



INTERIM ACTION PLAN
COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES AND
SUPPORTS STRATEGY

BACKGROUND

Motivated by the impacts of the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic, the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC) was established in 2005 to “work to ensure sustainable development and resiliency” in the north-central region of British Columbia bounded roughly by Smithers, Valemount and Mackenzie. A key function of the OBAC is the development of a series of regional response strategies. When complete, these strategies are expected to address eleven high-priority subject areas ranging from industry sectors to community services.

Each of the regional response strategies will provide an up-to-date profile of the current situation, analyze the opportunities and challenges associated with each subject area, and recommend a series of immediate and longer-term actions. Although each strategy is developed with broad stakeholder involvement, the final product remains advisory in nature – identifying what could be done by senior and local governments, industries, public institutions and others.

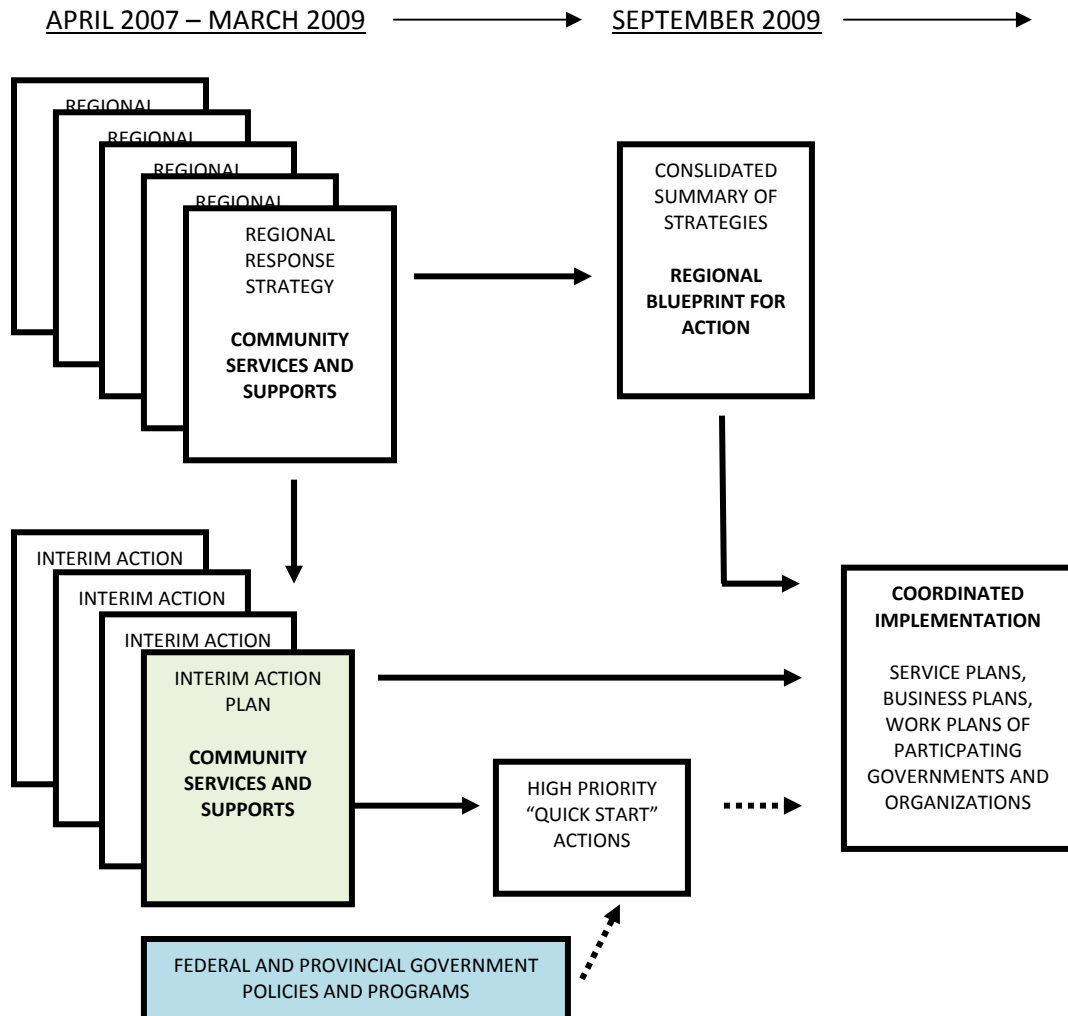
The Community Social Services and Supports Strategy is the sixth of the regional response strategies to be released (December 2008), and sets out five objectives and four broad recommendations. To support the recommendations, 22 specific actions are proposed. As each successive regional response strategy is developed, it is expected that there will be many common and interdependent recommendations and actions. This strategy has particularly close links to the Attraction and Retention Strategy.

The economic circumstances that have developed over the past several months, plunging the country into a recession, increase the urgency to act on this strategy. Governments at all levels are looking for ways to maintain critical community services in areas affected by declines in the resource extraction and manufacturing industries. Community resilience and recovery depends significantly on the ability to provide services during the economic downturn.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Interim Action Plan is to identify what work can effectively take place now, in order to ensure that

- a. High priority (important and immediate) opportunities are addressed in a timely manner, and
- b. Individuals and organizations whose mandate it would be to undertake specific activities are informed and engaged in implementation.



As more of the regional response strategies are completed the Interim Action Plans will inform the implementation activities of a variety of government and non-government organizations. During that period it expected that a longer-term implementation structure will be developed.

KEY OBAC ACTIONS SUMMARY

OBAC does not have the mandate or resources to take on implementation of most actions in the regional strategies, including the Attraction and Retention Strategy. However, in line with its role to advocate for regionally important community interests, it will work to see they are addressed. In many situations, the OBAC function will be to communicate the opportunity, encourage partnerships and advocate for action by the appropriate government or organization.

OBAC will actively encourage the appropriate parties to advance all the recommendations and specific actions identified in the Strategy. It is understood, however, that this does not mean that every action will be completed exactly as it is currently described – as work progresses and circumstances evolve, actions are expected to fall into a number of categories:

- a. Addressed through existing initiatives,
- b. Implemented as described,
- c. Intent is achieved, but through different means, and
- d. Deferred or dropped with reasons.

In general, however, the intent of the recommendations will be carried forward.

Concurrent to the completion of regional response strategies, OBAC will work with other levels of government to determine what type of collaborative model is best suited to oversee the implementation, monitoring and adaptation of strategies over the longer-term. This is a fundamental requirement if the benefits from OBAC's investment in strategy development are to be realized.

In the interim, the following actions provide important and immediate opportunities which should be pursued with OBAC leadership:

- 1 Seek support from senior government for the development and implementation of a regional social services coordinating mechanism which will:**
 - facilitate efficient communications between community and FN leaders, service delivery agents and the provincial and federal government programs.
 - provide a point of contact for provincial and federal program managers seeking local information.
 - facilitate and support communications and networking among all service providers in the region
 - provide capacity which will facilitate community access to existing social service programs; including capacity to prepare grant applications.

Target: See below

2 Advocate for the development a “rural lens”, which will help to guide senior government’s social services policies and programs

- the “rural lens” will be a set of principles developed through engagement with stakeholders in the region which will guide social services program design, policies and delivery mechanisms and help to ensure that they are meeting the actual priority needs of the region in an efficient and flexible manner. (strong linkage with #1 above)

Target: There is a strong linkage between Actions 1 and 2; OBAC to bring these matters to the attention of all levels of government by April 30, 2009 and develop an options paper by September 30, 2009.

3 Encourage implementation of the Transition Toolkit

- the toolkit is designed to communities deal with economic crisis events and ongoing transition challenges; it must be kept current if it is to remain useful

Target: Continue to advocate for and support implementation of the Toolkit with the target of having all member communities using it proactively by December 31, 2009.

4 Promote innovative business models for improved transportation services between small communities and larger centers

- *This will serve a number of needs including providing access for residents of smaller communities to the social services available in the larger communities (see also Interim Action Plan – Regional Infrastructure Strategy)*

Target: A needs assessment and options paper with business analysis complete by March 31, 2010.

5 Work with member communities and senior governments to ensure that grants accurately reflect the number of people relying on services

- *Census inaccuracies and grant formulas which do not account for those individuals who use services but live outside the communities can be major problems for some social services programs.*

Target: Advocate “in principle” beginning immediately. Prepare an initial assessment, discussion paper or proposal by December 31, 2009.

6 Establish baselines and track progress

Target: Put in place a regionally based method to credibly track progress toward the objectives set out in the Regional Infrastructure Strategy, including documenting the baseline, by June 2009. (See example below).

Appendix 1 describes each specific action and identifies steps the OBAC will take to encourage and advocate for implementation.

Upon agreement in principle, a more detailed proposal will be developed for each of these actions.

EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE MEASURES AND TARGETS

As part of the interim action planning process, a proposed performance measure and target is identified for each recommendation.

1. Strengthen social service delivery in the region.

Proposed success measure: To be determined

Information source: To be determined

Proposed target: To be determined

2. Establish responsive and flexible provincial and federal social service programs that meet rural, urban and First Nations priority needs

Proposed success measure: To be determined

Information source: To be determined

Proposed target: To be determined

3. Enable youth and adults to obtain local education and employment services that will allow them to fully participate in the region's economy.

Proposed success measures: To be determined

Information source: To be determined

Proposed target: To be determined

4. Realize the economic benefit of a strong social service sector.

Proposed success measures: To be determined

Information source: To be determined

Proposed target: To be determined

APPENDIX 1

Appendix 1 is based on the “specific actions” set out in Chapter 6 (pages 28-38) of the Integrated Regional Infrastructure Strategy.

Actions colour coded yellow indicate an immediate opportunity for OBAC



Actions colour coded green are considered to be already underway



COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS STRATEGY

Recommendation 1: Strengthen social service delivery in the region

Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
<p>a) With the support of the province, regional and municipal Governments to establish a <i>coordinating mechanism</i> which will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitate efficient communications between community and FN leaders, service delivery agents and the provincial and federal government programs. • provide a point of contact for provincial and federal program managers seeking local information. • facilitate and support communications and networking among all service providers in the region this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional mechanism. • This is a particularly important need. However it requires the agreement and support of a large number of players, and even once there is agreement in principle, a significant effort will be required to make it a reality. • There will need to be an exploration of the options: e.g., an individual coordinating position; a new organization with a coordinating function; a process for communications and work sharing amongst existing organizations? 	<p>Governments at all levels Service providers</p>	<p>The cost will vary depending upon the solution selected. There may actually be cost savings achieved through coordination, or a net increase in funding attracted to the region.</p> <p>There will need to be some up-front investment in time and \$ to develop options and support the implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage all levels of government to reach agreement in principle on this action. • Work with governments and providers to develop options for a “coordinating mechanism”, including the relative costs, benefits and probabilities of success (consider using the strategy Working Group to provide the initial input to this)

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<p>should include as well "grass roots" gatherings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide capacity which will facilitate community access to existing social service programs; including capacity to prepare grant applications. 				

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS STRATEGY				
Recommendation 1: Strengthen social service delivery in the region				
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b) Provincial and federal programs to coordinate with each other, communities, and First Nations to develop integrated social service plans that will guide overall delivery of social services and will mobilize during sudden economic downturns and transition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A certain amount of coordination will already occur. However, the focus of this action is to provide a more formal mechanism at the community level through <u>integrated social services plans</u>. There is some risk that these plans could be developed, but have little impact, especially if they do not have broad support and encouragement from the entities that provide funding. Work has been done to develop templates, check-lists etc. to help this process. 	All levels of government Service providers	The immediate costs may be modest if plans are developed from the "grass roots" level in each community / community cluster.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage member communities to be proactive. Communicate the needs on a regional basis to senior governments. Participate in (or where appropriate lead) in the development of tools to help local coordination.
c) Establish training programs that will build the capacity of service providers to effectively use available communication technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need and opportunity should be clearly defined so that a business case is clear for either public or private training organizations. 	Service providers Training organizations Communications technology providers	Costs will include development and delivery of training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage service providers to work with training and technology providers to develop and deliver programs.
d) Continue to build the communications infrastructure including increasing broadband internet access and video conferencing capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is linked directly to the Regional Infrastructure Strategy Community-level distribution / service providers may be a gap. 	All levels of government Communications service providers and institutional users		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote through Regional Infrastructure Strategy

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS STRATEGY

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e) Increase the agency-level human resources to allow for increased communication and networking activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The staff increases will have to be carefully targeted to be effective. This action may be part of implementation (or pre-implementation) for action 1 (a) 	Provincial and Federal Governments	On average, assume at least \$100k per year for a staff position and the accompanying support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate the needs and regional “business case” to senior governments.
f) Support community level volunteer programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider establishing centers to organize and efficiently recruit volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer centers could provide a focal point and catalyst for increasing volunteerism and optimizing benefits. Some seed funding and start-up support may be needed. 	Local governments Existing volunteer organizations Province & the Rural BC Secretariat	Some seed funding may be required to establish and staff small centers. This should be modest, but could add up to \$150k to \$250k per year across the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage member communities to consider this. Support regional approaches to senior governments for support.

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Recommendation 2: Establish responsive and flexible provincial and federal social service programs that meet rural, urban and First Nations priority needs

Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
a) Ensure that existing and new social service programs are designed to meet the priority needs of the region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with rural stakeholders in a process to; explore the dynamics affecting rural and small community programming; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This could be linked to 1(a) or conducted separately Caution that small communities are not overwhelmed by multiple processes when what they need is service Draw on experience that has been documented from other regions and jurisdictions 	Provincial and Federal Governments to “ensure...” Local and First Nations governments to efficiently provide input Service delivery organizations to work with recipients and	Developing the “lens” involves a relatively modest effort. Implementation of increased program funding is dependent upon the specific program, and will probably be part of broader programs (e.g. provincial or national)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the need for locally relevant and effective program criteria and funding levels to senior governments. Encourage members to provide a “rural lens” to senior governments.

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS STRATEGY				
Recommendation 2: Establish responsive and flexible provincial and federal social service programs that meet rural, urban and First Nations priority needs				
Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
<p>build on best practices, and; collaboratively develop a set of principles (a 'Rural Lens') to be used by government to design rural-friendly funding programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On an ongoing basis, ensure that the priority needs of the Omineca communities for social services are identified and addressed. Senior governments to examine options to increase funding and greater program flexibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at what information presently exists, including the experience of regional First Nations bodies. 	<p>provide feedback to governments</p>		
<p>b) Ensure that the Transition Toolkit is implemented and that it is updated periodically.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All member communities have a copy of the toolkit. UNBC, the Community Development Institute and OBAC are available to provide advice and support 	<p>Local governments Support from the Province</p>	<p>Implementation costs are modest - mostly time and effort at a local level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and support all member communities to use the toolkit and keep plans updated.
<p>c) Develop Social Services Mobilization Plans which will anticipate the potential impact of significant, sudden economic slowdowns and resultant increase in demand for social services. The Transition Toolkit provides a good starting point for</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on work done at the community level. 	<p>Province Federal Government Local Governments Service providers</p>	<p>The cost of the plans themselves should be quite modest, but the resulting services will have significant costs in some cases.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage all levels of government to follow-up.

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Recommendation 2: Establish responsive and flexible provincial and federal social service programs that meet rural, urban and First Nations priority needs				
Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
the development of these plans.				
d) Province to provide capacity that will allow communities to develop (or build on current plans) social plans which identify priority social needs, including housing, child care and senior health care services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Province has recently announced some new programs for housing. OBAC communities need to determine whether programs meet rural and small community needs. 	Province Local Governments.	The planning cost should be relatively modest. Implementation could be expensive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for programs that are relevant to rural areas and small communities.
e) The Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance (for Income Assistance) and Service Canada (for EI and CPP) to re-establish a presence in each rural community providing regular, face-to-face outreach services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	Province Federal Government	The agencies would likely need a significant budget increase or reallocation to do this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate the need to senior governments. Encourage members to assess needs and work directly with senior governments.
f) Put in place transportation services to ensure that the social services which are only available in the larger centers are accessible to residents of the smaller communities including First Nations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linked to the regional infrastructure strategy (promote innovative business models for improved transportation services between small communities and larger centers). 	All levels of government Transportation providers	Costs will depend on the business model developed. However, it is expected that where a service cannot be provided within reasonable distance of a person's residence, then a transportation supplement (direct or indirect) would be paid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate on behalf of the region Support regional input to planning and priorities Encourage innovate models for funding of services

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Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
g) Government departments make regulatory and licensing information available electronically, through person-to-person contact and through community education processes (See Recommendation 1 a).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linked to 1(a) 	Governments	Cost should be modest, but depends on approaches taken.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate the need to senior governments. Encourage members to assess needs and work directly with senior governments.
h) Ensure that grants to communities accurately reflect the number of people relying on these municipalities for services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy review for some programs may be needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to identify for what programs this is an issue. Need to deal with concerns about census data, especially for First Nations communities. Identify which communities are likely most impacted. 	Province Federal Government Local and First Nations Governments	<p>There will be a cost to reviewing and revising policies.</p> <p>The resultant policy changes may have costs - these will need to be analyzed at the time of policy development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate the need to senior governments. Advocate of the appropriate review and analysis, and subsequent policy changes. Encourage members to participate fully in the dialogue.

Recommendation 3: Enable resident young people and adults to obtain the education and employment services that will allow them to fully participate in the region's economy.

Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
<p>a) Establish learning centers with Education Facilitators whose role is to enable individuals to access the education opportunities they need. This should include distance education opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is likely done most effectively by enhancing existing services rather than creating a new organization. Knowledgeable individuals, with the time and mandate to provide this service, combined with appropriately located kiosks may be appropriate. 	<p>Education providers Employer organizations Governments</p>	<p>A project plan and cost analysis is required. Hiring dedicated staff and facilities could be quite costly, whereas a modest investment may adequately supplement existing resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage member communities to address at the local level. Communicate the need to education providers and others.
<p>b) Ensure that students in the region are provided excellent secondary school opportunities which are relevant both to them and their communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural resource programs are one of the priorities but others will emerge as implementation steps are taken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is an important issue and involves government policy on education funding. Private school options explored? 	<p>Provincial government School Boards</p>	<p>May require changes to school funding formulas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support community and school board initiatives
<p>c) Ensure that secondary, post-secondary education and training programs are well connected with present and future employer needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement a plan which brings together information on job skill and training needs for the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This will involve a dedicated and sustained effort by school/education boards, employers, and individual schools. (COFI program is a good example) Private training organization 	<p>Employers Professional associations Education boards and individual schools</p>	<p>This is a long-term, relatively low cost opportunity, but involves time and effort by a large number of individuals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage follow-up by stakeholders

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Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
<p>region.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the relevance of education offerings by linking to local opportunities and to knowledgeable members of the community. 	<p>options?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "culture" shift - community and individual citizen investment in education? 			
<p>d) Build better communications between employers and employment service providers; a skills registry could be an important first step.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the performance indicators for employment service providers? Develop a model and business case for a skills registry 	<p>Service Canada Employment service providers Employers</p>	<p>Modest cost for a skills registry to be developed and maintained - will need to be a business case / proposal developed and performance indicators established.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage stakeholders to address this.
<p>e) Develop and implement community youth employment strategies that will assist local youth to move into employment. Aboriginal young people are an important priority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific programs that work within the local community. Branding - need to make participation desirable (preferred) 	<p>Local governments School Boards Local volunteer/service organizations Service Canada Employment service providers Employers</p>	<p>Relatively low cost but require involvement and coordination at the community level - this will take some resources (e.g., a part-time coordinator in the region)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage stakeholders to address this.
<p>f) Take advantage of local human resources/experts to enhance educational offerings provided by secondary and post secondary institutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closely linked to (c) above. 	<p>Employers Professional associations Education boards and individual schools</p>	<p>This is a long-term, relatively low cost opportunity, but involves time and effort by a large number of individuals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage stakeholders to address this.

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORTS STRATEGY

Recommendation 4: Realize the economic benefits of a strong social service sector.

Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
<p>a) Recognize the economic impact that stable social service infrastructures have on rural and small communities when social service program decisions are made.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will need to be formally recognized in provincial funding policies for social services. • Province can support “bridge” or transition funding during economic turbulence. • Need clear social policy objectives - not just driven by per capita formulas. 	<p>Province Federal Government Regional economic development organizations Local and First Nations governments</p>	<p>Depending on the policy, there could be a significant direct cost to this, however it would need to be weighed against the likely long-term benefits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage clear articulation of social policy that meets the interests of the region.
<p>b) Provide supports that will allow greater leveraging of national and provincial foundation funds and other types of program funds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further work will be required to determine what “supports” are required. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage exploration of opportunities in this area. • Be prepared to participate in initial information gathering