

Western Regional
Enterprise Network

Annual Report

2022-2023

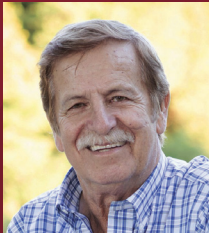




Contents

Message from LOC Chair Guy Surette	4
Message from Board Chair Benjamin Shearer	5
Message from CEO Angélique LeBlanc.....	6
2022-2023 Results.....	9
Increasing Investment in Private Sector	10
Increasing Investment in Public Sector.....	15
Addressing Talent Needs.....	18
Liaison and Oversight Committee.....	21
Board of Directors.....	21
Staff	22

MESSAGE FROM LIAISON AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE CHAIR GUY SURETTE



ANOTHER YEAR of building connections is behind us. The Western REN continues to do excellent work with private sector and government to bring out the best in our region. I've been a member of the Liaison and Oversight Committee (LOC) for many years, and this is my first as Chair. It's always been a pleasure to work with the Western REN, but seeing the work being done from a Chair perspective shows me just how important it is for the region's future.

This past year, I attended the provincial Regional Enterprise Network's *Partners for Progress* conference hosted by the Valley REN. I've seen the impact the Western REN has here, but knowing we are part of a broader provincial network makes me realise our organization has a platform to make it even more effective, and makes me happy to be involved. The RENs are committed to working collaboratively across the province to bring out the best in every business and community.

Closer to home, the Western REN is continuing to address key challenges and is connecting business owners from Digby to Barrington. Support from the Towns and Municipalities in the area remains strong. We're here for the long haul and would not be as successful as we are today without municipal partners who recognize that investment results don't happen overnight. Economic Development is something that requires vision and patience.

That patience is paying off. Our population is growing, immigrants want to come here to work and job opportunities are plentiful. The secret is out, Western Nova Scotia is the place to be. Our population has been growing since 2020 with no sign of slowing down.

As we move forward with our partners, we're prepared, determined and lots of great things are on the horizon.

Guy Surette

MESSAGE

FROM BOARD CHAIR BENJAMIN SHEARER



WHEN WAS the last time our region could boast of population growth? Or even consider it as a realistic possibility? As our province, with full support of our provincial government, is building towards growth in the

population, our region is already positioned well.

From 2017-2022, the Western REN was a pilot partner in the Atlantic Immigration Program, assisting 82 companies who were interested in hiring internationally. Many newcomers to our region are a direct result of the employers involved. It is now a permanent program from which our region will continue to benefit. This overall success speaks to our regions' embrace of immigration as a viable solution to our labour needs and the numbers reflect this success. According to Statistics Canada, since 2020, our region's

population has grown in consecutive years and school enrollment for this school year is up almost 10%.

The Western REN hosted a Newcomer Welcome Event in March which I had the great pleasure of attending. The event was wonderfully attended by newcomers and local/regional leaders including from all levels of government. The event reflected the support and excitement our region and its' newcomers have for this growth. There is much work to do, some of it of a critical nature, and the Western REN will continue to be at the forefront by bringing key people, organizations, and government together to ensure we meet these new and exciting challenges.

Benjamin Shearer

MESSAGE FROM CEO ANGÉLIQUE LeBLANC



THE PAST YEAR has been a recalibration of sorts, as we are able to return to longer-term planning. The urgency of the pandemic has passed, but we are still dealing with the fallout and repositioning of our economy and workforce.

As we welcome an increasing number of newcomers to the Western Region, we continue to support integration through our Connector Program and our Local Immigration Partnership. The goal of both programs is for newcomers to make a life and settle down permanently in Western Nova Scotia.

Support continues for business owners who are looking to streamline their operations, and those who are ready to transition their enterprise to new ownership. As well as working with clients locally, we take time to showcase and share successes and lessons learned at a provincial level, supporting our partners to help build a better Nova Scotia.

As we head towards Net Zero 2050, the Western Region is working on a Residential Efficiency Retrofit project, which will lower energy expenditures for residents and businesses and strengthen the region's energy security.

The work we do cannot be accomplished without a team of professionals dedicated to the region. The Western REN has exactly that. I want to express my deepest gratitude to them for tackling complex challenges. Each one contributes by taking initiative and applying creativity to their work. Team members consistently go the extra mile for clients and partners to develop trusting, long-term relationships.

Together, let's continue to make Western Nova Scotia a place we are all proud to call home!

Angélique LeBlanc





2022-2023 RESULTS

YEAR 1 OF 3 OF OUR STRATEGY

INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PRIVATE SECTOR

3 OF 5
TARGETS ACHIEVED

INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC SECTOR

5 OF 6
TARGETS ACHIEVED

ADDRESSING TALENT NEEDS

3 OF 3
TARGETS ACHIEVED

OVERALL YEAR END RESULTS

11 OF 14
TARGETS REACHED

= 79%

INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PRIVATE SECTOR

SUPPORTING THE HEART OF OUR REGION

Communication & Engagement

Expertise is shared at a provincial level on priority economic development issues, programs & activities impacting our region.



BusinessNow

The Western REN's BusinessNow program helps businesses identify and overcome barriers to success.

It's an ongoing relationship-based model. Referrals help businesses with access to capital, staff training, talent recruitment, accessing new markets & business planning assistance.



149 clients,
72 referrals to partners





Photo: Clifton Saulnier



Promoting Regional Target Investment & Growth Sectors

Regional target investment & growth sectors continue to be promoted, with the focus shifting to adapting messaging to a more local audience.

Preparing Businesses for Transition

The Western REN helps business owners prepare for the eventual sale of their company. Support with complex decisions or valuations is offered through vetted consultants. Of the 15 businesses in the Succession program this year, 2 have sold at the time of publication.



15 businesses participating

2 

"The Succession Planning Program was such a huge help to me. I cannot thank everyone involved enough for the help and guidance with the succession of my business. Bring on retirement. Lots to Celebrate!"

- Randy Comeau, owner of R.C. Communications Inc.



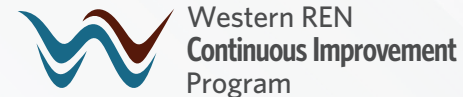
Continuous Improvement



Continuous Improvement Program Success Story | Carl's Store
Photo credit: Clifton Saulnier

Continuous Improvement (CI) projects help companies enhance competitiveness by eliminating waste and training the management team in the CI mindset, resulting in a highly efficient operation.

By enhancing productivity, companies are becoming more competitive against firms from both within the region and from far beyond.



12 companies participated, including seafood companies, boat builders and agricultural businesses.

"The Western REN's Continuous Improvement Program allows you to focus on your business needs and come up with a plan to achieve your goals through an easy and efficient process." – Steven Bourque – co-owner



INCREASING INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC SECTOR

Regional Innovation Strategy

After the development of the Western Region Innovation Strategy by local participants of the MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program, the Western REN is providing oversight on implementation.

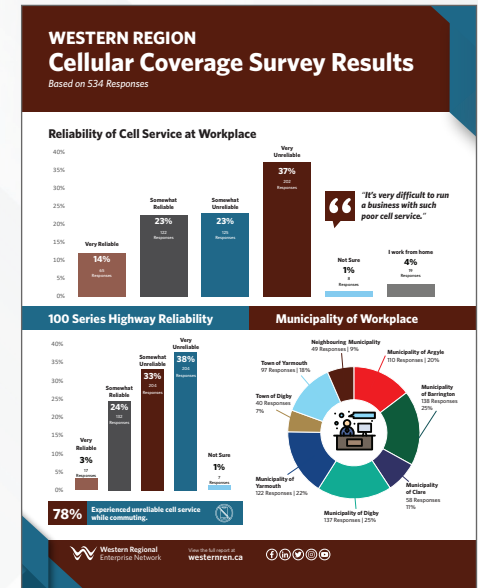
The vision is to address or overcome weaknesses to best create an environment geared toward innovation driven entrepreneurship.

Actions aim to help protect and strengthen the resiliency and sustainability of the marine industry while supporting growing industries; identifying and using both technology and innovation to help solve the region's labour force limitations; and continuing to grow a culture of innovation through continued positive messaging, mentorship and demonstrated entrepreneurial successes in the region.

Access to Reliable High-Speed Internet & Cell Service

Municipal units remained in close contact with the Western REN throughout the year to stay as up to date as possible with fibre installation times. The Nova Scotia Internet Funding Trust allocated an additional \$3.9 million dollars for the purposes of expediting the final builds in Yarmouth and Digby Counties, as well as other areas across the province. Additionally, Build Nova Scotia announced funding to help residents and businesses to connect to wireless internet services such as cellular towers or Starlink satellites.

The Western REN conducted and compiled the results of a cell service survey which were shared with Build Nova Scotia to inform their planning stages and by providing a better understanding of how lack of reliable cell service impacts the business community.



534 responses
to Cellular coverage survey

Working with Partners

The Western REN leads the newly named Western Impact Partnership (originally The Regional Economic Development COVID-19 Response & Recovery Group) to align regionally around communications & service delivery to the business community. Participants are organizations who offer services to businesses in the Western Region and include Chambers and Boards of Trade, Nova Scotia Works, Municipal Economic Development Officers, Invest Nova Scotia, Community Business Development Corporation (CBDC), Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC), Develop NS, Yarmouth and Acadian Shores Tourism Association (YASTA), Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse (CDÉNÉ) and more.



10 meetings

took place this fiscal, with numerous working groups and initiatives spinning off from the initial group.

Energy Retrofitting

Funding was received from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Low Carbon Communities for a feasibility study to address barriers that smaller municipalities face in developing a strong ecosystem of financing and resources to support successful municipal-scale or municipality-led residential deep energy retrofit programs. Such programs will help municipalities meet energy conservation and carbon emission reduction targets. The study developed cost models for retrofit packages, defined an Energy Concierge Role, and built the Retrofit Forecaster web app, which helps municipalities track how many homes in their unit fit each of the recommended retrofit packages.



Placemaking

Building on the region's unique sense of place, the Western REN has defined a regional placemaking project concept with the goal of increasing economic activity in the entire region. The Western Region is home to a multi-use trail system (known locally as rails to trails) which is approximately 200+kms in length from Digby to Shelburne. The Western REN has been discussing enhancements to the trail system with potential partners that could benefit all trail users and nearby service/goods providers.



Photo: Clifton Saulnier

ADDRESSING TALENT NEEDS

Connecting Businesses with Talent

The Connector Program matches community and business leaders (Connectors) with skilled newcomers, local and international graduates, and other qualified local professionals (Connectees) in their industry of expertise.

Connectors are local business and community leaders who have a strong network. They can often be found making introductions within social, cultural, professional and economic circles.

Connectees are job ready newcomers, local and international graduates or underemployed skilled locals who are actively looking to launch their new career in the Western Region. The Connector Program hosted networking sessions throughout the year, including “Empowering Women Through Connections” in Digby and “Connecting Businesses in Barrington” as well as supported Ukrainians temporarily living at Annapolis Basin Conference Centre looking for opportunities in the region.



40
New
Connectors



51
New
Connectees



4
Networking
Events Hosted



21
Known Jobs Found
by Connectees



“THE NETWORKING CAPABILITIES of the program for newcomers to the area are great. The amount of time I saved, and the formal and informal introductions I was given definitely was an asset in helping me find a great employer.”
- Lisa Burke

Planning Regionally for Immigration & Population Growth

The Local Immigration Partnership (LIP), funded through IRCC, works in three priority areas and has created working groups made up of local partners who work with the LIP Coordinator to advance projects.

The *Attracting Talent* working group is concentrating on the creation of marketing materials with an immigration



focus which include a bilingual website (www.welcometowesternns.ca), newcomer videos and photography which demonstrates diversity in our region.

The *Employer Outreach & Support* group focused on a simplified online tool to help employers become "Immigration Ready".

The *Fostering Welcoming Communities* group initiatives included the translation of an existing Health Guide for Newcomers to Nova Scotia, and a Newcomer Welcome Event which took place on March 25th at the Yarmouth Firehall.

Newcomer Welcome Event

200 people attended
- most of them newcomers.

45 New Permanent Residents attended.

14 New Canadian Citizens attended.

Employee Views on Labour

The Western REN partnered with CBDC Yarmouth on a survey and analysis with the goal of preparing a snapshot highlighting workforce issues through the employee lens. The survey helped identify needs and gaps in attracting and retaining talent in the region.

Top three requirements to stay in a workplace were as follows:

1. **Employees treated respectfully**
2. **Adequate compensation in terms of hourly wage/salary**
3. **Having management that is open to constructive feedback**

156
responses
to labour survey



LIAISON AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Guy Surette, Chair - Municipality of Argyle

Eddie Nickerson - Municipality of Barrington

Yvon LeBlanc - Municipality of Clare

Linda Gregory - Municipality of Digby

Patti Durkee - Municipality of Yarmouth

Ben Cleveland - Town of Digby

Gil Dares, Vice-Chair - Town of Yarmouth

Marilynn Hay - Dept. of Municipal Affairs & Housing

Joe Brown - Dept. Labour, Skills & Immigration

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Benjamin Shearer - Board Chair

Julie MacLean - Board Vice-Chair

Nick D'Eon - Finance Committee Chair

Mary Thompson - HR & Governance Chair

Brenda Francis - Director

Charles Surette - Director

Jamie Symonds - Director

Jocelin d'Entremont - Director



STAFF

Angélique LeBlanc, Chief Executive Officer

Rob Stephenson, BusinessNow Lead

Brenda LaGrandeur, Project Coordinator

Jakob Postlewaite, Communications Coordinator

Keval d'Entremont, Accounting and Finance Coordinator
(shared position)

Hélène D'Eon, Accounting and Finance Coordinator
(shared position)

Miranda MacLean, Connector Program Manager

Darshini Arogyaswamy, Board Coordinator





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