. Build consensus. Easier said than done. As mentioned earlier, projects with low risk but visible outcomes are best to try in communities without a track record of success. An inclusive, well-facilitated process helps in building consensus.</p>	<p>communities from weak.</p> <p>10. Perform a reality check. Many community-building exercises do not accurately take into account community energy, resources, passion, leadership and timing.</p>
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By Mike Stolte – Originally published in Canadian Living Magazine