



A PROPOSAL FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE TOWNSHIP OF NORTH HURON

Re: Building Capacity in Blyth Memorial Community Hall

Blyth Arts & Cultural Initiative 14/19 Inc. has submitted a grant application to Ontario's Rural Economic Development (RED) program to build capacity in our newly revitalized Blyth Memorial Community Hall within the following category:

Sector Development and Economic Diversification

Rehabilitation of cultural, heritage or tourism attractions.

We are seeking approval from the Township of North Huron to leverage the RED application and support this project with an allocation of \$25,000, from the Memorial Hall Fund established by the renovation committee. \$20,000 will be directed to Human Resource costs while \$5,000 will support marketing and pilot programming initiatives.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Blyth Memorial Community Hall has been a gathering space for community events and cultural activities in downtown Blyth since 1920. Now, after a \$4.2M renovation it's ready for a re-boot. It is our shared responsibility to ensure it remains vibrant, vital and sustainable not just for today but for generations to come. The revitalization of the facility, completed in May 2017, made it truly a 21st century facility that we are just learning to understand re potential. Fully equipped with professional lighting and

impeccable sound the theatre is second-to-none. A new culinary kitchen offers opportunity. The lower hall is a more pleasing space for assembly. High speed fibre throughout the building will appeal to meeting planners. We need to explore all the opportunities - and then leverage them.

Blyth Memorial Community Hall is a campus of the Canadian Centre for Rural Creativity. Our plan is creating new collaborations for economic growth, increased economic competitiveness and diversity.

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR RURAL CREATIVITY:

The Canadian Centre for Rural Creativity (CCRC) is an arts, education and innovation centre created to revitalize our community socially and economically through the arts and creative thinking. Through this project, we will build capacity at one site in our campus - our heritage cultural centre and village cenotaph, Blyth Memorial Community Hall. We want to engage citizens in our communities through the performing and visual arts and in the expression, celebration and preservation of rural heritage.

Two flagship programs at the CCRC include Fashion Arts & Creative Textiles and the Rural Voice (more detail on the programs under OUTCOMES).

THE NEED:

Rural communities are at a crossroad. The challenges and uncertainties that threaten sustainability also threaten its survival. Globalization, automation, migration of youth, aging populations and a manufacturing exodus contribute to loss of economic and social vitality. In Blyth, we're fortunate to have a thriving theatre festival that runs for 10-12 weeks each summer. But we need to increase foot traffic the other 40 weeks each year.

Blyth 14/19 has been inspired by the Letcher County Culture Hub project in eastern Kentucky where grassroots development is inclusive and mindful of cultural, social and local assets. We are borrowing from the Letcher County model for economic prosperity to build that capacity 365 days a year in North Huron.

New cultural activity in the downtown core will have an immediate economic impact on dining establishments, local retail and other local attractions. While the Blyth Festival has been contributing to this for many years, the Transfigured Town Festival that brought 6,000 people to the community this year may serve as another example of the potential as it was the busiest day in retail in the village in known history. In the long term, the economic impact will influence residential and commercial development.

Cowbell Brewing Company reports their 100-seat Thresher's Hall is booked everyday from December 1st to mid-February for meetings and others types of gatherings. Cowbell's success has increased business downtown, where the Blyth Inn has reported a 60% increase in patrons. We must develop new opportunities for programming and rentals unique to Memorial Hall to make a viable business that pays it own way, but we need time and human resource assistance to do so.

OUTCOMES:

The project will support the following RED outcomes;

- Collaboration for economic growth
- Increased economic competitiveness and diversity (e.g., attraction, retention and expansion of businesses)
- Innovative communities

Collaboration for economic growth

Inspired by Appalshop in rural Kentucky, the CCRC is working through its Rural Voice program on a new model for grassroots sustainable development that is "inclusive and mindful of cultural, social and local assets of a community and works to create conditions for agency, voice, and ownership." Ultimately it identifies existing (actual and potential) community centres of power and builds relationships with their local leadership then identifies goals and plans projects, based in shared self-interest

Blyth 14/19 is working collaboratively with Regional Tourism Organization Four, Blyth Festival, members of the Blyth & Area BIA, County of Huron and Township of North Huron and our destination brewery - Cowbell - on a Destination Blyth initiative. Sessions include identifying tourism assets, and agreeing on the DNA (unique selling propositions) of Blyth; identifying short and long term vision for the village; and identifying, prioritizing and beginning to scope projects that work towards the vision.

It's critical for our organization to build and cultivate strategic partnerships aligned with our purpose.

Increased economic competitiveness and diversity

Flagship programs at the Canadian Centre for Rural Creativity are: Fashion Arts & Creative Textiles and Rural Voice.

Through the fashion arts program we invite participation from local farmers and gardeners as we explore fibre from and of the land, natural dyeing and innovation. Students include post-graduate fashion and costume designers. Local artisans and hobbyists will be offered professionally-led creative workshops and opportunities for further creativity during Open Studios. High quality professional training opportunities will expand participants skills and employability.

Also in that program we'll work to grow consumer awareness of sustainable industry practices by hosting new events in the hall like Clothing Swaps providing unique and fun opportunities to revamp participants wardrobes and include restyling and repurposing garments and accessories.

In the Rural Voice program, Blyth 14/19 Inc produces conferences, hosts think-tanks and presents Ted-type talks to engage ruralists to find solutions to their unique challenges and celebrate all things rural.

These initiatives will increase foot traffic on the street year-round and thereby opportunity for creative retail to flourish.

Innovative communities

As an innovative community, we're igniting conversations that tackle the tough questions to help the community identify, acknowledge and fix it's own unique problems. We'll engage ruralists to find solutions and celebrate all things rural through think tanks, conferences like Rural Talks to Rural 2018, Rural Talks, Town Halls and one-on-one conversations. We've invited Bank of I.D.E.A.S. founder Peter Kenyan from Australia here to lead a workshop next spring. He is motivated by the desire to create caring, healthy, inclusive, sustainable and enterprising communities and local economies and asks "what do you care enough to act upon". We look to inspire fresh and creative ways that stimulate community and local economic renewal and share those results with rural communities across Ontario.

We will revitalize our heritage building with programming that furthers our mission and increases quality of life for residents through skill development (creative activity)

and community engagement. A growing need for enthusiastic and engaged volunteers provides opportunities for them to develop new skills.

Innovative initiatives will build social capacity, and provide opportunities for revenue generation - for the CCRC and for presenting groups, artists and event planners.

PROJECT BENEFITS:

Our initiatives reach across Ontario and beyond. We are building partnerships with post-secondary institutions (Ryerson, York, U of Guelph, U of Alberta, Brandon University and Memorial in Newfoundland) and complementary not-for-profits (School for Social Entrepreneurs - Toronto; Start-up Canada - Ottawa). In the community we're supporting the work of the Blyth Festival, inspiring the Blyth Business Improvement Area to work on new branding and projects in the village, and engaging local government and Ontario's Ministry of Culture Sport and Tourism.

In the artistic community, we are working with Powerline Films on a documentary "The Granary Project;" Vera Causa Opera on a new piece based on a local story of the last public hanging in Canada; Lighting Designer Lesley Wilkinson and Costume Designer Julia Tribe on a Design Camp; a local chef for an after school Kids in the Kitchen program; Costume Designer/Fashion Educator, Jennifer Triemstra-Johnston, Peggy Sue Deaven-Smiltnieks of Peggy Sue Collections and members of the Upper Canada Fibreshed for the Fashion Arts Program.

We'll continue to engage farmers, artists, academics and ruralists in our programs.

And, because of the extensive renovation the Hall is once again ready for the local community to use for fundraising and social functions as has been the tradition since it was first built.

SUSTAINABILITY

The RED funding will kick-start a new future for this facility. The Hall will provide an environment where local retail and entrepreneurial activity can flourish. We'll host and pilot new events that elevate artistic qualities during shoulder seasons and not compete with recurring annual events in the community. Future programs being explored include:

- the Boreal Collective photography course;
- creation of an outdoor school;
- Rural Investment Workshop (January 11, 2018);
- the Rural Network and partnership with the University of Guelph and Gateway Centre Centre for Excellence in Rural Health;
- a Rural Civic Tech Hub; and
- an investigation into creating a carbon neutral village.

Artists will be engaged in meaningful work, local restaurants and accommodations will benefit from increased activity and we'll grow our impact for quality programming that engages an audience while expanding our social impact. So many organizations are working to raise funds for their worthy causes. We'll create ways to assist them to increase profitability - perhaps in some cases by working together on larger events that attract a clientele that will travel to enjoy a few hours of activity in the area. New ideas often take time to take hold and grow and are risky, but ultimately the payoff will assist us to meet costs and our vision.

We must reinvent ourselves. Inside our stories are lessons to create a resilient rural community.

This community has the experience, wisdom, passion and leadership required to revitalize itself. We are already experiencing a time of exciting growth, and want to ride the momentum. Through our programs we will celebrate all that is rural - our traditions, our challenges, the environment, innovations, lifestyles and contributions.

BUDGET:

Ad campaigns, website and social media work are budgeted at \$10,000 and are all part of the work plan. Programs in development as outlined in the RED application (\$30,000) include:

- Vera Causa Opera: development of the 2019 production based on the true story of the last public hanging in Canada which took place the Huron County Gaol in Goderich.
- The Granary Project: a sound and visual art installation in a Westeel granary.
- Design Camp: A lighting designer and a set/costume designer work to develop a unique creative project with secondary school students in Huron and Perth Counties.
- R2R2018/Rural Talks (x5): The second Rural Talks to Rural Conference is scheduled for October 17-20, 2018. We'll also host guest speakers who will share RuralTalks about rural issues and challenges. We have Peter Kenyon from Australia tentatively confirmed for June - a partnership made possible with assistance from the Rural Ontario Institute.
- Fashion Symposium/Swap: We look forward to bringing together representatives from various divisions in the industry to explore sustainable

fashion trends and tales. A used clothing swap will be co-ordinated in the spring and in the fall.

- Human Resources for one full year are budgeted at \$50,000 (includes the benefits).
- \$47,500 has been requested from the RED program.

The Township of North Huron will receive acknowledgements including logo placements on materials and web pages as well as Master of Ceremonies' shout outs promoting these pilot programs before and during the events.

CONCLUSION:

To complete the renovation of Blyth Memorial Community Hall, this one year investment in the marketing strategy will set the course for the next ten years. Building relationships, exploring funding and assisting with event and program development are all part of the job description for this new hire.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Karen Stewart", followed by a horizontal line.

Karen Stewart

Director of Operations