CEDEC

BUSINESS VITALITY INITIATIVE

FACILITATOR HANDBOOK

November 2010

Business Vitality Initiative BVI

Facilitator's Handbook

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MANUAL

The BVI includes two highly structured public meetings which require expert facilitation. This manual is a basic resource for facilitators. Other necessary resources include:

- The BVI PowerPoint presentation
- The BVI Community Handbook
- Discussions with CIEL management
- Discussions with the Community Sponsor
- A BVI Assessment Report and Final Report from another community

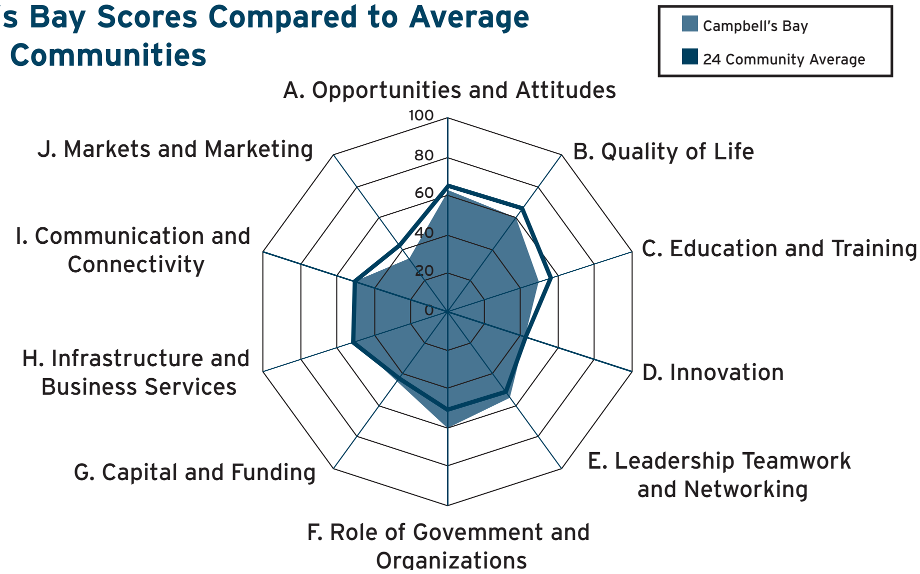
INTRODUCTION TO THE BVI

The Business Vitality Initiative (BVI) measures a community's capacity to work with and support entrepreneurs and to foster business growth. This unique group process was developed and is administered by the Centre for Innovative and Entrepreneurial Leadership based in Nelson, B.C.

The BVI explores the perceptions of citizens and business people about the business friendliness in the community. Through community meetings, focus groups, questionnaires, statistics, and written reports, the community assesses its current reality, focuses on what needs to be done, and then takes action.

The BVI process allows the community to compare its scores to those from other communities using a unique graphical index (the Business Vitality *Index*) such as the one below.

Campbell's Bay Scores Compared to Average of All BVI Communities



The BVI has been employed in 20 communities in BC, five in Alberta, three in Manitoba, and five in Australia since its introduction in 2001. In 2003, the BVI team was nominated for BC's top award in community economic development.

Business Vitality- What Does it Mean?

A key feature of the new knowledge-based economy is the increased flow of information and goods on a global scale. This opening of markets has the potential to constrain or to enhance a local economy, depending on community vision & action.

For example, if you spend your money at the big box store in the closest big city, your local economy loses (this is termed *leakage*). If, on the other hand, you spend your money locally and at the same time export goods from your business to external markets, your economy benefits. The idea is to keep the pipeline open to exports while avoiding leakage.

Increased competition is another feature of the new economy, along with a shift from a resource base to a knowledge base. Resource sectors such as forestry and mining are being replaced by knowledge-based industries, often utilizing new technology coupled with innovative application. With adequate infrastructure to allow the flow of goods and information into and out of the area, the potential for the revitalization of rural Canada presents itself.

In addition, a young, skilled population looking to raise a family in a safe and beautiful place can be attracted to invigorate rural economies. With careful planning, a community can ensure that the economy works for them.

How Does the BVI Measure Business Vitality?

Most projects that have set out to define and measure business health are statistical report-cards: they gather figures or carry out surveys to develop a set of statistics.

CIEL has found that statistics give a limited picture, and that citizens have difficulty engaging with statistics or being inspired by them. So the BVI relies more on *perceptual indicators*— citizens' thoughts and feelings about their community. We have found that perceptions, even though they do not provide a "scientifically accurate" analysis, offer an excellent starting point for reflection and action by communities. See Appendix A for more details on sample sizes.

So the BVI collects and analyzes citizens' perceptions on such things as the business-friendliness of the city council, the availability of entrepreneurial training, the quality of life in the community, telecommunications infrastructure, availability of business capital, the quality of leadership, whether or not young adults consider the community a desirable place to live, and more.

Participants in the BVI are presented with 60 statements about the community and asked to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with each one. The 60 statements are all derived from the following ten components of business vitality:

1. Opportunities and Attitudes

The ability of the community to recognize, take action on, and follow through on available opportunities.

2. Quality of Life

The ability of the community to attract & retain businesses & citizens, especially young, skilled workers.

3. Education and Training

The ability to develop entrepreneurship skills & attitudes in the non-business population, and to upgrade skills in the business community.

4. Innovation

The ability of a community & its citizens to think of and develop new ideas, adapt to changes, recognize unusual and new opportunities and technologies, and share their ideas with like-minded people.

5. Leadership, Teamwork, and Networking

The capacity of a community to take action on an idea or opportunity as a whole group, with good leadership, effective teamwork, and clear communication.

6. Role of Government and Organizations

The ability of local governments and other organizations to work with business to design processes and programs that make it as easy as possible to start or expand a business.

7. Capital and Funding

The ability of the community to financially support entrepreneurs through ensuring access to capital, and educating businesses about financial management and supports.

8. Infrastructure and Business Services

The ability to provide necessary and high quality support services and infrastructure to business at reasonable costs, allowing businesses to be as competitive as possible.

9. Communications and Connectivity

The ability of businesses to connect with each other and with outside markets.

10. Markets and Marketing

The ability of business to capture and expand markets locally, regionally, and outside the region, thus keeping and building local wealth.

Benefits of the BVI

- Diagnoses community's business vitality in a visual way
- Finds gaps and strengths in 10 key areas with an easy-to-read graphical design
- Quantifies 60 indicators important for entrepreneurial stimulation
- Allows community to build common understanding and set priorities for action
- Brings business people, leaders and citizens together to build capacity
- Helps move a community from indecisiveness to action
- Improves a community's business vitality allowing it to maximize business start-up, expansion and attraction

Summary of the BVI Process

The BVI is based on a structure best described as *assess- focus- act*.

Phase 1: Assessment

The process begins with an assessment session attended by 25-30 invitees, representing the business sector (50%), community leaders (25%), and a cross-section of citizens (25%). This session consists of a questionnaire administered by the BVI Team, followed by a focus group discussion on community responsiveness to entrepreneurs and small business.

The public is also invited to respond to the questionnaire on line.

Following the assessment session and the collection of on-line responses, the BVI team writes a detailed report of the results.

Phase 2: Community Focus and Action

The public is invited to the second session, scheduled four to eight weeks after the initial meeting. The results of the assessment are presented, and the community is asked to set priority actions – either strengths the community wishes to build on, or weaknesses the community wishes to address. Following the priority-setting exercise, a "reality check" is performed in small groups in order to determine if current resources, energy and circumstances are in place to move forward with determined actions.

FACILITATING THE ASSESSMENT SESSION

Before you facilitate the Assessment Session, there will have been a lot of advance preparatory work done by the Community Sponsor, a local organization that coordinates the BVI. You should familiarize yourself with this preliminary work by reading the *BVI Community Handbook* and having a discussion with the Community Sponsor.

Before facilitating the Assessment Session, you should study a BVI Assessment Report from a community that has recently completed the BVI. The Assessment Session you are about to facilitate will result in a similar report, and it will be useful for you to have seen a sample of the result you are working toward.

Purposes

The primary purpose of the Assessment Session is to gather participants' perceptions of local business friendliness through a structured set of questions and focused discussion.

The secondary purposes of the meeting are to assist in building connections in the community and to gather commitment for the BVI process from participants. It is essential that those participating become interested and engaged so that follow-up BVI activities and actions are successful.

Overview

The meeting should take no longer than three hours.

Despite the fact that they are living in a small community, many of the assessment meeting participants may not have met one another, so it is important to have name tags, introductions at the start of the meeting, and informal opportunities where people can make connections and start conversations. This can take the form of:

- personally welcoming all participants and introducing them to others prior to the formal start of the meeting,
- mixing up the seating so that people are not sitting with the people they always associate with, and
- openly encouraging networking and connection building during the "networking break."

It is important that people feel comfortable and free to speak their minds in a safe environment. As a facilitator, it's your role to keep the meeting positive, on track, and focused.

Room Set-up and Preparation

Set the room up so that participants can:

- watch a PowerPoint presentation
- fill out questionnaires with adequate space and comfort
- engage in groups of six to twelve during a small group exercise

Ideally, the session should use easily movable tables that can accommodate six to eight people. It is most important to have a comfortable writing surface for the questionnaire process.

At the beginning of the meeting, all chairs should face the front. Set up a small table with LCD laptop close to the front of the room with a projection screen behind the facilitator. You may wish to use a podium or table for notes or materials. If the space is large or if there are is a large crowd expected, use a sound system with microphone and speakers.

Arrive at the meeting space at least one hour in advance to set up the equipment, familiarize yourself with the room, and scout out the facility for possible issues (*e.g.* location of washrooms, exits, ensuring that power works, ensuring equipment is functional, etc.).

Ask that a volunteer from Community Sponsor greet participants and take attendance on an attendance sheet, asking participants to fill out their name, phone number and e-mail as they enter the room. In addition, participants should be asked to fill out a blank name tag. And they should be given any other relevant written information about the session including a paper copy of the PowerPoint presentation.

If possible, use a separate room to host food and drink for the networking break. Work with the Community Sponsor to ensure that coffee, tea, water, juice are set up and available prior to and throughout the session. In addition, snacks should be provided for the participants at the break.

Equipment required

- LCD projector (with extra lamp)
- Laptop
- PowerPoint presentation on CD, DVD or USB drive
- small table for LCD
- extension cord(s)
- projection screen
- flipcharts (at least one sheet for every three participants)
- flip chart markers
- masking tape
- pens & pencils
- questionnaires
- evaluation forms
- attendance sheet
- name tags
- copies of PowerPoint presentation (optional)
- other copies of reports from other communities (optional)

Assessment Session Agenda

1. Welcome and acknowledgment of Community Sponsors and other key organizers (5 minutes)

It is important that the Community Sponsors kick off the meeting by introducing the facilitator. In turn, the facilitator should acknowledge the significant role of the Community Sponsor. Other key organizers and funding organizations should also be acknowledged at this time. If there is someone from a funding organization, give them an opportunity to speak briefly.

2. Introductions (10-15 minutes)

Ask all participants to briefly introduce themselves.

3. PowerPoint Presentation of the BVI process (20-25 minutes)

A PowerPoint is available for facilitators to guide participants through the BVI. The PowerPoint explains the purpose of the BVI, introduces the Community Sponsor and other organizations involved, and reviews the BVI process including the agenda for the Assessment Session. It shows sample results from other communities, demonstrating the *assess- focus- act* structure of the BVI. This presentation should be kept to a brief overview. You should be familiar with the PowerPoint in advance, and encourage questions.

4. Determination of Geographical Boundaries (5-10 minutes)

Before the questionnaire can be administered, participants need to define the geographic scope of the community to be considered in their answers. For example, does the questionnaire refer to the area within the municipal boundaries or to a larger natural trading area? In some communities that have complex interrelationships with other communities, some sections of the BVI may include a larger or smaller boundary. This should be defined and agreed upon at this juncture (unless the funders and Community Sponsors have predefined the community boundaries).

5. Administration of the BVI questionnaire (20-40 minutes)

Distribute pencils or pens in advance. Ask participants to fill in the questionnaire as honestly and completely as possible in order to get an accurate picture of the state of the community. Some participants may finish the questionnaire in as little as 20 minutes while some may take much longer.

Display the following instructions on the overhead:

- Answer ALL questions
- Check only one box for each question
- If you do not know the answer or feel you are not adequately informed about the question, check "don't know"
- If you do not feel the question applies to your community, leave the question blank
- PRINT answers in the space provided for each short answer section (note the questionnaire is 2-sided)
- Print any comments about the clarity, topic, or wording of the questions in the *comments* section at the end of the short answer sections
- If any questions arise as you complete the test, PLEASE ASK!
- Take a break if you need to!

Once participants have completed the questionnaire, direct them to the to the food/networking area to quietly carry on a conversation.

If people have not finished the questionnaire and want to finish later, designate someone from the Community Sponsor to collect the questionnaires and send them to CIEL within one week of the meeting.

Encourage participants to get up, walk around, grab a snack or drink during the session.

Be on hand to answer any questions that may arise.

6. Networking break (15 to 25 minutes)

This can be the most valuable part of the BVI process as connections are made while people are collectively trying to make their community a better place.

7. Focus groups with a brief report back (40 to 60 minutes)

Break participants into groups of six to twelve participants to answer one of the two questions below. In order to get a good mix of people in each group, use a counting off exercise, where participants number off 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. and move to the table matching the number.

Once participants have moved to their new tables, explain the purpose of the focus group and identify the two questions.

Give each group 15 to 20 minutes to answer one of the questions below— the odd numbered tables will do the odd question while the even numbered tables will do the even question. Select a facilitator and recorder from within each group. In addition, each group should nominate a person to present back following this exercise. This is a brainstorming session—encourage participants to be creative, not block or debate responses, and list what quickly comes into their heads. Circulate among the groups, reinforcing this instruction if need be. Should a group finish quickly, encourage them to attempt the second question.

- **Question 1 -** What are the things that make this community business-friendly?
- **Question 2 -** What are the things that can be done (within community's control) to improve the business-friendliness of the community?

Give each group several minutes to report back to the whole group at the end of this session. Encourage brevity in the presentations. If time is tight, only new comments and observations should be offered. Praise each group, giving them a hand and thanks for their efforts.

Collect the flipchart paper and ensure the flipchart is properly labeled with question number, date and community name (alternatively, digital photographs can be taken of the flipcharts at the end of the session).

8. Conclusion (15 minutes)

Quickly reiterate the *assess- focus-act* aspect of the BVI. Explain that we have come together tonight to complete the first step of the BVI - the assessment. Explain that CIEL will produce a report based on today's questionnaire and focus groups. The next meeting, in 6 - 10 weeks time, will be the three-hour Community Focus and Action Session, where we'll look at the report, review possible actions, and vote for actions the community would like to proceed with.

Work with the group to identify one or two possible dates for the Community Focus meeting.

Explain that the questionnaire is available online. Give them the web address and recommend that they encourage their friends and business associates to fill it in.

Thank everyone for taking time out of their busy schedules to attend and help to build a more vital community. Acknowledge the hard work of the Community Sponsors and other key organizers. Acknowledge the funders.

Hand out a one page evaluation forms to be completed by everyone in the room. Participants should be told that this will take no longer than two minutes and are an important part of making the BVI a better process (see Appendix A).

All participants should leave with:

- A sense that they have contributed to a larger community process that will continue.
- A sense that it is critical to have continuity of participants between the first meeting and the second.
- An understanding of the purpose of the BVI.
- Excitement about the BVI and an interest in finding out what their fellow citizens think about their community.
- The knowledge that the BVI process is open to everyone and that friends and neighbors may complete the questionnaire online.
- The intention to invite their friends and associates to attend the Community Focus and Action session.
- An understanding of the role of the Community Sponsor.
- Recognition that the reports will be sent to the Community Sponsor, posted on the CIEL website (www.theCIEL.com), and emailed in summary form to each of the participants.
- Contact information of the Community Sponsor should they require more information.
- Knowledge of two tentative dates for the next meeting.

After the meeting

It is important that you as the facilitator leave with:

- the attendance list (with contact names, numbers and e-mails) completed
- the completed questionnaires
- the flipchart paper from the focus groups
- the completed evaluation forms
- a list of those who have not yet completed the questionnaire

It is CIEL's job to analyze the data from the questionnaires and the focus groups and write an Assessment Report. In about 100 pages, the Assessment Report outlines the results in written and graphic formats, points out key trends and patterns in the data, draws conclusions, and makes preliminary recommendations.

CIEL will then collaborate with the Community Sponsor to distribute the report as widely as possible, including to the local and regional media. It will also be posted on the CIEL website. The intent of this distribution is to allow as many people in the community as possible to see the report in advance of the Community Focus and Action Session.

FACILITATING THE COMMUNITY FOCUS AND ACTION SESSION

Purpose

The purposes of this meeting are to use the reported results of the Assessment session to decide on some feasible actions that could improve the business friendliness of the community, and to begin planning for those.

Overview

In summary, this session will

- Present the results of the assessment back to the community
- Invite the community to offer feedback and input
- Present possible actions and activities (developed by CIEL as part of the assessment report) that the community might consider as a response to the assessment
- Allow for additional actions to be added by the participants
- Select projects, actions and activities through a voting process
- Create action committees to move some of these actions forward
- Have the community perform a reality check on the selected actions to discuss their feasibility
- Decide on next steps

This meeting should take no longer than 2 1/2 hours. It requires much more active and adept facilitation than the first meeting. Because this meeting is open to the entire community, it is more difficult to gauge the turnout, and the dynamics can be more challenging than the Assessment Session.

Like the assessment meeting, it is important to have name tags, introductions at the start of the meeting, and informal opportunities where people can make connections and start conversations.

People must feel comfortable and feel they can speak their mind in a safe environment. As a facilitator, it's your role to keep the meeting positive, on track and focused.

Room Set-up and Preparation

The preparation of the room is the same as for the Assessment Session, described above.

In addition, provide a second microphone for questions from the floor if a large crowd is anticipated.

CIEL will provide you with some 8.5 x 11 sheets which will be posted on the wall. One group of these contains the headings *capacity building, marketing, networking*, and *research*, each on a separate sheet. Others will each contain one of the possible actions and activities included in the Assessment Report: each one of those should be placed on the wall under the appropriate one of the four headings.

CIEL will provide a PowerPoint presentation for this meeting.

Equipment

Equipment for this session is the same as for the Assessment Session described above. In addition, you will need:

- several copies of the full BVI report
- several dozen copies of the summary BVI report
- coloured sticky dots (for the *dotmocracy* project-picking exercise)
- some blank 8.5 x 11 blank sheets

Agenda

1. Welcome & acknowledgment of Community Sponsors and other key organizers (5 minutes)

It is important that the Community Sponsors kick off the meeting by introducing the facilitator. In turn, the facilitator should acknowledge the significant role of the Community Sponsors. Other key organizers and funding organizations should also be acknowledged at this time. If there is someone from a funding organization, give them an opportunity to speak briefly.

2. Introductions (5-10 minutes)

Ask all participants to briefly introduce themselves.

3. Present the results of the community assessment to the community (20-25 minutes)

The BVI Assessment Report contains a large amount of quantitative and qualitative information. You should be very familiar with the report, and be prepared to answer questions about it. Use the PowerPoint to summarize the report.

4. Present possible actions and activities that the community might consider as a result of the assessment (15-20 minutes)

Potential actions and activities in the PowerPoint are broken into four main categories: *capacity building, marketing, networking*, and *research*.

While the full report lists short-term (things that can be accomplished in less than one year), medium and long-term actions, the PowerPoint usually includes only short-term actions.

The actions are those things that have been suggested by the participants in the Assessment Session and others suggested by CIEL based upon the findings in the Assessment Report.

5. Invite the community to offer feedback and input (10-20 minutes)

Following the presentation of short-term actions, ask the participants for feedback and suggestions on other actions which may not have been suggested in the reports or PowerPoint. In this way, even those who did not attend the session can influence project selection. Using blank 8.5 x 11 sheets, post the new ideas on the wall with the other potential actions, under the appropriate category.

6. Select projects, actions and activities through a voting process (conducted during the break)

Use dotmocracy, a process in which each participant is given five dots to place on projects or activities they feel passionate about, and would like to participate in over the next year. This weeds out projects that might be good for the community but have no one willing to commit to working on them. Participants can put one dot on five projects, five dots on one project or any combination in between.

7. Networking Break (20-30 minutes)

In order to use time efficiently, use the networking break to accomplish both networking and the dotmocracy exercise.

Tally up the votes for each potential action and, using a large marker, write the total on each sheet.

Collect the sheets for the top three or four vote-getting actions and bring them to the front of the room.

8. Create action committees to move some of these actions forward (15 minutes)

The facilitator should announce the results of the votes for the top three or four actions.

Place the sheets for the top three or four actions on different empty tables spread throughout the room, and ask that participants move to the table of the action that they are most interested in working on.

If no participants go to a table, that action is scrapped or put on hold, because it is clear that there is not enough energy in the room to carry it forward.

9. Perform a Reality Check on the selected actions (35-50 minutes)

Hand out a Reality Check sheet to each group (see Appendix A).

Appoint a recorder for each group. The recorder should ensure that the names of all action group participants are recorded along with their e-mails and phone numbers on the back of the reality check.

The group should discuss the following questions and write the answers on the Reality Check sheet.

In the reality check, participants should answer the following questions:

- Purpose of the action— What is the main goal of this action? What would it look like if it were successful?
- Commitment-- Can we get commitment and energy from the community to undertake this? If not, what do we have to do?
- Leadership-- Who has the skills to lead (organization(s), individuals)? Who else do we need to involve to ensure success who isn't in the room right now?
- Time Frame-- How long will it take to accomplish? Are there any political, economic or funding factors which might hurt/help the timing?
- Financial Resources-- What, if any, financial resources do we need to tap into? Are there any organizations that can assist this action? Any other resources?
- Next Steps—time and location of next meeting, and name of organizer

After 25 or 30 minutes, check in with the groups to see if they are nearing completion or if they need help.

One member of each group should present back the summary of the Reality Check.

10. Decide on next steps to move the process forward (15 minutes)

Based on the Reality Check exercise, you and the group must come to a clear conclusion about which actions will be carried forward and the next steps for each one.

Review with the group the PowerPoint *BVI Tips for Success* and reiterate that success in carrying out actions will be determined by the community's own energy and efforts. This is a shared community responsibility despite the Community Sponsor playing a facilitative role.

Quickly review the *assess- focus- act* framework of the BVI.

11. Conclusion (10 minutes)

The Community Sponsor should make a public statement about the role it will play in the coming months.

Thank everyone for taking time out of their busy schedules to attend and help to build a more vital community. Acknowledge the hard work of the Community Sponsors and other key organizers. Acknowledge the funders.

Hand out evaluation forms (see Appendix A). Tell participants that this will take no longer than one minute and is an important part of making the BVI a better process.

All participants should leave with:

- A sense that they have contributed to a larger community process that will continue
- An understanding of the purpose of the BVI
- Excitement about the actions that their community has selected
- Knowledge of the dates for follow-up meetings for community action groups
- An understanding of the role of the Community Sponsor
- Recognition CIEL will be writing a Community Focus and Action Report which will be sent to the Community Sponsor, posted on the CIEL website (www.theCIEL.com), and e-mailed to each of the participants

After the meeting

Ensure that you leave with:

- the attendance list (with contact names, numbers and e-mails) completed
- the completed reality check sheets (a copy of these should be faxed back to the Community Sponsor immediately after returning to the office)
- any flipchart paper used by the action groups (most of the reality check should be completed on the reality check worksheet)
- the completed evaluation form

For more information:
www.theCIEL.com
www.cedec.ca