

River Canyon Country Rural Tourism Studio
Six Month Progress Report
October 2013



RURAL TOURISM STUDIO

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A. Introduction

This report presents a progress assessment for the Rural Tourism Studio (RTS) program in River Canyon Country (RCC). The region includes Jefferson County, Crook County, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs (CTWS) Reservation, and the northern part of Deschutes County (Terrebone area). It is a sub-region of Central Oregon. The RTS program workshops commenced in September 2012, and wrapped up in January 2013. The information in this report reflects the status of activity six months *after* workshop completion, based on an electronic survey completed in October 2012. The survey focuses on determining what was most useful about the workshops; initial effectiveness of action teams; and planned tourism development activities for the coming year.

The e-survey asked respondents to rate their progress on two categories of success factors for tourism development: their level of personal engagement to work effectively on tourism development, and community conditions—the broader context in which they operated. For respondents who were currently active on action teams or who owned tourism-related businesses, there were additional questions added to the e-survey for the first time. The full survey and results are available through the Travel Oregon survey monkey account.

According to survey respondents, RTS had a positive impact on all variables related to the level of personal engagement in future tourism development, and on most community conditions related to tourism, albeit generally on a more modest scale than for past RTS communities.

In February 2014, additional follow up interviews and assessment will be conducted to better capture project implementation experience and progress relative to logic model indicators. This coincides with twelve months after workshop completion. The e-survey results suggest several specific areas for additional probing in interviews:

- Information about regional programs, the asset inventory, and information about bicycle tourism were reported as having the greatest lasting value. How has the value of these RTS program components been apparent in your work around tourism development since the RTS?
- Given that the “capacity for implementation” was not high at the beginning of RTS, why did it not change much given the program’s focus on building such capacity?
- While trust and community involvement both increased significantly, the action teams appear to have stalled. Why? Could the program better help build community connections for implementation?
- What is the current status of progress on projects? Is there anything that could be done to renew momentum, or are the projects themselves not a good fit with current conditions?

B. Survey Findings

OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

- 26% response rate: 12 survey respondents out of 46 who attended and had email address on record.
- Four respondents are members of the original RTS Project Steering Committee.

- People with high levels of participation in the RTS workshop series are heavily represented among survey respondents. Six of the twelve respondents attended at least 6 different RTS workshops/events and received a certificate of completion as a result. These six people represent 43% of all RTS participants from this region who received certificates of completion (6 of 14).
- The survey participants are typical of overall participants in terms of which workshops they attended, except for the disproportionate amount of survey respondents attending the bicycle tourism development workshop. The three workshops/events that attracted the highest attendance *by survey respondents* were the “Community Tourism Planning Part 1”, “Community Tourism Planning Part 2”, and “Bicycle Tourism Development.” For all participants, the two community tourism planning workshops also attracted the highest participation, with the Pub Talk event for entrepreneurs attracting the next largest crowd.
- Three of the twelve respondents reported that they are currently members of action teams. This is low compared with prior RTS communities, for which generally at least one half of respondents were active action team members at the same time interval after program completion.

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT

All of the indicators related to personal engagement in future tourism development improved (by between 12% and 36%) after the RTS workshops. This is, however, the lowest range of change reported by any RTS community to date, as further shown in Section C. In terms of level of personal engagement, the two indicators (of 6) that changed the most and ended the highest were:

- Knowledge of sustainable tourism development principles (+36.0% change)
- Awareness of assets and resources (+33.3% change)

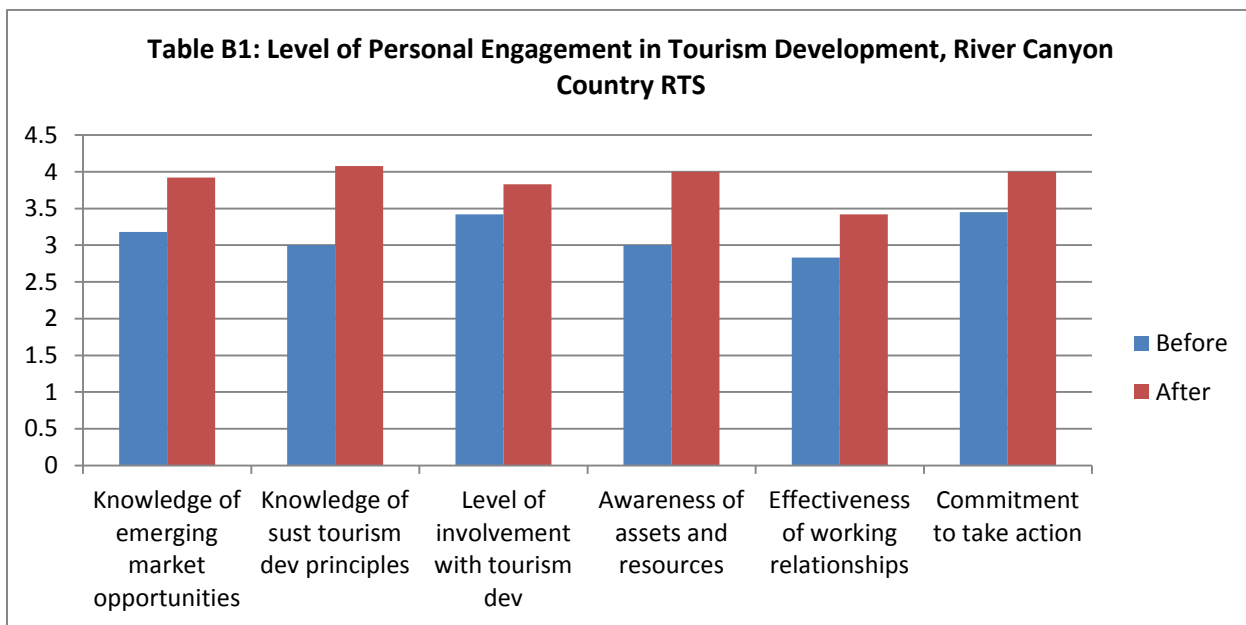


Table shows average scores, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “low” and 5 being “high”

In terms of which changes were most perceived to have been *caused* by the RTS program, respondent rankings were somewhat different. The two changes most caused by RTS itself were:

- Awareness of assets and resources for tourism development
- Knowledge of emerging market opportunities

Table B2: Change and Relative Impact of Personal Engagement Factors, in order of starting level

	Pre-RTS	6 months post-RTS	% Change	Perceived impact of RTS on any changes noted	Importance of this factor in shaping future tourism
Effectiveness of working relationships	2.83	3.42	20.8%	2.82	3.75
Knowledge of sustainable tourism dev principles	3	4.08	36.0%	3.17	4.17
Awareness of assets and resources	3	4	33.3%	3.4	4.42
Knowledge of emerging market opportunities	3.18	3.92	23.3%	3.4	4.25
Level of involvement with tourism dev	3.42	3.83	12.0%	2.91	4
Commitment to take action	3.45	4	15.9%	3.2	4.08

In terms of their starting level of personal engagement, RCC respondents rated themselves slightly above average than past RTS communities. In terms of the change in their level of personal engagement, they rank lower than average in most categories. See Tables C1 and C2 for details.

COMMUNITY CONDITIONS:

In terms of their starting level of community conditions, RCC respondents rated themselves lower, on average, than past RTS communities. In particular, they rated the starting levels of trust and community involvement within the community around tourism development as lower than in any past RTS community. Compared with other communities, the ranked their starting capacity to attract visitors as strong. See Table C3 and C4 for details.

Nearly all of the indicators related to community conditions for future tourism development improved positively (by greater than 12%) after the RTS workshops. See Table B3 for detail. In terms of community conditions related to tourism, the four indicators (of 12) that changed the most were:

- Clarity of community priorities (+52.7%)
- Level of collaboration (+51.9%)
- Level of community involvement (+51.3%)
- Clarity of community vision for tourism development (+50.9% change)

These were also the four community conditions ranked lowest at the start of RTS.

Two factors, “ability of the area to attract visitors” and “capacity for implementation” were not judged to have changed at all. In the case of “ability to attract visitors”, this is understandable because it was already the community condition ranked most strong at the start of RTS. That “capacity for implementation” did not change either is less expected, as this was not an area of high capacity to begin with. This finding will be explored as part of the 12 month progress report interviews early in 2014.

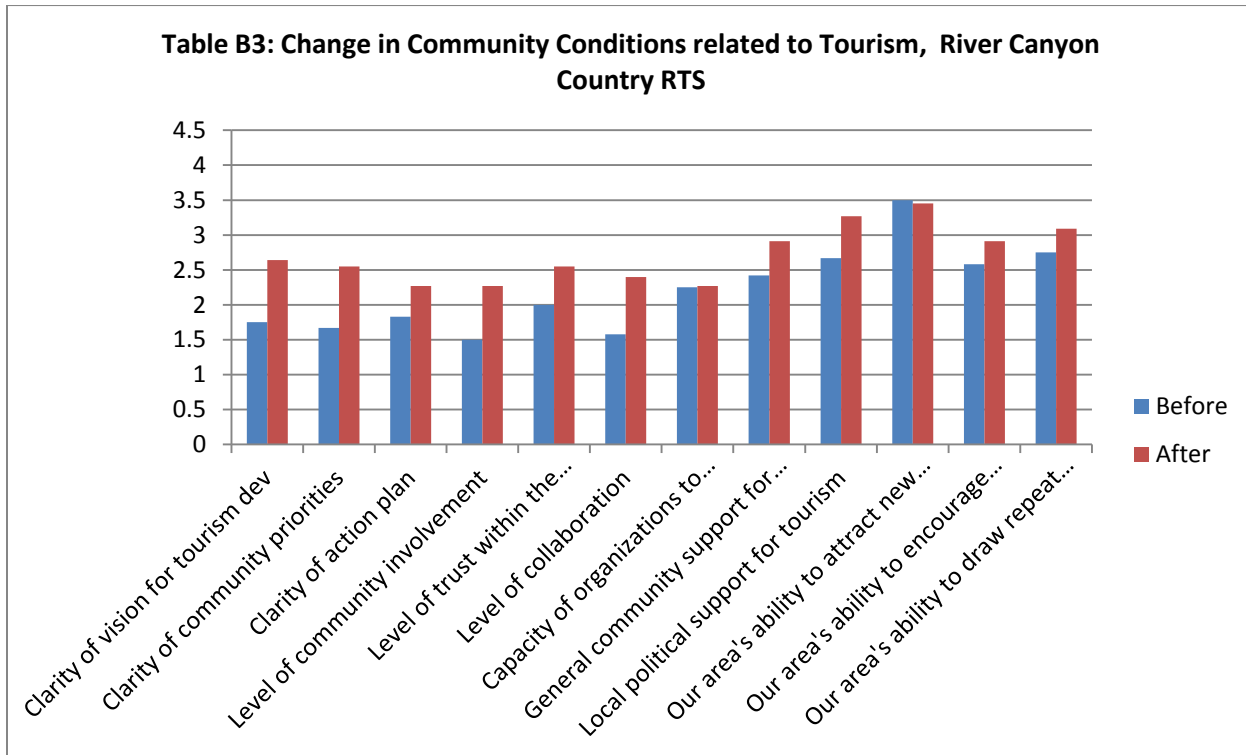


Table shows average scores, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “weak” and 5 being “strong”

In terms of the causal effect of RTS on community conditions, respondents in general judged RTS to be a significant factor in explaining the changes they observed, though in different areas than one might conclude given where the greatest magnitude of changes occurred. Specifically, participants cited change associated with the area’s ability to attract new visitors as most attributable to RTS, although the change was actually a negative change! They also linked RTS to the area’s improved ability to draw repeat visitors, and encourage longer stays to RTS, as well as the level of political support for tourism. These are all areas where they ranked themselves as strong at the start of the program, and therefore showed little change.

On the other hand, the factors that changed most strongly in a positive direction (vision, priorities, collaboration and community involvement) were *not* as strongly seen as having been *caused* by RTS. This result also occurred in a past community, and is something that will be further explored during the personal interviews at the 12 month post-program interval.

Table B4: Change and Relative Impact of Community Condition Factors, in order of starting level

	Before	After	% Change	Perceived impact of RTS on any changes noted	Importance of this factor in shaping future tourism
Our area's ability to attract new visitors	3.5	3.45	-1.4%	3.36	4.78
Our area's ability to draw repeat visitors	2.75	3.09	12.4%	3.18	4.75
Local political support for tourism	2.67	3.27	22.5%	3.09	4.44
Our area's ability to encourage visitors to stay longer	2.58	2.91	12.8%	3.09	4.78
General community support for tourism	2.42	2.91	20.2%	2.91	4.33
Capacity of organizations to implement	2.25	2.27	0.9%	2.82	4
Level of trust within the community around tourism dev	2	2.55	27.5%	2.91	4.22
Clarity of action plan	1.83	2.27	24.0%	2.64	4.67
Clarity of vision for tourism dev	1.75	2.64	50.9%	2.73	4.67
Clarity of community priorities	1.67	2.55	52.7%	2.82	4.44
Level of collaboration	1.58	2.4	51.9%	2.6	4.33
Level of community involvement	1.5	2.27	51.3%	2.64	4.33

Table shows average scores, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “weak” and 5 being “strong”

LASTING VALUE

Finally, in terms of what aspects of the Rural Tourism Studio workshops have had lasting impact, the most valuable and least valuable content aligns to some degree with that of past communities except for the fact that “connections with others in my community” is not among the top five most valuable impacts for the RCC area. “Overview of sustainable tourism principles” (sadly!) is among the least impactful for all communities.

Consistent with results from past RTS communities, all program components are seen as having significantly lasting value, which is important to acknowledge! River Canyon Country is first region to rank “information about regional tourism programs” as its top value-added.

Table B5: What has had the most lasting value for you from the RTS workshops?

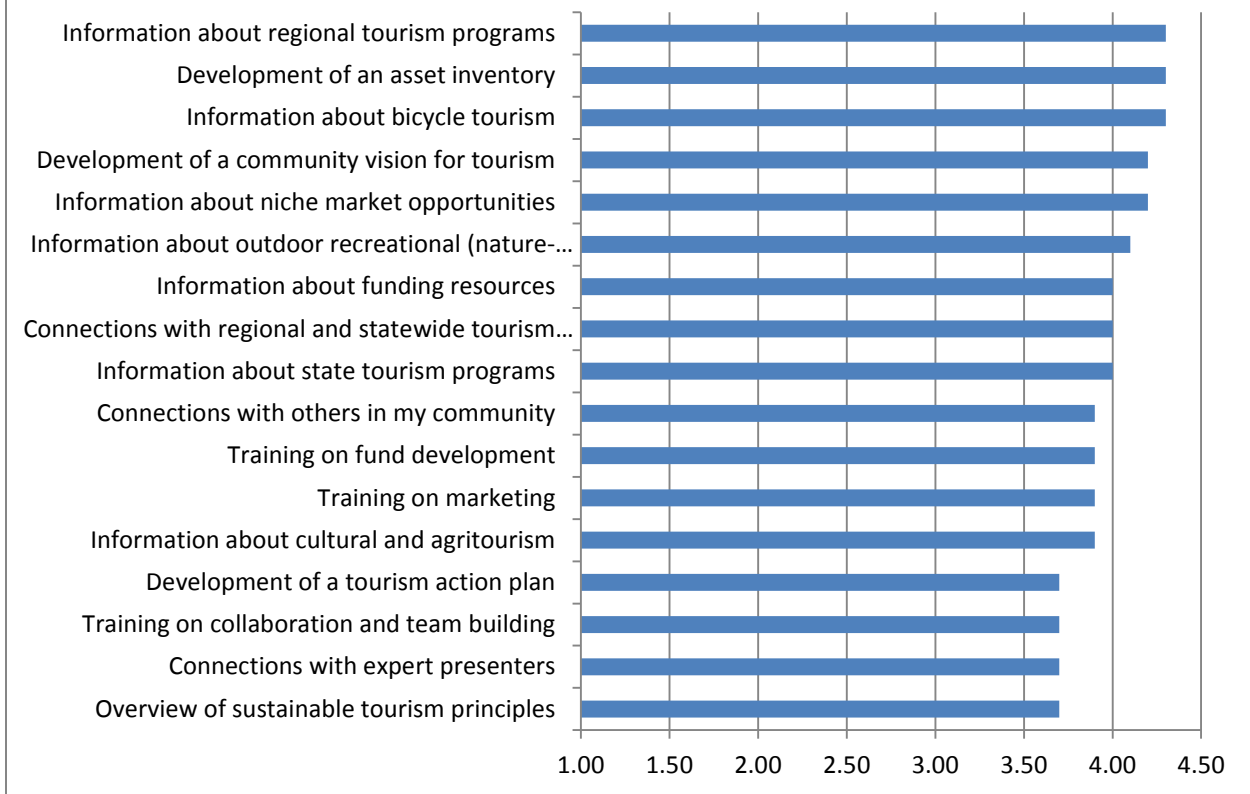


Table shows average scores, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “not useful” and 5 being “extremely useful”

OTHER RESULTS:

The e-survey included additional questions related to the value of action teams and potential new product and service development underway by local businesses. These questions provided limited insight, given the small number of responses.

With respect to the action teams, the three action team members were mixed in their assessment of their progress to date, although all indicated that action teams were a critical component for future success.

Question	Average ranking
From your perspective, how would you rate the progress of your action team in moving forward since the end of the RTS workshops? (1 = poor, 5 = excellent) (3 respondents)	3
How effective do you believe your action them will be in implementing its projects going forward? (1= ineffective, 5 = very effective) (2 respondents)	3.5

With respect to business plans, only one respondent was a business owner, and that respondent indicated a strong correlation between planned product development, marketing, and “greening” initiatives and knowledge gained through the Rural Tourism Studio.

C. Comparison across RTS Communities

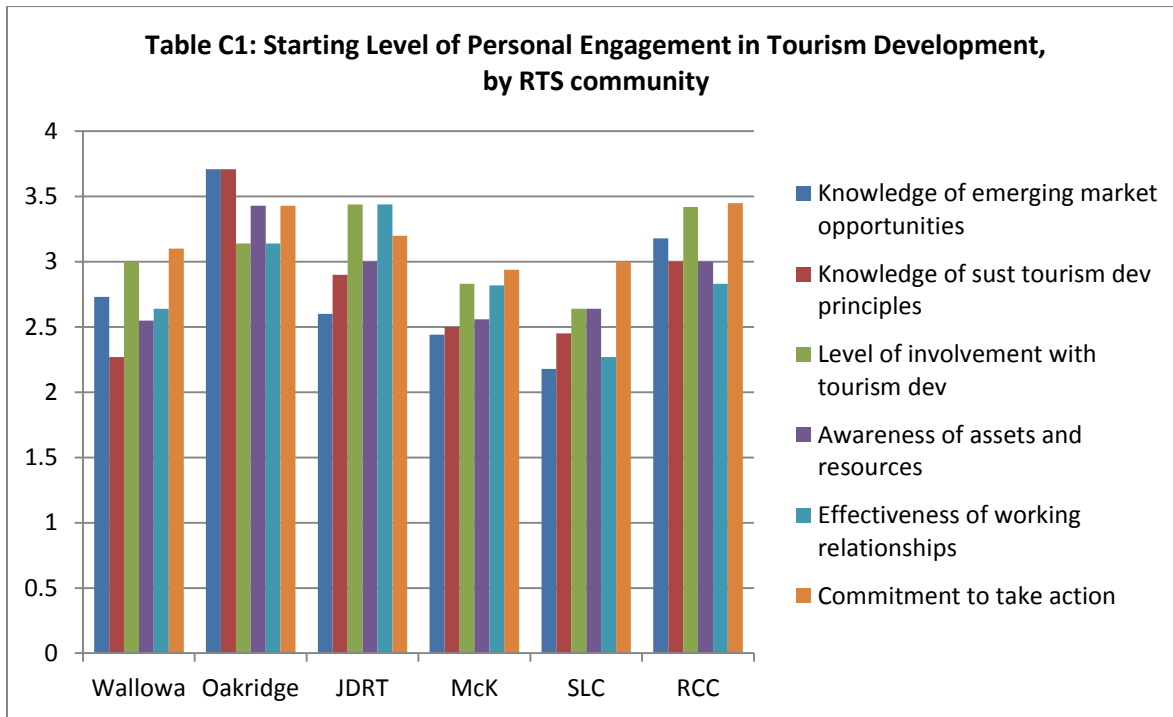


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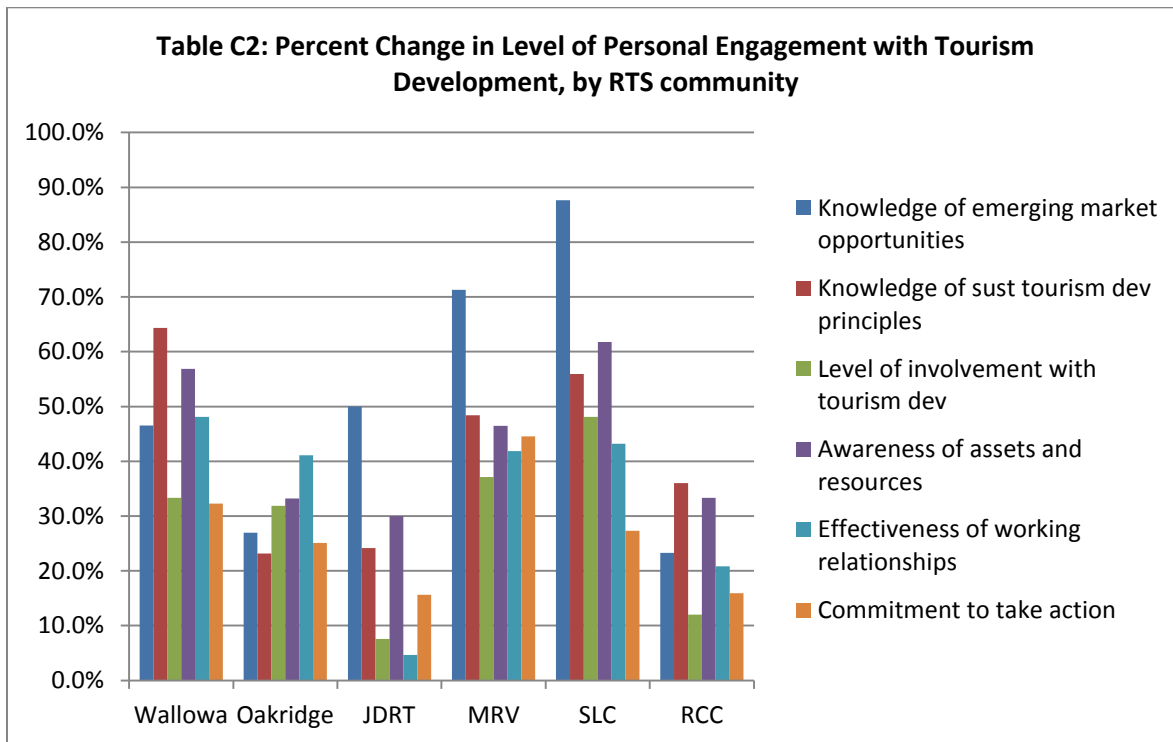


Table C3: Starting Level of Community Conditions for Tourism Development, by RTS Community

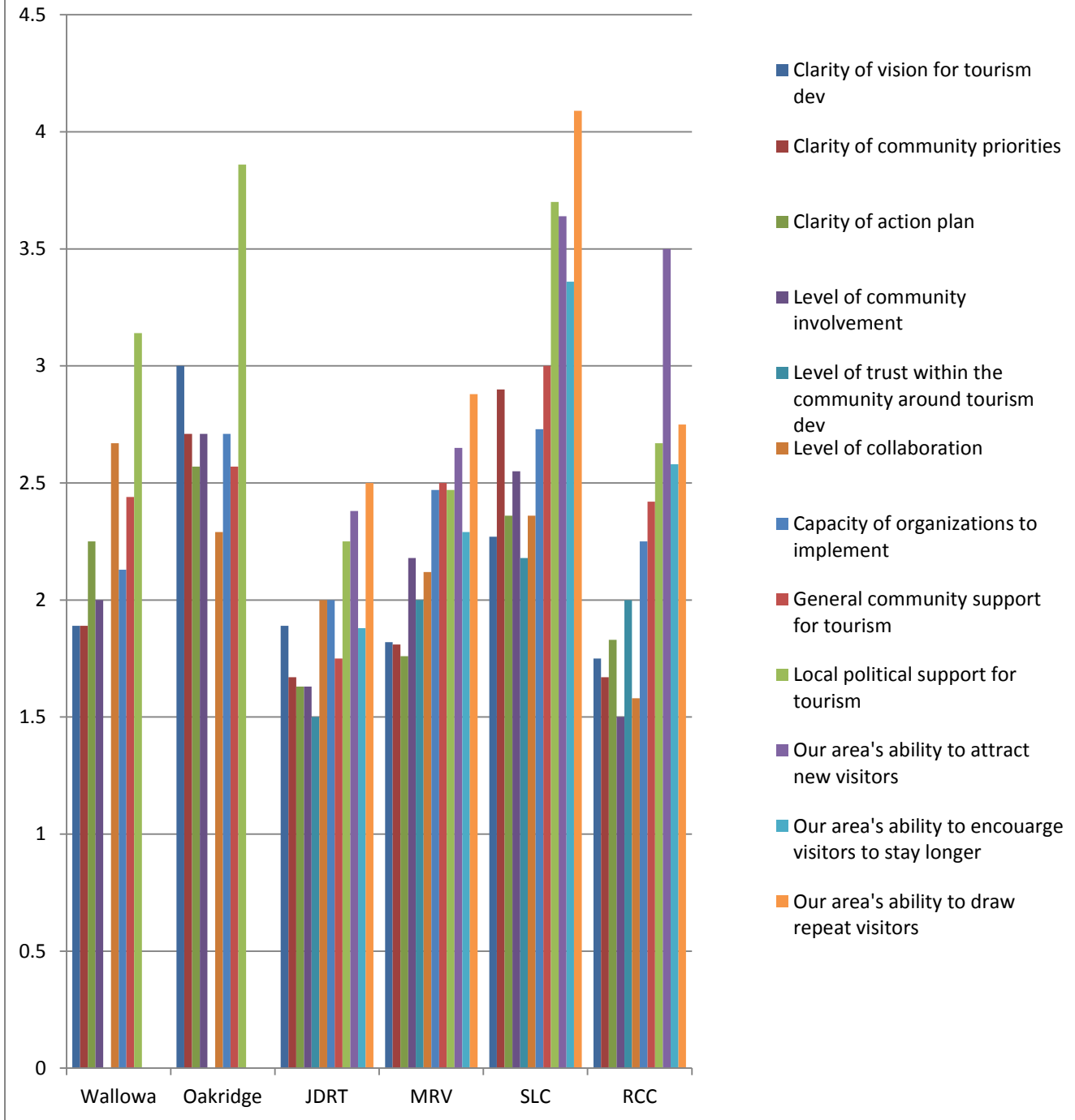


Table shows average scores, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “weak” and 5 being “strong”: The four categories in italics were added to the survey after the first two communities were complete. Thus, there are not comparative results for these changes across all RTS communities.

Table C4: Percent Change in Community Conditions for Tourism Development, by RTS Community

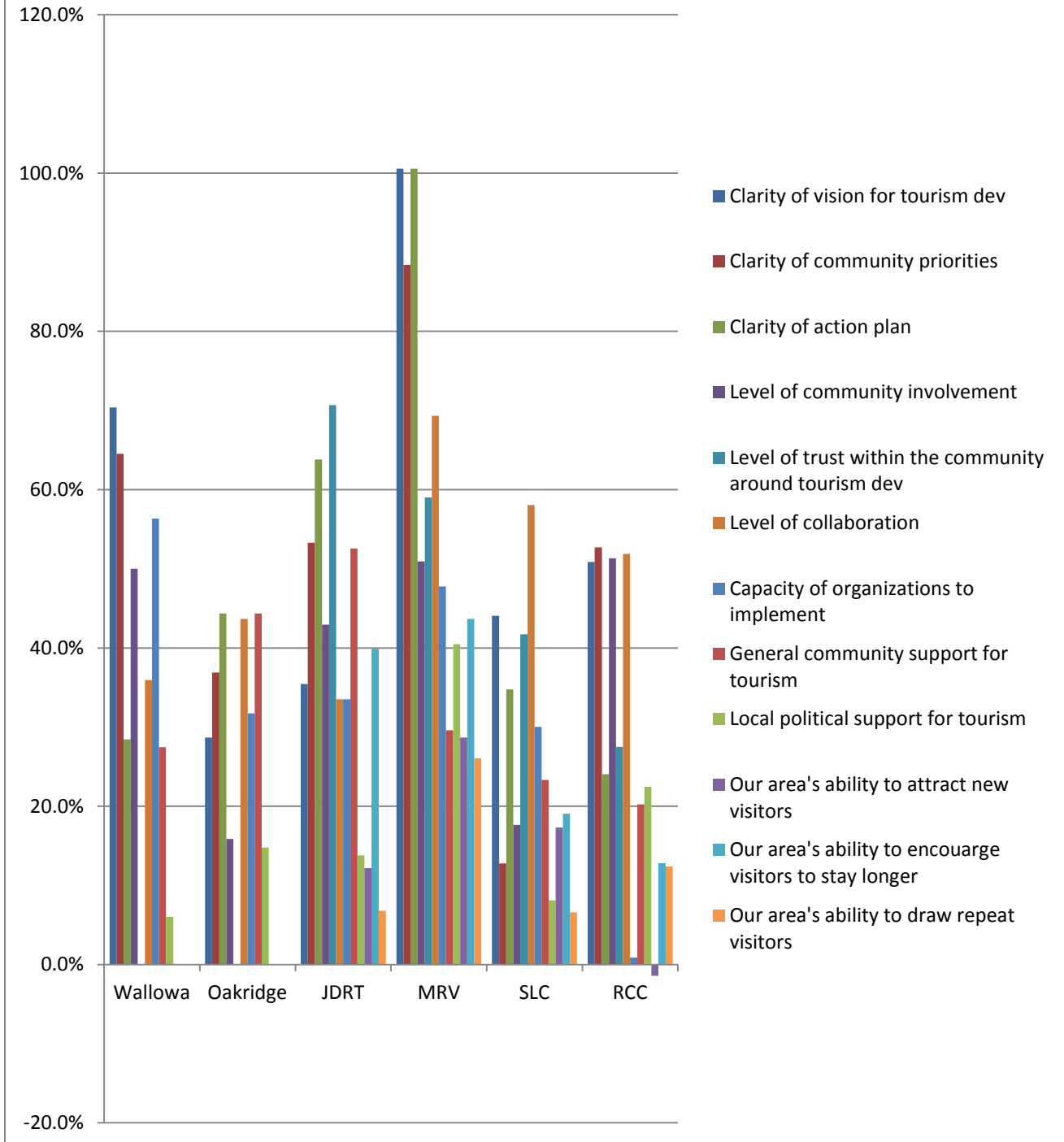


Table shows average percentage change in before and after rankings of community conditions, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being “weak” and 5 being “strong”: The four categories in italics were added to the survey after the first two communities were complete. Thus, there are not comparative results for these changes across all RTS communities.