



Darrell Ohokannoak of Cambridge, chairman of the Nunavut Broadband Corp., had a success story to share at last week's Sivummut III Nunavut Economic Forum in Iqaluit.
(PHOTO BY JANE GEORGE)

Qiniq subscribers, who can use their portable modem to roam in 56 communities in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, will see their bandwidth increasing by 50 per cent at the end of this month and 50 more over next six months, thanks to \$21 million more bandwidth from the federal National Satellite Initiative.

With \$4.5 million to be invested into the Nunavut broadband network in 2009, Qiniq subscribers will also see faster downloads and improved video and voice connections.

Qiniq's success resulted from being creative with what money they had, said Ohokannoak.

Qiniq stands out among the few tangible examples of concrete success cited at the Sivummut conference, the third gathering of its kind so far in Nunavut.

Sivummut III was supposed to look at the Nunavut Economic Development Strategy, first released in 2003. The strategy calls for progress in four areas - "our land," "our people," "our community economics" and the "territorial economy."

Feb. 11 was set aside to look at these "strategic priorities" and come up with an "honest evaluation of its performance to date."

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However, none of the four panels specifically touched on concerns in the strategic section on "people" - that is, housing and hospitals.

The lack of discussion on these two points revealed a huge disconnect between the conference materials and what actually happened at the meeting.

For example, materials in the Sivummut III participant binder invited comments on best practices for capital projects and how housing development supports trades.

But, with little information on what's happened in this area since 2005, there was no way for participants to evaluate in their workbook whether there has been an "assessment of the readiness of the local labour force and business sector in the timing of our capital projects" or to say "what specific recommendations should be added to this strategy."

Judging from what the panelists did say about economic development, Nunavut has a long way to go to meeting any goals of its strategy, which was optimistically updated last year just before the global financial crisis kicked in.

Nunavut's population has low levels of formal education and a poor ability to read, write and deal with numbers, said Nunavut Arctic College's president, Daniel Vandermeulen.

Fewer than one in two Nunavummiut have high school diplomas and there are also fewer college and university graduates in Nunavut than in the rest of Canada.

What Nunavut needs is more training targeted to increase employability, Vandermeulen said.

As it stands now, the majority of Nunavummiut already in the workforce have problems reading and using numbers, which affects workplace retention, said Dan Page, secretary of the Nunavut Literacy Council.

Too bad because low, local employment and outside recruitment means an estimated \$123 million flows out of Nunavut every year to imported workers, said Joe Kunuk, executive director of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc..

Money paid in relocation and benefits to outside trades could remain in the territory, he said.

As for building on the knowledge of elders - another part of the economic strategy's goals, there's Tusaqtuut.

This project wants to produce a written body of work on the origins and application of Inuit traditional knowledge by working with the last generation of Inuit elders still living in south Baffin.

But as Meeka Mike, the project coordinator, said, they're working against time to gather information from elders.

Some comments from Sivummut III participants concerned the

need to offer more Inuktitut language education and training to help boost economic development.

For the moment, Nunavut's economic challenges are so large that underpaid and overworked economic development officers in the communities bail out quickly.

Mark Morrissey, executive director of the Nunavut Economic Developers Association, told the Sivummut III meeting that there's "an exceedingly high turnover rate for economic development officers" who are often asked to take on unrelated jobs for the hamlets which employ them.

"As an example, in the few short months that I've been with NEDA, we've seen an entire region have a full turnover in economic development officers," he said.

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