

The State of Rural Canada 2015

Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation
Fondation canadienne pour la revitalisation rurale



Candidate Questions

On September 17th, 2015 the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation/Fondation canadienne pour la revitalisation rurale released the report State of Rural Canada. To help people use the report in constructive ways authors were asked to help identify questions that people might ask the various federal candidates in their ridings about their position and their party's position on various rural issues. Below you will find those questions. These questions are not meant to be definitive, but simply are meant to serve as a stimulus for thinking about rural issues. We encourage people to formulate their own questions, particularly as they address the rural issues in their own regions.

A Vision for Rural and Northern Canada

"The authors in this report make it clear that there is nothing inevitable about rural decline: where it is occurring, it is largely intentional by virtue of what we choose to do or not to do in our policy decision-making."ⁱ Rural and northern places are by virtue of their size and relative isolation, complex and interdependent social entities. Yet most of our federal and provincial policies are sectoral in nature - thereby developing conflicting objectives and complicated requirements. There are very few contexts in which the inter-sectoral nature of rural and northern challenges can be identified, researched, discussed, and acted upon.ⁱⁱ

- What is your party's perception of and vision for rural and northern Canada?
- How is it different from its vision for urban Canada?
- How does your party plan to support sustainable rural and northern development?
- What will your party do to facilitate inter-sectoral policy discussion and development - particularly as it is related to rural and northern people and places?
- What do you see as the key rural and small town issues/opportunities that will inform your approach to governing?

Demographic and Economic Characteristics

Since 2008 the number of individuals entering the workforce in non-metro areas has been less than the number who left.ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time, the labour force participation rate among 15 to 24 year olds has remained high relative to urban places.^{iv}

- How will your party's platform address these concerns regarding rural youth and employment?

Rural areas have mixed success in attracting and retaining immigrants: with some areas being as successful as our major metropolitan regions while others being well below urban levels.^v

- What policies and programs does your party propose that will facilitate the integration and maintenance of immigrants in rural places?

The Rural Economy

Rural and northern resources continue to support Canada's economy. As noted in the Québec chapter, "the rural economy in the province shows a gross domestic product (GDP) with a higher growth rate than that of Montreal and other urban areas over the past 15 years."^{vi} Our favourable balance of trade has consistently relied on rural-based natural resources since Confederation. Yet the general figures mask substantial variation in the economic conditions across the country.^{vii}

- What is your party's approach to the economic development of rural and northern Canada?
- How will this approach ensure development that provides a fair return to rural people, sustainable support for their communities, and environmental responsibility in the use of resources?

Aboriginal Peoples

"The settlement and redefinition of title and treaty rights, and the day-to-day realities of living and working together represent opportunities to address historical wrongs and revitalize regional economies with development opportunities that are grounded by an intense commitment to place. In community development work, rural communities illustrate that cultural strength just as much as any other factor supports both community and economic resilience."^{viii}

- What policies and programs does your party have to help revitalize Aboriginal communities, particularly those with non-treaty status and/or off-reserve populations
- How will your party address historical wrongs and rebuild trust with Aboriginal peoples across Canada?
- How will your party ensure that all First Nations communities across Canada have access to clean drinking water?

Aboriginal children aged 14 and under make up 28.0% of the total Aboriginal population and 7.0% of all children in Canada. Non-Aboriginal children aged 14 and under represent 16.5% of the total non-Aboriginal population.^{ix} First Nations youth commit suicide about five to six times more often than non-Aboriginal youth.^x Social science research makes clear that the mental health and wellness of Aboriginal youth is strongly related to the strength of aboriginal language and culture in their communities.^{xi}

- What specific policies and programs does your party have that will significantly improve the prospects of Aboriginal youth?

Rural Poverty and Inequality

In general, rural residents are more likely to be poorer, less educated, less healthy, and at a higher risk of death than their urban counterparts. Lack of access to services, infrastructure, markets, and adequate housing all contribute to these results.^{xii}

- How would your party deal with the challenge of rural poverty and inequality?

Rural areas are highly diversified - with uneven wealth and growth rates exacerbating the increased inequities within Canadian society.^{xiii}

- What policies and programs does your party have to decrease these inequities and ensure that disadvantaged communities are better able to influence their futures?
- What policies and programs does your party have that are targeted to the most vulnerable rural and northern residents: single parents, the elderly, children and youth, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities?
- What actions would your government take to ensure food security in our country?

Rural Infrastructure and Services

The long distances and low densities in rural and northern places create demands on public infrastructure that far outweigh the per capita costs in urban centres.^{xiv} From the “user pay” perspective that dominates Canadian discourse, this places rural people and communities at a considerable disadvantage when building, maintaining, or using that infrastructure. Many of these costs are reflected in things that urban people take for granted – buying food, internet access, travelling to work, or managing a health crisis.

- What is your party’s approach to financing for rural municipal infrastructure?
- What are your policies and programs for insuring investment in rural infrastructure?
- What specific policies and programs does your party have to address the current infrastructure deficit in rural and northern communities?
- What policies do you have to support rural and small towns prepare for extreme weather conditions?
- What is your party’s platform with respect to the accessibility of health care and high quality medical services near rural and small town residents?

Financing

Municipal financial stability has been identified by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities as a critical issue for rural and small town communities.^{xv}

- How would your party deal with cost-sharing between levels of government?

- What rural-related transfers/investment programs do you believe require change or continued support in the coming years?

Environment

“Rural lessons show how we must transform from where the environment is an un-costed externality or waste sink to one where the environment is a sustainably stewarded foundation for communities, economies, and our quality of life.”^{xvi}

- What policies and programs does your party have to identify and manage negative “un-costed externalities” on behalf of environmental and social sustainability?
- What would your party do to responsibly manage our key natural resources such as water, soil, air, forests, fish, minerals, and energy?
- What specific policies does your party have to mitigate climate change and support rural economies to adapt to the changes?

Governance

Rural and northern places have been faced with increased governance demands as federal and provincial services have been downloaded to them.^{xvii} At the same time, their capacity to deal with these demands has decreased through outmigration, withdrawal of services, and an aging population. The traditional strength of the voluntary sector has suffered.^{xviii}

- What policies and programs does your party have that will support the voluntary sector in rural and northern places?
- What programs will it establish to build the governance capacity of those places?
- What resources will it provide to help rural places and small towns cope with their additional administrative and fiscal demands?

Information and Knowledge Development

“A fundamental challenge associated with addressing rural development issues is that the senior governments’ (Provincial and Federal) knowledge base about rural places has withered. Cuts to programs, services, and staff have meant that senior governments simply don’t have the “boots on the ground” necessary to truly understand the rural condition.”^{xix}

- What will your party do to improve access to reliable data which is sufficiently detailed to inform small towns?
- How will your party ensure that the research capacity on rural and northern issues will be rebuilt to a level where we can understand and anticipate the many challenges we face?

The full State of Rural Canada report can be found at: sorc.crrf.ca

Endnotes

- ⁱ State of Rural Canada Report, 2015
- ⁱⁱ OECD. 2010. *OECD Rural Policy Reviews: Québec, Canada*. Paris: OECD Publishing. http://www.oecd.org/document/38/0,3746,en_2649_34413_45400614_1_1_1_1,00.html.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Fact Sheet, <http://www.fcm.ca/home/issues/rural-and-northern/rural-report-fact-sheets/replacement-of-working-age-population.htm>.
- ^{iv} Statistics Canada, 1987 to 2006 data.
- ^v FCM Fact Sheet <http://www.fcm.ca/home/issues/rural-and-northern/rural-report-fact-sheets/immigrant-arrivals.htm>.
- ^{vi} State of Rural Canada Report, 2015.
- ^{vii} Laidler, David, and Shay Aba. 2001. "The Canadian Dollar: Still a Commodity Currency." Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute. https://www.cdhowe.org/sites/default/files/attachments/research_papers/mixed/laidler_%26_aba-2.pdf.
- ^{viii} State of Rural Canada Report, 2015
- ^{ix} Statistics Canada, 2015: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm>
- ^x Health Canada, 2015: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/promotion/mental/index-eng.php>
- ^{xi} Lalonde, Christopher E, Bryan W Sokol, Michael J Chandler, C Anada Vw, C Anada Va, Darcy Hallett, and British Columbia. 2003. "Personal Persistence, Identity Development, and Suicide: A Study of Native and Non-Native North American Adolescents." *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 68 (2). http://www.google.ca/search?sourceid=navclient&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4DBCA_enCA241CA241&q=+chandler++adolescent++suicide++monograph.
- ^{xii} DesMeules, Marie, and Pong, Raymond. 2006. *How Healthy Are Rural Canadians ? An Assessment of Their Health Status*. Ottawa: Canadian Population Health Initiative. https://secure.cihi.ca/free_products/rural_canadians_2006_report_e.pdf.
- ^{xiii} Alasia, Alessandro. 2004. "Mapping the Soci-Economic Diversity of Rural Canada." *Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin* 5 (2). http://nre.concordia.ca/ftp2004/StatCan_BULLETINS/vol5_e/21-006-XIE2003002.pdf.
- ^{xiv} Federation of Canadian Municipalities. 2012. "The Road to Jobs and Growth: Solving Canada's Municipal Infrastructure Challenge." Ottawa: Federation of Canadian Municipalities. http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/backgrounders/The_Road_to_Jobs_and_Growth_Solving_Canadas_Municipal_Infrastructure_Challenge_-_Submission_EN.pdf.
- ^{xv} <https://www.fcm.ca/home/events/past-conferences/2012-sustainable-communities-conference-and-trade-show-post-conference-resources/workshop-infrastructure-financing.htm>
- ^{xvi} State of Rural Canada Report, 2015
- ^{xvii} Jacob, Benoy, Becky Lipton, Victoria Hagens, and Bill Reimer. 2008. "Re-Thinking Local Autonomy: Perceptions from Four Rural Municipalities." *Canadian Public Administration* 51 (3 (Sept)): 407–27.
- ^{xviii} Bruce, David, Paul Jordan, and Greg Halseth. 1999. "The Role of Voluntary Organizations in Rural Canada: Impacts of Changing Availability of Operational and Program Funding." Montreal, QC: The New Rural Economy Project, Concordia University. <http://nre.concordia.ca/ftprootFull/voluntarysector/voluntary-availability.pdf>.
- ^{xix} State of Rural Canada Report, 2015

