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Resident Retention and Attraction Guidebook for Rural British Columbia

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About the Guidebook

This guidebook is for rural communities interested in resident retention and attraction (RRA) who need:

- A deeper understanding of the concept
- Help with planning and implementing projects
- Guidance with resources
- Ideas and inspiration

Planners, practitioners, and other personnel will benefit from the guidance in this resource.

The guidebook provides tools, information, tips, and guiding questions. Each section includes information to generate ideas that rural communities can adapt and use.

Community case studies are examples of RRA and provide context and inspiration. You will find them in the guidebook near this icon:



A series of worksheets are available for RRA practitioners to work through the steps and organize their results. You will find them in the guidebook near this icon:



The guidebook references communities in a broad sense that includes local government, Indigenous Communities, First Nations, and regions that represent a geographic area looking to work together on RRA.

This guidebook applies a lens that considers the economic, social, and environmental contexts of rural places. It incorporates knowledge gathered from literature on rural RRA, practitioner experience, and lessons learned from an evaluation of RRA initiatives delivered in rural British Columbia communities from 2021 to 2023.

How to Use the Guidebook

Communities are at various points in their readiness for or implementation of RRA. This guidebook offers value to all communities, regardless of their position in the process ([Figure 1](#)).



Figure 1: The resident attraction and retention process

RRA is not always a linear process. While some communities may progress through the steps in the order shown in [Figure 1](#), others might learn something during one phase that causes them to revisit an earlier phase. RRA is a long-term endeavour, and your community's plan will evolve as priorities and opportunities change. Refer to your [Official Community Plan \(OCP\)](#) when assessing the phases below.

Consider the following to determine where your community might find the most value in this guidebook:

Start at **Get Ready** if your community:



- Wants to know if RRA should be a priority
- Wishes to determine if there is support for RRA from local leadership
- Is assessing whether to dedicate human or financial resources to RRA
- Wants to know who to include in their core team or RRA partnerships

Start at **Understand your Context** if your community:



- Wants to proceed with an RRA process and needs to know where to start
- Needs to know if it should prioritize retention, attraction, both, or neither
- Wants to know more about community priorities before it begins a dedicated process
- Has done some research and wishes to understand how to interpret the data

Start at **Define your Goals** if your community:



- Has determined its strengths and weaknesses related to RRA and wants to translate that knowledge to an action plan
- Has made a plan that is outdated or needs to be reassessed in the context of current community priorities and programs
- Needs to determine a target population for its RRA process
- Wants to understand how an RRA process relates to other community plans and initiatives

Start at **Determine your Actions** if your community:



- Knows where it wants to go with RRA and wants clarity on how to get there
- Would benefit from inspiration for RRA activities that would support its goals

Start at **Implement the Plan** if your community:



- Has made a plan but wants tips to improve follow-through
- Needs guidance on how to resource RRA actions

Start at **Monitor, Evaluate, and Adjust** if your community:



- Has implemented RRA actions and wants to determine their effectiveness
- Is considering refreshing an existing RRA strategy

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Introduction to Rural Resident Retention and Attraction

What is Resident Retention and Attraction?

Resident retention and attraction (RRA) initiatives position communities to address issues associated with population size (e.g., low or declining number of residents) or population composition (e.g., aging population) — whether that be a shortage of skilled workers, low school enrolment, or a small tax base. **Resident retention and attraction is more than a marketing campaign. It is also about making an appealing place to call home.**

The factors that draw and keep people in a place are diverse and so is the list of possible RRA activities. RRA is therefore highly related to the broad theme of community development, which can include economic development, infrastructure or asset development, community programs or services, cultural activities, and other initiatives. By using a slightly different lens, you can think of many community development activities as RRA activities.

Why do Resident Retention and Attraction?

Rural communities across British Columbia and Canada are facing pressures that affect their fundamental nature as well as the size and structure of their population ([Source 1: Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation](#)). These include:

- A low birthrate and ageing population
- Youth out-migration
- Economic restructuring and the loss of foundational employers
- Reduced access to essential services like healthcare

RRA can help a community address these issues by stabilizing or growing a population that contributes to a strong economy.

As the make-up of rural British Columbia changes, communities need to find new and innovative ways to be sustainable and vibrant. It is critical to focus on retaining and attracting residents that support the common components of a strong community ([Figure 2](#)).



- **Essential Infrastructure and Services** – These are the necessary services to support current residents (e.g., health care, seniors support, schools and child care) and, if your community wants to attract new residents, the types of services that the target population will need (e.g., broadband for remote workers, housing for new residents).



- **Inbound Investment** – Statistically, new residents are more likely to become entrepreneurs, often starting new businesses or purchasing an existing business. Inbound investment is important for the diversification and expansion of services that enhance quality of life and support the local economy.



- **Workforce Development/Business Retention and Expansion** – Increasing the number of skilled workers and professionals in your community will support current businesses and create business expansion opportunities. It can also help address skills shortages that impact essential services.



- **Tax Base** – Increasing the number of permanent residents will strengthen the ability to maintain and enhance public infrastructure and services funded through taxes.



- **Social Vitality** – The arrival of new residents into a community can introduce new energy, skills and ideas, and new members for social organizations. This builds on the existing social vitality of a community.



- **Tourism Development** – Destination development and promotional efforts enhance a community's brand and assist with community awareness, pride of place, amenity development, and eventual resident attraction.

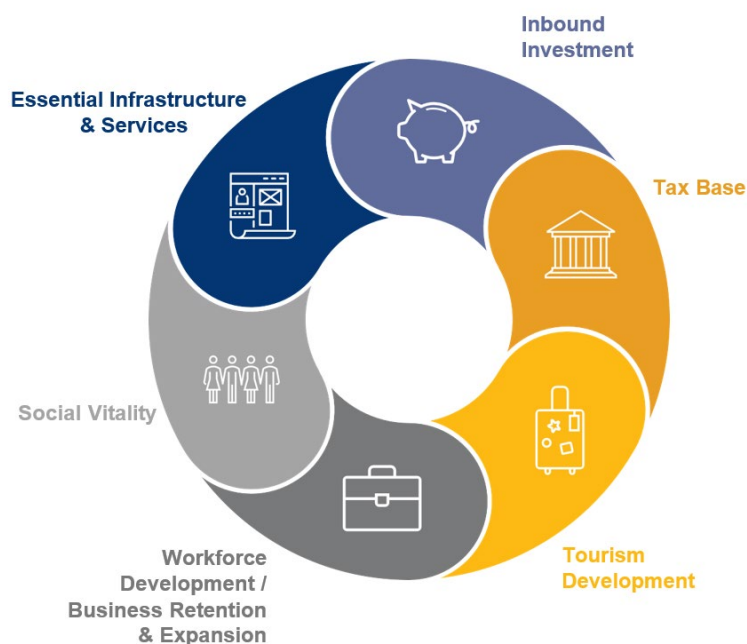


Figure 2: Components of a strong community

What makes Rural Resident Retention and Attraction Different?

Rural communities are all different and come to any community development process with a unique set of assets and challenges. While limited capacity is a frequent struggle for rural communities, they often have advantages that stem from their smaller size and close social connections. Below is a list of factors that commonly differentiate rural communities from their urban counterparts in processes like RRA ([Table 1](#)).

Table 1: Factors influencing community development in rural places
([Source 2: Vodden & Cunsolo](#))

FACTOR	DESCRIPTION
Human capacity	Larger rural communities are unlikely to have a department or individual dedicated to RRA, and smaller rural communities can have minimal or no staff. On the other hand, rural communities often have strong social networks and benefit from high rates of participation in community affairs.
Knowledge and expertise	Rural communities can often draw on valuable local and/or Indigenous knowledge networks. However, smaller organizations may have limited subject matter expertise and ability to analyze data.
Data	The smaller and more remote an area is, the more likely it is to have limited availability and access to meaningful and credible local-scale data.
Financial capacity	Smaller and more remote communities have limited tax bases and smaller markets to generate revenue to support RRA efforts.
Jurisdiction and institutional alignment	The factors that affect a community's ability to attract or retain residents are not always under the jurisdiction of local or Indigenous governments, but small organizations have an ability to be nimble and resourceful to capitalize on opportunities that arise.

Studies show that there are a few systemic issues that challenge rural communities' abilities to retain and attract residents; however, there are also factors that give rural communities an advantage ([Source 3: Various Authors](#)). The [Understand your Context](#) section of this guidebook further explores these factors.

Challenges:

- Limited housing availability (purchase or rental)
- Unreliable connectivity – including broadband and cell phone
- Limited or no access to public transportation
- Limited access to diverse and reliable healthcare services
- Lower diversity in educational opportunities
- Limited occupational and employment opportunities
- Weaker connections to larger centres and global markets

Advantages:

- More affordable housing relative to urban centres
- Enhanced pride of place
- Tighter social connections
- Improved access to natural and outdoor amenities
- Attractive rural lifestyle

General Guidance for Rural Communities

Retention before Attraction

You will have more success by ensuring your community is meeting the needs of the current population before attracting new residents. Typically, existing residents are invested, and it is easier to retain them than it is to attract others. However, do not assume that people will want to stay because they are already there. Newly attracted residents will only remain over the long-term if there are factors that make them stay. Since provincial and national migration trends show populations centralizing in urban places, preventing the loss of residents is important for rural British Columbia.

Helpful Resource

Page 5 of the [Columbia Valley's Resident Attraction and Retention Strategy](#) includes common factors that support resident retention.

Consider Equity

Your RRA activities might involve changes to community services and assets. Ensure these changes do not disadvantage residents from different races, cultural backgrounds, genders, age categories, education levels, or socioeconomic statuses. Consider the diversity of your community in your planning and ensure no one is left behind.

Helpful Resource

Access [Gender-based Analysis Plus \(GBA Plus\) information and tools](#) on the Government of Canada's website.

Work across Borders and Silos

Keep in mind that RRA activities—especially those aimed at retention—are closely related to other community development processes. RRA should not be the exclusive work of one organization or individual. Also consider how regional organizations and neighbouring communities could be involved. Perhaps partnership on a regional RRA initiative is right for your community. The [Get Ready](#) section of this guide discusses the potential benefits and challenges of regional approaches.

Learn from Others

Many rural communities across British Columbia and Canada have implemented RRA processes and are able to share experiences. Case studies can provide inspiration or lessons learned, but always be mindful of how your community's specific context compares to another's. What worked in one community may or may not be a good fit for yours.

Embrace Change

New residents will bring new perspectives, cultures, lifestyles, and ways of interacting with the others. Encourage residents and organizations to be welcoming of these changes. Diversity makes communities stronger.

Document the Process

Staff turnover is a common challenge in small communities which can result in lost RRA progress when core members leave the team. To protect against this possibility, document your process as much as possible. Keep records of key decisions and the factors that contributed to those decisions. Save the results of any research you do in a place that is accessible to others and can be used to bring new staff and elected leaders up to speed.

Adapt the Process to Work for You

Rural communities are all unique and the same process will not work for every place. This guide includes “Size it Right” orange boxes that discuss how communities can adjust the process depending on their size. You may recognize other opportunities for customization.

Get Ready

Assess your Level of Readiness

Before you get started, assess how ready your community is to retain and attract residents, and if RRA needs to be a priority. Understanding your level of readiness allows you to scale your efforts to what the community is willing to accept and support. Refer to your [Official Community Plan \(OCP\)](#) when answering the questions below.

Ask yourself some key questions to better understand your level of readiness, and go to [Worksheet 1](#) to complete a readiness self-assessment:

1. Are local leaders and other influential community members supportive of an RRA process, or does RRA align with your leadership's strategic objectives?
2. How much do you know about your current population and their intent to either stay or leave the community?
3. What are the current efforts, programs, or policies that relate to resident retention or attraction? Consider any program that makes your community more attractive or livable.
4. Has something important happened that affects life in your community or is something like this on the horizon (e.g., the loss of a major employer or a new industrial development in the region)? How stable are your community's demographics and economy as a result?
5. What is the general attitude of the community towards attracting or retaining residents?
6. What is the state of your working relationship with affected groups, including neighbouring Indigenous or non-Indigenous communities? What are the opportunities for collaboration?
7. Are there local resources (e.g., people, time, money) available to support the initiative? Think about whether there are opportunities to increase available resources (e.g., through grant funding or contracted support). See below for information on resourcing.

Build Relationships and your Team

A strong and well-defined team will set your initiative up for success. The size and makeup of your team will fluctuate as your community's RRA initiative moves through various phases.

When considering who should be part of your team, draw on your knowledge of your community and your networks to include individuals that are supportive and who have some investment in the initiative's success.

Core Team

Your initiative's core team might consist solely of personnel from within your organization, or it might also include members of other organizations.

The role of the core team is to:

- Design the RRA strategy
- Define and implement activities that support the strategy

- Manage resources
- Coordinate contributions from partner organizations
- Monitor and communicate progress to leaders and partner organizations

The core team should have dedicated workload and funding. Studies consistently show that this is a major success factor for RRA initiatives ([Source 4: Various Authors](#)).

Size it Right: Expanding your Organization’s Capacity

Very small communities with only a few staff may not have the human resources available to implement an in-house RRA initiative. In this situation, consulting organizations or contract staff can be a helpful short-term addition. This approach does not build the same internal knowledge and familiarity with RRA as a staff-delivered initiative, but it can be a cost-effective option that helps a community move forward with a defined project scope.

Peripheral Team

Other staff or departments from within your organization or from other organizations can support your core team. These team members should be representative of groups within the community that will affect, or be affected by, an RRA initiative, including those with related activities and programs. Be inclusive in who you approach to participate to encourage diverse perspectives and leverage maximum resources. [Table 2](#) includes a list of potential partner organizations.

Table 2: Possible partner organizations

GOVERNMENT	NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS	PRIVATE BUSINESS
Local elected officials and municipal staff that will have a role in implementation	Organizations and associations providing services to newcomers and residents	Major employers
First Nations Chief and Councils	Organizations or associations focused on local economic development issues	Small, medium, and micro-scale enterprises including entrepreneurs
District, regional, and provincial government staff from ministries charged with specific responsibility for programs related to resident attraction and retention	Trade unions and other professional associations	Industrial, commercial, and residential land and real estate developers
	Post-secondary educational institutions	Banks, credit unions, and other financial institutions
	Tourism or destination development organizations	Business development support agencies, councils, and intermediaries
	Cultural organizations	Chambers of commerce and other business associations
	Indigenous organizations	
	Resident associations	

The roles of partners can differ greatly. Make sure to respect that each group will move and commit to the RRA effort in different ways. Some may be able to directly support implementation, while others may only be able to provide occasional advice. Build flexibility into your strategy for engaging partners and offer different levels of opportunity to get involved.

Collaboration takes time and you should account for this in your project plan. The bigger the group, the more resources you should dedicate to coordinating and integrating their contributions.

Consider a Regional Approach

In the same way that rural communities tend to work with their neighbours to market their area as a tourism destination, it can be advantageous to work together on RRA initiatives. Regional approaches can help reduce duplication and stretch limited resources. They also acknowledge that one community does not have to be everything to an existing or potential resident. For example, when considering whether your community offers all the [Components of a Strong Community](#) listed in [Figure 2](#), it can be helpful to instead think about whether these components are within an attractive distance to your community.

On the other hand, a large regional project may not allow communities to focus on what makes them special. Regional initiatives can also add complexity, which may cause a small community to lose focus on a simple, achievable goal. In this case, a regional approach could be as simple as sharing ideas and related activities to keep each other informed and identify future opportunities to work together.

Helpful Resource

Learn how having a [regional growth strategy](#) may enhance sustainability and resilience in your community.

Working with Indigenous Communities

For non-Indigenous communities, relationship building with neighbouring Indigenous communities is an important step toward reconciliation. Non-Indigenous communities need to consider how an RRA initiative could help advance a respectful relationship with Indigenous partners. Relationships take time to develop – whenever possible, extend an invitation to consult on priorities and hold space to engage as opportunities arise.

Resource Initial RRA Steps

Given that your team should have dedicated funding and capacity, your community may be challenged to resource even the initial steps of RRA. The [Implement your Plan](#) section of this guide includes helpful tips for resourcing along with a list of potential funding sources. You can apply most of this information at any point in the RRA process.



Newcomer Integration in Newfoundland and Labrador

(Source 5: Li et al)

This case study is an example of a collaborative effort that, among other benefits, enhanced relationships among community programs and institutions.

In the early 2000s and 2010s, Newfoundland and Labrador's newcomer retention rate was lower than other provinces. In response, the provincial government, communities, and partners assessed gaps in services aimed at newcomers. Researchers focused on youth found gaps in educational, employment, health, and transportation services, and also suggested a need to improve residents' awareness of immigration issues and the contributions that immigrants make to communities.

Many services and programs collaborated to address the gaps faced by youth. Schools served as a connection point. Settlement and healthcare services accessed youth in their classrooms, and the schools worked with local non-profits to deliver programs that promoted diversity and understanding.

Participants acknowledged that enhanced collaboration could further improve program outcomes. They made recommendations for how to collaborate more effectively, including ensuring better information sharing between agencies.

The Association for New Canadians is one of the organizations that has supported newcomer retention in Newfoundland and Labrador. The organization's website describes their current [child and youth programs](#).



EXAMPLE WORKSHEET 1: RRA READINESS SELF-ASSESSMENT

Use this worksheet to assess how ready your community is to begin an RRA process. The guidance at the end of the worksheet explains how to interpret your answers. Refer to your [Official Community Plan \(OCP\)](#) when answering these questions. Go to [Appendix 1](#) for a fillable version.

1. How much do you know about your current population and their intent to either stay or leave the community?

Knowledge is incomplete or out of date

Have current observations and anecdotes

Have current and robust evidence of demographic trends and community perceptions

1	2	3	4	5
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Comments: Have reviewed latest demographic data but data is likely out of date given recent mill closure.

2. What are the current efforts, programs, or policies that relate to resident retention or attraction? Consider any program that makes your community more attractive or livable.

Unknown or none relate

Some understanding

Have inventory of relevant efforts with related actions identified

1	2	3	4	5
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Comments: Economic development strategy updated earlier this year and Official Community Plan (OCP) renewal is in progress. Need to better understand other potential linkages.

3. Has something important happened that affects life in your community or is something like this on the horizon (e.g., the loss of a major employer or a new industrial development in the region)? How stable are your community's demographics and economy as a result?

Highly unstable, Major changes expected

Moderate stability, Some change expected

Highly stable, No significant changes expected

1	2	3	4	5
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Comments: Mill closed last year. Too soon to understand long term impact on population.

4. What is the general attitude of the community towards attracting or retaining residents?

Unknown or negative		Uncertain or mixed		Welcoming
1	2	3	4	5

Comments: Industry has always attracted new residents. Most of the community is welcoming but there is a component who is resistant to change.

5. What is the state of your working relationship with affected groups and potential collaborators, including neighbouring Indigenous or non-Indigenous communities?

Potential for relationships Past tensions		Information exchange		Active collaborative relationships on multiple projects
1	2	3	4	5

Comments: Tensions with a neighbouring community. Relationship with a nearby First Nation is growing but still early. Good relationships with local organizations from economic development and tourism sector.

6. Are local leaders and other influential community members supportive of an RRA process, or does RRA align with your leadership’s strategic objectives?

Unknown or unsupportive		Moderate		Highly supportive
1	2	3	4	5

Comments: Council priorities have not settled following the mill closure and will likely remain uncertain until completion of Official Community Plan (OCP) renewal.

7. Are there local resources (e.g., people, time, money) available to support the initiative, or are there opportunities to increase available resources (e.g., through grant funding)?

No or few existing resources		Resource potential		Available resources that can be used or leveraged
1	2	3	4	5

Comments: No staff or funds to take this on at present. Would need to identify a funder, secure a grant, and hire staff or contractor.

Are you ready?

If you answered mostly 1-2, spend more time getting ready or, if you have the resources and support you need, move to [Understand your Context](#). If your answers were mostly 4-5, start at [Define your Goals](#).

Understand your Context

Analyze Strengths and Weaknesses

Creating an effective retention and attraction strategy requires identifying and assessing a community's strengths and weaknesses considering resident needs. **If your community is new to RRA and can only commit a limited number of resources over the short term, this should be the focus of your efforts.** A simple assessment will help your community prioritize needs and prepare to make use of RRA funding or partnership opportunities as they arise.

[Table 3](#) includes some of the key characteristics that influence a community's ability to succeed in retention and attraction efforts. These questions help you evaluate quality of life in your community, a key factor in any decision about where to settle. This is not a comprehensive list, so make sure you also consider any unique factors in your community.

When using these questions to evaluate your community, consider the following:

- Not all characteristics are equally important for each community. The importance of each characteristic will vary depending on your community's situation (e.g., community history, location, existing population characteristics).
- Characteristics may mean different things in different communities (e.g., economic opportunity differs from community to community).
- Characteristics have multiple indicators that you can look at to help answer these questions (e.g., economic opportunity has multiple elements such as employment, self-employment, and investments).
- You can influence some aspects of the characteristics listed, while others will be subject to external influences outside of your control.
- Your community may or may not be able to answer all questions depending on the data available to you. See the [Gather Data](#) section below to learn more about data sources.

Table 3: Questions to guide an assessment of RRA strengths and weaknesses

CHARACTERISTIC QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Population	<p>How has your population fluctuated over the last 10 years? What affected the change?</p> <p>What is your demographic composition? Is it changing? How diverse are you?</p> <p>What is your average age? Are you getting older or younger?</p>
Economic Opportunities	<p>What does your employment rate and unemployment rate tell you about your available workforce?</p> <p>What is the average household income and how does that translate to local economic opportunity?</p>

CHARACTERISTIC QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Economic Opportunities

What is the average commute to work?

Is there a high-level of self-employment in the community?

What are the sectors driving the economy? Are these sectors stable or changing?

What are the emerging sectors in the local, regional, and provincial economy?

What are the workforce needs of key industry sectors?

Is there equitable access to economic opportunities?

Housing

Are there choices in the types and cost of housing available? Can you purchase or rent?

What information from the Housing Needs Report needs to be incorporated into RRA efforts?

Is there fair and equitable access to suitable housing?

Are there land development opportunities for the community to grow?

Health and Wellbeing (physical and social)

Is there access to a hospital? Does it provide a variety of services?

Are there sufficient doctors supporting the community?

Does the community have elderly care facilities or services?

What emergency services do you have access to (e.g., Med-Evac)?

Are there other health services (e.g., physiotherapy, pharmacy)?

Is there access to nature, parks, and recreational trails?

Does the community have amenities and programs for health and fitness?

Are there organizations in place to support resident and newcomer inclusion?

Are there opportunities to volunteer?

Are there diverse faith-based organizations?

Safety

What are crime rates? Is there a perception of safety?

Does the community have access to local and cooperative policing?

Are there programs supporting high-risk and vulnerable groups (such as youth)?

Education and Learning

Is the entire spectrum of education available (e.g., K-grade 12)?

Is there early years and after school childcare available?

Are there high rates of secondary school completion?

CHARACTERISTIC QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Education and Learning	<p>Is there a diversity of courses offered?</p> <p>Are there academic bridging programs?</p> <p>Are there out of school activities for youth, particularly teenagers?</p> <p>Are there post-secondary opportunities? Are there linkages to external ones?</p> <p>Are there diverse opportunities for adult education? Are they culturally sensitive?</p> <p>Does the community have a library?</p>
Infrastructure	<p>Is there access to a reliable airport for travel?</p> <p>Does the community have reliable telecommunications?</p> <p>Is the internet connectivity high-speed? Is the whole community connected to high speed?</p> <p>Is there adequate transportation? Is the community walkable and bikeable?</p> <p>Is there access to public transportation? Is it reliable and convenient?</p> <p>Do water and waste systems have capacity to support expansion?</p>
Culture, Heritage, and Entertainment	<p>Is there a diversity of arts, cultural, heritage, and entertainment opportunities?</p> <p>Are unique heritage buildings and history part of the community identity?</p> <p>Are there annual events that bring people together and year-round opportunities to participate in arts and cultural activities?</p> <p>How do Indigenous Peoples want their culture, history, and language to be acknowledged and reflected in the general community?</p> <p>Are there public and commercial venues for performers and artists?</p> <p>Are there local sports leagues for all ages?</p>
Community Reputation	<p>Is there a local sense of pride?</p> <p>Are there gathering places and beautification efforts that help with placemaking?</p> <p>What is the relationship between the local community and neighbouring First Nations?</p> <p>How is the downtown regarded by residents and visitors (e.g., welcoming or dangerous)?</p> <p>What is the reputation amongst visitors and neighbouring jurisdictions?</p> <p>Are there positive portrayals of newcomers in the local media?</p> <p>Are branding and promotional efforts consistent with your community brand?</p>

Size it Right: Completing an Assessment with Limited Resources

The [Understand your Context](#) or research phase is critical to know if and what type of RRA is right for you, but it might seem too time consuming for small or low-capacity communities. To keep this task manageable, avoid data gathering approaches that involve community engagement or primary data collection (see below) and focus on existing, easily accessible data that can help you answer key questions, such as:

- What are the trends in your community's population?
- Could your community address important issues by retaining or recruiting more residents? If so, what are those issues?
- Are there gaps in housing, services, or economic opportunity that are negatively affecting the livability of your community?
- Is your community welcoming to visitors or newcomers?

Gather Data

The person responsible for assessing your community's strengths and weaknesses will likely not know every answer in [Table 3](#). Consider what data your community has on hand before launching an in-depth data gathering process. The results of recently completed planning or community engagement processes might include helpful information. Statistics Canada and BC Stats also publish robust, free data on population statistics like growth trends, average age, and diversity.

Helpful Resources

Statistics Canada's Census program is the most reliable source of population data for most small communities. The [Census Profiles](#) are a good summary of census data.

BC Stats also publishes [population projections](#) that can help you understand how statisticians expect your community or region to grow given trends in fertility, mortality, migration, employment, and housing.

Regional resources like the [ETSI-BC Regional Data Platform](#), the [State of the Basin](#), the [State of the North](#) and [State of the Island](#) reports can provide easy access to collated and analyzed data.

Refer to the [Labour Market Outlook](#) for data on employment trends, the [BC Economic Atlas](#) for spatialized and regional data, and the [Community Information Tool](#) for other economic data.

If you notice important information gaps, consider gathering new data. Larger capacity communities may elect to do this during the Understand your Context phase, while smaller communities may identify this as a specific action to undertake (see [Determine your Actions](#)). Some common approaches to primary data gathering for RRA include:

- **Community Surveys:** These are helpful for understanding perceptions among your residents of the factors that they consider to be strengths or weaknesses of the community. You can also use surveys to gauge public support for an RRA process or to allow residents a say in which activities go ahead.
- **Asset Mapping:** This is helpful to understand the presence, absence, and importance of attributes needed to maintain livability in your community. You can include natural, built, social, economic, public service, and intangible assets (expertise, community pride).

Helpful Resource

The Tamarack Institute, a leading community development organization in Canada, shares this [Guide to Community Asset Mapping](#) (authored by the Falls Brook Centre).



What Makes you Stay in New Denver?

(Source 6: [Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute](#))

This case study is an example of a rural community that gathered data for its situational analysis through a community survey.

The project aimed to understand resident satisfaction and well-being, factors influencing quality of life, and ideas for future services and infrastructure. It also asked residents to weigh in on their support for population growth.

Results helped the Village of New Denver understand what current residents treasured about the community, what was needed to improve livability, and what types of new residents they were perceived as being important.

Learn more about the project in the [final report](#).

Bring it Together: SWOT Analysis

While there are different ways a community can bring data together in a situational analysis, one useful approach is a SWOT Analysis. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. [Figure 3](#) outlines the four elements of a SWOT analysis. In your analysis, be specific about how each strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat relates to RRA.

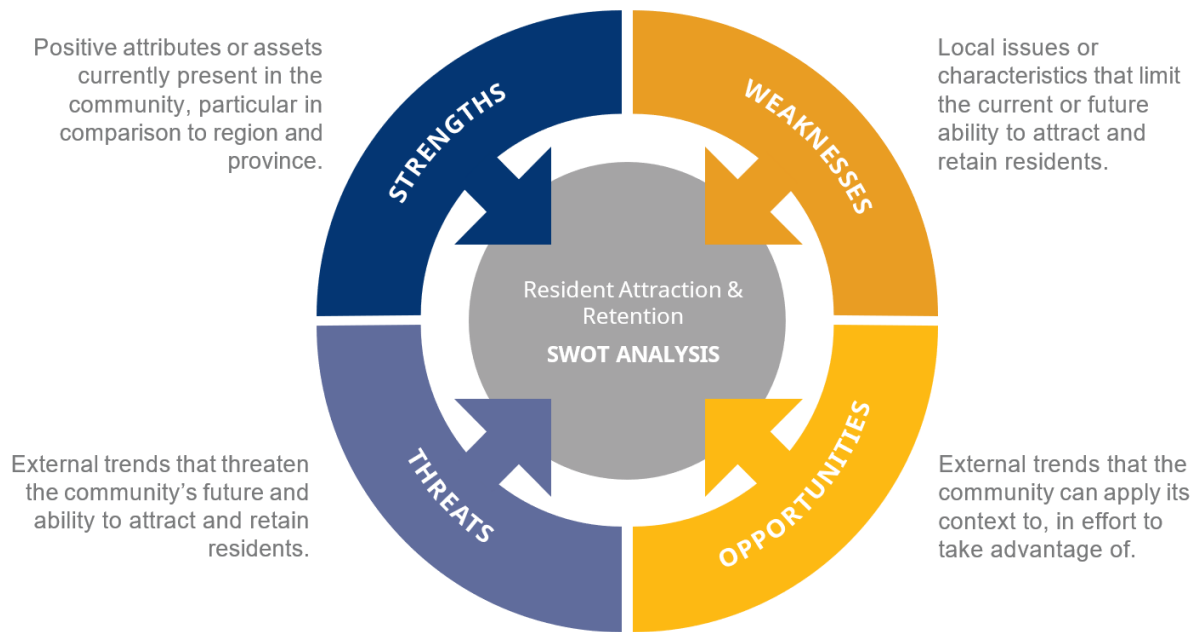


Figure 3: Elements of a SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis can help identify and understand key issues, but it does not necessarily offer solutions. You should be aware of the limitations as well as the benefits of a SWOT analysis before you decide to conduct one. Knowing what you can reasonably expect to achieve will make the SWOT analysis more useful and save you time.

Benefits of SWOT Analysis

- Helps you understand your community better
- Positions you to address weaknesses, deter threats, capitalize on opportunities, and take advantage of your strengths
- Provides information to develop targeted goals and associated strategies
- Can be done with little or no cost
- Does not require specialized training

Limitations of SWOT Analysis

- For complex issues, you will need to conduct more in-depth research and analysis to make decisions
- Does not prioritize issues
- Only covers issues that can be uniquely classified as a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat (it is difficult to address factors that could either be a strength or a weakness or both)
- Does not provide solutions or offer alternative decisions
- Can generate many ideas without helping you choose which one is best

[Worksheet 2](#) will help guide your situational analysis.



EXAMPLE WORKSHEET 2: SWOT ANALYSIS FOR RRA

Note the examples below do not represent an exhaustive list of possible strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. As much as possible, ensure the points you include in your SWOT analysis are based in evidence rather than opinion. Go to [Appendix 1](#) for a fillable version.

	Internal Factors		External Factors	
	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Population	Well educated Strong labour participation rate	Population trending down over last 10 years Low population diversity	Increased in-migration of skilled workers into BC in recent years	People moving to urban areas Hard to attract immigrants to rural areas
Economic Opportunities	New business openings have trended up over last 5 years Strong service organizations	Employment is cyclical and does not match student training High proportion of entry-level positions	Remote work is becoming more accepted	Macro-economic conditions are unstable
Housing	Cost of owning a house is lower than BC average There is available land	Average rents exceed 30% of average household income (accepted guide for housing affordability) Lack of diversity in housing stock	Urban residents seeking lower/no mortgage	Rising risk of flooding on developable land
Health and Well-Being (Physical and Social)	Local hospital had major renovation 2 years ago	Continuous turnover of doctors	Popularity of rural quality of life	Urban centres have access to specialized health care
Safety	Low crime rates	No local RCMP detachment	Perception of high crime in urban areas	The RCMP are further reducing their regional presence
Education and Learning	Have both K-7 and 8-12 schools Strong library network	The satellite college campus closed this year	Moving to online learning and partnering with out-of-town institutions	Employers are asking for higher education

	Internal Factors		External Factors	
	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Infrastructure	Access to airport within 1.5-hour drive	Sidewalks in poor condition and not well connected Limited public transit	Working with neighbours for regional water supply	Potential for reduced funds from provincial and federal government
Culture and Entertainment	Strong community theatre Artisan and crafter culture and programs	Challenging for newcomers to find and get involved with existing networks	Funding being directed to rural arts and culture	Urban centres offer wider diversity of opportunities
Community Reputation	5 years in a row of record number of visitors Strong sense of community	Modest budget for community promotion	Tourism focusing on rural and outdoor experiences Strong ties to residents who have left the community	Reputation tied to resource-based sectors with an uncertain future

Interpret the Analysis to Identify Critical RRA Focus Areas

Once you have completed the situational analysis the next step is to evaluate the results to identify the most important elements that the community wants to either address or build on for their RRA strategy. Be aware and accepting of the positive and negative aspects of your community. Do not hide from the weaknesses and threats—these can be good justification for an RRA strategy.

Answering the following questions will help determine your community's critical challenges and opportunities to focus on:

- Which of our strengths will give us an advantage in attracting and/or retaining residents?
- Which of our weaknesses need to be addressed for us to be successful?
- Which of the external opportunities best matches our community strengths?
- Which of the external threats have the greatest impact on our community?
- What influence can the RRA strategy and relevant interest groups have on addressing some of the complex issues that we identified during the situational analysis?
- How does this analysis influence our community brand and promotional strategy?

[Worksheet 3](#) will help prioritize the results from your situational analysis. Use this to determine your community's strongest RRA advantages and challenges.



EXAMPLE WORKSHEET 3: CRITICAL ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

List 5-10 advantages and challenges that are the most important for your community to consider in its RRA efforts.

- Build off the results of your SWOT analysis
- Critical advantages should be community strengths that align with identified opportunities and are not likely to be negatively affected by identified threats
- Critical challenges should be community weaknesses that could be strengthened by the identified opportunities, or that you could make forward progress on even if identified threats are likely to materialize

Go to [Appendix 1](#) for a fillable version.

Critical RRA Advantages

Lower housing costs compared to urban centres

Rural lifestyle with easy access to the rest of the world

Strong cultural scene that is getting stronger

Good place to run a small business

Safe community with good schools and libraries for families with young children

Attachment to community from both current and past residents

Critical RRA Challenges

Population is in decline

Community reputation tied to resource based economic opportunities

Low population diversity

Housing inventory is older and lacks rentals

Transportation options are limited within community/region, especially for people with mobility challenges

Once someone relocates it is challenging to be included into activities

Weak connection between the workforce needs of local employers and the training available to residents



Columbia Valley Resident Attraction and Retention Strategy

(Source 7: MDB Insight)

This case study is an example of a SWOT analysis focused on RRA.

In 2016, Columbia Valley communities came together to engage a consultant to research and develop a resident attraction and retention plan. The project, as described in the [final report](#), began with a situational analysis and broad community engagement, followed by a SWOT analysis.

The SWOT analysis highlighted relevant issues and perceptions that then informed the strategy's strategic priorities:

- Solidify a collaborative regional approach for effective action
- Formalize and advance regional economic development initiatives
- Refresh the Columbia Valley's image and promote the image
- Improve infrastructure, amenities, and recreational features

Results of the SWOT analysis pointed toward economic development and tourism as promising routes through which to attract and retain residents. The analysis also recognized that foundational needs like housing and transportation would need to be addressed to improve the success of recruitment efforts.

One of the outcomes of the strategy was the [Work Columbia Valley website](#) which connects employers with job seekers and supports recruitment of specific skilled workers.

Define your Goals

Now that you understand the context of your community and have thought through priority strengths and weaknesses, it is time to solidify your RRA project's purpose and strategic priorities. A purpose is the long-term, overarching goal that guides every action taken through your project. Strategic priorities are shorter term, more specific goals that, if achieved, help fulfill the purpose.

Focus on Purpose

A clear purpose allows your team to be able to effectively answer any questions around why your RRA initiative is needed. It also provides a north star for decision making and something to measure success against.

The community will likely have a of broad vision statement in a master plan or strategy (e.g., Official Community Plan, Strategic Plan, Economic Development Strategy) and the purpose of the RRA strategy should contribute to achieving the community vision. A strong purpose has the characteristics outlined in [Table 4](#).

Table 4: Characteristics of an effective purpose

WHAT TO AIM FOR

Focused and aligned on a clear, achievable goal

Clear in what you want to achieve but flexible in how you will achieve it

Easy to communicate to different audiences

Creates a reference point that leadership can rely on to guide decisions

Balances long-term nature of RRA with the importance of achieving short-term goals

WHAT TO AVOID

Vague in what will be achieved and how goals fit with broader community objectives

Focuses too much on today's challenges or an unrealistic version of the future

Creates unrealistic expectations

Does not challenge the community enough, is uninspiring, or stretches the community beyond what is possible

A key step in any planning process is to **be clear about why you are doing the plan**. It may seem obvious to some, but many plans fail because participants and leadership did not reach agreement on outcomes at the outset. It is critical to start with a shared understanding of the intent of the strategic planning process. Your purpose can only be effective when it is well understood by everyone involved and can be transformed into actions that demonstrate progress.

Your team can ask itself the following questions to ensure all members understand and agree on the purpose:

- What do we hope to accomplish and why?

- Who will use the plan?
- What types of activities will we need to implement to achieve the goal(s)?

Develop a few achievable targets to support your purpose. You will define specific progress metrics later in the process, but at this stage, ask yourself how you will know if your project was successful at the end of the planning period (typically 3-5 years).

Build off Previous Plans and Initiatives

Think back over the last five to ten years to identify various community planning efforts and activities related to RRA that can help define the purpose of your initiative. Ensure the RRA initiative aligns with these plans rather than acting in isolation. Consider the interrelationships identified in [Figure 4](#). The examples in this graphic are specific to a local government and will differ for Indigenous communities or other types of organizations.

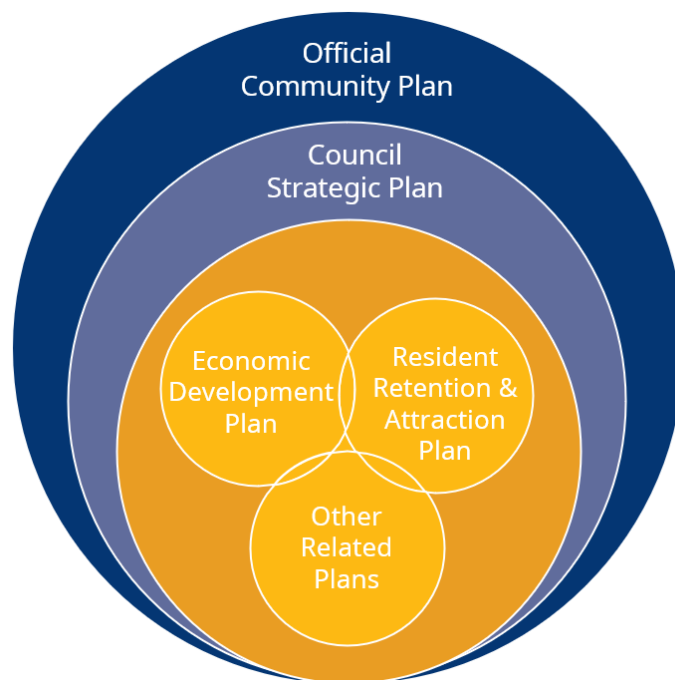


Figure 4: Relationship between RRA and other community planning efforts

Use [Worksheet 4](#) to think through existing plans, strategies, policies, or other community documents that relate to your RRA initiative. Consider whether there is information in those plans that helps define your RRA purpose or actions, or whether there are learnings from those processes that you should keep in mind as you develop a new plan.



EXAMPLE WORKSHEET 4: MAPPING PREVIOUS COMMUNITY PLANNING EFFORTS

Use this worksheet to reflect on past decisions and experiences. Go to [Appendix 1](#) for a fillable version.

Make a list of all previous planning process that may provide helpful information to resident retention and attraction efforts.

Council Strategic Plan
 Economic Development Strategy
 Housing Needs Report

What elements of these plans should be considered in the RRA plan to ensure alignment?

Council Plan	Economic Development Strategy	Housing Needs Report
Future vision is a “prosperous and welcoming community”	Vision is “A community with a high quality of life where all are welcome and have the opportunity to participate in sustainable work”	Large component of housing stock needs repairs
Strategic goal of improving community services to attract and retain residents		

What elements of past planning processes contributed to their success?

Broad based community input
 Clear direction from council

What elements of past planning process contributed to their challenges?

Was not clear how to resource implementation of activities
 Some key decision-makers were difficult to engage

What elements are in place to support a successful RRA planning process?

With it being driven from both the Council plan and Economic Development Strategy there is a commitment to budget and monitoring activity

Based on previous efforts, what do you think is missing to support your initiative?

Finding the support for Local Government, service providers and private sector to work together

What can you do to fill in the gaps you know are missing?

Meet with key players in advance and find desired outcomes we can collectively agree on



Tides of Change on Cormorant Island

This case study demonstrates how RRA can contribute to an overarching community vision. It is also an example of how communities in a region (in this case, an Indigenous and settler community) can collaborate on RRA.

The Village of Alert Bay and 'Namgis First Nation were concerned about the island's future due to a lack of economic opportunity. It was also a challenge to retain youth as many had to move away for work or school. The two communities came together to engage residents, take stock of their assets, define a vision, and develop a plan. Recognizing the link between a stable or growing population and a permanent economic base, the plan also established a strategic objective of attracting and retaining residents. Related actions included incentivizing businesses, establishing a business incubator, and supporting retention of essential services.

Some of the major lessons learned through the project mirror the suggestions in this guide: assess your assets to determine the gaps you need to fill to meet your vision; have dedicated staff capacity to implement the plan; build a steering committee with representatives from affected parties; and ensure that your plan is clear on how and when to implement actions.

You can [read more about this story and others online](#).

Establish your Strategic Priorities

You can think of your strategic priorities as outcome statements. They flow logically from the challenges and advantages you identified in your situational analysis, along with the established purpose of your RRA efforts. Strategic priorities outline broad themes and intentions. In the next step, you will determine what initiatives or action items will help achieve these intentions.

To identify strategic priorities, revisit the critical advantages and challenges you identified at the end of your situational analysis. Look for ways to combine these statements thematically to create 3-5 clear and broad strategic priorities.

[Worksheet 5](#) helps develop strategic priorities that clearly link to a purpose and situational analysis.

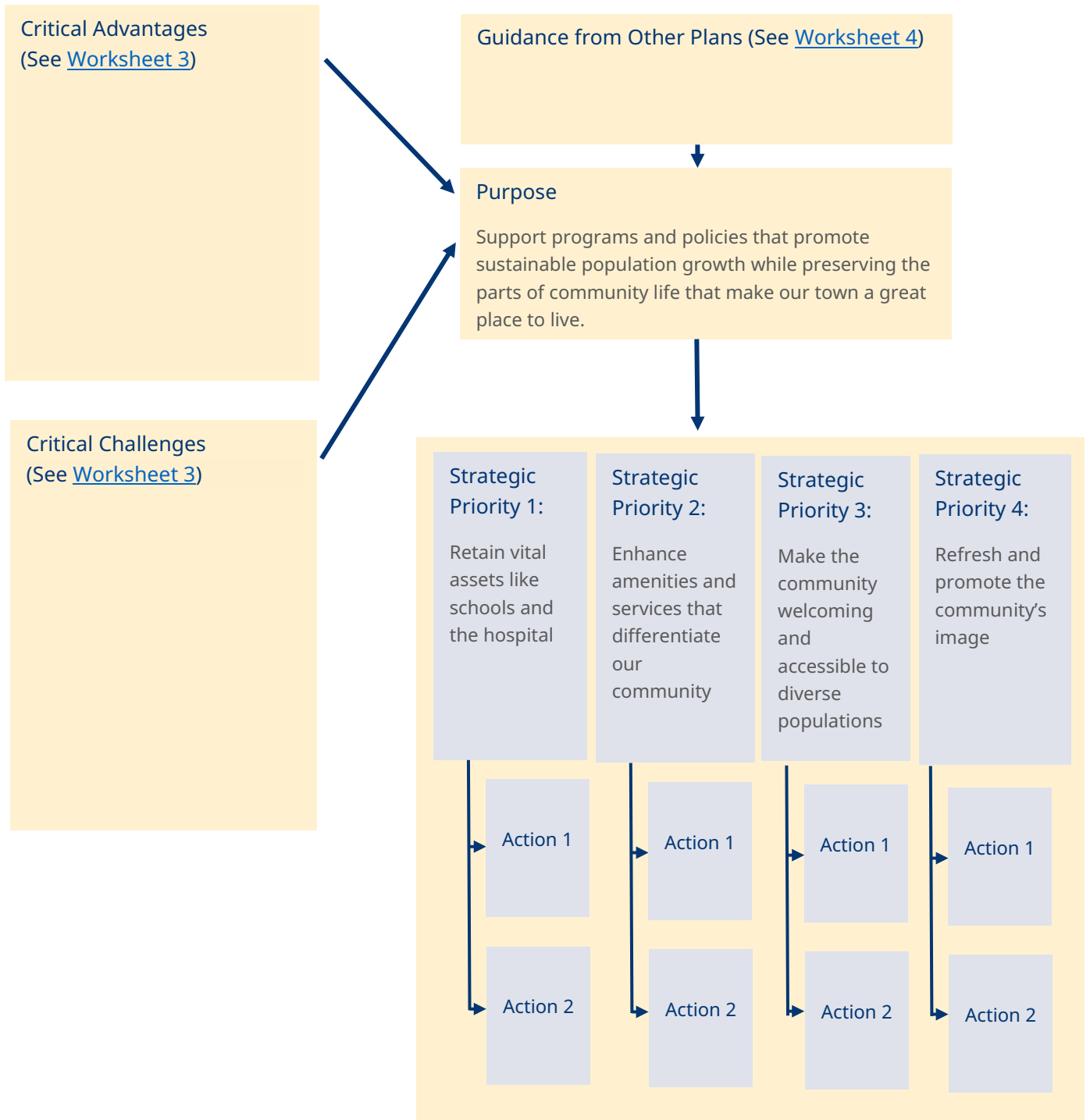
A Note on Timelines

When developing your strategic priorities, be mindful of what your community can reasonably accomplish within your plan's timeline. While many plans of this nature tend to have a 3- to 5-year implementation period, your community may not be able to commit to something as lengthy. When determining your plan's timeline, balance the need for a long-term vision with the knowledge that you will achieve that vision incrementally in shorter time periods.



EXAMPLE WORKSHEET 5: LINKING PRIORITIES TO PURPOSE AND CRITICAL NEEDS

Use this worksheet to visualize how your situational analysis and other community plans contribute to defining your purpose and strategic priorities. This worksheet also provides space to include actions that link to your strategic priorities but be sure to review the next section of the guidebook before drafting your actions. Go to [Appendix 1](#) for a fillable version of this worksheet.



Target your Efforts

Your situational analysis revealed what your community has to offer, and what types of residents will help it remain sustainable and livable. Next, explore how to target your RRA efforts at residents that will be the best fit with what your community needs or has to offer.

The default can be a desire to retain everyone and attract anyone. This, however, makes it difficult to focus time and limited resources on the residents who offer the best potential return on those investments. To avoid this challenge, you need a strong understanding of the characteristics of people more likely to settle in and contribute to your community, as well as your needs related to specific skills and professions. Targeted initiatives are essential to success ([Source 8: Urban Enterprises](#)).

Information is available to help you define your target household. If you have identified a need to retain a certain population segment that already lives in your community, you can consult a sample of those residents to understand what they need or want in a place to live. If you are trying to recruit a new type of resident, you can review population data to understand migration patterns and an area's demographic makeup. If you are trying to recruit a specific skill set or profession, you can combine general population and migration data with graduation rates and employment data.

Helpful Resource

To identify where potential residents are located, consider where recent in-migrants to your community have come from. The Community Data Program publishes [Migration Estimate Tables](#) that record which region migrants are coming from and going to. The Community Data Program is a subscription service, but many communities in BC will have access through a [local consortium](#).

People at various stages of life will explore where they want to live from different perspectives. Think about the following household characteristics, what may affect their decision on where to settle, and how those preferences align with what your community has to offer:

- Recently married
- Families with young children
- Single professional
- Recent retiree
- Senior citizen
- Racialized individual
- Individual who identifies as a member of a sexual or gender diverse community
- Remote work professional

Helpful Resource

If your community sees immigrants as a potential target for RRA initiatives, explore some of the resources available on the theme of “welcoming communities.” The [Pathways to Prosperity Canada Welcoming Communities toolkits](#) are funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and include an impressive list of partners from across the country, including B.C.

As you think about defining your targets, consider the following aspects that can help you focus your actions:

- **Geographic:** Identify where potential residents are located (other communities in BC, other provinces or territories in Canada, or internationally). A potential resident's geographic location will provide clues to help you determine what your community offers that is similar or different.
- **Demographic:** Residents are attracted to communities where they see familiarity and supportive community-based services.
- **Psychographic:** Attitudes, beliefs, and emotions guide much of what we do, including the community we live in. As you understand your situation think about how you can market your context to appeal to target households who value what you have to offer.

Use the following [worksheet](#) to identify the best fit between the motivating factors for different household types and your community strengths and opportunities.



EXAMPLE WORKSHEET 6: TARGET HOUSEHOLDS

Complete this worksheet to explore the fit between a target household and your community. For the Rationale columns, be sure to reference any relevant Critical Advantages and Challenges you defined in [Worksheet 3](#).

Go to [Appendix 1](#) for a fillable version of this worksheet.

Target	Profile (Description)	Rationale – What we offer them	Rationale – What they offer us	Key Motivators
Family aged couples	<p>25-45 yrs old</p> <p>Early stage of family life with children</p> <p>Active lifestyles</p> <p>Located in urban centres: Vancouver, Calgary, Kelowna or Kamloops</p>	<p>This life stage is looking for safety and family opportunities in an affordable community (match with our advantages)</p> <p>They are living in an urban centre environment where they are financially and socially uncomfortable</p>	<p>Stable and committed population</p> <p>Increasing children and youth in community</p>	<p>Rural safe active lifestyle</p> <p>Looking to balance economic opportunity with lifestyle</p>
Free footed professionals (Hidden Professionals)	<p>Professional couples</p> <p>Can work from home or remote locations</p> <p>Dependent on internet connectivity and ability to travel</p> <p>Active lifestyles</p>	<p>Airport asset is a match with their needs</p> <p>Able to capture economic opportunity from anywhere</p>	<p>Financial capital</p> <p>Influencers (raise profile of community)</p>	<p>Arts, culture, entertainment is key</p>



Move Up Prince George

This case study is an example of a community who focused their RRA efforts on a specific target group.

The City of Prince George knew that to be effective with their resident attraction efforts, they needed to be strategic about who they targeted. As part of their community assessment, it was identified that there was a need for skilled trades. Upon further analysis they created a target profile of someone a skilled tradesperson with needs and wants that matched what the community of Prince George had to offer. Based on this target profile the geographic markets of the BC Lower Mainland, Alberta and Ontario's industrial cities such as the City of Hamilton were selected as focus areas for their attraction efforts. "It is important that your community make a long-term commitment to your resident attraction and retention efforts. With your community partners being key in the implementation."

**Melissa Barcellos, Ec.D. Manager,
Economic Development, City of Prince George**

You can review the results of Prince George's efforts at [moveupprincegeorge.ca](https://www.moveupprincegeorge.ca)

Determine your Actions

Draft your Actions

Now that you have identified your purpose, strategic priorities, and the target households that are best fit for your community, you will create a series of achievable actions. Actions are tangible activities that help realize your strategic priorities.

As you develop each action, think through the following questions:

- What strategic priority will this support?
- What are the political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental risks or barriers that might prevent or slow achievement of this action?
- Who will carry out these actions?
- When will these actions start and how long are they likely to take?
- What resources do we need to carry out these actions?
- Who can we partner with?

Unless your plan is very limited in scope, you will not be able to work on all actions at once. Prioritize actions using criteria that make sense for your community—consider cost, achievability, and potential impact. Engage your team to determine who should participate in the priority-setting process. Consider that starting with “quick wins” or “low hanging fruit” can create momentum that makes the rest of the plan seem more achievable; however, make sure that work on these items does not undercut higher priority needs in your community.

Size it Right: Making Best Use of Available Resources

Larger communities may have the capacity to take on RRA as a distinct initiative with staff they have dedicated to long-term implementation of actions. Smaller communities who do not have this option can still make progress on RRA by looking for alignment with other resourced initiatives. When crafting your actions, think about what you could accomplish under another program umbrella like economic development or infrastructure upgrades.

While most actions should be specific with clear responsibilities and timelines attached, resource-strapped communities could benefit by building some flexibility into their action plan. This will allow them to make use of well-aligned opportunities (e.g., time-limited grants or partnerships with academic institutions) as they arise. These opportunities might not be a perfect fit with the actions you had envisioned, but you might still be able to make progress on a strategic objective if you approach it slightly differently.

Sample Actions

Sample RRA activities are in [Table 5](#). You can also review the case studies in this guidebook.

Table 5: Sample RRA Activities
(Source 9: Various Authors)

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Tell your community's story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using your communications platforms to tell the story of your community Creation of new or upgrades to existing digital and print assets Serve as a point of entry and source of information Goal can be to raise awareness, increase visitors, or attract new residents Audience can range from specific (e.g., sector or profession specific) to general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Webpages Portals Investor or visitor guides Videos Brochures Branding Marketing Campaigns – print, media, social media
Build your knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building knowledge or addressing knowledge gaps at your organization or in the project team Improves potential for decisions that are evidence-based and grounded in best practice Improves likelihood of success by narrowing efforts to specific target markets or sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys Asset mapping Labour market analysis Assessment of local businesses Market analysis Training
Enhance foundational aspects of community livability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements to infrastructure, housing, childcare, amenities (trails) or other assets that enhance quality of life Creation of new or upgrades to existing assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public art Community beautification Land development Signage Trails or access improvements to outdoor recreation amenities Housing developments Public or accessible transportation
Host showcase events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of new events or the continuation or expansion of existing events Can showcase your community to potential residents or bolster community pride 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forum or conference featuring key sectors or opportunities "Come Home" events
Focus on your target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct recruitment or retention of specific individuals, businesses, and services Specific approach depends on place and target sector/skill/demographic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambassador programs Immigrant recruitment or transition programs Sector or skill recruitment for key services (health, education) Academic bridging programs (linking local training opportunities with local workforce need)

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentive programs (e.g., tax subsidies for specific new businesses or residents) • Investment attraction programs
Craft supportive policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updates to existing or creation of new community plans, policies, or bylaws • Ensures policy environment is supportive of resident retention and attraction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approvals • Bylaws and Policies • Plans (e.g., Housing Plan) • Zoning

Seek out specific guidelines on how to design and implement any of the above-listed actions effectively. Below are a few key resources for some types of RRA activities. Use [Worksheet 7](#) to work through identifying activities.

Helpful Resources

Communities who are interested in immigrant recruitment or transition programs can review [“Beyond the Big City: How Small Communities Across Canada can Attract and Retain Newcomers.”](#)

Communities who are planning marketing or branding campaigns can review the Federation of Canadian Municipalities’ [Community Branding and Marketing Tool](#).

Revisit the [Interpret the Analysis to Identify Critical RRA Focus Areas](#) section to learn more about community brand identities and positioning statements.

The Settlement Decision-Making Process

If your strategic priorities are focused on attraction rather than retention, consider the process by which a potential resident decides where to live. Try to craft actions that serve each of the various points in this process ([Figure 5](#)).

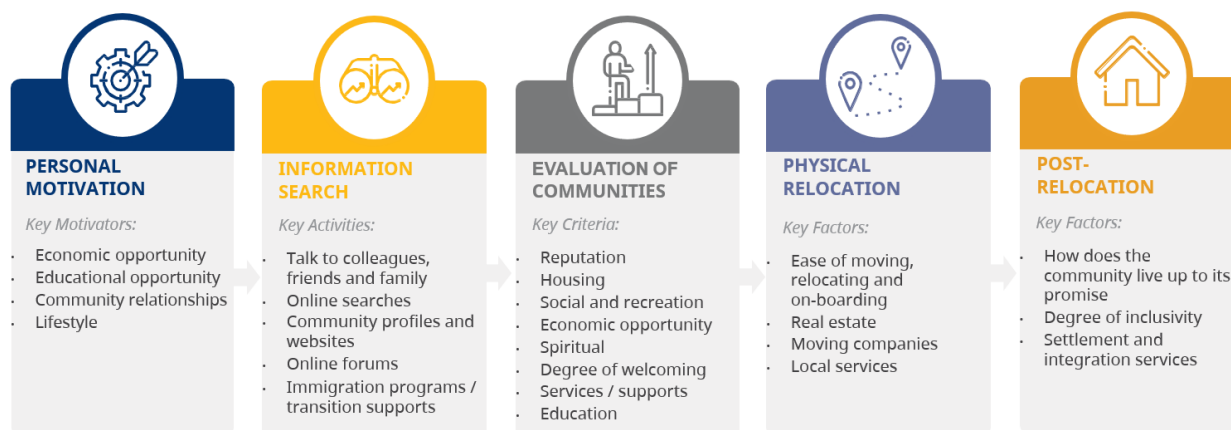


Figure 5: Settlement Decision-Making Process



EXAMPLE WORKSHEET 7: KEY COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE ACTION PLAN

Use this worksheet to document the specific plan for each of your actions. Go to [Appendix 1](#) for a fillable version.

Strategic Priority

Promote ongoing business support for retention of newcomers (investors/entrepreneurs/employees)

Action	Champion	Partners	Resources	Risks	Priority
Create Working Group	Chamber of Commerce	Downtown Business Association Local Government	50 hours per year for facilitator/coordinator Facilitator, space to meet, time to steer group/plan agendas/follow up	Requires collaboration and support from external organizations	Year 1
Inventory available business service providers and promote inventory	Economic Development Partnership		50 hours for facilitator/coordinator Knowledge of business support organizations, research skills		Year 2
Create PR tools to encourage business participation in program	Economic Development Partnership	Chamber of Commerce	40 hours for facilitator/coordinator, fee for marketing/design agency Marketing and design skills, network for promotion	Need to be designed to appeal to local businesses (contingent on Working Group being successful) Requires buy-in and uptake from businesses	Year 1

Plan to Revisit your Plan

To ensure that the action plan stays relevant as the community and your team changes, plan to reevaluate it regularly to ensure the following criteria are met:

- **It is complete:** The plan lists all the actions you intend to implement. Add new actions as needed and keep track of items that you no longer need or prioritize (including the rationale). Keep track of items that you have completed.
- **It is clear:** In the plan, it is clear who is going to do what by when, and the partners involved know about their role.
- **It is current:** The plan accurately reflects changes in your local context, the current state of knowledge about RRA, and direction from leadership.



Northern Vancouver Island Youth Retention

(Source 10: [Fraser Basin Council](#))

This case study is an example of retention-focused RRA activities.

Like many other remote areas, the North Island struggled to retain youth following high school graduation. A survey helped the project team identify three priority areas for action: jobs, culture, and community.

One way the project addressed the Jobs focus was by bridging the gap between local training opportunities and available employment. The Regional District of Mount Waddington—the project champion—worked with educational partners to develop a co-op program that provided grade 12 students with a pathway into a directed learning experience at North Island College. The program improved the availability of summer jobs for youth and it also enhanced youth awareness about potential career pathways in North Island communities.

The Northern Vancouver Island project was part of the Project Comeback initiative. To learn more about this initiative and the Northern Vancouver Island example, view the [final report](#).



Quesnel – It's in our Nature

This case study is an example of marketing-focused RRA activities.

The City of Quesnel wanted to address the image of their community as being dependent on the forest industry and its mills. The apprehension around mill curtailments and closures forced the community to think, plan and act differently. It strongly believed that there was much more to Quesnel than most people thought. The development of a new brand laid the groundwork for the community's transition.

To craft their brand, they undertook efforts to understand who their key audiences were both internally and externally and their needs and wants from the City of Quesnel. In response to the shared audience needs, four brand attributes were identified:

- **Trailblazing:** First Nations settled where the Fraser and Quesnel rivers meet, and ever since these forks have supported and nurtured a trailblazing spirit.
- **Sustainable:** Sustainability is not easy. It takes vision and hard work. It takes a commitment to the land and to the community. The community's sustainability is rooted in First Nation history of deep connection to the land.
- **Accessible:** In Quesnel, everything is close. Work to home. Home to nature. Possibility to opportunity. Your life, not just your house, is affordable. Affording you both time and means to reap reward and recreation.
- **Fun:** Safe, caring and kind, of course. Family- and community-centred. Passionate and accepting. Quesnel is connected to the lakes and the land, even when residents are at home and at work.

To successfully implement the new brand Quesnel committed to five strategies:

- Build brand foundations
- Launch the brand
- Enhance social media communications
- Ongoing brand building
- Long term brand building

Visit the [City of Quesnel](#) website to learn more about branding efforts.

Implement your Plan

Shift the Focus to Implementation

The pay-off for investing the time and energy upfront comes as you implement your strategy. Implementation, however, has its own set of challenges and must be well-planned and managed to succeed.

What does that look like and how is it done? There is no simple formula or complicated approach to implementing your RRA plan. As you evaluate your path forward, focus on the following areas:

- **Revisit your team** – The team that developed your plan may not be the same team that will implement your plan, though there will be crossover. See the next section for more information about the implementation team.
- **Create an implementation strategy** – You will need to continuously assess the resources needed to implement the actions that are next on your priority list. If your plan covers multiple years, create a simple implementation plan at least once per year to align with the budget cycle. The [Resourcing Implementation](#) section below includes guidance to support your resourcing efforts.
- **Look for opportunities to integrate RRA in normal operations** – As you begin to implement your RRA actions and become more familiar with the process, you may find overlap between planned activities and “business as usual” at your organization or among partners. RRA may prove to be a useful lens through which to view new potential projects. You might also discover that a planned activity benefits other community priorities and therefore warrants continuation beyond the life of the RRA plan.

The Implementation Team

The team and its ownership of the initiative is critical to successful implementation. The essential functions of the implementation team are:

- Ensuring actions serve the overall purpose and strategic directions developed during the planning process
- Facilitating dialogue between partners
- Managing data collection and analysis
- Handling communications with leadership and potentially with the broader community
- Documenting the process
- Coordinating community outreach
- Mobilizing funding

Recruit members to the team based on the skills, knowledge, and influence they bring to the table. The team should include affected parties, parties with jurisdiction over the action area, and other groups critical to achieving success. Each member will be responsible for linking the team to their resources.

As you think about how to move forward with implementation, consider your structure and team through the following questions:

- What individuals or organizations took responsibility for planned actions and therefore need to stay involved in the team?
- What new team members do you need to recruit? This will likely involve technical or operational staff and may involve contactors if you need additional capacity to implement your planned actions.
- Have you cultivated potential new team members throughout the planning process who could play a meaningful role in supporting implementation?
- How will you be sure that new team members are with the plan background and purpose?
- Is there the potential for conflict if you introduce new voices who disagreed with previous elements of the planning process and want to bring their own agenda to the implementation phase? Think about what you can do to mitigate this possibility.
- Will making changes damage the legitimacy or credibility of what you built in the community through the planning process? How can you address this in your communications strategy?

The implementation team's connection to the community is key to the success of any effort. Team members should consistently engage the community around emerging opportunities or issues. One way to do this is by scheduling regular check-ins with interest groups and partner organizations. Log any opportunities or challenges identified and follow up on progress during your next check-in.

Resourcing Implementation

During the action planning phase, you evaluated the resources (money, people, skills, data) that you would need to implement each action. To make best use of the limited resources available, consider sources of in-kind support. For example, the British Columbia Government's Regional Economic Operations (REO) branch has staff located across B.C. who provide on-the-ground assistance to Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to support their economic development capacity building, sector development, investment attraction and business retention and expansion activities. [Contact REO](#) to discuss your project. Collaborations with other organizations may also help you access additional resources (e.g., through grants that are only open to certain groups).

Funding Sources

This guidebook does not include a list of specific RRA grant programs since they change so frequently; however, below is a list of granting organizations that may fund RRA-related activities ([Table 6](#)). When evaluating the suitability of a grant, consider opportunities to use the flexibility you built into your actions. Available grants may not be a perfect fit with a planned action, but you may be able to reframe the action in a way that meets the funder's objectives while also allowing you to make progress on your RRA goals. Consider how you can leverage your RRA budget (or budget from other related community initiatives) to meet the requirements that many grant programs have for matching funds. You may also be able to stack grants by leveraging a small grant as the contribution you need to get a larger one.

Few organizations offer grants specifically targeted at resident retention and attraction. Therefore, when searching for appropriate grants, consider related search terms like:

- Economic development
- Workforce
- Beautification
- Infrastructure
- Resilience
- Housing

Helpful Resources

The British Columbia government offers a searchable [database of granting programs related to economic development](#). This database contains entries from many funders across the province.

CivicInfo BC also offers a [database of grants available to local governments](#).

Your [Regional Economic Operations manager](#) will be able to advise on the latest and best grants for RRA.

Table 6: Organizations offering funding programs that support RRA in British Columbia

FUNDING ORGANIZATION	LINK
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/project-funding-and-mortgage-financing/funding-programs
Columbia Basin Trust	https://ourtrust.org/grants-and-programs-directory/
Economic Trust of the Southern Interior	https://www.etsi-bc.ca/funding-streams/
Federation of Canadian Municipalities (Green Municipal Fund)	https://greenmunicipalfund.ca/funding
The Francophone Immigration Support Program	https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/partners-service-providers/cifi/fisp/about.html
Government of Canada	https://www.canada.ca/en/government/grants-funding.html
Island Coast Economic Trust	https://islandcoastaltrust.ca/apply-for-funding/
New Relationship Trust	https://newrelationshiptrust.ca/apply-for-funding/funding-overview/overview-of-funding-programs/
Northern Development	https://www.northerndevelopment.bc.ca/apply-for-funding/
Pacific Economic Development Canada	https://www.canada.ca/en/pacific-economic-development/services/funding.html
Real Estate Foundation of BC	https://refbc.ca/priorities/
Union of British Columbia Municipalities	https://www.ubcm.ca/funding-programs

[Table 6](#) does not include community foundations or philanthropic organizations. Canvass your team and partner organizations to generate additional ideas about potential funding sources.

Monitor, Evaluate, and Adjust

As you implement your plan, build a culture of continuous evaluation and adjustment. The purpose of this phase is to track outcomes while gathering knowledge on how to adjust efforts for greater impact. Monitoring and evaluation can also help your project stay accountable, which in turn can increase support for further actions. You can evaluate individual actions at completion and conduct a more comprehensive evaluation on a regular schedule that suits your community.

Size it Right: Scalable Approaches to Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation can be formal or informal, qualitative or quantitative or both, simple or intensive. This step, like all others in the RRA process, needs to be resourced. Factors that increase cost (but also potentially value) include the number of datasets considered (particularly those your organization does not manage itself or those requiring expert analysis), the extent of community consultation, and the type of output desired (e.g., internal memo vs. designed public-facing report). Your community may already be monitoring issues that relate to RRA. For example, your local government likely already tracks new housing starts through the building permit process. Incorporating these pre-existing datasets into your monitoring plan reduces the additional effort needed to track progress.

Your monitoring processes should evaluate the results of your metrics alongside changes to the community context that you have witnessed since plan development. These changes may affect the need for, or potential success of, planned actions. Consider related regulatory and policy changes, changes in government funding and supports, or notable changes in social, economic, and environmental conditions.

If your RRA work is externally funded, you may need to report certain metrics to the granting organization. These metrics may or may not be helpful to your own evaluation. Your metrics should focus on tracking progress and lessons learned relative to your plan's defined purpose and strategic priorities, rather than the funder's objectives.

Quantifiable Metrics

Your monitoring approach should include some attention to both outcome- and output-based quantifiable metrics. Good metrics are:

- **Logical:** It should take someone little effort to understand how you performed on a measure. Easy-to-read charts or infographics are helpful.
- **Directly Attributed:** Choose metrics that your efforts directly affect. Ensure your metrics are clearly related to your actions and strategic priorities.

- **Repeatable:** Metrics should be consistent over the longer term. You should be able to track progress over time to identify trends.

Some possible quantifiable metrics for RRA strategy implementation:

Table 7: Sample quantifiable metrics

TYPE	METRIC
Outcome-based	Population statistics – population size, diversity, age
	Housing statistics – building permits, dwelling value, rental vacancy rates
	Employment statistics – new jobs created, business starts
	First impressions – newcomer perceptions measured through surveys administered at first point of contact (realtors, visitors' centres)
	Workforce size and composition – labour force skills and gaps potentially measured through an employer survey
	Welcoming community – newcomer satisfaction measured through retention rates or a survey
Output-based	Deliverables like marketing materials or policies
	New or expanded services
	Training completed by RRA team

Helpful Resource

The British Columbia government offers a [Performance Measurement Toolkit for Local Economic Development](#). This guide provides further detail on how to select measures, develop a customized implementation plan, and communicate the impact of your work.

Unquantifiable Metrics

In addition to your quantitative metrics, consider what is not necessarily measurable but still valuable to track. For instance:

- What lessons have you learned through the process of plan implementation? Did the actions achieve the results intended? What were the barriers or challenges affecting progress? What factors enabled progress?
- What intangible benefits did your plan help realize (improved community engagement, stronger relationships)?

Some communities find that unquantifiable results, particularly those that relate to relationship-building, are among the most important outcomes of their RRA work.

[Worksheet 8](#) can help you identify and assign responsibility for metrics that link to your strategy and actions.



The Regional District of Mount Waddington Economic Forum

This case study is an example of adjusting plans based on monitoring and evaluation.

Economic development organizations in the Regional District of Mount Waddington recognized that collaboration was necessary to promote the exchange of ideas, avoid duplicating efforts, and pool resources. The 2015 [Strategic Sector Study](#) identified the need for stakeholders in the regional district to work together to develop a framework for collaborative action, providing several options based on other regions.

In 2021 the opportunity came up for the Regional District to participate in a provincially funded Resident Retention and Attraction Pilot Program. One of their planned activities involved hosting a forum of North Island economic development practitioners. The forum aimed to exchange ideas and enable coordination of activities related to RRA.

The forum was so well received by participants that the pilot project team revisited and adjusted their RRA project plan in real time. The team re-allocated resources to support additional forums and expand the format to address participant feedback requesting additional time to discuss specific economic development topics.



EXAMPLE WORKSHEET 8: METRICS

Use this worksheet to plan metrics that clearly link to your plan's strategic priorities and related actions. Go to [Appendix 1](#) for a fillable version.

Strategic Priority and Related Actions	Metric	Information Source	What does this metric tell us	Responsibility for tracking
Refresh and promote the community's image as a well-connected place with strong social ties as well as good access to the rest of the world.	Number of new marketing materials produced	Internal records	Degree of implementation of Action 3	Project coordinator
1. Establish marketing committee	Distribution of new marketing materials	Printing orders	Demand for materials; Reach of campaign; Extent of relationships with distributing organizations	Project coordinator with input from distribution partners
2. Retain marketing agency to conduct market research, establish new brand identity, and define marketing strategy				
3. Develop new marketing collateral	Website visitation rates	Web analytics	Reach of campaign	IT department
4. Develop recruitment website				
5. Implement marketing strategy	Change in visitor perceptions of community image	Survey delivered at Visitors' Centre	Outcome of image transformation and marketing efforts	Visitors' Centre

Final Considerations

This guidebook is a starting point. Use the ideas presented here, along with your own learning from other tools and resources (and your own lived experience) to continue to grow and change along with your community. While no single approach or series of actions is definitively the right one, the following tips can be helpful reminders throughout your journey to retain and attract residents:

- **Ground your project in place:** Your community's culture, assets, and needs are different from anywhere else. Uncover your community's unique attributes and use them to drive your RRA purpose and activities. This includes supporting a strong sense of place. In the past, people made decisions about residence around employment or proximity to family. While these are still components of a decision, the changing nature of the world has allowed workers to become increasingly mobile, making quality of place a key determinant of where people choose to live.
- **Build your "sticky factor":** Do not overlook the retention part of attraction and retention. Continue to develop a community where citizens are fully invested and engaged in co-creating their home. Tap into the local expertise and lived experience of citizens to build a strong reputation as a great place to live.
- **Keep your focus on the purpose:** At the beginning of the planning process, you will work hard to develop a purpose based on your community's specific context. Your priorities and actions should flow logically from this purpose. Staying on track improves the probability that your plan will be successful and that you will make measurable progress.
- **Set realistic but ambitious goals:** A plan is only a waste of time if you do not stick to it. Achievability is an essential component of any successful plan; however, it is also important to push your community to try new things.
- **Remember the general guidance from the introduction:** Prioritize retention over attraction, keep equity at the forefront of your community development work, collaborate and learn from others, embrace change, document your progress, and recognize that all guidance can and should be adapted for your community.

Appendix 1: Fillable Worksheets

[Worksheet 1: RRA Readiness Self Assessment](#)

[Worksheet 2: SWOT Analysis for RRA](#)

[Worksheet 3: Critical Advantages and Challenges](#)

[Worksheet 4: Mapping Previous Community Planning Efforts](#)

[Worksheet 5: Linking Priorities to Purpose and Critical Needs](#)

[Worksheet 6: Target Households](#)

[Worksheet 7: Key Components of an Effective Action Plan](#)

[Worksheet 8: Metrics](#)



WORKSHEET 1: RRA READINESS SELF-ASSESSMENT

Use this worksheet to assess how ready your community is to begin an RRA process. Refer to your [Official Community Plan \(OCP\)](#) when answering these questions. The guidance at the end of the worksheet explains how to interpret your answers. To see an example, go to [Example Worksheet 1](#).

1. How much do you know about your current population and their intent to either stay or leave the community?

Knowledge is incomplete or out of date

Have current observations and anecdotes

Have current and robust evidence of demographic trends and community perceptions

1	2	3	4	5
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Comments:

2. What are the current efforts, programs, or policies that relate to resident retention or attraction? Consider any program that makes your community more attractive or livable.

Unknown or none relate

Some understanding

Have inventory of relevant efforts with related actions identified

1	2	3	4	5
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Comments:

3. Has something important happened that affects life in your community or is something like this on the horizon (e.g., the loss of a major employer or a new industrial development in the region)? How stable are your community's demographics and economy as a result?

Highly unstable, Major changes expected

Moderate stability, Some change expected

Highly stable, No significant changes expected

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Comments:

4. What is the general attitude of the community towards attracting or retaining residents?

Unknown or negative		Uncertain or mixed		Welcoming
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

5. What is the state of your working relationship with affected groups and potential collaborators, including neighbouring Indigenous or non-Indigenous communities?

Potential for relationships Past tensions		Information exchange		Active collaborative relationships on multiple projects
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

6. Are local leaders and other influential community members supportive of an RRA process, or does RRA align with your leadership’s strategic objectives?

Unknown or unsupportive		Moderate		Highly supportive
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

7. Are there local resources (people, time, money) available to support the initiative, or are there opportunities to increase available resources (e.g., through grant funding)?

No or few existing resources		Resource potential		Available resources that can be used or leveraged
1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

Are you ready?

If you answered mostly 1-2, spend more time getting ready or, if you have the resources and support you need, move to [Understand your Context](#). If your answers were mostly 4-5, start at [Define your Goals](#).



WORKSHEET 2: SWOT ANALYSIS FOR RRA

As much as possible, ensure the points you include in your SWOT analysis are based in evidence rather than opinion. To see an example, go to [Example Worksheet 2](#).

	Internal Factors		External Factors	
	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Population				
Economic Opportunities				
Housing				
Health and Well-Being (Physical and Social)				
Safety				
Education and Learning				

	Internal Factors		External Factors	
	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Infrastructure				
Culture and Entertainment				
Community Reputation				



WORKSHEET 3: CRITICAL ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

List 5-10 advantages and challenges that are the most important for your community to consider in its RRA efforts.

- Build off the results of your SWOT analysis
- Critical advantages should be community strengths that align with identified opportunities and are not likely to be negatively affected by identified threats
- Critical challenges should be community weaknesses that could be strengthened by the identified opportunities, or that you could make forward progress on even if identified threats are likely to materialize
- To see an example, go to [Example Worksheet 3](#)

Critical RRA Advantages

Critical RRA Challenges



WORKSHEET 4: MAPPING PREVIOUS COMMUNITY PLANNING EFFORTS

Use this worksheet to reflect on past decisions and experiences. To see an example, go to [Example Worksheet 4](#).

Make a list of all previous planning process that may provide helpful information to resident retention and attraction efforts.

What elements of these plans should be considered in the RRA plan to ensure alignment?

What elements of past planning processes contributed to their success?

What elements of past planning process contributed to their challenges?

What elements are in place to support a successful RRA planning process?

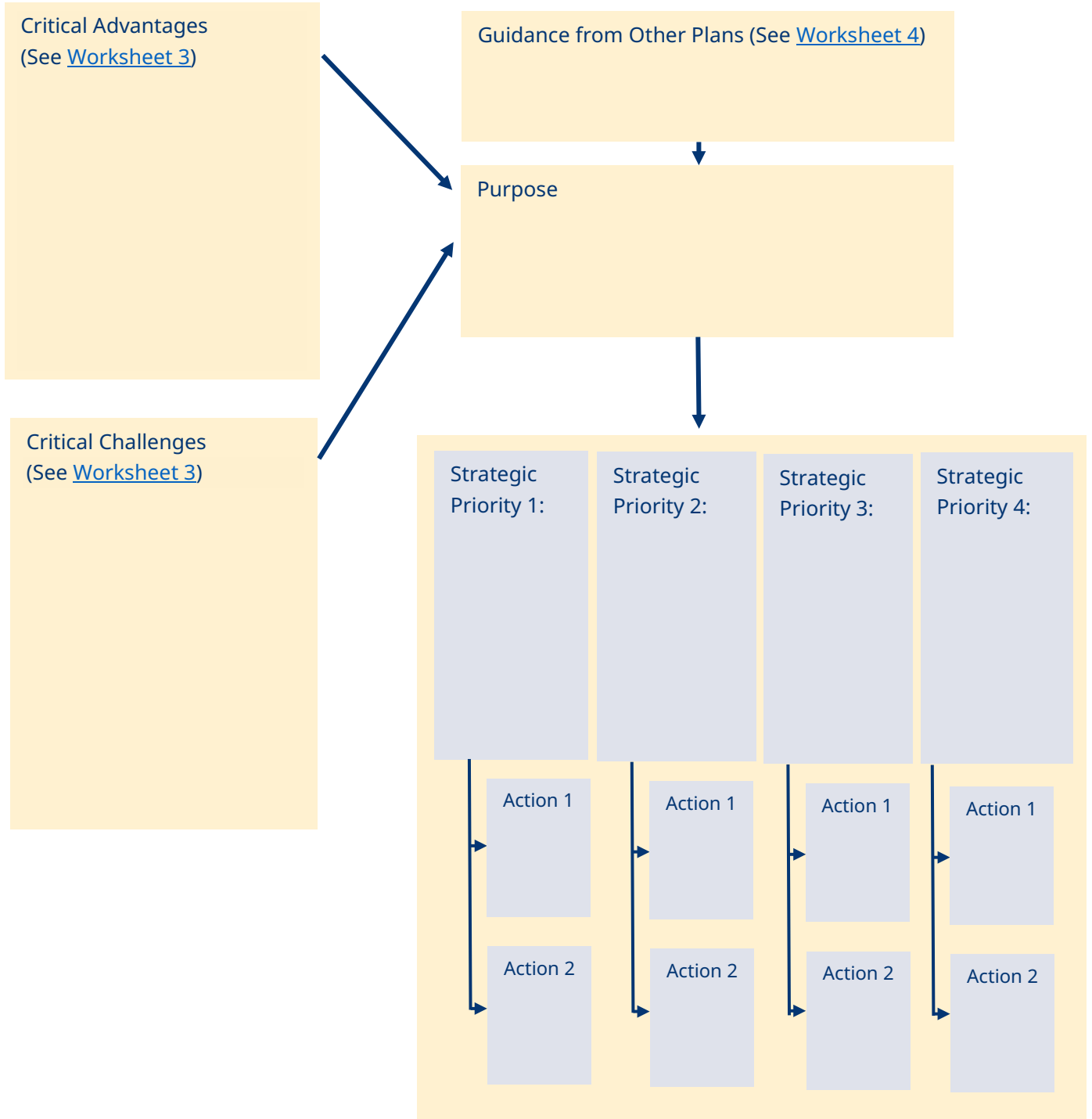
Based on previous efforts, what do you think is missing to support your initiative?

What can you do to fill in the gaps you know are missing?



WORKSHEET 5: LINKING PRIORITIES TO PURPOSE AND CRITICAL NEEDS

Use this worksheet to visualize how your situational analysis and other community plans contribute to defining your purpose and strategic priorities. To see an example, go to [Example Worksheet 5](#).





WORKSHEET 6: TARGET HOUSEHOLDS

Complete this worksheet to explore the fit between a target household and your community. For the Rationale columns, be sure to reference any relevant Critical Advantages and Challenges you defined in [Worksheet 3](#). To see an example, go to [Example Worksheet 6](#).

Target	Profile (Description)	Rationale - What we offer them	Rationale - What they offer us	Key Motivators



WORKSHEET 7: KEY COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE ACTION PLAN

Use this worksheet to document the specific plan for each of your actions. To see an example, go to [Example Worksheet 7](#).

Strategic Priority

Action	Champion	Partners	Resources	Risks	Priority Level



WORKSHEET 8: METRICS

Use this worksheet to plan metrics that clearly link to your plan's strategic priorities and related actions. To see an example, go to [Example Worksheet 8](#).

Strategic Priority and Related Actions	Metric	Information Source	What does this metric tell us	Responsibility for tracking

Appendix 2: References

Source 1

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