



## *VideoCom Research Update:*

# Encouraging urban organizations to videoconference with remote and rural First Nations

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*The VideoCom research initiative is studying how First Nations organizations are using video communications on broadband networks for community, social and economic development in remote and rural First Nations in Canada.*

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*For further info, visit:*

<http://videocom.knet.ca>

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Many First Nations in Canada have significant capacity for videoconferencing. The Regional Management Organizations (RMOs) for First Nations SchoolNet are supporting videoconferencing for community development by the remote and rural First Nations on their networks. The RMO technical staff has considerable expertise to use the available bandwidth to ensure a high-quality videoconferencing experience.

A previous VideoCom study found that rural and remote First Nations are using videoconferencing to conserve financial and human resources and allow participation in events that may not otherwise be possible due to time and travel constraints. Videoconferencing provides more access to region-wide activities and promotes interaction between groups that may not have connected previously.

In our most recent research, we identified many challenges for videoconferencing in remote and rural First Nations. A big challenge is the low level of videoconferencing activity by urban organizations. Professionals and institutions in urban centres have a general lack of awareness of the communication needs of rural and remote communities. People working in urban organizations have ready access to communication links and many do not understand the importance of videoconferencing as a tool for connecting rural and remote communities.

In some cases, organizations in urban areas do not have adequate support for videoconferencing in their own organizations and need the support of First Nation RMOs to connect with communities. As well, some large urban institutions have IT departments that do not want to change their mode of operating and are not aware that the RMOs have videoconference bridges that can connect ISDN sites to IP networks in remote and rural First Nation communities.

This study concluded that urban organizations should understand and validate the need for videoconferencing in communities. This requires developing policies and funding programs to support the more widespread diffusion of broadband networks capable of supporting video communications, and programs with resources for community capacity building to use these technologies effectively. Urban institutions should review their own organizational processes to prioritize using video communications to engage more frequently with rural and remote First Nations communities.

References (publications available on <http://videocom.knet.ca>)

O'Donnell, S., Perley, S. and Simms, D. (2008, forthcoming). *Challenges for video communications in remote and rural communities*. Proceedings of the IEEE International Symposium on Technology and Society (ISTAS 08), Fredericton, Canada, June.

O'Donnell, S., Perley, S., Walmark, B., Burton, K., Beaton, B., & Sark, A. (2007). *Community-based broadband organizations and video communications for remote and rural First Nations in Canada*. Proceedings of the Community Informatics Research Network (CIRN 2007), Prato, Italy, November.