



Valley REN
Valley Regional
Enterprise Network

Business Plan 2017–18

November 2017 – version 2.0
W. Coby Milne, Interim CEO



Valley Regional Enterprise Network
Business Plan
2017–18
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Our Vision

Communities working together to create a prosperous region

Our Mission

Stimulating economic growth by empowering business and community leaders to improve the economic climate of the Annapolis Valley

Our Core Principles

Collective Impact | Integrity | Respect | Excellence | Empowerment

Our Funding Partners

The Valley REN serves Glooscap First Nation, the Municipality of the County of Kings, the Municipality of the District of West Hants, and the Towns of Berwick, Kentville, Middleton, Windsor and Wolfville, with the Province of Nova Scotia as a joint funding partner. Our partners provide oversight to the Valley REN board, which is led by the regional business community.

Nova Scotia Regional Enterprise Networks

In Nova Scotia, Regional Enterprise Networks are leading a collaborative approach to economic development and supporting business growth outside the Halifax area. Their collective mission is to guide and navigate regional economic development while providing support to businesses; operate as connectors among economic development partners, supporting business growth and retention; and provide regional leadership on economic priorities.



Executive summary

The Valley Regional Enterprise Network (Valley REN) is in a strong position mid-way through Year Two of our three-year Regional Economic Development Strategic Plan. Our revised 2017–18 Business Plan charts our direction for the remainder of the fiscal year.

The Valley REN is committed to collaboration and communication to empower businesses and our communities. By working together, we find greater opportunities to create a more prosperous region.

Highlights from our 2016–17 year included advances in four key areas:

- Enhancing our *BusinessNow* program to empower businesses to accelerate their growth
- Taking a project focus to tackle economic barriers in key sectors
- Raising the profile of the Valley REN and promoting the region
- Increasing the Valley REN's impact through leadership and relationships

Our *BusinessNow* suite of services provides local businesses with one-on-one support and effective referrals to a network of resources. This helps businesses stay strong and become stronger.

We work with businesses in five key sectors – agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, sustainable energy, and information & communications technologies (ICT).

We also identify common issues across all sectors to initiate actions that will improve the regional business climate through collaboration and innovation, as we lift the profile and investment readiness of our region.

In 2017–18, we sharpened our focus and adopted a project-based approach on four priorities:

- Promoting the region
- Accelerating business growth
- Cultivating and sharing expert knowledge
- Forming a collaborative network to unlock regional opportunities

This Business Plan sets out specific goals for each priority and how we plan to achieve these goals.



Who we are and what we do

The Valley Regional Enterprise Network is a publicly funded economic development organization. We serve the Province of Nova Scotia and our First Nations and municipal partners in the Annapolis Valley.

Our regional partners are Glooscap First Nation, the municipalities of the County of Kings and the District of West Hants, and the towns of Middleton, Berwick, Kentville, Wolfville and Windsor.

Leadership

Regional Enterprise Networks in Nova Scotia share a common structure. Municipalities and First Nations within

a broader region enter an Inter-Municipal Agreement defining the terms and responsibilities of the governance structure. The new Inter-Municipal Corporation enters into a funding agreement with the Province. A Liaison and Oversight Committee (LOC), representing the regional partners and the Province, appoints a volunteer Board of Directors from the private sector.



The LOC members meet at least twice a year. They receive regular reports from the Valley REN Chief Executive Officer (CEO), as directed by the Board. Their role is to oversee the core activities of the Valley REN and to ensure each funding partner is informed about the Valley REN's work in the region.

2017-18 Valley REN Board of Directors

Scott Roberts (Chair)
Michele Fash (Vice-Chair)
Tammy Belanger
Barry Gander
Bob Gaudet
Jessy Gervais

Scott Hearn
Alex Jurgens
Robert Maher
Coby Milne (on leave as Interim CEO)
Dan Mullen
David Ritcey

The Board is primarily a Policy Governance Board, focussing on the vision, mission, principles and strategic priorities of our organization. They also empower staff, through the CEO, to carry out our mission within established limitations. The CEO is responsible for all hiring and staff management.



Valley REN Staff

The Valley REN is searching for a **Chief Executive Officer** to bring strong knowledge and experience in the private and public sectors to lead the organization and help develop the region.

Rachel Brighton is the Research Lead for the Valley REN, leading corporate communications, research and regional marketing to support our economic strategy. Rachel brings her skills as a journalist, editor, publisher, researcher, public commentator, consultant and small business owner. During her 25-year career in Canada and Australia, she has concentrated on business, public policy and rural economic development.

Jennifer Tufts is the Special Projects Lead, responsible for managing projects that support business across sectors and for partnership ventures and investment readiness initiatives with our funding municipalities. Jennifer previously worked with the Kings RDA on project management and relationship development.

James Schofield leads the *BusinessNow* program and is the Valley REN's primary point of contact for businesses. With a background in HR and Employment Services, James has been serving Valley businesses by providing support with business development in a wide range of industries.

Debbie Roza-Mercier is the Administrative Officer, responsible for managing the office, finances, event planning, as well as the administrative supports for Board of Directors and LOC. Debbie has worked with Annapolis Valley communities in many roles and has provided businesses with the stability and support needed to create impact.

Tania Vassallo is the data entry clerk and Research Assistant for the Valley Regional Enterprise Network, working closely with the EDOs to support special projects. She has worked as a library technician for schools in the Tri-county and Annapolis Valley school boards.

What We Do

The Valley REN delivers region-wide economic development services to benefit our municipal partners and the province of Nova Scotia. With a strategic focus on business, our role is to guide regional economic development and foster rural entrepreneurship and investment.

Our core activities include:

- Connecting local businesses with resources and helping them overcome barriers
- Lifting the profile of the Annapolis Valley
- Collaborating with partners to strengthen our business climate
- Diligently supporting the investment competitiveness and readiness of our regional partners

We believe economic development is a team sport.
By working together, we achieve greater results.



Priorities

The Valley REN is working to create a stronger, regional business climate, fostering new business establishments and growth, and attracting working residents. A stronger business climate will also foster innovation and entrepreneurship, while more business activity will increase the commercial tax base, create more opportunities for youth and attract immigrants and other residents.

Four Priorities

This year we sharpened our focus and adopted a project-based approach to four priorities:

- Promoting the region
- Accelerating business growth
- Cultivating and sharing expert knowledge
- Forming a collaborative network to unlock regional opportunities

Our work plan on these four priorities is shown in the table on page 6.



Promoting the region

A regional focus is critical to the long-term success of the Annapolis Valley. Therefore, a core function of the Valley REN is to promote our region (through collaboration and collective impact) and raise the profile of our pride points and value proposition. This requires a regional marketing plan supported by key partner organizations and a marketing toolbox. We are developing the plan, partnership and materials to execute the marketing campaign for our region: “Choose Annapolis Valley.” Our specific goals include: raise the profile of the Annapolis Valley; develop and strengthen internal buy-in for a regional brand; increase business activity to create opportunities for youth and attract residents/immigrants; show that our region is welcoming and open for business.

Accelerating business growth

Strong local businesses are necessary for a prosperous region. The Valley REN provides services and learning opportunities to help businesses to succeed in the region. Through our *BusinessNow* program, business owners tell us directly what those needs are. We work with businesses individually or as a group to address issues and remove barriers. Where these issues or barriers are outside the responsibility of the REN, we communicate them to others who do have responsibility and can take action (often a department of government). *BusinessNow* acts as the key contact and essential connector for every business in the Annapolis Valley that requests our service. Acting like a concierge of business supports, *BusinessNow* connects, supports, mentors and aids in developing business in whatever supportive role that is required to help a business accelerate growth.

Cultivating and sharing expert knowledge

If more businesses and communities were equipped with the right information, our region would be able to retain wealth, increase our investment readiness, attract new business, and empower new businesses to launch in our communities. Therefore, a core function of the Valley REN is to develop and promote access to information critical to business and community growth. We need to dedicate resources to the development of business resources around succession planning, business start-up acceleration, and access to experts to guide businesses to their next level of sustainable growth. We also need to dedicate resources and explore strategies to improve the investment readiness of our municipalities and region. Our tools for creating and sharing the knowledge resource base will be building key partnerships, engaging in collective impact, access government programs to extend the reach and impact of the Valley REN’s capacity, and having our finger of the pulse of what the region needs to develop sustainable growth and success, not only now, but for future generations.

Forming a collaborative network to unlock regional opportunities

We are focussing our efforts on developing opportunities and tackling challenges that cross sectors and will fundamentally lift the region to a level where we can capitalize on our natural assets and develop a strong identity of collaboration and innovation. We are bringing stakeholders together to identify and advance initiatives that will tackle these cross-sectoral challenges and achieve maximum utility for our efforts. The activities from this work will support all other key priorities of the Valley REN to collaborate, empower and lift the Annapolis Valley. We are also working with other business-focused economic development organizations and our partners to ensure we are complementing and enhancing each other’s work, not duplicating efforts.



Actions, measures & outcomes

Work plan

Goal	Actions	Measures	Outcome
Promoting the region	Regional Marketing Plan	Engagement (website analytics) Collaboration efforts (with VBLI and AVCC)	Stimulate interest in business investment, tourism, resident attraction of youth, creative workers, and immigrants
	New regional website to showcase opportunities and support the promotion of assets and messages	Search engine marketing analytics and website analytics	Lead generation; search engine rankings; third-party referrals; awareness about the region's assets and value proposition to differentiate the region
	Regional Marketing Toolkit (content creation/digital creative/print tools/social media materials)	Content Created Content Accessed Campaigns Launched and Tracked Partner Response	Stakeholders executing strategies and campaigns to promote the region with Regional Marketing Toolkit assets
Accelerating business growth	<i>BusinessNow</i> support program	50 business supported Referrals / actions taken Quarterly updates (to regional Economic Development Officers)	Strong business – feeling supported and equipped for success, resulting in retention and expansion of business in the region
	Annual Business Survey	75 completed surveys	Greater understand of local business needs, and access to data to support future development (survey provides evidence to partners to help shape policy)
	Business Directory	Business Listings (500)	Creates opportunity for increased business-to-business activity locally
Cultivating and sharing expert knowledge	Define our regional value proposition	Stakeholder engagement Clear assets for regional growth identified	Strategies for future opportunities and priorities for investment readiness are identified
	Investment readiness strategy	Partners engaged Barriers assessed Opportunities identified Information consolidated	Inventory of the reality of the Annapolis Valley's investment readiness and identification of practical methods to implement best practice to make the region more competitive for investment



	Land and Asset Inventory	Properties listed Database metrics (number of clicks) User engagement	Business and partners (NSBI) can easily access information on available lands and properties for expansion decisions
	Business resource development	Projects started Resources developed Business Supported	Empowering businesses to grow and success by giving them access to best practical and easily consumable resources created with their specific challenges in mind
Forming a collaborative network to unlock regional opportunities	Partnerships to tackle cross-sectoral challenges and opportunities	Engagement with other organizations, agencies and services to bring leadership and collaboration to create impact on economic growth opportunities	Large scales issues (such as workforce development, succession planning, youth retention, sales and marketing training) can be tackled through collective impact.
	Pan-Provincial REN collaboration	Participation rate (Summit) Coordinated efforts on shared priorities	Better economic development coordination in rural NS

Valley REN administration

Valley REN administration includes budget allocation for human resources; office operations and services; and Board/governance.

Human resources:

The Valley REN has a regular complement of five staff. Short-term contract workers will be employed in 2017–18 to complete specific projects. With Wolfville remaining part of the Valley REN for another year, an Administration Officer has been hired to assist with office management and event coordination.

Effective April 1, 2017, the Valley REN will be offering BENSPlus benefits plans including health and life. The coverage is cost shared with the employee 50:50.

Office operations and services:

The budget includes additional rent for the months of May to December to accommodate contract workers and an administrative position. Four additional cell phones have been purchased for office use and a virtual assistant telephone directory for a convenient and professional communication process.



Board/governance:

The Valley REN allocates a portion of its budget towards the work of the Board of Directors and the Liaison and Oversight Committee. This includes recruitment costs for new board members as well as meetings, functions, travel and training.

The Board and the Liaison and Oversight committee are planning a half-day or one-day retreat to revisit the strategic plan in 2017–18.



Financial summary

Valley REN Budget 2017–18

Revenues	April 2017–March 2018
Province of Nova Scotia	295,183
Municipalities and First Nations	295,183
Deferred Initiatives (surplus)*	450,000
Total revenue	\$940,366

Expenses	
Human Resources	
Wages and Benefits	358,120
Training and Recruitment	9,100
Office	
Rent and Utilities	26,393
Telephones, Internet and Web Hosting	4,420
Services	
Financial, Legal, IT and Insurance	16,325
Consulting and Strategic Initiatives	384,000
Operations	
Board and Liaison and Oversight Committee	8,700
Office Consumables, Technology Upgrades	20,040
Marketing	
Travel and Conferences	20,150
Website Enhancements, Communications	18,050
Operating Reserve	75,000
TOTAL Expenses	\$940,298
Surplus (deficit)	\$68

* refer to Deferred Initiatives (next page) for details

Deferred Initiatives 2016–17

Revenues	April 2017–March 2018
2016–17 Surplus	430,000
HST return (reclassified as Municipality)	20,000
TOTAL Income	\$450,000



Expenses

	\$ value	account
Succession Planning (Business Support)		
Event Costs (Planning expenses and curriculum development)	20,000	Service
Complete Business Directory (Business Support)		
Contract employee for Data entry	8,000	HR
Research, data collection and verification	10,000	Service
Complete Business Climate/BRE Survey (Business Support)		
Consulting (project completion)	20,000	Service
Research Studies (Building Knowledge Base/Investment Readiness)		
Global Cities Index	30,000	Service
Investment Readiness/Attraction Research	60,000	Service
Regional Marketing (Promoting the Region)		
Content Creation, Marketing, Consulting	150,000	Service
Event Funding (Collaborative Network)		
Devour	10,000	Event Cost
Sector Exchange Events	10,000	Event Cost
Other Event (TBA)	35,000	Event Cost
Subject Matter Experts (Business Support)		
Billable Hours	6,000	Service
Collect Impact Project (Building Knowledge Base /Collaborative Network)		
Funding (Sept-Jan)	10,000	Project Cost
Funding (Jan-March)	10,000	Project Cost
Entrepreneur Toolkit (Business Support)		
	14,000	Service/ / Marketing
Land and Asset Database (Building Knowledge Base/Investment Readiness)		
Consulting (project completion)	10,000	Service
TOTAL Expense	\$450,000	

