



Community Summary Report #8

Location: Hinton, Alberta

Partner Name: Iron & Earth

Community Summary Report - Hinton, Alberta

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Summary

This report outlines the event held by Iron & Earth in Hinton, Alberta, as part of the Green Resilience Project on the topic of climate change, income security and community. Participants discussed how the climate increasingly affects their community, daily lives, and income sources. They expressed the need to be proactive, to support workers in the transition, and that potential solutions should focus on diversifying local sources of income, and must have economic, environmental, and social components. Following this session, Iron & Earth plans to hold a second community discussion in Hinton, to continue the conversation.

1. Introduction

About the Green Resilience Project

This community conversation was part of the Green Resilience Project, a Canada-wide series of conversations exploring and documenting the links between community resilience, income security and the shift to a low-carbon economy. Through working with a designated partner organization from each community, the Green Resilience Project aims to create spaces in which a wide range of participants can talk through the links between climate change and income security and identify possible next steps to build or maintain community resilience in the face of these challenges.

This Community Summary Report reflects what we heard and learned in our community's conversation. Each Project partner organization across Canada will be producing a similar report. In March 2022, the Green Resilience Project will produce a final report summarizing findings across conversations, which will be available to the public and shared with Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Funding for the Green Resilience Project is generously provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada's Climate Action and Awareness Fund. The project is managed and delivered by Energy Mix Productions, Basic Income Canada Network, Coalition Canada Basic Income - Revenue de base, Basic Income Canada Youth Network, national experts and local partners.

About the Community Partner organization

Iron & Earth (I&E) is a worker-centered organization that seeks to empower fossil fuel industry workers and their communities to build & implement climate solutions. Our reach extends to various provinces across Canada with a strong presence in Alberta.

We decided to take part in this project due to its thematic approach on the intersection of climate change and income security, as well as its emphasis on local solutions. Also, we

considered that the funding provided was reflective of how difficult it is to have conversations with communities, allowing space for potential supports to lessen barriers to participation.

We prepared a 2-page project proposal and offered it to potential facilitators from various communities in Alberta, as our priority was to be able to develop a truly local session, considering both the project's timeline as well as local capacity. We were able to select Hinton as our community thanks to the interest and the hard work of three local facilitators that were invested in creating this type of space in their town.

Why this community was selected to have a conversation

Oil, gas and coal have built prosperity for Hinton and its people are grateful for the hard work of those who have contributed to the wellbeing of the community. However, the climate has become increasingly uncertain, and it has taken a toll on the local economy. We offered this session as a space to talk about these issues, understanding the diversity of opinions, and bringing the community together to find innovative solutions tailored specifically to Hinton.

In the past couple of years, the town has been experiencing:

- Extreme weather changes: cold snaps, heat waves, drought, excess rain, mild/dry winters, pests (mountain pine beetle), and fish killed due to heat waves
- Thermal coal phase out: over three hundred employees face income insecurities moving forward
- Inconsistent income avenues: fossil fuel unstable prices related to both energy transition policy and market fluctuations
- Several green projects with various degrees of success: a geothermal pilot project, LED streetlights, electric car charging stations, Hydro power station, Lignin Plant

But Hinton also has strengths:

- The town started out as a diverse economic community (Pulp, forestry, coal, oil and gas, tourism), so a diverse economic future is possible
- Hinton is the “gateway to the Rockies” so there is a certain connection, familiarity and sense of pride with regards to the environment for the community as a whole

About the conversation participants

Our goal was to gather diverse people from various industry and local government groups, ages and races, and educational backgrounds. Our facilitators led the outreach campaign with the support of I&E, who prepared an amplification document to be used during this stage with scripts ready for email and social media.

I&E also prepared a google sign-up form with all the necessary registration details, as well as accessibility and demographic information. We wanted to ensure that we considered all potential barriers to participation during our planning phase. We identified that the major accessibility supports were competitive reimbursement, childcare assistance, and access to stable internet for the duration of the session, which we included in our form. We also added an open-ended question for participants to include any other accessibility requests that they

may have, as we knew that each person's needs are different and that our planning might not include them all.

From the data collected, 50% of attendants opted for reimbursements with no other accessibility requests. None of the participants identified as racialized, yet 10% described themselves as Indigenous. Our session reached gender parity, with 50% self-identified men and 50% self-identified women. With regards to age, 60% of attendants were in the 20-40 range, 30% were in the 41-60, and 10% were over the age of 60. All the participants spoke English at home, and none described themselves as recent immigrants to Canada, with a disability, or being part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. With regards to socio-economic status, 70% of the participants identified as middle income, while 20% were high income and the remaining 10% were low income. Their job sectors showed that 50% of attendants were part of the agricultural/natural resources category, while the rest belong to various sectors: 10% in business, finance, and administration; 10% in arts, culture, recreation, and sport; 10% in education; 10% in health; and 10% in management.

Compared to our original goal, these statistics show that we succeeded in some areas while we were not as effective in others. We recognize the absence in our community session of racialized, migrant, disabled, and 2SLGBTQ+ peoples, as well as youth. Still, it is important to point out that our participants' demographics are representative of federal census data¹ for the town of Hinton.

The Community Conversation

Our community conversation was held via Zoom on Monday, January 24th, 2022, from 5:30 to 7:30pm MST. The session started with a 20-minute plenary introductory talk presenting the topics to be discussed, followed by a 70-minute breakout conversation, where participants were split into groups with facilitators asking our key questions. After a 10-minute break, the community session ended with a 15-minute wrap-up that included concluding remarks and next steps.

During our planning process, we took great care in the language we would utilize during our conversation and developed a comprehensive script that reflected this. We wanted to make sure that the language was not confrontational or polarizing and considered our target audience. This examination led to the avoidance of potentially contentious terms such as universal basic income, and just transition. Likewise, we used human-caused extreme weather or environmental changes when referring to climate change, and energy transition instead of net-zero emissions or net-zero 2050. Additionally, we focused on the town of Hinton and its peoples, leaving out any provincial, federal, or global associations. These considerations allowed the participants to use any terminology they felt comfortable with and not feel the burden of imposed narratives.

Our planning also led us to avoid language regarding resilience, and focus instead on the intersection of climate change, income security and community. Again, we wanted to avoid

¹ Statistics Canada. 2017. Hinton, T [Census subdivision], Alberta and Division No. 14, CDR [Census division], Alberta (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017.
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

imposing narratives to participants as resilience is quite a complex term. And while it is key for a community to respond to and recover from the effects of climate change, not everyone is ready and accepts the end of their normalcy. Grief, denial, and acceptance are some of the aspects that need to occur before resiliency can take place and it is the community who should decide when and how to talk about it.

Our planning led to a successful community conversation. Facilitators and feedback forms related positive experiences, highlighting a communal and agreeable session. Participants felt engaged and comfortable sharing their opinions, even when they may have been apprehensive before the event. Our main challenge was the ongoing pandemic. We may be in year 3 of the pandemic, but the new variants made the development of the session and its attendance quite difficult. We are grateful for those who participated during these very uncertain times.

2. What We Heard

During our breakout session, we invited participants to discuss the three key questions that are the focus of this section. Facilitators used these as guides and had the freedom to expand their questioning depending on the fluidity of the interactions.

How are the changes to the community's environment and economy affecting you, your family or the community as a whole?

The coal phaseout, transition preparedness, and extreme hot and cold conditions affecting industries, municipal and housing infrastructure, as well as mental health and wellbeing, were identified as the main issues participants were experiencing. With regards to the coal phase out and the transition, attendants were quite cognizant of the need to support workers with the necessary skills and competitive incomes to transition, as well as diversifying the existing industries to attract and maintain workers and their families. As one participant expressed, “[We] have to keep not only in mind the worker of today, but the worker of tomorrow”.

Participants also described how these extreme temperatures affected their day to day - how they unsettled their workplaces, affecting equipment or number of customers, to their daily life, with dangerous road conditions during commuting or the higher cost of their electricity bills. Attendants also talked about how the inclement weather was upsetting their wellbeing, with a participant simply stating, “The summer kill off of [sic] the fish in the rivers and the lakes really affected my entire fishing season which is 90% of my life. That’s that”. Another participant described how challenging it was to work with vulnerable populations during this time, stating diminished staff capacity and increased demand for services.

How are these environmental and economic changes related to each other?

The narrative presented by participants in the previous section showed awareness of the economic impacts to the extreme weather they have been experiencing. Due to this, when asked this question, attendants led the conversation towards strengthening the previous themes, further expanding on how the environment was affecting extractive industries, i.e., mitigation plans never implemented before, and how it influenced businesses outside this field

such as retail, environmental services, and tourism, with an added layer created by the current pandemic.

Moreover, this question ushered the discussion towards interconnectedness and balance as the key concepts behind a stable economy in the face of climate change. As one participant put it, “It is definitely a balancing act between the pros and cons of the economy and the pros and cons of the environment. And what we're willing to take and lose”. Attendants identified a historical approach still observed to this day, where, as a participant stated, if “you care about the environment, you have to conflict with either these [extractive] industries or an economy”. The group acknowledged that this approach cannot continue, that the environment and the economy are interconnected, and that it is the avenue that needs to be pursued. As an attendant expressed, “we can have an economy that is strong, and we can still protect ... these areas and values within the environment that we do care about”. Moreover, participants indicated that it is not only the economy and the environment that are interrelated. Social and cultural aspects should also be included. As the community’s wellbeing is a key component of stable and balanced livelihoods.

What are some possible solutions to the challenges we have discussed that will help the community respond to these extreme environmental changes and create income security for all community members?

Diversification was the main theme identified from the discussion. From energy sources to industries, participants expressed positive associations to this concept. As one attendant explained,

if we can diversify where we're getting our energy from [And if] we're starting to lose some of these coal jobs, or oil and gas jobs, ... we could start to move some of those people, ... , and bring them into these different jobs that are emerging. Maybe build up this different sector within our community. It could really make a big impact and really make our community a little bit stronger, by utilizing the talents that we already have.

Several participants mentioned Hinton’s geothermal potential while others referred to its biomass capability. Some emphasized on the town’s key geographical location, and how the community had responded to previous boom and bust cycles. The group was keen to point out how they felt their community could respond to climate change. What is needed, as one attendant indicated, is to be “proactive rather than reactive {W}e are going to have these immense changes, and what can we do to sort of prepare ourselves before it happens”. And as another stated, the community must have “the capacity to shift”.

This narrative led to the other major theme identified from the discussion, awareness. For a participant, it is crucial to have “clear, [and] factual information out in a positive manner”. As another stated, people want

to be familiarized with these topics [And understand] that they're not as polarizing and toxic as they're portrayed in [the] media or ... in certain groups We're all part of the Hinton community, and we would like to see the betterment and a stronger community. So looking at those points where we can each relate to each other, ... , [and

that] we're not all working against each other, whether or not ... we all share the same views.

Attendants were conscious of how contentious it can be to talk about the environment, and how important it was for the community, from decision makers to business owners and families, to have a clear understanding of any potential solutions offered, i.e., the provincial carbon tax. As one participant indicated, if this were evident, that would be “one thing that they can get behind and ... then it sort of starts shifting, because then they have a frame of reference to say, oh, climate change, environmental and economic. It actually did this”.

Other barriers identified during the breakout session were affordability and how to remain competitive in the market economy. Participants expressed how it may be more environmentally conscious to shop local but how chain stores or franchises offered more competitive prices. The group further emphasized on the need for a comprehensive approach that supports local business and changes consumer mindsets.

As it was mentioned in previous sections, we wanted our audience to use terminology they could relate to and not feel pressured by any imposing narratives. This resulted in participants organically bringing up their ideas about resilience, the government, and potential supports, such as universal basic income (UBI). Several attendants see diversification as the key to a resilient community. The group is cognizant of how public policy can be helpful, yet it can also create anxiety, uncertainty, and bureaucracy. They see that decision makers, from the local to the federal level, can implement comprehensive solutions involving communities in the process. Several attendants recognize that part of that public policy could include economic support for those who are most affected.

3. What We Learned

Conclusions

- Connecting climate change with its economic impacts and how they affect communities is a realistic approach that generated positive engagement and allowed the participants to provide potential solutions based on their knowledge and experiences.
- Any solution must be comprehensive, and include social and cultural aspects that support economic approaches
- Emphasis should be given in raising awareness on these issues in a clear and positive way. Community conversations such as these can be great catalysts and should include diverse groups and perspectives
- The community wants to see decision makers implement comprehensive solutions and want to be involved in the process.
- The language used by facilitators allowed participants to discuss these topics in a positive way. They were the main protagonists using terminology and narrative they felt comfortable with

Feedback and Q&A

We shared a google feedback form at the end of our session which was completed by 80% of our participants. We were able to discern their level of satisfaction with 75% being very satisfied and the remaining 25% being satisfied. Only 12% of our participants were not familiar with the links between extreme weather events, income security, and community. Yet 88% of them felt they learned something about these topics during our session. Seventy five percent of respondents felt that there was nothing missing in the conversation. However, 50% felt that there were definitely some groups absent, such as youth and other vulnerable populations. The feedback ended on a positive note with 100% of participants expressing interest in continuing the conversation later. And what is more, all respondents welcomed an invitation to future projects or activities related to these topics that take place in the community.

- To what extent do you think your conversation built a wider and deeper understanding of the links and synergies between community resilience, livelihoods, income security and the low-carbon transition? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so

This conversation was a great starting point.

- To what extent did participants demonstrate increased awareness of climate change and their own capacity for climate action? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so

As indicated in our conclusions, participants were cognizant of climate change and its economic impacts. They offered solutions and the language they used showed them as active participants in these actions.

- To what extent were new relationships between community partners and conversation participants created and fostered? Please explain your response.
 - 1 - Not at all
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5 - Very much so

While our local facilitators had strong community connections, this was I&E's first event in Hinton. Thanks to our participant's positive feedback we feel confident in continuing the relationship.

- To what extent did your conversation create opportunities to foster ongoing discussion of solutions related to climate change, income insecurity and community resilience?

Please explain your response.

- 1 - Not at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 - Very much so

All breakout groups spent the majority of their time talking about solutions and emphasized on concepts like interconnectedness and balance to achieve stability.

- In your opinion, what does the community need to do next in order to build or maintain resilience in the face of climate change and rising income insecurity?

Having further conversations on the topic with larger audiences in person would be the approach we would offer with all that was learned during this event.

4. Next steps

Iron & Earth is planning to host a second community conversation in Hinton this summer. We want to utilize what we learnt from this session as well as any potential feedback received once this report is published. We also would like to consider what other community partners had to say in their reports and the results presented in the final Green Resilience Project document.