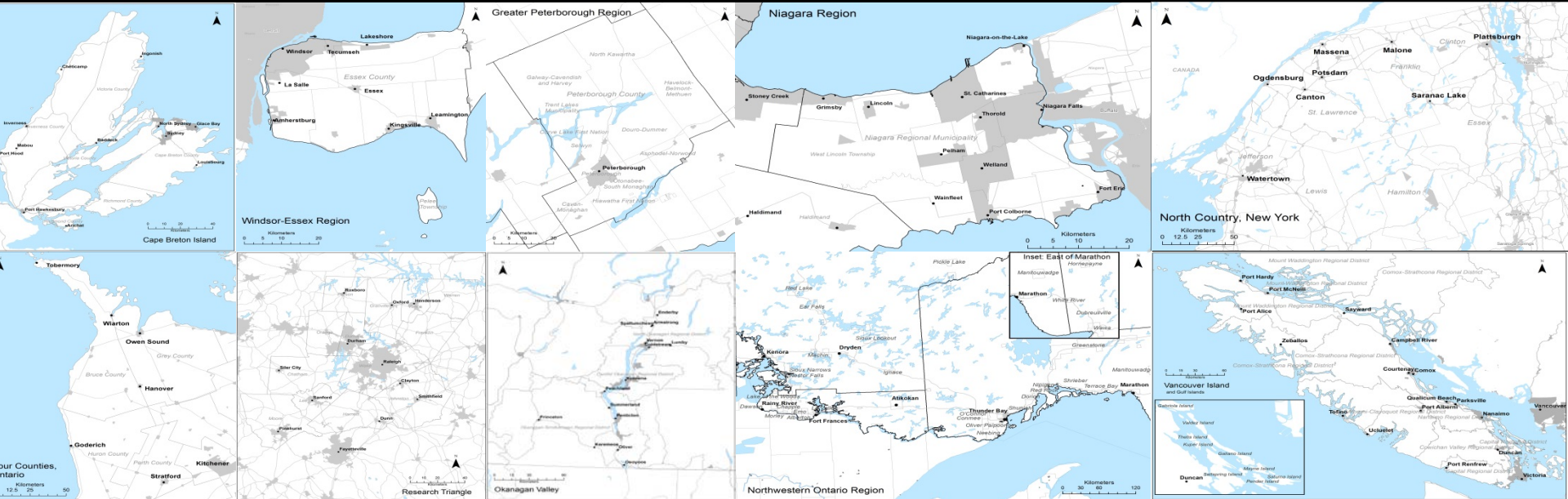


# EVALUATING REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES: POLICY LESSONS



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# AGENDA

- Key thematic findings
- Summary / Conclusions
- Policy Lessons

# SEVEN KEY THEMES

- ‘Region’ Themes
  - History and Identity
  - Urban-Rural Dynamics
- ‘Organization’ Themes
  - Governance Structure
  - Leadership
  - Relationship Building
  - Resources
  - Monitoring and Measurement

# HISTORY & IDENTITY

- Impact of **path dependence** on how regional economic development is pursued.
- A shared history, geography and strong regional identity positively influenced collaboration in 6 of 12 regions:
  - Cape Breton Island, North Country (NY), Northwestern Ontario, Greater Peterborough Region, Windsor Essex, Okanagan Valley
- **POLICY: Develop a culture of collaboration *in* and *between* urban and rural communities. Recognize that local/regional economies are not always bounded by traditional borders**

# URBAN-RURAL DYNAMICS

- Concern about **power or resource imbalances** between urban and rural jurisdictions within the region
- Urban-rural dynamics emerged as a theme in 7 of 12 regions:
  - Cape Breton Island, Greater Peterborough Region, Windsor-Essex, Niagara Region, Vancouver Island, Tristate TechBelt, North Carolina Research Triangle
- Urban areas were usually perceived as receiving a greater share of time effort and resources from regional initiatives.
- **POLICY: Actively and meaningfully integrate rural communities into regional approaches where there are strong urban centres**

# GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

- Diversity of structures used to organize regional economic development
  - Formal, informal; Bottom up, top down
  - Public, private; For-profit, not-for-profit
- Diversity of organizational governance mechanisms
  - Board of Directors, Steering Committees, Executive Committees
  - Multiple stakeholders “at the table” (business, community, government) allowing for more transparent and accountable decision-making
- **POLICY: Support governance that is transparent and accountable using structures that accommodate multiple stakeholders**

# LEADERSHIP

- The importance of regional champions / leaders was emphasized in 10 of the 12 regions
  - Leadership can make the difference between an initiative or collaboration gaining traction or falling flat.
  - Strong leadership can move initiatives from the planning to the implementation stage by catalyzing support
  - Leaders emerged from the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors
  - Strong champions can build support for a project in the presence or absence of committed stakeholders.
- **POLICY: Seek out organizational / regional champions that are passionate about an initiative.**

# RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

- A negative attitude towards collaboration was one of the primary barriers to success in many of the case studies
  - Social/professional linkages and networks need to be continuously fostered across a region to ensure collaboration does not stagnate
  - Constant relationship building to widen reach of collaborative projects
  - Transaction costs of collaborating can cause potential free-riding
- **POLICY: Support relationship building and networking between regional actors to widen reach of collaborative projects**



# RESOURCES

- Human resources viewed as both a success factor and a challenge across the cases
  - In some cases, limited capacity to undertake collaboration due to staff turnover and volunteer burnout
- **POLICY: Engage in capacity building.**
- Funding viewed as essential for success. Differences across the cases in terms of the locus of decision-making related to funding access and allocation
  - Collaboration to access funds (North Country, Tech Belt)
  - Top-down funding, local determination (Vancouver Island)
  - Top-down funding and allocation (Research Triangle)
- **POLICY: Allow flexibility in funding programs so that resource allocation can be determined at the regional level.**

# MONITORING & MEASUREMENT

- Mixed approaches to monitoring and measurement
  - Using **indicators** to track regional progress (TechBelt initiative)
  - Using **national, state and county statistics** to measure economic performance (Research Triangle)
  - **Development of statistical indicators** in progress (Niagara Region EcDev, Four Counties Labour Market Planning Board, North Country Regional Economic Development Council)
  - **Not using any indicators** or relying on qualitative measures (Windsor-Essex EcDev, Upstate California Economic Development Council, Vancouver Island Economic Partnership, Okanagan Valley Economic Development society)
- Qualitative, anecdotal evidence much more commonplace than statistical measure of ‘success’
- **POLICY: Recognize challenges in measuring outcomes. Qualitative and quantitative indicators are both valuable.**

# SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

- There is no ‘one’ model for collaboration in regional economic development
  - The evidence underscores **importance of local/regional context**
- Factors that can facilitate and improve the collaborative process:
  - A **strong history and identity** of operating as a ‘region’
  - **Meaningful integration of rural areas** into regional initiatives
  - **Identifying champions** that can foster support for an initiative
  - **Oversight structures** to increase transparency and accountability of decision-making
  - Continuous **relationship building** to widen reach of collaborative projects
  - **Access to resources** is critical
  - Engage in **monitoring and measurement** using both qualitative and quantitative indicators

# POLICY LESSONS

- Develop a **culture of collaboration** in and between urban and rural communities.
- Recognize that local/regional economies are **not always bounded by traditional borders**.
- Support the **integration of rural areas** where there are strong urban centers.
- Seek out organizational/regional **champions** that are passionate about an initiative.

# POLICY LESSONS

- Support governance that is **transparent and accountable**, and structures that accommodate multiple stakeholders.
- Engage in **capacity building** to support rural community participation in regional economic development initiatives
- Allow **flexibility in funding programs** so that resource allocation can be determined at the regional level
- Recognize that the measurement of outcomes is difficult. Qualitative indicators of progress are **equally as valuable** as quantitative ones.

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# QUESTIONS

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