

West Parry Sound Economic Development Collaborative Action Plan



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Prepared by:



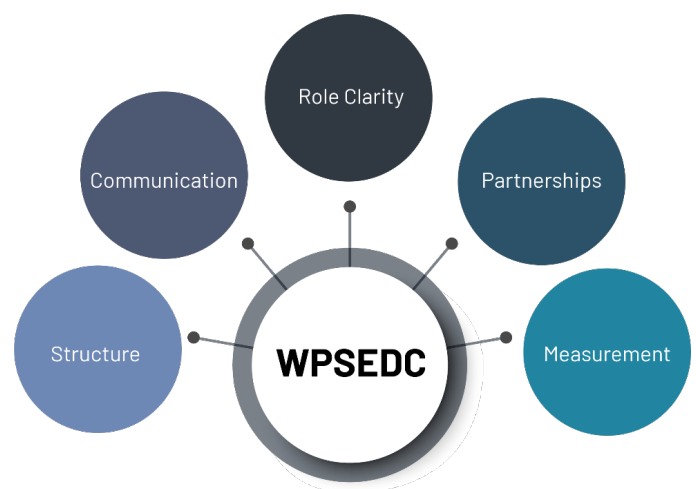
Current Situation

The West Parry Sound Economic Development Collaborative (WPSEDC) is in a state of flux. Initially funded through FedNor’s CIINO program, the funding has come to an end. The collaborative no longer has a staff member employed in the Economic Development Officer (EDO) role and only five municipalities from the original seven are involved. Initially WPSEDC included the Township of Carling, the Municipality of McDougall, the Township of McKellar, the Town of Parry Sound, the Township of Seguin, the Township of The Archipelago, and the Municipality of Whitestone. Since the recent changes, only the Township of Carling, Town of Parry Sound, the Township of The Archipelago, Municipality of McDougall and the Municipality of Whitestone are remaining.

Before the organizational changes occurred, a 2023 report was developed to support the future growth and sustainability of the organization. This report entitled, *WPSEDC Organizational Review and Engagement Report*, provides a summary of the engagement with the Municipal Stakeholder Board and Steering Committee and recommended next steps. Following the completion of the report, organizational changes occurred making the recommendation to move forward with a Strategic Plan obsolete. As such, a decision to identify an action plan to guide next steps and how WPSEDC should transition was made. The municipalities involved in the collective recognize and understand that working together in a regional way will better service West Parry Sound District as a whole. As such, they retained the services of Karen Jones Consulting Inc. to establish a plan to identify how the municipalities could play a role in regional economic development in West Parry Sound moving forward.

Recognizing the significance of regional economic development, strategies and supports are still needed to advance and adequately support the needs of the businesses and organizations in the West Parry Sound District. With the focus on the remaining WPSEDC municipalities, interest to work together and support regional economic growth is evident. This document serves as a road map to chart the course of the future.

The recent organizational changes present an ideal opportunity to reflect on the past successes/challenges and the previous work undertaken to help shape the best approach forward. In the *WPSEDC Organizational Review and Engagement Report*, five common themes were identified as areas of focus, this includes structure, communication, role clarity, partnerships and measurement. These themes emerged through extensive consultation and during one-on-one meetings with members of the Municipal Stakeholder Board and Steering Committee.



Looking Ahead

To determine next steps and assess how to play an effective role in Economic Development, the WPSEDC Municipal Stakeholder Board and Steering Committee must understand what the current landscape looks like. This includes:

- Having a wholesome perspective about economic development;
- Recognizing the organizations who are currently contributing significantly to the ecosystem and who support business development/workforce efforts; and
- Identifying the current and future needs of community regional economic development.

A new model should be considered that incorporates the five common themes that emerged from the *WPSEDC Organizational Review and Engagement Report*. This includes establishing an efficient and solid organizational structure, establishing clear communication, defining the role of the EDO in a way that aligns with the expectations and standards of WPSEDC, collaborating closely with regional partners and measuring key performance indicators to track success and pivot when necessary. A clean slate should be established with a “together we are better” mantra driving the new direction.

Partnership Development

To be successful leaders in economic development, municipal governments must position themselves as collaborators and partners, actively supporting and encouraging grassroots-level organizations who are making significant positive contributions to the region. It is crucial to rely on them to fulfill their mandates, which significantly impact regional economic development.

As part of this action plan, one-on-one consultations were conducted with several organizations to gain a deeper understanding of their roles in the West Parry Sound District. These organizations included:

Parry Sound Area Community Business & Development Centre
<https://cbdc.parrysound.on.ca>

Parry Sound Area Chamber of Commerce
<https://psachamber.ca>

YMCA of Simcoe Muskoka/Parry Sound Employment Resource Centre
<https://ymcaofsimcoemuskoka.ca/employment-services-2/>

FedNor
<https://fednor.canada.ca/en>

Northern Ontario Heritage Fund
<https://nohfc.ca>

Canadore College
<https://www.canadorecollege.ca/corporate/west-parry-sound-campus>

The Business Centre Nipissing Parry Sound
<https://tbcnps.ca>

North Bay & District Multicultural Centre
<https://www.nbdmc.ca>

Northern Ontario Angels
<https://northernontarioangels.ca>

Labour Market Group
<https://www.thelabourmarketgroup.ca>



During the consultation process, [Almaguin Community Economic Development \(ACED\)](#) was also approached to identify best practices, synergies and potential partnership opportunities to strengthen the overall region.

The organizations listed, along with many others, possess in-depth knowledge about the region, its key players, businesses, and other organizations. They understand the needs of potential businesses and prospects, including new investments, startups, and entrepreneurs considering relocating to the West Parry Sound region.

The knowledge and local connections that all the organizations within the ecosystem possess enable the success of economic development initiatives. The strength of collaboration and alignment of efforts creates a solid foundation that the WPSEDC must rely on to foster sustainable growth in the region.

For example, the YMCA Employment Resource Centre and Canadore College have a deep understanding of workforce development, focusing on skills enhancement and education. Meanwhile, the CB&DC and the Northern Ontario Angel Network are well-versed in the financial challenges and opportunities related to financing, regional business opportunities, investment attraction, and community development. The Parry Sound Area Chamber of Commerce effectively addresses business needs through advocacy and networking, while the Labour Market Group has an extensive regional network that provides insights into labour market trends, data, and future needs. Numerous organizations are involved in the economic development ecosystem, each playing a unique role and fostering growth within the region. By utilizing the expertise available, and serving as a conduit, WPSEDC can achieve greater success.

Aligning the resources of each organization involved in this space will enable WPSEDC to leverage resources effectively and better position each municipality to meet the needs of their local businesses while supporting the entire region. Cooperation and collaboration are powerful forces that help eliminate silos and break down barriers. WPSEDC should work in alignment with these organizations to foster synergy and drive economic development forward.

A different perspective.

To offer a different perspective, economic development success can be compared to a relay race. Each organization must rely on the next to pass the baton during each leg of the race. From an economic development standpoint, the goal is to support business growth and new development, create and retain jobs, and foster vitality. The regional municipalities are the leaders of this race, and they must take an active leadership role to adequately support everyone involved. No matter where organizations and businesses are located within the region, if everyone in the race works effectively together, success will be evident, and all businesses will receive the support they need.

West Parry Sound cannot be competitive unless its companies are competitive. By collaborating and working together, it is possible to raise the bar for all businesses. As leaders, WPSEDC must identify a vision and future for the region. To accomplish this, the region must be united. For example, a connected workforce with clusters built on strengths with training efforts aligned with employer needs is a requirement. Identifying areas of accelerated growth and understanding what employers truly need is critical. To help drive business, policies and supports must be implemented to foster growth. This begins with understanding businesses unique needs and working collaboratively to overcome challenges. The steps outlined below drive the actions required to achieve this overarching goal.

Step 1: Define Economic Development

Regional economic development is not a one-size-fits-all approach. It involves a collaborative process that brings together partners from government, business, and community sectors to create jobs, stabilize and grow incomes, and generate a solid tax base. Everyone must contribute to this effort. The overarching goal is to create a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive economy, which is best achieved through partnerships and collaborative efforts. To simply define regional economic development, it is best described in three pillars:

1. **Attraction:** The processes of ‘wooing’ a new business or investment to relocate or expand into the region. This can include the use of investment attraction tools, financial incentives, site selection support, reduction of red tape, open for business policies, etc.
2. **Retention:** The process of growing a long-term relationship where the region provides ongoing supports and resources to keep the business happy and thriving. This can include financial supports, access to labour, marketing and awareness, education and training resources, engagement and consultations, strong relationships and networking.
3. **Growth:** The process of nurturing the business and offering community supports to help grow, expand and stay healthy. This can include all aspects of community economic development including quality of life, housing, transportation, workforce strategies, business development opportunities, improved infrastructure, etc.

Regional economic development refers to efforts and initiatives aimed at improving the economic well-being and quality of life for a specific region. This process involves strategies and policies designed to:

- **Increase Employment Opportunities:** Creating jobs to reduce unemployment and underemployment.
- **Boost Economic Growth:** Enhancing the region's economic output and income levels.
- **Improve Infrastructure:** Developing and maintaining physical infrastructure such as roads, transportation, and utilities.
- **Foster Business Development:** Encouraging the growth of local businesses and attracting new businesses to the region.
- **Enhance Quality of Life:** Improving education, healthcare, housing, and recreational opportunities for residents.
- **Promote Sustainable Development:** Ensuring that economic growth is environmentally sustainable and benefits future generations.

Regional economic development is typically driven by a combination of government policies, private sector investment, and community involvement. It often involves collaboration between various stakeholders, including local governments, businesses, economic development agencies/organizations, educational institutions, funding partners, and non-profit organizations.

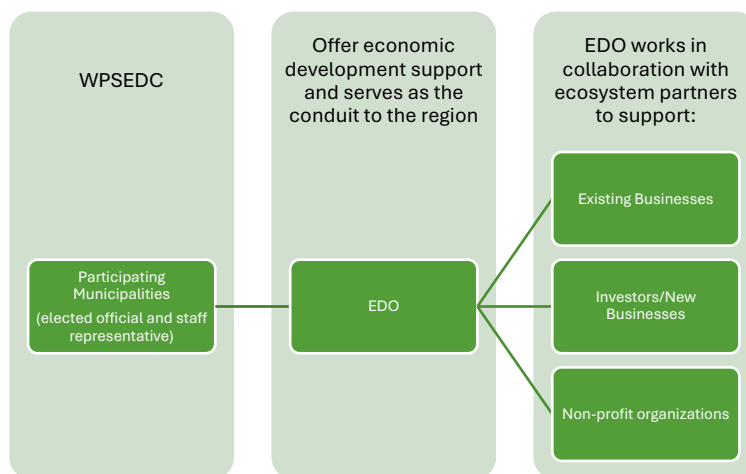
Step 2: Recognize Municipal Role in Regional Economic Development

A municipality plays a crucial role in regional economic development by acting as a catalyst, facilitator, and supporter of various initiatives aimed at improving the local economy. Given that economic development is a shared responsibility throughout the region, it is essential for the Economic Development Officer (EDO) to connect existing and potential businesses with the resources and opportunities needed to create, build, and maintain a thriving economy. Whether the EDO serves in a regional capacity or solely for one municipality, the role remains the same.

It is impractical to expect that a municipality or regional municipalities have the resources and capacity to address all needs independently. Therefore, strong reliance on and solid partnerships with other organizations specializing in various aspects of economic development are essential. It is the EDO's responsibility to build relationships, collaborate, and identify new partnership opportunities to support all businesses and organizations in the region. This collaboration is critical to achieving sustainable success.

Participating municipal councils and senior staff should establish a strong working relationship with the EDO. Through a designated municipal staff member, the EDO should have a seamless way to communicate wins, gaps, challenges, and opportunities as they relate to the specific municipality and/or the region. To create a mutually beneficial relationship, communication should flow both ways between each participating municipality and the EDO. The municipality should identify areas of focus and priority to ensure the EDO understands unique needs, if required. While all efforts to take a collaborative approach should be made, at times municipalities may need differing services or supports. For the relationship to be effective, the EDO should accommodate and customize approaches where possible.

Serving as the conduit between the region and the municipality, the following diagram visually displays this relationship.



Step 3: Understand the Ecosystem

As indicated, many organizations in the West Parry Sound region already offer economic development-related services. These organizations deliver their services based on the direction of their Board of Directors and/or funding partners. With so many organizations available, it can be challenging for businesses to navigate and identify where to seek help. The role of the regional EDO is to act as a conduit, connecting businesses with the specific resources and supports they need. If the participating municipalities support the EDO and direct this position to service regional needs, WPSEDC will naturally assume a leadership role in creating a seamless process for new and existing businesses. By thoroughly understanding the ecosystem and its partners, the EDO can guide businesses through the landscape and help them establish long-lasting relationships with each organization based on their stage in the business life cycle.

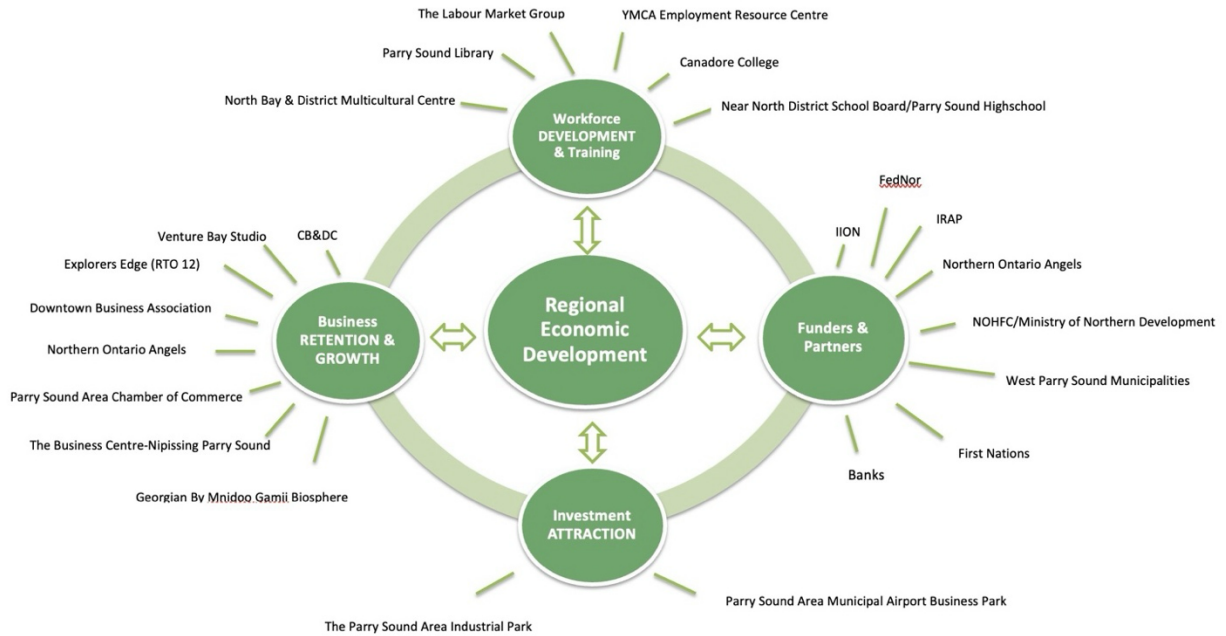
To fully understand the ecosystem, one must put themselves in the shoes of a new or existing business owner. How do they currently navigate the web of information and plethora of available resources and services? Who is the contact person to help lead them through the process? Who are the community ambassadors that can lead, advocate for, and support businesses on their journey? By supporting the regional EDO, WPSEDC municipalities play an instrumental role in this process without duplicating efforts or operating in silos. It is not the EDO's job to offer these services but to guide businesses through the ecosystem while staying current on the latest regional needs, trends, and opportunities. This may involve key aspects of economic development, including but not limited to:

- Assisting and promoting upcoming workshops, forums, and events to support entrepreneurship and business development.
- Facilitating business retention and expansion efforts.
- Supporting investment attraction through site selection, market research, distribution of community profiles, labor market data, recruitment packages, etc.
- Playing a role in workforce development strategies, education and training programming, skilled labor gap identification, and youth outmigration tactics.
- Increasing awareness of new infrastructure development, housing, transportation strategies, or opportunities around innovation and technology advancements.

It is important to remember that the role of the EDO and supporting municipalities is not to do the work but to understand the big picture and help businesses navigate the programs, resources, and partners within the ecosystem. If an economic development priority is identified, a lead partner(s) should be selected to work in collaboration with the EDO to achieve the desired result. For example, if an Investment Attraction Strategy for the region is identified as a priority, the EDO and selected partners should work collaboratively to meet the identified

goals and key performance indicators. Project-specific priorities may qualify for funding, and the EDO should develop the applications and criteria to achieve these set goals.

To provide context surrounding the number of organizations, the following provides a visual overview of a variety of partners currently operating in the ecosystem. Many organizations can be classified in multiple categories as they offer a variety of services and supports. It is important to note that not all partner organizations may not be represented.



Note: West Parry Sound Municipalities is inclusive of the Town of Parry Sound, Township of Carling, the Municipality of McDougall, the Township of McKellar, the Township of Seguin, the Township of The Archipelago, and the Municipality of Whitestone. The Town of Parry Sound is the largest player in the regional economic development ecosystem.

Step 4: Establish a New Model

Building on the definition of economic development, the WPSEDC role, and the ecosystem, it is time to put the pieces together and establish a new model. WPSEDC municipalities must agree on and define success from each of their perspectives. Rather than focusing solely on job creation, partnering municipalities should explore ways to build regional competitiveness by leveraging potential and existing strengths. With a highly productive EDO and a strong ecosystem, it is realistic to drive productivity growth over time.

Once a foundation is set for each municipality's expectations, developing a unified report card that outlines regional expectations and standards for the EDO will be easier. The goal is to create a framework that defines success, sets expectations, and manages targets. A variety of requirements may include:

- Understanding the needs of local businesses and working with partners to support these needs.
- Helping to attract new investment to under-developed sites, vacant land or buildings.
- Conducting a regional gap analysis to identify opportunities for growth.
- Ensuring community spaces are used frequently to host business-related events and activities.
- Partnering on events to stimulate networking, business development, and access to funding for existing businesses/organizations.
- Developing sector-specific initiatives to support investment attraction and business expansion goals.
- Developing grant applications for regional initiatives, non-profits and private sector businesses.

Additionally, working pillars may be established in collaboration with relevant partners in the ecosystem. The EDO could report on progress through monthly metrics and an annual business plan. These pillars may include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Workforce Development & Training Solutions
- Business Startup & Growth Resources
- Newcomer & Settlement Services
- Investment Attraction Support

New Operating Model

To guide future success, it is recommended that the current operational model be disbanded. The reserve funds should be allocated towards any costs required to formally close the organization, and the remaining funds should be redirected to support proposed future regional economic development initiatives. If necessary, funds can be evenly distributed back to the municipalities no longer participating, based on their capital share percentage. However, the remaining municipalities should retain their share within the new model. For the greater good of the region and the original purpose of WPSEDC, the accumulated reserve could further enhance new initiatives if it was re-invested into the new operating model as seed money.

The existing operating model is not conducive to grassroots economic development. With a cumbersome organizational hierarchy, difficulty aligning schedules for frequent meetings, and a lack of unified direction for economic development, it is no surprise that the model was inefficient. It is critical that the participating municipalities agree on a direction based on annual goals with identified key performance indicators. Furthermore, a seamless communication plan should be developed to ensure progress can be clearly articulated to the WPSEDC municipal representatives and each Council. For a new model to be successful, each Council must buy in and support the long-term vision. To accomplish this, communication should be frequent and flow in multiple ways. This includes written reports, presentations, a strong digital presence with a working website and social media presence, testimonials and frequent virtual/in-person meetings. Communication should flow through senior staff for regular updates with bi-annual or annual presentations to Council.

Once WPSEDC municipalities have agreed to a unified approach and identified communication expectations, the management structure must be defined.

The current model does not work. It is not effective for the EDO to report to each of the municipal CAOs and then to the Municipal Stakeholder Board comprised of elected officials. The EDO should have one direct report to manage their progress and KPI's. It is also not recommended to start a new entity as developing the governance structure, recruiting a dedicated Board of Directors, creating by-laws, policies and procedures adds additional pressure, and creates work. In addition, this adds financial and HR capacity pressure that only weighs down the organization from a governance perspective. This detracts from fostering a grassroots approach to drive economic development. However, WPSEDC should still be an active participant and drive the high-level objectives and vision regional economic development as it pertains to each of their municipalities needs.

As such, the following model is recommended:

1. WPSEDC remains as a regional brand and conglomerate of the participating municipalities.
2. WPSEDC selects a lead organization to manage day-to-day operations and oversee the EDO position. The selected organization should be established and part of the regional Economic Development ecosystem in West Parry Sound. It should be a neutral third party with the sole goal of fostering and supporting regional business growth and prosperity.
3. WPSEDC and the Lead Organization collaborate to create an MOU. The MOU should identify management and hiring expectations, annual budget, clear expectations, key areas of focus for Year 1, KPI's and a Communications Plan to ensure seamless operations. Each Municipality is responsible for providing expectations that would serve them well in the economic development space (e.g. Investment attraction support, hosting events for local businesses, one-on-one grant writing support for local non-profits, businesses or municipality, business retention support, etc.). Each Municipality may have a different list of needs, which is understandable and expected.
4. WPSEDC may consider offering in-kind contributions such as space to host events and workshops, or donations of computer equipment, cell phones, etc., to help set the EDO and regional ecosystem up for success. In turn, events, programs, and initiatives should recognize WPSEDC as a partner by using the logo and offering acknowledgement.
5. The Lead Organization should arrange working space for the EDO, including Wi-Fi, mentorship, and management support. Physical space can be provided by an ecosystem partner in a shared-space facility.
6. The Lead Organization's Executive Director or General Manager is responsible for managing the EDO's daily workload, ensuring collaborative approaches with partners, measuring KPIs, and attending frequent progress meetings with the EDO and WPSEDC representatives, Councils, and funding partners.
7. The WPSEDC continues to meet frequently with the lead organization's Executive Director/Manager and the EDO. The WPSEDC has the assurance that the deliverables important to their municipalities and those identified in the MOU in step 3 are being executed. The Board of Directors for the lead organization is not involved in this process.
8. It is understood by all that the WPSEDC carry out the vision and expectations and the lead organization Executive Director/Manager ensures the EDO has the daily support and guidance to deliver on this workload. This person is in place to help the EDO trouble shoot and navigate the ecosystem when needed.

Benefits

There are numerous benefits to be realized through this unique operating model, offering wins for both the WPSEDC municipalities and the Lead Organization. Each municipality can reflect on these advantages to understand how the new model can benefit them individually and as a region.

Benefits for Municipalities

Leadership in the Ecosystem: Positions WPSEDC municipalities as leaders in the economic development ecosystem without adding additional administrative burdens.

Support without Strain: Offers robust support for regional economic development without compromising the internal staff capacity.

Central Contact Point: Establishes a central point of contact for all businesses and new investors in the area, streamlining communication and support.

Reduced Management Requirements: Minimizes the need for municipal staff and elected officials to manage and oversee the EDO position.

Regular Updates: Ensures senior staff and councils are kept up to date on progress through structured communication methods including presentations, reports, and meetings.

Business Support: Provides access to supports for local businesses, including assistance with funding applications, networking opportunities, and hosting business development events and initiatives.

Financial Leverage: Leverages funds from regional municipalities, community partners and potential funding partners to create a greater impact.

Turnkey Operation: Creates a turnkey operation that does not add additional management requirements for CAOs and elected officials.

Clear Reporting and Communication: Establishes clear reporting requirements, standardizes processes, and promotes open communication.

Strategic Value: Considers the needs of businesses and taxpayers in each community and develops strategies to provide tangible value.

Benefits for the Lead Organization

Staff Resources: Gains access to a new staff member dedicated to advancing regional economic initiatives and strengthening partnerships within the ecosystem.

Financial Support: Receives financial support through an annual administration fee, aiding operational stability.

Increased Capacity: Enhances capacity to advance regional economic development goals effectively with direct relationships with regional municipalities and ecosystem partners.

Formalized Relationships: Formalizes a direct working relationship with participating municipalities and ecosystem partners fostering better coordination.

Funding Leverage: Leverages the partnership to apply for funding that advances regional priorities.

Enhanced Partnerships: Increases opportunities to partner with community organizations and identify new collaborative opportunities.

By implementing this model, WPSADC and the Lead Organization can collaboratively drive regional economic development, ensuring sustainable growth and prosperity for all stakeholders involved.

Proposed Budget

The following provides a sample budget of how this new model could look. The municipalities would flow their annual contribution to the Lead Organization who would be responsible for managing the expenses to operate. An Intern position has been added should WPSEDC wish to build staff capacity and a longer-term succession plan.

Revenue

Contributions	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Municipality of Whitestone	\$20,000	\$21,000	\$22,050
Township of The Archipelago	\$20,000	\$21,000	\$22,050
Township of Carling	\$20,000	\$21,000	\$22,050
Town of Parry Sound	\$25,000	\$26,250	\$27,563
Municipality of McDougall	\$20,000	\$21,000	\$22,050
Intern Funding (NOHC/FedNor)	\$0	\$35,000	\$35,000
Total	\$105,000	\$145,250	\$150,763

Expenses

Contribution	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
EDO Wages & Benefits	\$65,000	\$68,250	\$71,663
Lead Organization -Start Up Fee	\$4,000	\$0	\$0
Lead Organization -Administration Fee	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$6,000
Intern Wages & Benefits	\$0	\$40,000	\$40,000
Travel	\$5,000	\$8,000	\$10,000
Office Supplies, Materials, etc.	\$5,000	\$6,000	\$7,000
Professional Development	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000
Memberships	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000
Special Projects	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Reserve	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Total	\$100,000	\$143,250	\$149,663

Additional Municipal Contributions

Should other municipalities wish to contribute, the contribution amounts listed above could be reduced for existing members, or the working budget could expand to accommodate more initiatives. The goal is to leverage municipal contributions with provincial and federal funding programs to maximize impact. Consequently, new projects should be applied for using the special project line item.

In-Kind Contributions

In-kind contributions from municipalities, the lead organization, and ecosystem partners should be negotiated to reduce annual operating expenses. These contributions could include space, equipment, telecommunications, Wi-Fi, printing, website development, and more. Any surplus funds could be reallocated to budget lines, special projects, or used to build reserves.

Revenue Generation Ideas

A variety of revenue generation strategies could be developed to increase funding for partnerships and initiatives. These could include a fee-for-service model for the following services:

Project-Specific Support: Providing additional economic development support to any West Parry Sound municipality, such as research, marketing development, and project support services.

Funding Application Preparation: Assisting businesses and non-profit organizations not located within a participating municipality's boundary with funding applications.

Hosting Events and Workshops: Collaborating with partner organizations to host events and workshops, with a revenue-sharing model through registration fees and sponsorships.

Project-Specific Funding Applications: Applying for funding to implement larger projects such as Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E), hosting trade shows, events, and training sessions, and investment attraction initiatives in collaboration with ecosystem partners. Utilize program funds to offset a portion of wages or other expenses specific to the project.

By implementing these strategies, the WPSEDC can enhance its financial stability, expand its reach, and drive significant economic development across the region.

Actions

An action plan with next steps should be established following consensus from WPSEDC on the proposed approach.

The following template provides an example of how to develop this Action Plan.

Deliverable	Role	Timeline
Discuss with respective Councils about needs, proposed direction and next steps.	Each Municipality	September 2024
Meet to discuss Council direction and comments	WPSEDC	October 2024
Agree to new model and draft Terms of Reference	WPSEDC	November 2024