

RURAL CONNECTIVITY MODELS REPORT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Internet access is vital to enabling access to critical services, participation in society, recreation, supporting access to information, facilitating freedom of expression and association, and more. However, rural communities continue to face connectivity challenges. The [Digital Readiness](#) project was developed to identify, understand, and evaluate models of community connectivity in rural BC. Project activities included the creation of an inventory of rural case studies, the development and testing of a framework to evaluate existing cases, and the preliminary development and refinement of a typology of rural connectivity models. The following summarizes the key findings of the project.

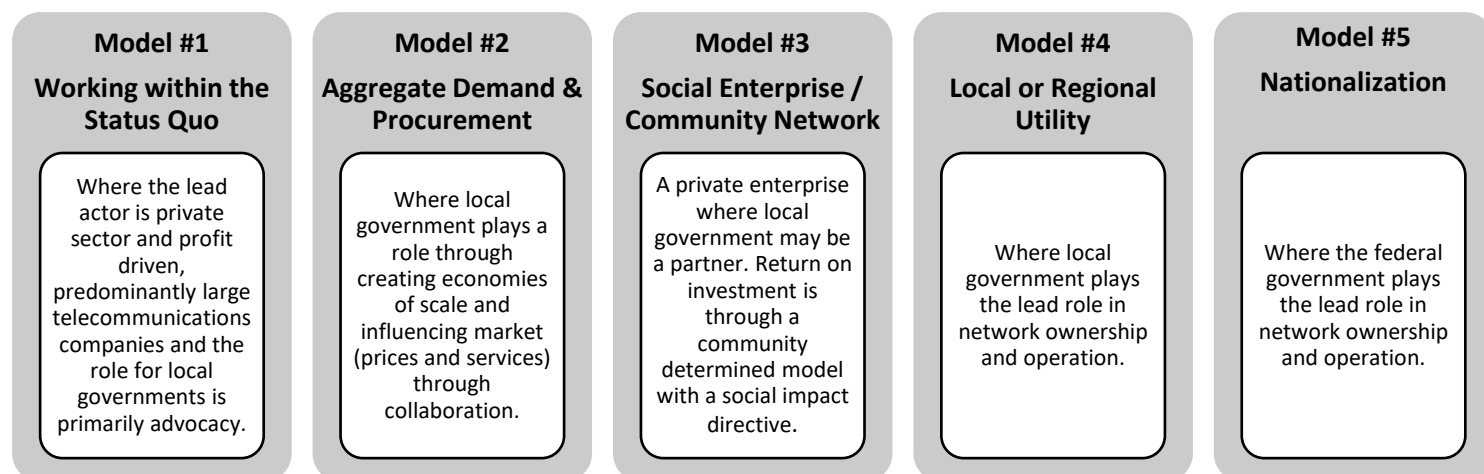
There are two important points relevant to existing models of community connectivity:

- Community-led projects succeed despite the system, not because of it.
 - **Key factors of community success include:** leadership, experience, partnerships and relationships, expertise, funding, access to capital, and a community focus.
- Early consideration of interactions with large private telecommunications companies is important.

Rural communities within an unchanged Canadian telecommunications landscape are likely to face one of three possible scenarios:

- **Failure to Launch:** Many community connectivity projects have not been initiated or have fizzled out due to lack of local expertise, lack of funding, lack of capacity, lack of support, or another gap in the key characteristics essential to success. Even when success factors are present, they must be aligned at the right moment in time in order to move forward.
- **Corporate Capture:** Large-scale corporate capture of Canada's digital infrastructure and service delivery is an impediment to policy change and efforts to closing connectivity gaps. Addressing corporate capture is foundational to supporting alternative and innovative connectivity initiatives.
- **Sisyphus' Network:** Much of the work completed by community networks seems analogous to Sisyphus' never-ending efforts to push a boulder up a mountain. It takes immense effort and capital to participate in the connectivity space and this work takes place in a broader policy environment that simultaneously celebrates the resilience of community networks while underfunding their work and reinforcing the primacy of market-determined service delivery.

Canada's approach to telecommunications legislation/governance make it difficult to propose clear and discrete connectivity models. However, based on project findings, **five models for community connectivity initiatives in rural Canada were identified, demonstrating that the existing private-market delivery approach is not the only model for connecting Canadians.**



To guide communities through which model may be appropriate for them, we developed a set of questions related to key structural variables which should be carefully considered. Those communities unable to make it through these guiding questions without substantive responses will likely remain within Model 1.

Structural Variable	Guiding Questions	Example of Responses and Related Model
Timeframe	How much time do you have? Are there timing constraints to available funding?	Limited timeframes and short-term funding windows could consider pursuing partnerships under Model 1.
Level of Intent	How much capacity do you have? Do you have sufficient expertise? Can you add that expertise? Is this a long-term project that requires planning or an immediate, stop-gap solution?	High levels of local capital and expertise could consider Models 3 or 4.
Action Type	How much capacity do you have? What is the existing market dynamic? How much funding do you have?	Communities with low risk tolerance should maintain Model 1.
Geographic Scale	What are your boundaries? Are you working with other governments (peers/partners or other orders; is there a hierarchy?) What are your limits?	Strong local and regional collaboration could result in Model 2.
Ownership	Who is the lead actor? Who will own this? What are the lines of accountability? How much capacity do you have? Do you have sufficient expertise?	Strong desire for community driven assets and existing leadership could consider Models 2, 3, 4.
Capital Orientation	How is the project funded? What are the conditions of that funding? Who has a stake – and what do they need in return?	Existing and accessible funding supports Models 2, 3, 4.
Profit Structure	Will profits be reinvested in the network/project or distributed to shareholders? Is the goal revenue generation or public good?	Strong local need for direct local investment and social return on investment could consider Models 3 and 4.

This project was intended to support communities considering their own connectivity initiatives. Through this research we highlight opportunities for future research and suggest potential policy recommendations. We highlight how these models of developing rural community connectivity can inform the efforts of other communities as they pursue their own projects. Lastly, we discuss turning models into action by pointing to future research opportunities and providing policy recommendations for connectivity-oriented rural development.

PROJECT DETAILS

Project Team

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