

Introducing the On-Line Course
**Developing Rural
Business Clusters**



Developing Rural Business Clusters

An on-line course for rural development practitioners across western Canada

Western Canada's communities are facing major economic challenges. In light of this, rural development practitioners need tools and strategies to assist their communities in the move to a long-term sustainable future.

The future of rural economies lies in the development of rural businesses, businesses that bring new wealth to their communities. The strategy of development rural business clusters aligns with the move to diversifying and broadening an economic base, while creating a balanced and stable economy. For this reason, students will learn strategies to build upon a community's comparative advantages and define business clusters that have the potential to grow and create more jobs and generate more wealth. Students will develop a business cluster project throughout the course.

This practical 15 week, interactive on-line course includes:

- Real world case studies of business cluster development
- Strategies to identify business clusters with potential to grow
- Strategies for working with business clusters to support their growth
- Planning and partnering effective cluster development
- Developing rural business cluster projects and writing proposals for project funding.

As a western Canada rural development practitioner, you will find this course engaging and relevant to your daily work. The course is facilitated by the Community Futures Alberta Rural Diversification Initiative Project Officers. It is interactive, with computer quizzes and games, video conference learning events, discussion forums, face-to-face interviews and culminates in a rural business cluster project work plan for your region. Throughout the course, students are encouraged to interact and learn from each other.

An added benefit of the course is the alignment with the Pan West Community Futures competencies of project management, proposal writing and community economic development.

This on-line course includes nine modules as outlined below:

Module Title	Module Description
Business Clusters in a Rural Economy	Includes the identification of regional business clusters and how to research and prioritize business clusters with the potential to grow.
Cluster Development Model	Explores a nine step model for developing rural business clusters and links this model to case studies, along with the introduction of a project management plan checklist for cluster development.
Development of Rural Business Clusters	Explores business cluster development strategies, analyses growth opportunities and defines the role of a cluster advisory team.
Players in Business Cluster Development	Defines the various players in business cluster development, i.e. cooperatives, associations and post secondary institutions, while exploring potential forms of cluster development.
Funding Cluster Initiatives	Examines the options for funding business cluster initiatives, the partners and the process for funding applications.
Clusters and Export Markets	Defines the connection between business clusters and export market opportunities.
Facilitating Cluster Development	Explores the role of a business cluster facilitator, the skills required and the relationship between a cluster facilitator and the players within a cluster initiative.
Evaluating Cluster Development	Defines a cluster initiative evaluation strategy, evaluation models and the linkages to evaluation and funding.
Developing a Rural Cluster Development Initiative	Provides a basis for developing a business cluster development plan as a foundation for moving ahead with a cluster project.

- Course dates:** September 12, 2011 to December 21, 2011 (15 weeks)
- Course Tuition:** Community Futures staff and board members - \$650, includes resource book
Economic development professionals and other interested community members - \$800.00, includes resource book
- Enquiries:** Contact Judy McMillan-Evans, Community Futures Network of Alberta (judy@cfna.ca or call 403-652-9664) to register.
- Registration deadline:** September 6, 2011
- Registration process:** Payment by VISA or MasterCard only. On-line registration will open mid July. *(If you wish to be notified as soon as registration opens, send Judy an e-mail with the student names and your spots will be held. Judy will contact you as soon as registration opens.)*
- Pre-requisites:** A thirst for knowledge

Note: Just prior to the course start date, you will receive log-in and password information to access the course on-line.

For more details on the on-line courses offered Community Futures Alberta, visit: www.ruraldiversification.com.