

Agricultural Society Implementation Toolkit

This toolkit contains several tools that may assist Agricultural Societies to enhance their operations and communication and build on their community or other business relationships. The tools included were defined through discussions with Agricultural Societies and stakeholders and through consideration of practices appropriate for excellence in the operation of the Agricultural Society. The tools were developed as guidelines to assist Agricultural Societies to pursue several initiatives recommended in the report “Within Reach – Strategic Direction for Alberta’s Agricultural Societies” (AAAS 2010). Many other approaches are also valid. The following tools are included:

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Stakeholder Relations Tool

Stakeholders are people or organizations that may influence or be affected by, either positively or negatively, directly or indirectly, the decisions, actions or direction of the Agricultural Society Board, employees, or volunteers. In most cases, the stakeholders are those for whose benefit the Agricultural Society operates.

It is noted that in many cases Agricultural Societies have not formally engaged their stakeholders in discussions about the direction of the Agricultural Society. Further, it is clear from this research that the stakeholders often have much to contribute and mutual benefit may result from stronger communication with the Agricultural Society.

Therefore, it is appropriate for the Agricultural Society to consider the implications of its decisions and actions on the stakeholders and the implications of actions by the stakeholders on the planning and operation of the Agricultural Society. Where those actions or decisions may have significant implications, the Agricultural Society should actively engage its stakeholders to gain input for mutually beneficial decision-making.

Action Plan

1. Identify your stakeholders (use the attached table – or modify to suit your situation)
2. Engage stakeholders in planning and other key decisions
 - a. Arrange special planning meetings, with agendas if appropriate
3. Integrate knowledge and decisions gained through stakeholder meetings and research into Agricultural Society planning
4. Communicate feedback for the stakeholders
5. Monitor and report on an ongoing basis, as appropriate.

The following approach may assist Agricultural Societies to identify, engage, and report to their stakeholders.

Step 1: Complete the attached “Stakeholder Identification” form to identify the organizations or individuals that may be affected in some way by decisions you make in this initiative or program. This step will help you to identify who should be involved in your initiative. Use as many forms as required.

Step 2: Prepare a short, written summary of the initiative and an agenda for a meeting to be held to start addressing your initiative.

Step 3: Set up the meeting and provide the summary and agenda to those selected in Step 1

Step 4. Conduct the meeting in a positive and enthusiastic tone. Stick to the agenda unless something specific causes you to change the topics.

Step 5: Convey the best understanding of your initiative and its benefits, determine an action plan with involved stakeholders and, after discussion, pursue agreement on next steps

Step 6: Provide a written summary of the conclusions and action steps to all agencies and people invited to attend.

Stakeholder Identification

For each group listed in Column A, check Col. B to identify the primary stakeholders or stakeholder representative groups relevant to your initiative or your Agricultural Society as appropriate.

A. Stakeholder Group	B. Primary?	C. Group Name(s) or description(s)	D. Contact Name	E. Email, Phone	How affected or implicated?
Local government					
Regional/District Government					
Key Community businesspeople					
Community business organizations					
Community economic planning organization					
Community social organizations					
Agricultural Organizations					
Agribusiness Organizations					
Youth Organizations					
The Agricultural Society's volunteer group					
Attendees at events staged by the Agricultural Society (May be represented by Members)					
Attendees at events using the Agricultural Society's facilities					
Recipients of goods and services provided or disseminated by the Agricultural Society (e.g., recipients of grants and bursaries, etc)					
Other Agricultural Societies					
Other (specify)					

Strategic Planning Tool

Strategic planning sounds complicated but it is not. This tool will assist you to plan and execute a strategic plan for your Agricultural Society, including developing a monitoring and evaluation method.

This tool can be used to develop a strategic plan for any organization or initiative, with little modification. It is recommended this tool is shared with other community organizations wishing to develop their own strategic plans.

The strategic plan should be developed by the Board and progress relative to the plan should be reviewed by the Board on an ongoing basis.

There are several key steps to producing a strong and workable strategic plan that helps guide you towards your vision for the future of the Agricultural Society. They are:

1. Determine the purpose of the plan (e.g., “to contribute to the development a Strategic Plan to guide the direction of the Agricultural Society during the forthcoming three years”)
2. Facilitate commitment by your Board and others to be involved to be open, progressive, and thorough as you develop your strategic plan
3. Conduct background research to understand clearly the business environment in which the Agricultural Society operates
4. Identify and consult with key stakeholder groups in the community to obtain their views and expectations for the Agricultural Society
5. Stage a formal planning session (perhaps a weekend) to bring your Board together to develop the strategic plan. In order to achieve successful results each participant should review the background material (steps 3 and 4 above). It is important that all members of the Board participate actively in the planning session
6. Conduct the planning session:
 - a. Agree on the purpose and benefits of developing a strategic plan as a key planning tool
 - b. Identify and list major accomplishments of your Agricultural Society over the past 3-4 years and why you think they are important
 - c. Through facilitation, develop and document a vision for the future of Agricultural Society
 - i. The vision might answer the question: “If you look back from several years in the future, what kind of an Agricultural Society would you be proud to have been associated with? What significant progress would it have achieved?”
 - d. Determine the mission or mandate of the Agricultural Society to pursue that vision
 - e. Review the vision and mission in light of the background knowledge (steps 3 and 4 above), to agree that your vision is appropriate and that you will pursue it aggressively
 - i. Determine the strengths and weaknesses (internal factors) and opportunities and threats (external factors) that will influence the Agricultural Society relative to pursuing its stated vision and mission

- f. Identify the pillars (goals) that define the highest level priorities of the Agricultural Society as it pursues its stated vision. A goal is not an action item but is more like a directional theme or grouping of priorities that underpin the pursuit of the vision and mission statement. Likely only 3-5 goals will be identified.
 - i. For each goal, identify the barriers and constraints that may limit your pursuit of your vision and mission; note how to overcome the barriers and constraints.
 - ii. For each goal, note critical assets, resources, and partners essential to successful pursuit of the goal
 - iii. Note how you will accomplish each goal (strategies), given the business environment and internal and external resources and partners you have available
 1. Identify ways to pursue each goal by employing the strengths and opportunities while offsetting the weaknesses and threats
 2. Identify additional resources, partnerships, and assets you must add in order to pursue the goal
 - iv. Also for each goal, identify and rank 1-4 objectives. These are deliverables that you need to accomplish as you pursue the goal.
 1. Describe an action and timing plan to accomplish the objectives, bearing in mind the business environment in which they are to be accomplished
 2. Note how you will track your progress and how you will measure accomplishment of the objective.
- g. Document the results of these discussions and seek a Board motion to adopt and aggressively pursue the Strategic Plan.
- h. Develop a plan to communicate the strategic plan, and your ongoing progress as you pursue it, to your stakeholders and community.

External facilitation of strategic planning sessions may contribute to developing a balanced view and to ensuring appropriate depth is achieved in planning discussions. Flip charts may be used very effectively to gather, develop, and prioritize points raised during the group discussion. The following format shows an outline for the document to present the results of the planning session. A separate goal sheet should be used for each goal identified.

Finally, the Business Plan and Budgets for the Agricultural Society would be developed, to show how the actions described in the strategic plan will be pursued.

Strategic Plan Document Outline

Focus of the Strategic Plan

Key Factors in the Business Environment that may influence the direction of the Agricultural Society

Vision for the future of the Agricultural Society

Mission for the Agricultural Society (what is the job of the Agricultural Society relative to the vision)

Opportunities for the Agricultural Society associated with the vision and mission

Strengths and Assets of the Agricultural Society relative to the vision and mission

Weaknesses of the Agricultural Society relative to the vision and mission

Threats, Barriers, and Constraints that might Impede progress towards the vision and mission by the Agricultural Society

Strategies to Offset Barriers and Constraints

Goal (new sheet for each goal)

Strategy to pursue goal

Deliverables (Objectives) for the goal

Measurement of Success for each deliverable

Methods to track and communicate progress

Re-Focusing Tool

This tool is to assist Agricultural Societies to refocus on a broader role of Rural Community Facilitation, to an extent reverting to their traditional role as a facilitator, motivator, and leader in the community.

The basic principle is to clarify the role and to determine how the Agricultural Society should pursue its new mandate. To an extent this is a strategic planning exercise and the Strategic Planning tool will be useful. Further, as the process requires stakeholder engagement, community engagement and communication, those tools will also provide assistance.

It should be noted that organizations like the Alberta Rural Development Network, ARPA's ACE communities, local community organizations, and other organizations target similar priorities – some having perhaps assumed that role in a void that may have been appropriate for Agricultural Societies. Therefore, part of this plan would be to facilitate a seamless process for the benefit of these partners and the communities.

This tool provides action steps for guidance in the re-focusing.

Steps to Pursue Refocusing

1. Directly engage AAAS to explore progress with, or support for, rebranding of Agricultural Societies and to understand the Provincial level relationship with other organizations focused on rural communities.
2. Board of Directors to consider a motion to explore refocusing and to form a Task Force of Board Members to guide and pursue the initiative.
3. Task Force develops a vision for the Agricultural Society with a broader mandate focused on a rural community development focus prioritizing issues relevant to facilitating a stronger rural community.
4. With that vision, use the Strategic Planning Tool to determine the goals and deliverables for the refocused Agricultural Society
5. Review with the Board and adopt a motion to proceed with the refocusing, returning the project to the Chair and the Board as a completed task
6. Using the Stakeholder Identification Tool, determine the key stakeholder organizations and other organizations that might be beneficiaries or might be impacted in some way as a result of decisions made in connection with the refocusing of the Agricultural Society
7. Using the Stakeholder Engagement Tool, review with stakeholders the reason for refocusing, the AAAS position on rebranding, the way in which a refocused Agricultural Society would enhance its contribution to the community, and the vision and enthusiasm of the Agricultural Society for its new role.
8. Again using the Strategic Planning Tool, conduct a mini-planning review, including key stakeholders, to obtain the ideas and views of the key stakeholders focused on the vision of the Agricultural Society for its new role and branding.
9. Negotiate the potential partnerships and resources identified through the planning session
10. Return to the Board with a motion to adopt the new plan

11. Communicate the plan to the stakeholders and the community using the Community Engagement Tool
12. Continue to implement, focused on the goals and deliverables, providing ongoing reporting on progress, partnerships, and achievements to the community.

Community Engagement Tool

The purpose of this tool is to assist Agricultural Societies to engage their community in enhancing awareness of the Agricultural Society and to encourage increased participation in, and support for, Agricultural Society events and priorities. This tool incorporates the use of several other tools provided.

1. Using the Stakeholder Tool, identify the Agricultural Society's main stakeholders
2. Categorize them according to their primary or most appropriate interest in the activities and future of the Agricultural Society.
3. Develop messages about the Agricultural Society and its priorities or achievements that are important to be understood by each of the groupings, e.g.:
 - a. Plans for the upcoming year – how does this targeted group benefit?
 - b. Summary of community benefits resulting from the Agricultural Society's past year
 - c. The success of teamwork among community organizations/leaders in providing for the growth or sustainability of the community
 - d. The communities business sector and the Agricultural Society
 - e. Long term direction and vision of the Agricultural Society
 - f. Etc.
4. Determine the most effective way to engage each of the groupings in order to convey the messages and open dialogue with them on the Agricultural Society's priorities
5. Determine what the Agricultural Society wants to achieve from the engagement of each targeted group
6. Determine who will represent the Agricultural Society and who will lead the strategy to engage each targeted group (Chair/President? Manager? etc. in each case.)
7. Identify appropriate partner(s) to support and participate in the engagement
8. Initiate the "opening" and "follow up" communication steps with each group, e.g.:
 - a. Presentation to the Municipal Council
 - b. Presentations to the Chamber of Commerce:
 - i. First meeting may be a presentation and discussion between the two Boards of Directors,
 - ii. Follow up may be a presentation to the Chamber membership at a Chamber membership event
 - c. Media engagement to communicate with a broad audience (use the Media Relations Tool to optimize media relations
 - d. Direct discussions with sport, arts, or other selected special interest organizations
 - e. Focus group discussions to explore in detail specific issues relevant to targeted groups
 - f. Membership or volunteer events to engage these specifically focused groups
 - g. In some cases individual engagement may be appropriate.
9. Always include a component in the communication to solicit feedback and opinions from the targeted audience; include a process to stimulate ongoing discussion among targeted stakeholders and between them and the Agricultural Society. Establish a reward or benefit program to motivate targeted audiences to remain engaged. This motivated open dialogue is a vital component of engagement, rather than "one way communication", strategies

10. Determine and record specifically how successful the engagement was relative to the expectations noted in Step 6 (above)
11. Following the initial event, determine how to maintain the engagement over the relevant forthcoming period and document an action plan to proceed
12. Create specific events focused on the specific targeted groups, including tracking to assess the measure of the achievement noted in Step 6 above
13. Maintain a record of community engagement activities, noting the relative success of each (regarding expected achievement)
14. Follow up as is determined to be appropriate to the initiative or message
15. Note that community engagement is an ongoing process, not a single job. The plan developed in Step 9 must be executed consistently, positively, and enthusiastically in order to maintain the benefit of the engagement.

Presentation Tool

Presentations to the community, or to any audience, need to be strategic and focused. They should include participation by relevant partners where appropriate, and must include processes for feedback and evaluation. The following presentation format is provided as an illustration of key components. It should be customized for presentations to meet specific needs and the specific community.

Communication methods for these presentations will vary and may include PowerPoint presentations, printed documents, verbal presentations, website content with links to other relevant organizations, FaceBook pages, Twitter, etc.

The general format will include the following key components:

1. Brief introduction to the Agricultural Society
2. Summary of the topic for the presentation and the key messages to be conveyed
3. Introduction to the topic (could be anything: for example, annual report, plan for a new facility, change in direction for the Agricultural Society, new event or program, acknowledgement of the contribution of a specific partner or individual, etc.)
4. Key background and contextual information relevant to the topic
5. Statement and quantification of key facts
6. Statement of request or message, with supporting details
7. Summary of action plan, ongoing steps, etc
8. Description of benefits from the initiative for the community/stakeholders, etc
9. Inputs and resources required to pursue the initiative
10. Identification of roles of key partners, including a statement by them
11. Message from the President/Chair Manager
12. Invitation for dialogue
13. Summarization again repeating the key message or request.
14. Plan for follow up

Communication Planning Tool

This tool assists Agricultural Societies to develop and execute a simple communication plan.

1. Ensure that appropriate communication avenues have been developed, e.g.:
 - a. Media contacts are familiar with the Agricultural Society
 - b. Face Book and Twitter feeds are active and promoted for, for example, live communication with young people or other targeted audiences
 - c. Locations are known for posters
 - d. Contact methods are known for key stakeholder groups
 - e. Appropriate partners to support the communication have been identified and engaged
 - f. The Agricultural Society website is well developed, up to date, and contains appropriate content
 - g. Etc.
2. Determine the message to be conveyed
3. Determine the specific audience to be targeted for that specific message
4. Identify partners that can assist the Agricultural Society to convey its message (always promote the contribution and achievements of partners in Agricultural Society communication initiatives)
5. Determine how you will know that the audience has received the message, what the audience's response to it is, and how to massage the communication to optimize the desired results
6. Determine the appropriate timing for the communication initiative
7. Determine the most appropriate communication method to convey the specific message to the targeted audience (e.g., direct mail, newspaper/radio/TV, direct presentation, special event, direct personal contact, email, social media, etc.). Examples include:
 - a. Local media and posters to communicate with the general population
 - b. Chamber of Commerce meetings or newsletters or direct contact to communicate with the business community
 - c. Website links connecting the Agricultural Society website (yes, your Agricultural Society needs a website today!) to the websites of other organizations in the community
 - d. Social media
8. Plan follow up if needed (communication plans generally require several repeats to be effective)
9. Determine how to obtain ongoing feedback if that is appropriate to the initiative.

Partnership Development Tool

Partnerships need to be formulated to address many initiatives or challenges. Successful partnerships result from full awareness of, and enthusiasm for, the venture and its outcomes. All partners look to determine the value or benefits that will accrue to them from the partnership.

Formal partnership agreements are not always necessary, but in any case a document to remind the partners of the nature, purpose, and goals of the venture and the roles of the partners is an important component of a successful partnership.

Identifying potential partners is a simple process.

1. Agricultural Societies should determine which community organizations or businesses are likely to benefit from the work or specific activities of the Agricultural Society. Then pursue those identified organizations or businesses to develop an agreement to pursue initiatives together.
2. Examine the beneficiaries of the Agricultural Society's initiatives. Determine what organizations or businesses also target those populations and approach them to develop joint initiatives.

A partnership should meet the following criteria:

- Both (or all) partners must know what the venture is about and what it is attempting to achieve.
- There should be a simple strategic plan and business plan for the venture, showing the involvement of all partners.
- Each partner must be motivated to participate in the venture by the fact that the partners will achieve more for their investment by working together than they will without the partners.
- All partners must know what they, and each other partner, are to contribute to the partnership and how each expects to benefit from it.
- All partners must know the expected timing of the venture and its benefits
- Each partner must know that they may be called on to invest more resources (time, money) in the event that things do not proceed exactly according to plan.
- All partners must know who/which organization is responsible to administer for the partnership
- There must be an agreement as to how the partnership will be dissolved in the event that becomes necessary.

State of the Industry Tool

It is recommended that AAAS prepared an annual “State of the Industry” tool, to be branded after consideration of rebranding. The purpose of the tool is to provide information to Government partners, the media, and key industry and other association partners, and for Agricultural Societies to use for communication purposes in their communities.

The approach is to conduct a brief survey of a select number of Agricultural Societies who agree in advance to be included on an annual basis. This would be supplemented by quotes from key Agricultural Society or AAAS partners and from ARDA.

As a follow up each spring, trend data comparing the past with the previous year should be published, including, for example, total revenue, balance of grants to earned revenue, total events staged, total attendance at all events. This would be obtained from analysis of the financial statements and annual reports of the Agricultural Society.

The following steps are appropriate:

1. Select, engage, and brief the Agricultural Societies to be included in the annual survey. It is suggested the survey includes three of the Regional Exhibition Associations, the Agricultural Societies in three larger rural/urban communities, three medium sized communities and three small rural communities.
2. It is proposed that the timing of the release is coincident with the Calendar year end.
3. In late November/early December each year conduct the brief telephone survey with each of the Agricultural Societies.
 - a. The survey will ask very simple questions:
 - i. Did attendance at events staged by your Agricultural Society during the past year increase more, the same as, or less compared with the rate of growth of your local population?
 - ii. Did use of your facilities increase in the past year over previous year?
 - iii. What were your three greatest successes over the past year?
 - iv. What were your three greatest challenges over the past year?
 - v. Do you expect that the coming year be a growth year for you?
 - vi. What new programs will you stage in the coming year?
 - vii. What message do you think should be included in a public statement about key trends, the past year and future years in the industry?
4. Conduct brief interviews with key strategic partners of AAAS, including Travel Alberta, AUMA, ARPA/ACE Communities, Alberta Rural Development Network, financial partners, agriculture/agribusiness or Food Chain partners. Questions would be simple and short:
 - a. How do you believe Agricultural Societies have contributed to life in rural communities over the past year?
 - b. How have Agricultural Societies and your organization/members/clients worked together to contribute to building stronger rural communities in Alberta?
 - c. What message do you have for Agricultural Societies for the coming year?

5. Develop a 300 to 500 word statement summarizing highlights from the review and distribute it to all Agricultural Societies, media, key partners, and government.
 - a. Agricultural Societies should redistribute it to their local municipality, community organizations (e.g., Chamber of Commerce, tourism office, 4H, service clubs, etc.), and local media
6. Follow up personally with strategic recipients after distribution of the report.
7. When the quantitative summary is available, send it as a follow up to the same recipients.

Media Relations Tool

AAAS and local Agricultural Societies should execute a well developed media strategy to remain in the public eye. Key components of the media strategy are:

- Ready contacts in local, regional, provincial media, appropriately informed about Agricultural Societies and their priorities, funding, and activities.
 - AAAS contacts would be at the provincial and regional level and Agricultural Societies would be local and sub-regional
 - The contacts should be familiar with AAAS and the local Agricultural Society. Action is required by AAAS and the local Agricultural Societies to develop this awareness
 - Where the same media outlet covers several Agricultural Societies, those Agricultural Societies should work together to build awareness with their local media representatives.
- As Agricultural Societies become higher profile the media will need background stories to support their reporting. An Internet-based Media Kit is appropriate for this purpose. The Media Kit should be established in a separate “Media Resources” tab on the AAAS website and on all individual Agricultural Society websites. The Media area must be kept up to date. The media kit would include:
 - A list of key contacts
 - A list of industry facts, e.g.:
 - Purpose and mission of Agricultural Societies
 - Relation of Agricultural Societies to their communities
 - Role of volunteers
 - Number and distribution of Agricultural Societies in Alberta
 - Source and nature of funding
 - A summary of briefing documents noting:
 - The activities and beneficiaries of Agricultural Societies
 - The benefits attributable to Agricultural Societies
 - Kind of programming and facilities
 - A handful of “story starters” to assist media writers and producers to develop stories for publication
 - An active program of RSS feeds to highlight new achievements, facts, etc.
 - A currently updated program of media releases
 - Related resources.

Board Renovation Tool

The goal of Board Training is to assist the Agricultural Society Board to become the most respected and desirable Board in the community. In that position, people will seek to become Board Members and the Agricultural Society will have the opportunity to select the best candidates to maintain a progressive and vibrant Board.

Several components are crucial to achieve this goal. The most critical is the desire of the Board to pursue the goal. Key steps are:

1. Encourage Board members to aggressively pursue the goal of Board Renovation
2. Engage Board members through Board training sessions to appreciate and adopt current Board governance and management methods and to understand why they are important and how they make a difference
3. Revisit the vision of the Board for the future of the organization
4. Engage the key stakeholders to explain the vision and to obtain their input to the direction of the Agricultural Society
5. Engage the community to learn about their desires and expectations relevant to the direction of the Agricultural Society
6. In conjunction with key stakeholders, develop a strategic plan for the Agricultural Society to pursue its vision, including identification and documentation of clear goals, deliverables, resources required, partnership opportunities, and monitoring,
7. Make it happen!

Tourism Planning Tool

Most Agricultural Societies are closely entwined with the tourism economy. The priority for tourism is associated with building the economic benefits for direct tourism industry stakeholders, such as hotels, restaurants, retailers, transportation companies, and events and activity operators, and for other community or regional residents and businesses. The Quantitative Report resulting from this assignment estimates measures of the benefits for Alberta’s tourism economy of visitor spending associated with the operation of Alberta’s Agricultural Societies.

Local Tourism Benefits

The most important tourism priority for the smaller Agricultural Societies is to optimize local benefits from tourism. These are simple to understand. However, in general, many smaller Agricultural Societies have not actively developed the relationships appropriate to this goal – for some practical reasons. The following table will help guide Agricultural Societies to discuss with key tourism industry participants how they benefit from the activities of the Agricultural Society:

Primary Beneficiaries	How they benefit	Opportunity	Strategy to Develop
Accommodation			
Food and Beverage			
Festivals, Events, Activities,			
Retail			
Local Transportation			
Meetings and Conventions			
Local Business Community			
Local Residents			
Regional Business Community			
Regional Residents			
Regional Business Community			

Overall Goal for Tourism

The overall tourism-related goal for Agricultural Societies is to contribute to the growth of the local tourism economy by pursuing tourism benefits associated with the events and facilities of the Agricultural Society.

Strategy

Develop relationships, communication to contribute positive benefits for direct and indirect tourism stakeholders.

Action Plan to Pursue Goal

Identify any local tourism agency. Possible tourism organizations include:

- Destination Marketing Organization
- Tourism Cooperative
- Chamber of Commerce
- Municipal tourism or economic development office

If there is no existing tourism organization, the Agricultural Society may facilitate the development of this focus for the community:

- The Agricultural Society could be identified as the lead tourism organization
- Through consultation with direct tourism stakeholders, develop a tourism plan
- As a partner in the tourism plan, explore and pursue opportunities to stage events or to encourage use of facilities to increase the benefits of tourism
- Develop methods to count and report attendance and other benefits
- Maintain ongoing priority on enhancing tourism benefits

Measuring values generated by non-resident spending:

The value of non-resident spending may be estimated using Travel Alberta data and estimates of attendance. Travel Alberta research shows that (among Alberta and other Western Canadian residents attending an event):

- \$0.09 is spent on public or local transportation
- \$5.15 is spend on private automobile operation
- \$5.19 is spent on accommodation, food and beverage
- \$2.06 is spent on retail.

It is important not to presume that all non-residents of the community attending an event in the community are motivated to make their trip specifically by the event. While many regional residents are, many non-residents include a visit to the Agricultural Society's event as one of the things they do on a larger trip.

Methods to estimate the number of non-residents attending an events vary significantly, depending upon the event and the venue. Most are relatively unscientific, but provide valuable estimates. Some options include:

- Using a draw prize initiative that requires all purchasers of tickets to put their name and address or home community on the stub

- The number of stubs for non-residents compared with residents of the community provides a proportion of visitors who are non-residents. That proportion may be applied to total attendance estimates
- Choose five different locations in the event area. Stage a volunteer at each for three half hour periods each day during the event, to ask attendees if they are having a fun day, if the volunteer can help them find anything, and where the attendee lives
 - This method will also provide a good estimate of the proportion of residents and non-residents to apply to overall attendance estimates. If the actual community the non-resident is from is recorded and tallied at the end of the event, that will also provide valuable information to help with marketing future, similar events in “high yield” communities for the event.
- If tickets are sold for entry to the event, ticket sellers should ask each purchaser where they are from and record the result as “local” or record where the visitor is from..
 - Again, proportions of non-residents and market targeting information will result.
- If tickets are sold for some events, although there is no ticket required for general entry, a similar approach will provide similarly valuable data.

Estimating overall attendance is also sometimes challenging. Again, some simple methods are available to build reasonable estimates of attendance:

- If there are gates, the gate control should simply count arriving attendees using a simple counter (if the budget is available, an electronic counter may be shared among several organizations that also want to count their attendees).
- If there is no gate but there are typical access routes (e.g., most people arrive using two or three local streets) a similar counting method could be used, counting the number of people on those routes headed towards the grounds. In this case, counts should be conducted for 30 minutes each two hours until no more attendees are arriving, then the resulting count multiplied by four for each access route.
- If there are no gates but there is a location high up where sharp photographs could be taken of the crowd of attendees, pictures could be taken and attendance counted on them. It may be simpler to divide the picture into eight approximately equally sized segments and then count the attendees in two of the segments, then multiply the count by four. This method is less likely to be accurate as in most events except entertainment concerts not all of the attendees are on site all the time.

Tourism Planning

In the event that the Agricultural Society stimulates interest in the community to develop a tourism plan, such a document can be developed in a planning approach similar to a strategic plan – and certainly including key representatives of the tourism industry (the Agricultural Society, a tourism organization, Chamber of Commerce, Visitor Centre, local tour operators, hoteliers, restaurateurs, retailers other attraction operators), etc. All participants in each of those areas should be in attendance at a planning meeting if at all possible.

Consultation with Travel Alberta prior to the planning meeting will likely result in gathering historical statistical and other relevant planning information. To develop a simple tourism plan, the planning meeting would proceed through the following steps:

1. Develop an understanding of why tourism is important to the community and the participants in the meeting. People travel. They will spend money when they travel. The job of the tourism promoter is to attract the people most likely to spend most to visit your community and spend their money there. If the opportunity is lost those people will spend their money elsewhere
2. Determine what each of the participants wants to gain from a successful tourism plan
3. Build a simple inventory of the tourism assets of the community
4. Identify why people come to the community and what they do there
5. Identify the residence of people who visit the community – this may be estimated by discussion if no hard information is available. However, hoteliers and local attractions may be able to provide estimates of this information.
6. Discuss and record the strengths, tourism weaknesses, opportunities to grow tourism, barriers that limit tourism, and the resources and partnerships required to enhance tourism
7. Identify tourism gaps
8. Determine action plans to fill or motivate others to fill the tourism gaps
9. Rank tourism priorities based on their potential yield for the community (measured in spending by visitors) and then select a small number of the highest specific priorities to pursue
10. Select the communities most likely to yield the highest number of visitors for your community
 - a. Discuss how best to raise awareness of your community or event in those origin communities and how to motivate people to choose your community to visit – remember, they have options and the WILL spend their tourism dollars somewhere
11. Develop an action plan to pursue those priorities. Options might include:
 - a. Inviting and facilitating media writers from the targeted markets to come to the community and consider writing travel stories about it
 - b. Advertising (often expensive) in newspapers or radio in the targeted communities
 - i. Consider the potential return (in visitor spending) on the investment (advertising cost) prior to making investments in advertising
 - c. Development and distribution of tourism brochures
 - d. Ensure the visitor centre is well prepared to actively promote activities, hotels, restaurants, shops, etc in the community
 - e. Visits to targeted communities by local politicians, community leaders, residents and tourism business people to talk to newspapers, bus tour operators, potential sources of groups (seniors homes, sports groups, etc.)
 - f. Encouraging local residents to actively invite their friends and relatives to visit the community during the event (this is one of the most important ways to attract tourism in smaller communities)
12. Ensure there is a good website for the community with a tourism page providing information and contacts for potential visitors

13. Identify and put in place the partnerships and other resources required to successfully pursue the priorities
14. Execute the plan
15. Track the performance of the plan by intercepting non-residents and asking them about their visit
16. Report the results of the mini surveys to local media, local government, Chamber of Commerce, and other tourism stakeholders.

The Agricultural Society in Numbers Tool

Agricultural Societies need to be able to disseminate information for stakeholders and other community players, for media, for government, and for partners. A simple tool to provide this information at the local level would be valuable. The following format may be suitable:

1. Name of Agricultural Society
2. Purpose of communication: summary of key message(s)
3. The Agricultural Society:
 - a. Role of the Agricultural Society in the community/rural area
 - b. Key partners
 - c. High level summary of key programs and priorities
4. Outline important messages or requests
 - a. (this is the purpose of the communication)
5. How the Agricultural Society contributes
 - a. Total attendance at all events staged by the Agricultural Society
 - b. Estimated local spending by the Agricultural Society in the community
 - c. Estimated spending by visitors to the community in connection with their attendance at events organized by the Agricultural Society
6. Funding the Agricultural Society
 - a. Summary of the source and use of funds at the highest level
 - b. Note key funders and sponsors and acknowledge that their contribution to the Agricultural Society's mission directly makes the Agricultural Society's facilities, programs and activities available to the community and rural area
7. Events and activities
 - a. Number of events or activities staged by the Agricultural Society – high level summary as below:
 - i. Group and total by type of activity – as grouped in the Activity Report
 - ii. Estimated attendance at all events organized by the Agricultural Society, totalled by those groupings
 - b. Number of events or activities staged by other organizations in the Agricultural Society's facilities, with overall estimated attendance
8. Summary of messages
9. Contacts for follow up.

Relevant Agricultural Societies Tool

Regaining relevance to the local population in light of the changing local demographics and economic conditions should be an important priority for many Agricultural Societies. Rural communities have changed significantly since the Agricultural Societies were formed, but often the Agricultural Society has not kept up. Many factors have contributed to the change, including the following:

- Changing demographics resulting from in-migration of people with urban values
- Loss of youth looking for opportunities elsewhere
- Loss of some long standing rural residents due to changing employment opportunities
- Economic stresses and changing trends in the agriculture and agribusiness sector
- Changes in the resource and distribution sectors
- Aging of the population
- Transportation and communication changes
- Changing urban values
- Etc.

When many Alberta's Agricultural Societies were formed, most smaller communities, and many larger communities, were based on opportunities and employment in agriculture. While that remains important, a wide range of other factors influence the decisions rural residents make about their lives. New residents in some communities aspire to the values of their new rural home but nevertheless retain some of their urban values and expectations due to their experience in more urban centres.

In some smaller rural communities survival or sustainability are the highest priorities. Many communities have declining population and cash flow as residents have left or are more oriented toward opportunities and services available in larger communities.

Agricultural Societies choose not to "blow their own horn". Further, many Agricultural Societies are more inclined to maintain their "status quo" than to pursue new opportunities. However, any Agricultural Society can take a more comprehensive role for the benefit of their community. It is very clear from the interviews with Agricultural Societies that Agricultural Society Boards are dedicated to their communities.

An appropriate way to regain leading relevance in the community may be to take an approach similar to the stakeholder engagement approach, which includes direct engagement of key stakeholder groups. Use of the strategic planning tool and the community engagement tool will assist Agricultural Societies to clarify their broader role and develop an approach to move forward.

It is important to note that this process should be approached without haste and with the cooperation of other community leaders and organizations. It would be counter-productive for Agricultural Societies to appear to be trying to replace existing mandates in the community.

Analysis of the activities staged by Agricultural Societies in their communities shows clearly the depth to which Agricultural Societies are serving their communities. Research data suggests that the rurally

focused Agricultural Societies attract 1.64 million attendees to events they stage, involving nearly 69,000 volunteers contributing 672,000 hours of time to their Agricultural Societies. The following table estimates the depth of this activity for Alberta's 286 smaller Agricultural Societies:

Activity	Volunteers	Volunteer Hours	Attendees
Total AAAS	596	8,666	-
Total Agriculture	15,894	146,946	152,683
Total Agribusiness	3,632	42,324	328,809
Total Business Development (Trade Shows)	581	4,440	45,429
Total Community and Economic Development	1,843	8,529	5,256
Total Community and Rural Events	20,891	161,775	626,424
Education and Training	1,579	12,919	18,566
Total Entertainment	1,875	14,190	24,684
Total Miscellaneous	1,296	14,475	45,126
Total Ag Society operating priorities	7,236	123,814	160,678
Total Sport and Rodeo	13,399	133,684	231,859
Totals	68,822	671,762	1,639,513

Focus on the Food Chain Tool

The agriculture and agribusiness sectors of the economy are crucial significantly because their contribution to the food chain and the resulting employment and economic development. Agricultural Societies have traditionally focused on raising awareness of the food chain as a key component of agricultural awareness.

Agriculture has been at the heart of the history and life of a rural community. Many rural communities benefit from the high community values that have resulted from the community's agricultural roots. For many recent or longer standing community residents, these values are the reason they choose to live in a rural or small-town environment.

In rural or small town Alberta the strong influence of agriculture and agribusiness reinforces the opportunity for special focus on the food chain. Integrating this focus in programming, events, and activities of the Agricultural Society allows the Agricultural Society to directly engage local and visiting populations to raise awareness of the food chain and to actively contribute to the value and growth of local participants in the food chain.

Agricultural Societies have consistently maintained this focus for many years. However with changing demographics and priorities, it may be appropriate for the Agricultural Societies to re-prioritize this theme. Several opportunities exist to do this. However, this is, again, a good opportunity for the Board to form a Task Force to develop a specific plan of action. Some approaches are provided below:

- Form a focus group of local agribusiness and agriculture sector participants to evaluate ideas generated by the Board and to develop an action plan to raise awareness of the food chain.
- Engage mothers with young children to develop programming and events that will assist them to focus on locally available food resources.
- Establish a free cooking program, led by acknowledged chefs, to directly teach small groups of young teenagers to cook using the “100 mile diet” – thus encouraging them to use food resources that are locally produced. Encourage them to compete to participate in the cooking program by writing an essay on how people benefit by eating local food and why the local food chain is important to the community.
 - Publish the winning essays in local media and display and promote them at Agricultural Society events
 - Encourage media coverage of the cooking school event.
- Establish a local competition to create cookbooks or menus using locally produced food resources.
- Establish a cooking competition at a major Agricultural Society event at which small groups of local agriculture and agribusiness industry participants compete for a major annual award for creative use of local food resources.
- Be creative!

Focus on Youth Tool

The research showed clearly that Agricultural Societies are significantly focused on youth, as the future of the community. However, most Agricultural Societies indicate that attracting the participation of youth is one of their greatest challenges. This appears to be equally challenging in three crucial areas:

- Youth attendance at events staged by the Agricultural Society.
- Youth as volunteers, to participate as Committee Members and organizers and in operational support roles
- Younger leaders as Board members

Most Agricultural Societies have tried many approaches to address this issue. The following notes provide some suggestions for ways to attract the participation of younger residents and businesspeople.

Youth Attendance

In general, young people are motivated to attend events if other young people are there. This is an interesting challenge. However, developing events **with** young people, rather than **for** them, may assist the Agricultural Society to make some progress. Thus young people must be engaged in order to make decisions about event planning and communication. As events are successful in attracting young people remaining

It is particularly challenging for many Board members who are older to enter into dialogue with young people on event planning and execution. The motivation, pace, and sense of fun of these groups is often so different. Their communication methods and sometimes even their language also often differ.

Therefore it may be appropriate to use partners or intermediaries to open dialogue. The following steps may assist Agricultural Societies facing this challenge to achieve some progress:

1. Through a Board Motion, form a Task Force to develop and initiate a specific focus on young people, to report back to the Board periodically on their progress and finally when the initiative has been initiated and is ready for ongoing application.
2. The Task Force would develop a mini-strategic plan to guide this initiative. Use the Strategic Planning Tool.
3. As part of the planning process, the Task Force will identify the partners or intermediaries appropriate in their community. These are of vital importance in pursuing this initiative. They will be able to facilitate engaging the younger people. Potential partners or intermediaries are:
 - Youth group organizers
 - Recreation groups, sports organizations, or clubs focusing successfully providing activities for young people
 - Teachers
 - Acknowledged youth leaders
 - 4H leaders
 - Class leaders
 - Employers in the community hiring young people

- Retailers or service companies in the community focusing on serving young people
 - Religious groups successfully engaging young people
 - Etc.
4. Select a small group of these youth facilitators and arrange to meet with them to review options for the Agricultural Society to develop a new focus on young people. In conjunction with the youth facilitators, determine appropriate targeted age ranges for development of the new programming and segment the action plan (below) as appropriate to focus on the targeted age groups.
 5. In conjunction with the leaders identified, select a group of 8-12 young people believed by the leaders to be motivated, enthusiastic, and innovative. Ask the leaders who nominate these young people to motivate them to attend a meeting at a suitable location to talk about creating some activities or programs for youth in the community.
 6. Also ask these contributors to assist in developing a program and a suitable format and location to stage the meeting of young people
 7. Facilitate a discussion among these young individuals to learn:
 - What kind of programs or events would interest them
 - When they should happen
 - How to accomplish them
 - What would motivate young people to attend
 - How to communicate the events or programs to young people.

Consider asking one of the young people in the group to assist as a facilitator for the meeting.

8. Explore communication in detail. Notably explore how to use social media and the Internet to communicate. For example, on an ongoing basis use Face Book, Twitter, or YouTube to engage young people about selecting Grandstand acts (e.g.: “Vote for your choice”), decisions about food, to communicate prizes, dances, activities, or competitions, to encourage last minute attendance with video clips of fun on the day, etc. The young people will have the expertise to describe how to do this.
9. Invite clearly motivated young leaders from the groups to participate in developing, staging, and communicating the events.
10. Stage the events and/or programs
11. After the events or programs have run, bring the group of young people together again to review how they went and to start planning for the next one, incorporating modifications they suggest.

Youth as Board Members, Committee Members, or Volunteers

The preceding step shows how to identify young people with the ability, interest and commitment to contribute. If the Agricultural Society has followed the above approach to developing and staging the programs or events focused on youth it is most likely some of the young team involved will have been observed to be leaders. They will be young people who have the interest and motivation to participate with the Agricultural Society on an ongoing basis. The intermediaries noted above will also be able to help identify the highest potential leaders among the young people – individuals who are already motivated to be, and acknowledged as, leaders.

Once suitable young individuals are involved, they may be invited to form a Youth Board to assist the main Board to maintain its focus on youth. There are many ways this could be accomplished. Examples might be to integrate the Youth Board as an Extra Curricular activity at school, as a "Pop Group" (like a coffee morning group), in conjunction with a special activity, affiliated with an education program, as a formalized meeting, etc. The young participants will likely choose their own format.

Specific leading individuals may be identified through the group interaction or directly by the Agricultural Society Board representatives or the intermediaries. Once identified, the Board may invite the individual to join the Board as an appointee, specifically focused on ensuring the Board maintains its focus on youth. Boards should have a bylaw empowering them to appoint members. It may also be appropriate to appoint a Mentor from the Board to assist in the individual's development.

Another opportunity to engage youth on the Board may be to establish a specific Developmental Mentorship as an award for individuals who would compete for it. The award may include participation in a certificated Board training program at a college or university, personal mentorship by an individual leader, an associated mentorship with an executive from an agriculture or agribusiness venture. The group if intermediaries would be effective to develop the mentorship programs.