

Q4 Western REN CEO Report

January 1st – March 31st 2020

Supporting Private Sector

The *BusinessNow* program is one the pillars of service offered by the Western REN. The program entails contacting local businesses, meeting with them and determining what their needs are to grow and succeed. The process also identifies what challenges and roadblocks business may be facing that impedes growth. The model is an on-going relationship-based system where after meeting with clients, the *BusinessNow* Lead seeks out resources that the client may require to grow. These resources could be access to capital, staff training, assisting in talent recruitment, accessing new markets and business planning assistance. The relationship continues long after connections are made.

To note, the COVID-19 crisis began in March, with the Province of Nova Scotia announcing a State of Emergency on March 22nd 2020, severely restricting or shutting down regular business operations. At this time, the *BusinessNow* program shifted entirely to COVID-19 crisis response by proactively reaching out to business to help navigate funding program announcements and criteria.

The following is a summary of *BusinessNow* program results for Q4:

2019-20	Clients	Referrals	Company interactions
Q1 Apr 1-June 30	10	10	23
Q2 Jul 1-Sept 30	10	9	10
Q3 Oct 1-Dec 31	30	10	21
Q4 Jan 1-March 31	25	12	25
Total 2019-20	75	41	79
<i>Target</i>	n/a	90	100
<i>Total since program launch</i>	261	292	289

The Western REN's **succession project**, funded by Global Affairs and NSCC, continues. The Western REN is issuing coupon codes to businesses interested in selling to give them access to the SuccessionMatching.com platform where matchmaking between buyer and seller can occur.

Succession 2019-2020	Coupon Codes Issued	Types (S) Buyers (B) Sellers	Be Your Own Boss Coupon Codes Issued
Q1 Apr 1-June 30	9	7 S 2 B	0
Q2 Jul 1-Sept 30	5	5 S	0
Q3 Oct 1-Dec 31	7	3 S 4 B	0
Q4 Jan 1-Mar 31	4	4 S	0
Total 2019-20	25	19S 6B	0
<i>Agreement Target over 12 months</i>	<i>40 Codes issued to either buyers or sellers</i>		7

A Business Valuation Workshop was held on February 5th 2020 at the Meteghan Fire Hall, offering an overview of this critical stage in the business succession process. 30 participants were in attendance.

The Western REN partnered with ACOA, Perennia and Ignite Labs on The **Lobster Bait Challenge**. A follow-up workshop was held on January 15th, 2020 on Opportunities for Seafood By-Products in the Pet Industry with Mark Murakami, an experienced entrepreneur in the pet food business; Michael Bryanton from Canada’s Smartest Kitchen; Peter Chapman of SKU Foods and Margot White, Innovation Projects Coordinator from Perennia. 38 people attended in person and 21 people streamed it. The project also funded two Icelandic speakers at the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture Minister’s Conference, held February 25-27th at the Halifax Convention Centre. Travel and associated costs were covered for Dr. Gudmundur Stefansson, Research Group Leader, Product Development and Value Chain, MATÍS, Iceland and Thor Sigfusson, PhD, Founder & Chairman, Iceland Ocean Cluster. Both of them spoke about fish by-products, particularly commercial uses and Thor Sigfusson, met with four local seafood processors / business people regarding fish waste and seafood by product development.

The Western REN’s **Continuous Improvement Program**, which receives partial funding support from ACOA, has launched. A call for consultants went out, and four companies were approved to be on a roster of consultants as part of the program. The program allows for funding of between 10-20 companies and allows for 5-10 days of Continuous Improvement consulting. 1 company participated in Q4, but the project was paused temporarily due to COVID-19.

Supporting Public Sector

The Western REN continues work on the **Western Regional Energy Investment Plan (WREIP)**, funded in part by the NS Department of Energy and Mines. Consultants at Sustainability Solutions Group (SSG) have now completed the modelling of potential energy futures for the region, which in combination

with the baseline data will allow for the creation of targets, and the identification of opportunities for efficiencies, and energy performance benchmarking.

Looking ahead to Q1... The data for the region is at this point consolidated. The remaining deliverables are a remote stakeholder engagement workshop, and the final report, which is presently underway.

Develop NS announced awards for their Nova Scotia Internet Funding Trust in February 2020. Bell, with support from Western REN staff, and the Municipalities of Barrington, Digby and Yarmouth, was awarded funds for four fibre to the premises projects in the region that reach a total of roughly 2,200 civic addresses by the end of 2020.

Looking ahead to Q1... Applications are now underway in partnership with Bell for the remaining underserved communities within the Western Region. The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has extended their deadline twice amidst COVID-19, with the most recent deadline set as June 1st, 2020. Develop Nova Scotia's RFP for Long-Term projects launched in February 2020, though their eligibility maps may need to be challenged to ensure that the majority of the access gaps in the region are filled.

Addressing Talent Needs

The **Connector Program** is a networking initiative that helps local businesses and organizations connect with new graduates, immigrants and international students interested in starting and growing their career in Nova Scotia.

The following is a summary of results for Q4:

2019-20	New Connectors	New Connectees	Initial Connections	Known jobs found in the region
Q1 Apr 1-June 30	21	13	33	3
Q2 Jul 1-Sept 30	9	9	13	4
Q3 Oct 1-Dec 31	7	11	15	5
Q4 Jan 1-Mar 31	6	10	9	5
Total 2019-20	43	43	70	17
<i>Agreement Target</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
Total since program launch	148	131	194	55

The two-year **Immigration pilot** project between Western REN, Nova Scotia Office of Immigration (NSOI) and ACOA focuses on building awareness of the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (AIP) and identifying and connecting employers looking to fill labor gaps to NSOI for the support required to become a designated employer under the AIP. The following is a summary of AIP results for Q4:

2019-20	Companies designated	Known positions endorsed	Known families receiving permanent resident status
Q1 Apr 1-June 30	6		
Q2 Jul 1-Sept 30	6		
Q3 Oct 1-Dec 31	5		
Q4 Jan 1-Mar 31	10		
Total 2019-20	27		
<i>Agreement Target over 24 months</i>	49	190	
Total since program launch	63	45	14

To note, number of positions endorsed and families receiving permanent resident access is not information available to the Western REN.

The Western REN’s proposal to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to establish a new **Zonal Immigration Partnership (ZIP)** for the Western Region was green lighted for a feasibility study, with the intent to fund based on the results of the study. The goal of this partnership will be to enhance collaboration, coordination and strategic planning at the community level in order to develop a regional immigration strategy and targeted action plan; to increase the overall number of newcomers and produce a more welcoming and inclusive community. This new ZIP will ensure strategic recruitment based on labor market needs, improve newcomer settlement and integration outcomes, and strengthen the region’s ability to better address the needs of newcomers. Responding to a call for proposals, the contract to complete the study was awarded to Group ATN.

Current significant issues/opportunities

The Western REN is developing a Succession 2.0 concept. It has been demonstrated that working through the steps with prospective sellers adds value to REN services, opens the doors to potential new immigrants to the region and uncovers new business opportunities. Succession is important to a business in any sector, and a mix of activities and tools can be employed to find suitable buyers/successors; employ trusted valuation processes; communicate and test financing for buyers; make referrals to partners who can help mitigate the financial costs of succession readiness; provide space for the dialogues around fear, family visions and employee related matters.

As mentioned above, after March 22nd, Western REN response shifted to **COVID-19**. 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 section on the www.westernren.ca website, with a regularly updated FAQ section

- CEO participation in the NS Business & Labour Economic Coalition, led by the Chamber of Commerce of Halifax 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 REN COVID-19 Response Group hosted weekly by the Western REN CEO. Members include Chambers and Boards of Trade, NS Works partners, EDOs, NSBI, CBDC, ACOA, NSCC, Develop NS, YASTA, CDENE and more. The goal is to keep partners informed and share information from the across the region. A client-facing working group was formed from this committee and meets 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 Boomers Plus. (to be launched in June)

Matters for noting

- The Western REN Workforce Committee has been reactivated since the Web.com closure announcement and meets as a regional collective to provide a high-level briefing of the Web.com situation as it develops; share and understand partner mandates and support the transition.
- On January 23rd, the Western REN and Cape Breton Partnership CEOs presented to the provincial Sector Councils of Nova Scotia who were meeting in Halifax. This presentation was a first step in recognizing the potential of solid partnerships between the two collectives.
- Northern Pulp's impending closure has impacted Western NS, with the forestry sector representing \$475 million of economic impact and 2,850 jobs annually. The RENs across the province have input into the transition process through an open line of communication to the Transition Team put into place by the Provincial Government. The RENs primary role is collecting information and identifying local concerns and perspective to ensure they are considered in the delivery of public support. The Western REN met with the local forestry sector and public sector partners on January 31st and will continue to play a liaison role as the situation unfolds.
- CEO LeBlanc, a few Board members, along with leaders from the Public, Private, Education and Financial Sectors were invited to a presentation by ONSIDE on the NS REAP program. The program was born out of a two-year engagement with the MIT REAP (Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program) championed by Dalhousie University and funded by the private sector. The REAP program provided the space for participants to understand the drivers of a successful ecosystem, identify its' comparative advantage and collectively accomplish its 'must-win-battle' – the Ocean Super Cluster. ONSIDE aims to continue those efforts and bring to bear the learning and experiences from MIT REAP and share them across Nova Scotia by building local REAP teams. The Teams have been formed and CEO LeBlanc has been asked to lead the Western REAP team, set to launch in January 2021.
- On March 12th the Western REN co-hosted a networking event with the Municipality of Barrington and the Barrington Chamber of Commerce.



Western Regional Enterprise Network

AT A GLANCE - FOURTH QUARTER - JANUARY-MARCH 2019

Increasing investment within Western Nova Scotia through collaborative actions.

<p>Engaging Private Sector <i>Direct client-facing services support businesses and provide needed data about strategic economic development needs.</i></p>	<p>Engaging Public Sector <i>Coordinating and supporting municipal and business development partners to maximize investment opportunities.</i></p>	<p>Targeting Talent Gaps <i>Work with all partners to increase successful recruitment and retention of needed workforce into the region.</i></p>
<p>Succession Program</p> <p>February 5, 2020: Hosted a Workshop on Business Valuation.</p> <p>Certified business valuator, Harold Duffett presented to 30 participants. Workshop included hands-on valuation exercises supported by Kent & Duffett partners.</p>	<p>Infrastructure</p> <p>Four projects bringing fibre internet to the door will reach roughly 2,200 civic addresses by the end of 2020.</p> <p>Energy investment planning project approaching completion. Plan will identify opportunities for locally generated, used, and stored energy.</p>	<p>Immigration Partnerships</p> <p>Approved for a feasibility study for a Western Region Zonal Immigration Partnership.</p> <p>The partnership would ensure strategic recruitment based on labour market needs, and improve settlement and retention outcomes.</p>