

# SKILLS TO CULTIVATE

Fundamentally, in order for the officer to effectively exercise their functions and deploy their professional talents, they must be able to communicate, forge links and develop a climate of confidence with local stakeholders.

They must continuously strive to avoid judging situations, and rather try to understand and come to terms with them.

The dynamism, culture, history, failures and successes of local leaders (elected officials, project promoters or citizens) are all factors that the officers must learn to take into account.

## BACKGROUND

For a number of decades in Québec, development policies have had a considerable impact on the ability of territories to develop and stimulate their local community.

The Policy supporting Local and Regional Development in 1997 and the National Policy on Rurality (NPR 1 in 2001 and NPR 2 in 2007) were tools that decentralized authority to the local level in order to stimulate and accelerate the assumption of management by local communities.

Originating in these two policy papers, the position of rural development officer introduced (at the supralocal level) an integrated and multisectoral approach based on community mobilization. The rural areas acquired this type of resource for themselves after noticing how beneficial the presence of these officers, whose salaries were subsidized through this policy, has been. These officers are also called: local development agent, rural development adviser, etc.



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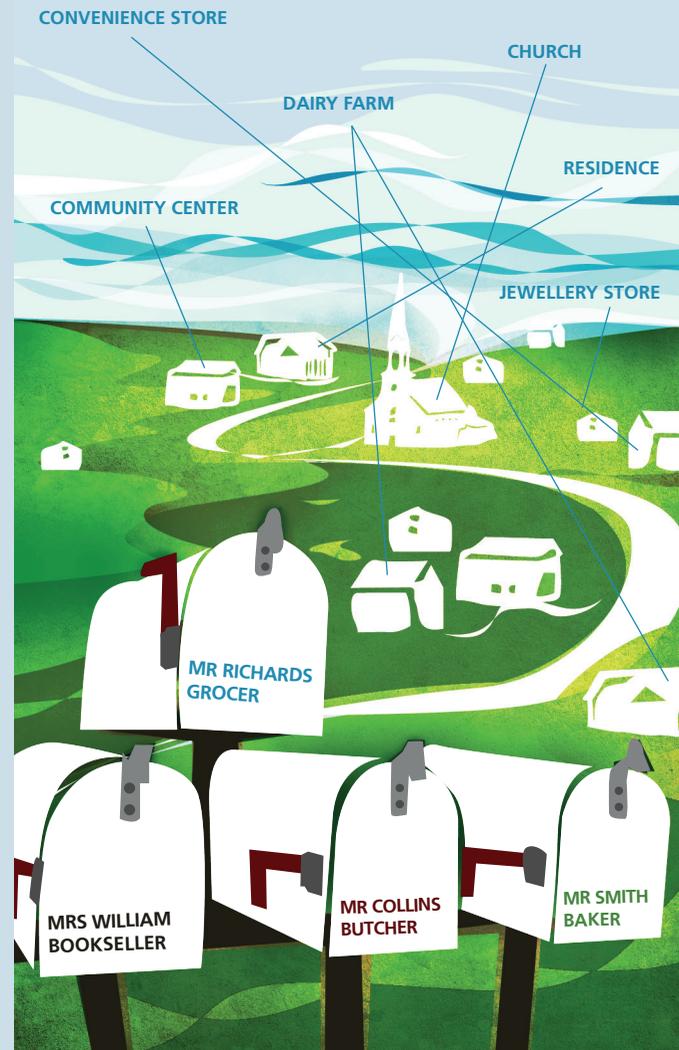
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# THE ROLE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



# A CENTRAL ROLE AND A MULTIDISCIPLINARY MANDATE

The officer's mandate is to facilitate, mobilize and provide technical aid to initiatives of rural communities and the coordinating work of the RCM. He also supports the promoters of rural and aboriginal communities in the development of their projects. Created in 1997, this mandate has been tied to the implementation of the National Policy on Rurality, in particular with respect to rural pacts, since 2001.

The officer plays a key role, central to community initiatives. He interacts with political representatives such as the RCM and municipalities, and with civil society represented by the members of local and supralocal organizations, project promoters and citizens. Through these interactions, he brings together all of these stakeholders in order to reach common objectives listed in local or supralocal work plans. He is also best positioned to ensure the alignment of these work plans with the guidelines provided by the NPR and to update the work plan with the MRC as needed.



# GENERAL FUNCTIONS OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICER<sup>1</sup>

The following table presents a summary of the functions and competencies specific to the role of rural officer. It is not essential to possess all the competencies to the same degree; it is more a question of adapting to the needs of the territory as a professional and acquiring the skills most relevant to the assigned mandate or issues.

Depending on the priorities of each rural territory, the officer's specific mandate can vary. However, generally, the following four main functions stand out:

GENERAL FUNCTIONS	SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES
Support communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Guide for local participants in finding solutions to problems</li> <li>▪ Develop the ability of communities to assume management responsibility through ongoing support</li> <li>▪ Stimulate and encourage local initiatives</li> </ul>
Facilitate territorial initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mobilize communities (inform, consult and encourage citizen participation)</li> <li>▪ Build alliances (collaborate and network)</li> <li>▪ Reconcile positions (encourage dialogue, seek consensus in order to facilitate decision making)</li> <li>▪ Train participants in the process of territorial development</li> </ul>
Territorial knowledge and analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Study communities carefully and diagnose the situation</li> <li>▪ Analyze complex problems</li> <li>▪ Anticipate development (research and strategic watch)</li> <li>▪ Determine strategies and priorities</li> <li>▪ Propose solutions</li> <li>▪ Evaluate spin-offs</li> <li>▪ Transfer knowledge</li> </ul>
Technical expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advise and assist communities and organizations supporting projects</li> <li>▪ Collaborate with available experts (internal and external)</li> <li>▪ Promote and defend issues and projects</li> <li>▪ Develop new multisectorial expertise</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the article "Les métiers du développement local et régional au Québec : l'émergence de nouvelles compétences" (Feb. 2007) written by Martin Robitaille, sociologist and UQO professor, and by a document produced by the French organization ARADEL, "Le référentiel de compétences des professionnels du développement territorial" (Oct. 2005).