Wild Rivers Coast Rural Tourism Studio
Six Month Progress Report
September 2014

Prepared for Travel Oregon by:

Kathi Jaworski

Write to Know Nonprofit Consulting

Eugene Oregon

www.write-to-know.com

Wild Rivers Coast Rural Tourism Studio Six Month Progress Report
Contents

A. Introduction

This report presents a progress assessment for the Rural Tourism Studio (RTS) program in the Wild Rivers Coast (WRC) region of Southwest Oregon. The region includes all of Curry County, as well as Coos County from the Bandon area south to the Curry County border. The RTS program workshops commenced in October 2013, and wrapped up in January 2014. The information here reflects the status of activity six months *after* workshop completion, based on an electronic survey completed in August 2014. The e-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.

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 community conditions related to tourism. In terms of improved levels of collaboration and local political support, the change was greater than for any other RTS community to date.

KEY CONCLUSIONS:

Given that this particular Rural Tourism Studio was offered in a more intensive format, with broad-based community outreach, visioning and asset inventories involving more people prior to the opening workshop, as well as post-workshop technical assistance, one might expect more robust and demonstrable results as implementation unfolds.

However, in the short term, the results do not look very different from past RTS communities except for a few notable exceptions:

- The Initial "commitment to action" here was the highest of any RTS community to date. This could be a result of the extensive community outreach and vetting for this region, the presence of a local funding partner, the broad participation in community visioning prior to the workshops, and or other factors that differed from past RTS communities.
- Well over 100 community members participated in RTS activities, far more than in any past community.
- The skills workshops (marketing, teaming, visioning etc.) were more popular than the product niche workshops, which has not typically been the case. And there was no downturn in attendance over the course of the RTS workshops—the teaming workshop attendance was far higher proportionately than for past communities.
- The reported increase in market knowledge is correlated with increased confidence in the area's ability to attract and retain visitors,

- Collaboration and political support increased more here than in any other RTS community to date, and "*level* of collaboration" was higher 6 months after the Wild Rivers Coast RTS than in any past community

Additional follow up interviews and assessment will be conducted in 2015, twelve to eighteen months after workshop completion, to better capture project implementation experience and progress relative to logic model indicators. The e-survey results suggest several specific areas for additional probing in interviews:

- What contributed to the large gains in collaboration and political support? Was the mix of people initially involved a factor? How has this affected implementation?
- What explains the high level of initial commitment to action?
- How has the vision and action plan served as a guide? Has the early emphasis on this made a difference?
- How have new people become involved? Does the higher number of early participants directly yield more robust action team for implementation?
- Many of the RTS communities experienced an initial drop in energy sometime during their first year, resulting in slow agreement on the use of grant funds for implementation? Has this happened here?

B. Survey Findings

OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS

- 18% response rate: 22 survey respondents out of 122 who attended and had valid email address on record. While the pool of participants was more than double the size of past RTS offerings, this survey garnered a relatively low response rate.
- Seven 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. Seven of the twenty two respondents attended at least 6 different RTS workshop events and received a certificate of completion as a result. These twelve people represent 22.6% of all RTS participants from this region who received certificates of completion (31 of 138).
- All segments of the Rural Tourism Studio program were well attended; each attracted an average of 54 participants, with a minimum of 46 people and a maximum of 66. The survey participants are typical of overall participants in terms of which workshops they attended. The three workshops/events that attracted the highest attendance *by survey respondent*s were the two marketing workshops and "Community Tourism Planning". For all participants, "Community Tourism Vision" and "Community Tourism Planning" drew the largest participation, followed by "Teaming for Success." The marketing workshops were also popular.
- Twelve of the twenty two respondents reported that they are currently members of action teams. This is typical of most other 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

Compared with past RTS communities, the starting level of personal engagement in tourism development was average, with the exception of two factors: "current level of involvement with tourism development" and most strikingly, "commitment to take action." This is illustrated in Section C, Table C1.

All of the indicators related to personal engagement in future tourism development improved (by between 8% and 54%) after the RTS workshops. In terms of level of personal engagement, the three indicators (of 6) that changed the most were:

- Knowledge of emerging market opportunities (54%)
- Awareness of assets and resources (+36.2% change)
- Knowledge of sustainable tourism development principles (+36.0% change)
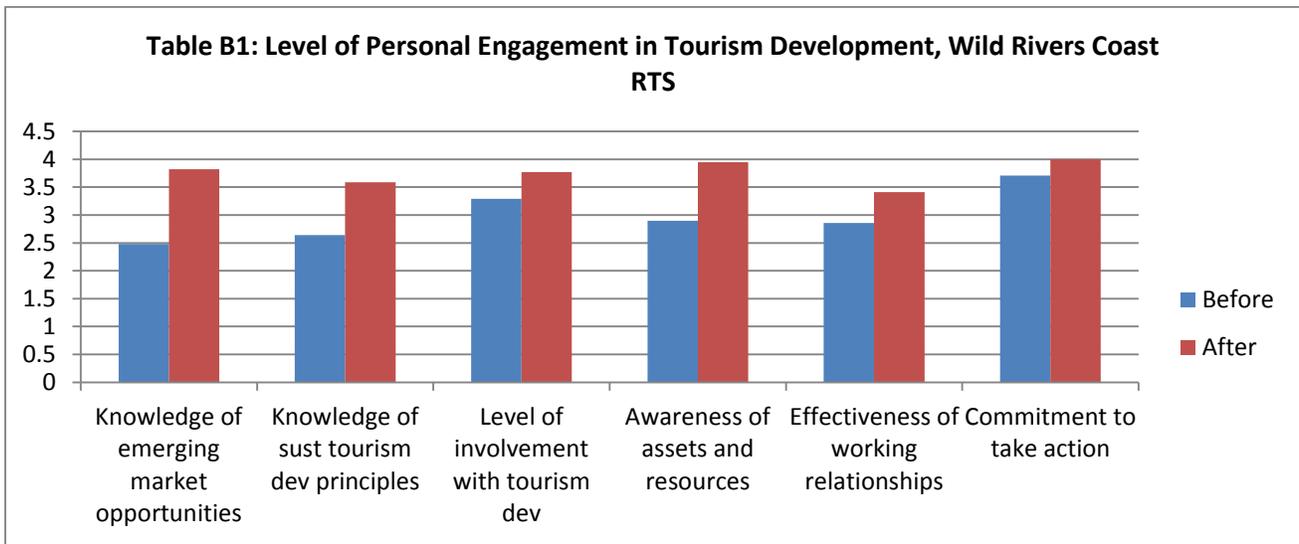
Table B1: Level of Personal Engagement in Tourism Development, Wild Rivers Coast RTS

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

The top two factors that most changed are the same two that respondents most perceive RTS as having *caused* the change.

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

This assessment of the causal relationship is quite typical for all RTS communities

Table B2: Change and Relative Impact of Personal Engagement Factors, in order of size of change

	Before	After	% Change	Perceived impact of RTS on any changes noted	Importance of this factor in shaping future tourism
Knowledge of emerging market opportunities	2.48	3.82	54.0%	3.75	4.3
Awareness of assets and resources	2.9	3.95	36.2%	3.7	4.2
Knowledge of sustainable tourism dev principles	2.64	3.59	36.0%	3.3	4
Effectiveness of working relationships	2.86	3.41	19.2%	3.35	4.2
Level of involvement with tourism dev	3.29	3.77	14.6%	3.4	3.95
Commitment to take action	3.71	4	7.8%	3.37	4.58

In general, the reported changes are average or below average for all RTS communities to date, as shown in Section C, Table 2.

COMMUNITY CONDITIONS:

In terms of their starting level of community conditions, WRC respondents rated themselves lower, on average, than past RTS communities. However, compared with most other communities, they ranked their starting capacity to attract new and repeat 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 between 15% and 75%) after the RTS workshops. See Tables B3 and B4 for detail. In terms of community conditions related to tourism, the four indicators (of 12) that changed the most were:

- Level of collaboration (+74.3%)
- Clarity of community vision for tourism development (+69.4% change)
- Clarity of action plan (+63.9)
- Clarity of community priorities (+54.6%)

Notably, respondents' perception of "local political support for tourism" grew 41.6% stronger, which is by far the greatest change noted in any RTS community to date.

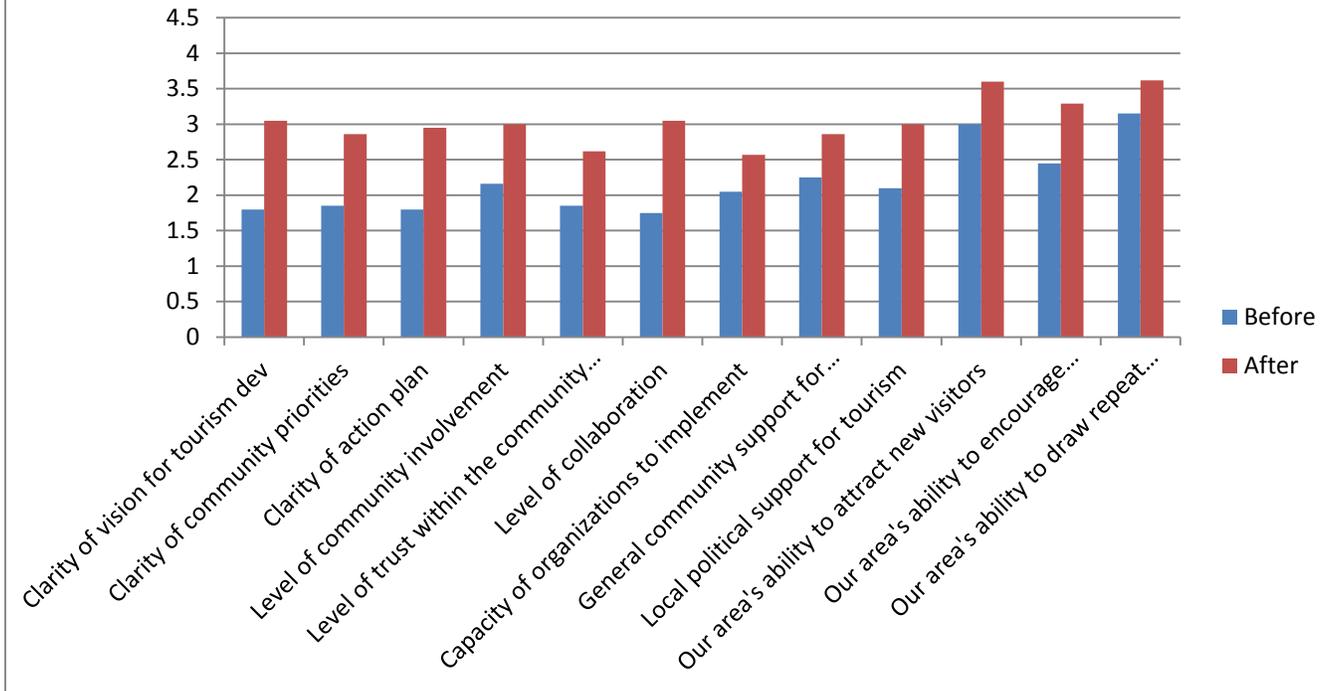## Table B3: Change in Community Conditions related to Tourism, Wild Rivers Coast RTS

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 indicate the top 4 areas of change noted above as the same factors most influenced by the RTS program (Table B4 below).

Table B4: Change and Relative Impact of Community Condition Factors, in order of size of change

	Before	After	% Change	Perceived impact of RTS on any changes noted	Importance of this factor in shaping future tourism
Level of collaboration	1.75	3.05	74.3%	3.37	4.72
Clarity of vision for tourism dev	1.80	3.05	69.4%	3.37	4.58
Clarity of action plan	1.80	2.95	63.9%	3.37	4.68
Clarity of community priorities	1.85	2.86	54.6%	3.21	4.63
Local political support for tourism	2.10	3.00	42.9%	2.89	4.67
Level of trust within the community re: tourism dev	1.85	2.62	41.6%	2.84	4.63
Level of community involvement	2.16	3.00	38.9%	3.11	4.53
Our area's ability to encourage visitors to stay longer	2.45	3.29	34.3%	3.00	4.61
General community support for tourism	2.25	2.86	27.1%	2.95	4.61
Capacity of organizations to implement	2.05	2.57	25.4%	2.84	4.72
Our area's ability to attract new visitors	3.00	3.60	20.0%	3.16	4.72
Our area's ability to draw repeat visitors	3.15	3.62	14.9%	3.16	4.78

LASTING VALUE

Consistent with results from past RTS communities, all program components are seen as having significantly lasting value, which is important to acknowledge! As shown on Table B5 that follows, "Connections with others in my community" is viewed as having the greatest lasting impact.
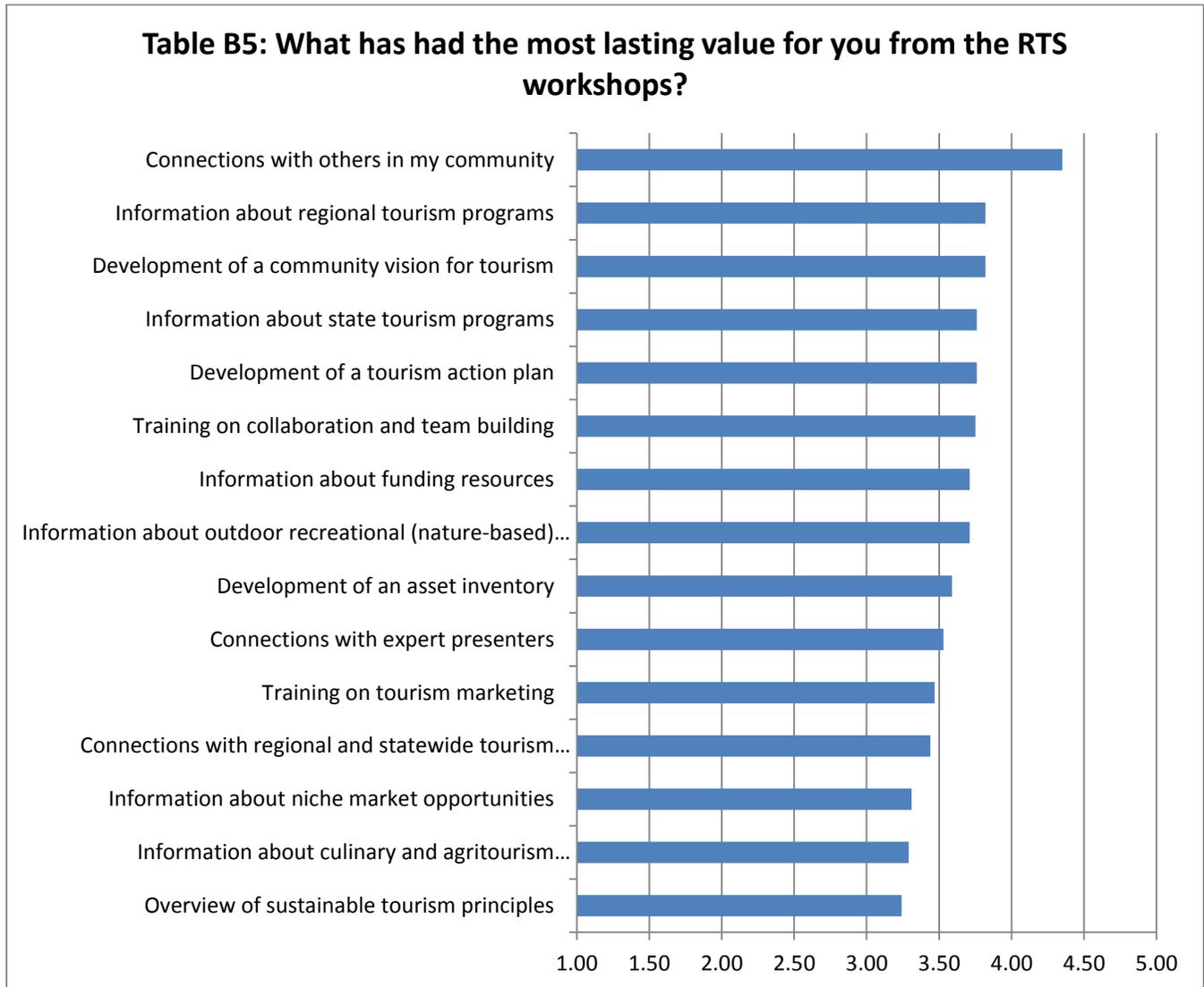
Table B5: What has had the most lasting value for you from the RTS workshops?

Table shows average scores, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being "not useful" and 5 being "extremely useful". Note that "information about bicycle tourism" was inadvertently omitted from the choices for survey respondents,

NARRATIVE RESPONSES ON NEXT STEPS

The tenor of responses was varied to the question "What do you see as the most important next steps for your community with respect to tourism development?"

Prepared for Travel Oregon by Write to Know nonprofit consulting, September 2014
www.write-to-know.com
pg. 7

- Many people mentioned the need for the community to work together, build capacity to work as a region, and overcome historic barriers to cooperation.
- Many mentioned how the RTS experience laid a great foundation for action.
- Some negativity due to personal priorities not being elevated as group priorities.
- Some felt it was too early to gauge next steps or likelihood of success
- The post-workshop technical assistance provided was seen as valuable, though some felt it needed to start earlier than it did.

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.

With respect to the action teams, the twelve action team members were mixed in their assessment of their progress to date, although 83% (10 of 12) indicated optimism about future performance and recognition of action teams as 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) (12 respondents)	3.17
How effective do you believe your action them will be in implementing its projects going forward? (1= ineffective, 5 = very effective) (12 respondents)	3.67
How important do you believe the action teams formed as Part of the Rural Tourism Studio are for your community to launch effective new tourism development work (1= unimportant, 5 = absolutely critical) (12 respondents)	4.08

With respect to business plans, only three respondents were business owners, so business-related questions and responses provide only limited insight. Responding businesses noted plans to increase product development and marketing, but did not note any plans to "green" their businesses. This is not surprising as the RTS program does not directly address "greening" opportunities.

C. Comparison across RTS Communities
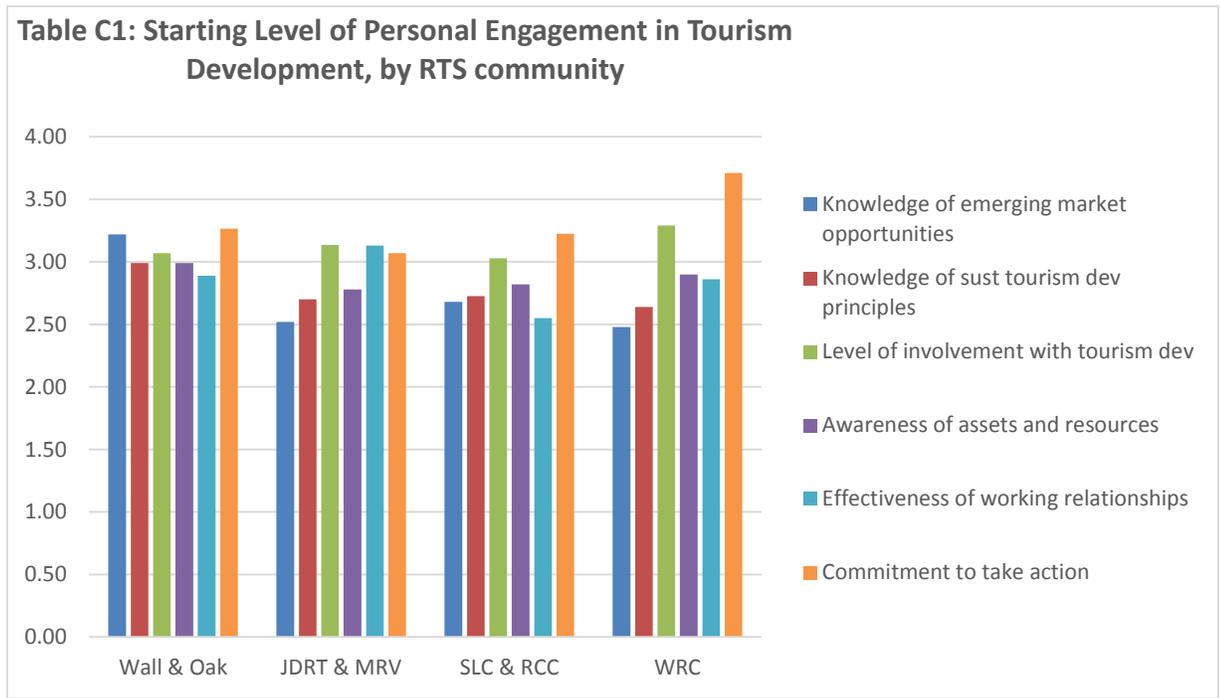
Table C1: Starting Level of Personal Engagement in Tourism Development, by RTS community

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

Table C2: Percent Change in Level of Personal Engagement with Tourism Development, by RTS community
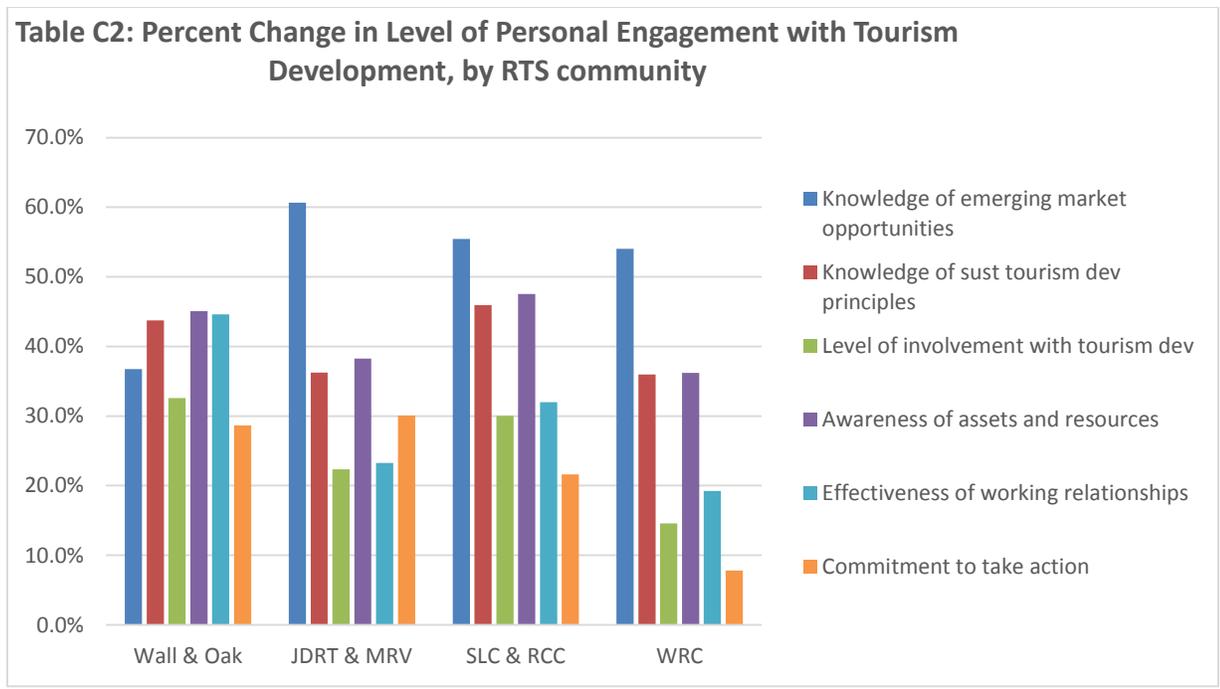
Table C3: Starting Level of Community Conditions for Tourism Development, by RTS Community

Legend:
- Clarity of vision for tourism dev
- Clarity of community priorities
- Clarity of action plan
- Level of community involvement
- Level of trust within the community around tourism dev
- Level of collaboration
- Capacity of organizations to implement
- General community support for tourism
- Local political support for tourism
- Our area's ability to attract new visitors
- Our area's ability to encouarge visitors to stay longer
- Our area's ability to draw repeat visitors

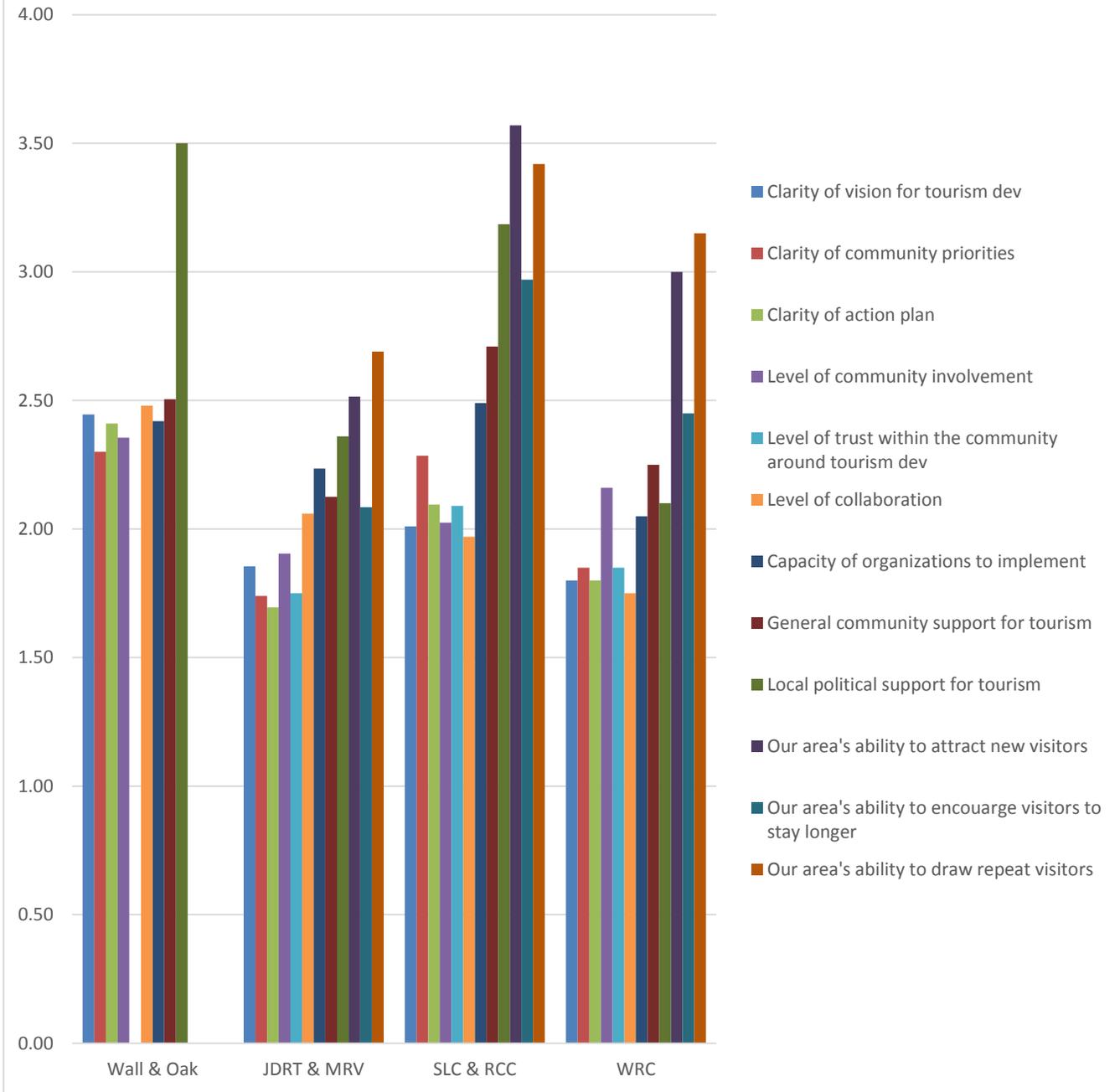Categories: Wall & Oak, JDRT & MRV, SLC & RCC, WRC

Table shows average scores, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being "weak" and 5 being "strong": Four categories were added to the survey after the first two communities were complete: "level of trust within the community around tourism development", as well as the three market related questions "our area's ability to…". 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
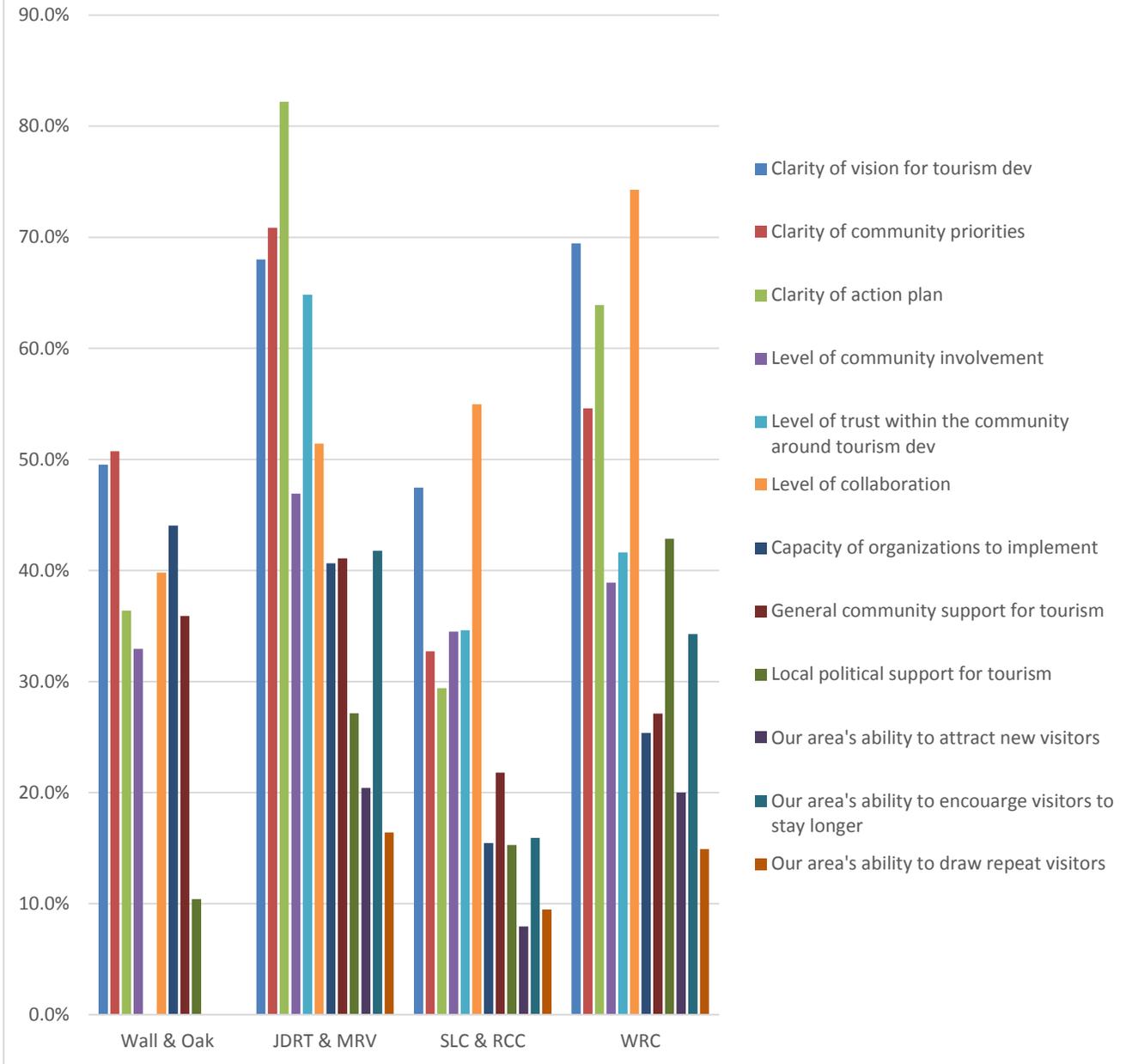
Legend:
- Clarity of vision for tourism dev
- Clarity of community priorities
- Clarity of action plan
- Level of community involvement
- Level of trust within the community around tourism dev
- Level of collaboration
- Capacity of organizations to implement
- General community support for tourism
- Local political support for tourism
- Our area's ability to attract new visitors
- Our area's ability to encouarge visitors to stay longer
- Our area's ability to draw repeat visitors

Table shows average scores, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being "weak" and 5 being "strong": Four categories were added to the survey after the first two communities were complete: "level of trust within the community around tourism development", as well as the three market related questions "our area's ability to…". Thus, there are not comparative results for these changes across all RTS communities.