

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Chief Administrative Officer

Rural Response to COVID-19

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Report No. CAO 2021-03 titled “Rural Response to COVID-19” be received for information.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- This report is provided to inform Council of a resident survey being distributed by the University of Guelph’s School of Environmental Design and Rural Development.
- Recovery from COVID-19 in our communities requires locally-focused, locally-relevant data that policymakers, organizations, and service providers can use to ensure solutions reflect what our residents and communities need.
- Oxford County and more than 20 local stakeholders have partnered with the University of Guelph to gather information from individuals in Oxford to help guide recovery efforts.

Implementation Points

The resident survey will be available online from early September until October 29, 2021. Copies will be mailed to all households (approximately 45,000) in early September.

Local partners will promote the survey via their own networks and channels, both digital and in-person where applicable and permitted.

The University of Guelph will conduct the analysis and provide a summary report; it is anticipated that this will be provided in late 2021 / early 2022. Following the summary report, our local partners will be able to contact the primary researcher directly to obtain specific data relevant to their organization.

Financial Impact

The bulk of the project is funded through research grants awarded to the University of Guelph by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). \$15,000 of the grant goes directly toward hard costs for the project (printing, mailing, etc.) while remaining grant funds will provide for effort hours of the Primary Researcher and PhD students for design and implementation, and analysis and reporting.

Additional funding is being provided by the County and local partners to ensure that all households receive a copy of the survey and the survey is well communicated.

- The County's contribution to the project is \$10,000, funded through Safe Restart Agreement (SRA) funding.
- Community partners have contributed a total of \$9,500 to date.

Total hard costs for printing, preparation, return postage, and promotion are estimated to be between \$30,000-35,000.

Communications

Communication with project partners has been front-and-center from the beginning of this initiative; the County sought interest from potential partners before agreeing to participate with the University of Guelph.

Communications have been on-going through the summer via online meetings / info sessions and regular email updates.

Partners have been given opportunities to review and provide feedback on the survey and the accompanying cover letter.

Communication materials, including advertisements and social media assets have been developed by the County's Strategic Communications and Engagement team which will be made available to all partners so that they can promote their support for, and involvement in, this important initiative, targeting their respective audiences.







Project partners are:

Canadian Mental Health Association Oxford
Children's Aid Society of Oxford
City of Woodstock
Community Futures Oxford
Community Employment Services
Domestic Abuse Services Oxford
Indwell
Ingersoll Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic
Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Oxford Coalition for Social Justice
Oxford County
Oxford County Community Health Centre
Oxford County Federation of Agriculture

Rural Oxford Economic Development Corporation
Social Planning Council Oxford
Southwestern Public Health
Thames Valley Family Health Team
Tillsonburg Multi-Service Centre
Town of Ingersoll
Town of Tillsonburg
Township of Blandford-Blenheim
Township of East Zorra-Tavistock
Township of Norwich
Township of South-West Oxford
Township of Zorra
United Way Oxford
Wellkin Child & Youth Mental Wellness

Project partners will have access to the University of Guelph research team following the analysis phase so that they can request datasets relevant to their respective role in our communities.

Strategic Plan (2020-2022)

					
WORKS WELL TOGETHER	WELL CONNECTED	SHAPES THE FUTURE	INFORMS & ENGAGES	PERFORMS & DELIVERS	POSITIVE IMPACT
1.ii.		3.iii	4.i. 4.ii.		

DISCUSSION

Background

Originally brought to our attention by the Rural Oxford Economic Development Corporation (ROEDC), the County has been working with the University of Guelph during the past few months to mobilize local partners, fine-tune the survey, and develop a communications campaign.

The University of Guelph completed a similar initiative with Perth-Huron in 2020-2021, partnering with the United Way Perth-Huron and Social Research and Planning Council. Following the success in those Counties, the research team secured funding from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) to expand their work to other rural communities.

By way of introduction from ROEDC, the County established a working relationship with the primary researcher, establishing itself as the local project lead / co-ordinator. Upon receiving

interest and support from an initial few community stakeholders, a wider net was cast to rally other partners, resulting in the list provided above.

Comments

While research has examined the impacts of COVID-19 on individuals, economics, and organizations, these have largely been focused on urban concerns.

Collecting locally-focused, locally-relevant data that policymakers, non-profit organizations, and service providers can use to ensure that whatever it is that they do is appropriate, important, and reflects what we need in Oxford. It is critical that local experiences are included in policy decisions.

The goal of this project is to examine the experiences of residents from across all of Oxford County related to COVID-19. In order to reach the research goal, four objectives were developed:

1. Identify populations in Oxford who have been most affected by COVID-19
2. Determine priority programs to support our communities during and post- COVID-19
3. Explore opportunities for the non-profit / charitable sector during and post-COVID-19
4. Identify emergent mental health and economic concerns generated by COVID-19

Conclusions

Residents in Oxford County have adapted to the local challenges of a global pandemic in some way or another. Each of us have experienced it in our own way and will continue to adapt in our own way(s) during recovery.

We have been presented with an opportunity to work with a well-known and well-respected academic institution that specializes in rural development. The academic and ethical rigour in which the University holds itself to provides us with a strong level of confidence in the findings this project will produce.

Add to that funding from OMAFRA and the group of 20+ local partners supporting the survey, we are pleased to provide Council with an update about this effort.

SIGNATURES

Report Author:

Original signed by

Dennis Guy
Manager of Strategic Initiatives

Approved for submission:

Original signed by _____

Michael Duben, B.A., LL.B.
Chief Administrative Officer