



# Economic Development Readiness Program Final Report

**Organization's Name:** Clayoquot Biosphere Trust

**Project Name:** Regional Marketing of Education Tourism Opportunities

**Commencement Date:** May 16, 2016

**Completion Date:** December 31, 2016

**ICET Contribution:** \$29,000

**Total Project Budget:** \$58,000

## Briefly describe your project's:

### 1. Purpose and Goals

*Please describe what your project aimed to accomplish.*

The purpose of this project was to develop the tools to market and promote education tourism at a regional scale. Our goals were to a.) promote educational tourism opportunities via a new website and social media marketing campaigns; b.) create linkages to local organizations, businesses and communities; and c.) test educational tourism booking models.

### 2. Implementation

*Describe how the project was implemented.*

The CBT convened a Regional Education Tourism Committee to advise on the project and create strong linkages with each community, as well as local organizations including two Destination Marketing Organizations. These individuals and groups have a vested interest in the project and provided considerable in-kind resources and expertise.

With CBT coordinating the project, ICET funding allowed us to engage a number of professionals to deliver key aspects including the naming, graphic design and creation of the highly visual [West Coast NEST](#) (Nature, Education, Sustainability, Transformation), the brand and website for the education tourism initiative. Designed as a communication and marketing tool, the site brings together information on education programs, local learning resources, volunteer opportunities, relevant news

stories, and education events in the region attractive to visiting learners and engage locals in learning as well. Organizations were engaged directly to provide content for the site and develop communications links on their websites and social media channels. All communities in the region had an opportunity to participate in the project, to provide images and content, and to review the summary information about their community.

### 3. Impacts

*Please describe to what degree the objectives proposed for this project have been met.*

The project objectives have been fully met and continue in force. A strong education tourism brand has been created and maintained. The website was made live in December 2016 and all social media channels were activated at this time. Education tourism marketing and programs continue to grow with additional support leveraged from the BC Rural Dividend Fund, as well as local partner contributions. We continue to test education tourism booking and revenue models.

We have been successful in growing the reach of the NEST website and social media channels. The West Coast NEST website has had almost 6,000 users for a total of more than 9,000 sessions since December 1, 2016! Our peak visitation was during July 2017. The West Coast NEST facebook page has 194 followers. The West Coast NEST Instagram feed has 1,105 followers and high engagement as a result of the rich images shared.

The CBT has hired one full-time Education Coordinator, four temporary, part-time persons to assist with marketing and communications (social media coordinator, google ad implementation, creation of marketing materials, and website maintenance), and one temporary, part-time person to assist with the education program development.

In 2017, 75 educational courses and 356 educational events were advertised on the NEST website. We estimate that 862 indirect jobs were created during the same time period assuming two temporary positions per course or event (one education program delivery, one logistics and support). This employment has been offered by local non-profit organizations, small businesses, and visiting academic institutions.

We are continuing to support incremental innovation and economic growth in local education organizations, First Nation communities, non-First Nation communities and local businesses. We continue to engage with local organizations and businesses to develop educational tourism products and partnerships while testing and refining booking and revenue models. Our marketing has expanded to include digital marketing such as Google Ads and facebook advertising.

### 4. Community Involvement and Collaboration

*Please provide a description of what successes occurred in initiating or expanding partnerships and collaborative efforts with other organizations and individuals.*

This project illustrates the innovative approach of the communities, organizations, and different institutions working together to leverage opportunities for shared prosperity. The regional scale and implementation of this project has evolved over several phases of community participation and endorsement. In March 2015, the CBT received the full support of every community in the region to lead this project into the next phase of education tourism market development.

In 2016, the CBT convened a Regional Education Tourism Committee to advise on the project and create strong linkages with each community, as well as local organizations including two destination marketing organizations. These individuals and groups had a vested interest in the project and provided considerable in-kind resources and expertise. By working with the Destination Marketing Organizations we have been able to align destination websites to complement and incorporate NEST messaging and links. This allows us to present a unified message to potential visitors.

In 2017, we grew our collaboration by working with local organizations and communities to pilot several education tourism programs, resulting in strong relationships and a growing network of education program providers throughout the region. This assistance includes marketing support (through West Coast NEST website, social media, Google Ads, representation at educational exhibits, and through word of mouth), meeting with local organizations and business to discuss possible educational tourism products and partnerships, providing financial support for educational tourism product development, and in one cases providing mentorship for coordinating the development of a field school.

## 5. Lessons Learned

*Please provide a critical review of your project including a discussion of lessons learned, recommendations and overall perception of project success.*

We learned a great deal about engaging marketing and communications professionals. Initially, we envisioned hiring a number of professionals to develop our identity and online presence. To my delight, our first contractor was passionate about the project and really understood our vision. She was able to engage other professionals as needed and to manage the workflow between these various specialists which was a blessing. This reduced my time managing the administration and communication so that I was instead able to focus on the vision, community partnership and local communication aspects.

We hired locally to the greatest extent possible which helped to build capacity and understanding of the project in the region. None the less, many of the marketing skills were not available locally and we certainly benefited from the specialization that the out-of-region professionals brought to the project.

We learned that we had to maintain the rich visual imagery of the website in our social media in order to build a following. We attribute our Instagram success to the hiring of a fantastic photographer who has a passion for our project.

We also benefited from the regional collaboration and partnership model. We dissolved the Regional Education Tourism Committee at the wrap up of this project and have recently reflected on the

difficulties maintaining momentum without the formal partnerships in place. We will be revitalizing the Committee in 2018.

While I feel confident about our project's success, our expenses were far beyond our initial anticipated budget. The CBT was able to utilize support from the communities to support the additional expenses and this was offset by a greater CBT staff contribution to education program creation. This demonstrates the CBT's commitment to the education tourism regional vision. Some aspects of the website, mainly the calendar functions, were outside of our initial scope of work and time consuming for the web developers to create.

## 6. Next Steps

*Based on the project findings, briefly outline the follow up steps for this initiative and how the project outcomes will be sustained.*

In November 2016, the CBT received further support from the BC Rural Dividend Fund to facilitate the growth of education product supply and the expansion of the education tourism market demand. Our next steps include:

1. Providing continued support for the creation of education tourism products in west coast communities.
  - Development of new BC curriculum-justified high school outdoor education programs and prescribed learning outcomes
  - Development of university partnerships
  - Development of adult learner programs being offered, including professional and personal development programs
2. Renewed partnerships for ongoing program support and collaboration.
3. Supporting the continued supply of content development for the West Coast N.E.S.T website marketing tool including event calendar listings, course calendar listings, community profiles, photographs, trip planning resources, blog articles, stories and industry related news.

## Storytelling

*If you had one story to tell to illustrate the impact of the project (whether in the community, your organization, business or an individual etc) what would it be? If media reports, please attach copies.*

In 2016, the CBT offered a University Field School pilot with Royal Roads University. I have attached a blog post written by one of the RRU students to demonstrate the value of education tourism programs to visiting learners. We delivered the program again in 2017 and have a renewed contract to continue to deliver the course in 2018. Additional West Coast NEST media coverage can be found [here](#).

The community of Hitacu was invited to participate and share in the co-learning experience, which resulted in the following outcomes:

- Collaboration between Yuu-cluth-aht Government, Royal Roads University, and the CBT to co-deliver a week long Biosphere and Sustainability residency course from July 24 - August 2, 2016;
- Yuu-cluth-aht received over \$12,000 in revenues for catering services and accommodation;
- Local Yuu-cluth-aht educators contributed to course instruction and received significant financial honorariums for their teaching services;
- Over 50% of course content was taught by local educators, involving five different education organizations, generating financial contributions to each;
- Eight Yuu-cluth-aht elders attended course session and engaged in meaningful conversations on reconciliation between rural non-First Nation communities and First Nation communities; and
- Roughly \$15,000 economic value linking to other goods and services were distributed throughout the region during the week.

**Certification:**

I, the undersigned, have authority to represent the recipient and certify that to the best of my knowledge that all the information in this final report is true and complete.

**Rebecca Hurwitz** \_\_\_\_\_ **Executive Director** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Recipient's Name**

**Title**

*Rebecca Hurwitz*

January 22, 2018

**Recipient's Signature**

**Date**