

Western REN Annual Report
October 1, 2014— March 31, 2015

Presented at AGM 2015
September 29, 2015

WESTERN
REGIONAL ENTERPRISE NETWORK



A MESSAGE FROM THE WESTERN REN LEADERSHIP

Allister Surette, Chair

The Western REN is the first of the Regional Enterprise Networks (RENs) to be operational in Nova Scotia. As such, our first order of business has been to build a strong foundation from which to best support regional economic development in our part of rural Nova Scotia.

In the wake of the reality check from the One Nova Scotia Commission and its *Now or Never* report, the RENs have been tasked with taking bold action to guide regional economic development. We are up to the task, but we know that it cannot be done in isolation.

This will take courage, innovation, and a willingness to do things in a different way. On behalf of the Western REN Board of Directors, we are pleased to step up to this challenge and trust that we can count on your support.



Angélique LeBlanc, CEO

This report represents a very busy first six months of establishing governance and operational procedures that promote efficiencies and provide built-in accountability; all to prepare for the challenge to do our regional part to turn around the Nova Scotian economy.

We have undertaken an in-depth examination of the current situation and opened the conversation with regional economic development partners and private sector to determine where our efforts would be most effectively applied.

By the time this report goes to print, we will have an approved Strategy and Action Plan and will have gained some momentum on our business retention and expansion program; both mandated core activities.

The work is already underway and we are happy to be a part of helping to turn around the economies of both the Province and Western Nova Scotia.



MANDATE & VALUES

The Western Regional Enterprise Network (Western REN) has **four (4) mandated core activities** described in our Inter-Municipal Agreement.

1. The Western REN will develop, implement and monitor a **Regional Economic Development Strategy** reflective of provincial and regional economic development priorities.
2. The Western REN will **cultivate close working relationships** with the business community and work with key partners to support the development and attraction of new businesses, and retain and expand existing businesses.
3. The Western REN will proactively and assertively seek to **connect our strategic assets** with new investment and ongoing investments from existing business.
4. The Western REN will **inform partners and stakeholders** about local business climate conditions, as well as regional challenges and opportunities. It will work with partners and stakeholders to provide investment readiness support.

We believe:

- *Expanding economic success will result from engaging people and existing businesses;*
- *The Western Region needs to be prepared for investment opportunities;*
- *A lens of innovation and entrepreneurship will guide all Western REN actions;*
- *The Western REN brings value through networking with existing economic development efforts;*
- *Increasing immigration is an important part of solutions to workforce issues; and*
- *Western Nova Scotia needs a strong and vibrant economic development service delivery model.*

BOARD & STAFF

Board of Directors

Allister Surette—Chair—3 Year Term

Warner Comeau—Vice-Chair—2 Year Term

Ron Smith— 3 Year Term

Dave Arenburg— 3 Year Term

Craig LeBlanc—2 Year Term

Clark Sigfridson—2 Year Term

Michel Comeau—1 Year Term

Angela Thurber—1 Year Term

Dave Saxton—1 Year Term

Staff (at March 31, 2015)

Angélique LeBlanc—Chief Executive Officer

Erika Rolston—Administration Officer

Gilles Babin—Economic Development Officer

Pam Doucet—Economic Development Officer



FIRST FISCAL YEAR

OCTOBER 1, 2014–MARCH 31, 2015

Pre-Incorporation

- Western REN Inaugural Board of Directors named day after release of *Now or Never* report from the Ivany Commission. (Feb 2014)
- Western REN (pre-incorporation) and partners create foundational reports, using Start-Up funds from Province of Nova Scotia. (PNS) (Spring 2014)
 - ⇒ Inventory of regional assets (People, Business, Quality of Life, and Natural Environment & Resources)
 - ⇒ Regional workforce study (*The Digby-Yarmouth-Barrington Workforce Advantage*)
 - ⇒ Scan of existing strategic (municipal, provincial and regional) planning documents
 - ⇒ Western Region Community Economic Profile

Post-Incorporation

- Inter-Municipal Agreement signed by Municipalities of Argyle, Clare, Digby and Yarmouth, and the Towns of Digby and Yarmouth; process of incorporation and business registration (May 2014)
- Western REN hires CEO Angélique LeBlanc (August 2014)
- CEO sets up office, hires administrative staff, starts drafting governance and operational policies, finalizes inaugural funding agreement with PNS and works with consultants to finalize contracted reports (Fall/Winter 2014)
- CEO hires first EDO, board completes Policy Governance Manual, and begins Strategic Planning process with consultants (Winter 2015)
- Western REN consultants work with stakeholders, board members and Liaison and Oversight Committee (L&O), work with PNS to clarify obligations in light of changing ministries (Spring 2015)
- REN file transfers from Nova Scotia's Department of Economic & Rural Development & Tourism to Municipal Affairs (Spring 2015)

WHERE WE ARE NOW

Since April 1, 2015

- BR&E visitation program expanded; includes working with municipal Economic Development Officers (Spring/Summer/Fall 2015)
- Hiring research and communications staff to increase capacity (Summer 2015)
- Financial reports from first six months audited (Summer 2015)
- Strategic Plan approved by Board and Liaison & Oversight Committee (Summer/Fall 2015)
- Staff working on strategic initiatives (i.e. Yarmouth Airport, Land Asset Database, Labour Force issues)
- First Annual General Meeting



Angélique LeBlanc

Chief Executive Officer

Hired August 2014



Erika Rolston

Administration & Communications

Hired November 2014



Gilles Babin

Economic Development—BR&E

Hired January 2015



Evan Nemeth

Economic Development—Research

Hired August 2015

LOOKING AHEAD: STRATEGIC THEME ONE

BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

Goal:

To understand the needs, issues, and opportunities present within existing industries; and to support businesses through referrals and more current information about the regional business climate.

Examples of current activities:

- Coordinating and delivering the regional BR&E program
- Making and following up on referrals made from BR&E visits
- Concentration on seafood sector

Looking forward:

- Generating business climate reports, with the goal to address industry concerns
 - ⇒ I.E. workforce availability
- Partnering to create action plans to address industry/sector challenges and/or maximize opportunities

LOOKING AHEAD: STRATEGIC THEME TWO

INVESTMENT READINESS

Goal:

To be realistically prepared for and effectively responding to investment inquires, from within or without the region.

Examples of current activities:

- Working with Yarmouth International Airport Corporation to assess potential for resumed passenger service.
- Building accessible database for region's asset inventory, including Land Asset Database

Looking forward:

- Creating round tables to focus on sector needs, used to direct Western REN efforts
⇒ I.E. workforce shortage already being identified
- Investment Readiness Assessment for entire Western Region

LOOKING AHEAD: STRATEGIC THEME THREE

INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS & COMMUNICATION

Goal:

To foster collaborative efforts across sectors and between businesses and government agencies, creating a positive and energized solutions-oriented business climate in South West Nova.

Examples of current activities:

- Website being used to host and share reports of regional importance
- Online calendar and social media being used to promote events/projects/initiatives of regional significance
- Advocating for strategic infrastructure critical to regional businesses

Looking forward:

- Hosting an annual summit for networking and relationship development
- Engaging round-tables to provide direction for Western REN efforts towards a prosperous South West Nova.

Find out more online:

www.westernren.ca

Call:

902-881-3008

Meet with us:

Box 12, 103 Water Street, Yarmouth, NS B5A 4P4



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