

Rural Lens: Assessing Regional Policy Implications

A Guide for Public Bodies

Public Engagement and Planning Division
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
2019

Purpose of a Rural Lens

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to the sustainability of rural regions within the province. As such, it has developed a Rural Lens tool, which ensures that rural concerns and priorities are considered fully in policy- and decision-making processes.

The Rural Lens policy assessment tool helps provincial departments and agencies to identify potential rural impacts of policies and decisions – positive and negative, direct and indirect – in a proactive, objective and uniform manner. The Rural Lens helps decision-makers to assess the potential impacts on rural regions and stakeholders of impending decisions or policies before they are made or approved. The Rural Lens can also be considered an educational tool as it helps to build capacity and understanding within government of rural issues, challenges and opportunities.

It is important for departmental officials to remember that the Rural Lens is a **mandatory** lens that must be applied to **all Cabinet submissions**. Departments are responsible for performing the analysis and are encouraged to contact the Public Engagement and Planning Division of the Communications and Public Engagement Branch, Executive Council, for information and assistance as required.

What is the Rural Lens?

The Rural Lens was designed to assist with Cabinet decision-making by encouraging departments to identify direct/intended, indirect/unintended, and disproportionate or differential impacts of proposed Cabinet decisions on rural citizens, stakeholders, and communities (both positive and negative). As such, the Rural Lens assists government to make more fully informed decisions (i.e., decisions that are positive for, or at least not harmful to, rural Newfoundland and Labrador).

Defining “Rural”

Definitions of ‘rural’ are many and varied. For example, the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency (see table 1) defines ‘urban Newfoundland and Labrador’ as those communities within the Census Metropolitan Area (St. John’s), the four Census Agglomerations (Bay Roberts, Corner Brook, Gander and Grand Falls-Windsor), or a community with a population of 5,000 or more not already a part of the CMA or the CAs (Clareville, Deer Lake, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador City, Marystown and Stephenville). According to the NL Statistics Agency, the balance of the population of the province lives in rural, comprising 39% of the population in 2016.

Using different definitions can lead to even higher numbers of rural communities (e.g., a rural and small town definition of anyone living outside the commuting area of a CMA or CA would mean a higher rural population in this province).

For the purposes of the Rural Lens, we suggest thinking about rural in terms of all communities outside the Northeast Avalon, since communities in the rest of the province all have to deal with issues not faced

(or not faced to the same extent) by residents of St. John's and surrounding communities, such as population aging and loss, lack of public transportation, and fewer economic and job opportunities.

As noted above, it is important to recognize that rural communities or regions of the province are not all identical. Therefore, it is unlikely that all rural areas will be affected in the same way or to the same degree by any given decision or recommendation. Rural realities can be very different in terms of smaller urban communities, urban adjacent communities and rural remote communities. Such a distinction is helpful in that it allows us to distinguish between the impacts a decision might have on communities such as Grand Falls-Windsor, St. Anthony or Goose Bay (smaller urban communities), Kippens, Springdale or Goose Cove (urban adjacent communities) or Forteau, Ramea or Conche (rural remote communities). Similarly, different regions of the province might also be impacted differently by a decision or policy (e.g., changes to fisheries policy are more likely to impact the Northern Peninsula, which has the highest percentage of people in that industry in the province than some other regions). With the above in mind, the Rural Lens should demonstrate that you have thought about how these different rural realities might be impacted differently by the proposed policy or recommendation.

Many of the challenges that rural communities face are related to a lack of population density and distances people have to travel for work, services and amenities. Lower population density creates challenges for service delivery and challenges for rural communities, such as recruiting volunteers to provide local government and finding supports for seniors and caregivers for young people. Distance is another major hurdle for rural residents going about their daily lives. Whether it is the commute for work, the drive/flight for public services or the trip to get a child to soccer practice, the reality of moving around is quite different in rural areas than it is in urban centres. With the above in mind, we suggest that as you complete your Rural Lens analysis you pay particular attention to these two factors.

Using the Rural Lens

The Rural Lens is a tool for all departments and agencies to use in the decisions and recommendations they put before Cabinet. The Lens presents three questions that departments should consider as part of any policy, decision-making or program/service development process. Some users may encounter instances where certain questions may be difficult to answer or may not apply. The tool is not meant to limit departmental analysis; rather, it has been developed to assist departments during the analysis phase. Departments may choose to include additional questions as part of the internal rural considerations process. Overall, the depth and type of analysis required will be dictated by the policy, program or service issue under consideration. Some issues may have no impacts or differential impacts on rural communities. These may require a succinct Rural Lens analysis. Others may have significant impacts on rural areas and as such, would necessitate a more thorough Rural Lens analysis. In either case, the Cabinet submission must note, either in a separate annex for lengthy analyses or as part of the Interdepartmental Considerations section for shorter analyses or when there are no impacts identified, that the Rural Lens has been applied.

Differential Gender Impacts in Rural Communities

Differential gender impacts in rural communities should be an important consideration throughout the policy development process. An appreciation of gender differences includes; an understanding of the different needs, roles, life experiences, and economic and social circumstances facing each gender; as well as, the nature of relationships between people of different genders. Some people may experience multiple, layered impact because of their age, sexual orientation, colour, race, ethnicity, ability/disability, socio-economic status and/or geography. For example, the rate of violence against women and girls is almost five times higher in Labrador than in Newfoundland.

The application of Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) will assist policy makers in understanding gender impacts within a rural context. GBA+ is a tool that assesses the potential impacts that government decisions may have on women, men, and gender diverse individuals from various backgrounds and abilities. This can be achieved through the examination of disaggregated data, as well as social, economic, and cultural conditions. Diverse perspectives should be included as a part of the rural lens.

Support from the Public Engagement and Planning Division

The Public Engagement and Planning Division supports departments and agencies by providing advice and guidance on the application of the Rural Lens. This is best done during the policy development stage. Ultimately, each department and agency is responsible for incorporating the Rural Lens into its Cabinet paper development processes.

The Rural Lens is not an approval or veto instrument in decision-making. Potential impacts on rural areas, once identified, will not necessarily mean that a policy, program or service should not be implemented, continued or discontinued. Rather, the identification of impacts will allow for more informed decisions by Cabinet, and, where necessary, mitigation measures.

Table 1: Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), Census Agglomerations (CA) and Communities of 5,000 Population and Over Newfoundland and Labrador, 2016 Census

Geographic Name	Population, 2016		Population, 2011		Percent of Total Province, 2016	Percent of Total Province, 2011
	Female	Male	Female	Male		
Newfoundland and Labrador	519,715		514,535			
	265,790	253,925	263,970	250,565		
Census Metropolitan Area (CMA)					39.6%	38.3%
St. John's	205,955		196,965			
	106,080	99,875	102,230	94,735		
Census Agglomerations (CA)					13.5%	13.4%
Bay Roberts	11,085		10,870		2.1%	2.1%
	5,720	5,365	5,520	5,350		
Grand Falls-Windsor	14,170		13,725		2.7%	2.7%
	7,445	6,730	7,205	6,520		
Corner Brook	31,915		31,415		6.1%	6.1%
	16,495	15,420	N/A	N/A		
Gander	13,235		12,685		2.5%	2.5%
	6,845	6,385	6,110	6,570		

Communities with Population 5,000 and Over					7.5%	7.4%
Happy Valley-Goose Bay	8,110		7,550			
	4,080	4,030	3,885	3,665	1.6%	1.5%
Labrador City	7,220		7,365			
	3,455	3,760	3,500	3,865	1.4%	1.4%
Stephenville	6,625		6,720			
	3,520	3,105	3,595	3,120	1.3%	1.3%
Clarenville	6,290		6,035			
	3,265	3,025	3,140	2,900	1.2%	1.2%
Marystown	5,315		5,505			
	2,710	2,610	2,770	2,740	1.0%	1.1%
Deer Lake	5,250		4,995			
	2,715	2,535	2,605	2,390	1.0%	1.0%
Rural*					39.4%	41.0%

Notes:

Figures based on 2016 geographical boundaries.

*Compiled by the Newfoundland & Labrador Statistics Agency (NLSA), Department of Finance. The NLSA defines rural as those communities that are not included in CMA and CA areas, as defined by Statistics Canada, and those whose populations are less than 5,000.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Canada

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Questions to Consider

Some perceived direct or intended impacts, likely positive, may be obvious to you. However, indirect or unintended impacts may not be as obvious. In thinking about what all these impacts are, it is helpful to consider the following questions:

1. Will the decision or proposed policy direction directly impact (positively or negatively) the economic, demographic and/or social circumstances of communities, stakeholders and/or citizens within or across rural regions? If yes, how?
2. Will the decision or proposed policy direction indirectly impact (positively or negatively) the economic, demographic and/or social circumstances of communities, stakeholders and/or citizens within or across rural regions? If yes, how?
3. Will the decision or policy being considered disproportionately affect smaller or remote rural communities (as compared to larger ones)? If so, how?

For assistance or further information, please contact:

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