



*Photo: Gordon More*

# Rural Canada and the AI Moment

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**Gordon More**

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## **A Note on Language**

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This paper is written in plain English on purpose. I want it readable by everyone it is about: the people who run our rinks, farms, libraries, businesses, and town offices, and the people in Ottawa and the provincial capitals who make decisions that reach them. Policy papers have a habit of being written so that only other policy people can read them, and that habit is part of the problem this paper describes. So, where there was a choice between the technical word and the plain one, I chose the plain one. Nothing was simplified in substance. Every claim still carries its source. The paper is simply written so that you do not need a glossary to hold me to what it says.

## About the Author

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The author of this paper is Gordon More. In January 2026 the Western Canada Economic Forum named him one of TheWest20, its twenty most impactful leaders in economic development and business growth in Western Canada (Western Canada Economic Forum, 2026). In 2025 the Southeast Techhub, which he leads, won the Saskatchewan Economic Development Alliance's Community Project Award for communities over 5,000, sponsored by PrairiesCan (Saskatchewan Economic Development Alliance, 2025). He founded Innovate Rural, Canada's leading rural innovation gathering, and is a published author on rural innovation policy (More, 2025).

He is the Executive Director of the Southeast Techhub in Estevan, Saskatchewan, a community-created technology hub seeded through the provincial and federal Coal Transition funds. He started at the Techhub as a volunteer mentor and worked his way up to a paid employee, shaping it into the organization it is today. Before that came more than two decades in software: Sales Manager at RSI International Systems, then co-founder of IDS Internet Dispatch Services in 2007, its President and a Director until 2023 as the company grew to operations in Canada, the United States, and Australia, and its board chair since. He completed MIT xPRO's Technology and Innovation Acceleration Program in 2024 and is writing his master's thesis at Royal Roads University on the conditions that let rural technology hubs build innovation networks.

One limit matters as much as the credentials. More has a working knowledge of web development from the practical side of a software career. He is not a credentialed developer, not a lawyer, and not a designer. That is the point, and the paper returns to it.

# Section 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 The Moment

In June 2026, Canada launched a national artificial intelligence strategy called "AI for All." The strategy is built on three principles, trust, opportunity, and sovereignty, and it sets one headline target: sixty percent of Canadian businesses adopting AI by 2034 (Government of Canada, 2026).

A target that size depends on physical capacity, the data centres and computing power that AI runs on, and that capacity was already being built before the strategy named the goal. Budget 2024 had committed \$2 billion to sovereign AI compute, including up to \$700 million for data-centre expansion (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2024a). The scale of the demand shows in Alberta, where requests to connect new data centres to the grid have passed 20,000 megawatts, even though the province's entire peak electricity demand is only about 12,000 (Alberta Electric System Operator, 2025).

That buildout has a geography, and the geography is why this paper exists. Canada's electricity is overwhelmingly generated in rural and remote communities and sent to its cities. An analysis done for this paper of Canada's fifty largest generating stations puts roughly three-quarters of their capacity outside metropolitan Canada (the method is in the project record). Data centres go where the power is.

The strategy names rural Canada directly, and this paper credits that. Through its National AI Literacy initiative, "Canada will empower public libraries and community organizations, long trusted as hubs for learning, as natural partners to bring AI literacy initiatives into every community, especially those in rural, remote, and northern regions" (Government of Canada, 2026). That sentence is the opening this paper builds on.

But naming rural and delivering to rural are different things, and the gap between them is this paper's subject. The literacy intent is named for rural; the delivery money is not. The \$200-million Regional Artificial Intelligence Initiative, which the strategy committed a further \$500 million to expand, carries no rural earmark (Government of Canada, 2026; Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2024a). And the named literacy channel has no rural delivery design behind it: naming libraries is not the same as guaranteeing the money, the method, and the local educators reach them. The channel is funded. Whether it reaches rural communities, and how, is the open question this paper takes up.

This paper's argument: the strategy's goals cannot be met without rural Canada as a partner. Not as a host that supplies land, water, and power to installations it had no hand in shaping, but as a partner with the capability to build, evaluate, and negotiate. The chapters that follow are the case.

## **1.2 The Build**

That argument rests on something the author saw first-hand, and the build is where this paper starts. Over roughly five weeks of part-time work, on a fresh consumer computer, the author customized and extended a large open-source software system for use in a heavily regulated field. He used free, standard developer tools he had never touched before; the AI taught him to install and use them as the work required. The build produced a working system with shipped features, a researched regulatory compliance framework, a competitive strategy, a brand identity, a security architecture, and a certification-ready roadmap. It was done with AI as a working partner under a disciplined method, which Section 8 describes and a companion program turns into a teachable course.

The system is described generically because identifying it would identify the company it was built for. The claims about it are author-attested, with the author's verifiable public record above offered in their place. Three honest caveats: the author was not a true novice, his web background mattered; human review was both the bottleneck and the safeguard; and a single documented success proves what is possible, not what is typical.

## **1.3 The Road Ahead**

The paper proceeds in plain steps. A short brief on where Canada stands (Section 2). How Canada's rural innovation supports compare with its peers (Section 3). The buildout now reaching rural ground, and why the pushback is rational (Section 4). The knowledge vacuum behind that pushback (Section 5). What the capital behind the buildout means for communities holding permanent exposure (Section 6). What has just become possible for the people who hold rural Canada's operational knowledge (Section 7), and how to teach it (Section 8). How to get delivery right (Section 9). What this paper recommends, by audience (Section 10), and why the window is now (Section 11).

## Section 2. Where Canada Stands: A Brief

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Readers in government know this ground, so this section is a reminder, not a tour. Four facts carry the rest of the paper.

Canada is adopting AI slowly. In 2025, 12.2 percent of Canadian firms used AI, double the year before. By comparison, the European Union's enterprise average was 20 percent, with Denmark at 42 (Li & Liu, 2026; Eurostat, 2025; the two surveys count slightly different things, so read the gap as rough, not exact). The new national strategy targets sixty percent by 2034 (Government of Canada, 2026).

Slow adoption matters because it shows up in productivity. The Bank of Canada called six straight quarters of falling labour productivity an emergency in 2024 ("it's time to break the glass," its phrase for reaching for emergency measures) and named AI the candidate fix in 2026: how big the gains are "depends on how fast and how broadly AI is adopted" (Rogers, 2024; Alexopoulos, 2026). How broadly is the question this paper turns on.

The prize is large on every estimate. The government's own target is roughly \$200 billion in added GDP over five years; independent estimates run from half a point of productivity growth per year to a conditional \$350 billion scenario (Government of Canada, 2026; Acemoglu, 2024; Filippucci et al., 2025; Goldman Sachs, 2023; Business Development Bank of Canada [BDC], 2026). The numbers disagree; the direction does not.

And one finding is the turning point of this paper. Statistics Canada's own firm-level research found the measured AI productivity gain shrinks to nothing once skills, infrastructure, and complementary capability are accounted for. In the study's words, "AI adoption in isolation is likely insufficient" (Li & Liu, 2026). The upside is real, and it is conditional on capability, not on hardware. Everything that follows builds on that finding.

## Section 3. Rural Canada Against Its Peers

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### 3.1 The Stakes

About one in five Canadians lives in a rural region, and rural Canada produces roughly a quarter of national GDP; the equivalent American share is around ten percent, which shows how much weight rural Canada carries (OECD, 2024). That weight is not just volume: rural labour productivity is actually higher than urban, roughly \$116,000 against \$112,000 in GDP per worker, though resource industries drive much of that (OECD, 2024). Rural Canada is not the problem.

The trajectory is the worry. Rural productivity grew at less than half the urban rate from 2011 to 2019. The rural population share is falling faster than the OECD average, and the young working-age share is falling at nearly three times the OECD rate (OECD, 2024). Statistics Canada gave that trajectory its human version a generation ago: fifty-six percent of rural teenagers had left their communities within a decade, education a leading driver, and a quarter or fewer returned (Statistics Canada, 2000).

### 3.2 What the Peers Built, and What Canada Built

Canada's peers run dedicated rural innovation architecture, and they have run it for decades. The European Union reserves a share of its €95.5 billion rural development fund for community-led local delivery, a design now in its fourth decade (European Commission, 2024). The United States runs a permanent rural development agency with offices in every state and a broadband program restricted to communities under twenty thousand people (USDA, 2024). The UK, Ireland, and Finland check every policy for rural impact as a standing obligation.

Canada is not empty-handed: a \$3.2 billion rural broadband fund, a rural economic strategy since 2019, seven regional development agencies. But the gaps are specific. The rural strategy is built around broadband; innovation is not its main focus. The regional agencies carry no standing rural earmark for innovation delivery. The flagship AI delivery money, \$700 million through those same agencies, carries no rural earmark either (Government of Canada, 2026). And Canada once had the peers' practice, then stopped using it: a federal Rural Lens, created in 1998 to check policy for rural impact (rural proofing, the habit of checking a new policy's effect on rural places before it passes), has not been used since 2013 (Hall & Gibson, 2017). Canada built rural proofing before most of its peers, then dropped it while they kept theirs.

### 3.3 The Gap, in the OECD's Voice

The sharpest sentence belongs to the OECD, from its 2024 review of rural innovation in Canada: "The current federal innovation policy has an inherent urban bias" (OECD, 2024). Federal innovation money flows largely through urban universities; rural support exists but is not systematic. The OECD's remedies point at the peer table: restore the rural lens and build grassroots delivery capacity.

Nobody is measuring rural innovation, either. Canada publishes no rural innovation statistics and no rural breakdown of AI adoption in any release. The OECD's analysts had to build

their own rural indicators from tax data to write their review, and their first formal recommendation was that Statistics Canada start publishing rural innovation statistics (OECD, 2024). One usable comparison exists: twenty-seven percent of rural small businesses adopted at least one advanced technology between 2018 and 2020, against thirty-five percent of urban ones (Statistics Canada, 2025–2026; Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada [ISED], 2024b). A country that does not measure where a fifth of its people stand cannot design for them.

### **3.4 The Question This Adds Up To**

How can rural Canada keep up with AI, and how can rural communities weigh hosting the data-centre buildout now arriving on their land, when the supports were never designed for them and nobody measures where they stand? The next two sections take the question's two halves: the buildout, and the knowledge gap it is landing on.

## **Section 4. The Buildout: Data Centres, Power, and the Rural Ground They Need**

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### **4.1 The Promise**

The Bank of Canada has tied the data-centre buildout to a clear benefit: "The massive buildout of data centre capacity... should eventually make accessing advanced AI tools cheaper and easier. And that, in turn, should encourage more Canadian businesses to use AI at scale" (Alexopoulos, 2026). This section is about what stands between that promise and rural Canada.

### **4.2 The Buildout Is Real, and It Is Siting Rural**

The money is committed. Budget 2024 put \$2 billion into sovereign AI compute (computing power kept on Canadian soil), including up to \$700 million for commercial AI data centres, and the strategy names the siting logic itself: Canada's advantages in "energy, land and climate" (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2024a).

The demand is running ahead of the grid that has to carry it. In Alberta, requests to connect data centres have passed 20,000 megawatts, against an all-time peak provincial demand of about 12,000. The grid operator has had to cap new connections at 1,200 megawatts, and even that cap is already fully spoken for (Alberta Electric System Operator, 2025).

Private capital is moving just as fast. Bell's 300-megawatt Sherwood project, the largest purpose-built AI data centre in Canada, is under construction, and Alberta's project queue grew from two data centres to more than thirty in eighteen months (TD Economics, 2025).

And the new projects are siting in rural and small communities: Sherwood, in a rural municipality ringing Regina; Ritchot, on Manitoba farmland; Fox Creek, Pincher Creek, Caroline, and Keephills in Alberta, where the grid operator's entire first batch of approvals went to two rural-county projects (Alberta Electric System Operator, 2025).

They are siting rural because the power is rural. An analysis done for this paper of Canada's fifty largest generating stations puts roughly three-quarters of their capacity outside metropolitan Canada, a conservative figure, with the method in the project record (Natural Resources Canada, n.d.; Canada Energy Regulator, 2024a). The country's three largest generating stations sit beside communities of twelve thousand, a few hundred, and six hundred and fifty people. That is permanent geography: hydro is where the rivers are, and few good hydro sites remain near big cities. Data centres go where the power is. The power is rural.

### **4.3 And Rural Canada Is Saying No**

In one region, in four months, the record shows two ways this can fail.

Sherwood, April 2026: about two hundred people protested at the Saskatchewan legislature. On the day of the vote, about one hundred stood locked out of the rural

municipality's office while a council, four of whose seven members had been provincially appointed days earlier, voted unanimously to proceed. The episode is logged by the OECD's AI incident monitor, and a First Nation's duty-to-consult objection is on the record (OECD.AI, 2026; George Gordon First Nation, 2026). The project's estimated value is \$12 billion, by the proponent's own figure (Bell Canada, 2026).

Ritchot, June 2026: a petition against a hyperscale data centre on farmland south of Winnipeg gathered more than thirteen thousand signatures, and Manitoba's premier rejected the largest data-centre proposal in the province's history. His words: "There's a big threat to the environment and not much benefit to the economy" (Canadian Press, 2026). The proponent has not conceded, and the record is in motion, but the proposal stands rejected. The rejection came the same day Canada launched its national AI strategy, which promises data centres with "tangible benefits for local communities" (Government of Canada, 2026).

This is not a Prairie quirk. In the United States, one tracking project counts \$64 billion in data-centre projects blocked or delayed by local opposition (Data Center Watch, 2025; a US count by an AI-security firm).

#### 4.4 The Pushback Is Rational

The objectors have valid concerns, and they come first: water, noise, farmland, and property values at Ritchot; consultation and consent at Sherwood. Nothing here reduces those to a knowledge problem.

But notice what failed. The benefits were offered, and they gained no traction. At Ritchot, the proponent offered five hundred jobs, union wages, millions in annual local taxes, closed-loop cooling, and a waste-heat greenhouse. The community petitioned against the project anyway, and the premier rejected it (Consensus Core, 2026; Canadian Press, 2026). An offer a community has never been given the trust and the tools to evaluate is an offer it cannot credit, however genuine it is.

Polling in the very province that said no shows the gap in numbers. More than three-quarters of Manitobans fear AI will take their jobs; only eight percent of Manitoba businesses expect to cut anyone. That is a fear-to-reality gap of nearly ten to one (Probe Research, 2026; this was an online panel in one province, so read it with that limit). And the finding that matters most: rural Manitobans were more open to data centres than Winnipeggers, thirty-nine percent to twenty-nine. Rural opposition is not the story. Rural communities are more open to the buildout than the city next door, and equally far from the tools to evaluate it. Workers who use AI tend to see it as an opportunity; those who do not expect losses (Alexopoulos, 2026). Who gets to be a user is the policy choice.

#### 4.5 The Ask

**This paper asks for two things, and Sections 9 and 10 turn them into designs.**

**First: build rural capacity into the buildout.** An AI strategy that needs rural land, power, and consent must build rural capacity to construct, run, and supply data centres: trades,

operations jobs, and local supply chains. Build with the community, do not fly in, build, and leave. The strategy already promises "tangible benefits for local communities." This paper asks for the mechanism that makes the promise binding. Resource development's impact-benefit agreements prove the instrument already exists, and more than 500 of them are in force in Canada today (Mining Association of Canada, 2023). The ask is to make them the default for data centres, with the benefits written in as binding terms rather than goodwill. And the community needs a voice where the terms are decided, not only at its own council table. Rural communities should have a representative on the federal and provincial committees that oversee data-centre development, so the people who host these facilities help shape the rules before the rules are set.

**Second: deliver AI training in rural communities, by rural educators.** This is the commitment Section 1 opened on: the strategy's own named channel for AI literacy is "public libraries and community organizations... especially those in rural, remote, and northern regions" (Government of Canada, 2026). The ask is to give that named intent a delivery design. The OECD's rural toolkit backs it: rural community actors "are ultimately best placed to know their comparative advantages" (OECD, 2025).

The same vacuum that explains the pushback is the thing this ask fixes. Sherwood and Ritchot together prove that benefit packages alone cannot buy consent where the trust and the tools to evaluate them were never provided.

Section 5 takes the vacuum itself: what it is, and what happened to the instruments that once measured it.

## Section 5. The Knowledge Vacuum

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### 5.1 The Divide Is No Longer Mostly Wires

The connectivity story has improved, and this paper says so plainly. By this paper's own computation from the regulator's open data, rural access to unlimited 50/10 megabit service (fast enough to stream video, hold video calls, and run a business online) rose from 38.9 percent of dwellings in 2016 to 86.1 percent in 2024 (CRTC Facilities Survey and Statistics Canada, 2024). Gaps remain: on First Nations reserves the figure is 69.3 percent, and Saskatchewan is the worst-connected rural province at 69.1.

But connectivity is only half the reason behind the divide. A community can have fibre to every farmhouse and still have no one down the road who can tell a believable AI claim from a far-fetched one. The weight of the argument now moves to skills, and to what happened to Canada's ability to even measure them.

### 5.2 The Vacuum in the Government's Own Tables

Three findings, all from the government's own instruments.

Rural businesses do not see the relevance. In Statistics Canada's most recent rural business survey, two in three rural businesses had no plans to invest in advanced technologies; of those, four in five "consider such investments irrelevant to their operations" (Statistics Canada, 2025). Urban businesses were nearly as unlikely to plan such investment, so the gap is not in the plans. The story is in the reason. Relevance is invisible from inside a vacuum: a business that has never seen a peer down the highway use these tools profitably has no basis on which the investment could look relevant.

Where exposure exists, it is shallow. Two-thirds of Manitobans used AI in the past year, mostly in incidental forms: drafting emails, recommendations, search. Rural Manitoba use, at 69 percent, was higher than Winnipeg's (Probe Research, 2026).

And the gap was measured. Statistics Canada's own typology of internet users found rural residents ten percentage points less likely to be advanced users, twice, in 2018 and again in 2020, the most recent available (Wavrock, Schellenberg & Schimmele, 2021, 2022).

What drives that gap is not rurality itself. The study's own analysis points the cause elsewhere: age and education drive the differences. And education is exactly where rural access has lagged longest, because living far from a university limits attendance: students more than eighty kilometres away were 58 percent as likely to attend as those nearby (Frenette, 2002, 2003; older work, cited for the mechanism). Distance limits education, education builds skills, and the gap in the tables is the result of that chain, not a community's choice.

### **5.3 Then the Instruments Were Lost**

Where Canada measured, it found the gap. Then the instruments lost their rural reach. The international skills survey that enabled Canada's rural skills research cut its Canadian sample by more than half between cycles, dropped its regional oversample, and dropped its technology-skills section; a federally funded skills agency spells out the result: regional analysis "will suffer" (Lamb & Munro, 2025). The AI-era surveys have no rural reach at all: the largest global study of AI literacy places Canada 44th of 47 countries on AI training, but its Canadian sample permits no rural cut (Gillespie et al., 2025). Even the rural business survey this section opened with has published no edition since early 2025.

Section 3 documented a federal rural lens that was built and then dropped. The measurement record runs the same way: where the gap was measured, it was found; the capacity to measure has thinned since; nothing measures rural AI literacy in Canada today.

### **5.4 It Is Not the People**

There is an obvious hypothesis under any discussion of rural communities and AI claims: that rural residents are more susceptible to technology misinformation. This paper tested it against the best Canadian evidence, and it failed.

Statistics Canada's own misinformation study carries rural and urban rows in all its tables, and the differences in exposure and in difficulty telling true from false are not statistically significant (Statistics Canada, 2026). What is significant runs against the stereotype: rural Canadians use social media as a news source markedly less than urban Canadians. Independent academic work found the same null in the 2021 election (Media Ecosystem Observatory, 2022). Rural trust in news media is identical to urban, at 15 percent (Statistics Canada, 2024). Rural Canadians are not more credulous. Whatever is going wrong, it is not the people.

### **5.5 What Actually Differs: Nobody Local to Ask**

The documented difference is structural, and it has two halves.

Local news is disappearing. Between 2008 and April 2026, 613 local news outlets closed in 391 communities across Canada; 73 percent of the closures were community newspapers, the format that serves small and rural places (Local News Research Project, 2026; a university-led tracking project). Launches do not offset the closures, and the replacements are mostly internet-delivered, in exactly the places with the worst connectivity.

And local people who could weigh technical claims were never there in the first place. Fewer local outlets, plus fewer local people equipped to judge a technical claim, means fewer chances for any claim, hype or fear alike, to meet a knowledgeable challenge close to home.

There is a specifically Canadian twist. When local news and local expertise are absent, the information that fills the space is calibrated to the wrong rulebook. US stories about data centres describe US power markets and US environmental review. The projects down the road in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are governed by neither: electricity in both provinces comes from

Crown corporations, and Manitoba projects run through the province's own licensing process with its public registry and comment periods (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d.; Manitoba Hydro, n.d.; Government of Manitoba, n.d.). Residents researching the Ritchot proposal circulated a US newswire story. The evidence they gathered was never measured against the rules that actually govern the local project. That is the vacuum operating, not anyone being misinformed.

## 5.6 What Fills a Vacuum, and the Ask

Fear fills it first. More than 75 percent of Manitobans fear AI will take jobs away. Only 8 percent of Manitoba businesses expect to cut anyone, down from 14 percent the year before (Probe Research, 2026). And the fear is growing with exposure, not despite it: very negative views of AI nearly doubled in the same year reported use grew. Rising negativity alongside rising shallow use is what exposure without evaluative capacity looks like. Hype fills the vacuum just as easily; it has no preference. It amplifies whoever shows up.

The public is asking for the missing layer. Only three in ten Manitobans think enough safeguards exist; 95 percent want AI content labelled (Probe Research, 2026). The appetite for the evaluative capacity this paper proposes is in the data.

**The ask: build the literacy, in rural, delivered by rural.** A sovereign AI buildout hosted by communities that were never given the means to evaluate it is sovereignty in name only. The strategy already names the channel: AI literacy through "public libraries and community organizations... especially those in rural, remote, and northern regions" (Government of Canada, 2026). Partnership requires literacy that is built in rural communities, delivered by rural educators, and calibrated to the Canadian rules that actually govern the projects. Sections 8 and 9 show how.

## **Section 6. The Capital Behind the Buildout, and the Dark Fiber Lesson**

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### **6.1 The People Running the System Are Weighing the Risk Out Loud**

This paper does not claim AI is a bubble, and it does not claim the opposite. What it claims, a rural reader can verify without taking anyone's word about the future: the people responsible for watching the financial system are publicly weighing the possibility, right now.

The Bank of Canada's Governor said in October 2025 that AI-company valuations "look stretched" and that a shift in sentiment could produce a "sharp downward revaluation" (The Logic, 2025; Bank of Canada, 2025). The Bank's 2026 Financial Stability Report put it in writing: valuations "appear increasingly stretched compared with historical levels," market value is concentrated in a handful of AI-heavy firms, and "a correction in these sectors would have an outsized impact" (Bank of Canada, 2026). Goldman Sachs tracks AI investment commitments in the trillions against AI revenues that remain, for now, a small fraction of that (Goldman Sachs, 2025). And the premier of Manitoba, rejecting the Ritchot project, called the surge in data-centre proposals a "gold rush" and a "potential bubble" (Canadian Press, 2026). A sitting premier with a multi-billion-dollar project in front of him priced the possibility that the boom may not hold.

None of these voices is predicting a crash, and neither is this paper. They are pricing the possibility that the boom ends badly, while it is still cheap to do so. Rural communities should be permitted to do exactly the same thing.

### **6.2 Canada Has Seen This Movie**

Between 1997 and 2000, telecom companies poured more than \$500 billion US into fibre-optic networks, far ahead of demand; by late 2002, no more than two percent of the new long-distance capacity was being used (Litan, 2002). When the correction came, shareholders lost roughly \$2 trillion US and half a million telecom workers lost their jobs (Litan, 2002). Canada was in it: Vancouver's 360networks, briefly valued near \$21 billion, filed for creditor protection in 2001 amid a court-recorded glut of fibre capacity, and Nortel announced a \$19 billion quarterly loss the same month (Couper, Hejkal & Wolman, 2003).

There are serious reasons today's buildout may not repeat that ending: the companies funding most of it are profitable incumbents building from cash flow, demand for computing is observed rather than forecast, and the capital sits on strong balance sheets (Alderson, 2025). Those arguments deserve full strength. But the Bank of Canada's 2026 report includes a chart showing the technology sector's share of US stock-market value back at nearly its dot-com peak (Bank of Canada, 2026). The country's central bank is drawing the comparison in its own publications.

And whether or not the bust repeats, one part of the pattern already holds: in both cycles, infrastructure lands in communities on investors' timelines, and the community's exposure outlasts the investment. In 2025, private equity supplied 72 percent of US data-centre investment, a five-year high; the funds are built to exit in five to seven years (S&P Global Market Intelligence, 2025; Georgetown Global Real Assets, 2024; US figures). The land-use decision, the grid connection, and the water allocation are permanent. The fund's horizon is five to seven years; the community's is the rest of its existence. Nobody at the table holds the community's timeline.

### 6.3 The Dark Fiber Lesson

The telecom bust left something physical behind: thousands of kilometres of fibre-optic cable, paid for by investors who lost everything, lying dark in the ground. What happened to that glass happened two different ways, and the difference is the lesson.

Where nobody acted for the public, the fibre rolled quietly into commercial hands, and the towns it passed through gained nothing. Where an institution acted, the bust's leftovers became public backbone. CANARIE, the federally supported research-network organization, built a national network substantially on dark fibre bought during the glut, on a model it called "condominium dark fibre": school boards, universities, and municipalities owning their own strands outright. "Optical networks for the rest of us," in CANARIE's phrase (Lightwave, 1999). Seventeen Quebec school boards and most Canadian universities got their own fibre that way. Manitoba Hydro later offered its own surplus dark fibre through a provincial process to bring broadband to rural, northern, and Indigenous communities (Province of Manitoba, 2020).

The lesson, stated plainly: the difference between a stranded asset and a community asset is not the glass. It is who claims the residue, and on what terms.

The same split applies to a data centre. The computers are not the residue; the industry itself debates whether AI chips hold value for even two years (CNBC, 2025; Goldman Sachs, 2025). What endures is the layer underneath: the substation and grid connection, the water and cooling systems, the building shell, and the fibre. That residue reaches the community only if the hosting terms secure it. A substation behind a fence belongs to whoever the contract says it belongs to.

### 6.4 The Ask: A Seat, and Five Table Stakes

**The community that holds the permanent exposure belongs in the room where the terms are set. Boom or bust.** If the boom holds, the terms decide whether a rural host shares in decades of value or just supplies the land and water. If it breaks, the terms decide whether the community inherits backbone or a fenced-off shell. The only scenario where terms don't matter is the one where the community never gets to set any.

**Five terms are the minimum worth securing before saying yes.** Every one already exists in Canadian practice:

**Enforceable community benefits.** More than 500 binding benefit agreements are in force between companies and Indigenous communities, principally in resource development (Mining Association of Canada, 2023). The precedent is mature. The ask is to apply it to data centres.

**Decommissioning and asset-residue terms.** Alberta already requires wind and solar operators to post financial security covering full decommissioning costs (Government of Alberta, 2025a), and the federal regulator requires pipeline companies to set aside funds for abandonment and decommissioning in the same way (Canada Energy Regulator, 2024b). Extend the same logic to data centres, with terms that pass the durable residue, grid connection, water systems, shell, and fibre, to community use if the operator leaves.

**Grid and water terms with community standing.** The commitments a data centre needs from the power and water systems are commitments the community lives inside. The community should have formal standing in setting them.

**Transparency on ownership and exit.** A community negotiating with a fund designed to exit in five to seven years needs to know who owns the project, what the exit looks like, and what survives a change of control, in terms it can publish.

**Local hiring and training tied to capability.** Employment and training terms are standard in the benefit-agreement tradition. Tied to a data centre, they are also how a community builds the very capability this paper argues for.

A community equipped with Section 5's literacy and this section's terms is the partner, not the host. The last time capital this confident built infrastructure this fast across rural ground, the communities that ended up with backbone instead of bystander status were the ones where somebody was in the room.

## Section 7. The Opportunity: Domain Experts Can Now Build

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### 7.1 The Divide, Inverted

For as long as there has been a digital divide, the story has run one direction: technology arrives in cities first, and rural communities adopt it last, at higher cost, with less support. For one class of technology, that ordering has quietly inverted. Building software, until recently the most urban-concentrated productive activity in the economy, can now be done by the person who understands the problem, working with an AI assistant, from wherever that person lives. The inputs are no longer a team and a fundraising round. They are a connection, a subscription, domain knowledge, and discipline.

Two conditions sit underneath that sentence, and they are the ones the earlier sections fought for: connectivity, which most rural communities now have, and the literacy Section 5 demanded. Where those exist, rural communities are no longer at the back of the line. They can jump the line, because the scarce input is no longer the engineering. It is knowing, in operational detail, which problem is worth solving. That input rural Canada has in abundance.

### 7.2 What One Build Proves

In roughly five weeks of part-time work, the author, a non-developer whose career was sales and management, built a working software system in a heavily regulated field, using a consumer computer, an internet connection, and AI assistance (the build is described in Section 1, with its anonymity explained there). What that build needed, and what it did not, is the whole point.

What it took: an ordinary computer, AI subscriptions costing about what a phone plan costs, free tools, persistence, and the discipline of verifying the AI's work rather than taking it on faith. The author had never used the standard developer tools; the AI taught them mid-build, in plain English, as they became necessary. What it did not take: a computer science degree, a development team, venture funding, or proximity to a tech hub. Every item on that second list was, until recently, a hard requirement, and every item is a reason such software has rarely been produced in rural places.

One more entry on the bill, and Section 8 is built on it: the human was both the bottleneck and the safeguard. Every output was reviewed. Research was treated as unverified until checked, and professionally validated where it mattered. The build went no faster than one person's ability to verify it, which is exactly why it worked.

### 7.3 Not Just One Person

The record beyond one build is growing, and each entry is identified by what kind of source it is.

A US farm-business consultancy with three decades of practice had always run its flagship cost-of-production tool as a spreadsheet. In spring 2026, two students on the family team rebuilt it as a free web application in, by the firm's own account, "a few days," at a cost of "a few hundred dollars" against the tens of thousands a development team would have charged (Foulk, 2026; the firm's own telling). A Globe and Mail reporter with no coding background built a working application over a few mornings and documented the failures along the way (Castaldo, 2025). The former editor-in-chief of a national magazine described building "a working tool I'm actually going to use" before her household woke (Plosser, 2026).

The world's most experienced users have converged on the same posture. In Stack Overflow's 2025 survey of roughly 49,000 developers, 84 percent use or plan to use AI tools, yet more developers distrust the output than trust it, and three-quarters say they consult humans "when I don't trust AI's answers" (Stack Overflow, 2025). Professional developers, in other words, use the tools constantly and verify everything. That is not evidence against this section. It is the field independently arriving at Section 8's method.

The strongest contrary study belongs here too. A 2025 randomized trial found experienced developers were slower with AI tools on codebases they knew intimately (Becker et al., 2025). Its own authors fenced the result, named less-experienced builders in unfamiliar code as the population AI plausibly does help, and in 2026 retired the finding: re-measured with newer tools, the same developers showed an 18 percent speedup (METR, 2026).

One limit: the corroborating instances are American or urban. The search for this paper found no published account of a named rural-Canadian builder yet. The author's build is, for now, the rural-Canadian instance, which is why this section claims a mechanism, not a movement. The mechanism is demonstrated. The movement is the opportunity.

## **7.4 Why This Matters Most in Rural Canada**

Canada keeps its hardest problems on rural ground. The federal government's own rural strategy lists rural Canada's key sectors: mining, forestry, agriculture, fisheries, energy, and electricity production (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2019a). Those are the sectors at the centre of every transition Canada is navigating, and the operational knowledge of those systems lives where the systems run: with the field worker who knows what data the site actually generates, the farmer who knows why the last software pilot failed at harvest, the operator who runs water treatment for eight hundred people.

Until now, converting that knowledge into tools required translating it: to a city development team, through requirements documents, at consulting rates. The record of that translation is grim. An analysis of eighteen agricultural-technology shutdowns found most failed not on the science but on adoption: the cost and burden of the technology exceeded what farms could absorb, even when it worked (Chandra & Lal, 2026; a university white paper). Well-funded teams keep building things that die at the farm gate, because the people with the missing knowledge were on the wrong side of the translation.

AI-assisted building collapses that distance. The domain expert no longer translates the problem to a builder. The domain expert builds. The people whose knowledge the transitions need most were the people the old economics of software served last. The new economics serve them first, if the literacy arrives too. An IRPP study of generative AI's reach makes the same conditional from the opposite direction: these tools are now accessible to individual workers through everyday applications, but "without proper AI literacy and digital skills, workers may use these tools ineffectively or inappropriately, potentially reducing rather than enhancing productivity" (Oschinski & Walia, 2025). Accessibility is the easy half. The literacy is the half that decides whether access becomes capability. That is the turning point of this paper.

## **7.5 Gatekeepers and Guardrails**

One distinction protects everything above. A gatekeeper decides whether you may build. A guardrail decides whether what you built is safe.

The documented failures of AI-assisted building are guardrail stories, every one. A viral platform built by an entrepreneur who boasted he "didn't write a single line of code" was breached within days through a missing basic access control (Nagli, 2026). An AI coding agent deleted a production database during a declared code freeze (The Register, 2025). A security firm's testing finds known flaws in roughly 45 percent of AI-generated code when no security guidance is provided (Veracode, 2026; the vendor's own instrument). A small cleanup economy now fixes AI-built applications shipped full of errors (Castaldo, 2025).

Read the list again and notice what is missing. Not one failure happened because a funding committee or an expert intermediary was absent. Every one happened because nobody reviewed the output, checked the defaults, or held the verification line. The gatekeepers would not have saved these builders; the guardrails would have. The author's build bypassed every gatekeeper and kept every guardrail, and that combination is what produced a working system in a regulated field. The failure record is not the case against rural people building. It is the syllabus for teaching them to build well.

## **7.6 The Stake, and the Chain**

A disclosure belongs here. Innovation Saskatchewan committed \$149,000 over three years in May 2026 to expand rural tech capability through the author's organization (Government of Saskatchewan, 2026). The author's organization receives that funding, the author teaches this capability, and this paper recommends investing in it. Weigh the argument with the interest declared.

Now the chain. Section 5 argued rural communities need literacy to evaluate what they are offered. Section 6 argued the community holding permanent exposure deserves the seat where terms are set. This section completes it: a community that can build no longer has to take anyone's word. Not the vendor's word about what the software does, not the proponent's word about what the technology requires, not the consultant's word about what is feasible. Literacy makes a community able to evaluate; the seat makes it able to negotiate; capability makes both credible, because the other side of the table knows the community can check.

## Section 8. Teaching It

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### 8.1 From Proof to Method

The capability Section 7 demonstrated is not a talent some people have. It is a set of working habits, and habits can be taught. The author did not know the developer tools when the build began; the AI taught them, mid-build, by being asked in plain English. If the AI can teach the tools, the tools are not what a course needs to teach. What no AI supplies is the discipline for using it safely: knowing what to check, when to slow down, and what never to hand over. That discipline is this section. A companion program document turns it into a course a rural community can run.

### 8.2 The Method, in Five Parts

None of the five parts requires a technical background. All of them require taking the work seriously.

**First: build the guardrails before deciding anything.** Before the first decision, use the AI to build three reference documents: a market guardrail (what customers actually need and what competitors do), a regulatory guardrail (every rule governing the field, in one place), and a design guardrail (what good looks like). A professional team has consultants for those questions; a solo builder rebuilds their function as researched, verified documents. One caveat is part of the method: AI research is labeled by confidence and verified before relied on, and professional sign-off stays wherever the stakes are high.

**Second: divide the labour, and keep the human in charge.** Use two AI assistants in different roles. A planning assistant works in plain English: it holds the plans and the project's memory, and it never touches code. A building assistant writes, tests, and tracks versions. The human sits between them and decides at every fork. The person never has to hold the whole project in their head, and the person never trusts an unsupervised AI. The structure makes both impossible.

**Third: work in slices.** Pick one piece. Define what done means, in writing, before building. Build it, verify it, and audit it against the plan before calling it finished. The slice is small enough to verify completely. That is the point.

**Fourth: verify in layers.** Automated tests prove the thing does what it was built to do. Then the human walks through it the way a real user would, because the walkthrough catches what tests cannot. When the walkthrough finds one hole, hunt the whole class of holes before fixing the one.

**Fifth: set the safety rules before the work begins.** Plan first, get approval, then execute. Show every change before anything is deleted. Refuse destructive commands. Honest diagnosis over reassurance. And the rule newcomers find most counter-intuitive: the AI works alone only when the work cannot touch anything live, the worst case is redoing it, and a test can prove it works. Anything else waits for human review.

The cost should be stated with the method, because the cost is the design: the human is the bottleneck and the safeguard. This is not teaching people to go fast with AI. It is teaching them to be the bottleneck well.

### **8.3 Every Failure, a Missing Part**

Section 7's failure record maps onto the method exactly. The breached platform: no one reviewed the build against a security baseline (parts four and five). The deleted database: no separation of live systems, no gate on destructive commands (part five). The 45 percent flaw rate, measured "when no security guidance is explicitly provided": the guardrails and rules are the guidance whose absence is being measured (parts one and five). The cleanup economy's broken apps: no slices, no defined done, no walkthrough (parts three and four). The agricultural shutdowns that proved the science but not the adoption: the market homework was never done (part one).

None of this is the author's invention, and that is the strongest thing that can be said for it. The Linux Foundation's open-source security body, not a vendor with a product to sell, published its AI coding guidance in 2025, and its first principle is the method's second part almost verbatim: "You Are the Developer – AI is the Assistant," with the instruction to never blindly accept suggestions (OpenSSF, 2025). Even the vendor at the centre of the deleted-database incident rebuilt the method's own controls within weeks: separated live systems and a planning-only mode (Replit, 2025a, 2025b). The five parts are the documented form of what the field independently arrived at.

### **8.4 Teachable, Through Channels That Exist**

Three pieces of evidence say this can be taught where this paper's readers govern.

Exposure changes the relationship. The Bank of Canada found workers who use AI see it as an opportunity creator, while those who do not expect losses, and drew the teaching corollary itself: as more workers build these skills, "it should help hasten AI adoption and speed up the productivity gains" (Alexopoulos, 2026).

The delivery infrastructure exists. Library systems, adult-learning centres, and hub workshops already deliver skills programming at scale, and both orders of government fund them. The federal strategy names the channel itself. Alberta granted \$200,000 across thirty-seven rural library boards in 2025 for digital-skills programming (Government of Alberta, 2025b). What has not yet been carried through these proven channels is the AI-building discipline itself. That gap is the opportunity.

And rural delivery has begun, at small scale, in the author's own community (interest disclosed in Section 7; reported independently). The reason it matters is the one the author gave in that reporting: without a program like this, people "can give up and not commercialize, or they can pick up their entire life and move it into a city. That's not a good option" (Cole, 2026). A teachable discipline removes the second bad choice. The knowledge is already in the home setting. The method is how it stays there and still becomes something.

Three boundaries close the section. The method manages risk; it does not guarantee outcomes. It does not produce professional engineers, and professional sign-off stays wherever stakes are high. And it will outlive the tools it is taught on, because the parts no platform can supply are the human ones: deciding what to build, defining done, and doing the homework no platform does for a particular business in a particular town.

## Section 9. Getting Delivery Right

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### 9.1 The Money Flows; the Last Mile Is Undesigned

Canada is not failing to fund rural innovation. It is failing to design how the funding gets there.

The Regional Artificial Intelligence Initiative, \$200 million from Budget 2024 plus the strategy's further \$500 million, flows through the seven regional development agencies with no rural earmark and no delivery guarantee (ISED, 2025a; Government of Canada, 2026). The agencies do fund rural work. But when rural delivery happens, it happens because someone chose it, not because the program was designed to produce it. The last mile is left to discretion.

Designed delivery is not hypothetical. In May 2026, Innovation Saskatchewan invested \$149,000 over three years directly in the Southeast Techhub in Estevan, straight to the rural organization doing the delivery, with published terms (Government of Saskatchewan, 2026). A disclosure is owed again here: the author's organization is an example of, and a beneficiary of, the direct-funding model this section examines. And a caution with it: one working instance proves the model is administrable, not that it is superior. Whether it should become a design principle is what the rest of this section assembles evidence for.

### 9.2 Canada Has Run the Design Since 1985

The arresting precedent is domestic. In 1985, the federal government launched the Community Futures Program to tackle rural underemployment, and its design is the design this section argues for: communities co-design their economic strategy and deliver it through a locally governed organization. Four decades later, 256 community-governed Community Futures organizations deliver on \$79 million in annual federal funding, and Canada's national evaluation found the program cost-effective with "a strong need" for what it does, "particularly in smaller and more remote communities" (ISED, 2019b). The OECD's survey of twenty-three countries singles the program out as a model (OECD, 2025).

The Community Futures network sits inside the same regional-agency family that delivers the new AI money. The architecture this paper asks for is not a new institution. It is a delivery design Canada has operated for forty years, one organizational chart away from the programs that need it. Community Futures organizations and local Economic Development Stewardship Committees are the place-based bodies already positioned to host these hubs and carry the training into their own regions. The ask is routing, not construction.

### 9.3 The Empty Seat

Who sits at the tables where AI terms are being set? The federal government publishes the membership of its two principal AI advisory bodies, so the question can be answered by reading. The thirty-eight published biographies cover institute heads, executives, professors, investors, a union researcher, and the First Nations Technology Council. Among them, the number of rural delivery practitioners, the people who run rural tech hubs, Community Futures

organizations, rural municipalities, and rural training providers, is zero (ISED, 2025b, 2025c). The claim is precise and checkable: the role is unrepresented.

Nobody is contesting the absence, either. The civil-society coalition that publicly campaigned over the task force's composition listed the missing seats it saw; rural was not on their list (Gandhi, 2025). The rural seat has no campaign. The same pattern runs provincially: Alberta's data-centre levy followed "a six-week consultation with industry stakeholders," and the rural municipalities' association was left organizing afterward to reach "future decisions" (Rural Municipalities of Alberta, 2025). The communities that will host the facilities were organizing to reach a table where the terms had already been set once.

The fix is additive: add practitioner seats where buildout terms are set, before they are set. Peer regulation already includes provisions keeping any one interest from dominating, so this is adopting governance, not inventing it (European Commission, n.d.).

## **9.4 Rural-to-Rural Delivery**

Who decides what flows through the rural learning channels? The international evidence points one direction: the communities themselves. The EU has run that principle for three decades, on regulation that says "local people are the best experts to drive the development of their own territory"; its own auditor confirms the model can be sustained at scale, while noting its full benefits are still being proven (European Commission, n.d.; European Court of Auditors, 2022). Australia's regional study hubs, which let rural students learn where they live, have created "a new population of university-educated people" among those bound to place (Baker et al., 2025).

The rural-to-rural layer adds what top-down delivery cannot: transmission between peers. The Southeast Techhub shares its incubator model with other rural communities, community to community (offered under the disclosure already given, as an observed channel, not a proof).

## **9.5 The Benefit Instrument: An Open Window**

Canadian resource development spent decades maturing instruments for exactly the situation rural communities now face: a large outside investment arrives, the community hosts its permanent consequences, and the terms decide who benefits. More than 500 binding agreements are in force. What does not yet exist is the application of that class to data centres. The first known data-centre community benefits agreement anywhere was signed only recently, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; the law school tracking such agreements calls the practice "still an emerging" one, and this paper's searches found no published Canadian instance (Nolette, 2026).

Industries form their norms in their first buildout wave, and the Canadian wave is now. The Lancaster agreement shows what binding terms look like: a clean-energy requirement backed by a \$10-million letter of credit, a hard cap on water use, enforcement up to discontinuation of operations. Its weaknesses teach too: hiring "goals" instead of binding floors, and a community group that saw the agreement two days before the vote (Nolette, 2026).

Canada's flagship rural deal shows the gap from the domestic side. Sherwood's agreement with Bell is genuinely strong on protections: sixteen conditions, acoustic limits, a ban on groundwater for cooling, well testing at the proponent's cost (D'Souza Butts, 2026; Smith, 2026). What the reported conditions do not contain is any commitment on local construction labour, training, or local supply chains. The protection half was secured; the benefit half is missing. If it is missing from the flagship agreement, negotiated at a capital city's doorstep, it will be missing in remoter municipalities with thinner capacity, unless it becomes the default.

## 9.6 The Ask

### **Five delivery fixes, none of which requires a new institution:**

**Design the rural last mile.** Route the AI delivery money through the locally governed design Canada has run since 1985.

**Fill the empty seat.** Put rural delivery practitioners at the tables where buildout terms are set, before they are set.

**Let communities choose their help.** Fund delivery directly, with published terms, and let rural communities select and share their own programming through the channels that already exist.

**Make benefit agreements the data-centre default,** with binding local-benefit terms, while the window for setting norms is open.

**Seat rural communities on the oversight bodies.** Give rural communities a standing representative on the federal and provincial committees that govern data-centre development, before the terms are set.

Section 10 turns these into formal recommendations.

## Section 10. Recommendations

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Nothing here asks anyone to invent. The federal government is asked to route money it has already committed through delivery designs it already runs, and to add one defined seat to tables it has already built. Provinces are asked to extend rules they already apply to wind and solar. Rural communities are asked to secure capability, terms, and seats before saying yes, using precedents that already exist. Industry is asked to adopt, while its Canadian norms are still forming, the benefit instruments that resource development matured decades ago.

One interest is declared once more: the author leads a rural delivery organization of the kind several of these recommendations would fund (Sections 7 and 9 carry the full disclosure). Nine of the twelve recommendations move no money toward any organization class the author belongs to; the three that could (R1, R3, R6) are the three this declaration names.

### For the Federal Government

**R1. Design the rural last mile into AI program delivery.** The \$700 million in regional AI money carries no rural delivery guarantee. Route it through the community-governed delivery design Canada has run since 1985, inside the same agency network that holds the money (Section 9).

**R2. Add the rural practitioner seat.** No rural delivery practitioner appears in the published membership of either federal AI advisory body. Appoint them before buildout terms are set, not after (Section 9).

**R3. Carry an AI-building curriculum through the strategy's own named channel.** The strategy names rural libraries and community organizations as its AI-literacy channel. Fund AI-capability training delivered in rural communities by rural educators through those channels. A companion program document provides a worked curriculum (Sections 5, 8).

**R4. Restore the rural measurement instruments.** Publish rural breakdowns of AI adoption and innovation statistics and reinstate rural digital-skills measurement. This is the OECD's own first recommendation to Canada. Canada measured the gap twice, found it both times, then lost the instruments (Sections 3, 5).

### For the Provinces

**R5. Extend decommissioning and asset-residue rules to data centres.** Alberta already mandates staged financial security for wind and solar. Apply the same logic to data centres, with terms that pass the durable residue, grid connection, water systems, shell, and fibre, to community use on operator exit (Section 6).

**R6. Establish direct investment streams for rural delivery organizations,** with published terms. Saskatchewan has shown it is administrable (Section 9).

**R7. Give host communities formal standing** in the grid and water arrangements large facilities require, and a standing rural representative on the federal and provincial committees that oversee data-centre development, before terms are set (Sections 6, 9).

## For Rural Communities

**R8. Secure the table stakes before saying yes.** Five terms: enforceable community benefits, decommissioning and residue terms, grid and water standing, transparency on ownership and exit, and local hiring tied to capability (Section 6). One test governs any benefit offer: when it arrived, who independently verified it, and what actually binds.

**R9. Build evaluation capability before the proposal arrives,** through the channels that exist and through peer communities that already deliver. Literacy makes a community able to evaluate; the seat makes it able to negotiate; capability makes both credible (Sections 5, 7, 8).

## For Industry

**R10. Make community-benefit agreements the default for rural data-centre builds, with local benefits written in as binding terms.** The instrument class is mature; the Canadian norms are forming now. Certainty and consent are worth buying while they are cheap (Sections 6, 9).

**R11. Build local, and bind it.** Local labour, supply chains, and training belong in the agreement, not the press release, as binding terms rather than goals and good-faith efforts (Sections 4, 9).

**R12. Publish the agreement.** An unpublished deal cannot set a public default (Section 9).

## The Twelve at a Glance

#	Recommendation	Who acts	Case made in
R1	Design the rural last mile into AI program delivery	Federal	9
R2	Add the rural practitioner seat	Federal	9
R3	Carry an AI-building curriculum through the named channel	Federal and provincial	5, 8
R4	Restore the rural measurement instruments	Federal	3, 5

R5	Extend decommissioning and residue rules to data centres	Provincial	6
R6	Establish direct investment streams for rural delivery	Provincial	9
R7	Give host communities standing, and a rural seat on oversight committees	Federal and provincial	6, 9
R8	Secure the table stakes, with the credibility test	Communities	4, 6
R9	Build evaluation capability first, rural-to-rural	Communities	5, 7, 8
R10	Make benefit agreements the default	Industry and federal	6, 9
R11	Build local, and bind it	Industry	4, 9
R12	Publish the agreement	Industry	6, 9

## Section 11. Conclusion

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This paper has traced a single chain. Canada trails its peers in putting AI to work, and the cost is carried by the whole country. The infrastructure wave meant to close the gap is landing where the power is, on rural ground. The communities hosting that wave were never given the supports their urban counterparts had; that is the finding of the country's own international reviewers. None of this reflects what rural people are capable of. The capability is provable and teachable, and the openness to the technology is already on the record.

What follows requires no invention. The delivery designs, the regulatory instruments, the benefit agreements, and the training channels all exist in Canadian or peer practice today. The recommendations ask only that the country route this moment through them.

The case for doing it now does not rest on knowing where the wave goes. If the buildout holds, the terms set in its first years decide whether host communities share in decades of value or merely supply the land, water, and power for it. If it breaks, those same terms decide whether communities inherit useful ground or fenced shells. Either way, the communities that hold the permanent exposure should hold a seat while the terms are still soft.

Rural Canada is not asking to be rescued by this moment. It is asking to be included in it. The author has watched, from inside one small Saskatchewan community, what happens when the tools arrive together with the means to learn them, and nothing in that experience suggests rural Canada needs the bar lowered. It needs the door opened. Partners, not hosts, is the standard worth setting. The precedents exist, the capability can be taught, and the window is open.

## About the Companion Program

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The teachable program this paper describes, ten sessions, run by a local educator through a library or community hub, exists as a standalone companion document: *The Program: AI-Assisted Building for Rural Communities*. It carries the session plans, the six safety rules in operational form, and the exercises. It circulates on its own so a community can pick it up without the policy case attached. The same interest disclosed in this paper applies to it.

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# The Program

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## **Gordon More**

AI-Assisted Building for Rural Communities • June 2026

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# The Program: AI-Assisted Building for Rural Communities

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*A companion to the paper "Rural Canada and the AI Moment" (More, 2026). The paper carries the evidence; this document carries the program.*

## 1. Who This Is for, and What Finishing Means

This program is for an adult with a real problem and no technical background: the person who runs the rink, the farm-supply store, the museum, the clinic's front desk, the municipal office, and who has known for years exactly what software their work needs and has never had a way to get it built. Domain knowledge is the entry requirement. Nothing else is.

It is designed to be run by a local educator through infrastructure rural communities already have: a library, an adult-learning centre, a community hub. Community Futures organizations and local Economic Development Stewardship Committees are well placed to anchor it, since hosting this kind of capability is already their work. The companion paper describes the method the program teaches and the evidence that it can be taught; this document is the program itself.

A learner who finishes the program leaves with four things: three guardrail documents for their own project, researched and standing; one working, verified slice of that project, built under the discipline; the six safety rules as working habits rather than a handout; and a written plan for the next slice. That is the whole promise, and its size is deliberate. The program does not produce professional software engineers. It does not promise an application, a product, or a business. And it does not replace professional validation where the stakes are high: legal, safety, and regulatory sign-off is a named step in this program, not an option a learner may skip. What the program produces is a person who can keep building safely after it ends, because the discipline, not the instructor, is what they take home.

One interest is declared because this document travels on its own: The author teaches this capability and leads an organization that delivers it.

## 2. The Program at a Glance

Ten weekly sessions of about two and a half hours, with working time between sessions. A cohort of six to ten learners, each with their own real project.

Session	What it teaches	What exists when it ends
1. The case, the project, the rules	Why discipline is the curriculum; the six rules as the program's contract	Each learner's problem stated in plain English

2. The market guardrail	Researching with the AI; labelling confidence; verifying before relying	A standing market document for each project
3. The regulatory guardrail	Compiling the rules that govern the learner's field; where professional sign-off stays	A standing regulatory document, with its limits written into it
4. The design guardrail and the gate	What good looks like; arguing a project against its own guardrails	A go, a pivot, or a better project; the decision in writing
5. The two-assistant rhythm	Dividing the labour; keeping the human in charge	The working setup, practised where mistakes are free
6. Slicing	Choosing one coherent piece; defining done in writing first	The first slice, defined; the safety rails confirmed
7. Build week	The rhythm on real work; honest diagnosis in practice	The slice, built and self-checked
8. Verify in layers	Tests, then the walkthrough; hunting the class, not the hole	The slice, verified and audited against its plan
9. Ship, capture, plan	Declaring done honestly; turning lessons into standing rules; the unattended-work gate	The slice shipped; the rulebook grown; the next slice planned
10. Showcase and sustainment	Demonstrating verified work; guardrails as living documents; where to get help	The cohort's slices shown; sign-off needs named per project; the continuation route

### 3. The Six Rules, in Operational Form

The companion paper gave these rules one line each. Here is the form a cohort actually runs them in. They are introduced in session one, posted in the room, and enforced by the deliverer and the learners on each other; by session ten they should be habits.

**Rule one: plan first, approve, then execute.** Before the AI does anything that matters, the learner has a plan for it in writing and has said yes to that plan. The operating instruction: never let the AI run ahead of a decision you have actually made. In practice this means every working session starts by settling what is to be done, in plain English, before any of it is

attempted, and the AI is told to outline its approach and wait for approval before acting on anything significant.

**Rule two: walkthrough style, one step at a time.** Work proceeds in single steps, each confirmed before the next. The operating instruction: never accept a wall of instructions or changes at once; ask for one step, check its result, then take the next. Speed is not the goal. Knowing what just happened is the goal, and it is what makes the next rule possible.

**Rule three: plain English, always.** Every explanation the learner accepts must be one they actually understand. The operating instruction is a test: if you could not explain what just happened to a smart friend outside the project, stop and ask again until you could. The learner makes the decisions on their project; a decision made through vocabulary the learner cannot parse is not the learner's decision.

**Rule four: safety rails, set before the work begins.** Four rails, all of them set up in session five and confirmed in session six, before anything real is built. Every change is shown before anything is deleted or overwritten. The AI never modifies anything outside the project's own working folder. Destructive commands are refused outright, not approved case by case. And the shipped version of the system is protected: once a slice is live, the working copy and the live copy are separate, and nothing touches the live one without the learner's explicit say-so. The rails are infrastructure, not preferences; the program treats a missing rail as a reason to stop work, not a thing to fix later.

The rule newcomers find most counter-intuitive lives here, and it deserves its full form. The AI works without supervision only when the work passes all three of these tests: it is isolated, meaning it cannot touch anything live; it is additive, meaning the worst case is redoing the work; and it is machine-verifiable, meaning a test can prove it works with no judgment calls. Work that fails any one of the three waits for the learner's eyes. And anything the AI produces unattended, however good it looks, is a draft for review, never shipped work.

**Rule five: honest diagnosis over reassurance.** When something is wrong, the learner wants the worst case first, while it is being investigated, not after. The operating instruction runs in both directions: the learner instructs the AI to report problems plainly and resist the urge to reassure, and the deliverer models the same posture in the room. A cohort that practises comfortable answers is practising the wrong discipline.

**Rule six: capture every lesson as a standing rule.** When a mistake happens, the learner fixes it and then writes the rule that prevents its recurrence into the project's standing instructions. The operating instruction: no repeated mistakes; if it happened twice, the rulebook failed, not the learner. By the end of the program each project has its own grown rulebook, and that rulebook is part of what the learner takes home.

## 4. The Sessions

Each outline gives the session's purpose, the work done in the room, the work done between sessions, and what exists at the end. They are outlines, not scripts; a deliverer who has run the discipline once (see A.6) can run them.

**Session one: the case, the project, the rules.** Purpose: the learner understands why the discipline is the curriculum, and commits to a real project. In the room: the documented failure record the companion paper describes, told plainly; what those failures had in common (no rules, no verification, no homework); the six rules introduced as the contract; each learner states their problem aloud in plain English, the first run of the smart-friend exercise. Between sessions: the learner writes their problem statement and what success would look like, one page, no technology words. At the end: a cohort of named, real projects.

**Session two: the market guardrail.** Purpose: the first guardrail document, and with it the program's research method. In the room: using the planning assistant to research the learner's market: who has this problem, what do they use now, what exists, what would they actually adopt; labelling every finding by confidence and tracing the load-bearing ones to their sources before relying on them. Between sessions: the document completed and one finding verified at its original source. At the end: a standing market document per project, confidence-labelled.

**Session three: the regulatory guardrail.** Purpose: the rules that govern the learner's field, compiled and honest about their own limits. In the room: building the document with the AI; the difference between a researched map and professional sign-off, taught as part of the document itself, written into its header: this guardrail answers "what do the rules appear to require," and where stakes are high, a professional answers "what do the rules require." Identifying, per project, which parts will need that sign-off. Between sessions: the document completed; the sign-off list drafted. At the end: a standing regulatory document per project, with its limits stated inside it.

**Session four: the design guardrail and the gate.** Purpose: the third guardrail, then the program's first real decision. In the room: what good design looks like for the learner's kind of project, researched and compiled; then the gate: each project argued against its own three guardrails in front of the cohort. Does the market document say someone needs this? Does the regulatory document say it can be built and run? Does the design document say what it should be? A project that pivots or shrinks here has used the method; building the right thing comes before building the thing right. Between sessions: the decision written down, with reasons. At the end: a go, a pivot, or a better project, per learner, in writing.

**Session five: the two-assistant rhythm.** Purpose: the working structure, experienced rather than described. In the room: setting up the two roles per the deliverer's note in A.6: a planning assistant that holds the plans and the project's memory and works in plain English, and a building assistant that writes and tests the work; then the rhythm practised end to end on a

shared toy project that is nobody's real work, so mistakes are free. The loop runs in five moves: decide with the planner, have it write a plain-English instruction block, carry that block to the builder, watch it execute and check itself, and bring the result back for review. The safety rails set up as part of the exercise. Between sessions: the learner repeats the loop once on the toy project alone. At the end: a working setup per learner, and the felt experience of being the person in charge between two assistants.

**Session six: slicing.** Purpose: the first real piece, defined before it is built. In the room: choosing one coherent slice of each project, small enough to verify completely; writing the definition of done before anything is built: what it will do, how the learner will know, what is out of scope; confirming the safety rails against rule four's checklist on each setup. Between sessions: the slice definition finished and approved by the planning assistant against the guardrails. At the end: a written, bounded first slice per project, and rails confirmed.

**Session seven: build week.** Purpose: the rhythm on real work. In the room: a working lab; each learner runs the loop on their own slice with the deliverer circulating; honest diagnosis practised when things break, which they will. Between sessions: the build continued; the rule-capture habit started, with the learner writing their first standing rules out of their first mistakes. At the end: a built, self-checked slice per project, in whatever state a week of honest work produced.

**Session eight: verify in layers.** Purpose: the discipline that separates this program from fast demos. In the room: the two layers run in order: first, tests that prove the built paths do what the definition of done said; second, the walkthrough, the learner going through their slice end to end as the real user would, because the walkthrough reliably catches what tests structurally cannot. The class rule applied: one hole found means hunting the whole class of holes before fixing the one. Then the audit: the slice checked line by line against its written definition before anyone calls it done. Between sessions: remaining holes closed; the audit completed. At the end: a verified slice per project, audited against its own plan.

**Session nine: ship, capture, plan.** Purpose: finishing honestly, and the habits that outlive the program. In the room: declaring done only what the audit supports; each learner turns their build's lessons into standing rules in their project rulebook; the unattended-work gate taught now, when the learner has a live slice and can feel why the three tests exist; the next slice planned in writing, because the program ends with momentum, not a ceremony. Between sessions: the next slice definition drafted. At the end: a shipped slice, a grown rulebook, and a written next step per project.

**Session ten: showcase and sustainment.** Purpose: demonstrated capability and a route to keep going. In the room: each learner demonstrates their verified slice to the cohort, and at the deliverer's option to the community; the guardrails revisited as living documents that future slices will consult and amend; the sign-off needs named out loud per project, so every learner leaves knowing exactly which parts of their road ahead require professional validation; the continuation route described per A.7. At the end: a cohort that has seen ten real, verified slices exist where none existed ten weeks earlier, and knows what its members do next.

## 5. The Exercises

Five exercise forms recur through the program. Scenarios used for demonstration are invented and deliberately ordinary: a community rink's booking sheet, a farm-supply store's inventory list, a museum's volunteer roster. Real projects supply everything else.

**The smart-friend pitch** (from session one): the learner explains their project, or what just happened in their build, in words a smart friend outside the project would follow. Used whenever vocabulary starts making the decisions.

**The confidence drill** (from session two): every research finding gets a label: how sure is the AI, and how sure is the learner, and what would verifying it take. Load-bearing findings get verified at the source before anything rests on them.

**The instruction block** (from session five): the learner and the planning assistant write the plain-English instruction the building assistant will receive. The discipline is in the writing: what is to be done, what done means, what must not be touched.

**The walkthrough hunt** (from session eight): the learner walks their own slice as its least patient real user, writing down everything that surprises them, then hunts each surprise's whole class.

**The rule capture** (from session seven onward): every mistake ends as a sentence in the project's rulebook. The deliverer's check is simple: has anything happened twice?

## 6. Deliverer's Notes

**Who can deliver this.** An educator with adult-programming experience who has run this discipline once themselves on a small project of their own. That preparation is not optional, and it is also not a software background: the program's materials are self-applying, so the honest preparation is to be the program's first learner, alone or alongside a peer community that has already delivered it (A.7). A deliverer who has felt the rhythm, broken something, and captured the rule can run the room. One who has only read about it cannot.

**Cohort and rhythm.** Six to ten learners; ten weekly sessions of about two and a half hours; real working time between sessions, which learners must know before they enrol. Smaller cohorts trade energy for attention; the band is guidance, not a rule.

**What the room needs.** A bookable room with reliable internet, one machine per learner, and a host organization with adult-programming experience, such as a library, an adult-learning centre, a Community Futures organization, or a local Economic Development Stewardship Committee. These are the program's needs stated as needs; The companion paper carries the evidence about which existing rural channels meet them and how they are funded.

**Choosing the tools.** The program is written against two roles, not two products, because products change and roles do not. The planning assistant must hold plans and project memory across sessions, work entirely in plain English, and never touch the code. The building

assistant must write and edit the work, run tests, and keep version history. And whatever fills either role must support the safety rails of rule four: it shows changes before applying them, it can be made to wait for approval before acting, and it refuses or can be barred from destructive commands. Any current products that meet those criteria will do; the deliverer should select them at delivery time, not from this page.

**The posture.** The deliverer's job in sessions seven through nine is mostly to protect the discipline from the learners' own momentum: the urge to skip the written definition of done, to accept the comfortable diagnosis, to call it finished before the audit. The program's value is exactly the habits that feel slow. The deliverer who lets a cohort go fast has taught the wrong course.

## **7. Where to Get Help**

The natural first call is another rural community that has run the program: rural-to-rural delivery is the companion paper's recommended architecture, and a deliverer preparing their first cohort learns fastest from a deliverer who has finished one. For the professional-validation step, the program's posture is to name the need early (session three) and budget for it like any other project cost: the regulatory guardrail tells the learner which professional to ask; it never replaces the asking.

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June 2026

To the Honorable Members of Government and Senior Officials,

**Re: In support of the rural capacity-building programs described in *Rural Canada and the AI Moment***

I write as the Chief Executive Officer of Shorefast, a Canadian registered charity based on Fogo Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and as the founder of the Shorefast Institute for Place-Based Economies. For more than two decades, our work has been devoted to a single proposition: that place itself is a legitimate pillar of economic development, standing alongside government and markets, and that communities both big and small can thrive in a global economy when they identify, harness, and amplify the assets that are already theirs.

I do not lend Shorefast's name to documents as a matter of routine. I offer it here because this work is right, and because it is timely.

I have read the work that sits behind these programs closely, and I have looked carefully at the programs themselves. They are rigorous, grounded in evidence, and refreshingly free of the overstatement that so often accompanies any conversation that touches on new technology. They do not promise that artificial intelligence will rescue rural communities, and they do not ask anyone to wait for someone else to act on their behalf. They make the more honest and more useful case in practice: that rural people, working from where they are and with what they have, are entirely capable of doing ambitious, sophisticated work, and that hands-on guidance can help them do it now.

What persuades me most is how these programs understand development itself. Too often, rural places are treated as problems to be managed or as markets to be served from a distance. These programs take a deeper view: they begin with the inherent strengths of a place and ask how to build on them and how to connect them to markets. That is precisely the work we have spent twenty years doing on Fogo Island and now carry to communities across the country through the Shorefast Institute. Money-making and meaning-making are not opposites. When investment is deployed to develop the assets of a community, the local economy and the national economy are made stronger and more resilient for it.

Strong communities are natural ecosystems of innovation. Rural communities do not lack capability, ingenuity, or resolve. What they too often lack is the recognition that local development is national prosperity, and the practical support to turn local potential into economic momentum. What is being proposed here takes that recognition seriously and puts it to work. These programmes are concrete the design has been done and the path to communities is short. What they now need is the support to be delivered.

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I encourage you to fund and support these programs so they can be delivered to rural communities now. The cost of acting is modest; the cost of inaction is paid later, by the communities least able to absorb it. Supporting this work is a low-risk way to show rural Canadians they have not been left to watch from the margins as the economy is remade. Shorefast and the Shorefast Institute would welcome the chance to lend our experience as these programs reach the communities they are built for.

We believe in place-based communities, big and small, and in the people who call them home. These programs do too, and that is why they have my full and unreserved support.

With respect and in support,

*Rida Nasir*

**per Zita Cobb**

Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer

Shorefast | Shorefast Institute for Place-Based Economies

Fogo Island, Newfoundland and Labrador

June 6, 2026

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in strong support of Gordon More's work and, in particular, the rural AI-building program it sets out. I review a great deal of proposed community programming, and this program is rigorous, evidence-based, and ready to run, addressing a gap that Canada's own data and the OECD have both plainly identified.

The OECD's 2024 review of rural innovation in Canada concluded that federal innovation policy "has an inherent urban bias." Canada is not behind because rural communities fail to innovate; it is behind because the delivery architecture our international peers run – rural-earmarked, locally governed, sustained over decades – was never built for rural communities. This program is a direct, practical answer to that finding. It takes the operational knowledge that already lives in rural communities – in the people who run the farm-supply store, the clinic's front desk, the municipal office – and enables them to build the tools their own work needs, where they live, without leaving.

This is not a concept paper or a study to be commissioned. It is a fully designed, ten-session program with defined outcomes, built to be delivered through infrastructure rural communities already have: libraries, adult-learning centres, and community hubs. Notably, the federal AI strategy itself names exactly these channels – AI literacy through "public libraries and community organizations... especially those in rural, remote, and northern regions." The channels are proven for this kind of work. What is missing is the curriculum carried through them, and this program supplies it. The path from this document to communities seeing results is short, and that is rare.

The single most important design choice in this work is that funding should flow directly to the rural organizations that deliver the program, on terms that those communities help set. Canada has run exactly this design since 1985 through the Community Futures Program – 256 community-governed local organizations that the OECD singles out as a model of bottom-up rural delivery which is very close to the very agencies now delivering new AI money. One province has already shown it works; in May 2026 Innovation Saskatchewan invested directly in a rural hub to run this kind of capability. The ask in this proposal is routing, not curriculum construction. The major federal AI funding currently carries no rural earmark and reaches rural ground only by discretion; designing that last mile, and sending the money straight to the communities doing the work, is what turns a good program into delivered results.



**UNIVERSITY  
OF ALBERTA**

I offer this letter in full support and encourage you to give this program the serious consideration it warrants. Our communities cannot afford for sound, ready work like this to go unfunded while the gap it would close grows wider. I would welcome the chance to discuss it further and would be glad to lend my own expertise as it moves forward

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Maria Mayan'.

Maria Mayan  
maria.mayan@ualberta.ca  
Professor, School of Public Health