

The Iron Ore Company of Canada's Community Advisory Panel and Regional Task Force

Context

Labrador West consists of the twin towns of Labrador City and Wabush located in the southwestern region of Labrador. The livelihood of the area depends primarily on the rich iron ore deposits of the Labrador Trough and the extensive history of development, which began in the 1950s. The Iron Ore Company of Canada (IOC) operates an iron ore mine, a concentrator and a pelletizing plant in Labrador City as well as port facilities in Sept-Îles, Quebec. It also operates a 418-km railroad that links the mine to the port. The company established Labrador City, and the deposits have allowed the twin towns to grow and reach a population of approximately 10,000 inhabitants. However, as the region experienced significant industrial growth, the IOC recognized the need for an advisory panel of local industry and stakeholders that could address cyclical impacts stemming from economic recessions and periods of low demand.



Description of Measures Implemented

In 2006, the IOC established a Community Advisory Panel (CAP) to help the company make informed decisions based on the community's needs. The consultative forum was created by bringing together mining company representatives and community stakeholders, including community organizations such as the hospital, police force, women's shelter and local college. Through the CAP, IOC has worked with community leaders in Labrador West and Sept-Îles to create a framework for addressing issues of mutual concern stemming from periods of boom and bust, such as health care service adequacy, recruitment and retention, community infrastructure and pressures on the environment.

In 2012, the IOC created a Regional Task Force (RTF) to compliment and build on the CAP's work. While the CAP exists to address issues at the local level, the RTF works to address issues at the provincial level. The RTF is composed of the following members: senior executives from IOC and the other mining companies in the area; the mayors of Labrador City and Wabush; the Town Councillor from neighbouring Fermont, Quebec; officials from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's departments of Municipal Affairs and Natural Resources, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat and the Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs Office; and a representative from the Government of Canada's Atlantic Canada Opportunity Agency. This group of senior representatives works collaboratively to anticipate and address the rapid growth or decline of the Labrador West communities by identifying pressure points and implementing appropriate actions collectively.

The RTF's mandate and membership can be revisited as the economic situation in the region shifts, in order to ensure key actors are included in the teams and adjust priorities quickly if needed. This helps to better adapt to the cyclical nature of mining.

Results

The CAP and the RTF have created positive results for the local communities, including but not limited to the following: advocating for affordable housing; addressing issues related to homelessness; working to ensure the region has appropriate health care, emergency, and child care services; supporting the development of community infrastructure; and partnering with colleges to improve education and training opportunities. These collaborative initiatives have successfully brought together stakeholders at all working levels to meet the common goals of future development and the sustainability of the region.

Despite the fact that CAP and RTF were initially created during periods of significant growth and expansion in the area, IOC considers multistakeholder consultation an equally essential undertaking during times of recession. For that reason, IOC is dedicated to such panels and forums, and have continued to expand their stakeholder engagement. For example, in 2015, IOC initiated Project RESET, to work with local suppliers and stakeholders in an effort to cut \$70 million in operating and business costs to help the company adjust to steep reductions in iron ore prices and to remain a key employer in the area. Additionally, IOC furthered its engagement with Indigenous communities by establishing agreements with the Innu Nation and the NunatuKavut Community Council to coordinate and deliver benefits such as employment, skills training and business development opportunities.

Lessons Learned

With mining at the centre of Labrador West's small population and economy, the IOC recognized the importance of transparency, open communication and dialogue, and a clear understanding of the cyclical nature of the industry and its impacts. By using regional committees, the IOC was able to support the alignment of industry with multilevel government stakeholders to share information about the rapidly changing economic situation in a region. Establishing an advisory committee composed of local community members helps ensure two-way communication, which is essential to building trust and a collaborative relationship to advance common goals.

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