

Workforce Development: Mapping a Comprehensive Plan

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Recent discussions between economic development organizations, community stakeholder groups and government funding agencies revealed that there were some gaps and areas of overlap around workforce development initiatives. There is no doubt that this issue has become a major focus of economic development offices, service organizations, and training agencies in the Vancouver Island region. Many programs and services exist to assist employers find skilled workers and to assist unemployed persons overcome barriers to employment. However, clarification was needed regarding what services were available by which agency. EDG responded to this need by hosting a one-day session titled "Workforce Development: Mapping a Comprehensive Plan."

The timing was excellent; the Vancouver Island Economic Alliance had recently hosted a two-day Workforce Shortage Summit on November 15 and 16, which facilitated dialogue and roundtable discussions between business colleagues, and urged everyone to be a part of the solution in addressing Vancouver Island's labour needs. On Wednesday, November 28, 2007, over 30 representatives from agencies, businesses, government-funded organizations and economic development offices undertaking skill-shortages initiatives in the region met in Nanaimo to compare notes.

The goal of this interactive session was to have the participants inform each other of current and planned activities, which would assist them in their business planning as well as funding and partnering requests. Presentations from each agency were shared with the group and compiled into a framework document. Many of the agencies expressed their appreciation at having the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues and receive an overview of all initiatives being undertaken in the field of workforce development. To obtain a copy of the information grid document, contact Katie Ferland, Economic Development Coordinator at katie.ferland@nanaimo.ca or 755-4465.

Evidently there are numerous services available to employers on Vancouver Island including HR toolkits and strategies, job fairs, assistance with skilled immigrant attraction and wage subsidy programs. A wide variety of services are also available for the unemployed including job boards, job placements, on-the-job training, apprenticeship programs and resume banks. There are targeted programs specifically for immigrants, visible minorities, persons with disabilities, aboriginal people and at risk youth.

Nonetheless, there is always room for improvement. In the near future EDG will be partnering in an action oriented dialogue between employers and those that work with persons facing multiple barriers to employment. Be sure to read future EDG articles for more information. Because of the community's collaboration on issues such as workforce development, Nanaimo continues to be one of the most desirable, livable small cities in North America.