



Western Regional
Enterprise Network

Economic Development *Strategy & Action Plan*

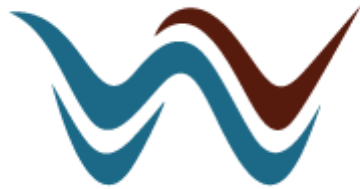
for the ***Western Regional Enterprise Network***

December 2021



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**Western Regional
Enterprise Network**

Economic Development Strategy & Action Plan

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Updated: December 2021



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McSweeney & Associates

201-900 Greenbank Road

Ottawa, ON K2J 1A8

T: 1-855-300-8548

E: consult@mcsweeney.ca

W: www.mcsweeney.ca

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*intro***1. INTRODUCTION****From the Western REN's 2015 Strategy until today...**

This strategy represents the 3rd reiteration of the core principles, values and strategic actions that help guide the Western REN as it continues to solidify the region's strong economic and community foundations.

To ensure for long-term economic recovery and growth, the Western REN continues to connect and work closely with its municipal partners, private sector partners and other non-government stakeholders in the region. These collaborative efforts have led to a number of successes, with more set to be achieved in the coming years. Examples of the Western REN's goals and successes include:

- **The Western REN BusinessNOW Program.** This program has become the REN's flagship model during the COVID-19 pandemic for local business outreach. Additional highly successful programs under this model have included the Continuous Improvement Program and Succession Program, focusing on **efficiency improvements and increasing business value**.
- **Providing access to high-speed internet across the region.** The region is on track to achieve this by the end of 2023. This success has been achieved by working with local municipalities alongside Develop Nova Scotia and Bell Canada, to bring fibre-optic service to over 8,000 new clients in Western Nova Scotia.
- **A rollout of the Western Region Energy Investment Plan.** This investment plan appropriately positions the Western Nova Scotia region to take advantage of the focus on a more sustainable ecological future. To ensure the success of this program the REN worked with its partners to identify actions that will strengthen Western Nova Scotia's economy, create and sustain "green" jobs, and lower overall greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Western Nova Scotia Connector Program.** In anticipation of increased immigration and population growth, this program connects local leaders with skilled newcomers, new graduates, and established local professionals to support the next generation of business leaders.

The Western REN, as the region's economic development leader, will ensure adaptability in the coming years while continuing to build the strong foundations needed for economic success in Western Nova Scotia. Though certain action items may change in this strategy, the Western REN's broad focus will remain on working with both private and public sectors locally and addressing local talent needs. Finally, with an understanding that changes are happening in a rapidly evolving

economic and natural ecosystem, this strategy recognizes the Western REN's need to move quickly, in partnership with the private sector, government, academic and financial institutions.

The 2021 Strategy continues to place emphasis on the following barriers and challenges to economic development:

- Communications infrastructure in Western Nova Scotia.
- The capacity limitations of the energy grid.
- The demographic profile of Western Nova Scotia and its impact on the region's ability to retain, sustain, and attract business.
- Talent retention and attraction.
- Innovation and entrepreneurship.

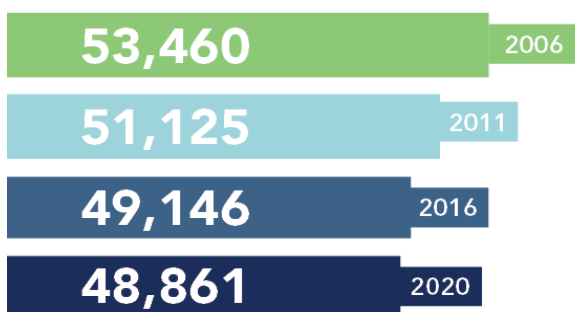


1.1. Statistical Overview

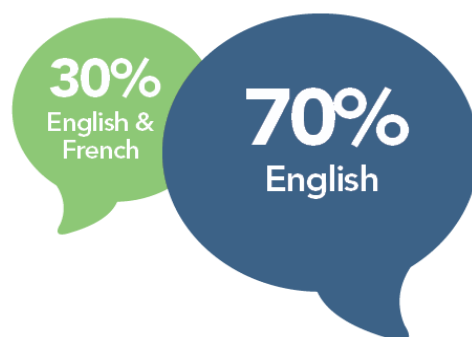
Demographics



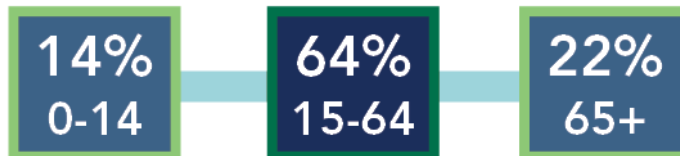
CENSUS POPULATION



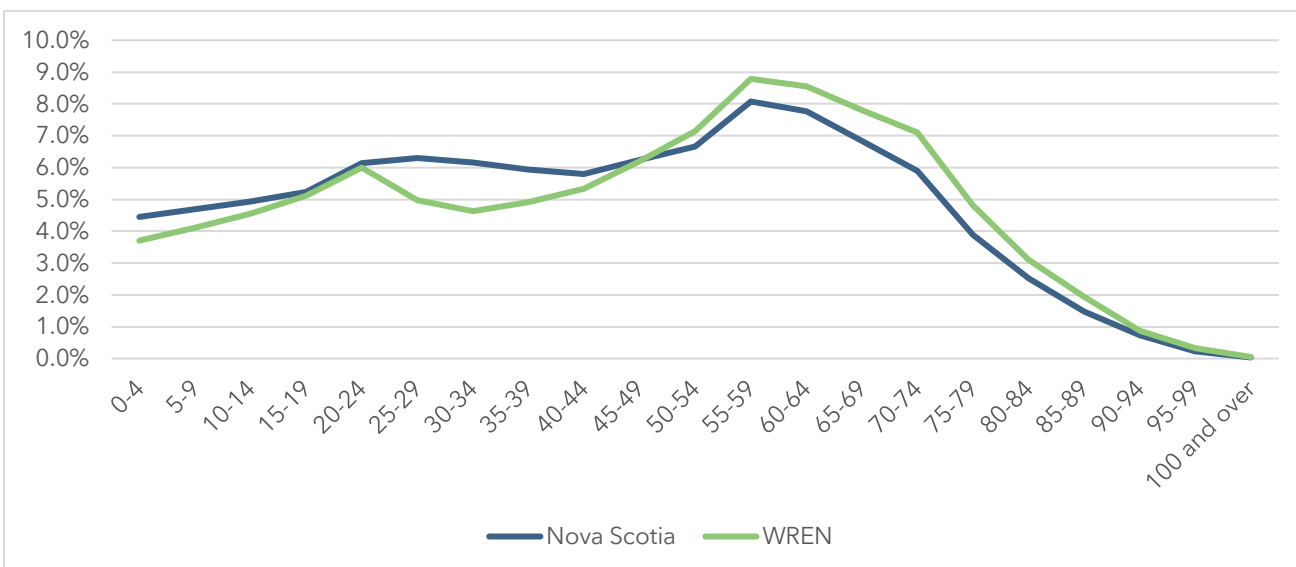
LANGUAGE



AGE PROFILE



Percentage breakdown of population by age cohort, 2020



Source: 2006-2016 Population Estimates are derived from the Canadian Census. All other data is from Polaris Intelligence.

2. THE ECONOMY AT A GLANCE

PARTICIPATION	EMPLOYMENT	UNEMPLOYMENT
58%	55%	6%
Nova Scotia: 61%	Nova Scotia: 57%	Nova Scotia: 6%

Source: Polaris Intelligence.

The Participation, Employment and Unemployment rates are normally greatly impacted by the seasonal nature and availability of work in the region.

2019 TOP 3 EMPLOYERS

1. Seafood product preparation and packaging
2. Fishing
3. General medical and surgical hospitals

2019 TOP 3 JOB GROWTH

1. Seafood product preparation and packaging
2. Ship and boat building
3. General medical and surgical hospitals

2019 TOP 3 EXPORT \$

1. Seafood product preparation and packaging
2. Fishing
3. Agriculture, Mining & Forestry

Source: EMSI Analyst



3. WESTERN REN VALUES



The fundamental Economic Development VALUES were tested during the process to refresh and update this strategy. It was confirmed and reinforced that the values which hold true today and remain deeply rooted in the Western Region include:

People are the Western Region's Core Strength

People's knowledge, skills, individual, positive outlook on economic development and optimism towards **the future of the Region** is a crucial element to the Western Region's success.

Diversity is Crucial to Sustainability

The Western Region is home to many unique cultures, languages and ethnicities, varying geographies and communities. Embracing those differences and diversifying industry is key to the long-term success of the region.

Creativity Drives Entrepreneurship & Innovation

A distinctive characteristic of the people and businesses in Western Nova Scotia is their **ability**, not only to survive in tough times, but **to actually grow and thrive**. This is a direct result of people's tenacity, resilience and entrepreneurial creativity. Driving innovation and strengthening the region's culture of innovation and entrepreneurship is paramount to the region's economic development future success.

People Living in Western Nova Scotia Value Rural and Small-Town Lifestyle

The people living in this region have a **love for their rural lifestyle**. This means residents value:

- their direct connection with their natural surroundings,
- the benefits offered through a more relaxed way of life in Western Nova Scotia, and
- the direct personal relationships supports and “helping hand” attitude offered within that small-town community atmosphere.

Partnerships are the Key to Success

The Western REN is only as strong as its partners and partnerships. The strength of the Western REN comes from the many municipal, provincial, federal, community and business partners that together support the business and economic development efforts of Western Nova Scotia. As the Western REN takes a leadership role in better understanding and communicating the region’s Innovation Ecosystem and accelerating Innovation, it will rely on its partners and its partnership for continued guidance, support and collaboration.

Natural Resources are the Backbone of Western Nova Scotia

People of Western Nova Scotia value their environment and the natural resources that generate opportunities for economic wealth and jobs to support people living in the region. It is vital that the sustainability, proper stewardship and enhancement of these natural resources are considered paramount when looking at economic development activities and opportunities.



4. 2021 STRATEGIC PLAN ACTIONS

The Western REN continues to not only succeed but also excel at being the face of Western Nova Scotia's regional economic development activities. Seen as one of Nova Scotia's premiere economic development agencies, the Western REN is relied upon heavily to drive the region's efforts towards an investment friendly, infrastructure ready and prosperous Western Nova Scotia.

To help maintain its focus, the organization is lead by a Board of private sector business leaders with guidance from its Municipal Liaison partners. The Western REN will continue to engage in strategic efforts connecting the needs, interests and opportunities of the region with potential investors and public sector partners.

The Western REN is and will continue removing barriers to expanding businesses in the region as well as driving investment, whether it is local businesses reinvesting, business start-ups or bringing investment in from outside the region. As with previous strategic documents, this Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan will also continue to build on the reputation, successes and efforts of the Western REN, while looking at new actions to increase its impact as a catalyst strengthening and growing the region's economy.

In 2021 and moving forward, Western REN Strategic Actions remain focused on being a driver of investment into Western Nova Scotia and are based on three main objectives:

1. Increasing investment in Western Nova Scotia through collaborative actions that *engage the Western Region's Private Sector Business Community.*
2. Increasing investment in Western Nova Scotia through collaborative actions that *engage the Western REN's Public Sector Partners.*
3. Increasing investment in Western Nova Scotia through collaborative actions that *engage all partners in addressing issues impacting the regions Talent Needs and Gaps.*

Western REN

Strategic Actions

1.

Increasing Investment within Western Nova Scotia through Collaborative Actions that Engage the Western Region's **Private Sector Business Community**

- Continuing to deliver a communications program by:
 - Focusing on the region's growth sectors to secure buy-in and support from the local business community.
 - Communicating and engaging with the Chambers, industry sector groups and business organizations at a regional level to best understand and highlight priority economic development issues impacting the region.
 - Participating in an on-going social media campaign (Web, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.). to continue communicating the region's target investment and growth sectors.
- Growing and expanding the Western REN's flagship BusinessNow program to include:
 - Continued and targeted business visitation and outreach program.
 - Creating a new business outreach and assessment tool to more effectively determine how to engage, support or refer businesses through the BusinessNow program.
 - Build internal capacity for the delivery of the Continuous Improvement & Succession Programs.
 - Continuing to assist with the region's business succession planning efforts by identifying the business types that need assistance and connecting those business with the most appropriate business consultants.
 - Exploring opportunities to create support programs (ie. Digital Main Street) aimed at assisting businesses adopt technology (web marketing, ecommerce, online commerce, etc.) as a way of doing business.
- Continuing to engage with partners such as local Chambers of Commerce to deliver regional business/sector networking and business development events.

2.

Increasing investment in Western Nova Scotia through collaborative actions that engage the Western REN's

Public Sector Partners

- Be a lead partner in the understanding and acceleration of the region's Innovation Ecosystem, by researching, outlining, mapping and continually updating the Innovation and Entrepreneurship support network in the region and Province.
- Focus on the site certification program to highlight the pieces of infrastructure which need to be developed or upgraded to meet the criteria.
- Continue pursuing opportunities to further strengthen the region's telecommunications network to allow business continuity and ensure remote working remains an option.
- Continuing to lead and/or support implementation of the region's Energy Plan.
- Continuing to provide Municipal, Economic Development and business partners with strategic data to support funding proposals and investment inquiries.
- Building out the region's value proposition to include the rationale for why these sectors are important to the region as well as facts and information to be shared with Municipal partners.
- Building off the Regional Economic Development Group, continue providing joint economic development partner training, forums and overall regional economic development collaboration.
- Defining a regional place making project, developing the business case or the "why this is needed" and collaborating with public and private sector partners to implement.



3.

Increasing investment within Western Nova Scotia through collaborative actions that engage all partners in addressing issues that positively impact the region's

Talent Needs and Gaps

The Western REN will work toward addressing **Talent Shortages** by:

- Continuing to be the lead delivery agent for the Connector Program in order to retain talent in the region.
- Preparing timely snapshots highlighting the workforce and community issues through both an employee and employer lens.
- Building off the snapshots, highlight the current gaps in the region's workforce.
- Undertaking a workforce development action plan to address the needs/gaps in attracting and retaining talent in the region. Focus on gaps in community infrastructure such as issues and opportunities related to mental health supports, housing, daycare, public transit, etc.
- Continue being a lead coordinator of immigration services where directly related to addressing gaps in workforce and the regional talent pool.



4.1. Appendix A

4.1.1. Board of Directors

The Western REN is led by a private-sector, volunteer Board of Directors. Our eleven-member board of directors has four standing committees: Executive, Human Resources & Governance, Finance, and Audit. Full biographies and board terms for all board members are available online at www.westernren.ca.



Mary Thompson
Board Chair



Benjamin Shearer
Board Vice-Chair



Nick d'Eon
Chair, Finance and Audit
Committees



Dr. Kenneth Deveau
Board Director



Karen Enright
Board Director



Julie MacLean
Board Director



Brenda Francis
Board Director



Charles Surette
Board Director



Jamie Symonds
Board Director



Jocelin d'Entremont
Board Director



Angie Greene
Board Director

4.1.2. Liaison and Oversight Committee – Membership

Municipality of the District of Argyle	Municipality of the District of Barrington	Municipality of the District of Clare	Municipality of the District of Digby	Municipality of the District of Yarmouth
Guy Surette, Councillor	Eddie Nickerson, Warden	Yvon LeBlanc, Warden	Linda Gregory, Warden	Patti Durkee, Councillor
Department of Municipal Affairs	Labour & Advanced Education		Town of Digby	Town of Yarmouth
Marilynn Hay, Municipal Advisor	Joe Brown, Workforce Consultant		Ben Cleveland, Mayor	Derek Lesser, Councillor

