

Regions and Ruralty Fund 2020-2025
Stream 4 – Support for Vitalization
Vitalization Framework

MRC Pontiac



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1. Context

The MRC Pontiac, located in the western part of the Outaouais, is facing important territorial challenges: an aging population, loss of local services, one of the lowest median incomes in Quebec and low economic diversification since the 2008 forestry crisis.

On October 30, 2019, representatives from the Government of Quebec, the Fédération of Québec Municipalities (FQM), the Union of Québec Municipalities (UMQ), the City of Montreal and the City of Quebec ratified the new agreement between the Government of Quebec and the municipalities at a signing ceremony held at the National Assembly. The Partnership 2020-2024: For Even Stronger Municipalities and Regions follows on the heels of the 2016-2019 partnership agreement with the municipalities, which expires on December 31, 2019. In total, nearly \$7.1 billion will be transferred to municipalities over a five-year period.

The Regions and Rurality Fund (RRF) is divided into four components:

- Component 1 - Support for regional outreach
- Component 2 - Support for the local and regional development competence of the MRC's
- Component 3 – MRC's "Signature Innovation" projects
- Component 4 - Support for vitalization and intermunicipal cooperation

This revitalization framework concerns Component 4 - Support for Revitalization, the Vitalization Agreement portion with the MRC's, whose purpose is to mobilize and cooperate with municipal organizations and partners to better face the specific challenges of revitalization. The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MAMH) defines vitalization as all the actions taken by a community to revitalize its environment and improve the quality of life of its population in a sustainable manner.

The government wishes to support the MRC's concerned so that they can mobilize their communities and adopt a well-thought-out vitalization framework aimed at stabilizing or turning around their demographic and economic indicators.

The objectives of Component 4 - Support for Vitalization, Vitalization Agreement with MRCs portion, are:

- Encourage the mobilization of elected officials and municipal governments to address specific vitalization challenges;
- Foster collaboration between government departments and agencies in the regions, MRCs and local municipalities with these challenges;
- Support the implementation of vitalization approaches and initiatives in the territory concerned;
- To improve services or facilities for the population, through the realization of development projects especially in the economic, social, tourist or cultural fields.

2. Economic Vitality Index

The economic vitality index¹ was developed by the Québec Institute of Statistics for the MAMH with the objective of allowing it to simply evaluate and compare the economic vitality of the territories. The main advantage of using this composite index is the standardization of data using the Z-score, which allows for an accurate comparison between territories.

The economic vitality index is derived from a statistical calculation composed of the following three indicators²:

2.1 Rate of workers aged 25-64 - Labour market vitality

It corresponds to the number of workers, expressed as a percentage of the number of individuals who filed a tax return with Revenue Québec. It includes both salaried employees and self-employed workers. This indicator highlights the dynamism of a territory's labour market.

2.2 Median total income of those 18 years and older - Standard of living of the population

Median income is the middle value that separates a given group of individuals with income into two equal parts. Total median income, also known as pre-tax income, consists of wages and salaries, net income from self-employment, investment income, pensions, government transfers and other cash income. Individuals with zero income are excluded from the calculation of median total income. Here, the standard of living of the territory's citizens is targeted as information.

2.3 Average annual population growth rate - Population trends

It represents the average annual change over five years in the population size compared to the average population for the period for a given territory. This indicator aims to represent demographic dynamics, a central element of the vitality of the territories and one that has important effects on their economy.

¹ <https://www.mamh.gouv.qc.ca/developpement-territorial/indices-connaissances-et-outils/indices/indice-de-vitalite-economique/>

² <https://statistique.quebec.ca/fr/document/indice-de-vitalite-economique-des-territoires>

Municipality	Place (within scale of Québec)	Population total	Economic Vitality Index (2018)	Quintile 2018
Alleyn-et-Cawood	1138	167	-17,92394	Q5
Bristol	1039	1017	-10,60363	Q5
Campbell's Bay	1003	729	-8,91555	Q5
Chichester	1015	346	-9,28913	Q5
Fort-Coulonge	965	1399	-7,66120	Q5
L'Île-du-Grand-Calumet	976	638	-7,98340	Q5
Otter Lake	1145	928	-19,31988	Q5
Portage-du-Fort	1137	214	-17,75580	Q5
Rapides-des-Joachims	1001	150	-8,87034	Q5
Waltham	980	375	-8,09832	Q5
Clarendon	752	1249	-2,76561	Q4
L'Île-aux-Allumettes	881	1319	-5,40937	Q4
Mansfield-et-Pontefract	711	2325	-2,00477	Q4
Shawville	897	1571	-5,79694	Q4
Sheenboro	919	117	-6,37156	Q4
Thorne	726	460	-2,36144	Q4
Litchfield	617	456	-0,46198	Q3
Bryson	653	695	-0,99578	Q3

3. Socio-economic profile of the population

A declining and aging population

With a population of 14,160 in 2018, the MRC Pontiac is among the 15 most sparsely populated and least densely populated MRCs in Quebec (1.11 inhabitants per km²). Since 2006, it has suffered a net loss of 596 inhabitants and its demographic weight in the region has also decreased, from 4.3% to 3.6%.

The average annual growth rate (AAGR) for 2016-2018 is -2.4 per 1,000 compared to -3.7 between 2006 and 2011, and -2.9 from 2011 to 2016, indicating a steady population decline, but one that appears to be slowing in recent years³.

³ ISQ. Panorama des régions. Édition 2019.

Since 2016, the Pontiac is the only MRC in the region to see its population constantly decrease⁴, while the Outaouais ranks among the administrative regions that show sustained demographic growth (AAGR of 7.1 for 2016-2018).

The Pontiac's population is aging rapidly. People aged 65 and over now represent a quarter of the population (24.8%), while the share of young people aged 0 to 19 is decreasing year after year, from 22.1% in 2008 to 18.8% in 2018. The average age, at 46.3 years, is much higher than that of the overall population of the Outaouais (40.9) and of Quebec (42.3)

People of working age (20 to 64) make up only 56.4% of the population, the lowest share in the Outaouais.

The demographic dependency ratio, i.e., the number of dependents (0 to 19 years old + seniors 65 years old and over) per 100 workers (the 20 to 64 years old group) is 77.4%, the highest in the entire region.

Projected population of the MRC Pontiac 2016-2041

2016	2021	2026	2031	2036	2041	Variation 2016-2041 (%)
14 300	14 000	13 800	13 500	13 300	13 200	-7,8

4. Mobilization process around the territory's development issues

In order to better understand the economic vitality issues in its territory, the MRC Pontiac relied on the community portraits prepared by the Observatoire du développement de l'Outaouais (ODO) to obtain a more detailed portrait of the economic vitality in the communities of the MRC Pontiac.

This portrait made it possible to direct the reflections and tool proposals towards the most critical issues regarding the economic vitality index of our communities. During several processes over the past two years, the portrait of the territory's economic vitality was presented, followed by an analysis exercise to target the elements to be worked on over the next few years in order to respond to vitalization issues. The definition of the vitalization framework relies heavily on a number of existing plans, processes and strategies, including:

- [Plan de développement stratégique Vision 2030](#)
- [Rapport d'analyse – marque territoriale](#)
- [Plan de gestion de matières résiduelles 2023-2029](#)
- [Schéma d'aménagement](#)

⁴ Contrary to the Pontiac, the RCM Vallée de la Gatineau, who posted a Average Annual Growth Rate of -4.1 for 2011-2016 and of -0.9 for 2011-2018, realized a positive growth (+1.0) according to the provisional statistics for 2016-2019.

- [Caractérisation du territoire agricole](#)
- [Plan de développement de la zone agricole \(PDZA\)](#)
- [Politique culturelle de la MRC de Pontiac](#)
- Comité de vitalisation

5. Vitalization Committee

The Vitalization Committee acts in an advisory capacity to the MRC Pontiac Council of Mayors. The general mandate of the Vitalization Committee, as indicated in clause 5.3 of the Vitalization Agreement between the MRC Pontiac and the MAMH, is to see to the application of the agreement, in accordance with the applicable standards and programs, and to ensure the management of the administrative and financial follow-up.

5.1 Committee Responsibilities

- Define the vitalization framework and recommend its adoption to the Regional Council of Mayors;
- Validate and recommend to the Regional Council of Mayors the initiatives, projects or interventions to benefit from the financial support provided for under the agreement;
- Ensure the implementation and achievement of the objectives of the agreement;
- Submit to the Regional Council of Mayors any recommendations for changes to the vitalization framework, the composition of the vitalization committee, or projects that it believes are useful or necessary;
- Report on its activities to the Regional Council of Mayors at the next meeting.

5.2 Composition of the committee

Appointed by the MRC Pontiac Regional Council of Mayors, the Vitalization Committee consists of thirteen voting members and four non-voting members.

Voting members :

- Warden of the MRC Pontiac
- Mayor of Campbell's Bay, who acts as Chair
- Mayor of Alleyn-et-Cawood
- Mayor of Bristol
- Mayor of Chichester
- Mayor of Fort-Coulonge
- Mayor of l'Île-du-Grand-Calumet
- Mayor of Otter Lake
- Mayor of Portage-du-Fort
- Mayor of Rapides-des-Joachims
- Mayor of Waltham
- Representative of CJEP/PAJP
- Citizen Representative

The Mayor of Otter Lake shall act as Vice-Chair and, in the event that he is required to act as an alternate to the Chair, his Pro-Mayor may cast the vote on behalf of the municipality.

In the event that a member mayor is unable to attend, their pro-mayor is designated as a replacement with voting rights.

Non-voting members:

- Director General of the MRC Pontiac
- Director of Economic Development or other Directors as required
- Vitalization Agent
- A representative of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

5.3 Operation

- The chair of the vitalization committee is the Mayor of Campbell's Bay.
- Coordination (convening, agendas and minutes) of the Vitalization Committee will be done by the Vitalization Agent, or by the MRC Economic Development Team.
- Project evaluation sessions will be convened by the Vitalization Agent. Additional sessions on the implementation of the Agreement are to be scheduled with the committee.
- The decision-making process is by consensus or by vote if consensus is not possible.
- The members of the Vitalization Committee are subject to or, if not, adhere to rules of ethics and professional conduct governing their function, particularly with respect to integrity, impartiality and confidentiality, in a manner substantially equivalent to the principles of ethics and general rules of professional conduct set out in Chapter II of the Regulation respecting the ethics and professional conduct of public office holders (R.R.S.Q., chapter M30, R.1), where applicable.

6. Vitalization Framework

In order to reverse the devitalization of the territory, the Vitalization Committee has set itself the objective of promoting the economic diversification of the region by relying on the growth niches identified in the MRC Pontiac's strategic planning, while keeping its horizons open to innovative sectors that the Vitalization Committee deems to be promising for the development of the region. The promising niches identified by the strategic planning process are:

- Tourism
 - Agrotourism • Outdoors • Cross-border tourism • Infrastructure
- Culture and Heritage
 - Cultural centers • Artists and craftsmen • Diversity of identity • Archaeology
- Agriculture
 - Circular economy • Development of wasteland • Markets • Eliminate shortage of local products • Promote agri-environmental practices • Promote organic farming
- Socio-community
 - Agency Relations • Seniors Services and Programs • Home, Youth and Family Services • Child Care Spaces
- Environment
 - Active mobility • Adaptation to Climate Change • Biodiversity • Supervision of agricultural practices
- Forestry
 - TPI Management • Community Forest

6.1 Priority axes of vitalization

Within the framework of its vitalization agreement and future calls for projects, the MRC Pontiac favors the following vitalization axes:

- 1. Population retention and attraction of new residents**
 - 2. Cohesive renaissance of the territory**
 - 3. Transportation development**
-

Axis 1 - Population retention and attraction of new residents

Retaining the existing population and attracting new residents are key factors in improving the economic vitality index of the MRC Pontiac.

Key Facts:

- Population in 2018 of 14,160, or 3.6% of the regional population.
- One quarter of the population (24.8%) is 65 years of age and older.
- The average annual growth rate (AAGR) declined from -3.7 between 2011 and 2016 to -2.4 for the 2016-2018 period.
- Situation of population decline due to chronic negative natural increase combined with low or negative migration balances.
- Border situation, lack of training programs adapted to labor market needs, and youth out-migration accentuate the difficulties of attracting and retaining skilled workers in a context of labor scarcity.

Objective A: Attractiveness and vibrancy of communities

Priorities:

- Enhance each municipality's own identity and local distinctiveness;
- Improve the overall quality of life on the territory, and enhance the living environment infrastructures (extracurricular, culture, recreation, sports, etc.);
- Improve the built environment and add beauty to village cores.

Objective B: Development of services

Priorities:

- Foster municipal and community involvement in school-related activities;
- Improve the availability of varied childcare services;
- Animating the local community;
- Taking competence in welcoming and integrating new residents;
- Engaging citizens, including youth and seniors.

Axis 2 – Cohesive Renaissance of the Territory

The MRC Pontiac, which occupies 42.2% of the Outaouais territory, is made up of large wooded areas, multiple bodies of water and vast agricultural lands while being located near Gatineau. This vast agricultural and forestry territory is inhabited by a bilingual population and is concerned by border issues. Economically, the MRC Pontiac, with its aging population, is one of the most devitalized regions in Quebec. Inter-regional migration and attractiveness, access to services, employment, support for entrepreneurship and promotion of tourism are at the heart of the economic development priorities of this territory.

In the tourism sector, the MRC wants to encourage entrepreneurship, improve basic and reception services to better meet visitors' expectations, and position the Pontiac as a tourist destination by growing the tourist offers on the territory and by increasing promotional efforts.

In terms of culture and community life, the MRC wants to work on the renaissance of the villages, the consolidation of local culture and heritage, and the improvement of community and recreational services.

Objective A: Renaissance Plan

Priorities:

- Solicit **one** territory-wide cohesive renaissance plan that addresses the individual needs and unique attributes and challenges of each of the 18 municipalities;
- Secure funding sources to implement priority actions and projects identified by a regional territory-wide renaissance plan.

Objective B: Industrial development plan

Priorities:

- Develop a plan for industrial lands located in the territory to encourage job creation and economic diversity

Axis 3 – Transportation development

Public transportation in rural areas consists of using the available space and availability of school and adapted, community and private vehicles and making them available to the population.

This transportation can include active, passive and green transportation methods.

On a vast territory, there is a need to break isolation and allow various segments of the population such as youth and seniors to access services and amenities to improve their quality of life.

Using an automobile is not a reality for many and finding alternative transportation solutions becomes essential to accessing employment opportunities, learning opportunities and basic needs.

Objective A: Active Transportation

Priorities:

- Develop sustainable active transportation initiatives that contribute to society's physical well-being;
- Build on and further develop existing infrastructure.

Objective B: Inter-Municipal Transportation

Priorities:

- Develop a sustainable intermunicipal transportation system that meets the needs of our isolated population segments;
- Capitalize on the systems and organizations already in place in the territory.

Objective C: Shared Transportation

Priorities:

- Explore shared transportation systems that incorporate green initiatives;
 - Expand access to electric vehicle infrastructure.
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6.2 Structuring projects carried out by the MRC Pontiac

1. Renaissance plan for the entire territory
2. Industrial plan
3. Public transit plan

7. General principles, terms of application and governance rules

7.1 Territory of application

The Revitalization Agreement applies to the Regional County Municipality (RCM) of Pontiac. To be eligible, a project must be carried out on the territory of the MRC Pontiac in addition to respecting the criteria that will be listed. Projects demonstrating clear impacts to one or several Q5 municipalities shall be given priority.

7.2 Admissible Organizations

The following organizations are admissible to submit funding requests:

- Municipalities
- Cooperatives
- Non-profit organizations
- Aboriginal Band Councils
- Private enterprises

* Organizations listed on the business registry that are not eligible for government contracts and organizations in the financial sector are not eligible.

7.3 Project selection criteria

Applications from all eligible applicants will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Alignment with a focus of vitality;
- Quality of the application and the proponent;
- Impact on employment and the economy;
- Innovative nature of the project;
- Impact on socio-economic vitality;
- Soundness of the financial plan;
- Respect for the environment.

Except for applications from a non-profit organization or a municipality:

- Alignment with a vitalization focus;
- Quality of the application and the promoter;
- Acceptability of the project by the community;
- Impact on socio-economic vitality;
- Soundness of the financial plan;
- Respect for the environment.

7.4 Non-admissible Projects

The following projects are not admissible:

- Projects that would contradict a government policy or measure approved by the Treasury Board or the Government of Quebec, or that would cover an activity already funded by budgetary rules approved by the latter;
- Projects in the area of retail or food services, except for offering a local service, according to the criteria established by the MRC and included in the vitalization framework, and which is not in a competitive situation;
- Projects associated with the establishment or expansion of health services (e.g., health cooperatives);
- Projects that consist of studies, procedures, action plans or strategic planning carried out as part of an organization's regular activities. However, this type of project may be eligible if it is clearly demonstrated that it addresses a specific vitalization issue or situation;
- Projects related to municipal administration (e.g., renovation of City Hall, maintenance of the municipal garage);
- Projects related to the place of worship, except if the building is converted to a non-religious use (e.g. the conversion of a church into a community hall for the general population would be eligible).

7.5 Applicable aid rates and threshold

Maximum support

A single organization and its subsidiaries may not receive more than \$100,000 for a single project for the duration of the agreement. The financial assistance granted to a single private enterprise or its subsidiaries cannot exceed \$150,000 at any time within a period of 12 consecutive months.

Funding for each project must include a minimum non-government match of:

- 50% of eligible project expenses in the case of a private company, or privately owned not-for-profit organization;
- 10% of eligible project expenses for other eligible organizations.

Cumulation of government aid

The maximum amount of government assistance includes the total financial assistance granted. Non-repayable assistance is considered at 100% of its value and repayable assistance is considered at 50%, for eligible project costs by all departments, agencies and Crown corporations, the governments of Canada and Quebec and municipal entities. In the event that the maximum accumulation of another Ministry or organization is lower, the lowest takes precedent.

This accumulation cannot exceed:

- 50% of eligible project expenses for a private business, or privately owned non-profit organization;
- 90% of eligible project expenses for other recipients.

7.6 Rules of governance

Rules and procedures for awarding financial assistance

The amount of financial assistance will be determined by the Regional Council of Mayors and will be paid in the form of a non-repayable grant. Authorized projects will be subject to a memorandum of understanding between the MRC and the promoter. This protocol will define the conditions for the payment of the financial assistance and the obligations of the parties.

Deadlines, progress, analysis and follow-up of projects

- One to two calls for projects will be made per year, depending on the funds available.
- The development team will evaluate the eligibility of applicants and proceed with the analysis of the projects received according to the project selection criteria.
- The development team's recommendations will be presented to the Vitalization Committee, which will then make a recommendation to the Regional Council of Mayors.
- The Regional Council of Mayors will evaluate the projects and recommendations. A resolution will be issued to this effect.
- Following the adoption of the resolution, the project manager will develop a memorandum of understanding between the MRC and the promoter. This protocol will define the conditions for the payment of the financial assistance and the obligations of the parties.
- The promoter who has received a grant will have to submit a report on its use. A form provided for this purpose, sent to the promoter by the MRC, must be used.

7.7 Eligible and non-eligible expenses

Eligible expenses are:

- Professional fees, consulting services* (see non-admissible expenses below);
- Purchases of goods and equipment related to the project;
- Marketing, promotion and advertising activities and costs;
- Leasehold improvements, rehabilitation, expansion or construction of a building, including the acquisition of land or a non-residential building;
- Salaries directly related to the project.

Ineligible expenses are:

- Expenses related to studies, initiatives, action plans or strategic plans realized in the course of regular operations of an organization. This type of expense may be

considered in the event that it can clearly be demonstrated that it responds to an issue or a particular situation regarding **vitalization**;

- The operating deficit of an eligible organization, the repayment of loans or the replenishment of its working capital;
- Expenses already paid by the Quebec government for the same project;
- Any expense that is not directly related to the project;
- Any expense related to the relocation of a business or organization unless the local municipality where the business or organization is located agrees;
- Any grant to the government administration, with the exception of organizations in the education network;
- Any expense related to activities governed by budgetary rules approved by the Quebec government;
- Funding for projects or activities whose expenses were incurred before the project was submitted;
- The financing of a project that has already been completed;
- Any expenditure made to companies registered with the Registraire des entreprises that are not eligible for public contracts;
- Any form of loan, loan guarantee or equity investment;
- Fees for professional services when the rate is greater than \$150 per hour;
- The portion of taxes (GST and QST) that the recipient recovers from governments;
- All recurring expenses;

Construction work

When the project aims to finance the execution of construction work entrusted to a third party, the recipient eligible for financial assistance, with the exception of a private company, must follow the provisions set out in the Act respecting contracting by public bodies (R.S.Q., chapter C-65.1, section 23).

For municipal organizations, educational organizations or organizations mandated by the municipal government, contracts awarded through public tenders must be open to liberalization agreements.

Public bidding is not required, on the advice of the MINISTER, when, due to an emergency situation, where the safety of persons or property is involved or when only one contractor is possible due to a warranty, property right or exclusive right.

Where the construction contracting rules of an agency eligible for the program are more restrictive than these rules, the agency shall apply its own rules.

7.8 Terms and conditions for financial aid

The MRC respects the rules for awarding contracts that are applicable to it and ensures that its members respect the codes of ethics and professional conduct under the Act

respecting ethics and professional conduct in municipal matters (RLRQ, chapter E-15.1.0.1).

All authorized projects will be subject to a financial assistance agreement between the recipient and the MRC. This agreement will define:

- The terms and conditions of payment;
- The MRC will pay, upon signature of the agreement, a first instalment of its financial assistance;
- The remaining amount of the financial assistance is paid according to the terms and conditions and the steps determined by the nature of the project, its duration and the expected deliverables;
- Financial assistance may be paid in several installments as determined in the agreement;
- Subsequent payments are conditional on the acceptance of documents relating to the reporting required by the MRC;
- The obligations that the beneficiary must respect, particularly with regard to the expected results of the project.

All projects should be completed within a period of time to be determined in the agreements to be signed. The MRC may, if necessary, review its commitments after this period.