

Q2 Western REN CEO ReportJuly 1st – September 30st 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 Q1 & Q2. Due to COVID-19 outreach, the current year's targets were met in Q1, during which the program saw more than twice as many clients than in the entire previous year.

2020-21	Clients	Referrals	Company interactions
Q1 Apr 1-June 30	193	154	296
Q2 Jul 1-Sept 30	66	66	107
Q3 Oct 1-Dec 31			
Q4 Jan 1-March 31			
Total 2020-21	259	220	403
Target	n/a	90	100
Total since program launch	520	446	692

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 2020-2021	Coupon Codes Issued	Types (S) Buyers (B)	Sellers	Be Your Own Boss Coupon Codes Issued
Q1 Apr 1-June 30	0	0		0
Q2 Jul 1-Sept 30	2	2S		
Q3 Oct 1-Dec 31				
Q4 Jan 1-Mar 31				
Total 2020-21	2	2S	B	0
Total 2019-20	25	18S	7B	0
GRAND Total	27	20S	7B	
<i>Agreement Target over 12 months</i>	<i>40 Codes issued to either buyers or sellers</i>			7

Out of the 20 businesses for sale in the program, 2 have sold, and 2 have since closed (one due to COVID).

The Western REN's **Continuous Improvement Program**, which receives partial funding support from ACOA, has picked up again after a pause due to COVID-19. The program allows for funding of between 10-20 companies and allows for 5-10 days of Continuous Improvement consulting. 3 companies participated in Q1 & Q2, for a total of 4 companies having participated to date.

Supporting Public Sector

The final version of the **Western Region Energy Investment Plan (WREIP)** was received in Q2 from consultants at Sustainability Solutions Group . The plan was presented to each of the Western REN's seven municipal councils and shared with relevant stakeholders. It includes regional energy consumption data, modelling of the energy demands for a proposed low energy future, and identified a total of 26 energy efficiency and energy generation opportunities for the Western Region. The Western REN released a Request for Proposals for consultants to assist with the implementation of the WREIP, and awarded the work to MCC Energy Strategies Inc. of Bedford, NS. The consultants have begun work to identify the top 4-6 opportunities identified in the WREIP to begin the implementation process.

Looking ahead to Q3... Western REN Staff and consultants from MCC Energy Strategies Inc. will agree on the top 4-6 opportunities identified in the WREIP and the consultants will identify the next steps towards implementation, including identification of appropriate funding opportunities, and application submission on behalf of the region.

Announcements were made by Develop Nova Scotia's Long-Term **Internet** projects RFP on September 1st, 2020, with projects expected to be built by Summer 2022. All of Bell's submissions were awarded for the four partner Municipalities of the Districts of Argyle, Barrington, Digby and Yarmouth as well as for the Municipality of the District of Clare. These awards will bring Fiber to the Premises service to a total of 5,400 previously underserved civic addresses in the region. The awards for the Municipalities of the Districts of Argyle and Barrington will achieve 95% or higher coverage upon build completion, meaning that the work in these units has largely concluded.

Looking ahead to Q3... Discussions will continue with Bell regarding some outstanding areas primarily located in the Municipalities of the Districts of Digby and Yarmouth. Western REN staff has prepared a list of remaining underserved areas in the region and Develop NS has confirmed their eligibility for a final round of funding. This round will skip the RFP process, and will instead be awarded directly to the service providers that have already been awarded in each area, which for the Western Region will be Bell and Mainland Telecom (Clare). Additionally, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada has launched a \$750 million Canada Wide Universal Broadband Fund, which may be helpful for any areas that are not able to be included in Bell's submission to Develop's final funding round.

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 Q1 & Q2 :

			Initial Connections	Known jobs found in the region
2020-21	New Connectors	New Connectees		
Q1 Apr 1-June 30	7	7	15	3
Q2 Jul 1-Sept 30	11	6	13	2
Q3 Oct 1-Dec 31				
Q4 Jan 1-Mar 31				
Total 2020-21	18	13	28	5
<i>Agreement Target</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
Total since program launch	166	144	222	60

Connectees this quarter were a combination of internal, Chamber, Municipal and current Connectee referrals and include an underemployed individual, two immigrants, a newcomer, a recent graduate, and an upcoming graduate. Referrals came in from current Connectees in the program, a university professor and an NSCC student.

The **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 Q1 & Q2:

2020-21	Companies designated	Known positions endorsed	Known families receiving permanent resident status
Q1 Apr 1-June 30	12		
Q2 Jul 1-Sept 30	0		
Q3 Oct 1-Dec 31			
Q4 Jan 1-Mar 31			
Total 2019-20			
<i>Agreement Target over 12 months</i>	20	57	
Total since program launch	69	102	14

To note, number of positions endorsed and families receiving permanent resident access is not information available to the Western REN. AIP designations took a pause during Q2 due to the low number of applications submitted during the COVID lockdown. A number of applications are currently in the works and targets are expected

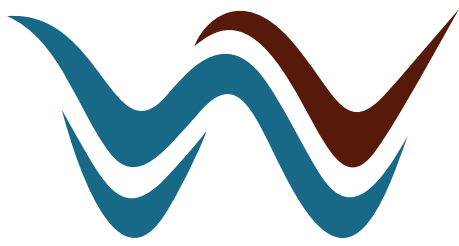
The Western REN's proposal to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to establish a new **Local Immigration Partnership (LIP)** for the Western Region was green lighted for a feasibility study, with the intent to fund based on the results of the study. Stakeholder outreach and engagement continued in Q2; the project is on track and a draft was presented for discussion. Most interviews completed to date indicate strong support for the concept of a LIP. There is a consensus that the focus of the LIP should be retention. Respondents enthusiastically offered a wide range of opportunities and challenges that could be addressed through a LIP. The employers spoken to provided concrete examples of how their businesses would grow – often in export markets - with greater access to an immigrant workforce. The study provides a positive feasibility analysis and a strong business case for advancing the WREN LIP initiative.

Current significant issues/opportunities

- The current COVID-19 global pandemic continues, impacting heavily on the business community, especially in the hospitality sector. Programs remain flexible to nimbly respond to real time business needs.
- Baie Sainte-Marie in Clare is at the heart of a lobster fishery dispute, centering around the Indigenous moderate livelihood fishery.

Matters for noting

- CEO continues participation in the NS Business & Labour Economic Coalition, led by the Chamber of Commerce of Halifax and meeting 1x/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.
- The Western REN COVID-19 Response Group continues to meet twice a month, hosted 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.
- Funded by ACOA, the first REN pan-provincial project, the REN Virtual Advisor Program, powered by Boomers Plus was launched in June.
- As part of the Western NS Kelly Cove Salmon Community Liaison Committee, CEO LeBlanc took part in a tour of the Rattling Beach site in Digby on July 28th 2020.
- CEO LeBlanc is a member of the Ignite Board of Directors and the comité organisateur du Congrès mondial acadien 2024.
- CEO LeBlanc, a few Board members, along with leaders from the Public, Private, Education and Financial Sectors are the members of the Western NS REAP Team. 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 program is set to launch in January 2021.
- **Western REN’s Win This Space** competition launched on October 26th 2020. The Western REN is looking for entrepreneurs that wish to kickstart an exciting career as a small business owner, realizing that doing business in our new COVID impacted economy is challenging. Businesses are encouraged to consider a “new” business model to ensure that they survive and thrive in the current and post-COVID market conditions. Up to 25 candidates will be chosen to take part in its WIN THIS SPACE initiative. The Grand Prize winner will win \$1,000 a month for an entire year to cover rent/lease payments after setting up a business within the Western Region. The Grand Prize winner will choose their business location from one of the available/approved participating rental spaces. The winner will also receive a one year Ignite Labs’ Resident membership as well as a professional website with integrated e-commerce platform for their new business. The 2nd place winner will receive one year Ignite Labs’ Resident membership and a professional website for their new business.



Western Regional Enterprise Network

AT A GLANCE - SECOND QUARTER - JULY -SEPTEMBER 2020

Increasing investment within Western Nova
Scotia through collaborative actions.

Engaging Private Sector <i>Direct client-facing services support businesses and provide needed data about strategic economic development needs.</i>	Engaging Public Sector <i>Coordinating and supporting municipal and business development partners to maximize investment opportunities.</i>	Targeting Talent Gaps <i>Work with all partners to increase successful recruitment and retention of needed workforce into the region.</i>
BusinessNow Plus Since the March 22 State of Emergency, the <i>BusinessNow</i> lead has been reaching out to ensure our clients are accessing emergency programs & services. The concierge-plus level of service has been a lifeline for businesses in crisis. Numbers this Fiscal Year: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 259 Clients• 220 Referrals• 403 Interactions	Internet Infrastructure Western REN staff has supported the Municipalities of Argyle, Barrington, Digby, and Yarmouth to select a partner ISP for application to the NS Internet Funding Trust.	Connector Program The Connector program uncovers the hidden job market and hidden talent in the region. Connectees are job seekers in the region, and Connectors get them noticed. Since the program launch, the program has seen: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 166 new Connectors▪ 144 new Connectees▪ 222 initial Connections▪ 60 known jobs found in the region