Information Needs and Internet Opportunities (Constraints):

**Report on a Questionnaire survey of
Community (Economic) Development groups in British
Columbia, CANADA**

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Project Abstract

This monograph is part of a larger research project on the possible/potential role of new information technologies in supporting/creating a civil society. It is increasingly clear that access to needed and relevant information forms a crucial linkage between the formation and enhancement of civil society and the success of community development and community economic development initiatives. If local community groups, the very foundation of civil society, are to be successful in their efforts and endeavours, then their access to information must be both efficient and effective.

The geographic focus of the project: "Pluralism in Community Development Practices: Can New Information Technology Build/Maintain A Civil Society?", is rural and small town communities. Such locations have historically been disadvantaged with respect to access to information and information sources. Large distances and small local populations (critical mass) are well known and well documented impediments for rural and small town communities across much of North America. Against this backdrop, there is considerable interest and debate at present about the potential role which new information technologies, especially computer based information access and retrieval technologies, may play in changing this historic relationship.

More generally, this research project also offers the opportunity to consider the question of representation and participation in decision making. These two issues are central to the idea of Civil Society. Motivating questions for the research include whether the new information technologies can enhance the ability of local groups to engage in community (economic) development debate and whether the membership of these groups is broadly representative of their local community or whether they represent specific sub-sets or interest groups. Is there democratic participation or are new information technologies likely to reinforce existing patterns of local elites?

The research project is based in the Community Economic Development Centre at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada and involves additional researchers at the University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, Canada and Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. The researchers in the Czech Republic are exploring the same types of general questions raised here, but in a much different context where rural and small town residents are now developing community groups and associations following the collapse of communism.

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Other publications related to this research include:

"An Essay on Civil Society"
by Dr. Brian Massam (York University)
1995, Vancouver: Community Economic Development Centre,
Simon Fraser University.

"Information Needs and Internet Opportunities (Constraints) - Report on a Questionnaire
survey of Community (Economic) Development groups in British Columbia, CANADA"
by Dr. Greg Halseth (University of Northern British Columbia)
1996, Vancouver: Community Economic Development Centre,
Simon Fraser University.

"Community (Internet) Access Groups: Case Studies from rural and small town British
Columbia, CANADA"
by Dr. Greg Halseth and David Arnold (University of Northern British Columbia)
1997, Vancouver: Community Economic Development Centre,
Simon Fraser University.

For further information on this research, or these research publications, please visit our Internet
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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Executive Summary:

Introduction

Organizations interested in community development and community economic development are an increasingly common feature of North American communities. Many of these groups can be considered as grassroots organizations, often forming out of the volunteer efforts of civic-minded residents hoping to improve some aspect of local quality of life. Unfortunately for many of these communities, such groups are disadvantaged. For example, they commonly have limited financial resources or may lack critical types of experiences or technical expertise. Such disadvantages are especially felt in rural and small town places. For these groups, access to information and knowledge which can then be used to develop local plans, strategies, and initiatives, is a critical issue. Information needs can include access to the "success stories" of other communities, to government programme announcements, to technical assistance, and many others.

There has been considerable speculation as to the impact of electronic based information technologies, such as the Internet, in changing the relative isolation of such community groups, especially those in the physically isolated rural and small town communities. This report presents findings from a questionnaire survey of community (economic) development groups in British Columbia. While a number of issues are addressed, three themes comprise the research focus. The first is to identify the types of groups active in community (economic) development through a profile. The second is to identify the types of information needs of these groups, while the third is to examine their expectations as to the value, opportunities and constraints in using new information technologies. Within this review of findings, special attention is given to the context and needs of community groups in rural and small town places. In this sense, the discussion of rural and urban community (economic) development groups provides a useful comparative tool.

Finally, this research was motivated in part by a concern that public policy may already be committing resources to action without critical inquiry into the needs of local community (economic) development groups and the potential benefits and uses of new information technology. If public policies, and related budget allocation decisions, regarding new information technologies and small communities in Canada are to be effective a careful examination of benefits and costs is needed.

Intersecting Contexts

The research is set within at least three intersecting contexts and literatures. These include the Community Development and Civil Society literature, the Geography of Rural and Small Town Communities literature, and the emerging debate on "Information and New Information Technologies".

Community Development and Civil Society

For both of the terms "Community Development" and "Civil Society", there are no single or widely recognized conceptualization (Cofsky and Bryant, 1994; Massam, 1996; McRobie and Ross, 1987). In fact, recent writings have only managed to muddy further an already complex set of ideas and viewpoints. In this report, Community Development is viewed as a way to increase the social or human capacity of places through education, personal and community skills upgrading, and communications. The importance of Community Development is that it increases the capacity of the community to respond to changing challenges and opportunities. Simply defined, this may be referred to as "Development of the Community"

Sometimes, the issue of Community Development and Community Economic Development are used interchangeably. This report considers Community Economic Development as limited more to specific economic sector participation - a grassroots plugging of local economic leakages and an attempt to insert local decision-making into global market action. Community Economic Development is, of course, supposed to be driven by the social, economic, and environmental goals of the community. This report, therefore, uses the term "Community (Economic)

Development" as a shorthand which recognizes the separate but connected definitions of this term.

While there is also a large body of philosophical literature, and a range of views, on the issue of Civil Society, this paper defines it as the critical space between the individual and the state. As such, Civil Society creates a geographical landscape for social organization, order, and action. In this sense, Civil Society is also a theoretical cornerstone in Community Development - a mechanism through which to re-assert local priorities through local democracy. Central to the notion of Civil Society are the collective associations, which at a local scale, are often of grassroots origins. Critical questions emerging from this view of community groups as Civil Society actors concerns the degree to which the (broader) community participates. For example, questions include whether there is an equality of access and whether these collective associations are representative, that is, when they speak up for local interests are they speaking from democratic foundations.

Rural and Small Town Places

As mentioned in the introduction, this report has a special interest in rural and small town places. This interest is motivated in part by the greater isolation from resources which such places often face, and also by the perception that new information technologies may be of greater assistance to such locales. As a growing literature suggests, the very geography of rural and small town places in North America, dictates ranges of advantages and disadvantages (Fitchen, 1991; Halseth, 1996; Hodge and Qadeer, 1983). In terms of disadvantage, these are often very much "Places on the Periphery"; in terms of both economic and political decision-making. In more formal terms: processes of marginalization and powerlessness are not unknown. Especially important for this report is that small community size implies limited human resources and social infrastructure, while remote locations mean limited access to alternative sources of information.

Information and New Information Technology

Finally, there is the context of changing information technology. To be effective, Community (Economic) Development Groups need information; information to make and to carry out plans, and to meet goals. Effective community development groups can contribute to a strong Civil Society. This is both a recursive and mutual relationship. However, many community groups and especially those in rural places are disadvantaged; they may lack the resources, skills, or budgets to access needed information. Many suggest that new information technologies can step into this gap by providing access to what is virtually a "worldwide" network of data and information. It is argued that this may provide large benefits to rural and small town places since, after all, new information technologies are assumed to "annihilate geography".

By "New Information Technologies", this report means computer-based and other electronic information access and retrieval systems. This includes the World Wide Web and the Internet, as well as such longer established technologies such as Faxes. If new information technology provides the opportunity for changing the relative levels of information access for community groups, the question then becomes - are such opportunities a possibility or a reality for community (economic) development groups.

Questionnaire Survey

To explore this topic, a questionnaire mail-out survey was sent to a previously identified set of Community (Economic) Development groups in British Columbia. The sample was constructed to compare some distinct group types and to allow some comparison between urban and rural places. The group types include "First Nations", "Community Groups", and "Community Futures Offices". A total of 148 surveys were mailed out and 64 valid responses were received back for a responses rate of 43%. In terms of the Urban/Rural comparison, 36 percent of the responding groups are from "Urban BC", while the remaining 64 percent of responding groups are from "Rural BC". Urban BC is defined in this report as all of the communities within the Vancouver/Victoria metropolitan complex located in the south-western part of the province. The Rural BC groups, therefore, are found in those areas of the province outside of the metropolitan Vancouver/Victoria region.

Characteristics of Community Groups

Drawing upon the questionnaire survey information, a first research interest is with identifying some of the characteristics of the respondent community (economic) development groups. A research interest in Civil Society means we have an interest in exploring the degree to which such groups may be democratic, or representative of local populations.

A first place to start is with the demographic structure of group membership. In terms of **Gender**, approximately 55% of members in respondent community (economic) development groups were female. While this mirrors the Provincial sex distribution (approximately 51% female), it is contrary to some of the expectations with respect to female participation found in public and academic discourse.

In terms of the **Age Structure** of community group members, nearly 80% are over age 35. Most respondents in our sample were between the ages of 35 and 55 years. This result is slightly older than for the British Columbia population.

In terms of **Education**, community group members are much better educated than the Provincial average. Approximately 76% have post high school education and 51% have a university or college degree. For rural community groups, the membership is even more skewed, with approximately 82% of community group members reporting that they have post high school education, with 57% having completed a university or college degree and 14% having undertaken post graduate work.

In terms of the education variable, this is a very unique subset of the Provincial, and especially the rural community, population. A first cautionary note, therefore, is raised. We need to be a little wary as the membership profile of community (economic) development group members may not reflect democratic demography. Instead, these results may be tracking the outcome of a sociology of community activism, where education affects levels of participation. As a distinct sub-set of community populations, we can validly ask the question in community development debate: "Who is speaking for Whom?"

Moving from the individual level to that of the group, the next questions concern identification of community (economic) development group characteristics. In terms of **Group Organization**, our sample showed a high level of formal organization. All had formal names and 95% had developed formal mandate or mission statements. In terms of operating budgets, more than 90% of groups reported that they functioned with a formal annual budget.

A second interesting point in terms of organization is with regard to **longevity**. It is very difficult for 'grassroots' and volunteer-based community groups to sustain activity over long periods of time. Yet many community (economic) development groups in BC did just that. While the sample contains a number of recently formed groups, over 30% of groups have been active for more than 10 years and over 10% have been active for more than 20 years.

In terms of **Group Goals** there is, not too surprisingly, a large economic focus. Approximately 70% of groups reported an interest in community economic development goals while approximately 30% reported an interest in community social development goals. Groups in rural and small town communities were especially interested in maintaining a broad set of interests. In

fact, most of the groups from Rural BC wanted to become a local resource centre, something upon which the local community could look for assistance in reacting to a wide range of pressures which might cause local uncertainty and change. This then becomes a critical issue with regard to information needs. The broader the range of interests for a community (economic) development group, the broader still the types of information needed.

A final organization issue is with respect to the **Geographic Focus** of these community groups. Our finding is that for "Urban BC", community groups are interested in very small areas such as a particular block or neighbourhood. In "Rural BC", however, our sample of groups tended to identify a broader area of interest, that is, something which covered not only the particular small community but also its rural hinterland. In a way, their area of interest was with the small places and their functional regions.

What Are Their Information Needs ?

Perhaps the most important issue connected with the information needs of community (economic) development groups concerns the issue of **Breadth**. Drawing directly from the kinds of mission and mandate statements these groups have, it is clear that the breadth of information needs is closely connected with the range of interests and issues the group hopes to address. For rural community groups especially, they were looking for a very wide range of information.

A second issue concerns the time frame within which information is needed. In this case we were able to distinguish between **Routine** and **Periodically** needed information sources. Routinely needed information was that deemed necessary for group organization and development. This included access to the experiences of other groups, to government program information, to further training opportunities, and access to basic community development research. Information needed on a periodic basis might best be thought of as "basic research data". This included economic sector data, demographic information, and census data. Access to this type of information was only needed for specific projects or reports, but when it was needed, it was needed right away. The rural and small town groups in the sample demonstrated very high use (60-95%) across all information types we described for them.

A final element, too often overlooked in the debate over potential benefits of the Internet and the new information technology, concerns the availability of local information sources. Our sample of community (economic) development groups reported that these local sources were in fact not limited within their communities. For most groups, there was access to a local public library or even to a community college library. In fact, the penetration of these community college libraries across the Province is quite remarkable.

Given this diverse and wide set of information needs, what are some of the barriers to accessing needed information? The most widely cited was cost, with 65% of respondents citing the expense of acquiring information as a barrier. Time was the next widest identified barrier, with 50% of responding groups reporting that the actual time required to locate, access, and perhaps acquire needed information was a barrier for small, volunteer-based community groups. For community (economic) development groups in rural and small town places, distance was not the expected significant barrier. The experience of longer distances to a wide range of services and facilities so common for residents in these places likely explains this apparent paradox.

Given these barriers, there are high expectations on the part of many community (economic) development groups concerning the potential of computer based technologies. To a degree, they are certainly "buying" the popular notions of easy access, quality information, and ease of practical use.

In terms of how they might use this technology, our sample of community development groups has high expectations that they will be able to access the broad types of information they need on group development, government programs, and training opportunities. Most consider this type of information as critical for local human capacity development. There are also high expectations that there will be easy access to a range of census and economic sector data. In general terms, groups in Rural BC have an expectation to access a broader range of information and data than do those in Urban BC. Finally, 70% of groups want to use the World Wide Web to advertise their community and their local businesses. This is a perception of the value and use of the Internet that connects with the commodification literature on binding rural economies even more fully to the global market.

With respect to the value of computer based technologies for education, our sample of community (economic) development groups was somewhat cautious with their expectations. Approximately 40% expect to be able to take some form of educational/training courses "on-line", while approximately 30% expect they will be able to compete whole degrees in this way.

Rural Communities and Technology Take-up

Given the mature organizational format of many of these surveyed community (economic) development groups, and given their high expectation regarding the potential for new information technology, how are these groups "taking up" this new technology. A key point here is that community groups in Rural BC are not lagging in their take up of technology. In fact, compared to the sample of community (economic) development groups in Urban BC, those in rural and small town places are often far ahead in their adoption of technology options.

In terms of usage, Faxes are used by 98% of our community groups, while a further 68% report they use a computer modem for information access. With both the fax and modem users, there is a relatively high level of satisfaction. For the fax, 100% report it as an extremely effective communication tool, while for the modem, approximately 80% report it extremely effective. For community groups, and especially for those in rural and small town places, these "immediate" and relatively cost effective information access technologies get tremendous support. In contrast, courier and postal service is seen as far less reliable.

Not only are they taking up the technology, but these community groups are also knowledgeable about support and service networks. For example, 65% of groups in Rural BC are aware of rural computer network servers. This is higher than the levels of awareness identified for groups in Urban BC. Groups in Rural BC also seem to be well aware of the costs and equipment needed to connect to such Internet servers. Given their broader mandates and information needs, rural and small town community (economic) development groups may be more open to exploring new alternatives despite a generally lower access to basic electronic infrastructure.

Summary - Reality Check

If new information technologies are to be of benefit to the broader population of rural and small town places, policy must be linked with some community realities. Approximately 70% of respondents recognized that they will need training in order to make more effective use of technologies. This said, however, the local availability of such training is very uneven. This is especially the case across the Province's rural and small town places. Added to this problem of training availability are the issues of both general literacy and basic computer literacy which need to be addressed.

A second important issue involves the financial costs of new information technologies. Only 60% of the groups in our survey reported that they have the dollars to purchase needed equipment <u>and</u> to pay the continuing expenses. Again, this may be a critical issue for public policy participation.

A third issue concerns acknowledged barriers to computer technology. Approximately 30% of community groups cited the costs of technology as a barrier to using it, while an additional 30% percent citied the time commitment required to learn, develop skills, and use the technology, as real barriers.

By way of summary, this report represents an initial overview of results on our study of community (economic) development groups and their involvement with new information technology. The spatial setting of rural and small town British Columbia is an important aspect of the study in that it presents some very real barriers to travel and to accessing non-local information. In this sense, this is just the sort of geography in which to evaluate the opportunities, constraints, benefits, and costs, of changing information technology. A second general comment is that these results already raise numbers of issues and questions which community groups, local residents, academics, and public policy makers can further explore. If new information technology is to become an effective tool for community (economic) development groups, then a much deeper understanding of both the way such groups work and function is needed and this then can be connected with the practical opportunities and limitations of the technology.

Section 1.1 - Introduction

This monograph provides a summary analysis of responses to a questionnaire survey of community (economic) development groups across British Columbia, Canada. The survey was conducted as part of the research project entitled: "Pluralism in Community Development Practices: Can New Information Technology Build/Maintain A Civil Society?". Broadly, the research project attempts to assess the potential value of new information technologies, and the possible continuing value of traditional information exchange mechanisms, in building and maintaining civil society. Emphasis is given to enhancing participation, representation, and consensus building in a pluralist social structure. The types of community groups contacted through our survey research, those where local residents volunteer their time in efforts to improve aspects of the social or economic quality of life, are key components of civil society.

The questionnaire component of the project surveyed groups involved in community development and community economic development activities. The purpose of the questionnaire was to seek answers to specific questions regarding group organization, information needs, and information access technologies. By establishing the "information context" within which these community groups are working, it is possible for the reader to identify possible opportunities or limitations in extending these case study findings to other groups and locations. By new information technologies, we mean electronic and computer based information sharing and retrieval technologies. These include fax machines, electronic networks, and computer assisted systems such as the Internet.

Across British Columbia there is a striking difference in the ability to access information and information sources between communities within the urban metropolitan complex of Vancouver-Victoria and the remaining rural and small town communities. Historically, rural and small town communities have been disadvantaged to the degree that large distances and small local populations (critical mass) are well known and documented impediments for local community and economic development. Against this backdrop, there is now considerable interest and debate at present about the potential role which new information technologies, especially computer

based information access and retrieval technologies, may play in changing this historic relationship.

More generally, this research project also offers the opportunity to consider the question of representation and participation in decision making; two issues which form a critical component of civil society. Motivating questions include whether the new information technologies can enhance the ability of local groups to engage in community (economic) development debate and whether the membership of these groups is broadly representative of their local community or whether they represent specific sub-sets or interest groups. Is there democratic participation or are new information technologies likely to reinforce existing patterns of local elites?

In exploring this issue, and the questions related to it, this monograph can contribute to community development groups, practices, and debate in at least three direct ways. For the groups who participated in the study, this report provides feedback and an opportunity to compare their own experiences with those of other community-based groups. Second, for the general community (economic) development audience this monograph provides something of a baseline from which to assess and interpret information needs and accessibility problems. It also provides a forum for looking at the potential benefits and limitations of new information technologies in meeting those needs. Finally, there has been considerable and often uncritical dialogue on the potential of new information technologies to 'close the gap' between rural/remote communities and the urban places which function as our information heartlands. A couple of points are already clear. First, there certainly does exist a tremendous and new opportunity in computer based technology to access information. Second, actions and policies seem presently to be proceeding without recognizing that there are costs, and potentially critical problems, in the application of technology based solutions in many rural and small-town communities. The current policy approach may be proceeding 'blindly'; a strategy which over the long term will not help small communities with already limited resources. Knowledge of costs and limitations will be critical if future policy initiatives are to address the needs of rural/remote communities and make the most of the opportunities new technology may afford.

Section 1.2 - Definitions

Within many urban, small town, and rural communities there exist volunteer groups and organizations of residents working to improve aspects of local quality of life. These groups may focus upon a variety of issues such as improving community well-being, improving the local economy, enhancing the livability of neighbourhoods, etc.. Prior to discussing the questionnaire results, it is important to establish a framework for understanding these community (economic) development groups. This section provides a brief review of this terminology.

The concept of "Civil Society" is key to this research. While there is a large body of philosophical literature, and a range of views, on the issue of Civil Society, this research project defines it as the critical space between the individual and the state (Massam, 1996). As such, Civil Society creates a geographical landscape for social organization, order, and action. In this sense, Civil Society is also a theoretical cornerstone in local community development; a mechanism through which to re-assert local priorities through local democracy. Central to the notion of Civil Society are the collective associations of individuals, residents, or other actors. At the local scale, such collective associations are often of grassroots origins. Critical questions emerging from this view of community groups as Civil Society actors concerns the degree to which the (broader) community participates. For example, questions include whether there is an equality of access and whether these collective associations are representative, that is, when they speak up for local interests are they speaking from democratic foundations.

In evaluating community (economic) development organizations and activities, we find the central terms of "community", "community development", and "community economic development", difficult to define. With respect to the concept of "community", the research literature suggests that perhaps the most useful understanding comes from one which recognizes that communities are self-defined by people as a reflection of their local interactions and participation. Certainly, community can be a place - a locale in which one lives, conducts business, and raises a family ("place-based" community). However, one's "community" also involves sets of relationships and personal ties ("interest-based" community). Following from this, people may belong to and interact with several distinct communities within any single

locality. Layers of community ties and linkages bind people in different ways, and to different degrees, to places. This issue is important in recent debate about new information technologies, especially the degree to which electronic "on-line" communities may end up displacing people's interactions with their place-based communities.

The term "community economic development", is equally difficult to define. Drawing upon the ideas of McRobie and Ross (1987, 1) - community economic development is "a process by which communities can initiate and generate their own solutions to their common economic problems and thereby build long-term community capacity and foster the integration of economic, social and environmental objectives". In their view, "development" is not necessarily equated with "growth"; it means consolidating existing resources, and improving qualitative aspects of community life. Community economic development (CED) strategies include such things as "import substitution", where local goods are purchased in order to keep revenues within the community, and the plugging of economic "leakages" by developing local capabilities to provide specialized types of goods and services. The goal of CED is to create and enhance opportunities to generate and maintain economic wealth within the community. CED strategies are supposed to be developed with broad public input and to represent general consensus with respect to the direction of future local economic development.

In a general sense, "community development" concerns improvements to local social and cultural infrastructure. When employed as an extension of the "community economic development" definition, community development is most often identified as being concerned with increasing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of residents - and with increasing the ability of the community as a whole - to access information and resources. In generic terms, this is referred to as "human capacity building" - something Cofsky and Bryant (1994) consider critical to community empowerment.

As a final point, it is recognized that community (economic) development is an inherently geographic phenomena. Place and scale are critical. While various CED strategies and tools have been applied in urban and rural places; and at global, regional, and intimately local scales, there is no single formula to remedy a community's ills - the unique social and economic geography of

each place precludes this.

Finally, this report has a special interest in rural and small town places. This interest is motivated in part by the greater isolation from resources which such places often face, and also by the perception that new information technologies may be of greater assistance to such locales. As a growing literature suggests, the very geography of rural and small town places in North America, dictates ranges of advantages and disadvantages (Fitchen, 1991; Halseth, 1996; Hodge and Qadeer, 1983). In terms of disadvantage, these are often very much "Places on the Periphery"; in terms of both economic and political decision-making. In more formal terms: processes of marginalization and powerlessness are not unknown. For many rural and small town places, small community size implies limited human resources and social infrastructure, while remote locations mean limited access to alternative sources of information.

In the questionnaire analysis below, the unique experiences of many community (economic) development groups from across British Columbia are explored. Most of these groups have a specific focus or mandate, with that focus often deriving from a specific local context. However, it is also clear that such groups share a great deal in common - limited financial and staff resources, limited access to technology expertise, and in the case or rural and remote communities they share the costs and hardship of geographic isolation from information sources. The analysis considers the impacts of shared difficulties with respect to the issue of new information technologies.

Section 1.3 - Canada Case Study

The research project is based upon a comparative research design involving case studies in Canada and the Czech Republic. The Canadian case study concentrates upon community organizations within the province of British Columbia. The geography of British Columbia is such that an urbanized core, focused upon the greater Vancouver-Victoria metropolitan region, is located in the south-west corner of the province. The remainder of the province can be characterized as involving small communities and rural areas isolated from one another by large distances, rough terrain, and a relatively limited transportation network.

Access to information of various types presents different problems across British Columbia's landscape. In urban communities there is a need to share among one another the stories and strategies of successful CED initiatives. Usually focussed upon intensely local issues/problems, urban community (economic) development groups often lack the time and awareness to explore the experiences of other groups which may assist in their own projects. Across the vast rural landscape there is the often experienced need to overcome the obstacle of distance in accessing even the most basic of information needs. In both of these situations there is an opportunity to examine the possible role which new information technologies may play in overcoming access/exchange difficulties.

Questionnaire Methodology

Data collection involved a questionnaire mailing to a broad range of organizations involved in community (economic) development activities. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect directly comparable information on four general topic areas:

> 1.) The individual organizations themselves; including their mandates and activities, and the socio-economic characteristics of the managers or "key" player(s) in these organizations.

> 2.) The kinds of information the organization needs in order to effectively carry out its mandate and activities. Questions are also asked about the current types of information access technology the organization employs.

3.) Details on whether the organization is making use of new information technologies and views on whether or not these technologies can assist the organization with its mandate and operation.

4) The type of community within which the organization is working. The organizations are asked to self-define their community and it is expected that there will be a range of place based and interest based communities described.

The questionnaire was developed in consultation with researchers who have carried out survey work along similar topic lines and was pretested with an expert panel. See Appendix I for a copy of the questionnaire. Finally, as part of the research protocols of Simon Fraser University, prior to proceeding with the questionnaire survey the project received ethics review and approval.

The questionnaire sample was drawn from a mailing list of British Columbia organizations and groups interested in issues related to community (economic) development. The list had been compiled by the Community Economic Development Centre at Simon Fraser University and was updated just prior to the questionnaire survey. The questionnaires were mailed on September 15, 1995. Approximately two weeks after the original mailing, a follow-up letter reminding our sample to send in the completed questionnaire was mailed out.

Community Group Type

Three general categories of community groups were selected for surveying:

FIRST NATIONS - this group includes all community (economic) development groups identified as being organized by, and concerned with, the aboriginal First Nations communities in British Columbia. It should be noted that all government offices associated with band, tribal council and nation governments were specifically excluded.

COMMUNITY GROUPS - this involves organizations interested in neighbourhood or community improvement and development projects. It includes those groups commonly interested in improving local social conditions or local economic capacity. All government and public education institutions are excluded.

COMMUNITY FUTURES - Community Futures offices developed out of an initiative of Employment and Immigration Canada (later Human Resource Development Canada) to respond to chronic issues in local economic development. Currently funded by the federal Department of Western Economic Diversification, with its associated bureaucratic support and policy area mandates, Community Futures is a unique subset among other community (economic) development groups.

Regions

The distribution of questionnaires was managed on a regional basis. In an effort to achieve geographic coverage of the province and to assess the role of geographic isolation for community organizations, the province was divided into six regions:

1) Northern B.C.
2) North and Central Coast
3) Thompson/ Okanagan
4) Columbia / Kootenay
5) Metropolitan Vancouver
6) Vancouver Island

It is recognized that there is incredible diversity at the local level within any one of these regions and that this diversity is important for local community (economic) development organizations. For the purposes of the questionnaire survey, however, it was considered that issues and problems of information access and exchange are generally comparable within each region. Further, in order to permit some analysis by location a subset was developed identifying community (economic) development groups in the urbanized Vancouver-Victoria area and those in rural and small town British Columbia.

Questionnaire Response Rates

A total of 158 questionnaires were distributed in the initial mailing. Ten questionnaires were returned 'undelivered', yielding a valid mailing of 148. A total of 64 questionnaires were completed and returned for a response rate of just over 43 percent. This response rate is considered very good according to expectations from the survey research literature (See for example Babbie, 1995; Dillman, 1978; Feitelson, 1991). Despite the questionnaire's length, the

response rate suggests a high rate of interest among groups which received the questionnaire.

The percentage distribution of questionnaires on the basis of Region and Community Group type is shown in the matrix below. On a regional basis, the response rate for Northern B.C. and for the Metropolitan Vancouver area are below the average of 43 percent. In terms of group type, the First Nations response rate also falls below the survey average.

Table 1

Response Rates by Group and Region:

Region	First Nations	Community	Community Futures	TOTALS
Northern B.C.	25	17.6	100	23.1
North and Central Coast	75	50	50	61.1
Thompson/Okanagan	0	70	66.7	55
Columbia/Kootenay	0	55.6	50	54.2
Metropolitan Vancouver	0	34.8	50	31
Vancouver Island	60	50	12.5	45.2
TOTALS	37.9	43.5	48.2	43.2

Section 1.4 - Initial Frequencies

Discussion of the response frequencies to a few key variables will serve to introduce the sample community (economic) development groups.

Region

For the original questionnaire mailing, the province of British Columbia was divided into 6 regions (described above). This design was to ensure that initial sampling coverage would seek responses from all areas of the province. As seen in Figure 1, the survey respondents are distributed fairly evenly throughout these regions. Approximately 20 percent of respondents are from each of the "North and Central Coast", "Thompson-Okanagan", "Columbia- Kootenay", and "Vancouver Island" regions, with a further approximately 15 percent from "Metropolitan Vancouver" and 10 percent from the "North".

Figure 1
Distribution of Survey Respondents
By Region

21
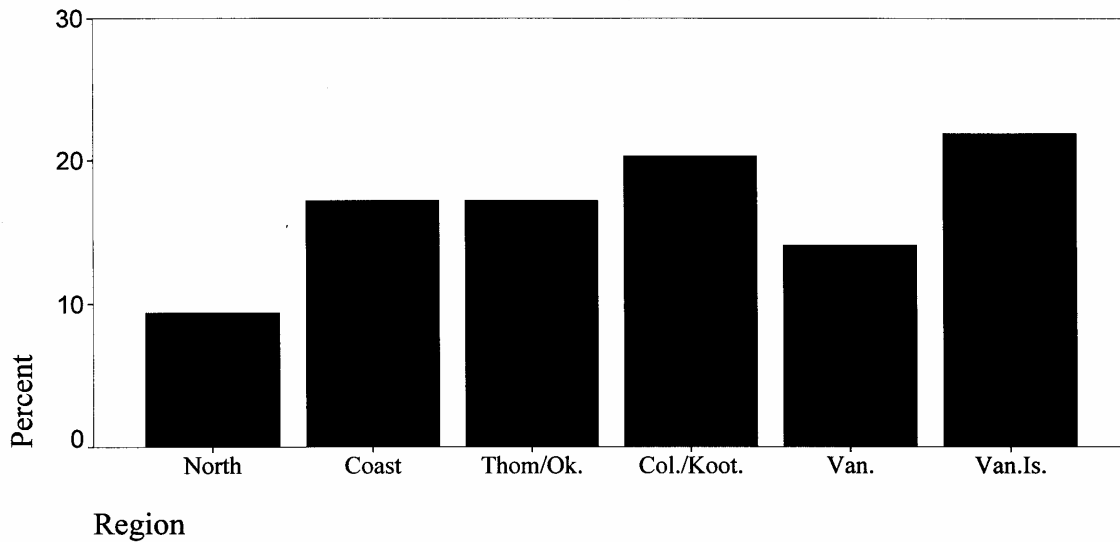
Given the small numbers of respondents from each region (from six to fourteen), to maintain a six region breakdown would preclude further analysis as the numbers would simply become too small for comparison. To handle this problem, the region variable was recoded into "Urban BC" and "Rural BC"; with Urban BC consisting of the former Vancouver and Vancouver Island regions and Rural BC consisting of the remainder of the province. Such regional categories are, quite naturally, coarse and it is recognized that considerable internal diversity exists within each category. Two points are worth noting. First, all respondent communities on Vancouver Island were from Victoria, Nanaimo, or the high-traffic corridor between these two urban centres. Second, if access to information and information sources had historically been limited by distance, then this new regional breakdown should capture differences among community groups depending on whether they are within or outside of the more urbanized south-west corner of the province.

Using this new regional breakdown, the sample is now divided approximately 36 percent Urban BC and 64 percent Rural BC. This involves 23 and 41 community (economic) development groups respectively.

Community Type

When asked about the community within which their organization functions, most respondents described small places (Figure 2). Approximately 10 percent responded that their community was best described as rural/village, while a further 20 percent indicated that their community was a town (1,000-10,000 people) and 27 percent as a small city (10-30,000 people). In addition, all but one of those who responded "other" identified a community context which included both a small settlement location and a surrounding rural hinterland.

Figure 2

Distribution of Survey Respondents

By Community Type
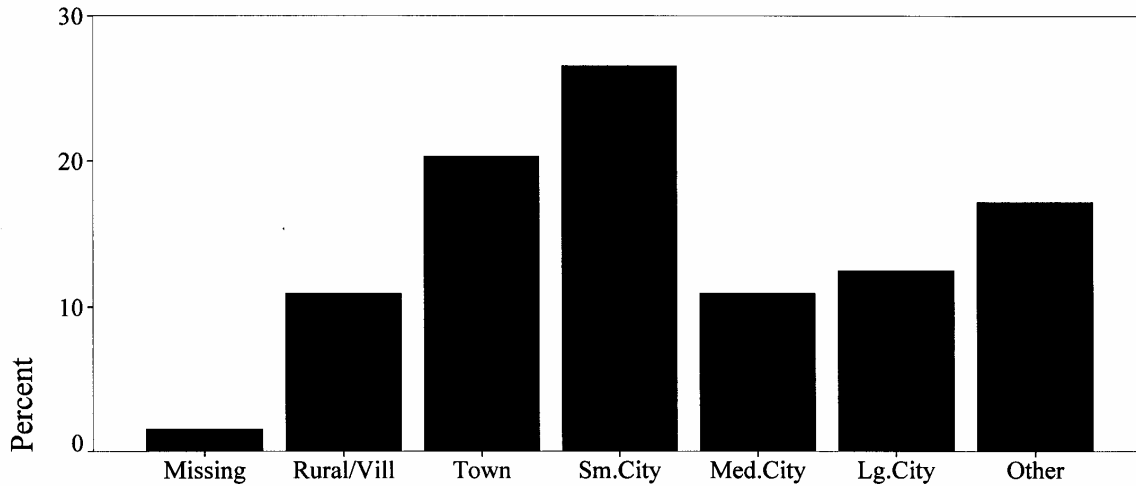
Figure 3

Distribution of Survey Respondents

By Community Group Type

Groups Combined
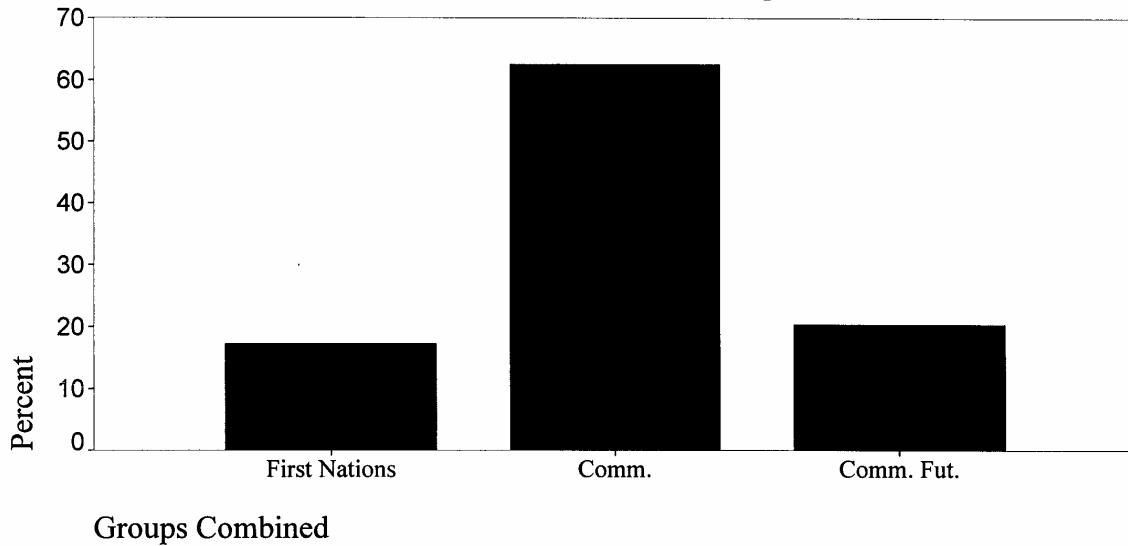
Community Group Type

For the purposes of this analysis, community (economic) development groups have been organized into three basic types. These are: "COMMUNITY", "COMMUNITY FUTURES", and "FIRST NATIONS" (described above). As seen in Figure 3, 40 of the 64 respondents are COMMUNITY based groups. COMMUNITY FUTURES accounts for 13 respondents and FIRST NATIONS accounts for eleven. In the discussion below, the report focuses first upon the COMMUNITY groups, adding COMMUNITY FUTURES and FIRST NATIONS for comparison and contrast. The small number of COMMUNITY FUTURES and FIRST NATIONS groups precludes further detailed discussion.

Community Group Activity

In terms of formal organization, all 64 respondents stated that their group had a formal name, and 80 percent of respondents felt that the group's name was generally recognized within their own community. Interestingly, approximately 12 percent felt their group's name likely was <u>not</u> locally recognized.

When asked how long their community (economic) development group had been active within the community, most respondents stated that these groups had been a part of the community organizational landscape for a long time (Figure 4). While approximately 30 percent of groups had come into being in the past five year period, 35 percent had been active more than 10 years and approximately 14 percent had been active more than 20 years.

Longevity is one of the most difficult issues facing community groups. The more informally organized they are, and the more they rely upon the efforts of volunteers, the more difficult it is to sustain interest and activity over time. While this sample contains a mix of new and long-time established groups, the success of many to remain active for an extended period suggests a promising continuing role in their community's civil society.

Figure 4

Length of Time Over Which The Community

Group Has Been Active

Years Group Active
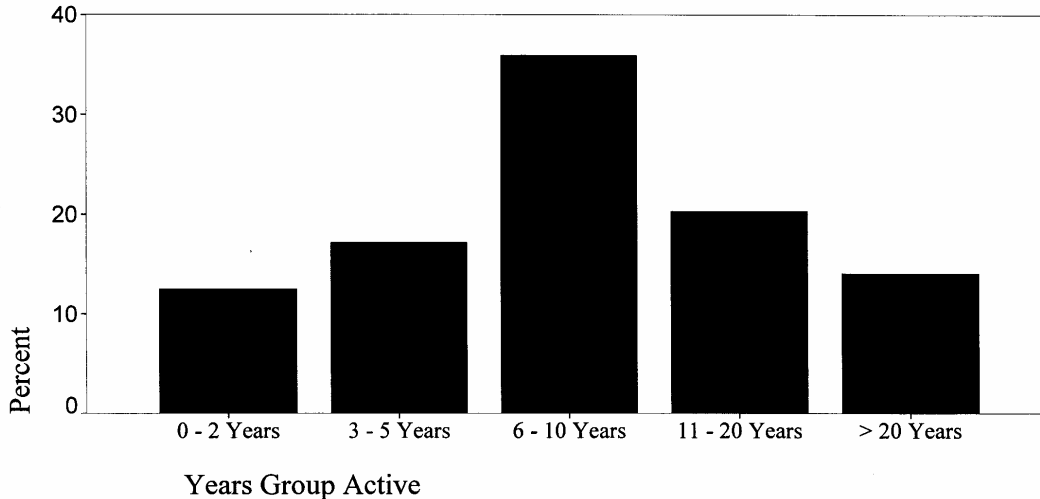
A final note on group organization concerns the issue of operating budgets. The more formally a community group is organized the more likely it is to have, and require, an operating budget. It is out of this annual operating budget that support staff may be retained and group activities funded. In looking at the questionnaire respondents, more than 90 percent reported that they did have an annual operating budget. Only two FIRST NATIONS groups and three COMMUNITY groups reported that they do not operate with access to an annual budget and funds.

Community Group Orientation

At a very general level, the sampled community (economic) development organizations follow up this high level of group activity and organization with a similarly high degree of focus. When asked if the group had a formalized a mandate or mission statement, approximately 95 percent of respondents stated that they did have such a mission statement.

When asked to describe the principal goals of their group, respondents tended to follow one of two patterns in identifying group social or economic goals. The first was to identify broad

general goals, most often related to local economic topics such as jobs, economic development, and business promotion. The second pattern was to identify a singular, and often highly specific, focus. In this case examples tended to involve local social issues and problems, particularly such topics as the family, women's rights, and community social service availability.

Respondents were given the opportunity to identify multiple goals for their group. The 64 respondents identified a total of 91 goals which acted to guide the group's efforts. When these goals are combined into the two general categories of "Community Social Development" and "Community Economic Development", more than two-thirds of the goals were focused upon local economic issues (Table 2).

Table 2

Community Group Goals

Goal Category	Responses n	Percent %
"Community Social Development"	27	29.7
"Community Economic Development"	64	70.3
Total Number of Goals Identified	91	100

Source: Questionnaire Survey.

Section 2.1 - Introduction

In this second section of the report, the questionnaire analysis explores five key areas. The first involves a more detailed description of the communities within which these local groups operate. The second involves a more detailed description of the community groups themselves, while the third involves an examination of the membership profiles for these groups. The last two sections focus upon information needs; with the first describing the types of information needs of community groups, and the second describing the potential for new information technologies to assist with accessing that needed information.

As described above, discussion in this section will be based primarily on differences between COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY FUTURES, and FIRST NATIONS groups. As well, the geographic distinctions between Urban BC and Rural BC will provide a focus.

Section 2.2 - Sample Communities

A first stage in the interpretation of our survey responses is to develop a profile of the communities, and the groups themselves. This is an important step as it will allow readers to interpret the degree to which their own experiences and situations may be similar to, or different from, those described in this report. As suggested above, when asked about the community within which their organization functions, most respondents described small places. When this result is examined against community group type, clear differences between groups appear.

Community Size

Within our respondent sample, COMMUNITY groups tend to be found across a broad cross-section of communities within the province (Table 3). While 55 percent of COMMUNITY groups functioned within places having populations less than 30,000 people, only approximately 20 percent functioned within large urban places having populations over 100,000. COMMUNITY FUTURES groups by contrast are focused more specifically around small towns in the 10,000 to 30,000 population range. FIRST NATIONS groups, on the other hand, are rather more concentrated within very small places.

TABLE 3
Community Size   By Community Group Type

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Rural/Village (<1,000)	5	0	50
Town (1 - 10,000)	25	15.4	10
Small City (10-30,000)	25	38.5	20
Medium City (30-100,000)	12.5	15.4	0
Lg. City (+100,000)	20	0	0
Other	12.5	30.8	20
n =	40	13	10

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Several possible explanations can be suggested for this pattern, including the response rate pattern to our questionnaire survey. Further, these patterns may also be a reflection of the legislative mandate of Community Futures groups, the geography of First Nations settlement following imposition of the 'reserve' system in the province, and potential biases in the original database from which the survey sample was selected. These explanations aside, the implications of this pattern on information needs and accessibility is already suggesting differences between group types. While COMMUNITY groups have formed to meet the some local need within places which range widely in terms of population size, COMMUNITY FUTURES and FIRST NATIONS groups in the sample are more focussed in terms of the size of community they service.

Community Socio-Economic Character

After identifying the type of community within which respondents lived, they were asked to describe something of the character of their community. Most provided a brief written description which characterized the general socio-economic outlook of their community as one of: "vibrant/fast growing", "stable", or "depressed". Some distinctions between community group types were noted in the way.

For COMMUNITY groups, there was a fairly even distribution of responses across the "vibrant/fast growing", "stable", or "depressed" categories (Table 4). For the COMMUNITY FUTURES groups, however, nearly all characterized their community as either "stable" (58 percent) or "vibrant/fast growing" (25 percent). Again, this outcome may be something of a legacy of the mandate and organizational criteria of the government programme behind Community Futures. FIRST NATIONS groups, in contrast, tended to sketch a rather different sense of the socio-economic character of their communities. Few were described as "stable" or "vibrant/fast growing". This may in part be an outcome of some of the motivations and target populations described above. Where a FIRST NATIONS group forms to support specific family or women's needs within their local community, it is most often described as a community struggling with a range of social, political and economic issues.

TABLE 4

General Character of the Community the Group Serves
        By Community Group Type

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Stable	35.1	58.3	18.3
Vibrant/ Fast Growing	29.7	25	9.1
Depressed	24.3	8.3	36.4
Other	10.8	8.3	36.4
n =	37	12	11

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When we look at differences between groups based on whether they are located within or outside of the Vancouver-Victoria metropolitan complex, we find that groups in Urban BC are less likely to describe their local community as "stable" or "vibrant/fast growing". As noted above, this may be closely related to the pressures which led to the group's formation.

For COMMUNITY groups within Rural BC, approximately 43 percent described a "stable" community while approximately 33 percent described a "vibrant/fast growing" community. Within Urban BC, COMMUNITY groups were more evenly distributed across the "vibrant/fast growing", "stable", or "depressed" categories. As reported earlier, most COMMUNITY FUTURES and FIRST NATIONS respondents were from small town or rural communities within the geographic area we have designated as Rural BC. Unfortunately, the small number of COMMUNITY FUTURES and FIRST NATIONS respondents from Urban BC means that no useful urban/rural comparison may be made.

Group Service Area

Beyond the place in which their group is located, respondents were asked to describe in a little more detail the "target" communities for their group's activities. In terms of a "target geography", respondents were asked whether the group seeks to serve the needs of the "entire community", a specific "neighbourhood", a particular "interest-group", or a "region" of the province. Examining this issue for the three community group types reveals differences between grassroots organizations, such as the COMMUNITY and FIRST NATIONS groups, and those groups which emerged out of the government COMMUNITY FUTURES programmes.

Approximately 62 percent of COMMUNITY groups tend to focus primarily upon the "entire community" while a further 18 percent focus upon the needs of some local interest group (Table 5). By way of contrast, COMMUNITY FUTURES groups maintain a broader conceptualization of their target community. Eleven of the thirteen COMMUNITY FUTURES respondents identify either the entire community or the local region as their service area. FIRST NATIONS groups, like the COMMUNITY groups, tend to focus upon either the entire community or upon a

specific interest-group within the community. It is notable that this interest-group focus is almost entirely aimed at addressing the needs of First Nations women.

TABLE 5
The Community Group's "Target" Geography
By Community Group Type

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Entire Community	62.5	53.8	36.4
Neighbourhood	2.5	7.7	9.1
Interest Group	17.5	7.7	36.4
Region	10	30.8	9.1
Other	7.5	0	9.1
n =	40	13	11

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When we look at differences between groups based on whether they are located within or outside of the Vancouver-Victoria metropolitan complex, little difference in their focus appears. For COMMUNITY groups within Rural BC, approximately 70 percent tend to focus upon the "entire community" while a further 17 percent expand this focus to include a broader community/rural hinterland "region". Within Urban BC, COMMUNITY groups are strongly oriented towards either the "entire community" or a specific "interest group".

Section 2.3 - Community Organizations

This section of questionnaire results concentrates upon developing a more detailed description of the community groups themselves through a discussion of three topics: Group Organization, Group Mission, and Group Funding.

Group Organization

In examining the period of time over which the community group has been functioning, it is clear that the questionnaire sample includes a range on newly-formed and long-standing

organizations (Table 6). Comparing this across Urban BC and Rural BC, there is a tendency for rural based community groups to be more recently formed.

TABLE 6
Number of Years the Community Group Has Been Active

_____

Years	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
0-2	12.5	8.7	14.6
3-5	17.2	17.4	17.1
6-10	35.9	26.1	41.5
11-20	20.3	26.1	17.1
+20	14.1	21.7	9.8
n =	64	23	41

_____

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Looking at the number of years that the group has been functioning against community group type suggests that COMMUNITY groups show a range of start-up periods while COMMUNITY FUTURES groups strongly reflect the introduction date of government support programmes (Table 7). For FIRST NATIONS groups, there is an almost bi-modal split between newly formed and long functioning groups. For the COMMUNITY groups, this pattern of activity does not change when comparing Urban BC against Rural BC.

TABLE 7
Number of Years the Community Group Has Been Active
       By Community Group Type

Years	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
0-2	12.5	0	27.3
3-5	20	7.7	18.2
6-10	27.5	76.9	18.2
11-20	27.5	15.4	0
+20	12.5	0	36.4
n =	40	13	11

Source: Questionnaire Survey

While all community groups responded that their organization has a formal name, not all responded that the name is generally recognized within their own community (Table 8). For all respondents, approximately 80 percent reported that the group's name is generally recognized within the community. Dissaggregated by geographic region, approximately 87 percent of Urban BC respondents and 76 percent of Rural BC respondents reported that the group name is locally recognized.

TABLE 8
Is the Name of Your Organization Generally Recognized
Within the Community

	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
Yes	79.7	87	75.6
n =	64	23	41

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Comparing local name recognition across the community group types, the COMMUNITY and FIRST NATIONS groups report approximately 83 and 82 percent respectively that the group name is generally recognized within the community. Interestingly, only about 70 percent of the COMMUNITY FUTURES groups report that their name would generally be recognized locally.

Local name recognition patterns do, however, vary somewhat according to the group's geography. Within Urban BC, 88 percent of COMMUNITY groups reported local name recognition, while in Rural BC, 78 percent of COMMUNITY groups reported local name recognition.

To further probe the question of group organization, respondents were asked whether their community group has been formally incorporated. Approximately 83 percent of all respondents reported that their community group was formally incorporated. This result did not vary across Urban BC or Rural BC.

Across community group types, there was some difference on the question of incorporation. While approximately 78 percent of COMMUNITY groups reported being incorporated, all COMMUNITY FUTURES groups stated they were incorporated. Approximately 82 percent of FIRST NATIONS groups also reported that they were incorporated.

Group Mission

The second general group organization issue corresponds to the development of a formal mission or mandate. When asked, nearly all (95.3 percent) respondents reported that their group had developed a formal mandate or mission statement. This held true for both Urban BC and Rural BC respondents.

Comparing mandate development across community group types, only FIRST NATIONS groups (at approximately 82 percent) lagged slightly in developing a formal mandate or mission statement to guide their activities. With this exception, these high levels are a positive sign, as the community research literature clearly shows that the more focussed local groups are with respect to their mandates, the more likely they are to be successful.

In order to refine our profile of community groups, the mandate/mission question was followed by a request to identify the group's principal goals. The responses included a wide range of both general and highly specific topics. For presentation purposes, this range has been redefined into either "community social development" or "community economic development" categories. The "n" values in this case are now greater than the number of returned questionnaires because most groups listed more than one goal.

For all respondents, most (70 percent) report goals that reflect community economic development (Table 9). Extracts from some community (economic) development group mandates include: "to assist and empower women by enhancing the well-being of the family and community", to develop "local employment and training", to "stop economic leakages", and to "enhance local economic and business opportunities".

There is, however, some geographic variation evident here. Within Urban BC, groups are divided evenly between community social and community economic development while in Rural BC, there is a much stronger tendency towards community economic development goals. As many of British Columbia's rural and small town communities can be characterized as having single-industry resource-based economies, residents in these communities are intimately aware of the boom-bust fluctuations common with these types of economies. As a result, it is not surprising to see Rural BC respondents emphasizing local economic growth and diversity issues.

TABLE 9   Community Group Goals

	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
"Community Social Development"	29.7	50	20.6
"Community Economic Development"	70.3	50	79.4
n =	91	28	63

Source: Questionnaire Survey

In examining group goals across community group types, both COMMUNITY and FIRST NATIONS respondents report an emphasis upon community economic development but with a continuing interest in community social development as well (Table 10). For COMMUNITY FUTURES groups, the interest is squarely upon community economic development - a reflection of their original government programme mandate.

TABLE 10
Community Group Goals
        By Community Group Type

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
"Community Social Development"	38.5	0	46.7
"Community Economic Development"	61.5	100	53.3
n =	52	24	15

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Comparing COMMUNITY groups within Rural BC to those within Urban BC, about 60 percent of Urban BC respondents identified community social development goals - a shift in orientation from an otherwise consistent emphasis upon economic matters. This result is most likely related to one of the common organizational motivations for urban community groups, that being to address some neighbourhood-based social issue such as literacy, crime, or social service provision and support.

Group Funding

An important aspect of the strength and resiliency of community group organizations involves their fiscal stability. To probe this issue, respondents were asked a number of questions regarding operating budgets and staffing levels.

When asked if their community group had an operating budget, nearly all respondents reported that they did (Table 11). While a slightly larger proportion of groups within Urban BC appear to be functioning with an operating budget, there is not much geographic differentiation.

TABLE 11
Does Your Community Group Have An Operating Budget

	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
Yes	92.2	95.7	90.2
n =	64	23	41

Source: Questionnaire Survey

There is a small difference noted between community group types with respect to whether they function with an operating budget. While nearly all COMMUNITY groups (approximately 93 percent), and all COMMUNITY FUTURES groups, function with an operating budget, only about 82 percent of FIRST NATIONS groups report having an annual operating budget.

Comparing COMMUNITY groups across Urban BC and Rural BC, there is little variation in this high level of affirmative response to having an operating budget. As with the question of mandate or mission statements, having an operating budget allows the group to move forward with its work. Of course, the amount of funding and the stability of its availability in the future is critically important.

To examine the question of group funding further, respondents were asked to identify their group's "funding sources". Up to four sources of funding could be identified and the "n" values in the table below reflect these multiple responses. For the entire sample, the most often referenced funding source was government; cited 62 percent of the time (Table 12). In this case, government can include the federal, provincial, regional, and local governments. Self-financing and donations from the corporate sector were also identified as important. The importance of government versus corporate sector assistance showed some geographic sensitivity. In Rural BC, government funding appears to be more important relative to Urban BC, while in Urban BC it appears that access to corporate support is more readily available.

TABLE 12
Community Group Funding Sources

	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
Government	62	52.8	67.9
Corporate Sector	11.7	18.9	7.1
Self-Financing	17.5	17.0	17.9
Donations	6.6	5.7	7.1
Other	2.2	5.7	0
n =	137	53	84

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Comparing funding sources by group type highlights some fundamental differences. For COMMUNITY groups, government funding is important but a wide range of alternative sources of support are also identified (Table 13). For COMMUNITY FUTURES groups on the other hand, most funding is from government or self-financing (for example, through contract work for local clients). Finally, while government is an important funding source for FIRST NATIONS groups, they report a heavier relative reliance upon self-financing and donations. Across these community groups, funding source underlies a sense of funding stability. As well, solicitation of donations and organization of fundraising activities takes time away from other activities.

TABLE 13
Community Group Funding Sources
        By Community Group Type

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Government	58.3	70.8	47.4
Corporate Sector	15.5	8.3	5.3
Self-Financing	13.1	20.8	26.3
Donations	10.7	0	15.8
Other	2.4	0	5.3
n =	84	24	19

Source: Questionnaire Survey

There are some differences in comparing funding sources across Urban BC and Rural BC. Access to, and the associated importance of, government funding appears to be proportionally higher for COMMUNITY groups in Rural BC than for COMMUNITY groups in Urban BC. Alternative funding sources may simply not be as common within rural areas, and information on accessing alternative funding sources may also not be as readily available to rural-based community groups.

When asked which ONE source was the group's main funder, government was again the most cited response (Table 14). This was especially the case in Rural BC, where reduced access to corporate sector and self-financing funds was noted earlier. Comparing main funding sources by group type reinforces the emerging distinction between community groups (Table 15). For COMMUNITY groups, government is important but it is also clear that some groups rely upon other sources. For COMMUNITY FUTURES groups the earlier noted reliance upon government funding is repeated. FIRST NATIONS groups, in contrast, cited self-financing most often as their main funding source.

TABLE 14

What is Your Community Group's Main Source of Funding

	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
Government	65.6	54.5	76.9
Corporate Sector	4.7	9.1	2.6
Self-Financing	17.2	22.7	15.4
Donations	3.1	4.5	2.6
Other	4.7	9.1	2.6
n =	64	22	39

Source: Questionnaire Survey

TABLE 15
What is Your Community Group's Main Source of Funding
        By Community Group Type

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Government	69.2	84.6	44.4
Corporate Sector	5.1	7.7	0
Self-Financing	15.4	0	55.6
Donations	5.1	0	0
Other	5.1	7.7	0
n =	39	13	9

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When asked what percentage of their group's budget comes from the main funding source, more than half of respondents stated it was 50 percent or greater (Table 16). This was more pronounced in Urban BC than in Rural BC. The inference to this point is that in Rural BC, community groups have fewer options for funds but must still rely upon a range of funding sources in order to function. A similar pattern of funding is seen when comparing main funding source across community group types (Table 17). By geographic region, COMMUNITY groups in Urban BC rely upon the main funding source to a greater extent than similar groups in Rural BC.

TABLE 16

Percentage of Community Group's Budget That
Comes From Main Funding Source

%	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
0-24	29.8	18.2	37.1
25-49	12.3	22.7	5.7
50-74	29.8	18.2	37.1
75-99	28.1	40.9	20
100	0	0	0
n =	57	22	35

Source: Questionnaire Survey

TABLE 17
Percentage of Community Group's Budget That
Comes From Main Funding Source
           By Community Group Type

%	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
0-24	28.6	30.8	33.3
25-49	17.1	7.7	0
50-74	28.6	30.8	33.3
75-99	25.7	30.8	33.3
100	0	0	0
n =	35	13	9

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When asked to identify major changes in the level of funding over the past three years, the general pattern was one of decreased funding (Table 18). This was not the rule for all groups, however, as some reported that funding levels had remained somewhat the same while others reported that funding levels had increased.

TABLE 18

Major Funding Changes Over Past 3

_____

	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
Same Funding Levels	32.7	17.6	40
Funding Increase	19.2	29.4	14.3
Funding Decrease	48.1	52.9	45.7
n =	52	17	35

_____

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Examining the question of funding level changes over the past three years by community group types, the most notable finding is that a large share of COMMUNITY FUTURES groups have experienced funding decreases (Table 19). Funding decreases are also a somewhat common experience for FIRST NATIONS groups. For COMMUNITY groups, the pattern of recent funding changes repeats for both Urban BC and Rural BC locations.

TABLE 19
Major Funding Changes Over Past 3
          By Community Group Type

_____

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Same Funding Levels	40	15.4	33.3
Funding Increase	26.7	0	22.2
Funding Decrease	33.3	84.6	44.4
n =	30	13	9

_____

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Human Resources

The issue of human resources is an important one for community groups. The effectiveness of such groups is often a direct result of the time and effort put in by their members. The more active the membership, and the larger the membership, the more likely it is that community groups will get done those types of projects and works which they feel will address their mandate and goals. However, some groups must expend time and energy on fundraising efforts simply to continue to exist, never mind addressing their mandate. It is, therefore, important to identify the kinds of staff resources which community groups can draw upon.

When asked if their community group employed any paid staff, most respondents reported that they do. While this result was higher for Urban BC (91.3 percent) than for Rural BC (85.4 percent), there is still a large proportion of community groups in both geographic regions who employ paid staff.

When comparing across community group types, it is the COMMUNITY group respondents who report lower levels of paid staffing (82 percent) compared to COMMUNITY FUTURES (100 percent) and FIRST NATIONS (90 percent). This is not too surprising since many expect that COMMUNITY groups often consist of "grassroots" organizations which commonly rely upon volunteer labour in order to function. Based upon our respondents, it appears that COMMUNITY groups in Rural BC rely upon volunteer labour more than those in Urban BC. For COMMUNITY FUTURES groups, of course, the nature of their start-up as a government funded programme has resulted in these organizations being staffed by paid employees.

The survey probed this question of staffing further, asking if employees were full or part time. Most respondents, across both Urban BC and Rural BC reported that their community groups employed a mix of both full and part-time employed staff (Table 20). Comparing across community group types, it appears that while a larger share of COMMUNITY FUTURES groups have full-time staff relative to the other groups, the FIRST NATIONS groups are most likely to support a range of full and part-time staff (Table 21).

TABLE 20
Community Group Paid Staffing Over Past Year

	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
Full-Time	32.7	28.6	35.3
Part-Time	7.3	9.5	5.9
Both Full and Part-Time	60	61.9	58.8
n =	55	21	34

Source: Questionnaire Survey

TABLE 21
Community Group Paid Staffing Over Past Year
         By Community Group Type

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Full-Time	33.3	41.7	20
Part-Time	9.1	0	10
Both Full and Part-Time	57.6	58.3	70
n =	33	12	10

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Section 2.4 - Community Organization Membership

The third section of this analysis involves an examination of the membership profiles for the participating community (economic) development groups. For a number of reasons, this is an important step in interpreting the activities and actions of local groups. Much of the literature, and indeed much of the popular discussion, on community (economic) development groups suggests that these are grassroots organizations and that they are one avenue through which democratic participation and 'community-based' decision-making may be brought back to empower local residents. Central to this debate is the way such groups may function as part of a Civil Society. One task of this section will, therefore, be to examine the representativeness of group members through the variables of age, gender, and education. A second task will be to use

variables such as length of time members have lived in the community to consider whether "newcomers" or "long-time" residents are playing key roles in creating such organizations. This will provide a foundation for assessing some of the underlying assumptions regarding community (economic) development groups as representative of the general community.

Gender Profile

As with the population of British Columbia, just over one-half of the survey respondents were female. This compares at 50.5 percent in the provincial population and 55.2 percent of questionnaire respondents (Table 22). This result may be somewhat surprising to some observers, as it runs counter to expectations that males are more active in community (economic) development activities.

TABLE 22

Membership Profiles: GENDER

	Community (Economic) Development Groups	British Columbia
Female	55.2	50.5
Male	44.8	49.5
n =	279	3,282,060

Source: Questionnaire Survey
1991 Canada Census

There is little difference between COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY FUTURES, and FIRST NATIONS respondents with respect to gender breakdowns (Table 23). COMMUNITY groups display a relatively even distribution of members based on gender, while COMMUNITY FUTURES and FIRST NATIONS groups are slightly more likely to have more female members. In the case of FIRST NATIONS groups, a number in our sample are organized around specific issues important to First Nations women.

TABLE 23
Membership Profiles: GENDER

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Female	51.7	64.1	55.8
Male	48.3	35.9	44.2
n	172	64	43

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Differences between COMMUNITY groups based on whether they are located within or outside of the Vancouver-Victoria metropolitan complex (Urban BC versus Rural BC) shows there is a greater likelihood that females will comprise the majority of members if the group is functioning within Urban BC.

Age Profile

The age profile of survey respondents is much more concentrated than is the age profile of the province's population (Table 24). Respondents are more likely to be between the ages of 36 and 55 years of age, while they are comparatively under represented in the under 25 and over 65 age groups. The time, personal energy, and needed experience which are so important in the organization and operation of community groups explains part of this pattern.

TABLE 24   Membership Profiles: AGE

Variable	Community Development (Economic) Groups	British Columbia
<25 years*	2.1	9.4
25-35 years	20.3	22.6
36-45 years	31.3	22.7
46-55 years	30.6	15.1
56-65 years	12.8	12.3
+65 years	2.8	17.6
n =	281	2,408,100

* For the Census data, this excludes all younger than 20 years.
Source: Questionnaire Survey, 1991 Canada Census

Among community (economic) development groups, there is relatively little difference between COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY FUTURES, and FIRST NATIONS respondents (Table 25). Each of these groups tend to have few members aged under 25 or older than 65. The only noticeable difference is that the age distribution of COMMUNITY FUTURES groups suggests a slightly older membership profile. For the COMMUNITY and FIRST NATIONS groups, it is indeed surprising that more 'retirement age' residents are not active, given the wealth of experience which they might bring into the group.

TABLE 25   Membership Profiles: AGE

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
<25 years	2.8	1.6	2.3
25-35 years	21.2	17.5	18.6
36-45 years	33.0	22.2	34.9
46-55 years	29.0	38.1	23.3
56-65 years	11.2	14.3	16.3
+65 years	2.8	6.3	4.7
n	179	63	43

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When we look at differences between COMMUNITY groups based on an Urban BC / Rural BC dichotomy, there is remarkable consistency, with the mean membership age hovering around the early forty year mark. The mean age for COMMUNITY group members within Rural BC is 43.9 years compared to 42.5 years for groups active within Urban BC.

Education Profile

Differences between the survey respondents and the provincial population are also evident in the analysis of the education variable (Table 26). Compared to the provincial population, the respondent profile identifies a group with generally high levels of formal education. While approximately 32 percent of the provincial population has a university/college degree or diploma, more than half of the survey respondents have completed a university/college degree/diploma. In fact, approximately 14 percent of respondents have some form of formal post-graduate education.

TABLE 26

Membership Profiles: EDUCATION

	Community (Economic) Development Groups	British Columbia
Some HS	6.3	28.2
HS Grad.	18.0	15.1
Some Coll/Univ.	23.2	21.0
Degree/Diploma	51.5	31.9
Other	1.1	3.8
n =	272	2,373,810

[To allow for better comparability, the British Columbia figures include data only for the population 20 years of age and over]
Source: Questionnaire Survey
1991 Canada Census (20% sample)

Among members of the three groups, there is considerable difference in level of education between FIRST NATIONS group members and those from COMMUNITY or COMMUNITY FUTURES organizations (Table 27). FIRST NATIONS group members are much more likely

than are members of the other group types to have an education level of less than high school graduation. By comparison, COMMUNITY and COMMUNITY FUTURES group members are more likely to have some post secondary education. Two factors are likely important in explaining these results. The first is that there is an historic pattern of constraints on educational access for First Nations peoples in British Columbia. The second is that the general community research literature highlights a connection between higher educational levels and community activism.

TABLE 27

Membership Profiles: EDUCATION

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Some HS	2.4	5.1	23.3
HS Grad.	15.3	28.8	14.0
Some Coll/Univ.	25.3	10.2	32.6
Degree/Diploma	42.9	35.6	18.6
Post-Grad.	14.1	15.3	11.6
Other	0	5.1	0
n	170	59	43

Source: Questionnaire Survey

For COMMUNITY groups, the only notable Urban BC / Rural BC difference in the level of formal education members have obtained concerns the proportion who advanced to some type of "post-graduate" study. Among Rural BC members this amounted to approximately 11 percent of respondents, while among Urban BC members this amounted to approximately 18 percent.

Employment Profile

Turning to the issue of membership employment status, there is generally little difference between COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY FUTURES, and FIRST NATIONS respondents (Table 28). For each group, most members (more than 80 percent) are actively engaged in the workforce. The only notable differences (in the order of 5 percent) are between the COMMUNITY and COMMUNITY FUTURES groups compared with the FIRST NATIONS groups. FIRST NATIONS members are more likely to have an "unemployed" status while COMMUNITY and COMMUNITY FUTURES group members are more likely to be retired. As well, more FIRST NATIONS group members reported an employment status of "other". In these cases, this response is the likely result of a more traditional way of conceptualizing and recording employment activity. Combining the "in the workforce" and "other " category for FIRST NATIONS members would not violate the spirit of the employment inquiry.

TABLE 28
Membership Profiles: EMPLOYMENT

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
In Work Force	87.6	89.0	81.4
At Home	3.4	0	0
Unemployed	1.7	1.6	7.0
Retired	6.2	7.8	2.3
Other	1.1	1.6	9.3
n	178	64	43

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When looking at differences in the employment profiles for COMMUNITY group members using the criteria of Urban BC versus Rural BC, relatively few differences are noted. For the most part, members in both Urban BC and Rural BC are employed in the workforce.

Community Residency Profile

There are some notable differences between groups based on the issue of how long group members have lived in the community (Table 29). Nearly half of the FIRST NATIONS membership had lived in the community for more than 20 years. This group does indeed draw upon people very familiar with the community and its history. The COMMUNITY FUTURES membership profile also suggests strong participation by people who have lived in the community for a long period of time. Given the mandate and organization of the Community Futures programme, this result may reflect participation of those with long local business experience. For COMMUNITY groups, there is a much more even distribution of members in terms of time lived in the community. This likely reflects the participation of long-time community activists with new-comers eager to demonstrate a 'commitment' to their new hometown.

TABLE 29
Membership Profiles: YEARS LIVED IN COMMUNITY

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
0-2 years	12.5	6.5	16.3
3-5 years	22.6	1.6	11.6
6-10 years	22.0	17.7	7.0
11-20 years	20.8	32.3	16.3
+20 years	22.0	41.9	48.8
n	168	62	43

Source: Questionnaire Survey

There are relatively small differences between the COMMUNITY group membership profiles based on whether the groups are located within or outside of the Vancouver-Victoria metropolitan complex. The only notable difference concerns a tendency for more involvement by relative newcomers in Rural BC compared to Urban BC.

Group Participation Profile

The final membership profile issue probes the length of time over which respondents have been active participants within their community (economic) development group. In general, there is a rather different pattern demonstrated between COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY FUTURES, and FIRST NATIONS respondents (Table 30).

For COMMUNITY groups, nearly 40 percent of respondents stated they had been active only for the past 2 years, while a further 32 percent stated they had been active for 3-5 years. The COMMUNITY FUTURES group respondents demonstrate a longer period of participation, with 42 percent stating they were active for 3-5 years and a further 37 percent stating they had been active for 6-10 years. The FIRST NATIONS group respondents answered in a pattern similar to the COMMUNITY group respondents. For FIRST NATIONS members, about 61 percent stated they had been active with the group for only the last 2 years. An explanation for this pattern has less to do with fluctuating volunteer involvement; rather it is more likely connected with the relative "newness" of community (economic) development groups within the province. This is especially the case with community (economic) development groups concerned with, and operated by, First Nations people.

TABLE 30
Membership Profiles: YEARS ACTIVE WITH GROUP

Variable	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
0-2 years	39.3	14.3	60.5
3-5 years	31.5	42.9	27.9
6-10 years	20.2	36.5	9.3
11-20 years	8.4	6.3	2.3
+20 years	0.6	0	0
n	178	63	43

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When comparing COMMUNITY groups based on whether they are located within Urban BC or Rural BC, there is relatively little difference in the pattern described above.

Section 2.5 - Organization Information Needs

Having described some of the basic characteristics of the participating community groups, the analysis now moves to a discussion of their information needs. The first issue concerns a description of the types of information needed by community (economic) development groups. The categories of information types were developed based on previous survey research conducted through Simon Fraser University's Community Economic Development Centre.

Information Used

When asked about the kinds of information their organization currently uses, the survey responses suggest a two tier ranking of important information (Table 31). The most commonly used types of information focus upon group/organizational development. This "tier" includes information related to learning from the experiences of other community (economic) development groups, being aware of government funding programmes or assistance programmes or other training opportunities for group members, and gaining access to the findings of basic community development research. Nearly all surveyed groups identified they use this type of information.

A second "tier" of information used by community (economic) development groups has more to do with basic research data. This includes economic sector data, demographic data and census (and other Statistics Canada products) data. This type of information likely forms the foundation for local community development planning and strategy reports rather than being information which will help the group develop its organizational capacity.

TABLE 31
Percentage of Groups Reporting They Use
Each Kind of Information

Kind	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
Economic Sector Data	65.6	43.5	80.5
Demographic Data	68.8	60.9	75.6
Census Data	57.8	52.2	65.9
Government Program Information	87.5	87.0	95.1
Experiences of Other Groups	93.8	95.7	95.1
Community Development Research	81.3	87.0	80.5
Training Opportunities	84.4	91.3	87.8
n =	64	23	41

Source: Questionnaire Survey

This general pattern is repeated when comparing differences in types of information used on the basis of whether the groups function within Urban BC or Rural BC. For both Urban BC and Rural BC, there is a distinction between Tier 1 and Tier 2 information sources as identified above. The notable difference, however, involves the higher levels of use among Rural BC groups across almost all information type categories. This suggests that the focused nature and mandates of Urban BC groups means that they tend to limit their information searches to categories most relevant to them (such as government funding programmes or training opportunities).The more general focus, both topically and geographically, of Rural BC groups suggests a firm basis for a much broader general information search.

Given the use of information types identified above, we can then ask about the frequency of information use (Table 32). In this case the two tier pattern of differences in types of information used continues to be important. Those sources which are important for group and membership development and capacity building information are sought out and accessed on a more frequent basis. It appears that this is usually done on a weekly or monthly schedule. For example, government programme information, which is likely to involve funding or other assistance opportunities, and which will likely involve application deadlines, is accessed on the most regular basis. For those groups which reported that they use government programme information, 50 percent reported that they "use" or access it on a weekly basis.

The second "tier" information sources are sought out or accessed on a less frequent basis. In this case, the information is more likely to be sought out on a monthly, semi-annual, or annual basis. The expected pattern is that this type of information would be sought out when needed (such as for a specific report or proposal) rather than being scanned on a regular basis.

TABLE 32
Frequency of Information Use: All Groups

| Kind | Frequency of Use | | | |
	Weekly	Monthly	Semi-Annual	Annual
Economic Sector Data	28.6	35.7	14.3	21.4
Demographic Data	27.3	15.9	22.7	34.1
Census Data	18.9	21.6	16.2	43.2
Government Program Information	50	33.9	8.9	7.1
Experiences of Other Groups	38.3	43.3	11.7	6.7
Community Development Research	25	32.7	21.2	21.2
Training Opportunities	38.9	29.6	24.1	7.4

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Comparing frequency of information use across Urban BC and Rural BC, there is relatively little geographic difference from the pattern described above.

When type of information used is compared across the community group types, the pattern seems to be one where the more formally organized the group - the wider the range of information they will routinely access (Table 33). Nearly 100 percent of COMMUNITY FUTURES offices report that they access most of the information types listed. No doubt the relative stability of funding, the 'professional' nature of these offices and their full-time staffs play a role in supporting and maintaining this breadth of information search.

For the COMMUNITY and FIRST NATIONS groups, the pattern with respect to the types of information used corresponds closely to the two tiers described above. More critical information, such as government funding programmes or experiences and success stories of other community groups is sought out more frequently than some perceived less immediately useful data such as from the census. For COMMUNITY groups, the experiences of other groups is information sought out by 95 percent of respondents while census data is reported as being sought out by only approximately 58 percent of respondents. The pattern is similar for FIRST NATIONS groups, with information on the experiences of other groups being sought out by all respondents and census data being sought out by only approximately 64 percent of respondents.

TABLE 33
Type of Information Used: All Groups
Percentage of Groups Reporting They Use Each Kind of Information

_____

Kind	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Economic Sector Data	60	92.3	63.6
Demographic Data	62.5	92.3	72.7
Census Data	57.5	69.2	63.6
Gov.Program Information	87.5	100	100
Experiences of Other Groups	95	100	90.9
Comm. Development Research	72.5	100	100
Training Opportunities	82.5	100	100
n =	40	13	11

_____
Source: Questionnaire Survey

When comparing the types of information used by COMMUNITY groups against their geographic location, distinctions appear to involve "coverage". Generally, the breadth of information coverage is much wider in Rural BC than in Urban BC. Reasons for this difference include the organizational mandates of the groups (discussed earlier) and the availability of many alternative sources of information in the metropolitan Vancouver-Victoria area. While this has allowed urban based groups to specialize on a particular local issue, community (economic) development groups in rural communities must take on a much broader and general role in finding and accessing needed information. Many have identified that they wish to become a local clearing house for such information. For the COMMUNITY groups, respondents from Urban BC focus upon government programmes, the experiences of other community groups, community research, and training opportunities. For respondents from Rural BC, there is a much more general focus across all of the information types listed in the above table.

Information Sources Within Community

The next information access issue concerns the local availability of a range of information sources. These sources, listed in Table 34 below, include various types of libraries and government offices. Important differences in this discussion of local access to information sources concerns the rather more disadvantaged position of First Nations community groups.

The general availability of information sources can be considered as relatively good for the COMMUNITY and COMMUNITY FUTURES respondents. Both sets of respondents report that the most information source categories are available locally. Exceptions to this pattern involve university libraries and MP's offices. Also, in an interesting twist, only about half of COMMUNITY respondents reported that a Community Futures office was located in their community.

The important difference in Table 34 concerns the FIRST NATIONS respondents. In this case, only about half of respondents typically report that an information source is available within their community. Two exceptions include public libraries and college/university college libraries, where approximately 73 percent of respondents report that this information source is available

locally. Taken with the information above, there appears to be exceptional local penetration of college/university college libraries into British Columbia communities.

TABLE 34
Information Sources within Community

Source	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
High School Library	97.5	100	63.6
Public Library	95	100	72.7
College/Univ.Coll.Library	100	100	72.7
University Library	30	15.4	18.2
Museum Archive	82.5	92.3	54.5
Chamber of Commerce	95	100	54.5
Municipal Government Office	92.5	100	54.5
Comm.Futures Office	55	100	27.3
BC Government Agent	92.5	100	54.5
MLA Office	72.5	92.3	54.5
MP Office	55	76.9	18.2
n =	40	13	11

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When comparing the local availability of information sources against the community's geographic location, between 80 and 90 percent of COMMUNITY groups, whether in Urban BC or Rural BC, report that the information sources listed in the table above are locally available. Exceptions, similar across Urban BC and Rural BC, are university libraries and MP offices.

Barriers to Access

The following discussion looks at the question of whether community (economic) development groups face barriers in accessing the kinds of information they need to function and be successful. Respondents were asked to identify whether they felt their community group faced barriers with respect to information access, and then were asked to identify those barriers (Table 35).

Collectively, only 18 percent of survey respondents stated that they do not face barriers in their access to needed information. Compared across the three community group types, 25 percent of

COMMUNITY groups reported that they do not face barriers while approximately 15 percent of COMMUNITY FUTURES groups reported that they do not face barriers. By contrast, none of the FIRST NATIONS groups reported that they are barrier free in accessing needed information.

Looking at some specific types of barriers, "time" is perhaps the most universal barrier identified while FIRST NATIONS groups report facing more barriers in general. About half of all respondents identified time as a barrier to accessing needed information. Given that most COMMUNITY and FIRST NATIONS groups are comprised largely of volunteers who donate time and effort, it is clear that easing this time burden through making information more readily available, and readily available in a user friendly format, would be of tremendous assistance.

Approximately one-third of both COMMUNITY and COMMUNITY FUTURES groups report that costs are a barrier to their accessing the kinds of information they need to function and be successful. Far more FIRST NATIONS groups report costs as a barrier to information access. As used in the survey, "costs" can represent the price of obtaining copies of published material or data, as well as less direct expenses such as travel or postage costs.

A similar pattern is repeated with respect to distance. Just less than half of both COMMUNITY and COMMUNITY FUTURES groups report that distance is barrier to information access, while nearly all FIRST NATIONS groups report distance as a barrier. Based on this result, Internet access to "free" and readily available information and data may have a place in assisting community (economic) development groups to be more efficient and effective in serving their local constituency.

TABLE 35

Barriers to Information Access

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
No Barriers	25	15.4	0
General Costs	35	38.5	90.9
Special Costs	30	38.5	72.7
Time	50	46.2	45.5
Distance	42.5	46.2	90.9
Other	35	7.7	18.2
n =	40	13	11

Source: Questionnaire Survey

For COMMUNITY groups, there are few information access implications which appear to develop from geographic differences between Urban BC and Rural BC communities. Approximately 25 percent of COMMUNITY groups, in both Urban BC and Rural BC reported that they do not face barriers in their access to needed information. Looking at the issue of "time", about half of COMMUNITY respondents in both Urban BC and Rural BC reported time as a barrier. With respect to "costs", COMMUNITY groups across both Urban BC and Rural BC report in approximately similar levels that costs are a barrier to needed information. "Distance" is reported as a barrier to information access by over 50 percent of COMMUNITY groups in Rural BC compared to only 30 percent from Urban BC. This pattern suggests that residents in rural communities may be adjusted to the day-to-day travel and mobility requirements of rural places, something which may affect their perceptions of distance as a barrier

Current Information Access Technologies

Collectively, most of the community (economic) development groups in the sample make use of the common information access technologies of postal services, courier services, telephones, and fax machines (Table 36). While cellular phones and radio phones are used far less frequently, some groups pointed out in their responses that they are at present limited to radio phones as ground-based telephone lines have not yet been installed. Approximately two-thirds of respondent groups reported using computer modems as part of their current information access technology.

TABLE 36
Current Information Access Technology
 - All Groups
_____

Kind	% Using
Postal Services	96.9
Courier Services	84.4
Telephone	96.9
Cellular Phone	29.7
Radio Phone	20.3
FAX	96.9
Computer Modem	67.1
n =	64

_____
Source: Questionnaire Survey

Breaking this comparison down by type of community group, the basic information access technology used by each group is generally similar (Table 37). Postal services, courier services, telephones, and fax machines are used by nearly all COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY FUTURES, and FIRST NATIONS groups. In an encouraging signal, there is also relatively little difference between groups in their use of computer modems. In contrast, cellular and radio phone use is higher among the FIRST NATIONS groups. In exploring this issue, it appears that location within Rural BC, and the relatively limited telephone service available to some of the more remote communities and Indian reserve lands, means that technologies such as cellular and especially radio phones are rated highly as communications tools.

TABLE 37
Current Information Access Technology

_____

Kind	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Postal Services	97.5	100	100
Courier Services	80	100	90.9
Telephone	97.5	100	100
Cellular Phone	32.5	0	54.5
Radio Phone	15.0	7.7	54.5
FAX	97.5	100	100
Computer Modem	67.5	69.2	63.6
n =	40	13	11

_____

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When asked about the effectiveness of information access technologies, those which provide the most "immediate" access were generally considered by the survey respondents to be the most effective (Table 38). The telephone, fax machine and computer modem scored the most support as effective information access technologies. In fact, no respondents reported that telephones or fax machines were ineffective. While not all respondents agreed, the postal and courier services were generally considered effective - with a sizable number reporting no specific opinion on their effectiveness. For those who use them, radio phones were considered slightly more effective than were cellular phones, but there was a wide diversity of opinion.

TABLE 38   Effectiveness of Current Information Access Technology

_____

Kind	Effectiveness				
	Extremely Effective	2	Neutral	4	Not Effective
Postal Services	19.4	32.3	33.9	9.7	4.8
Courier Services	31.5	35.2	20.4	7.4	5.6
Telephone	66.1	27.4	6.5	0	0
Cellular Phone	15.8	15.8	21.0	26.3	21
Radio Phone	23.1	23.1	23.1	15.4	15.4
FAX	69.4	30.6	0	0	0
Computer Modem	51.2	27.9	11.6	2.3	7.0

_____

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When the effectiveness of information access technology is compared across the three group categories of COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY FUTURES, and FIRST NATIONS, there are no notable breaks between the results and those generally described in Table 38. When effectiveness is compared for COMMUNITY groups across Urban BC or Rural BC, there are two notable differences. The first is with respect to courier services, where it is more likely that respondents from Rural BC will report neutral or less than effective. The second is with respect to the effectiveness of computer modems. Again, respondents from Rural BC consistently report lower levels of effectiveness. In both cases, support and service networks for these two forms of information access technology may hinder their effectiveness in rural communities.

Section 2.6 - New Information Technologies

This final section of the questionnaire analysis examines the responses of community (economic) development groups to the potential for new information technologies to assist with accessing that needed information. As highlighted in the discussion above, there are differences in the mandates and orientation of community groups, and there are some key barriers to accessing needed information. Both of these differences suggest possible roles for new information technology. The purpose of this section is not only to explore these possibilities, but also to identify some of the potential limitations which may impact how possibilities are translated into practice.

Current Access

Current familiarity with computer-based electronic information systems is probed in two ways. The first focuses upon community group access to electronic communications technology, while the second focuses upon use of a range of common information exchange mechanisms.

When asked about the kinds of electronic information technology the group currently has access to, most (over 90 percent of survey respondents) report access to FAX and basic personal computer equipment (Table 39). At least half of the groups report access to personal computer equipment with some form of modem communications capacity. Relatively fewer groups report

having personal computer equipment which supports CD-ROM capacity. Comparing these trends across Urban BC and Rural BC, it appears that there is relatively little difference based on geographic location.

TABLE 39
Currently Have Access to Electronic Information Technology

Type	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
FAX	93.8	87.0	97.6
Personal Computer	92.2	100	87.8
Personal Computer with CD ROM	26.6	21.7	29.3
Personal Computer with Modem	62.5	60.9	63.4
Personal Computer with FAX Modem	53.1	60.9	48.8
n =		23	41

Source: Questionnaire Survey

In comparing access to electronic information technology by community group type, it appears that there are relatively few differences in currently available technology (Table 40). Fax machines and personal computer equipment are again almost ubiquitous, while modems for personal computers are also relatively common. As described above, there is almost no diversion from this general trend for COMMUNITY groups based on location in either Urban BC or Rural BC.

TABLE 40
Currently Have Access to Electronic Information Technology
By Community Group

Type	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
FAX	92.5	100	90.9
Personal Computer	90	92.3	100
Personal Computer with CD ROM	20	30.8	45.5
Personal Computer with Modem	52.5	84.6	72.7
Personal Computer with FAX Modem	50	61.5	54.5
n =	40	13	11

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When asked whether the group had access to a computer network, over half of respondents reported that they did (Table 41). There is little fluctuation in this finding despite differences in geographic availability of networks in Urban BC and Rural BC. For community groups in the Vancouver-Victoria metropolitan region, this finding may reflect a lack of awareness concerning computer networking opportunities. In developing the profile of Urban BC groups, it was found that many of them, especially the COMMUNITY and FIRST NATIONS groups, were very focussed on some local social issue and that they similarly had to rely upon volunteer workers. Both conditions may play a role in limiting interest in/awareness of computer networks among Urban BC groups.

TABLE 41
Do You Have Access to a Computer Network?

	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
Yes	54.7	52.2	56.1

Source: Questionnaire Survey

TABLE 42
Do You Have Access to a Computer Network?
          By Community Group

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Yes	60	69.2	18.2
n =	40	13	11

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When the question of access to a computer network is compared against community group types, there is a notable difference respecting FIRST NATIONS groups (Table 42). While 60 to 70 percent of COMMUNITY and COMMUNITY FUTURES groups report access to a computer network, only approximately 18 percent of FIRST NATIONS groups so report. Rural isolation, and the very specific mandates/missions for Urban BC groups, likely account for this pattern among FIRST NATIONS respondents.

For COMMUNITY groups, while just over half of Urban BC groups report access to a computer network, over 65 percent of Rural BC respondents report having access.

When asked about community group use of a limited set of electronic information retrieval options, computer based systems are not nearly as commonly employed as are FAX machines (Table 43). Nearly all survey respondents reported that they use FAX technology, compared to just less than half who report that they use computer based access to Internet services such as electronic mailing lists or the world wide web. These general patterns repeat for groups regardless of their Urban BC/Rural BC location.

TABLE 43

Have You Ever Used The Following Electronic Information Technology?

	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
FAX	96.9	95.7	97.6
CD ROM	26.6	17.4	31.7
Electronic Mail Lists	48.4	47.8	48.8
World Wide Web	43.8	43.5	43.9

Source: Questionnaire Survey

With respect to CD ROM use, while the general use level is well below that reported for Internet services, there is a marked difference between Urban BC and Rural BC respondents. The higher reported level of CD ROM use by Rural BC respondents repeats an emerging trend in the survey; that community groups in Rural BC are not lagging in their "take-up" of electronic technology. Many Rural BC groups have broader and more general mandates and information needs than their Urban BC counterpart, with the result being that they may be at the forefront of community groups seeking more efficient ways to communicate and access needed information.

When use of a limited set of electronic information retrieval options is compared across community groups types, the most notable differences emerge with respect to FIRST NATIONS groups (Table 44). For all of the options listed, COMMUNITY FUTURES groups report the highest level of use while FIRST NATIONS groups report the lowest. Again, the rather more "solid" financial and organizational structure of COMMUNITY FUTURES groups likely explains this pattern.

TABLE 44

Have You Ever Used The Following Electronic Information Technology?
       By Community Group

_____

Type	COMMUNITY FUTURES	COMMUNITY FIRST NATIONS	
FAX	97.5	100	90.9
CD ROM	27.5	30.8	18.2
Electronic Mail Lists	47.5	69.2	27.3
World Wide Web	50	53.8	9.1

_____

Source: Questionnaire Survey

For COMMUNITY groups, the pattern of electronic information technology use displays some diverse results when comparing between Urban BC and Rural BC. In Urban BC, all COMMUNITY groups use FAX equipment, just less than 60 percent use the Internet services of mailing lists and web sites, and about 24 percent use CD ROMs. In Rural BC, almost all groups use FAX equipment, about 40 percent report using the general Internet services, while about 30 percent use CD ROMs. As COMMUNITY groups in Rural BC have consistently shown themselves not to be "lagging" in the acquisition of electronic information technology, part of this response pattern reflects differential access to basic infrastructure to connect to the Internet.

Current Familiarity

When asked about accessing computer-based / technology-based information systems, 70 percent of respondents reported that they would need training. For those who reported that they did need training, approximately 72 percent reported that such training was not locally available (or at least that they were unaware of any local training services/opportunities).

Interestingly, there is relatively little difference in this pattern of responses when comparing across Urban BC / Rural BC locations. For Urban BC, this is a rather surprising result given the wide range of computer training opportunities generally available. Again, this may reflect a lack of pre-knowledge on the part of urban respondents who had not previously sought out this type of information.

Differences in training needs do emerge when comparing between community group types (Table 45). In this case the FIRST NATIONS respondents identify not only a much higher level of training support needed before being able to use computer-based and technology-based information systems, they also report much lower community availability of such training opportunities.

TABLE 45
Will You Need Training to Make Use of Computer Based
Information Systems? By Community Group

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Yes	67.5	69.2	81.8
If Yes, is that training locally available:			
Yes	80	92.3	18.2

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Comparing training needs for COMMUNITY groups across Urban BC and Rural BC, a larger share of Rural BC respondents (73 compared to 59 percent) report that they will need training.

Expectations

Community group expectations with respect to the potential value and use of electronic information technologies is probed with two questions. The first involves the kinds of information the group would normally expect to be able to access with these new information technologies. The second focuses upon the kinds of opportunities afforded by the wider contact and exposure of new information technologies of which the group may wish to take advantage.

Looking first at the kinds of information expected to be accessed with new information technology, the responses are not nearly as focused as a similar question asked earlier regarding the general kinds of information the group needs in order to be successful. The first tier of information types (government programme information, the experiences of other community groups, community development research and training opportunities) recorded some of the highest response levels (Table 4650). These levels, however, were only in the order of 70 to 80 percent. By comparison, the second tier of information types, which had previously been identified as very distinct from first tier information types, recorded expected use levels which were almost as high.

TABLE 46
Which of the Following Would you Expect to Access with
Computer Based Information Technology?

Type	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
Economic Sector Data	71.9	65.2	75.6
Demographic Data	65.5	65.2	65.9
Census Data	62.5	56.5	65.9
Gov.Program Information	78.1	73.9	80.5
Experiences of Other Groups	75	73.9	75.6
Comm. Development Research	71.9	69.6	73.2
Training Opportunities	70.3	60.9	75.6
ALL SELECTED	40.6	30.4	46.3
n =	64	23	41

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Comparing across Urban BC and Rural BC, the average level of expected use across most

categories is higher for Rural BC respondents. The urban/rural gap is especially notable with respect to accessing training opportunities (an approximately 15 percentage point difference) and with respect to the share of respondents who selected all of the information types (a 16 percentage point difference).

Comparing across community group types, it is the COMMUNITY FUTURES groups who report generally higher levels of expected use across the information type categories (Table 47). This is especially notable with respect to economic sector data (a key component of a COMMUNITY FUTURES mandate) where the difference is about 20 percentage points above the nearest other community group type.

TABLE 47
Which of the Following Would you Expect to Access with
Computer Based Information Technology?   By Community Group

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Economic Sector Data	65	92.3	72.7
Demographic Data	67.5	76.9	45.5
Census Data	60	76.9	54.5
Gov.Program Information	77.5	84.6	72.7
Experiences of Other Groups	70	84.6	81.8
Comm. Development Research	62.5	84.6	90.9
Training Opportunities	62.5	84.6	81.8
ALL SELECTED	30	69.2	45.5
n =	40	13	11

Source: Questionnaire Survey

When comparing expected use levels for COMMUNITY groups against their geography, there is relatively little difference between Urban BC and Rural BC groups with respect to economic sector data, census data, and government programme information. Those in Urban BC are more likely to expect to use demographic data, the experiences of other groups, and community development research, while those in Rural BC are more likely to expect to use information on training opportunities. COMMUNITY groups in Rural BC are also more likely to have selected all categories than are their Urban BC counterparts.

The second aspect of community "expectations" with respect to the use of new information technologies focuses upon the kinds of opportunities afforded by wider contact and exposure which the group may wish to take advantage of (Table 48). Only about half of respondents expect to take advantage of educational courses through the Internet, while only about 40 percent expect to complete an educational degree or diploma this way. Comparing this result across Urban BC and Rural BC, it is clear that Rural BC respondents most hope to use new information technology to upgrade their skills and education.

Across all respondents, approximately 75 percent of respondents expect to participate in electronic "discussion" groups. This result is relatively similar for groups in Urban BC compared to those in Rural BC.

Building upon the economic discourse that permeates much of the discussion of Internet opportunities, approximately 70 percent of respondents expect to use the Internet to advertise the economic and business opportunity potential of their community. This result is slightly stronger among Rural BC groups.

TABLE 48

How Would You Expect Your Organization To Make Use of Computer
 Based Information Technology?

Type	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
take educational courses	53.1	30.4	65.9
take educational degrees/diplomas	40.6	17.4	53.7
access "discussion" groups			
of community orgs	75	73.9	75.6
Advertise the economic potential			
of your community	70.3	60.9	75.6
ALL SELECTED	25	8.7	34.1
n =	64	23	41

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Looking at responses to the question of "opportunities" across community group types, there is a general difference between FIRST NATIONS groups and the COMMUNITY and COMMUNITY FUTURES groups (Table 49). For both COMMUNITY and COMMUNITY FUTURES groups, expectations for taking courses or educational programmes through new information technology is much lower than are expectations for accessing discussion lists and of advertising to improve the local economy. For COMMUNITY groups, this general pattern repeats across both Urban BC and Rural BC, with the caveat that respondents in Rural BC are more likely to have higher levels of expected use across all categories than their Urban BC counterparts.

The opposite emphasis is found for FIRST NATIONS groups. In this case, expectations of accessing educational opportunities is higher than are expectations of accessing electronic discussion lists or of advertising the community's economic potential. While the expectations of COMMUNITY and COMMUNITY FUTURES groups appear to reflect a community economic development emphasis, the expectations of FIRST NATIONS groups appear to reflect an emphasis upon the human capacity building aspects of community development.

TABLE 49

How Would You Expect Your Organization To Make Use of Computer
Based Information Technology?   By Community Group

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
take educational courses	42.5	69.2	72.7
take educational degrees/diplomas	27.5	53.8	72.7
access "discussion" groups			
of community orgs	75	84.6	63.6
Advertise the economic potential			
of your community	70	84.6	54.5
ALL SELECTED	12.5	38.5	54.5
n =	40	13	11

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Reality Check

Adoption and use of new information technologies is not without potential difficulties and pitfalls. One such issue, the need for training in order to use new information technologies has already been introduced. Besides the training issue, the survey asked for responses to three additional questions. The first involved the practical matter of whether the community group has the financial resources to purchase and use new information technology. The next two questions were more speculative in nature; they asked about potential benefits from, and potential barriers to, community group access to information through new technologies.

When asked about the capital purchase of new information technology, only approximately 45 percent of respondents reported that their community group would have the financial resources. This proportion varied only slightly between groups in Urban BC (47.8 percent) and Rural BC (43.9 percent). The initial outlay of funds for capital equipment purchase is clearly as issue for community groups.

When asked whether their community group would have funds to pay the operating or continuing costs of new information technologies, approximately 61 percent of respondents reported that they would have the financial resources. Again, there is only a small variance between Urban BC (56.5 percent) and Rural BC (63.4 percent) respondents.

Comparing financial resources to purchase new information technologies highlights tremendous unevenness between community group types (Table 50). While almost 60 percent of COMMUNITY groups reported they would have the funds to make a capital purchase of equipment, just less than 40 percent of COMMUNITY FUTURES and less than 10 percent of FIRST NATIONS groups reported having the funds available. The situation may not be as difficult for COMMUNITY FUTURES groups, as they are often already well equipped and may be able to develop capital fund pools for additional future purchases.

There is relatively little difference in the availability of funds for capital purchases by COMMUNITY groups based on whether the group is in Urban BC or Rural BC.

TABLE 50
Does Your Organization Have Sufficient Financial Resources?
    By Community Group

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
To Purchase Computer Based Information Technology:			
Yes	57.5	38.5	9.1
To Pay the Continuing Costs of Accessing Information with Computer Based:			
Yes	60	76.9	45.5

Source: Questionnaire Survey

On the question of ability to pay the continuing operating costs of new information technologies, there continues to be some difference between groups, especially with respect to a disadvantaged position for FIRST NATIONS groups. While approximately 60 percent of COMMUNITY groups and approximately 77 percent of COMMUNITY FUTURES groups report having operating funds for new information technologies, only 45 percent of FIRST NATIONS groups so report.

Again, there is relatively little difference in the availability of funds for continuing operating costs for COMMUNITY groups within Urban BC or Rural BC.

When asked about the potential benefits which their group might derive from access to new information technologies, 75 percent of the 64 survey respondents identified a benefit. Table 51 displays the results for these 48 respondents who identified a potential benefit. The most common reply was, simply, access to data/information. Approximately 31 percent of respondents identified this general access to information as being the most important potential benefit. A further approximately 21 percent of respondents identified networking, especially with other community groups, as an important benefit.

Respondents also identified a strong interest in the economic potential of new information technologies. Approximately 17 percent cited greater efficiency in serving clients while an additional approximately 10 percent cited marketing opportunities as the most important potential benefit.

TABLE 51

Which is the Most Important Potential Benefit For Your Organization
From Access to New Information Technologies?

Type	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
Networking	20.8	31.3	15.6
Marketing	10.4	6.3	12.5
Data/Information	31.3	25	34.4
Education	10.4	12.5	9.4
Economic Dev. Planning	4.2	12.5	0
Disseminate Information	4.2	0	6.3
Speed Client Services	16.7	12.5	18.8
Few/Minimal	2.1	0	3.1
n =	48	16	32

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Comparing expected benefits by geographic location, respondents in Urban BC emphasize networking benefits while access to information/data is the key benefit seen by Rural BC respondents. This addresses one of our opening questions concerning the need among urban-based groups to share information and the need among rural-based groups to gain basic access to information.

Across the three community group types, there is also considerable difference as to the potential benefits of new information technology (Table 52). For COMMUNITY groups, networking and access to information are most emphasized. For COMMUNITY FUTURES groups, access to data/information and (the related point of) speeding client services were most often cited as the potential benefits. For FIRST NATIONS groups, marketing and access to data/information are emphasized as potential benefits from new information technologies.

TABLE 52

Which is the Most Important Potential Benefit For Your Organization From Access to New Information Technologies?   By Community Group

_____

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS
Networking	30	0	12.5
Marketing	6.7	10	25
Data/Information	30	40	25
Education	13.3	0	12.5
Economic Dev. Planning	3.3	10	0
Disseminate Information	6.7	0	0
Speed Client Services	10	40	12.5
Few/Minimal	0	0	12.5
n =	30	10	8

_____

Source: Questionnaire Survey

For COMMUNITY respondents, there is no difference in the pattern of perceived benefits from new information technologies when comparing Urban BC groups against those in Rural BC.

When asked about potential barriers which limit their group from access to new information technologies, only 44 of the 64 survey respondents (approximately 69 percent) identified a barrier. For those respondents who did identify a barrier, approximately 41 percent cited cost while an additional 27 percent cited a lack of time to learn and time to use these new information technologies (Table 53). Comparing Urban BC against Rural BC, perceptions of barriers are such that Urban BC respondents cite lack of time more often while those in Rural BC cite cost more often.

TABLE 53

What is the Most Important Potential Barrier For Your Organization
in Using New Information Technologies?

_____

Type	All Respondents	Urban BC	Rural BC
Lack Knowledge	15.9	18.8	14.3
Cost	40.9	31.3	46.4
Lack Time	27.3	37.5	21.4
Doubt Value of Technology	2.3	0	3.6
Lack Infrastructure	11.4	6.3	14.3
Software Compatibility	2.3	6.3	0
n =	44	16	28

_____

Source: Questionnaire Survey

With some variation, the pattern described above for all respondents repeats when the analysis dissaggregates community groups (Table 54). It is worth noting, however, that the response rate to this question was less than 70 percent and that some of the numbers become small when dissagregating by community group types.

For COMMUNITY respondents; cost, lack of time, and lack of knowledge are most commonly cited as perceived barriers to use of new information technology. COMMUNITY FUTURES respondents focus more often on the issues of cost and lack of time, while nearly all FIRST NATIONS respondents who answered this question perceived costs to be the critical barrier. Even with the small numbers of responses to this question, the pattern of perceived barriers repeats for both Urban BC and Rural BC respondents across the three community group types.

TABLE 54

What is the Most Important Potential Barrier For Your Organization
 in Using New Information Technologies?   By Community Group

_____

	COMMUNITY	COMMUNITY FUTURES	FIRST NATIONS

_____

Lack Knowledge	22.2	9.1	0
Cost	29.6	45.5	83.3
Lack Time	29.6	36.4	0
Doubt Value of Technology	3.7	0	0
Lack Infrastructure	11.1	9.1	16.7
Software Compatibility	3.7	0	0
n =	27	11	6

_____

Source: Questionnaire Survey

Discussion

This report contains a great deal of detail describing the results of a questionnaire survey of community (economic) development groups in British Columbia. The intent of the detail is to provide a baseline against which other community groups can assess their own activities, performance, and plans. A "capsule" summary of some key findings from this questionnaire survey is contained in the Executive Summary at the front of the report. As a result, there is an opportunity to use this discussion section to highlight points where the potential use and take-up of new information technology by community (economic) development groups also raises potential public policy issues.

A first issue raised concerns that of the basic skills and education needed to make effective use of new information technologies. While the membership profiles of the surveyed community (economic) development groups identified a relatively well educated collection of participants, this is not representative of the general educational level across many rural and small town places. New information technologies, however, do demand a general level of literacy both with respect to grammar and spelling as well as with computer literacy. In terms of education and training it is recognized that the local availability of such training is at present very uneven

across communities. This is especially the case across the Province's rural and small town places. Even where such training is available, the social stigma of low literacy must be dealt with. After all, it is no sense giving a program manual to someone who struggles to read, or asking someone to engage in email discussion list dialogue and debates if they are so self-conscious about their spelling and grammar that they will simply not participate. This issue of basic skills and education is a general public policy concern.

This first issue also raises concerns regarding the promotion of community development groups as part of a healthy Civil Society. If educational level already somewhat distinguishes the membership of community (economic) development groups, the publicly assisted acquisition of new information technology may exacerbate divisions within localities. Community members who are currently excluded from local decision-making may be further marginalized. Training and education is, therefore, not only important with respect to using new information technologies but it is also important with respect to supporting and enhancing a broader sense of local Civil Society.

A second important public policy issue involves the very real financial commitment which new information technologies demand. Funding the set up of "access sites" is only part of the financial picture. For many community groups, it is actually the continuing costs of operating and maintaining such sites which are prohibitive. After all, volunteer-based community groups not only have difficulty maintaining resident participation and involvement over long periods of time, but they also have difficulty maintaining fundraising and general budget levels as well. In rural communities, there are two further related issues. The first involves basic infrastructure where, for example, some of our surveyed community groups are still limited to radio-phone communications links. The costs of land-based telephone line access is enormous. When considered in relation to the small market size in these communities, it is no surprise that commercial firms have not yet supplied this service. The second is the issue of long distance charges being added on top of charges set by Internet servers. This can greatly affect costs to users in rural and remote places. While rapidly changing technology and changing modes of service delivery are the norm at present, the Canadian experience is that there has been no change in the relative level of disadvantage for small volunteer-based community groups in

general and those in rural and small town places in particular.

A third issue concerns acknowledged barriers to computer technology. Not only are costs cited as a barrier to the take-up of new information technology, but so to is the time commitment required to effectively learn and use such technology. Community organizations are key components of a healthy Civil Society. Accessing computer based information may seem a "blessing" to such groups but, in fact, it may add to an already heavy burden on local volunteers to the point where participation, and by extension group effectiveness, are harmed. Public policy debate must include this broader issue of how to support community groups and how to sustain a healthy Civil Society.

A final point concerns the representativeness of community groups and the question of whether new information technologies will assist the community or simply reinforce the position of an already established elite. In general terms, communities are diverse social landscapes, and this is true for both urban and rural/small town communities. In this review, it is clear that the membership of many community (economic) development groups does not necessarily reflect the socio-demographic characteristics of the community it seeks to serve. There is an important question here about "democratic" representation. If public policy remains active in promoting new information technologies, we must ensure we know which parts of the community will benefit.

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Appendix

Questionnaire
Circulated in B.C.
September 1995

QUESTIONNAIRE COVER LETTER

Dear ....

The Community Economic Development Centre at Simon Fraser University is engaged in a research project on the role of new information technology (such as fax and electronic mail) in community building. We wish to identify the community context within which local volunteer, private sector, organizations are working, the general characteristics of those organizations, the kinds of information needs they have, and the potential which new information technologies have in meeting their information needs. Our goal is to assess whether new technologies can be of use in facilitating the sharing of information between community members and between communities. To accomplish these objectives, we need your help in completing the enclosed questionnaire.

If you examine the questionnaire carefully you will see that there is absolutely no way we can identify the individual respondents. You will also find that the questionnaire is divided into four parts. Ideally, we would like you to answer all of the questions which apply to your particular circumstances, but please feel free to ignore any questions or sections of the questionnaire which you would rather not answer. Finally, we guarantee your confidentiality and assure you that no results will be presented such that any individual or individual organization could be directly or indirectly identified.

This research is a collaborative effort between John Pierce at Simon Fraser University and Greg Halseth at the University of Northern British Columbia. It is financially supported by the Toyota Foundation, but the content of the questionnaire and any subsequent analysis are the sole responsibility of the researchers. During the course of the research, all materials will be securely stored with the researchers. At the conclusion of the study, the questionnaires will be destroyed.

Thank you for your time and consideration in completing this survey, your response will be of great assistance. Please use the enclosed postage paid envelope to return the questionnaire. It is important to us to have these questionnaires returned, but you are reminded that your participation is voluntary. If you have any questions about the questionnaire or any other concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us. Please understand that you may register any complaints you might have about this survey with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts at SFU. Should you wish a copy of the research report, please send a note under separate cover to Penny Simpson at the CED Centre at Simon Fraser University.

Sincerely,

Dr. John Pierce   Dr. Greg Halseth
Director   Geography
Community Economic Development Centre   University of Northern
Simon Fraser University,   British Columbia,
Burnaby, B.C.   Prince George, B.C.
V5A 1S6   V2N 4Z9

October 2, 1995

group
place
street
pcode

Dear name,

Recently, you should have received a letter from us asking you to fill out a questionnaire on the role of new information technologies in community building. If you have already returned the questionnaire, you have our thanks. If for some reason you have not, we would be very grateful if you could spend a few minutes, fill it out and return it in the postage paid envelope which came with it. It is important to us to have these questionnaires returned, but you are reminded that your participation is voluntary. Also, should you wish a copy of the research report, please send a note under separate cover to Penny Simpson at the CED Centre at Simon Fraser University.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Dr. John Pierce   Dr. Greg Halseth
Director   Geography
Community Economic Dev. Centre   University of Northern British Columbia
Simon Fraser University   Prince George, B.C.
Burnaby, B.C.   V2N 4Z9
V5A 1S6

Community Building and the Role of New Information Technologies

This survey is interested in your community development / community economic development organization and the information it needs to be successful. In particular, we wish to evaluate the potential of new information technologies as a way to meet those information needs. By new information technologies we mean fax, electronic networks and other computer based means of sharing information. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

PART 1

In this part of the questionnaire we would like to ask you about your organization. The first questions ask about how it came into being while the second set of questions ask about the people in the organization.

1.)   For how many months or years has your local organization been active?
        _____

2.)   Does your organization have a formal name?
        yes   ___
        no   ___

3.)   In your opinion, is this formal name generally recognized within the community?
        yes   ___
        no   ___

        don't know / unsure - please explain: _____

4.)   Has your organization become incorporated?
        yes   ___ ➡   **IF YES** - What was the date: _____
        no   ___

        don't know / unsure - please explain: _____

5.)   Does your organization have a formal mission statement, mandate or statement of goals?

         yes   ___ ➜   **IF YES** - could you briefly list these goals:

         no   ___   _____

                                                 _____

                                                 _____

                                                   _____

                                                   _____

         don't know / unsure - please explain: _____

6.)   Please describe briefly your organization's main activities:

         _____

         _____

         _____

         _____

         _____

7.)   Does your organization have an operating budget?

         yes   ___

         no   ___ ➜   **(IF NO** - Go To Question 12)

         don't know / unsure - please explain: _____

8.)   If your organization has an operating budget, please identify the sources of funds which have been available to your organization in the past 12 months (list as many as relevant):

         ___ local government

         ___ regional government

         ___ provincial government

         ___ private / corporate donations

         ___ earned income (self-financing)

         ___ public donations / fundraising

         other _____

9.)   If your organization has an operating budget, what have been the major changes in your sources of funding over the past 3 years?

         _____

         _____

         _____

         _____

10.)   If your organization has an operating budget, which ONE funding source would be your most important?

         ___ local government
         ___ regional government
         ___ provincial government
         ___ private / corporate donations
         ___ earned income (self-financing)
         ___ public donations / fundraising
         other _____

11.)   Approximately what percentage of your organization's operating budget comes from this ONE funding source?

         _____%

12.)   Does your organization employ any paid staff?

         yes   ___ ➡   **IF YES** - over the past 12 months how many:
         no   ___   full-time   ___
                                       part-time   ___

         don't know / unsure - please explain: _____

13.) The following questions ask about the general socio-economic characteristics of people who are active in your organization. Please complete the information as best as you can for yourself and up to four other members of the organization 's executive or those you consider to be most active in the organization.

	MEMBER 1	MEMBER 2	MEMBER 3	MEMBER 4	MEMBER 5
____					

	MEMBER 1	MEMBER 2	MEMBER 3	MEMBER 4	MEMBER 5
female	___	___	___	___	___
male	___	___	___	___	___

____

AGE:

	MEMBER 1	MEMBER 2	MEMBER 3	MEMBER 4	MEMBER 5
<25 years	___	___	___	___	___
25-35	___	___	___	___	___
36-45	___	___	___	___	___
46-55	___	___	___	___	___
56-65	___	___	___	___	___
+65 years	___	___	___	___	___

____

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION:

	MEMBER 1	MEMBER 2	MEMBER 3	MEMBER 4	MEMBER 5
some public or high school	___	___	___	___	___
public or high school graduation	___	___	___	___	___
some college or university	___	___	___	___	___
college diploma or university degree	___	___	___	___	___ ___
post graduate degree	___	___	___	___	___
other	___	___	___	___	___ ___

____

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

	MEMBER 1	MEMBER 2	MEMBER 3	MEMBER 4	MEMBER 5
full-time	___	___	___	___	___
part-time	___	___	___	___	___
seasonally	___	___	___	___	___
employed at home	___	___	___	___	___
self employed	___	___	___	___	___
unemployed	___	___	___	___	___
retired	___	___	___	___	___
other	___	___	___	___	___

____

LENGTH OF RESIDENCE

IN THIS COMMUNITY: (in years)   _____   _____   _____   _____   _____

_____

____

TYPE OF COMMUNITY LIVED IN
BEFORE MOVING HERE:
    always lived in this community   ___   ___   ___   ___   ___
    rural   ___   ___   ___   ___   ___
    village (<1,000)   ___   ___   ___   ___   ___
    town (1,000-10,000)   ___   ___   ___   ___   ___
    small city (10-30,000)   ___   ___   ___   ___   ___
    medium city (30-100,000)   ___   ___   ___   ___   ___
    large city (>100,000)   ___   ___   ___   ___   ___
    other   ___   ___   ___   ___   ___

_____

____

LENGTH OF TIME ACTIVE
WITH THIS COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATION: (in years)   _____   _____   _____   _____   _____

_____

_____

PART 2

In this part of the questionnaire we would like to ask you about the kinds of information your organization uses and the ways in which you access that needed information.

14.) Please indicate the KINDS of information your organization uses and how FREQUENTLY you use them:

USE? **KIND**		**FREQUENCY OF USE**			
(√)		Weekly	Monthly	Semi-annual	Annual
___	economic sector data	___	___	___	___
___	demographic data	___	___	___	___
___	census data	___	___	___	___
___	government program information	___	___	___	___
___	experiences of other groups	___	___	___	___
___	community development research	___	___	___	___
___	training opportunities	___	___	___	___
___	other _____	___	___	___	___
	_____	___	___	___	___

15.) In your own words please indicate the barriers, if any, which limit your organization from obtaining the kinds of information necessary to be effective.

     ___ No barriers.

     Barriers include: ___ general costs (postage / purchase costs etc.)
                   ___ cost of special communication equipment (fax / computer etc.)
                   ___ time
                   ___ distance to information sources
               other (please specify) _____

16.) How much is COST a factor in limiting your organization's access to information?

     ___ Not a factor
     ___ A minor factor
     ___ Neutral
     ___ A major factor
     ___ Most important factor

17.) Please indicate whether any of the following information sources are available within your community. For those NOT available locally, could you please estimate the approximate driving time to the nearest location:

AVAILABLE LOCALLY (✓)	SOURCE	DRIVING TIME
____	high school library	_____
____	civic/public library	_____
____	community college library	_____
____	university college library	_____
____	university library	_____
____	community museum/archives	_____
____	chamber of commerce	_____
____	municipal government offices	_____
____	Community Futures Office	_____
____	BC Government Agent's office	_____
____	MLA's office	_____
____	MP's office	_____
____	other _____	_____

18.) Please indicate the TYPES of communications technology your organization makes use of. For those which your organization does use, please RANK their effectiveness for obtaining non-local information.

MAKE USE OF (✓)	TECHNOLOGY	EFFECTIVENESS (Rank)				
		extremely effective 1	2	neutral 3	4	not effective 5
___	Postal Services	___	___	___	___	___
___	Courier Services	___	___	___	___	___
___	Telephone	___	___	___	___	___
___	Cellular Phone	___	___	___	___	___
___	Radio Phone ___	___	___	___	___	___
___	FAX	___	___	___	___	___
___	Computer Modem	___	___	___	___	___

19.)   Please indicate any CHANGE in your organization's use of the following
communications technology:

TECHNOLOGY	USE LEVEL		
	increasing over last 12 months	similar over last 12 months	decreasing over last 12 months
Postal Services	___	___	___
Courier Services	___	___	___
Telephone	___	___	___
Cellular Phone	___	___	___
Radio Phone	___	___	___
FAX	___	___	___
Computer Modem	___	___	___

PART 3

In this part of the questionnaire, we would like to ask questions about whether your organization
is making use of new information technologies and their potential benefits and costs to your
organization.

20.) Please identify the kinds of information technology your group presently has access to
        (indicate as many as are relevant):
        ___   FAX
        ___   Personal Computer
        ___   Personal Computer with CD ROM
        ___   Personal Computer Modem
        ___   Personal Computer FAX Modem

21.) Do you have access to a computer network?
        yes   ___ ➜   **IF YES**   - Local Area Network   ___
        no   ___   - External Network   ___

        don't know / unsure - please explain: _____

22.) Would you require training to make use of computer based information systems?
        yes   ___
        no   ___

        don't know / unsure - please explain: _____

23.) Is training on computer based information systems available locally?

yes ___
no ___

don't know / unsure - please explain: _____

24.) Have you ever used (please √ all applicable answers):
    ___ FAX
    ___ CD ROM's
    ___ electronic mail lists
    ___ world wide web or other internet services

        ➔**IF YES**, how do you use these technologies to access needed information:
            _____
            _____
            _____
            _____

25.) Which of the following types of information would you normally expect to be able to access with computer based technology such as World Wide Web or other Internet services (please √ all applicable answers)?

    ___ economic sector data
    ___ demographic data
    ___ census data
    ___ government program information
    ___ experiences of other community groups
    ___ community development research
    ___ training opportunities
    ___ other   _____

26.) Would you or your organization be interested in using computer based technology for any of the following activities (please √ all applicable answers):

    ___ to take educational courses
    ___ to take educational degrees or diplomas
    ___ to access "discussion" groups of community organizations
    ___ to advertise the economic potential of your community
    other uses ? :   _____
                  _____

27.)   Does your organization have the financial resources to purchase computer based communications equipment ?

         yes   ___
         no   ___
         don't know / unsure - please explain: _____

28.)   Does your organization have the financial resources to pay long distance telephone charges and other continuing costs for access to electronic information sources?

         yes   ___
         no   ___
         don't know / unsure - please explain: _____

29.)   What, if any, are the potential benefits for your organization from access to new information technologies? Please list them.

         _____
         _____
         _____
         _____
         _____

30.)   What, if any, are the potential barriers for your organization in gaining access to / or in using / new information technologies? Please list them.

         _____
         _____
         _____
         _____
         _____

PART 4

In this final part of the questionnaire we would like to ask you some questions about the community in which your organization works.

31.)   How would you classify your community?
         ___ rural
         ___ village (<1,000)
         ___ town (1,000-10,000)
         ___ small city (10-30,000)
         ___ medium city (30-100,000)
         ___ large city (>100,000)
         other _____

32.) How would you classify the TARGET AREA for your organization:
      ___ the entire community?
      ___ a selected neighbourhood /area within the community?
      ___ a selected interest group within the community?
      other (please specify) _____

33.) What is your best estimate of the population you serve?
      _____

34.) In your own words, could you please offer a brief description of your community - something that would give us a sense of its character:
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____
      _____

We value the time and effort you have taken to complete this questionnaire. It is our hope that the results of this project will assist communities with improved access to information resources. We would appreciate your comments on any of the issues raised in this questionnaire or any issues you feel we have missed. Use the space below or additional pages if necessary.

Thank you again.