
MEMORANDUM

ED 8-2020

Subject: COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Economic Development
Date: June 17, 2020
To: Planning and Economic Development Committee
From: Val Kuhns, Acting Director, Economic Development

Economic Development

Current Status of Operations

This report is an update on ED 7-2020 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Economic Development, which was provided for information at the May 13, 2020, Planning and Economic Development Committee meeting. Niagara Economic Development has re-focused its work, in the wake of COVID-19, to support Niagara businesses. New initiatives have been developed in collaboration with the other economic development offices in Niagara, working together as the Economic Rapid Response Team (ERRT).

While all work in connection with the ERRT takes priority, where resources are available, some regular activities continue, including projects started before COVID-19. They include ongoing advisory support for the Local Area Municipalities that do not have economic development offices, responding to investment inquiries, development of a CRM tool necessary for client follow up, webinar to present the results of a Supply Chain study developed in partnership with Transport Canada and the McMaster Institute for Transportation and Logistics, development of a Transportation and Logistics policy brief in partnership with the Niagara Community Observatory, connection with local exporters as part of the Foreign Trade Zone program and providing support for Enbridge in the preparation of an application for a Natural Gas Extension in the region.

Service/Operational Changes

Two major areas that regional economic development normally focuses on are business investment attraction and the external marketing of Niagara as a competitive location for investment. Although, we are not currently involved in active lead generation to identify potential prospects for investment, Niagara Economic Development has received 10 inquiries since mid-March. These leads are all active and have required ongoing follow up.

All pro-active external marketing activities have stopped and work is focused on crisis communications to local businesses and the promotion of tools including the websites (ERRT and Open in Niagara), the surveys and other information to support businesses impacted by COVID-19.

Significant Initiatives or Actions Taken

The COVID-19 webpage continues to provide up to date information on provincial and federal announcements, new funding programs and local support. The link to the website is errt.niagararegion.ca in the last 30 days the website has had 5,715 visitors, 145 were returning visitors and 2,557 were unique visits. The most visited category was Financial Support.

The dedicated ERRT email is promoted as a channel for businesses to ask questions. The emails are triaged and sent to the appropriate municipal Economic Development office or organization to respond immediately. The email address is ERRT@niagararegion.ca

The first Business Impact Survey report was released in May and the results widely circulated to upper levels of government as well as FCM, AMO, FedDev etc. and the results also informed our own recovery planning. The second Business Impact Survey closed on June 1st and a report will be available this month. In collaboration with the 6 Economic Development Offices, the survey questions were reworked to understand the effect of government funding and where gaps in support exist, as well as current and projected impact to businesses. The report will be widely distributed and a government relations plan has been developed to disseminate the information to the appropriate government contacts.

We continue to promote the 'Open in Niagara' website to businesses that are open to encourage them to self-register and to Niagara residents to encourage them to shop local and support Niagara businesses. As of May 29, the website has received 20,000 page views with an average of 14 minutes spent on each page.

Working with the Economic Development offices a draft Economic Recovery Plan has been created and circulated to Economic Development Officers and other stakeholders, for comment. The next revised version will be available once the results from the second survey are available.

The ERRT is also promoting a Niagara PPE list compiled by the Niagara Industrial Association from their membership. The list includes companies who produce different types of PPE or have pivoted to produce PPE. The directory has been built and is hosted on our website. At the time of writing this report it was being tested before going live.

A partnership between Venture Niagara and Niagara Economic Development has been facilitated to assist with the administration and promotion of the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF) <https://www.ventureniagara.com/regional-relief-recovery-fund/> which has to be distributed by June 30th 2020.

Niagara Economic Development is a member of the GTA Economic Development Alliance and is jointly promoting the impact being felt by businesses across the GTA to the provincial and federal governments. An Economic Recovery Plan for the broader area is also being developed in tandem with our own Niagara Economic Recovery Plan.

Operational Outlook

1 month

- Second Business Impact survey results will be analysed and a report will be developed, widely distributed and used to inform the Economic Recovery Plan and other levels of government.
- Ongoing support to local businesses through the ERRT initiatives.
- Ongoing engagement with key sectors to inform the Economic Recovery Plan.
- Ongoing collaboration with the local Economic Development Offices, Chambers, Niagara Workforce Planning Board, Niagara Industrial Association etc.

3 months

- The ERRT Economic Recovery Plan will be completed and implementation started.
- Monitoring the economic indicators to better understand where COVID-19 has affected the regional economy, compared to previous years, and determine where resources could best be utilized to maximize ongoing economic development programming.
- Ongoing collaboration with the local Economic Development Offices, Chambers, Niagara Workforce Planning Board, Niagara Industrial Association etc.

6 months

- Review of the pandemic's impact on the Economic Development Strategic Action Plan and make revisions as necessary.
- Long term Economic Development Strategy development will begin.
- Development of an economic emergency communications plan to address possible future emergencies that may impact the regional economy.
- Ongoing collaboration with the local Economic Development Offices, Chambers, Niagara Workforce Planning Board, Niagara Industrial Association etc.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Valerie Kuhns
Acting Director, Economic Development