Models and Implications for Community-led Connectivity in Rural British Columbia

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BACKGROUND

Rural communities and scholars are faced with:

Limited research into community broadband models

No clear typology of rural models or framework for evaluating these initiatives

Limited understanding of what enables models to be successful, or to help communities to understand appropriate models to use

METHODS

To accomplish the objective, the following activities were undertaken:

Preliminary development of a typology of rural connectivity models: *A literature review was used to identify existing approaches to connecting rural communities.*

Case study inventory: *An inventory was developed through a broad scan of rural connectivity initiatives focused on rural BC.*

A transferable evaluation framework: *A framework was developed for qualitative and quantitative analysis of the characteristics of community-led rural connectivity initiatives.*

Select case study evaluation: *The project team identified two case studies for further investigation (City West and Kaslo infoNet Society) and applied both the typology and the evaluation framework to these cases.*

Refine typology of rural connectivity models: *Based on the results of the above, the preliminary rural connectivity models were refined based on lessons learned.*

OBJECTIVE: to identify, understand, and evaluate models of community connectivity in rural BC

1 INITIAL PROTOTYPE MODELS OF COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

Based on the literature review three prototype models were identified for exploration.

Variable	Prototype Model 1	Prototype Model 2	Prototype Model 3
Action Type	Infrastructure	Service Procurement	Combination of 1 & 2
Timeframe	Long term	Long term	Long term
Level of Intent	Strategic	Strategic	Strategic
Geographic Scale	Community and Regional (sub-provincial)	Community and Regional (sub-provincial)	Community and Regional (sub-provincial)
Ownership	Local government and partnership	Local government and partnership	Local government and partnership
Capital Orientation	Any	Any	Any
Profit Structure	Any	Any	Any

2 EVALUATION PROCESS OVERVIEW

The project team developed an evaluation process that could be used to explore and better community-led connectivity initiatives.

START
- Understand evaluation process.
- Review metrics

DATA COLLECTION
- **SECONDARY**: collect relevant existing documentation
- **Primary**: Identify needed data and appropriate colleciton approach

ANALYSIS
- Follow metrics analysis instruction

REPORTING
- Determine reporting needs and present results as needed

3 EVALUATION RESULTS *The evaluation process was applied to two rural BC case studies. Of the data analyzed, several metrics stood out.*

Kaslo infoNet	City West
Leadership: *KiN's social capital and leadership is a large contributing factor to their success.*	**Experience**: *Since its inception, City West has had over 100 years of experience.*
Partnerships: *KiN's partnerships with the Columbia Basin Broadband Corporation (CBBC) and the Village of Kaslo has been critical for accessing infrastructure and supporting grant applications.*	**Expertise**: *City West possesses the technical expertise required to manage broadband solutions as well as to design and implement infrastructure essential for connectivity.*
Funding: *KiN has received multiple funding opportunities from municipal, provincial, and federal sources. Consistent and generous funding has allowed KiN to establish itself and the expansive network that services the North Kootenay Lake communities.*	**Funding & Access to Capital**: *Funding through grants issued by Provincial and Federal governments play an important role in providing City West with the necessary funds to conduct its operations in the communities it serves.*
Community Focus: *Throughout KiN's history, the non-profit organization has maintained its community focus by dedicating itself fully to the community and evolving to fulfill the community's needs at the given time.*	**Relationships**: *Building long term relationships with their customers has enabled City West to be successful. City West's mandate is to serve the public. They are focused on solving community needs and people's problems rather than solely on making profits.*

4 MODEL REFINEMENT:

*The team identified that the private market delivery approach is **NOT** the only option for connecting Canadians and in fact, five models and approaches were identified*

MODEL 1 Working within the Status Quo
Where the lead actor is private sector and profit driven - predominantly large telcos.
The role for local gov is primarily advocacy.

MODEL 2 Aggregate Demand & Procurement
Where the local government plays a role through creating economies of scale and influencing market through collaboration.

MODEL 3 Social Enterprise/ Community Network
A private enterprise where local government may be a partner. ROI is through a community determined model with social focus.

MODEL 4 Local or Regional Utility
Where local government plays the lead role in network ownership and operation.

MODEL 5 Nationalization
Where the federal government plays the lead role in network ownership and operation.

IMPLICATIONS

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.

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.

SISYPHUS' NETWORK: 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.