

**THE ONTARIO
TRILLIUM
FOUNDATION**



**LA FONDATION
TRILLIUM
DE L'ONTARIO**

Small Towns, Big Impacts

Small Towns: Big Impact

**TORC Conference
Ottawa, ON
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Objectives for today

1. Overview of significant trends facing the not-for-profit sector in small and rural communities
2. Overview of OTF research into our grants in small towns
3. Sharing of our findings
4. Discussing practical actions to support the essential capacities of rural communities





Outline

- Background
- Key challenges facing rural Ontario
- *Small Towns, Big Impacts*: background
- Goderich Video
- Key Learnings: OTF Impact in Small Towns
- Next Steps: from learning to action
- Small Group Discussion—localizing action





Key challenges facing rural Ontario





Challenges facing small towns

- Health challenges
- Economic changes
- Population trends
- Infrastructure/capital needs





Challenges facing NFPs in rural communities

- Funding challenges
- Volunteer burnout
- Leadership retention
- Lack of young volunteers
- Transportation





Priorities in Ontario's Rural Plan

- Economic development.
- Tourism as an economic driver.
- Sustainable resource use.
- Employment opportunities and leadership development for youth.
- Water quality and waste management.
- Alternative and renewable energy opportunities.
- Repairs and improvements to the arts, culture, sports and recreation infrastructure.
- Reducing tobacco use, preventing obesity and increasing physical activity.
- Building the capacity of the voluntary sector.
- **OTF's granting strategies address these priorities.**





OTF's strengths → a strong impact.

- 16 regional offices and a province-wide volunteer network.
 - A per-capita funding formula, with equity adjustments.
 - Granting priorities that are relevant to rural communities.
 - Eligibility of small municipalities and public libraries.
 - A simplified application process for small capital grants.
- **More than half of OTF's investments in communities benefit small towns across Ontario.**





Small Towns, Big Impacts: Background





Why this Study?

- Initiated as one of our 25th Anniversary initiatives
- Looking for “deeper” understanding of the impact of our grants – the “stories behind the numbers”.
- Blending qualitative field research with quantitative data gathered from grantees.
- Exploring the use of more interactive and richer media formats to document impact and demonstrate effectiveness.





Why Small Towns?

- Small town = population under 20,000
 - More than half our grants benefit rural and small communities
 - Grants cut across all four priorities, all four sectors, and the three types of grants we provide – capital, operating, project.
 - We are often one of very few funders available to voluntary organizations in small communities.
- **A strong evidence base to assess the Foundation's impact.**





- \$1.6 M for 36 grants
- No Province-Wide grants
- 1,800 volunteers (28,000 hours)
- Leveraged \$1.2 M (\$1.51 per \$1 granted)

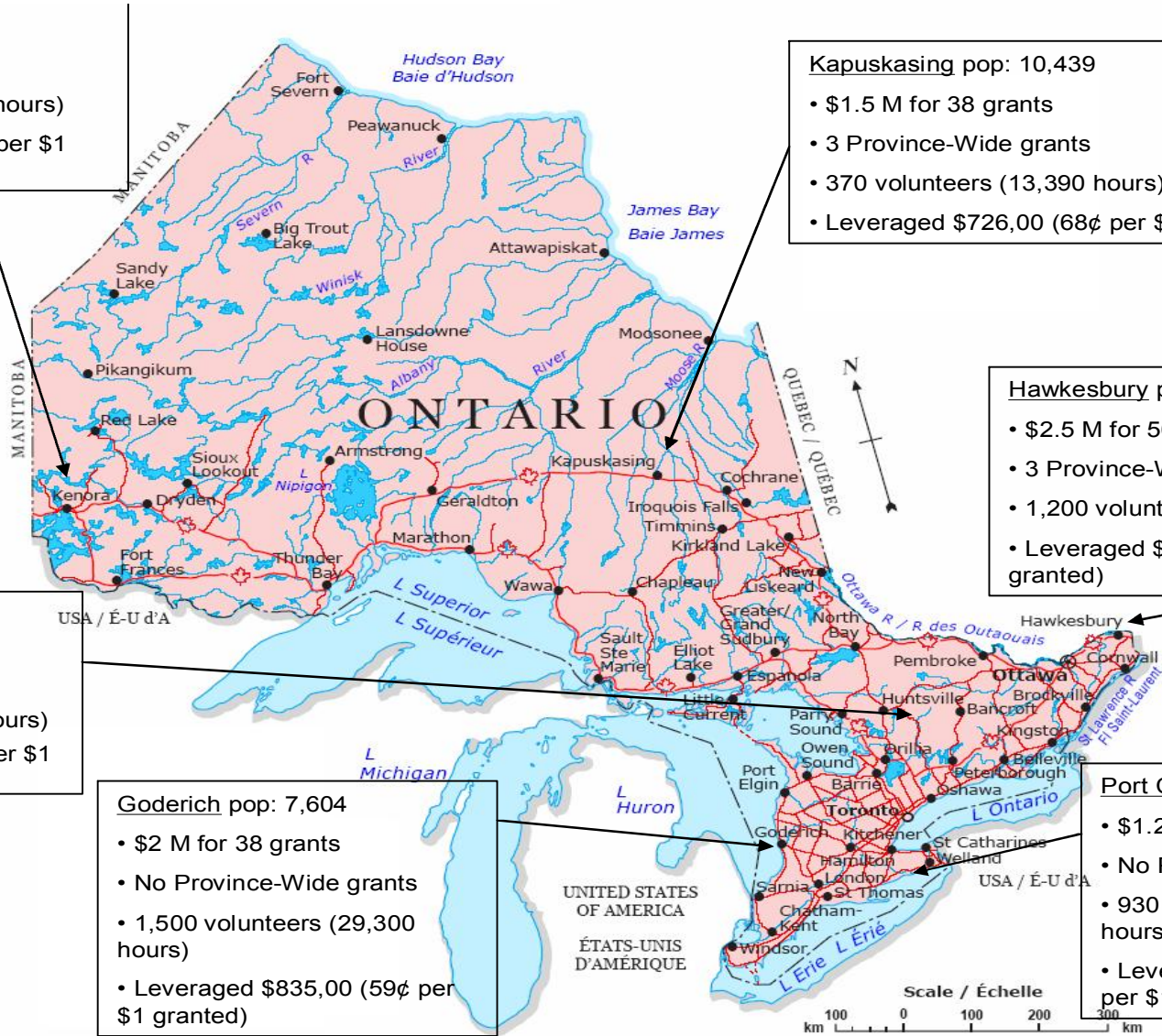
- Kapuskasing** pop: 10,439
- \$1.5 M for 38 grants
 - 3 Province-Wide grants
 - 370 volunteers (13,390 hours)
 - Leveraged \$726,00 (68¢ per \$1 granted)

- Hawkesbury** pop: 18,907
- \$2.5 M for 56 grants
 - 3 Province-Wide grants
 - 1,200 volunteers (65,000 hours)
 - Leveraged \$1.6 M (\$1.42 per \$1 granted)

- Haliburton** pop: 20,397
- \$1.48 M for 48 grants
 - 1 Province-Wide grant
 - 1,800 volunteers (67,000 hours)
 - Leveraged \$5.5 M (\$5.55 per \$1 granted)

- Goderich** pop: 7,604
- \$2 M for 38 grants
 - No Province-Wide grants
 - 1,500 volunteers (29,300 hours)
 - Leveraged \$835,00 (59¢ per \$1 granted)

- Port Colborne** pop: 18,450
- \$1.2 M for 36 grants
 - No Province-Wide grants
 - 930 volunteers (88,500 hours)
 - Leveraged \$2.3 M (\$3.11 per \$1 granted)





Key Learnings: OTF impact in small towns





1. OTF as a Catalyst

- Often the only source of funding in small towns (real or perceived).
- Flexibility of our programs.
- We help leverage other sources of funding and volunteer support – and therefore impact.
- We help foster local collaboration and networking – a key to local impact.
- We encourage and support innovation.
- We help build capacity for local NFPs.





2. The Importance of Local Circumstances

- Leadership at the local level.
- Level of volunteer involvement in the community.
- Cohesiveness of local community networks
- OTF staff and volunteers present and active in the community.





3. A little can go a long way

- What may appear to be simple grants can have sustained, community-wide impact with a high degree of leverage.
- For example, a small capital grant for equipment, or a key renovation, can have a significant and lasting impact.

“So, if you’re talking about groups like ski clubs and what not, they do everything possible to run their club, but when there’s a time that they need the extra push to buy new equipment or to renew their building, nothing else is out there but the Ontario Trillium Foundation. So the role of OTF is very important and vital, otherwise a lot of these groups wouldn’t bother existing, or couldn’t continue existing.” (interviewee)





4. Serendipity

- There are often unintended benefits that result from the responsive nature of the Foundation's grantmaking.
- For some grantees, the simple fact of receiving a grant from OTF created new opportunities for local partnerships and innovations that had nothing to do with the grant itself.





Ongoing challenges we face

- Continuing to streamline our application process.
- Finding ways to free up time for program staff to spend in the communities they serve.
- Reviewing the eligibility of small municipalities for capital grants.



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Next Steps: from learning to action





Four priorities for enhancing our impact

1. Make grants that encourage and develop local leadership.
2. Facilitate and support the convening of local organizations and the development of local networks.
3. Focus on volunteerism and civic engagement.
4. Have an active presence in the communities we are serving.





How have we been responding to the trends?

- Examples from Thames Valley





For discussion:

Building on this research and thinking about future actions, consider the following questions:

1. What things can be done to encourage and develop leadership within your local community?
2. How can organizations in small communities be supported to foster stronger local networks?
3. How can we strengthen volunteerism and civic engagement in rural communities?
4. Are there other strategies that should be adopted to build on the findings of the small town research?



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Thank you.

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