

Proposal Brief: RDI for Local Government

Building Regional Resilience through Informed Decision-making, Collaborative Action and Capacity Building

Background

The Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute (RDI) was established in July 2011, built on an 8-year partnership agreement between Columbia Basin Trust (CBT) and Selkirk College. This partnership agreement ends in 2019. The mandate of the RDI is to support evidence-based decision-making in the Columbia Basin-Boundary region through the provision of information, applied research, and related outreach and extension. CBT has provided core funding to the RDI which has been leveraged with other funding sources allowing the RDI to expand its research agenda. Selkirk College has contributed infrastructure and operational support, including the BC Regional Innovation Chair in Rural Economic Development (RIC) who directs the RDI's research agenda. The RIC is an endowed research chair position that was established in 2005 resulting from \$1.5 million raised by Selkirk College and matched with \$1.5 million from the Provincial Government's Leading Edge Foundation. By supporting evidence-based planning and decision-making, innovation, and technology transfer, the RIC portfolio aims to improve the economic climate of rural communities. The RIC's research agenda is based on regional priorities and partnerships with local and regional organizations and businesses. Efforts have been made to align the RIC and RDI research agendas.

Since its inception, the RDI has delivered the State of the Basin initiative, hosted training and learning events, supported co-op student placements, and has undertaken a number of regionally relevant applied research projects, including:

- Regional Food Systems
- Business Retention and Expansion
- Employment Lands
- SME Adoption of Digital Technologies
- Climate Adaptation
- Workforce Development

Over \$3 million in research and rural development projects have been undertaken and the RDI has and continues to work in partnership with the regions' colleges to advance initiatives such as the Kootenay Workforce Development Initiative – a College of the Rockies-Selkirk College joint-initiative. The RDI's strategic priorities are up for renewal in 2018. The 2014-17 priorities included:

- Consolidate, identify gaps and build regional knowledge
- Undertake applied rural development focused research
- Support the access, use and application of RDI research and tools
- Support meaningful applied research collaboration amongst educational institutions and Columbia Basin Trust

An external evaluation conducted on the RDI in 2017 revealed there is a healthy foundation of familiarity with the RDI across target client groups (local government, economic, social, cultural and environmental non-profits), the RDI is recognized as a hub of regional information, and RDI products and services have effectively supported a multitude of planning and development projects. However, evaluation findings suggest that a narrowing of focus with respect to target audience and more targeted provision of products and services could position the RDI for improved impact moving forward. A key opportunity for improvement lies in being able to ensure a strong match between the products and services the RDI provides and the needs of the communities it serves.

RDI 2.0

With this knowledge in hand and the upcoming end of the CBT partnership agreement, the RDI proposes a **shift to focus its efforts on meeting the needs of local government partners** – tailoring projects, products and services more directly. This proposed shift is based on the recognition that the RDI's broad regional mandate has made it difficult to address the emerging research needs of its local government partners. The new approach would include targeted, responsive and increased levels of direct support to help local government make informed decisions, test innovative approaches through pilot projects, and build regional capacity to tackle complex issues in a coordinated way.

In addition to bringing \$500,000 in provincial funding into the region, the BC Rural Dividend proposal submission is providing us with the opportunity to test a new and sustainable direction for the RDI. Building on this new direction, the following draft strategic priorities are proposed for this project and for the RDI's renewed 2018-2022 Strategic Plan:

1. support informed decision-making by providing local government with direct research support designed to deliver concrete actions and/or tangible benefits;
2. address complex regionally-relevant challenges and opportunities by undertaking pilot projects; and
3. build regional capacity through the provision of training and collaborative learning opportunities.

Required Contributions and Proposed Budget

The Rural Dividend grant requires that partners contribute both cash and in-kind contributions. The project budget includes \$500,000 from the BC Rural Dividend grant, \$100,000 from the CBT/RDI 2018-19 final year budget, and \$150,000 cash from local government partners. The RDI is contributing in-kind time of the RIC and an additional \$25,000 annually in the form of data purchases and data analytic software and databases. Selkirk College and College of the Rockies are each providing \$10,000 of in-kind contributions. The requested contribution from the Regional Districts includes:

- \$40,000 cash over the course of the 2-year project (\$20,000 per year)
- \$15,000 in-kind time to scope research projects, engage in pilot projects, and participate in training and collaborative learning

Local government partners may decide to contribute at the municipal or rural electoral area scale instead of / or in addition to the regional district scale. Additionally, local governments may tie this into their existing economic development budgets to support upcoming research (e.g. BRE, employment lands analysis, economic impact analysis).

Cash contributions will yield a 50% return on investment in the form of 'funder-defined' direct research support regardless of the funding amount (a municipal government may choose to contribute \$15,000 over 2 years which would equal \$22,500 in direct research support). A Regional District scale or 'consortium' contribution of \$40,000 over 2 years would also qualify for **a co-op student placement** and **\$20,000 in seed funding for pilot projects** – including scoping and proposal development support (e.g. \$20,000 seed funding can translate into \$200,000 in BC Rural Dividend funding for 2 pilot projects). Related funding resolutions need to be secured by January 31, 2018.

RDI 2.0 Budget - 2018-20

Cash Contributions		Total
RDI/CBT Contribution		100,000
Local Government Contribution		150,000
BC Rural Dividend Grant		500,000
	Total	750,000
Expenses		Budget
Local Government Defined Direct Research Support		225,000
Regional Research		50,000
Innovation Seed Fund for Pilot Projects		100,000
Training and Collaborative Learning		100,000
Project Manager Salary (50%)		100,000
Rural Development Internships (5 co-ops x \$10,000)		50,000
Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant		10,000
LCDDTS (partner applicant) administrative fee		20,000
Operating costs - supplies, capital, travel, meetings, software, etc.		25,000
	Subtotal	680,000
	Overhead (10%)	70,000
	Total	750,000