



HEARing Rural Voices: Data Municipalities can use Tomorrow

ROMA 2026

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Who am I?

- From Corbeil and now live in Fergus
- McCall MacBain Research Chair in Resilient Rural Communities in the Ontario Agricultural College, University of Guelph
- 20+ years of rural-focused research
- Expertise in research methods, data collection, knowledge mobilization, advanced analytics
- Led large (24,000 responses) project on rural experiences related to COVID-19
- Was catalyst for where I am now



What is HEAR?

- Health, Economy, and Adaptation in Rural Communities (HEAR).
- Research platform to understand rural well-being and adaptation.
- Evidence for policy, partnerships for practice, and data for communities.



HEAR

Health, Economy,
Adaptation in Rural
Communities Initiative

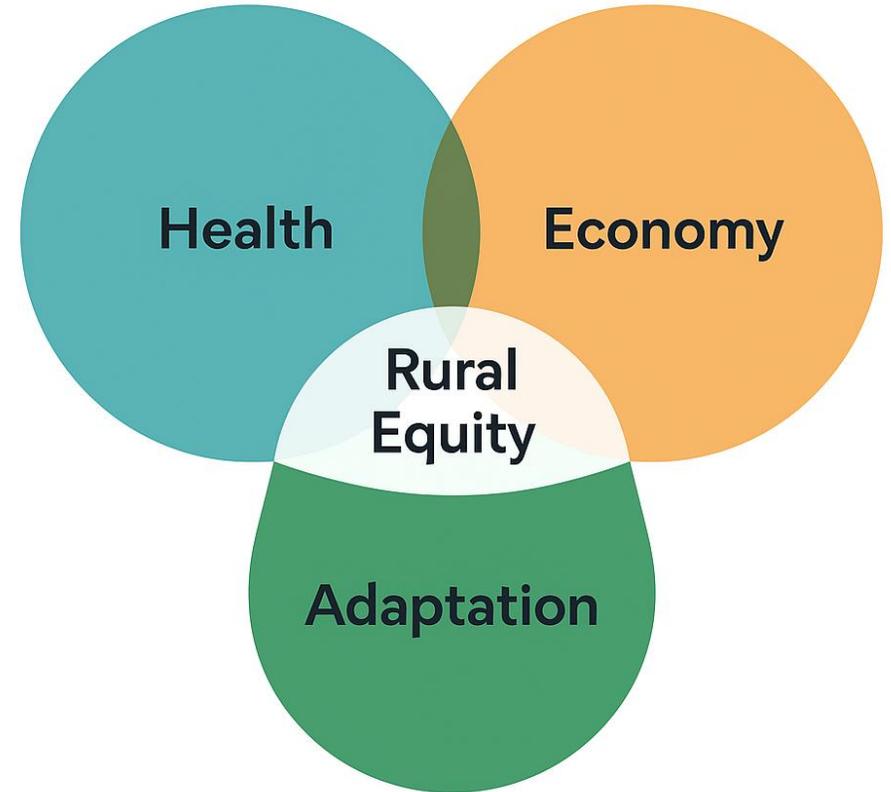
Why HEAR exists?

“Provincial policies and decision-making doesn’t reflect our reality”

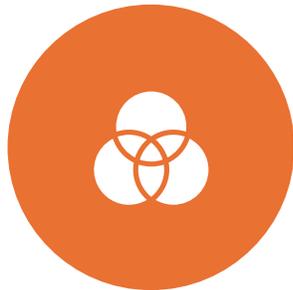
- HEAR exists because:
 - Rural and Northern Communities are often invisible in datasets
 - Data is fragmented across systems and ministries
 - Decision-makers are forced to rely on proxy- and/or aggregated data instead of local evidence

Three Components of HEAR

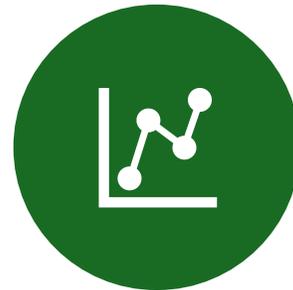
1. HEAR Survey: Community-level data capturing local realities.
2. HEAR Research Database: Spatial and socioeconomic data harmonized across Canada.
3. HEAR Dashboard: GIS-enabled tool for exploring rural resilience.



1. The HEAR Survey



300,000 paper surveys
sent across rural Ontario



Grounded in community
partnerships—local voices
guide data priorities.

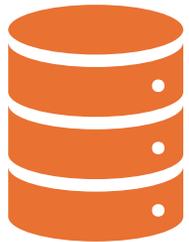


Geocoded to integrate
with national datasets.

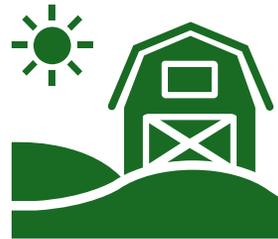


Captures how change
affects well-being and
adaptation capacity.

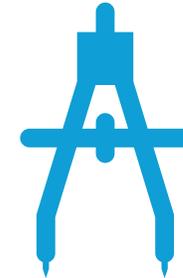
The HEAR Research Database



Integrates health, economy,
and environmental datasets.



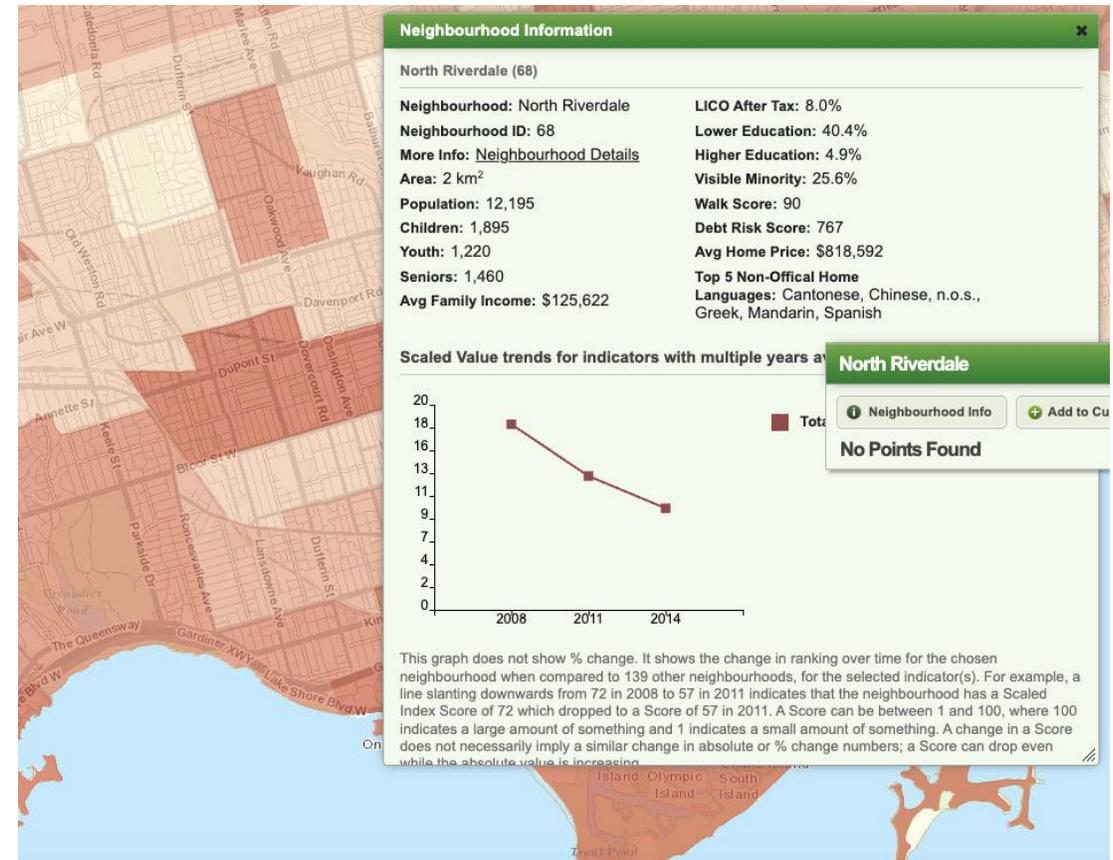
Provides a foundation for
spatial analysis of rural equity.



Designed for interoperability
with GIS architectures.

The HEAR Dashboard

- Central platform translating data into interactive maps.
- Enables comparison of rural communities across sectors and time.
- Built to evolve with new data and tools.



Sample: Toronto Well-Being Map

What Municipalities Get

Access to local data

- Community-level reports
- Dashboard access
- Disaggregated insights by geography, age, income, and access (for example)

Data for:

- Council reports
- Grant applications
- Strategic plans
- CSWB plans
- Health recruitment strategies

DECISION-READY DATA

What HEAR Enables

- HEAR will support municipalities to:
 - Advocate with confidence
 - Plan proactively
 - Demonstrate need with evidence
 - Tell a clearer, more credible story about rural realities





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