

# **2019-2020**

## ***Annual Report***

***Informed***

***Connected***

***Getting  
Results***



**Western Regional  
Enterprise Network**

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# Leadership Messages

***Now, more than ever,  
partnerships are  
critical to success.***

Since its incorporation, the Western REN has consistently built and strengthened relationships with public and private sectors alike. Those relationships have led to benefits back into our region, in the form of new programs and services, as well as a strong voice for regional infrastructure improvements.

Western Nova Scotia has a lot to offer its residential and business communities. Our determined and innovative population has demonstrated again and again that we understand our strengths and know how to succeed.

Our Western REN partnership continues to demonstrate its value and provide regional leadership.



*Digby Warden, Jimmy MacAlpine  
Chair, Liaison and Oversight Committee*

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# Leadership Messages

Knowing that economic development is a team activity, the Western REN is focused on informing and connecting the whole team - including those outside our organization. This last fiscal year the Western REN has been building and expanding relationships, targeting sectors and issues of regional importance, and honing our own programs and services to be of the most benefit to regional businesses.

In my 6 years on this Board, I've seen the organization grow into an effective and valued economic development partner. I look forward to seeing this growth continue under the leadership of a new Chair.



*Ron Smith*  
*Chair, Western REN Board*

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The Western REN has been hitting its stride over the past few years. 2019-20 has seen our organization implement new programs and services to support the needs of our regional business community. Succession and Continuous Improvement Programs join our more established BusinessNow, Connector and Atlantic Immigration Pilot Programs. This year our Internet efforts are paying off with secured funding commitments throughout the region and more expected the year ahead. We've conducted an energy study which will inform investments in the years to come.



*Angélique LeBlanc*  
*Chief Executive Officer*

With increased uncertainty on the horizon, the Western REN focus will be on supporting our SMEs as they pivot their business models. Although many are facing hardships like never before, the rural economy may find itself in a position to take advantage of new opportunities as the entire world shifts. The Western REN will be there to work shoulder to shoulder with our business and public sectors to continue investment in Western NS.

# THE WESTERN REGION & ITS ECONOMY

The Western REN covers an area that includes seven (7) municipal units, with a geographically dispersed population of over 48,000.

Fishing is both a traditional and a current economic driver in this region; with multiple groundfish and shellfish species exported.

Historically, agriculture and forestry played significant roles in the economy. Presently, emerging industries provide opportunities for growth in these sectors.

Manufacturing, including food processing, is one of the largest employers in the region and many of those products are exported.

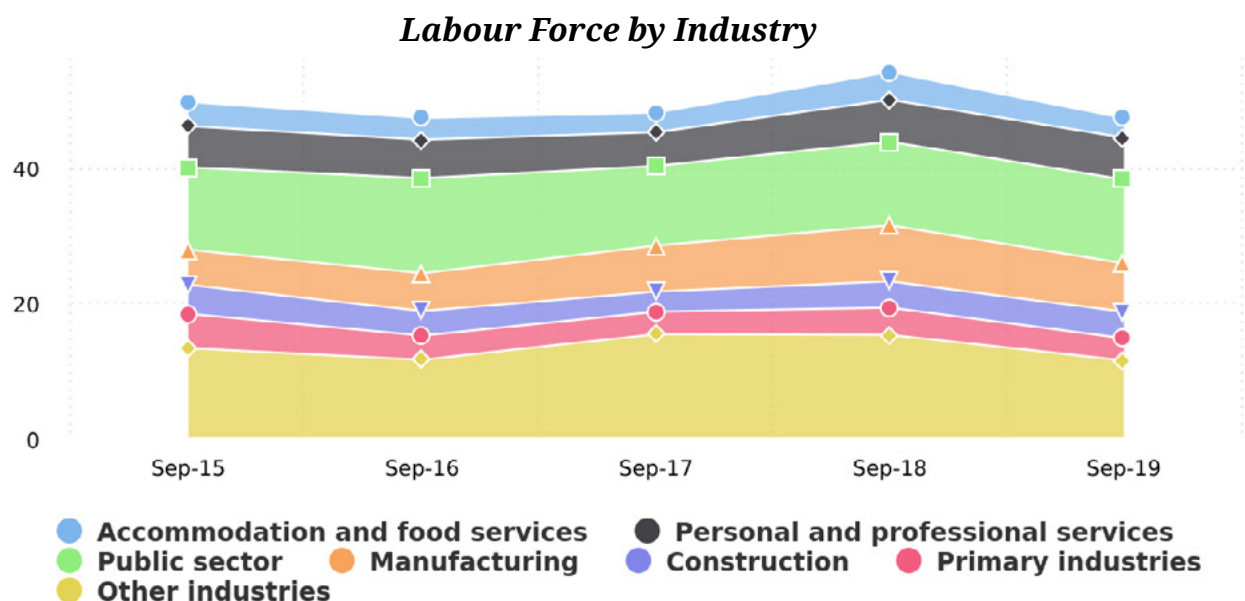


*The Western Regional Enterprise Network serves a large area in the Southwestern part of Nova Scotia.*

## THE REGION'S LABOUR FORCE

Friendly, skilled, and loyal talent lives in this region, with a high rate (30%) of French/English bilingualism.

Talent among the mature, experienced populations, as well as new talent emerging from the robust post-secondary systems are targeted by recruitment and support programs for both employers and job-seekers.



Source: [westernren.ca/regional-profile-dashboard/](https://westernren.ca/regional-profile-dashboard/)

# Regional Realities

<b>PEOPLE</b>	Population	<i>Generally stable. Aging population may cause higher supply of businesses/properties for sale. Creating opportunity.</i>
	Talent	<i>Many programs in support of retaining and recruiting workforce. (e.g.. Connector, Graduate to Opportunity, Atlantic Immigration Pilot)</i>
	Research & Development	<i>Université Sainte-Anne Laboratory for Innovation &amp; Science in Industry, Canada Ocean Supercluster. Nova Scotia's Sandbox models.</i>
	Entrepreneurship & Innovation	<i>Ignite Labs, NSCC entrepreneurship programs, Enactus Clubs with NSCC and Sainte-Anne</i>
<b>NATURAL RESOURCES</b>	Renewable Energy	<i>Solar, wind, wood energy &amp; biomass, tides. Western Energy Investment Opportunities Study.</i>
	Mining	<i>Value of tin is at a 3-year low, this may impact the viability of the East Kemptville mine plans.</i>
	Oil & Gas	<i>Provincial fracking bans impacts onshore potential. From 2020-2026 over \$1B of exploration commitment exist from some of the largest oil companies.</i>
	Forestry	<i>Closure of Northern Pulp impacted the ability of current forestry sector's ability to access over \$3.1B in standing timber across the province.</i>
<b>INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCES</b>	Canadian Dollar	<i>At March 2020, the dollar was par with March 2019. Declining oil demand due to COVID-19 may impact this further.</i>
	Trade Agreements	<i>Canada-US-Mexico Agreement about to replace NAFTA. The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement both can impact seafood export prices in Canada's favour.</i>
	Export/Import	<i>Over \$700M in seafood exports to China in 2019 - though prices and demand decreased due to COVID-19. Likewise, COVID-19 disrupting import supply chains supports the case for local supply.</i>
	Oil Prices	<i>Plummeting oil prices help consumers but challenge producers and threaten jobs.</i>
<b>HARD INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	Transportation	<i>Ferries: Yarmouth to Maine - COVID-19 has suspended start of season. Digby to St. John's - impacted schedule but still running. Highways: 100-series highway upgrades continued Airports: Digby Regional and Yarmouth International</i>
	Internet	<i>By end of 2020, 3,500 under-served households will have access to high speed internet. More funding proposals are in the works. High speed access is more important than ever, with working and learning from home.</i>
	Energy	<i>Southwest Nova's energy grid is limiting the potential for renewable energy development. Western Energy Investment Planning Project identifies opportunities for locally generating, using and storing renewable energy.</i>

# PRIVATE SECTOR

## 2019-20

2019-20 COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS WITH PRIVATE SECTOR		
Action	Targets	Achievements
Continue communications via ongoing social media campaign	25% increase in social media uptake	29.9% increase across all social media platforms
Continue to deliver and partner on business and sector networking development and events	Host and co-host a minimum of 8 events	12+ events hosted including Meet & Greets and the annual Summit
Use <i>BusinessNow</i> to identify opportunities and barriers to investment	12 presentations 90 actions taken 100 company interactions	12 presentations 41 referrals 79 company interactions
Strategically apply Succession Matching efforts	20 coupon codes to both sellers & buyers 7 Be Your Own Boss codes to buyers	19 seller coupons issued 6 buyer coupons issued
Implement Continuous Improvement program	10-20 companies participating	Launched with 1 company, program continues into next fiscal year



2020 Forestry Sector Update



# PUBLIC SECTOR

## 2019-20

2019-20 COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS WITH PUBLIC SECTOR		
Action	Targets	Achievements
Create an action plan for regional energy and internet infrastructure	Regional energy action plan developed ISP partner secured	Draft report in hand ISP partner submitting proposals for improvements in multiple communities
Work on strategic issues with economic developers from municipal units	4 meetings actively seeking partnerships 25 support activities	4+ meetings 20+ support activities including investment readiness work, internet, energy file
Advance the Western Nova Scotian Regional Value Proposition work	12+ stakeholders and partners involved 7 presentations	Integrated in 7+ presentations to multiple stakeholders throughout the year
Circulate, coordinate, and respond to regional investment inquiries	10 collective responses to investment inquiries	11 inquiries fielded



2020 Energy Planning Session

# ADDRESSING TALENT NEEDS & GAPS

## 2019-20

2019-20 COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS TO ADDRESS TALENT NEEDS & GAPS		
Action	Targets	Achievements
Continue delivering the Connector Program	46 Connectors 58 Connectees 4 Events	43 Connectors 43 Connectees 5 events
Coordinate immigration services related to workforce and talent gaps	Working agreement among immigration services	Secured funding for required feasibility study
Continue delivery of employer driven Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program	12 Designations 3 Events 4 Presentations	27 designations 3 events 4+ presentations
Lead provincial, regional, and economic development partners to craft an attraction and retention action plan	Attraction and retention plan in place	Pushed into next fiscal year



2020 Connector Recognition Event



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# CURRENT FOCUS: A COVID-19 WORLD

After the State of Emergency was declared on March 22, 2020, the Western REN response shifted to **COVID-19 crisis management**.

Actions included:

- **Proactive outreach** to businesses through the client-facing team, to help navigate programs and identify issues for advocacy
- Creation of a **COVID-19 resource section, including FAQs**, on the westernren.ca website
- CEO participation in the **NS Business & Labour Economic Coalition**, led by the Halifax Chamber of Commerce and meeting 3x/week. This group is a point of contact for government as they make rapid decisions and changes to the business environment and help share these decisions with the NS business community
- Creation of the **Western Regional COVID-19 Economic Response Group** hosted weekly by the Western REN CEO. Members include Chambers and Boards of Trade, NS Works, EDOs, NSBI, CBDC, ACOA, NSCC, Develop NS, YASTA, CDENE, and more. The goal is to keep partners informed and share information across the region. A client-facing working group was formed from this committee and met weekly to align efforts to best serve the business community
- Launch of a **Western REN COVID-19 social media strategy**
- Funded by ACOA, approval of the first REN pan-provincial project, the REN **Virtual Advisor Program**, powered by BoomersPlus
- **Western Wins** social media campaign highlighting innovative businesses responding to COVID-19
- Current focus shifting to economic **recovery planning**

# Organizational Structure



## *Liaison and Oversight Committee - Funding Partners*

Municipality of Argyle	Councillors Lucien LeBlanc, Guy Surette (alternate)
Municipality of Barrington	Warden Eddie Nickerson, Councillor Shaun Hatfield (alternate)
Municipality of Clare	Warden Ronnie LeBlanc, Councillor Yvon LeBlanc (alternate)
Municipality of Digby	Warden Jimmy MacAlpine, Deputy Warden Linda Gregory (alternate)
Municipality of Yarmouth	Councillors Patti Durkee, Trevor Cunningham (alternate)
Town of Digby	Mayor Ben Cleveland, Councillor Mike Bartlett (alternate)
Town of Yarmouth	Deputy Mayor Phil Mooney, Councillor Wade Cleveland (alternate)
Municipal Affairs	Marilynn Hay
Labour & Advanced Education	Joe Brown

## Board of Directors 2019-20



Ron Smith  
*Chair*



Mary Thompson  
*Vice-Chair*



Nick d'Eon  
*Finance Committee Chair*



Benjamin Shearer  
*HR & Governance Committee Chair*



Angie Greene



Brenda Francis



Allister Surette



Jamie Symonds



Karen Enright



Charles Surette



Misty Morrison



Vacant

## Staff at March 2020



Angélique LeBlanc  
*Chief Executive Officer*



Brenda LaGrandeur  
*Connector Program Manager*



Andrew Melanson  
*BusinessNow Lead*



Evan Nemeth  
*Research Lead*



Keval d'Entremont  
*Accounting Clerk & Office Manager*



Erika Rolston  
*Communications Lead*



Rob Stephenson  
*Immigration Lead*

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