

APPENDIX A: The Northern and Rural Lens

What

The Northern and Rural Lens was created in 2006 by the AMO Northern and Rural Working Group, after noting that many of the challenges facing rural and northern communities had one commonality—a lack of forethought about the consequences of applying a one-size-fits-all approach to a specific policy area. The Lens is meant to be employed by provincial ministries to assess the impacts of new policy initiatives or changes in existing programs before they are implemented. It is meant to function as a flexible tool that all ministries can use to ensure their policies are road-tested before implementing.

The Lens has a list of questions for the government to use as a way to measure the effectiveness of its programs. The questions and issues are for each phase of the development of policy and program initiatives: considerations; delivery options; communications; and measuring and reporting.

Why is this still important?

The Lens was developed in 2006 to raise awareness of rural and northern issues across provincial government organizations, by asking ministries to assess the effect of new policies, programs and services on Ontarians living in rural and northern areas. In today's economic and demographic climate, the need for comprehensive awareness of rural and northern issues across provincial government is even greater. Ontario needs rural and northern Ontario to remain a vibrant part of the Province and the country.

ROMA wants to ensure that new provincial initiatives support the social and economic well-being of rural and northern communities and strengthen the capacity of communities to meet local challenges.

Any policy or program that has an impact on rural and northern communities should answer the following questions:

Considerations

Questions for program/policy developers and decision makers:

1. How is this initiative relevant to rural and northern Ontario?
2. Is the impact specific to a selected remote environment or region?
3. Have the most likely positive and negative effects on rural and/or northern Ontarians been identified and, where relevant, addressed?
4. Is the initiative designed to respond to the priorities identified by rural and/or northern Ontarians?
5. Have rural and/or northern Ontarians been directly consulted during the development or modification of the initiative?
6. How is the benefit to rural and/or northern Ontarians maximized? (e.g. cooperation with other partners, development of local solutions for local challenges, flexibility for decision making, etc.).
7. Will this initiative properly tax and regulate the extraction of natural resources and other assets?
8. Has the initiative supported the uniqueness of predominantly Francophone and First Nations communities?

Delivery Options

Issues to consider for delivering initiatives:

1. Address concerns regarding roles and responsibilities of differing government levels.
2. A mechanism to offset the higher costs of providing program and services in rural and northern communities that factor in distance and scarcity.
3. Identify the factors that affect the delivery of the program, policy, or service (e.g. geographic distances, limited access to government offices, and to the internet).
4. Determine the appropriate delivery vehicles, which accommodate rural and/or northern considerations.
5. Partner with organizations (e.g. other ministries/agencies and/or other

orders of government, private sector, non-governmental organizations) to maximize benefits.

6. Consider using community-based organizations to deliver the program or service to meet unique local challenges.

Communications

Issues to consider for communicating initiatives:

1. Test communications products and messages with both rural and and/or northern Ontarians.
2. Identify the communication vehicles appropriate for rural and/or northern Ontario (e.g. community local newspapers, radio, posters at government offices, local TV).
3. Advertise new programs and services through the Ontario and Ministry sites, local and regional newspapers, radio and television.
4. Include key messages that address the concerns of Ontarians living in rural and/or northern communities.

Measuring and Reporting

1. Determine how the initiative will be assessed for rural and/or northern implications during its design, development, and implementation.
2. Determine how the initiative will improve the quality of life for rural and/or northern Ontarians (e.g. health, education, economic and community benefits).
3. Identify the phases (e.g. pilot, post-implementation evaluation) where rural and/or northern considerations will be reviewed to determine if changes are needed to accommodate rural and/or northern needs.
4. Include key messages that address the concerns of Ontarians living in rural and/or northern communities.
5. Modify new initiatives to accommodate rural and/or northern issues, where appropriate.