

MEMORANDUM

ED 3-2021

Subject: COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Economic Development

Date: February 17, 2021

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee

From: George Spezza, Director, Economic Development

Economic Development

Current Status of Operations

This memo is the Economic Development Division's monthly update on our response to COVID-19 and business continuity. As previously reported, Economic Development's work on COVID-19 response is focused on leading planning for business recovery through the Economic Rapid Response Team (ERRT) and the implementation of the Economic Recovery Plan.

Service/Operational Changes

There have been no operational changes in the last month. Our work is a balance of COVID-19 response projects and business continuity.

Significant Initiatives and Actions Taken

Marketing Support to Businesses

- COVID Business Support Site has been updated to be more user friendly: <https://niagaracanada.com/covid-19-2/>
- Buy-local campaigns are underway in their municipalities being run by local Economic Development Officers (EDOs) with support from our office;
- Tourism Adoption and Recovery Fund grant advertising is underway;
- Website traffic in the last month: 7,114 which is +1,362 over last year;
- Tourism Adaption and Recovery Fund is the most visited site with 1,735 views in under three weeks;

- Developing a number of profiles of businesses that have successfully pivoted and/or innovated their products and services in the face of the pandemic.

Website Analytics:	Last 30 days:	Vs. Same time last year:
Visits	4,197	(+1,267)
Page views:	7,114	(+1,362)
Unique Visitors:	3,407	(+921)
Returning Visitors:	144	(+11)

Most popular Pages:	Number of Views:
Tourism Adaptation and Recovery Fund Grant Program	1,735
COVID-19 Business Support	978
COVID-19 News	789

Business Updates

The biweekly calls to our EDO colleagues, BIAs, Chambers and Industry Associations are used as a communications channel to disseminate information to our local businesses. The calls are in partnership with Niagara Region Public Health and include the latest information on new government announcements and protocols. In the last month these have included lockdown and the provincial ‘Stay at Home’ Order. Information that is released between meetings is shared with the group by email. These calls are also an opportunity to provide an update on the progress of the Economic Recovery Plan.

Tourism Adaption and Recovery Funding

The ERRT Expression of Interest submitted by Niagara Economic Development was accepted, although at the time of writing this report there has been no official Minister’s

announcement. Funding is available to tourism-dependent businesses for the costs of equipping them to meet Public Health guidelines and protocols including: purchase of PPE, cleaning supplies etc. for workers; accommodating social distancing (expansion of restaurant patio space, pick up windows or curbside pickups for retailers, secondary entry/exit to allow physical distancing, equipment to extend the outdoor dining season e.g. purchase of patio heaters); implementation of technology, digital tools etc. for tourism operators to enable for example, virtual queuing, time ticket entry.

A communications and marketing plan has been implemented to promote the funding opportunity. An application and evaluation process has also been developed to process applications through an adjudication committee. Applications for the first round of funding were accepted until January 31st. Retrospective costs are eligible back to June 2020 and the project will run until December 31st 2021.

Business and Economic Research and Analysis

Due to the current lockdown and 'Stay at Home' Order, the launch of the third Business Impact Survey has been delayed. An Economic Update will be provided to Planning and Economic Development Committee (PEDC) in March/April depending on when the data is available.

Ongoing projects include:

- Niagara Community Observatory (NCO): Niagara Active Economy policy brief with Julie Stevens;
- NCO: Information Communications Technology (ICT) Policy Brief (February 2021);
- Niagara Workforce Planning Board (NWPB) Scenario Planning Prioritization Committee (drafting a report on Niagara for the Province that looks at potential scenarios and possible outcomes over the next 2 years);
- NWPB Economic Impact Analysis from Students Not Returning Due to COVID-19;
- Niagara Region COVID-19 Recovery Measurement Indicators (providing advice and information);
- Airport Economic Impact Assessment Project (providing advice and assistance);
- Students going digital - the economic impact on Niagara (providing advice and assistance to NWPB).

Business Development

Niagara Economic Development has been actively involved in two site selection exercises. One was submitted by the Province of Ontario and a second was received directly from an industrial/commercial broker. This resulted in a number of sites from across the region being put forward for consideration. We have received one Industrial Development Charge Grant that is currently under review.

Trade and Investment

Since the last PEDC report, Niagara Economic Development has organized three meetings and a focus group with representatives from the Niagara Industrial Association to analyze the regional Supply Chain and identify opportunities for business collaboration and development moving forward.

Successfully applied to the Global Affairs Canada, Can Export Program for funding to support foreign direct investment (FDi) programming in 2021. The funding also supports the joint Hamilton Niagara Partnership activities.

Contracts for lead generation work in the U.S. have been extended into 2021 due to the effects of COVID-19. At the end of December there was one virtual client meeting.

The Coordinator for the Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) received 8 client inquiries and meetings to leverage the benefits of Niagara's FTZ designation and respond to regional trade opportunities.

Sector Support and Economic Development Support to Local Area Municipalities without Economic Development resources

Local campaigns; Broadband projects, Rural Economic Development (RED) applications; lockdown support to the tourism sector; workforce engagement in the tourism sector and Niagara Cycling support.

Economic Recovery Plan

A separate report to PEDC this month, ED 5-2021 Economic Recovery Plan Update 3, describes the progress and implementation of the Plan.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- Contribution agreements in place for grants to tourism-dependent businesses from the Tourism Adaption and Recovery Fund.
- COVID-19 third Business Impact Survey released.
- 'Open in Niagara' website expanded into permanent online regional business directory.
- Implementation of Economic Recovery Plan on-going.
- Review work practices depending on Niagara Region recommendations and Public Health advice.

3 months

- Implementation of Economic Recovery Plan completed.
- Initial work started on development of a 10 year Economic Development Strategy.
- Continue to monitor economic indicators to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on the local economy compared to previous years and determine where resources could be best utilized to maximize ongoing economic development programming.

6 months

- Longer term strategic economic development planning underway.
- Review work practices depending on Niagara Region recommendations and Public Health advice.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

George Spezza, Ec.D., CEcD
Director, Economic Development