

Swift Current
Business Retention & Expansion
FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

2016

Swift Current Business Retention and Expansion (BRE)

FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

February 2016

A u t h o r :

Sandra Blyth



R e s e a r c h
A s s i s t a n c e :

Michael Darger and Brigid Tuck

Doug Elliott, QED Information Systems Inc.

Sponsors:



Growing communities one idea at a time.

SUMMARY

The City of Swift Current initiated the development of an economic growth strategy for the city and rural municipality in 2013. The overall strategy encompasses two key phases:

Phase 1: Understand the Economy

Phase 1 focused on first understanding the city and region's economy. Establishing such an understanding required both an analysis of the overall makeup of the economy and as well, the systems that support the economy and decide its level of performance and sustainability. An assessment of these two critical areas provides a blueprint for determining areas of strength and weakness and deciding a fact-based directive for future economic development planning.

Phase 2: Create Connectedness

Phase 2 focused on creating greater connectedness within the city and rural municipality. Connectedness is essential for sustainable long-term growth. The process of analysis cannot occur independently. It must become alive and direct a plan of action. All local stakeholders (business, government, organizations and institutions) came together in dialogue to lead a process for determining the priority areas that will result in the greatest economic impacts for the future. Phase 2 began with implementation of a process for engaging business and industry and engaging economic opportunities for growth known as Business Retention and Expansion (BRE).

Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Project

A critical step within phase two involved the implementation of a Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) project. BRE is an internationally adopted and focused approach that works directly with communities to identify and understand the needs of local business and assist them to survive and grow. Often communities focus solely on attracting businesses from the outside and forget the vital importance of their existing businesses, in the course of trying to land that “big fish”. Focusing on existing business is important for the following reasons:

- Existing business have built the economy to the level of success it is today.
- It is less costly to retain an existing job than to attract new business and jobs.
- Attraction efforts are unlikely to be successful if existing firms are not happy.
- 60%-90% of new jobs created come from existing business.
- 100% of jobs lost come from existing business.
- Businesses that stay competitive are more likely to remain and possibly expand.

If communities offer a healthy growing existing business base, investment attraction and new entrepreneurship come naturally as a bi-product of a healthy business climate.

Other benefits of BRE is the assembly of a Task Force representing local leaders from business, education, government and economic and business development. This broad collaboration will not only allow access to more resources, expertise and contacts it will ensure local issues are broadly understood and solutions are sought by all leaders of the community. Connected communities utilize all possible resources and assets to achieve optimum results and success.

BRE History in Swift Current

Swift Current is no stranger to BRE. In 2002, a BRE survey was completed through the assistance of some of the same stakeholders represented on the 2014 BRE Task Force, now twelve years later. As a result, the team had a strong understanding and appreciation that a significant step in conducting analysis of an economy and identifying strategies for growth are essential in determining the needs and opportunities of the local business community. To design effective strategies, it is necessary to gain an accurate understanding of the needs, weaknesses, capacities and strengths of the business community and its potential for future growth.

The 2002 initiative, Action Swift Current, interviewed 200 businesses in the community and was so successful that it received international recognition for its efforts. A number of key initiatives and successes resulted from that work such as: the five year tax incentive program; new city brand; immigration strategy; and casino and performing arts centre. It was time, once again, to reconnect to the business community and identify a new and current strategy to capitalize on new economic growth opportunities now and into the future.

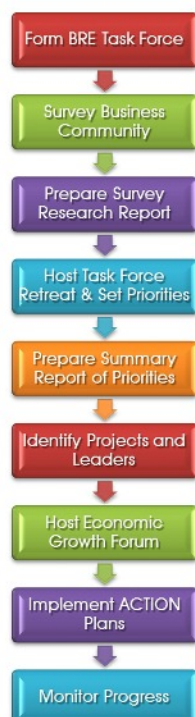


BRE Task Force

The Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Task Force is represented by the following key local stakeholders:

- Marty Salberg, Director of Business Development – City of Swift Current
- Mark Carefoot, Councillor - Rural Municipality of Swift Current
- John Parker, General Manager – Community Futures Southwest
- Clayton Wicks, Chief Executive Officer – Swift Current and District Chamber of Commerce
- Garry Kobel, President – Downtown Business Association and Owner - Sputtergotch Toy Company
- Lee Friesen, Marketing Director – Tourism Swift Current
- Jackie Moore, Visitor and Convention Services Coordinator – Tourism Swift Current
- Karen Richmond, Region Manager – Great Plains College

BRE PROCESS



BRE Task Force Objectives

The Task Force set four key objectives for the BRE project:

- enhance cooperation and consensus among businesses, local government and economic development organizations;
- accurately assess the needs of local business;
- provide support/information to address immediate individual business issues and opportunities; and
- contribute to the development of a strategic action plan for economic prosperity.

BRE Survey

The Task Force began the process for connecting directly with the business community through the implementation of a BRE survey. The Task Force agreed that an assessment of local businesses by way of a BRE survey would be instrumental in strengthening relationships between the business

sector and the community and at the same time aid in identifying the areas of strength and weakness within the local economy and business environment.

A total of 1300 businesses in the city and rural municipality of Swift Current received personal letters of invitation to participate in the survey. A total of 120 select businesses were targeted to be personally contacted by the Task Force within the key sectors (construction, mining / quarrying / oil and gas extraction, and professional / scientific, /technical services) determined priority targets in the phase 1 analysis. Key tourism businesses were also included though some of the sectors encompassing the tourism industry were not identified as a priority target.

The survey process also included the option for business to request immediate assistance from a government authority (city, rural municipality or provincial government) or to receive assistance with a general business need. Four requests were issued to the city, one to the provincial government and three were requests for general business assistance. Each business was contacted within 7 - 30 days of their request. No requests were received for the rural municipality.

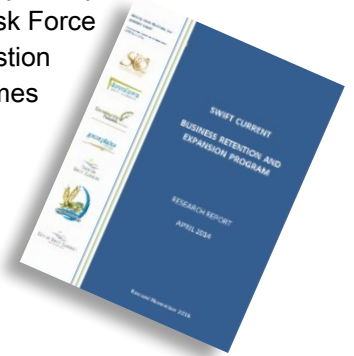


The survey was served online for three weeks from January 21 to February 14, 2014 and resulted in 142 businesses participating in the process.

BRE Research Review

Upon completion of the survey all data was forwarded to Minnesota to be compiled and analyzed by a team of BRE specialists. The data results were then summarized and shared with the Task Force for review and dialogue at a one day working session. The data results of each survey question were analyzed and a SWOT analysis completed highlighting overarching and universal themes within. The session was then completed with the group identifying potential projects to undertake and address these themes.

Following the working session, the BRE specialists compiled all the information into a research report outlining four key strategy areas and twenty five potential projects or ideas for addressing the larger themes identified by the survey. The report also summarizes the survey data, gives a history of the BRE initiative, and contains the raw survey data.



The Task Force reviewed the report and revised the list of twenty five projects to a final list of nineteen projects in total.

BRE Task Force Retreat

The Task Force Retreat is about bringing together a broad cross-section of community leaders to provide further insight and advisement into the strategy areas and potential projects and set priorities for the business community. A list of 48 community and business leaders were identified as Advisors to the four strategy areas and were invited to participate in the retreat. A total of 35 Advisors agreed to participate, as follows:

Strategy 1: Improve Labour Force Availability Through Training and Recruitment

- Blair Clark, Grasslands Group
- Larry Wells, Ministry of the Economy - Labour Market Services
- Anika Henderson, Imagine Immigration
- Icasiana de Gala, Newcomers Welcome Centre
- Kimi Duzan, Saskatchewan Abilities Centre
- Jackie Powell, Saskatchewan Abilities Council

-
- Sheldon Poitras, Living Sky Casino
 - Cecile Blanke, Southwest Métis Association - Friendship Centre
 - Scott Mayall, Comprehensive High School
 - Sally Wiens, Fresh Start Program
 - Betty McDougall, Southwest Youth Emergency Centre
 - Michael Boutillier, City of Swift Current

Strategy 2: Improve Business Retention and Expansion by Developing and Strengthening Local Capacity

- Erroll Castle, Castle Design Services
- Ivan Gellea, Microage
- Lloyd Fehr, Superior Cart Rentals
- Brock Friesen, Rittinger's Men's Wear
- Sasha Godenir, Optical Image
- Jahnaya Mann, Pharmasave
- Tim Marcus, City of Swift Current

Strategy 3: Improve Business Conditions by Developing and Strengthening Swift Current's Connections with the Region, Nation, and World

- Todd Shultz, Swift Current Airport
- John Kennedy, Diamond Energy
- Dallas Philippon, Matrix Solutions
- Ron Rosvold, Quantum Technology
- Mike Berteig, Jamal Contracting
- Brian Gobbett, Great Plains College

Strategy 4: Improve Retail, Trade, Tourism, and the Downtown Business Atmosphere in Swift Current

- Lloyd Begley, Swift Current Museum
- Denise Wall, Lyric Theatre
- Chad Parenteau, WWW Smith Insurance
- Wayne Roberts, Copies Express
- Lawrence Carr, Sign Here Signs
- Stuart Dyrland, Pioneer Co-op
- Damone Caron, Living Sky Casino
- Lenora Bells, Swift Current Agriculture and Exhibition Association
- Michael Ruus, City of Swift Current

Each Advisor received a package of information containing the Research Review report and a listing of the leaders invited to participate. Those advising within strategy areas 2, 3, and 4 also received reports on the city brand and summarized sector reports for the target sectors (construction, mining / quarrying / oil and gas extraction, and professional / scientific, /technical services).

The retreat was hosted on January 27th where Advisors reviewed each of the projects identified in the report and determined whether each project should: remain on the list as is, be revised, be removed, or a new project be developed. Next Advisors prioritized the projects by strategy area and then overall with selection of a top 10 list. Projects ranked in the top 10 should be given first consideration for implementation however, all projects are important and their advancement should not be discouraged if they are not ranked in the top 10.

Projects cannot advance unless there are individuals willing to lead and support the project. Though a project may be ranked in the top 10 it cannot advance without necessary resources and support. As a result, Advisor were asked if they

were interested in providing support to see a specific project(s) advance. Their names were recorded for future contact should the project be flagged for implementation.

The retreat concluded with 5 projects being removed from the original list, 12 projects remaining and 1 project being created. The end result was a final list of 13 projects prioritized and 18 project supporters!

Final BRE Projects

The following outlines each of the projects ranked in order of priority and illustrates the projects strategy area, number of votes received, and committed supporters. Each project was voted on twice, first by the individual strategy groups (SV) and second by all attendees (AV) to identify an overall vote for the Top 10 of all projects.

1

Create and Enhance Programs and Events to Educate Local Youth and Young Adults about Employment and Entrepreneurship Opportunities.

Strategy 1: Improve Labour Force Availability Through Training and Recruitment
Votes: 12 SV, 38 AV
Support: Karen Richmond, Scott Mayall, Erroll Castle, Sally Wiens, Brian Gobbett

2

Assist Business Owners and Managers with Employee Attraction, Recruitment, Training and Retention

Strategy 1: Improve Labour Force Availability Through Training and Recruitment
Votes: 11 SV, 37 AV
Support: Karen Richmond, Jackie Powell, Sally Wiens

3

Target One of These Sectors for Further Analysis and Action: Oil & Gas, Mining, Oil and Gas Support; Construction

Strategy 3: Improve Business Conditions by Developing and Strengthening Swift Current's Connections with the Region, Nation, and World
Votes: 7 SV, 35 AV
Support: Marty Salberg, John Kennedy, Dallas Philippon, Mike Berteig

4

Explore Options for Service by Manufacturing and Construction as they Apply to the Agriculture Sector

Strategy 3: Improve Business Conditions by Developing and Strengthening Swift Current's Connections with the Region, Nation, and World
Votes: 6 SV, 34 AV
Support: Unsupported

5

Develop a "Swift Current: A Place to Work" Recruitment Campaign.

Strategy 1: Improve Labour Force Availability Through Training and Recruitment
Votes: 9 SV, 33 AV
Support: Icasiana de Gala

6

Examine City Street Maintenance, Signage, and Streetscape Planning

Strategy 4: Improve Retail Trade, Tourism, and the Downtown Business Atmosphere in Swift Current
Votes: 11 SV, 31 AV
Support: Lee Friesen, Lawrence Carr

7

Partner with the Chamber to Engage Business

Strategy 2: Improve Business Retention and Expansion by Developing and Strengthening Local Capacity
Votes: 7 SV, 31 AV
Support: Brock Friesen

8

Assist Professional, Scientific, and Technical Service Businesses in Exploring Options for Expanding Service Area

Strategy 2: Improve Business Retention and Expansion by Developing and Strengthening Local Capacity
Votes: 5 SV, 30 AV
Support: Clayton Wicks

9

Enhance Marketing & Branding of Swift Current

Strategy 4: Improve Retail Trade, Tourism, and the Downtown Business Atmosphere in Swift Current
Votes: 6 SV, 29 AV
Support: Unsupported

10

Create Ways to Encourage More Local Shopping

Strategy 4: Improve Retail Trade, Tourism, and the Downtown Business Atmosphere in Swift Current
Votes: 5 SV, 27 AV
Support: Garry Koebel

11

Host a Swift Current Succession Planning Workshop

Strategy 2: Improve Business Retention and Expansion by Developing and Strengthening Local Capacity
Votes: 6 SV, 26 AV
Support: John Parker

12

Improve Air Service to Swift Current

Strategy 3: Improve Business Conditions by Developing and Strengthening Swift Current's Connections with the Region, Nation, and World

Votes: 3 SV, 21 AV

Support: Todd Schultz

13

Initiate a Conversation about Housing in Swift Current

Strategy 1: Improve Labour Force Availability Through Training and Recruitment

Votes: 4 SV, 11 AV

Support: Unsupported

Final BRE Project Briefings

The following provides an excerpt from the Research Report for each of the projects that were selected at the Retreat. As noted, the Retreat allowed Advisors to revise projects or develop entirely new projects and the results of these discussions has also been included in the following briefings.

1

Create and Enhance Programs and Events to Educate Local Youth and Young Adults about Employment and Entrepreneurship Opportunities.

Recruitment efforts can be more successful if a large pool of trained workers is available. Once students graduate from high school, it would be beneficial to local businesses if more of the graduating students remained in the area or were drawn back upon completion of a higher degree. The Task Force could explore ways to be more active in making students aware of employment opportunities in the local economy. Swift Current is home to a quality K-12 public school system (as rated by businesses). The Task Force might wish to develop specialized youth employment or entrepreneurial programs or host events and activities to encourage students to become employed in the community upon graduation or come back once further education has been completed.

A summer job internship program could connect high school grads to jobs with local business and encourage their return after graduation. An entrepreneurship - mentorship program would also be beneficial to teach youth how to setup a small business and then source mentors for students who take the next step and setup a business. Junior achievement is a successful entrepreneur program and could be utilized to get a program started.

Events might include a career day or job fair at the high school. The Task Force could host such an event. This would include: coordinating with the school to select a time, date, and place; recruiting businesses to participate; advertising; and encouraging students to attend.

Activities might include field trips or visits to local businesses. Students would be encouraged to learn more about the local business community, about the types of businesses in Swift Current, about the array of job opportunities available, and about the required skills for these jobs. Once students learn more about their opportunities locally, perhaps they will be more willing to stay in the community or perhaps return when they have acquired additional qualifications.

If local businesses are interested in this project, perhaps a few would be willing to host student interns or offer to mentor local students. Both efforts would also strengthen ties. Internships and mentorships also allow employers to know a particular employee better before hiring them permanently.

Surveyed businesses report they will need to *recruit and train* workers while survey results also indicated an overall need for training for owners and managers related to employee attraction, recruitment, training, and retention.

Efforts should begin with addressing the needs of owners and managers first. The Task Force may wish to consider hosting a series of workshops for business owners and human resource managers. These sessions could be structured to integrate together, so the owners and managers could attend the series and build on their current knowledge. They might be breakfast sessions or “after hours” events.

Recruiting

Potential hires include both skilled and unskilled positions. Positions requiring skills include professional and managerial and construction fields, occupations they also indicate are difficult to recruit. Both unskilled service workers and unskilled manufacturing workers are in demand. Businesses also need to *train* their current workforce, particularly with regards to general skills.

Reasons for difficulties in recruiting include inadequate labour skills and competition for employees. Recruitment strategies most commonly employed include Internet advertising, word of mouth, and referrals from existing employees. Managers and owners could use training to increase the effectiveness of these strategies. The Task Force could consider bringing in a recruitment expert to discuss methods for best practices in online recruitment. The expert could discuss ways to effectively use Internet marketing in recruitment efforts and give advice on the effective use of other available recruitment resources.

The Task Force may also wish to host a “Swift Current Works” Labour Summit. As a one-day event, the summit could begin with a keynote speaker with knowledge of labour force issues. This might be a person from the public-sector that works specifically on workforce training and education issues, it might be a university leader, who could provide perspective on how colleges and universities work towards labour force development, or it could be someone from the private sector who offers cutting-edge strategies for business and labour force issues.

After the keynote, there could be breakout sessions and working sessions. Breakout sessions could address specific labour force issues including retention, training, and retaining employees and target business owners. Another breakout session might target government officials and address demographic and industry trends reinforcing the need for conversations about workforce. Working sessions might be designed to bring local organizations working on labour force issues and businesses into discussions with each other. For example, businesses indicate a need for general skills training. Perhaps a few businesses would be willing to give brief overviews of those training needs. There could then be a dialogue between business leaders and organizations about potential methods for increased collaboration to address business needs.

The Task Force will need to be intentional about the audience for the summit. The audience will help to determine the best choice in keynote speaker, the best breakout sessions, and the topics for working sessions. Potential audiences might be local business owners and managers, local organizations working on workforce issues, local educational institutions (including K-12), and local government officials.

Training

Businesses indicate a need for continued training of their employees, especially in the area of general skills. Swift Current businesses are heavily relying on in-house training (e.g. one-on-one meetings with supervisors or co-workers and training department classes) and self-taught training (e.g. employee reads manual or watches video). Businesses are also using onsite and online training, but to a lesser extent. As with recruitment, learning about best practices in training could help owners and managers increase their effectiveness. The Task Force could ask an expert or experts in employee training to come speak with local businesses about methods to improve their current training practices. Following the workshop the Task Force could consider providing assistance to businesses to review their current plans and apply what was learned in the workshop. Perhaps successful businesses could also be identified to help mentor other businesses with

less experience in this area. If a business does not currently have a plan, the mentor could help them in designing a training plan. If the business has a plan, but it isn't effective, the mentor could review the plan and give tips and strategies for improving the plan.

The Task Force might want to source local experts in training such as the Great Plains College. The college already offers technical and skills training for jobs in the energy field (http://www.greatplainscollege.ca/energy_training_center). The Task Force may wish to have further conversations with the college about the training needs of other industries in the city and region. It may be possible Great Plains College has other partners it could bring in to address those needs. Other experts to engage may be professional organizations. Specific occupations require specific types of training. As businesses hire new occupations (for example, professional and managerial), partnering with a professional organization to come into Swift Current and provide training may be very helpful for those employees and businesses.

Attracting and Retaining

Although the survey did not directly address this issue, retaining trained employees is critical to businesses as well. Once a business has invested in an employee, keeping that employee is critical. The Task Force may also want to have a workshop around best practices in retaining employees.

When the series of workshops and summit are completed, the Task Force could consider leading the group in the development of employee retention and attraction strategies. Armed with their new knowledge, each individual business could work to develop a plan for their own internal retention and attraction strategies. The group could also brainstorm ways in which businesses in Swift Current could work together to develop strategies for retention and attraction.



Target One of These Sectors for Further Analysis and Action: Oil & Gas, Mining, Oil and Gas Support; Construction

The *Competitive Advantage Analysis for Swift Current* report highlights these three sectors for Swift Current because of their relative growth rates within Saskatchewan and/or within Swift Current. Oil & Gas is depicted as a “Driver”, as being Swift Current’s fastest growing sector and a sector that is growing within the province. The other two sectors listed here -- Mining, Oil & Gas Support and Construction -- are depicted in that report as “Retention Targets” as being fast growing in the province yet growing relatively slowly in Swift Current. Although Doug Elliott cautioned prudent, realistic usage of the CAA results that he authored (and he pointed out the inherent limitations and biases), it is clear that these three sectors are the leaders in terms of growth compared to the other Swift Current sectors. Thus these industry sectors were highlighted by the analysts at the research review session for possible further study.

Qualitative and quantitative analysis could be done with one of these industry sectors to learn more about the needs and opportunities therein. As noted by one analyst, “choose one sector and do it well”. The supply chain could be targeted by meeting individually and/or convening the various players for roundtable analysis. There are pros and cons to each approach, 1:1 meetings vs. getting everyone there at once, but the key is to call on their enlightened self-interest so that they see a benefit for themselves and their sector in participating. Of course, there are ways to protect individual confidentiality even in group meetings. For instance, skilled use of audience response technology (i.e. clickers) is a way to have competitors in a room and ask sensitive questions without revealing “who said what”.

People to include in this project include city and regional economic development staff, sector stakeholders, industry-relevant officials from government divisions, college officials, and others as needed.



Explore Options for Service by Manufacturing and Construction as they Apply to the Agriculture Sector

This project was created at the Task Force Retreat and a briefing or direction for what the project would encompass was not provided by the group. Interestingly however, the project still ranked fourth in the top 10 project priorities. Strategy

group leaders were later consulted and it was relayed that Advisors felt that there could be opportunities for the construction and manufacturing sectors within the agriculture industry and a closer look at the industry as a whole may be important. Advisors discussed that farms may need capital upgrades such as buildings, bins, and quonsets which could present opportunities for the construction sector.

As with any project, we must always refer to the data analysis which tells us that both the construction and manufacturing sectors are lagging in growth comparatively to other regions in the province. Further, the Market Threshold Analysis targeted the sub-sector - foundation, structure and building exterior contractors - as being under-supplied comparatively to other cities in Saskatchewan. However, agriculture has increasing gross revenues and incomes per farm and is the largest industry and employer in the region. As global demand for increased food production climbs the agriculture industry will continue to be a driving industry for the region. As a result, sourcing opportunities to further develop local supply chains to provide service and supplies to the region's greatest economic asset is a positive and necessary step.

In 2008, an effort to develop local supply chains in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors was looked at by the region. Approximately 100 stakeholders from both industries were brought together in a one-day workshop to review the option of developing a regional cluster supply chain initiative in the southwest. Industry leaders spent the day discussing the opportunities that could evolve by taking a regionally-focused approach to supply chain development. The day ended with a vote that was virtually unanimous to proceed with the initiative. A report outlining the directives of the initiative is available and still very much relevant today. This document could serve as a strong foundation for advancing this project.

There is no question that the southwest could and should do more to add-value to its driving industries. This can start with small steps such as mapping local supply chains to determine who supplies the industry and where gaps reside. Identifying what is produced in the region and what is being outsourced is helpful in determining levels of economic leakage and as a result, strategies for how to “plug the leaks” and expand and develop local suppliers.

Lastly, it should also be noted that in the initial research reviews a project was proposed to conduct a BRE specifically of the agriculture industry. However, due to the low response rate for the survey (i.e. 2 agriculture businesses) the Task Force decided it lacked support to be listed as a priority project. Any effort to engage this industry in the future will need to take a direct and targeted approach to ensure full engagement by industry stakeholders.



5 Develop a “Swift Current: A Place to Work” Recruitment Campaign.

Difficulty in recruiting employees is not necessarily unique to one business in Swift Current. All businesses face the same basic potential challenges. At the same time, Swift Current has a high quality of life and positive attributes to attract new employees. Putting these positive attributes together into a recruitment campaign could be helpful to local businesses.

The Task Force could consider organizing a recruiting effort. This effort would focus on attracting educated and skilled employees to the region. Potential attributes to be featured, from the survey, include: strong public schools, short and easy commutes, safety, and festivals and events. The campaign could also work to highlight what is available in Swift Current for amenities and how those amenities compare to other similar cities.

There would be two central tasks in organizing the recruitment campaign. The first task would be to organize themes and materials for the campaign. This may involve hiring a marketing firm to work with the Task Force. The Task Force would need to identify the theme of the campaign, the target audience, the aspects of Swift Current to promote, and the best materials and outreach for the target audience. The campaign could include brochures, web content, print, and television copy. A witty video commercial could potentially be effective. As an aside, another potential project in this report addresses reviewing and updating the current Swift Current marketing campaign “Where Life Makes Sense”. If both projects are selected for implementation, the two projects may wish to coordinate.

A second task for this project would be to implement the campaign. One suggestion is to attend trade shows and career events. The Task Force may wish to assemble a group of interested people from Swift Current and coordinate their

attendance of these events. The group attending events might include business owners, human resource managers, Chamber of Commerce representatives, and City officials.

In addition to attending college and school career events, the group may wish to attend career events hosted by professional associations, which would widen the scope of the search to potential new employees with more experience and would allow for the group to target specific industries in need of new employees. For example, the construction industry indicates it will be adding employees. Attending trade shows geared towards the construction field may help target the efforts of the recruiting campaign.

Advisors at the Task Force Retreat also felt that there was a need to address how the community will welcome newcomers. Further, Advisors noted five possible sources of labour recruitment: (1) youth entering workforce, (2) retirees looking to augment pensions, (3) fringe (disabled, underemployed, women), (4) Aboriginal, (5) newcomers.



6 Examine City Street Maintenance, Signage, and Streetscape Planning

Street maintenance is called out by businesses in the survey. Their concerns include being able to navigate during snow season, danger to employees and customers, wear and tear on vehicles, and making good impressions on visitors to the community. On some factors, there were high numbers of businesses indicating “don’t know”. However, this was not the case with street maintenance since everyone uses the roads in Swift Current. Analysts suggested these ideas for improving the situation:

- prioritize maintenance of streets in the city budgets. Several businesses expressed the opinion that repaving the streets would save in the long run versus continuous patching.
- recalibrating the balance between short, medium and long term development budgets for city streets.
- create a transparent action plan that keeps people informed via:
 - maintenance and construction schedules on city website
 - appropriate signage so people know when/where to make arrangements
 - social media and other media campaign, etc.



7 Partner with the Chamber to Engage Business

Survey responses appear to indicate that some Swift Current businesses are apathetic. Apathy is defined by Merriam Webster's dictionary as the “lack of interest or concern”.

Business literature suggests one way to address apathy is to break the normal routine. Therefore, the Task Force may consider partnering with the Swift Current and District Chamber of Commerce to host events and activities to create excitement and enthusiasm in the business community. Recently, the community of Hugo, Minnesota, United States, reinvigorated its civic and commerce association following its BRE Strategies program there. The results and enthusiasm have been noteworthy.

One suggested technique for creating excitement and enthusiasm would be to host “Eggs and Ideas” meetings. Local business owners and managers could gather for breakfast catered by a local restaurant. Task Force members could organize a topic for discussion, perhaps chosen from the list of concerns expressed in the survey. The focus would not be on solving particular issues, but rather opening the conversation and encouraging businesses to suggest creative solutions. If appropriate, the Task Force could invite a local or regional expert in to provide insight.

Another suggestion would be for the Task Force to host a motivational business speaker. The Task Force could arrange for the speaker to come to Swift Current. If the speaker has written a book, the business community could be encouraged to read the book and come together for a discussion.

Twenty of the responding businesses classify themselves as providing professional, scientific, and technical services. Nineteen of those businesses are not currently exporting and 60 percent of them report it is because the business is designed to serve a specific area.

The BRE Task Force could explore options for supporting professional, scientific, and technical service businesses as they expand into new markets. This project could develop in several ways. Task Force members may wish to meet one-on-one with professional, scientific, and technical service businesses to learn more about the businesses, to learn the services they provide, and to further discuss the opportunities for expanding their service area. Task Force members may have suggestions for expanding or know of resources the businesses can access.

The Task Force could also consider offering a workshop for professional, scientific, and technical service businesses. The workshop could focus on expanding service areas. The workshop could be offered by an economic development specialist or a business that has successfully navigated this growth.

Task Force Retreat Advisors noted that training would be needed on how to export. Training could be arranged through the Chamber or college and a partnership with Saskatchewan Trade and Export Development (STEP).

The Swift Current brand is *Where Life Makes Sense*. Does this brand still make sense? Is Swift Current living up to the brand? What has worked and what hasn't? Are adjustments needed? These are some questions that emerged in the research review session. Most of the responding firms were satisfied or very satisfied with "community promotion of itself and business", yet 27 percent were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

The City of Faribault, Minnesota had an award-winning branding/marketing that emerged from its BRE. See <http://www.extension.umn.edu/community/business-retention/case-studies/>. This case study could shed some light for Swift Current. One analyst suggested that the community hire a marketing firm to help the community think through the branding issues. This author believes that whatever brand is chosen, or reconfirmed, it needs to be consistent with the overall Swift Current plan for economic development.

Advisors at the Task Force Retreat did not feel this was a huge priority overall as approximately 70% of survey respondents were pleased with the community's promotion of itself. The data would seem unresponsive and may lead more to question - is it really broken? Advisors felt that the logo aspect of the brand seemed to work however, the tag line "where life makes sense" may be something worth examining in time. An initial step forward could be to enhance communications about the symbolism of the logo and how the tag line originated. The brand is supported by eight pillars that represent the strengths of the community and this needs to be broadly marketed.

A few analysts noted the amount of purchasing from businesses located outside of the province and the country. They suggested a few ideas:

- Encourage/Facilitate new businesses to set up business to meet supply needs of Swift Current firms
- Create a local joint advertising and consumer education campaign "You have great shopping in your own backyard".

-
- Another variant on the theme is to develop local marketing opportunities and/or tools for marketing both locally and beyond (such as trade missions – see the idea 3.6 below)

It should be noted that buy local campaigns are ubiquitous. It is difficult to find evidence in academic literature of them working. Therefore, if Swift Current embarks on such a path, how do they ensure that it is a shrewd path? That is, how do they gear up for enabling local business to sell their products while ensuring that purchasers get what they need?



Host a Swift Current Succession Planning Workshop

Business succession is a vulnerable time for a business and a community. If a locally-based, interested and qualified buyer can be identified, it increases the likelihood that the business will remain in the community following its sale.

Task Force members and other community leaders, especially those involved in education, such as community education, could come together to host a series of events on the future of Swift Current businesses. The focus of the events would be to address succession issues for businesses in the city. Both current business owners and potential future successors should be targeted for attendance.

Topics for current owners could include: writing a strategic business plan, creating a personal financial plan, crafting an estate plan, identifying a successor, transitioning to new ownership, and mentoring a successor.

Topics for potential future successors could include: writing a strategic business plan, business financing, ownership structures, transitioning to new ownership, and management of a business. Mentoring/coaching opportunities for aspiring and new business owners could be introduced at these events as well.

Speakers could come from across the educational and business spectrum. Business advisors, educational institutions, local attorneys, accountants, bankers, and local residents with success stories could all be potential sources of speakers. This workshop could also be coupled with other topics, such as taxation issues and employee benefits information to increase turnout.

This project would require the guidance of a few Task Force members. Task Force members would be responsible for recruiting participants, securing meeting locations, arranging for guest speakers, and perhaps arranging for a meal to be served. Other organizations that may be willing to assist in this project include Community Futures, the Chamber of Commerce, Great Plains College, and the Downtown Business Association.

Advisors at the Task Force Retreat noted that creating awareness was important in being proactive as opposed to reactive. A marketing plan should be developed and communicated.



Improve Air Service to Swift Current

The survey indicated dissatisfaction with air service. By a considerable margin, this factor received the lowest score by far (average of 2.04 on a 4 point scale) of all factors listed on Question 43 of the survey. The next lowest score was for street maintenance (2.44). The good news is that the businesses on average don't rate the importance of air service particularly important (2.40). On the other hand, the types of businesses that tend to provide higher wage jobs gave this factor a higher level of importance in location decisions than other businesses. These sectors include: manufacturing (importance score of 3.00 and 197 aggregate jobs); mining, quarrying, oil & gas (score of 3.33 and 104 aggregate jobs); and professional/scientific/technical (score of 2.47 and 179 aggregate jobs). Further, almost 40 percent of the businesses overall rate this factor as important or very important.

The City's website has information about current air service at <http://www.swiftcurrent.ca/divisions/infrastructure-operations/swift-current-airport>.

So what could be done to enhance air service? First, an assessment could be performed on what the options are for providing better air service. Looking at city airports of similar capacity to Swift Current's in the western or central regions of Canada and the U.S. would be a starting point. Second, a follow-up research effort with the types of businesses likely to be most interested in air service could be initiated to learn more about their interest and requirements. This would be critical in assessing likely demand insofar as there is a chicken and egg conundrum. If increased air service is provided but not used, what community resources will have been squandered in investing in that resource, including the reputation of the community in reaching out for provincial, federal or other outside resources?

Advisors at the Task Force Retreat noted to look at options to increase activity at the airport and continue efforts to complete infrastructure including access to airport.



13 Initiate a Conversation about Housing in Swift Current

Businesses indicate housing is an important issue for their businesses. Over 75 percent of businesses surveyed indicated housing supply and housing costs are important when selecting a location or site. At the same time, 23 percent of businesses are dissatisfied with housing supply in Swift Current and 36 percent are dissatisfied with housing costs in Swift Current.

If businesses increase the number of employees they hire, the demand for housing may increase. If quality and affordable housing is not available, businesses may have continued difficulty in recruiting. Employees may also commute in. Housing costs will also be an issue, as businesses look to hire skilled and unskilled labour. Wage rates, as provided in this report, vary depending on the type of position. There will be a need to accommodate all levels of housing prices.

The Task Force may wish to initiate conversations about housing in Swift Current. This might begin with a little research by the Task Force. What kinds of housing are currently available in Swift Current? Are there certain market demographics that are currently under-served? What plans do local housing developers have for the next 6 to 12 months? What are the trends in the housing market?

Armed with this information, the Task Force may wish to address city officials about the housing needs in the community. The research could help inform strategies for addressing housing needs. For example, if trends show little or no new housing development, what can be done to encourage development? If there is a market demographic that is under-served, what can be done to encourage development to serve that population?

Advisors at the Task Force Retreat noted that it would be beneficial to look at North Battleford and Medicine Hat to see what they did to address this need. It was also revealed that the city of Swift Current had developed a housing strategy in the past and it would be important to review this as well. A need for low-income housing was also raised and a need for a local "watch dog" to ensure rental properties are meeting tenant needs.

Final Steps of BRE Process

The priorities have now been confirmed and efforts to advance the projects into action is the critical next step. The Task Force must come together to assess the priorities and source resources to lead the projects forward.

Identify Projects and Leaders

Select projects for implementation and determine leadership.

The BRE Task Force must now determine which projects they are going to lead to action. Each member will decide which project(s) they will lead. This means the member will commit their own leadership and resources to ensure the project is implemented. This also includes selection of key stakeholders who can lend insight, knowledge, and possibly resources to move the projects forward. Advisors who participated in the Task Force Retreat may have expressed interest in participating and supporting the project and should be contacted.

It is important that projects are selected that will produce some early wins.

Once the projects and their leaders are identified Project Leadership Teams are formed and a series of working sessions begin. The sessions will outline a charter for each of the projects. The project charters will serve as the foundation documents that will assist in guiding the projects to success and also providing a communication tool to be shared with others to build local understanding of the projects within the community and their importance to economic growth.

The project charters will identify the vision, mission, goals, objectives, roles and responsibilities, timelines and reporting schedules, and measures of success for each of the Project Leadership Teams.

Host Economic Growth Forum

Celebrate projects moving into action and the Leaders who will drive them forward.

A forum is hosted to present the results of the survey, the economic analysis and the key priorities that resulted. Within this forum the Leaders who stepped up to lend support and have committed to drive the projects forward will be introduced and celebrated. Further all businesses who dedicated their time to participate in the survey process will also be acknowledged and celebrated. The forum will serve to communicate the commitment of the city, local businesses, organizations and institutions to the growth of business and the local economy.

Implement ACTION Plans

Move projects into ACTION!

The Leaders have now been positioned and are equipped with a detailed plan of action for moving forward. It is now the responsibility of the BRE Task Force to ensure meetings occur, action plan deliverables are being achieved and action is happening.

As a result of time spent by the Project Leadership Teams constructing detailed charters and action plans for each project and determining key tasks with completion dates, meeting schedules should be developed and correlated to these dates. In turn, each meeting agenda should complete a review of each task proposed for completion by the meeting date. Those responsible for the tasks will be required to report to the team on the status of the task and whether it has been completed.

To ensure optimum participation by team members an organized and structured system for participation that offers clear lines of communication is vital.

Monitor Progress

Measure progress, align priorities, and celebrate success!

Once the projects have been underway for approximately a year and it is time to complete a review of how the projects are progressing and determine if priorities must be realigned. This will be done by engaging each of the Project Leadership Teams to develop report cards on the progress of their projects.

At this point, some projects may have achieved their directives and it is time to report and celebrate a great milestone within the economic growth plan. Some projects may not be complete but are moving along very well. Other projects may be struggling for various reasons and may need to be revisited and evaluated as a current priority. A new priority from the Summary Report may be selected for action.

Many things can occur over the course of a year and for this reason, it is essential that time is taken to listen, evaluate and align priorities as required for success.

Upon completion of the progress reporting it may be time, once again, to host another Annual Economic Growth Forum to celebrate success and set align new priorities for economic growth.



Phone: 306.778.6445
Cell: 306.774.5232
Email: sblyth.ies@sasktel.net
Web: www.communitybreakthroughs.com