

Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)

Phase One Summary Report

Acme, Alberta

June 2010





Acme Assessment Summary

The BVI

The **Business Vitality Initiative (BVI)** helps communities to assess their capacity to work with and support entrepreneurs, and to foster small business growth. The BVI measures the perceptions of community leaders, business people and citizens about the current business environment in their community and compares the results to an average of other communities to determine possible short and long term actions the community can undertake to improve its business friendliness.

The Acme BVI was initiated by a partnership between the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and CIEL. The Rural Community Adaptation Program (RCAP) of Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development (ARD) funded it. The community sponsor was a working group at the Village of Acme, which selected the participants.

Acme is the twentieth community in Canada that has taken part in the BVI, in addition to five communities in Australia.

This report summarizes the *Assessment Session* of the BVI in Acme, where a questionnaire and a focus group assessed the community's small business resources and potential on April 28, 2010. The phase 2 or *Focus and Action Session* will be open to the entire community with the purpose of setting priorities for improvement and jump starting the community to action. That session will be held on Thursday, June 10, 2010 at 7 pm at the Acme Community Centre.

Key Findings

From highest to lowest, section scores out of 100 were as follows: Opportunities and Attitudes, 59; Communication and Connectivity, 57; Quality of Life, 52; Leadership, Teamwork, and Networking, 50; Role of Government and Organizations, 47; Education and Training, 46; Markets and Marketing, 43; Capital and Funding, 40; Innovation, 38; Infrastructure and Business Services, 36.

Overall, Acme had a full survey score of 47 out of 100, which is 14% below the 20-community average of 55.

The BVI section results as shown in figures 1 and 2 show that particular strengths for Acme are its two highest scores in the *Opportunities and Attitudes* and the *Communications and Connectivity* sections.

The lowest scoring sections of the survey are *Innovation* and *Infrastructure and Business Services*.

In the Assessment Session, participants were asked to give three words to describe their community. The majority of responses were positive. According to many respondents, Acme is a *friendly, relaxed, and close-knit* community. When participants were asked to identify key strengths not used to potential in the community, the top responses were *the new community hall, youth, and the Seniors Centre*.

When participants were asked to name their predicted top economic drivers for the community in the next five years, the most common responses were *agriculture, oil and gas, and trucking*. When asked about untapped business opportunities in the community, *a motel, a bottle depot, and a better grocery store* were the top responses.

When asked for suggestions on how to improve Acme, the top four responses were *more businesses and incentives for business, beautification of the town, and street improvements*.

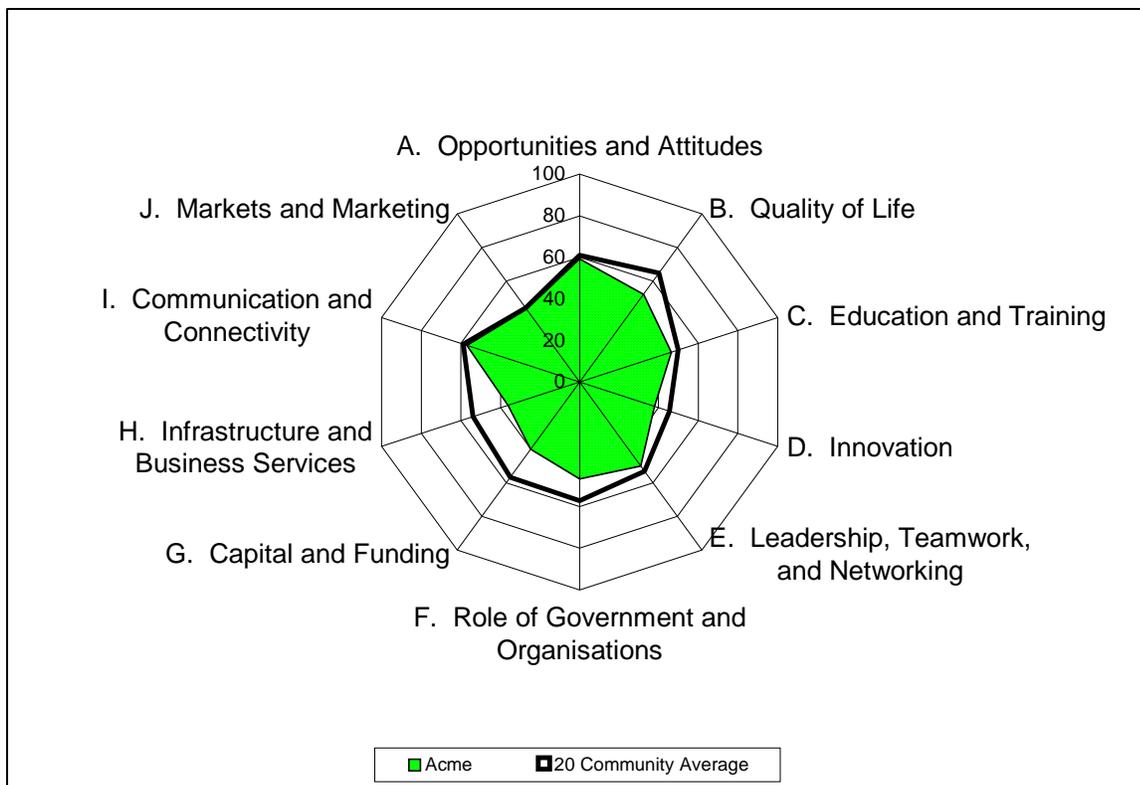
The Assessment

The multiple-choice section of the two-part questionnaire asked the participants to rate their community by agreeing or disagreeing with a series of statements related to entrepreneurial capacity. Each statement was framed in a positive context (e.g. *marketing services in my community are affordable and accessible*). Participants were asked to rate the statement with one of the following: *completely agree*, *somewhat agree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *somewhat disagree*, *completely disagree*, or *don't know*.

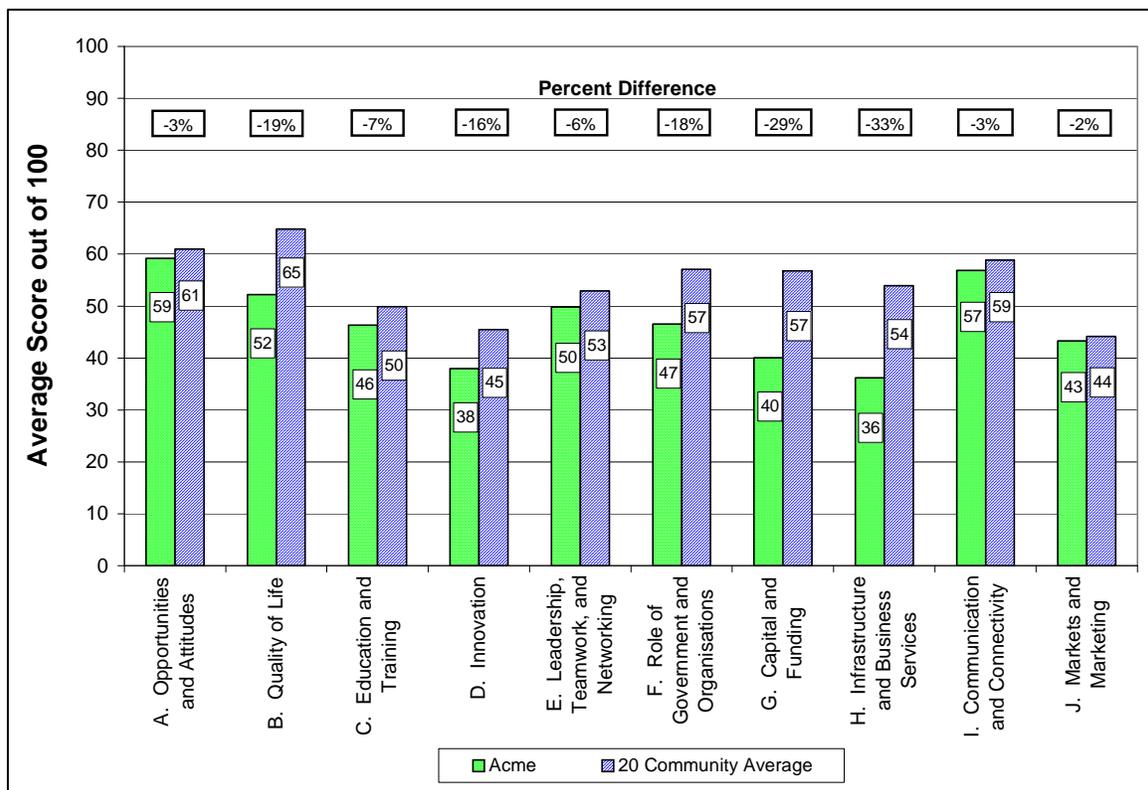
If all respondents *completely agreed* to a positively worded statement, the question score would be 100. If all respondents *completely disagreed* with the statement, the question score would be 0. A neutral response (*neither agree nor disagree*) would be scored as 50. A score over 50 would indicate that there is a perceived good capacity, while a score less than 50 would indicate a perceived lower capacity.

Acme and 20-Community Average Section Scores

The full report on the Acme BVI consists of 70 pages of analysis of the ten BVI sections, illustrated by charts and graphs such as the one on the next page and the one below which shows the score out of 100 for each of the ten BVI sections. The area circumscribed by Acme's scores is shaded. The darker black line connects the 20-community average scores.



Acme and 20-Community Average Section Scores



Recurring Themes

The qualitative (written answer) section of the questionnaire collects information about the issues, strengths and weaknesses within the community. (e.g. *What are 3 words or phrases that describe your community? What is your community's greatest strength in terms of its markets?*), as well as additional comments in each of 10 sections. The following themes were particularly prominent throughout those sections of the Acme BVI.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many under-utilised resources including new community hall, youth, Seniors Centre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly, laid-back, close knit community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance/downtown in need of beautification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to get next generation involved in terms of community and interest in business
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office & other space for business needed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More forums for communication needed, especially on issues like business/village relations, taxes, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School is key to community vitality

Recommended Short-term Actions

The following are some possible courses of action that the community could undertake to improve business friendliness, derived from feedback and results.

Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Buy Local' program (first identify what is most often bought elsewhere for residents and businesses) • Work with Community Futures to explain their services including grants, funding opportunities, courses (business start-up, marketing, youth business options, etc.) • Opportunity identification session for youth to identify recreational, educational, and business needs & opportunities
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look to improve town web-site (start by incorporating BVI positives, business opportunities, council minutes, etc.) • Recognize local businesses (newspaper profiles, awards, etc.) • Entrance or downtown beautification project • An Acme event (could be festival, Farmers Market, etc.)
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More Village public open meetings, forums (among issues to be considered would be taxes, business development (use BVI results as starting place)) • Business mentorship &/or Chamber breakfast meetings to strengthen ties and build local knowledge/skills
Admin., Research, Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory office space availability (supply/demand) with aim of finding provider(s) • Publish and strategize top business opportunities from BVI (e.g. motel, bottle depot, grocery store, etc) • Research trades/skills training options (e.g. partnering with Olds College)

On June 10, 2010, Acme residents will be asked to select priorities and form working groups around specific actions.

Recommended Long-term Actions

The following are some possible courses of action that the community could undertake to improve business friendliness, derived from feedback and results.

Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land review and strategy to address shortage concerns • A community learning strategy that involves taking advantage of school, community hall (e.g. night courses), local amenities (e.g. trucking, oil & gas, agriculture), local skilled educators (e.g. Community Futures, youth teaching internet, Facebook skills), video conference facilities
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Acme brand + strategy around the brand • Long-term strategy to beautify downtown and entrance ways to town
Network- ing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street parties • Volunteer recruitment (“no one to take over from 70 to 80-year-olds”) • Look at public transportation links to other communities (including costs, access, etc.)
Research, Admin. and Plan- ning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research trades/skills training options (e.g. partnering with Olds College) • Investigate industrial sub • Street paving/ improvement review and strategy • Examine tax rate difference & possibly incentives to encourage new businesses

On June 10, 2010, Acme residents will be asked to select priorities and form working groups around specific actions.

The Ten Highest Scoring Questions

		Score out of 100		
	Question	Acme	20 Community Average	% Difference
C6	There are quality elementary and secondary schools in the area.	91	80	14%
H2	Core business areas are easily accessible by all users (e.g. parking, sidewalks, crosswalks, etc.).	80	61	32%
A4	Successful businesses want to remain in the area.	78	82	-5%
F1	The governing bodies (town councils, regional district) recognize that businesses are important and valuable for the development of the area.	70	75	-6%
A5	There are employees available to meet business needs.	67	49	38%
I1	Informal business communication (word of mouth) is highly effective).	67	88	-24%
I3	Quality communication services (phone, cell phone, high speed internet, etc.) are adequate for business.	67	60	11%
B2	There are no significant environmental pollution issues here.	66	85	-22%
E4	We collaborate and cooperate with neighbouring communities.	64	38	71%
B4	There are plentiful and varying opportunities for involvement (e.g. arts, athletics, politics, church groups).	64	70	-9%

The Ten Lowest Scoring Questions

Score out of 100				
	Question	Acme	20 Community Average	% Difference
I4	Public transportation within the area is adequate.	13	32	-59%
H7	Quality rental space is available to accommodate business needs.	18	45	-60%
H3	Adequate business services (e.g. printing services, computer help, graphic design, etc.) are available.	21	57	-63%
D2	Support and assistance for innovative business research and development is available.	23	46	-50%
D1	There are formal and informal forums (conferences, workshops, association breakfast meetings) on technology and technology applications.	23	28	-19%
H6	Affordable rental space is available to accommodate business needs.	26	43	-40%
F3	There is a recognized organization or individual available to assist people identify, assess, expand and/or create business opportunities.	27	51	-47%
H1	There are vibrant, active downtown areas or community cores.	30	49	-40%
C4	The education and business communities work together to provide convenient training for businesses.	30	41	-27%
C2	Other business education is available in the area (e.g. personal development, professional forums, etc.).	30	41	-26%

The “Gut Check 12”

The following 12 questions provide a snap-shot of a community’s business vitality. These key questions can be used to inform future efforts aimed at improving business friendliness. They are taken from the 60 BVI questions.

Question	Score out of 100		
	Acme	20 Community Average	% Difference
A5. The area is facing a significant economic opportunity.	67	49	38%
B5. Young adults (25-34) consider the area to be a desirable place to live.	41	50	-18%
A4. Successful businesses want to remain in the area.	78	82	-5%
C4. The education and business communities work together to provide convenient training for businesses.	30	41	-27%
A3. Citizens are motivated to learn new skills and to develop existing ones.	46	51	-10%
F2. The governing body is committed to recruiting or attracting businesses to the area, and uses strategies or incentives to do so.	39	57	-30%
H1. There are vibrant, active downtown areas or community cores.	30	49	-40%
J2. The area has a distinctive or unique brand or marketing image	49	44	12%
J5. People prefer to purchase local products and services.	39	42	-8%
D3. Local businesses demonstrate creativity and innovation in seeking new customers	47	52	-10%
E6. There is a pool of talented leaders with diverse skills, cultural experiences and backgrounds who are available for leading community initiatives.	63	66	-6%
G1. Lenders are willing to take chances based on individual character and good business ideas.	42	47	-11%