



ASSOCIATION OF CHAMBER OF COMMERCE EXECUTIVES

2016 Chamber of the Year Application



SASKATCHEWAN
CHAMBER *of* COMMERCE

SECTION 4, Synopsis 2 - PUBLIC POLICY

SASKATCHEWAN NORTHERN BUSINESS TASK FORCE



SECTION 4

Synopsis 2: Saskatchewan Northern Business Task Force

Impact Area Addressed:

Public Policy

NOTE TO JUDGES: LINKED DOCUMENTS CAN BE ACCESSED BY CLICKING UNDERLINED WORDS/LINKS.

Initiative Summary:

The Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce (SCC) created a Northern Business Task Force (NBTF) as an offshoot of the Expert Committee on Investment & Growth, to lead the organization's discussions about expanding business opportunities in Saskatchewan's remote northern communities through greater communication between businesses and community leaders.

The NBTF was also tasked with identifying and advocating for the implementation of key northern infrastructure initiatives that would lead to enhanced economic development opportunities.

Coordinating northern informational tours for senior business leaders, government officials, the media, and elected representatives was another primary goal. Based on information gathered on the northern tours and continued research, the Northern Business Task Force Recommendations report was produced.

Needs identification:

Target audiences of the NBTF and its report included southern business people who might not be aware of investment and business expansion opportunities in northern Saskatchewan. Provincial and federal government officials and elected representatives, who sometimes require a more thorough understanding of the region in order to make public policy decisions, were another focus. The media, being well positioned to raise awareness among the general public about challenges and opportunities in the north, was the third audience.

The quality of the NBTF members themselves, and the connections they were able to facilitate on the two northern tours, were key to the success of the NBTF. When selecting members, the SCC chose individuals who own or operate businesses or community development organizations in the remote north. During quarterly meetings, they were able to highlight relevant concerns of this region's people (road development, energy efficiency, cost of healthy food, etc.)

This group was able to connect the SCC with northern residents so that tour participants had access to the most knowledgeable people on those topics. The tour participants gathered firsthand information on the challenges and opportunities in northern communities, data which was then used to create the recommendations in the group's report.



Program objectives:

As well as the nature of the initiative (described above), the goals and objectives are best illustrated via the 12 recommendations included in the Northern Business Task Force Recommendations report, since those are the advocacy items on which the group ultimately chose to focus:

- Increase efforts to encourage energy efficiency
- Change all northern communities from E03 electricity rate code to E02 code
- Adjust ice road closure dates on an annual basis
- Increase the provincial budget for northern roads by a meaningful amount every year
- Build the all-weather Garson Lake Road from La Loche to Fort McMurray
- Build an all-weather road from Highway 905 to Wollaston Lake
- Increase awareness of career opportunities and training options among northern residents
- Ensure that educational opportunities and attainment standards are comparable to southern Saskatchewan
- Ensure comparable access to bandwidth and cellular coverage for northern communities
- Increase Nutrition North Canada subsidy for healthy foods
- Continue to improve internal communication and cooperation between Crown Corporations and Ministries on northern issues
- The Premier and appropriate Ministers should visit Saskatchewan's remote northern communities



In order to encourage people living in remote northern Saskatchewan communities to eat more healthy foods, increased subsidies to transport these foods are needed.

Methodology:

In order to create a Task Force filled with knowledgeable people, the SCC asked northern chambers of commerce, northern businesses, and First Nations councils to submit the names of people they felt would best represent the interests of remote northern Saskatchewan.

Currently, the SCC has two northern-based policies: Northern Roads Expansion and Enhancement, and Implementation of Northern Business Task Force Recommendations.

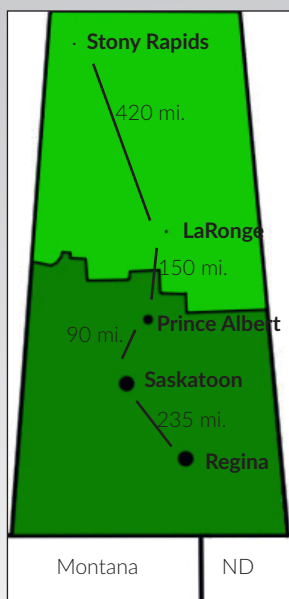
To reach its objectives the SCC used two tours of the north to gather information on social and economic conditions and determine which recommendations would be part of the final report.

The tours included a mix of government, media and business representatives who explored the social and economic issues in Saskatchewan's northern communities. Their input was important in determining the recommendations in the final report.

In advocating for the recommendations contained in the final report, the SCC held media events, as well as writing to and meeting with provincial and federal elected representatives and government officials. SCC members and other stakeholders were informed about the task force recommendations via the SCC e-newsletter, action! online, the SCC website, social media channels, and various advocacy events.

Task Force meeting expenses are minimal and are covered by the SCC. The northern tour budget is below.

Northern Tour Budget	
Revenue	
Cameco	\$15,000.00
Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership	\$2,100.00
Government Ministries	\$6,300.00
SaskTel	\$2,100.00
SaskPower	\$2,100.00
SCC Reps	\$6,000.00
Total Revenue	\$33,600.00
Expenses	
Air travel	\$26,044.88
Ground transportation	\$450.50
Meals	\$500.00
Accommodation	\$5276.09
Speaker Gifts	\$192.06
Total Expenses	\$32,463.53
Net Profit	\$1,136.47



L: Map showing approximation of distances in Saskatchewan's south and remote north.

Above: Housing in the remote north.

Communications:

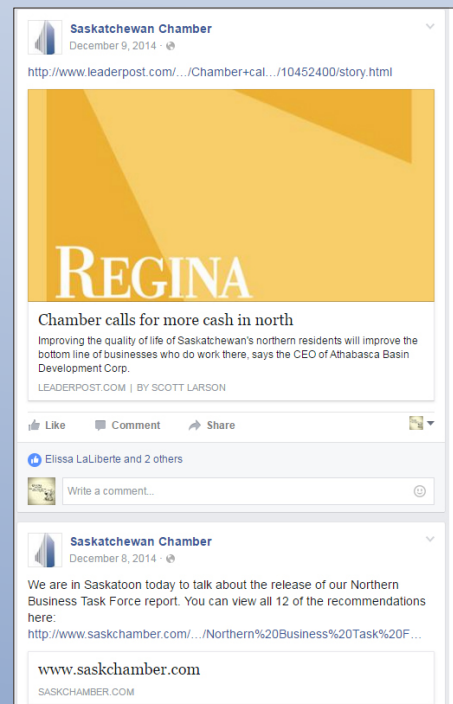
Upon creation of the final report, a media conference was held with a variety of northern business owners to each provide comments on sections of the report.

Print copies of the report were also sent to all relevant provincial and federal government officials and elected representatives, with electronic versions of the document circulated to the SCC's 648 business members and the 10,000 members of Saskatchewan's 68 local chambers of commerce. Social media was also employed to raise awareness, and a media advisory and a media release were sent out. Information on the NBTF and the report are housed on the SCC website.

The SCC developed its communication strategy to promote the final report, as well as the two northern tours, by considering what audiences would actually be able to use the information from each.

For all of the 12 recommendations in the report, the target audiences were provincial and federal government for all of the infrastructure investment and government program-related items. The general business community was the target for items that could benefit from private sector attention and/or investment. See Letter of Support.

The specific calls to action are embodied by the 12 recommendations that are listed in the Program Objectives section above.



Evaluation:

The best way to illustrate the impact that this initiative has had on the SCC's business members who operate in northern Saskatchewan is to comment individually on some of the final report recommendations where progress has been made:

Change all northern communities from E03 electricity rate code to E02 code – SaskPower (Saskatchewan's state-owned electricity provider) has undertaken a review of the rate codes applied to reserves in northern Saskatchewan and throughout the province.

Adjust ice road closure dates on an annual basis - The closure date for ice roads was extended in 2014 and 2015 and we are hopeful the Ministry of Highways will continue to extend the closure dates in future years, pending safe ice conditions.

Increase the provincial budget for northern roads and infrastructure by a meaningful amount every year – The provincial government has committed to significant funding to improve the runways and airport facilities in Stony Rapids and Buffalo Narrows.

Increase awareness of career opportunities and training options among northern residents - Northlands College, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, and other educational institutions are developing new courses that are more focused on the needs of the north.

Ensure comparable access to bandwidth and cellular coverage for northern communities – In late 2015, Industry Canada announced that Saskatchewan will be receiving \$7.42 million through the Connecting Canadians program to expand high-speed internet in northern Saskatchewan communities.

Increase Nutrition North Canada subsidy for healthy foods – The 2016 federal budget has committed an additional \$64.5 million over five years to expand the Nutrition North Canada program.

All of the progress that has been made on the recommendations listed in the previous section has been a result of effectively communicating the final report and those specific recommendations to the people in the public and private sector who can actually fix the problems.

Scoop at underground McArthur River uranium mine; mining is one career option for northern residents



Supplementary Material Index

Supplementary Documents:

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Hyperlinks:

Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce website (NBTF Materials):

<http://www.saskchamber.com/pages/investment--growth1>

