

ISRN City Regions Study: Associations Interview Guide

Theme III: Inclusive Communities and Civic Engagement

For Associations and Community Actors

“Community actors” refers to “associations, societies, networks, coalitions, collectives, unions, alliances, movements and non-profits with a cultural, social or economic development mandate.”

The innovation systems and cluster literature has argued recently that government, especially at the regional and local levels, retains an essential role in the learning economy, but one that departs from traditional forms. A key societal challenge, according to this perspective, is to create the conditions in which firms, associations, and public agencies engage in a collective process of interactive learning and adaptation to stimulate innovation and creativity. This conception of governance delegates certain tasks from formal government agencies to business associations or community organizations that possess relevant assets (such as knowledge of, and credibility with, their members) needed to ensure the effectiveness of their policies. Sharing power and responsibility with lower levels of government and community organizations creates the opportunity for dialogue or discussion, which is central to the process by which parties come to reinterpret their roles and relationship to other actors within the local.

The following questions investigate the specific conditions that facilitate or inhibit the emergence of effective collaborative leadership and the broadly based civic engagement that integrates community stakeholders within a social process of interactive learning.

Interviewer's Note: this semi-structured questionnaire is intended to be a qualitative research tool – it will gather information that is useful for the qualitative aspect of the city region studies.

The respondents should be include executive directors, board members, and support staff in the actual association)

The organization fact sheet should be filled out as much as possible before the interview.

The respondent may have a copy of an Information Sheet that was faxed or e-mailed before the interview.

Please ensure that the respondent understands the purpose of the interview and formally consents to participate.

ASSOCIATIONS INTERVIEW GUIDE

PART A: GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. What types of services or programs does your organization deliver?

2. What is your position in the organization?

3. What role does your organization play in broader economic (including innovation), social or cultural development activities within your city region?

PART B: LOCAL GOVERNANCE DYNAMICS

4. What are the key networks or local associations that you regularly interact with to promote the development of the city region as a whole? With respect to:
 - a. economic development (including innovation)?

 - b. social development?

 - c. cultural development?

5. What sectors are these other networks or associations based in, i.e. higher education, business or industry associations, and social organizations, ethnic and cultural groups?

6. Who are the key business, community, or government leaders who are particularly effective at linking different networks or associations – people who stand out as community leaders – in each of these organizations or associations? [relevant business federations; educational institutions., post-secondary, public and private research organizations, different levels of government, organized labour, immigration-relevant actors, non-business community groups, representatives of ethnic minorities]
 - a. Which leaders are particularly effective at linking different networks or associations across economic, social and cultural development issues?

7. How would you describe the relationships among these various networks or associations at the local level? How often and effectively do they work together in pursuit of key economic (including innovation), social and cultural development goals?
 - a. What form do they generally take: structured regular meetings or more informal contacts?
 - b. Do interactions tend to be collaborative or conflictual? [Prompt: Are people typically 'on the same page' or do different groups tend to compete to dominate agendas or resources?
 - c. Are there key actors in the city region who should be at the table but are not? [Prompt: degree of involvement of key industry actors, unions, social equity groups, cultural organizations, etc.]
8. What particular contributions has your own organization or association made to these local development network[s]? (e.g. disseminating research findings developed by research centres or institutes, brokering research partnerships between companies in the organization, organizing networking events, helping companies obtain financing, stimulating the supply of highly skilled personnel to local firms, providing training opportunities in the community, integrating other social equity concerns or developing creative/cultural strategy).
9. What have been the most important outcomes or impacts of these networks or associations regarding local economic (including innovation), social and cultural development? [probe for specific outcomes with respect to strategic planning initiatives such as infrastructure development, R & D pooling, sharing info on product or process design, or markets, acquiring needed skills, addressing issues of safety and social equity in the community, other aspects of 'quality of life']
10. Are you aware of any previous or existing, innovation-based strategic planning processes at the city region level? [inquire if they have used a SWOT type analysis or other method to develop an underlying analysis of the city's current or prospective economic development trajectory]
 - a. What concrete outcomes resulted from these strategic planning initiatives? (provide examples)
 - b. Which agencies or associations played the most important role in these planning processes?

11. What are the major barriers or challenges that local networks or associations face in promoting economic (including innovation), social and cultural development initiatives in your city region?

12. To what extent have social equity or social inclusion been included as part of innovation-based strategic planning or economic development activities?

PART C: ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

13. Which levels of government and which government departments are most actively involved in those local networks and/or strategic planning initiatives?

a. Which do you interact with most regularly?

b. How do you regularly make your views known to key government actors on issues involving local economic (including innovation), social or cultural development?

14. How effectively do the three levels of government interact at the local level to facilitate regional [social, cultural and/or economic] development?

15. Overall, what role do you think that formal government agencies (such as federal programs or agencies like Community Futures or the Regional Development Agencies or provincial government departments) should play in these activities?

PART D: SOCIAL INCLUSION

16. What mechanisms exist to help newcomers (both from other parts of Canada and outside Canada) integrate into this city region?

a. What challenges affect the ability of newcomers to integrate into the local community?

b. What initiatives are being taken to help newcomers deal with these challenges?

17. Which local networks or civic associations representing 'diverse interests' are most involved with local economic (including innovation), social and/or cultural development issues?

18. How do local civic associations and networks respond to new and sometimes divergent perspectives on local economic (including innovation), social and cultural development issues?

19. How do the leaders of local networks or civic associations in the city region respond to the needs of the region's residents of diverse socioeconomic, gender, cultural or ethnic backgrounds?

PART E: CONCLUSIONS

20. What are the major barriers or challenges that local networks and civic associations face with respect to promoting an economic (including innovation), social or cultural development agenda in the city region?

21. Is there anything you would like to add?

22. Who else should I talk to?

PART F: REGIONAL INNOVATION NETWORKS (RIN'S)

(The following questions are intended for the six Ontario cases only; however interviewers may find that some of the questions are answered in the preceding sections, making these ones redundant.)

RIN Directors / coordinators/board members, etc.

1. What have been the major accomplishments or outcomes of the RIN thus far?
 - a. Did the network reach its initial objectives? which ones?
2. How were RIN partners identified? Who are currently the key leaders in the RIN?
3. Are there any partners you wanted to engage but couldn't, or are in the process of negotiating with?
4. What respective roles do industry, education, civic institutions, and local government play in the RIN?
5. How would you describe the linkages between different actors in the network? (This refers to the depth and quality of linkages – is it a loose or tight group?)
6. What connections does the RIN have with other key networks or civic associations in the city region, involved with:
 - a. Economic development (including innovation)?
 - b. Social development?
 - c. Cultural development?
7. What are the barriers and challenges that this RIN faces/has faced?

APPENDIX: Organizational Characteristics Template

This template should be completed for each civic association included in the interviews, including government, government-supported but independently incorporated, and non-government development organizations not receiving government support. The interviewer should fill out as much of the information as possible in advance and then supplement it as necessary during the interviews.

1. Name of Organization
2. Address/Contact Information
3. Mandate (brief description)
4. Source of Funding; Annual Operating Budget (brief description)
5. Human Resources
 - a) Leadership (individual/board/other) (brief description)
 - b) Staff (number/salary range/education range) (brief description)
6. Community Participation (open meetings/consultations/other) (brief description)
7. Democratic or management accountability (elected board/appointed/self-assigned/other)(brief description)
8. Geographic area/boundaries of the organization (brief description; acquire map if possible; digital is ideal)
9. Time (is organization established under a program with a set time period, etc)