



SUMMARY OF THE HORIZONTAL EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY FUTURES PROGRAM

June 2019

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

- The evaluation examined the relevance and performance of the Community Futures Program (CFP) between 2013-14 and 2017-18. This is the first national evaluation of the CFP, since the pilot was evaluated in 1990.
- CFP is administered by four Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) (the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, the Canada Economic Development Agency for Quebec Regions, the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario FedDev and Western Economic Diversification Canada) and the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario (referred to as the RDAs).

WHAT THE EVALUATION FOUND

- There is a strong need for continued federal economic development programming in the communities served by the CFP and for the unique services that the program provides, particularly in smaller and more remote communities.
- The CFP has contributed to the achievement of many of its intended outcomes, especially those flowing from its loans and other business support services. These include strengthened business practices, economic growth, job creation and diversification of rural economies.
- However, it was difficult to assess at a national level the achievement of outcomes related to community economic development and strategic planning as there is variation in their implementation across the country.
- While considerations for inclusiveness have not been formally integrated into the CFP, a variety of approaches were being used by CFOs to meet the needs of different identity groups. However, the extent to which these are implemented differs by region and community.
- The RDAs have developed a national Performance Measurement (PM) Strategy for the CFP. It includes the analysis of Statistics Canada business data to provide consistent national reporting that illustrate outcomes for CFP-assisted businesses, which is a best practice. However, there are still some gaps in aligning regional performance measures to the national strategy and in capturing results of community economic development and strategic planning.
- Available evidence showed the CFP is generally implemented efficiently and cost-effectively. It continues to achieve its primary objectives despite the declining real value of its funding. However, limited comparable quantitative data across RDAs and CFOs precluded a full assessment.

DESCRIPTION

- *The CFP supports economic development by assisting primarily rural communities to develop and implement local solutions to local problems.*
- *It is delivered by a national network of 256 Community Futures Organizations. These are independent, not-for-profit organizations overseen by a volunteer board comprised of community members.*
- *The federal government allocated \$78.9 million in annual funding for the program, which is managed by five Regional Development Agencies.*



RECOMMENDATIONS (as agreed upon by management)

The RDAs and FedNor should build upon their efforts to provide a comprehensive national picture of the results of the CFP, to the extent possible, by:

- aligning regional performance measurement to the national PM Strategy;
- exploring ways to improve how the impact of the community economic development and strategic planning components are measured;
- considering the addition of standardized indicators to reflect GBA+ considerations; and
- exploring ways to provide a national level quantitative assessment of program efficiency.