

Western Regional
Enterprise Network

Business Plan

2022 - 2023



MESSAGE FROM BOARD CHAIR **MARY THOMPSON**



As we come through the Covid-19 pandemic, we have learned a great deal about the resilience of our communities. The Western REN has continued to focus on helping our partners through providing information and programming to them in these uncertain times. Programs such as Connector and Business Now have helped fill labor shortages, assist in helping businesses become more productive and make connections to new opportunities. Regional economic development meetings continued throughout the year bringing public partners together to share programs and services that were available to support business through the challenging times. Most exciting is new programming coming that includes ongoing infrastructure improvements, energy projects and increased innovation. As we emerge from the pandemic, our world is changing, and our Western REN is here to serve our communities to meet the demands of these changing times. We continue to learn from the past and push forward with a goal to grow our region economically with a focus on innovation.

FROM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER **ANGÉLIQUE LEBLANC**



As Spring begins, it seems appropriate to take a moment to recognize the blossoming success of economic development in our region. We have fiber Internet installation happening on a regional level, leveling the playing field to do business globally. Immigration support is increasing, which will contribute to sourcing the talent pool needed for growth. Innovation is being tightly woven into the fabric of our region, with the goal of increasing the value of our ocean resources. Energy projects are moving forward, positioning us for a greener future.

The focus on economic development is to create conditions needed to support business retention and expansion. Long-lasting relationships are developed with our business owners, management, newcomers, and recent graduates, the people who are at the core of our work. As we launch our newest strategy, we continue to build a culture of Continuous Improvement amongst our business leaders. We help businesses in preparing for succession and maximising the value of sale.

We work with public sector partners to assist clients, but also to share information and work collectively on opportunities that are a fit for Western Nova Scotia.

Continued focus will lead to regional growth and prosperity, and the Western REN is prepared for the year ahead.



"EVERY THREAT TO THE STATUS QUO IS AN OPPORTUNITY IN DISGUISE"

– Jay Samit

Despite the massive and long-term economic disruption resulting from the global pandemic, Western Nova Scotia is poised for both population growth and economic growth. It will take creativity, innovation, and perseverance - qualities readily available in Western NS.

This plan outlines ways the Western REN continues to work with private and public sector partners and address the ongoing labour force and infrastructure challenges within the region.

WESTERN NS REALITIES

People

The 2021 Census population counts have been released, and the Western Region has seen a slight growth of 0.2% since 2016 when combining counts from all 7 participating municipal units. There was population growth in the Municipality of the District of Digby, the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth, and the Town of Yarmouth, with decline in the other four municipalities. This slight overall growth marks a potential turning point for the trend of declining population from 2001 to 2016.

Infrastructure

Working from home and increased e-commerce underscores the importance of access to both quality high-speed internet and reliable, good quality energy. The roll-out of fibre internet in the region has been accelerated in response to this need, with the goal of 97% of homes and businesses by end of 2023.

Transportation

The Cat's international high-speed ferry service between Yarmouth, Nova Scotia and Bar Harbour, Maine, is planned to resume in May,

2022, with an operating season of May 19th, 2022 to October 10th, 2022. The interprovincial Digby, Nova Scotia to Saint John, New Brunswick is fully operational with no COVID-19 related changes to their operating season or crossings schedules.

Immigration

Digby County was a leader in the attraction of international immigrants in 2021, as the county with the 3rd most international immigrants excluding Halifax County. Every county in the province experienced a net positive interprovincial migration in 2021, with the number of people moving to Nova Scotia from other provinces exceeding those moving from Nova Scotia. All but four counties in Nova Scotia had a negative net intraprovincial migration in 2021, with the bulk moving to Halifax County.



GENERAL REALITIES

Workforce

The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) is no longer available to Canadian workers. The overall number of people employed in the Southern Economic Region, which includes the Western Region, increased by 3.2% from January 2021 to January 2022, although the unemployment rate increased over this same time period from 9.1% to 10.7%. The total number of job vacancies in Nova Scotia is 70.6% higher than it was in 2020.

Canadian Dollar

The Canadian Dollar has been holding strong against the American Dollar at \$0.79 US cents, during periods of high inflation for both currencies. Inflation was at 7.5% in the United States as of January 2022, and 5.1% in Canada. Canada's average inflation rate since 1915 was 3%.

Commodities

The cost of Crude Oil is the highest it has been in 5 years, at \$91.44 as of February, 2022. This high price is beneficial to the Canadian Dollar, which relies heavily on oil produced in the Oil Sands. Unfortunately, this rise in price has a negative impact on residents, as well as the costs for any industries relying on transportation, or those with food drying operations as well.

Lumber prices have remained high through 2021, and have been rising since a slight downward price correction in the Summer of 2021. As of February, 2022 they are priced at \$1,200/1000 board feet, up from \$1,000/1000 board feet in February, 2021. Prices have roughly tripled since early 2020. Low interest rates have resulted in a boom in construction and home renovations, though these interest rates are expected to increase in the coming months to help control inflation.

Tourism

As of February 28th, 2022, unvaccinated travellers arriving to Canada from any country are still required to quarantine for 14 days, though vaccinated travellers will no longer be required to. The Government of Canada will no longer recommend that Canadians avoid travel for non-essential purposes. This change, combined with the resumed crossings of the Cat Ferry will likely result in a boost in tourism to Western Nova Scotia in 2022.

International Trade

Congestion at ports for shipping container vessels continue to negatively impact supply chains and freight rates, globally. Container rates have increased by a factor of 4x since 2020. In many cases, this cost is passed on to the consumer, resulting in an increase in consumer prices.

Global demand for computer processors in consumer goods continues to grow with increased demand from automobiles and Internet-of-things (IOT) devices. This increased demand is difficult to meet with fixed supply, and shortages are expected to continue well into 2023. This has the potential to impact a variety of consumer goods, including transportation, home electronics, and more.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS 2022-2023

Increasing Investment in the Private Sector

WESTERN REN ACTIONS	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
Communication and engagement with regional Chambers, industry sector groups & business organizations	4-6 engagements	Increased understanding of priority economic development issues impacting the region
Continue to deliver BusinessNow services	100 clients; 125 referrals	Increased business stability and growth
Promote regional target investment and growth sectors	Communications campaign launched, website traffic increased by 50%	Buy-in and support from local business community
Continue to deliver Succession Program to prepare businesses for transition	10 companies participating	Businesses ready for succession and maximising value of sale
Continue to deliver Continuous Improvement Program	10-20 participating companies	Increased culture of Continuous Improvement among business leaders

Increasing investment in the Public Sector

WESTERN REN ACTIONS	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
Lead MIT REAP Innovation Strategy	Funding identified to lead implementation	Acceleration of region's Innovation Ecosystem
Continue to support access to reliable, high-speed, rural internet and cell service	Identify last-mile service gaps	Increased access to high-speed internet and cell service in under-served and unserved communities
Implement energy retrofit project	Project implemented	Decreased demand for electrical energy
Build out regional value proposition to include rationale for why these sectors are important to the region	7 presentations to Councils, awareness campaign launched	Increased support for priority sectors leading to improved business climate
Provide joint regional economic development partner training, forums and collaboration	10 meetings per year; 2 events; 10 support activities	Effective communications channels supporting active partnerships
Define a regional placemaking project	Project defined	Increased economic activity building on region's sense of place

Addressing Talent Needs

WESTERN REN ACTIONS	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
Continue delivering the Connector Program	40 Connectors; 50 Connectees; 4 Networking Events	Increased quality employment for youth, newcomers and boomerangers
Prepare snapshot highlighting workforce issues through employee lens	Survey and analysis completed	Needs/gaps in attracting and retaining talent identified
Coordinate immigration services related to workforce and talent gaps via Local Immigration Partnership	Regional people retention and attraction projects funded	Increased regional population

CORE BUDGET 2022-2023

REVENUE	APPROVED BUDGET April 2022-2023
Municipal Grants	
Total Municipal Grants	\$290,518
Provincial Grants	
Province of NS Core funding	\$277,250
Total Provincial Grants	\$277,250
Other Revenue	
Total Other Revenue	\$41,300
TOTAL REVENUE	\$609,068
EXPENSES	
Wages and benefits	\$443,904
Training, governance, and risk management	\$7,700
Travel, meals, and lodging	\$10,800
Conferences	\$3,000
Communications and recruitment	\$21,500
Consulting support/Data management	\$9,000
Office space and supplies	\$39,700
Professional and corporate services	\$15,700
Strategic planning initiatives	
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$709,804
NET INCOME/LOSS	-\$100,736

GOVERNANCE

LIAISON & OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE



Core Funders
Approve Strategy
Appoint Board

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Private Sector Directors
Limited Terms
Strategic Direction

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Hired & Managed by Board
Runs Organization
Manages Staff

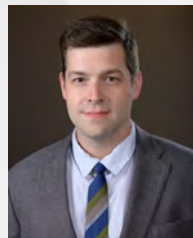
Liaison and Oversight Committee - Funders and Board Appointment

Municipality of Argyle Guy Surette	Municipality of Barrington Eddie Nickerson	Municipality of Clare Ronnie LeBlanc	Municipality of Digby Linda Gregory	Municipality of Yarmouth Patti Durkee, Chair
Town of Digby Ben Cleveland	Town of Yarmouth Derek Lesser		Dept. of Municipal Affairs & Housing Marilynn Hay	Dept. Labour & Advanced Education Joe Brown

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2021-2022



Board Chair, Mary Thompson
2nd term expires June 2024



Board Vice-Chair, Nick d'Eon
2nd term expires June 2024



Committee Chair, Benjamin Shearer
2nd term expires June 2023



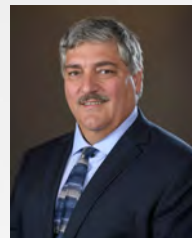
Director, Angie Greene
1st term expires June 2022



Director, Jamie Symonds
2nd term expires June 2023



Director, Brenda Francis
1st term expires June 2022



Director, Charles Surette
1st term expires June 2022



Director, Karen Enright
1st term expires June 2022



Director, Julie MacLean
1st term expires June 2023



Director, Jocelin d'Entremont
1st term expires June 2023



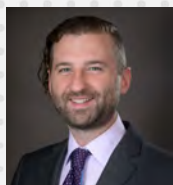
Director, Kenneth Deveau
1st term expires June 2023

STAFF 2022



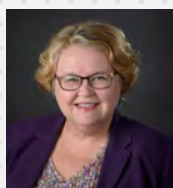
ANGÉLIQUE LEBLANC, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER *Since August 2014*

Possessing natural leadership skills, Angélique brings extensive experience with partnering across sectors to her role. She has a thorough understanding of business and economic development and has built a solid team to implement the work.



EVAN NEMETH, RESEARCH LEAD *Since August 2015*

Steeped in data and analyses, Evan's ability to understand and translate complex information is crucial to the evidence-based decision making of the organization.



BRENDA LAGRANDEUR, LOCAL IMMIGRATION PARTNERSHIP COORDINATOR

Since April 2017 Brenda uses her networks and her natural welcoming personality to connect with community groups, employers, and newcomers to the region as an important part of population growth efforts.



ROB STEPHENSON, BUSINESSNOW LEAD *Since October 2019*

Rob's nearly 30 years in the private sector, including management and export, provide him with a clear understanding of the issues facing private sector daily. He connects with business people to help them overcome barriers and grow.



ALYSON DUFFY, COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR *Since July 2020*

A recent graduate from Carleton University, Communications and Media Studies, Alyson brings enthusiasm and fresh eyes to the story-telling needed in economic development.



MIRANDA MACLEAN, CONNECTOR PROGRAM MANAGER *Since March 2021*

Miranda's community outreach and program development skills will help her grow the Connector program while helping clients build their networks, connecting talent with local employers.



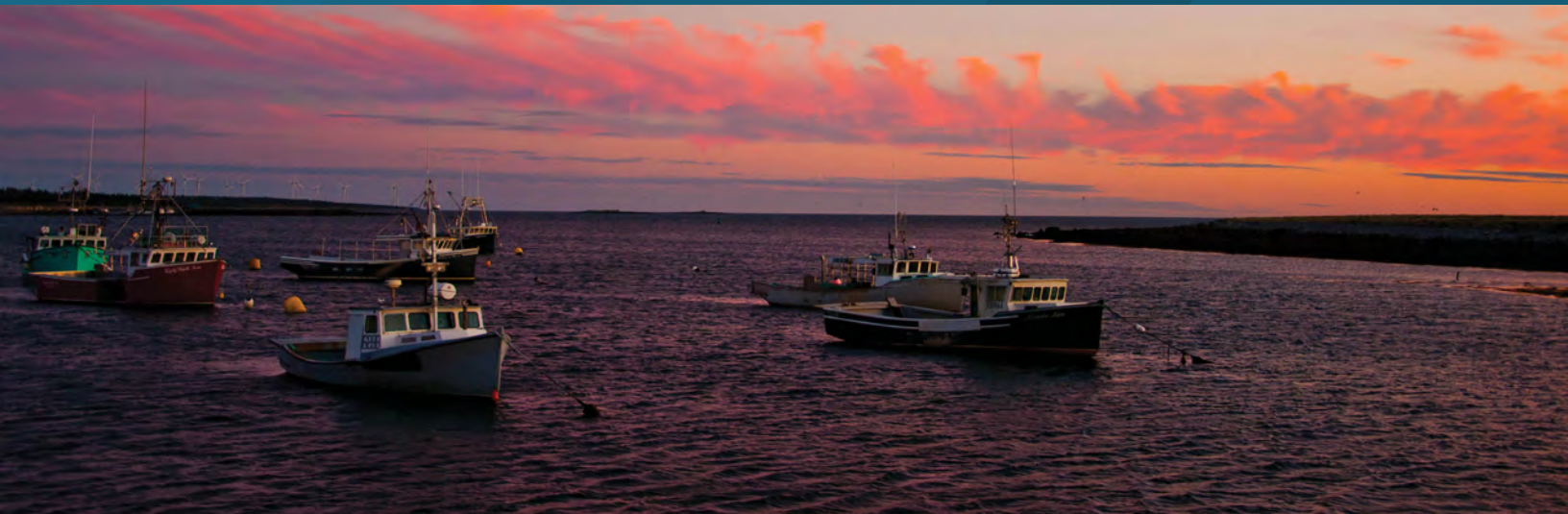
HÉLÈNE D'EON, ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE COORDINATOR *Since September 2021*

Hélène is currently covering a maternity leave with the Western REN. An NSCC graduate in Business Administration with Accounting concentration, Hélène has with many years' experience in the administrative field, most recently in the health care sector.



DARSHINI AROGYASWAMY, BOARD COORDINATOR *Since February 2022*

Darshini brings several years of expertise in Event Management and Customer Service. She has worked with cultural non profits and has experience organising large scale community engagement events in Toronto. Originally from India, she moved to the town of Yarmouth in 2020.



210 Main Street | Yarmouth, Nova Scotia | B5A 1C8
Tel: 902-881-3008 | Fax: 902-881-2838
wren@westernren.ca | westernren.ca

