

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT READINESS PROGRAM

Organization's Name: Community Futures Cowichan

Project Name: Cowichan Lake Region Tourism Action Plan

Commencement Date: January 2018

Completion Date: October 31, 2018

ICET Contribution: \$10,000

Total Project Budget: \$120,900.32

Briefly describe your project's:

1. PURPOSE AND GOALS

Please describe what your project aimed to accomplish.

The purpose of the Cowichan Lake Region Tourism Action Plan (CLRTAP) is to develop a strategy for tourism infrastructure and to stimulate business opportunities in the Cycling, Hiking and Accommodations.

The Three Goals:

1. Engage consultants to provide a report on the Cycling, Hiking and Accommodation sub-sectors. The report will focus on needed infrastructure and business development opportunities and provided actionable next steps.
2. Complete an Engineered Study for a pathway that links the Cowichan Lake First Nation Water Sport Centre and Café to the Lake Cowichan Town centre, a distance of about 2 km along the north shore of Lake Cowichan. This missing link has been identified as major gap in connecting major tourism destinations and will be a key route for cyclists and walkers.
3. Community Engagement and Commitment. To educate the community at large on the opportunities. Engage them in a process that gave them a voice. To provide them with the tools and "road-map" to take the steps.

2. IMPLEMENTATION

Describe how the project was implemented.

In the Project Start-Up Phase (Jan 2018) Community Futures had two primary objectives:

1. Hire a Part-Time Coordinator to assist with communications and coordinating both the Leadership Team and community engagement activities.
2. Leadership Team Formation - Comprised of local citizens, business owners and some elected officials, the team's primary purpose is to act as Champions for the project and its goals. The Team was a resource for the consultant and the applicant, and assisted with ongoing community engagement and communication.

The next major objective (Feb 2018) was the RFP design, distribution and securing the contractors. Community Futures Cowichan, together with its partners and the Leadership Team engaged the following consultants:

- TAVI – for the Biking & Hiking Sector Action Plan
- URBAN Systems – Accommodation Study
- Associated Engineering – Engineerd Pathway between the Town and Lake Cowichan First Nations
- Maarten VanWamel – Team Training

From March to October 2018 the research and action plan work was conducted. Major activities were:

- ✓ Context Interviews and Secondary Research
- ✓ Monthly Leadership Team Meetings (7 in total)
- ✓ Business and Stakeholder Engagement Session
- ✓ Asset Inventory and Analysis
- ✓ Stakeholder Interviews (one-on-one)
- ✓ Market assessment & Digital Listening Study
- ✓ Economic Analysis of Infrastructure Investments
- ✓ Tradition and Digital Marketing Recommendation

Hiking and Cycling Action Plan Final Report was received September 2018

Accommodation Study Received October 2018

Engineering Study received Decemeber 2018

3. IMPACTS

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

For the mountain-biker- traveller, growing the number of trail experiences in the Region positions the whole Cowichan as a real cluster. Specific to this sub-group, is the anticipated there will be growth of some retailers and service providers to meet the biker and hiker needs. Because trails are year-round amenities, tourism development will stretch the season to year-round. And will also make the area more attractive to neighbouring communities and towns within the Cowichan to capture day-trippers.

Lake Cowichan First Nations Partnerships - What may be the strongest potential partnership opportunity to be directly related to this project is the identification that the local first nations culture and storytelling could be an important Value Proposition in differentiating the Cowichan trail experience vs. others. This was supported by research that indicates a large amount of trail users are also “cultural explorers”

Youth Engagement- mostly related to mountain biking, this is a youth orientated sport. Building and riding trails should retain and attract youth who are seeking amenities that they value in the community they want to live in.

Trail Culture – improving and increasing the trail culture serves the economic and social well-being of the community. This is a tourism product that benefits both residents and tourists equally

Attraction of Skilled Workers- The communities of Squamish and Cumberland have demonstrated that having a strong trail culture can be leveraged into a skilled and youth employment attraction tool.

Timberwest Support - Timberwest has showed interest and support in this project from the beginning. To have them involved in all the meetings has allowed them to better understand the community desires for the use of the private lands around the Region. This project identified for the citizens what needs to happen to access private lands to leverage them for Tourism Development. And because the study was a formal process with reputable organizations involved Timberwest was able to engage at a deeper level and give formal input than if it was a random group of citizens.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

Using the indicators identified in your project application, detail how the success of the project was evaluated and how the benefits were measured.

Community Engagement

Measurement Indicators:

- The project will involve all jurisdictions within the Western Region of the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), the Town of Lake Cowichan and neighboring First Nations communities. Focus groups held within each Jurisdiction will measure success by their ability to attract a minimum of 10 participants to each session, and participant satisfaction with the engagement sessions will be gauged through an follow-up survey.
 - Overall this was met, thou was not accomplished by having groups in our sub-regions. But representation was achieved in both the Leadership Team membership and attendance at all stakeholder meetings.

Leadership Team

Measurement Indicators:

- Connections with and ongoing communication with local business operators, First Nations, government and community leaders across the region.
 - ✓ Met, except for there was no Representative from Lake Cowichan First Nations
- Standards will be established by the Leadership Team that place emphasis on teamwork, collaboration, and harnessing shared strengths.
 - ✓ Met, huge assistance from Trainer
- Team development and dynamics will be improved by investing in a facilitator-supported sessions.
 - ✓ Met having trainer at all meetings
- The Leadership Team will meet regularly and be supported by the Coordinator to provide input into the project and provide strategic direction regarding project outcomes.
 - ✓ Met with monthly meetings

Completion of Tourism Product Development Strategies

Measurement Indicators:

- The Strategy will produce a prioritized series of actionable recommendations for growing the cycling, hiking and marine industries, with specific recommendations on developing the required business attraction and investment strategies
- It will identify the necessary partnerships needed between business, government, First Nations, and community to create new tourism products and expand existing tourism offerings in the key focus areas.
- The Consultant will be required to produce a minimum of 2 tourism development product opportunities that are validated by the findings
- Utilization of the Destination BC Product Development Program

***MET** – Action Plans provide detailed for:*

- ✓ What retail is needed (bike parts)
- ✓ Packaged experiences
- ✓ Trail Development Recommendations
- ✓ Identifying Partners

Completion of Tourism Infrastructure Strategy

Measurement Indicators

- The strategy will produce a prioritized series of actionable recommendations for creating key tourism infrastructure within the Cowichan Lake/Western Region supported by strong rationale
- Consultant will be contracted to identify and create the “business case” for a minimum of 2 infrastructure investments.
- The strategy will demonstrate how infrastructure can be funded through partnered or private sector investment.

***MET**- received detailed recommendations for both trail development and accommodations*

- ✓ Identify latent demand for accommodations
- ✓ Amenity add-ons for current accommodations providers (bike lockers)
- ✓ Types of accommodations missing, that trail users desire (hostel)
- ✓ Trail Development Recommendations
- ✓ Engineers Drawings for Shoreline Pathway connections

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.

The region and Lake Cowichan First Nations share borders but because they are governed separately, it has made for siloed development decisions. Partnering in this project has led to joint decisions and future investments to serve tourists in a more unified way.

Business Walk Program- in June project partners and elected officials from the Town visited over 50 business in the core of town. The outcome was confirming the need for improved communication tools, understanding impacts of seasonality, transportation issues and zoning. All which impact tourism development.

The Project activities and partners garnered the attention of other area Trail Society's who have offered assistance in society formation, land agreements and operations.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

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

Working with Consultants:

What became apparent to us when trying to get a consultant for the Accommodation Study, is how very few firms will work for less than \$10,000 per contract. This is especially evident when "public consultation is required". Feedback from many is it is time consuming and so often the public brings many issues unrelated to the scope which burns "billable hours"

Second, the consideration of using a consultant that is closer to home. This can result in more meaningful engagements as there may be relationships are in place already, so they can be leveraged. And much of the research does not have to rely on internet research and existing reports. You also don't lose time and money paying for travel time.

Choosing to work with Tourism Association of Vancouver Island resulted in many unexpected and valuable benefits. Their vast and detailed knowledge of tourism development and marketing, as well helping other communities implement Trail Development strategies, provided huge value in all steps of the process. And probably made the recommendations more meaningful in how they could be implemented. An added bonus is because they are DMO they can never fully withdraw from supporting the community, they are always available to assist going forward.

Project Manager Role; it's a long term commitment

CF knew as Project Managers that there is a commitment needed way beyond the end date of the project. Once there is the Final Report, acting on it and following through with recommendations is critical for success. The continuity of the PM to assist with this implementation Phase is very valuable as you can help champions and organizations take ownership in areas relevant to them.

Early Wins

This is a well-known success factor in any project. We had the chance to get an early win when the Cross the Rock Cyclocross event picked the Region as a major stop on their circuit. The Report had just been released and presented to many stakeholders, so having an event that demonstrated the benefits for having developed trails in the early days provided lots of credibility and momentum. This event attracted 200+ riders and 200 more spectators.

Ongoing Communications and Looping –Back

You can never communicate enough. But the key is to loop-back. Project Managers need to build-in a communication function that forces you to check back with key people and groups. Always communicating in “next steps and this is what we learned” context is forward thinking but you need to go-back and ensure the Project has not had key people drop-off, and if they did understand why.

Project Champions

We are very confident this project will provide the benefits and outcomes we predicted and even more that are now emerging. If we could contribute that to one factor we've had 1 – 2 people be project Champions. They are personally invested and share the vision. They are the glue in all the work and activities that are continuing to happen

Advocates

This is about other organizations and groups where the Project outcomes align with their mandate. You could also consider them a Third- Party Endorsement. Identify these advocates early on in the Project to validate the report and any recommendations. We found this in the Cowichan Trail Stewardship Society and Vancouver Island Tourism Association.

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.

We anticipate the work to implement the Action Plan Recommendations to be supported by the Community. As Project Managers and Community Developers we recognise the completion of the

Reports and Studies are valuable pieces of work, but follow through and implementation is critical to long term success and sustainability.

The following activities are in progress as of Jan. 2019:

- Community formed a Trail Society- the Cowichan Lake Trail Blazers. 648 Facebook Members, regular trail building days, paid memberships, and “sharing” with neighbouring Trail Society’s
- Introductions between the local Visitor Info Centre and Chamber members with Tourism Cowichan, Tourism Victoria, and Tourism Vancouver Island for the purpose of understanding how small local business can benefit from DMO Programs and educating the DMO’s about what the Region is pursuing and developing.
- Working with the Chamber of Commerce to attract resources and experts to provide business capacity training in digital and online marketing for local businesses
- Presentation to the Town of Lake Cowichan on implementing a Façade Improvement Program
- Working with the Lake Cowichan First Nations to support them in proposal writing and product development related to tourism
- Upcoming meetings and conversations with Timberwest

7. 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.

Finding the Project Champion. Passion and dedication does not need compensation, it needs support and for barriers to be removed so they can progress. For this project its Bob Day. He is the “crazy” (as quoted at the ICET 10th Anniversary Celebration) that needs to be embraced. He’s connecting, he’s organizing, he’s excited, he’s owning it in a way the whole community gets to have a say. Every project is a “bus”, that needs a “bus driver”. He’s that guy.

Here we are at the Society Kick-off in November 2018.



FINANCIAL REPORT

The final financial report should include a signed and dated financial statement for the period of the project which includes:

- *Total actual project spending (by categories as submitted in your proposal)*
- *Total of all funding received from other sources (matching funding)*
- *Surplus/Deficit if any*

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.

Print Recipient's Name

Title

Recipient's Signature

Date