



Western Regional
Enterprise Network

Business Plan

2023 - 2024





MESSAGE FROM BOARD CHAIR **BENJAMIN SHEARER**



Governments, organizations, and the business community are re-focused on planning for the future. That is a positive message. Even some of the issues that need resolved for an improved future are inherently positive in nature. As an example, expectation is starting to build in our province for growth in the population. We have already seen signs of that in the migration patterns within Canada the last two years. There are challenges that go along with that, and some of those challenges which are already a reality within our region have been and continue to be a focus of the Western REN, such as improving cellular coverage, addressing talent needs and gaps in our local workforce, and increasing business efficiencies. Those issues and others such as housing limitations and improvement needs for the infrastructure grid are all part of the challenges within our region, which will continue as the population grows. The Western REN will continue to work diligently and bring other partners together in collaboration, so that our region will be more prepared for this and other exciting opportunities.

FROM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER **ANGÉLIQUE LEBLANC**



As another year begins, we have shifted from managing a public health crisis, to addressing population growth and planning for the region's economic future. Critical issues remain in need of innovative solutions, such as labour shortages, a housing and healthcare crisis and public infrastructure shortfalls. The Western REN continues to either lead or support these complex files.

We will continue to support our private sector through our Continuous Improvement Program. A cluster of businesses who focus on continuously improving their business processes and involve their most valued assets, their people, are leading the way to growth and innovation. Employees are being valued and recognized as significant contributors to business success, which make for happier, more productive workplaces.

The Western REN will also continue to support business owners looking to sell their business, connecting them to the resources they need, and promoting opportunities in Western Nova Scotia to prospective buyers.

Longer term, our focus is on setting up the region for success. Where and how we grow is to be debated, discussed, and determined, so we can be as welcoming as possible to newcomers. Long-term retention and sharing in the pride of place celebrated in the Western Region is the goal.



" THE ULTIMATE RESOURCE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS PEOPLE. IT IS PEOPLE, NOT CAPITAL OR RAW MATERIALS THAT DEVELOP AN ECONOMY." – Peter Drucker

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, resumed fully in 2022. The Cat's 2023 season starts on May 25th and runs through to October 9th. The interprovincial Digby, Nova Scotia to Saint John, New Brunswick continues to offer daily passages through the entire year.

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. The number of monolingual French speaking immigrants to Nova Scotia reportedly quadrupled in 2022.



GENERAL REALITIES



Workforce

The percentage of people employed in the Southern Economic Region, which includes the Western Region, increased from 49.8% in January 2022 to 52.1% in January 2023. During this same period, the unemployment rate decreased from 11.7% to 7.0%. The total number of job vacancies in the Southern Economic Region is 2.3% lower than it was in 2021, though still 56% higher than pre-covid 2020.

Canadian Dollar

The Canadian Dollar is down slightly against the American Dollar at \$0.75 US cents compared to \$0.79 in 2022, during periods of high inflation for both currencies. The inflation rate is up to 6.3% in December, 2022, from 5.1% in January, 2022, but is down from the peak of the year of 8.1% in June. Canada's average inflation rate since 1915 was 3%.

Commodities

The cost of Crude Oil is down 8% since February, 2022, while the price of gas and home heating oil remain elevated compared to 2021.

This has implications on the purchasing power of residents due to increased expenditures on energy. Diesel is up 9.3% year over year, which has impacts on shipping costs for various commodities, further reducing the purchasing power of residents. Lumber prices are down 53.6% year over year, likely resulting from this purchasing power reduction, which is further reduced by higher interest rates for loans and mortgages.

Tourism

Tourism to Nova Scotia in 2022 was up 75% as of October 2022, compared to the same period in 2021, with 1.6 million visitors to the province. This represents a significant recovery from the dip in tourism that resulted from travelling restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic. The numbers were down 20% compared to the same period in pre-pandemic 2019, however, so there is still room for more recovery and growth. Businesses in the Western Region reported a large boost in tourism that resulted specifically from the resumed service of The Cat Ferry.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS 2023-2024

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; 75 referrals	Increased business stability and growth
Promote regional target investment and growth sectors	Social Media 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 Western Region Innovation Strategy	Strategy implemented	Acceleration of region's Innovation Ecosystem
Continue to support access to reliable cell service for business purposes	Information shared	Increased access to reliable cell service in under-served and unserved communities
Build energy retrofit project design	Design built	Decreased demand for electrical energy
Provide joint regional economic development partner training, forums and collaboration	8 meetings per year; 1 event; 10 support activities	Effective communications channels supporting active partnerships
Identify funding and partners for a regional placemaking project	Funding & partners identified	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
Conduct population growth plan exercise	Plan 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 2023-2024

REVENUE	APPROVED BUDGET April 2023-2024
Municipal Grants	\$311,348
Provincial Grants	\$277,250
Other Revenue	\$50,000
TOTAL REVENUE	\$638,598
EXPENSES	
Wages and Benefits	\$485,878
Training, governance, and risk management	\$8,850
Travel, meals, and lodging	\$16,150
Conferences	\$3,250
Communications and recruitment	\$22,500
Consulting support/Data management	\$9,000
Office space and supplies	\$43,244
Professional and corporate services	\$22,500
Strategic planning initiatives	\$106,000
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$717,372
NET INCOME/LOSS	-\$78,774

GOVERNANCE



Liaison and Oversight Committee - Funders and Board Appointment

Municipality of Argyle Guy Surette, Chair	Municipality of Barrington Eddie Nickerson	Municipality of Clare Yvon LeBlanc	Municipality of Digby Linda Gregory	Municipality of Yarmouth Patti Durkee
Town of Digby Ben Cleveland	Town of Yarmouth Gil Dares, Vice-Chair		Dept. of Municipal Affairs & Housing Marilynn Hay	Dept. Labour, Skills & Immigration Joe Brown

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023-24



Board Chair, Benjamin Shearer
2nd term expires June 2023



Board Vice-Chair, Julie MacLean
1st term expires June 2023



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



Director, Brenda Francis
1st term expires June 2022



Board Chair, Mary Thompson
2nd term expires June 2024



Director, Charles Surette
1st term expires June 2022



Director, Jamie Symonds
2nd term expires June 2023



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

STAFF 2023



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.



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.



KEVAL D'ENTREMONT, ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE COORDINATOR *Since October 2018*

Keval's calm and competent nature, combined with her organizational and accounting strengths keep the Western REN's wheels turning. Keval job shares this position with Hélène.



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 job shares this role with Keval. 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.





Western Regional
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