



**ONTARIO
AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE**

SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN
AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

January 18, 2022

RE: Letter of Information and Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

*Identifying Supports and Structures to Help Small and Rural Communities in
Northern Ontario Respond to Disruption*

My name is Leith Deacon, and I am an Associate Professor at the University of Guelph. This letter serves as a formal invitation to municipalities in Northern Ontario with populations <10,000, to participate in a research study that is exploring the experience(s) of small and rural Northern Ontario communities' COVID-19 response. The study's purpose is to identify supports and structures that would help small/rural communities in Northern Ontario respond to future disruption.

This project is taking place from September 2022 until August 2023. If you choose to participate, we will ask to:

1. Gain access to council and committee agendas and minutes for the period of January 2020 through June 2022.
2. Interview one elected leader and one municipal management-level staff, ideally both individuals held their roles during the period identified above.
3. Invite one participant from your municipality to attend an in-person focus group discussion to explore the findings; all expenses will be reimbursed.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

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School of Environmental Design and Rural Development
Landscape Architecture Building
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Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1G 2W1
Leith.Deacon@uoguelph.ca
519-824-4120 ext. 52521

To indicate your municipality's interest in participating in this study, please review the document below and return the expression of interest, signed, to pderbedr@uoguelph.ca

Sincerely,

Leith Deacon

Project Title: Identifying Supports and Structures to Help Small and Rural Communities in Northern Ontario Respond to Disruption.

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Background:

My name is Leith Deacon, and I am an Associate Professor at the University of Guelph. The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a study exploring the experience of small and rural Northern Ontario communities' COVID-19 response. Financial support for this project is provided by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR).

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to identify supports and structures that would help small/rural communities in Northern Ontario to respond to disruption more effectively. The research has four objectives:

1. To identify municipal decisions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. To explore successes and challenges experienced by small and rural communities in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To identify supports and structures that will help small and rural communities more effectively respond to disruption.
4. To compile and share findings from research to inform policy and practice.

Eligibility:

Fourteen municipalities with populations <10,000 that are located within the areas served by any of the following 7 public health units are eligible to participate in this study: Northwestern, Thunder Bay and District, Algoma, Porcupine, Timiskaming, North Bay Parry Sound District, Sudbury, and Districts.

Research Procedures:

Participating municipalities will be asked to identify one elected representative and one senior staff member, who held their role during the COVID-19 pandemic i.e., from January 2020 through June 2022. Each will be invited to take part in an online 90-minute interview, and the municipality will be asked to identify one of these individuals to participate in an in-person 2.5-hour focus group. Interviews will be audio and video recorded and the focus group will be audio recorded. Each participating municipality will be asked to grant the research team access to agendas and minutes from council and committee meetings for the time indicated above.

Risks and Benefits:

There are very few foreseen risks to participation in this study.

Psychological risks: All participants will be taking part within their professional role, and risk within this study is less than anything that would be encountered within other aspects of their work. There may be some degree of worry related to recalling the stress associated with working during the COVID pandemic. Meeting documents included in the study are all understood to be in the public domain and therefore do not involve risks.

There are no direct benefits to your participation in this study. This research will contribute to informing policy and practice related to governance in small and rural communities. It is expected to benefit participating communities as well as rural communities elsewhere in Ontario and Canada. You do not waive any legal rights by agreeing to take part in this study. Findings will be shared at one or more research conferences, through publication in an academic journal, and within the PhD dissertation of Amanda Mongeon. Any participant, alongside their respective municipality, will not be identified directly or indirectly unless said participant and associated municipality provide written consent allowing for identification within the research.

One researcher is employed by the Timiskaming Health Unit; refusing to participate in this research will not impact any relationship you may have with Timiskaming Health Unit.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

This study will not identify participating municipalities without express written permission. Participation in this study is voluntary. Individuals may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions and individuals or municipalities may withdraw from the study at any time with no effect

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to their future by contacting the researcher or stating in the moment. As a municipality you may withdraw from the study up until March 21, 2023, and all data associated with your municipality will be destroyed. Interview participants can request to have any collected data withdrawn from the study up until May 1, 2023. Due to the nature of focus groups, participant contributions after May 1 will not be able to be withdrawn; data will not be destroyed and will be kept. All possible steps will be taken to help ensure confidentiality; however, it is possible that information provided may enable identification among study participants. Individuals will be given the choice to share their name in their consent form. All collected data will be stored on recording devices, hard drives, and portable jump drives which will be encrypted using advanced file security software (Bitlocker: www.uoguelph.ca/ccs/encryption). Please note that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while data is in transit over the internet.

Identifiable data will be kept until submission of results for publication (typically 3 – 6 months after conclusion of project). Non-identifiable data will be kept for a maximum of 5 years in a secure location at which time, all recorded information will be destroyed and disposed of. During this time, all members of the research team will have access to the data.

Municipalities will not be paid to participate in this study; however, if not already planning to attend the conference at which the focus group takes place, focus group participants will be refunded for their costs related to travel, food, and accommodations. Those already attending will not be reimbursed for their costs.

Ethics:

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics board for compliance with federal guidelines for research involving human participants. If you have questions regarding your rights and welfare as a research participant in this study (REB #22-10-010), please contact: Manager, Research Ethics, University of Guelph; reb@uoguelph.ca; (519)-824-4120 Ext. 56606

I, who possesses the power to sign on behalf of the municipality, have read the letter of information and agree, on behalf of the municipality, to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Municipality