

16/97 Economic Alliance 2009-2011 Action Plan

Introduction:

Members of the 16/97 Economic Alliance met in McBride, BC October 14 and 15 for networking and planning. The intent was to develop a five year Strategic Plan for the organization. Due to illness and other commitments, fewer members than expected (approximately 12) were able to participate throughout the two days. Fortunately, this group included long-time members of the Alliance, more recently involved members, and some who were attending for the first time.

With substantive discussion about the rationale for the Alliance and opportunities for its future, and with the support for an external facilitator for a two-hour planning session, this shorter-term, draft Action Plan was developed in lieu of a full Strategic Plan.

The actions outlined below are drawn from the McBride conversations, particularly the facilitated desires that the 16/97 Economic Alliance can be:

- An active table of engagement for regional economic development practitioners
- An effective venue for “intelligence sharing”
- A venue for project development discussions and a catalyst for regional partnerships
- An active community of practice/opportunity for professional development for regional economic development practitioners
- Within the context of the Alliance’s broader focus on economic development, the Alliance itself can be a “cluster” of economic development practitioners

Action 1: Developing and Sharing Capacity

We will increase our collective opportunities for professional development by sharing information about learning opportunities with our member organizations, and supporting access to these.

Action 2: Networking and Relationship Building

We will support the development of collaborative and trusting relationships between organizations concerned with regional economic development, and foster relationships with organizations representing diverse groups of members.

Strategies:

- Rotating responsibilities to organize networking events by having agencies volunteer to host.
- Hold at least two face-to-face meeting each year.
- Build networking opportunities for Alliance members into other events that members are attending. (for instance, drinks after a meeting or lunch together at a conference)
- Ensuring Alliance members are aware of events, consultations, fairs and conferences being sponsored by member organizations.

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Action 3: Communication and Information Sharing

We will focus resources to ensure a continuous and strong flow of information between Alliance members.

Strategies:

- The College of New Caledonia (CNC) will continue to compile and distribute by email the Signposts newsletter four times per year.
- Time-sensitive information and requests can be distributed through an e-mail blast by sending information to CNC.
- CNC will continue to keep the 16/97 Economic Alliance website updated, with the active support of Alliance members
- Initiatives Prince George will continue to compile regional benchmark reports.

Action 4: Complete Cluster Identification and Development projects

While the future mandate of the Alliance is to support a Community of Practice, the Alliance has existing Cluster Identification projects for which funding has been provided, and must be completed.

Strategy:

- Complete the Western Economic Diversification contract, developing the Northern Interior Mining Group as a regional industry cluster.

Notes from the Discussion

On October 15, 2009, the 16/97 Economic Alliance came together to discuss the discussion paper developed by Susan Stearns and Cathe Wishart (attached). This session was facilitated by Zelda Craig of JAZ Training & Facilitation.

Discussion participants included:

Catherine Wishart	Vice President, Community and Student Services	College of New Caledonia
Susan Stearns	General Manager	Community Futures Fraser Fort George
Leslie Lax	Regional Team Leader – Northern BC, Rural BC Secretariat	Ministry of Community & Rural Development
Rebecca Reid	Initiatives Development Officer	Community Futures Fraser Fort George
Sabrina Tylee	Administrative Assistant	College of New Caledonia
Tara Bogh	Senior Economic & Market Research Analyst	Initiatives Prince George
Karin Hunt	Executive Director	Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment Training Association
Al Gorley	President	Triangle Resources Incorporated, representing Omineca Beetle Action Coalition
Marc von der gonna	General Manager	McBride Community Forest Corporation
Margaret Graine	Economic Development Officer	Village of McBride
Greg Lawrence	General Manager	Community Futures Quesnel
Bert Groenenberg	Economic Development and Community Planning	Carrier Chilcotin Tribal Council
Clara Appleby	Vice President	McBride Chamber of Commerce

The questions discussed during this conversation included:

- 1) What purpose does the Economic Alliance serve that can not be met by existing local economic development organizations?
- 2) Given the diverse membership, who does the Economic Alliance serve? Who do we mean when we refer to the “Economic Development Practitioner”?
- 3) In 5 years, what do you want to be able to say about how the Alliance has supported your work as an Economic Development Practitioner?

The answers to the first two questions are indicated in the section named “Agreements”. These agreements were used as a basis for the remainder of the discussion. The responses to the third question were used to shape the plan, and are included to provide the context for the strategic priorities identified in the Action Plan.

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Agreements:

- The Alliance provides an opportunity to coordinate across communities on regional priorities.
- It is a Community of Practice for economic development practitioners to network, collaborate, and share information and resources to meet common goals.
- Its primary purpose is to enhance regional economic development capabilities by supporting the work of economic development practitioners, who are defined as individuals working in organizations that have an interest in regional economic development.

Membership and attendance is open to economic development practitioners to facilitate communication and information gathering in order to meet the primary purpose as described above.

The 16/97 Economic Alliance will support a community of practice by providing opportunities to network and communicate with each other, which will:

- Provide a larger “voice” on an issue than a single organization could provide
- Present opportunities to collaborate
- Foster information and intelligence sharing
- Support relationship building between individuals and organizations
- Promote and support professional development / training.

Ideas that were generated through a five year idealized projected-retrospective exercise:

1. Networking and Information Sharing

- Introduced me to a broader network of people
- Helped me develop my region’s initiatives by connecting me with the right people and partners.
- Connected me with others working on similar projects.
- Provided a forum for ideas
- We developed the social capital in the region.
- We developed strong relationship models with First Nations.
- I received effective communication about what happened in the region.

2. Learning and Professional Development

- I learned from other practitioners
- I developed a better understanding of the overall economy
- I found opportunities to get involved in projects that created jobs.
- Lots of Pro-D opportunities
- Had opportunities to share best practices
- I learned more about the informal / unmeasured economy in the region.

3. Champion Economic Development in north-central BC

- We placed our region on the provincial radar.
- We came together to successfully lobby other levels of government for resources.

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- Government learned from us and considered our concerns when developing policy.
- Gave my organization a bigger / louder voice.
- We supported development of the Transportation Corridor. (advocacy)

Some items didn't naturally or specifically fit in the previous 3 categories, but would be a natural outcome from those activities:

- Population grew in McBride
- Helped us with our strategic planning for workforce development. (through information on trends, upcoming development)
- It stimulated and supported creative ideas and solutions (linked to the strategic plan)

APPENDIX 1: Discussion Paper

Intent of Document:

To assist in framing the discussion and strategic planning at the 2009 Fall Forum of the Economic Alliance.

Society Information:

From the 16/97 Economic Alliance Constitution and Bylaws

The following are the principles under which the Alliance operates:

- *Members work cooperatively to support economic development in the region;*
- *Member organizations work collectively, individually or in flexible groups to provide the required expertise and services for Alliance projects;*
- *Members are treated as equal partners; whenever possible a consensus-based approach will be used in decision making; and*
- *Members commit to being active participants of the Alliance.*

Member organizations consist of agencies with an economic development mandate, and companies interested in regional economic development.

Funding Structure

It is expected that the Alliance's operating funds will be generated by membership fees and funding agency grants. Funding will be used in approved projects, communications, staff expenses (contract or salaried employees), meeting expenses, legal expenses, training, and other activities. An annual operating budget must be approved by the Board of Directors. Membership fees are to be established at various times as required by the membership.

Background

The 16/97 Economic Alliance is currently a loosely formed group of economic development practitioners across the Highway 16 and Highway 97 region. To date the focus area has encompassed south to Quesnel, north to Dawson Creek, east to Valemount and west to the Burns Lake/Lakes District area.

The formation of a legal Society took place in the Fall of 2008. With this came the re-formation of the Alliance itself, with the discussion being: How do we get back to the core of 16-97 Economic Alliance and focus on the roots of our work, serving the needs of economic development practitioners' within this region?

The Alliance is premised on the regional recognition that the global economy does not use the political and administrative 'boundaries' that communities, governments and agencies establish. By talking with each other and business and communities, and jointly planning initiatives and



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strategies, we develop synergies, share resources and strengthen north-central BC. We are stronger together.

Cluster Identification and Development:

2007 and 2008 funding from the Regional District leveraged \$265,000 in funding from other sources, including \$150,000 from the provincial government to support the cluster identification research, and \$115,000 from the federal government to facilitate development and support of a mining-related industry cluster.

The major research initiative on clusters in north-central BC not only identified viable industry clusters in the region, but initiated discussion and new ways for business and economic development agencies to look at regional development and opportunities to attract investment to north-central BC.

Clusters are important because:

- Industry clusters bring wealth into the region
- Clusters are the building blocks of the economy
- Competing businesses find advantages to locating in one place; businesses and their suppliers like to be close together
- Clusters provide access to more suppliers and customized support services, skilled and experienced labour pools, and knowledge transfer – clusters enhance competitiveness

There are eight components of economic infrastructure that go into building sustainable clusters, and that drive cluster work. This is part of the outcome and implementation phase of the 16/97 work. The components are:

- Governance/Collaboration
- Access to Capital
- Physical Infrastructure
- Business Climate
- Education
- Innovation/Technology
- Available Workforce
- Quality of Life

Nine clusters were identified in the region, each in various stages:

- Performing: Growing with high employment concentration
- Transforming: Slow to no growth with high employment concentration
- Emerging: Showing growth, but employment levels not yet significant
- Seed: Small concentration of employment compared to national level, but exhibiting rapid growth

Some of the clusters were already under practical development, though not always identified by the international business language of “clusters”. Alliance members have been the active leaders for new cluster work in all of the identified, feasible clusters. Identified clusters, their identified stage, and the Alliance members taking the lead on development are:



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Tourism

Stage: Transforming Cluster
Regional District Fraser Fort George, Barkerville Heritage Trust/ Quesnel Community and Economic Development

Resource Technology

Stage: Pre-Cluster
Innovation Resource Centre, Initiatives Prince George and multiple Alliance partners

Transportation and Logistics

Stage: Transforming Cluster
Initiatives Prince George

Health/Life Sciences

Stage: Emerging Cluster
CNC, UNBC

Bio-energy/Bio-products/Clean Technology

Stage: Seed Cluster
Innovation Resource Centre/Quesnel Community and Economic Development Corporation/UNBC

Mining (fabrication and manufacturing)

Stage: Emerging Cluster
Northern Interior Mining Group with the active support of the 16/97 Economic Alliance, Innovation Resource Centre and Community Futures – Fraser Fort George

The 2008 funding from the Regional District and other Alliance members also supported the formation and stabilization of the Northern Interior Mining Group (NIMG) through to 2010, with additional funding provided by Western Economic Diversification (Community Economic Development Initiative).

These initiatives have allowed the Alliance to invest in building capacity for cluster development in the region, with economic development practitioners and, more importantly, with business and industry leading the projects. The targeted development of a mining-related cluster followed the recommendations of the research, and will lay the foundation for future, planned cluster development and implementation in the region.

Measurement:

Alliance members have recognized for several years that ongoing measurement of key regional economic indicators is important for charting progress. With that understanding, the Alliance has funded and led Annual Regional Benchmark Reports since 2006.

For 2008 the 16/97 Economic Alliance completed two reports:



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- I. 2008 Annual Regional Benchmark Report
 - II. 2008 Regional Economic Structure Report: By Industry
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Plans for 2009 - 2010

The Alliance has received feedback from its members and potential members that certain elements are essential for regional success:

- Professional development opportunities for regional economic development officers
- Regional meetings for sharing, identifying projects and collaborating
- Shared market intelligence opportunities
- Strengthen relationships with Beetle Action Coalitions and interested communities to the west and south
- Leverage project funding in support of members
- Support members in developing and delivering effective projects
- Continue to actively engage and support cluster development with regional industry and business

General Collaboration:

The strategies of the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC) and the Cariboo-Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition (CCBAC) have provided regional direction for economic development with new, integrated models of planning, as well as the investments of the Northern Development Initiative Trust.

At the municipal and agency level, the work of the 16/97 Economic Alliance has allowed economic developers throughout the region to form a network and develop tools to support the decisions and direction of the elected bodies. To date the Alliance has focused on understanding cluster development, identifying opportunities for clusters in central B.C., supporting cluster development within industry, and building a network of practitioners. Of particular significance for the future of economic development in the region is the continued development of two clusters, led by industry and supported by the Alliance participants: mining manufacturing and services, and clean technology.

This foundation work by the Alliance members has prepared us to support the regional strategies, particularly those defined by OBAC and CCBAC.

CCBAC's strategies for agriculture, tourism, the secondary wood sector, resource technology and the mining sector are the most relevant to the cross-regional work of the Alliance, and also align with work done by OBAC in terms of a north-central B.C. perspective of development. OBAC strategies that provide guidance for the 16/97 Alliance include the Alternative Energy Strategy, the Minerals and Mining Strategy, the Attraction and Retention Strategy, the Future Forest Products strategy. In addition, it is expected that recommendations from



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the Agriculture strategy and the Tourism strategy will inform future 16-97 Alliance activity.

The Network:

A critical component of the Alliance's work is effectively supporting the regional network of economic development practitioners in north-central B.C., particularly those EDOs who work in smaller communities and agencies.

The 16/97 Economic Alliance received \$20,000 from the Regional District of Fraser Fort George for 2009 – 2010 in support of the following activities:

- Host two region-specific professional development opportunities for economic development officers;
- Host a minimum of four regional meetings to continue network development;
- Promote sharing of market intelligence within the network, via meetings, website and newsletters. The College of New Caledonia has agreed to coordinate Alliance meetings, maintain the website and produce six newsletters based on the interests of the participants and the economic development activities within the region;
- Host joint meetings with Beetle Action Coalitions to identify areas of collaboration, congruence and support and to identify relevant cluster projects for development;
- Support members in developing and delivering effective projects, through opportunities to seek advice and partnerships through the network;
- Continue to actively engage and support cluster development with regional industry and business.

Beyond the RDEFG-specific funding to support network and professional development for EDOs, the Alliance priorities for the year include:

- Successful completion of the Western Economic Diversification contract for the Alliance to support the development of the Northern Interior Mining Group as a regional industry cluster, and the continuation of the NIMG as a sustainable cluster leadership group
- Continuation of the Clean Technology cluster development strategy with industry
- Active engagement with industry and business in three sectors to pursue cluster development:
 - BioEnergy
 - Tourism
 - BioProducts
- Development of the next multi-year strategic and business plan for the Alliance



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Strategic Planning

Critical question:

How do we get back to the core of 16/97 Economic Alliance and focus on the roots of our work, serving the needs of economic development practitioners' within this region?

Objectives of October 15, 2009 Session

Develop a five year strategic plan that is focused on the interest of the 16/97 Economic Alliance Association that is inclusive of economic development practitioners across the region;

Identify clear, measurable goals/objectives for the 16/97 Economic Alliance with reasonable timelines over the life of the Strategic Plan;

Bring the group in attendance to a place of common understanding on the members roles and responsibilities in achieving the outcomes identified in the Strategic Plan.

