

**NORTH ISLAND EMPLOYMENT**  
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*A North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy:  
Supporting Economic and Employment Growth in the  
Mount Waddington Region*

**A STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

Prepared on behalf of:

**THE REGIONAL DISTRICT OF MOUNT WADDINGTON  
AND  
THE PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE**

Prepared by:

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**JUNE 29<sup>TH</sup>, 2010**



## IN YOUR WORDS...

### Remarks by Gordon Patterson, Keltic Seafoods Presented at the June 2, 2010 Workforce Strategy Stakeholder Forum

*My name is Gordon Patterson. I love the North Islands rich rural and marine environment, its peoples, its history and First Nation culture. I am an employer representative sitting on the steering committee to the North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy, for Mount Waddington. As a business representative I have been asked to say a "few" words here.*

*The company I work for is an off loader and processor of ocean fishes. We seasonally employ about 240 persons. Year round we employ about 75 FTE's. We employ a multicultural work force. I consider our employee base to be expertly labour competent. They are among the finest I have ever had the opportunity to work with. We employ engineers, fabricators, management professionals, supervisors, accountants, and expertly competent labourers.*

*Labour market stability is crucial to North Island development and Economical survival in a competitive world market as it is to our company.*

*Successful meeting of employment challenges is part of the equation that creates our ability to meet unforgiving business demands and regulatory matters. It is the meeting of such business demands that allows our companies to meet the marketplace competitive pressures. Employee stability is something we all challenged by. In the overall grand scheme of things given time our company has no difficulty "finding employees" on the North Island. Still, we have all the same training, competitive recruiting issues, and inter-industrial migration of employees, and other issues that all employers on the North Island face. In our case a significant challenge to a stable work force is repetitive absenteeism. Perhaps many of my colleagues will find this to be an issue as well. Never-the-less any issue regarding employee stability profoundly affects local profitability in our highly competitive labour marker. Without profitability we cannot conduct business.*

*In a diverse cultural complicated by rural sociological and amenity limitations traditional methods of addressing this matter may not work. In our company to compensate for difficult recruitment and attendances issues we utilize in house training programs and sponsored programs: i.e. fork lift operators, 5th class engineers', first aid personnel, refrigeration technicians. While we employ standard behaviour correction models, such methods are moreover only a temporary fix, and repetitive issues reoccur in all areas of challenge.*

*A coordinated solution and tactical action plan must be found to address common employment issues many North Island employers face. I believe that the North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy to support economic and employment growth may be that solution. Employer, employee, and regional administrative education is the key to successful coordinated implantation.*

*Developing a Strategy is the beginning. As leaders in industry, education, and government it is our responsibility to endorse and participate in the support the proposed Strategic Building Blocks to our economic and employment growth.*

*As an employer I have to say, "Business must buy in to this Strategy". It is only through responsive coordinated effort on the part of all stakeholders that a successful plan will be developed that assures the North Island's economic and employment stability.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document provides the rationale for and outlines the elements of a proposed *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* (the “Strategy”). For purposes of this Strategy, “North Island” refers to the area within the boundaries of the Regional District of Mount Waddington (RDMW), unless otherwise noted. This is a *regional* strategy that is intended to achieve the synergy of its “parts” – several communities, First Nations, and other stakeholders who live and work as North Islanders.

The Strategy is a product of seven months of work among project consultants, a Project Steering Committee of regional stakeholders, and over 200 individuals – mostly North Islanders – since the fall 2009. An extensive labour market analysis, a regional employer survey, four local stakeholder action planning sessions, two well-attended stakeholder forums and several Steering Committee meetings and discussions constitute the methodology for developing the Strategy.

### Situational Analysis

The economic and labour market **context** for the Strategy is laid out in detail in the main body of this report. In brief, this context includes and documents the following themes:

- Resource-based economy exacerbated by recent economic downturn;
- Population decline and population and workforce aging;
- Growth in Aboriginal labour force;
- Engagement and retention of youth;
- Need to attract and retain families and workers;
- Increasing need for education and training;
- Increased supports and services are needed for the unemployed and underemployed; and,
- Opportunities for growth in value-added resources, aquaculture, tourism, construction and renewable energy.

Based on this context and the research and consultation in the development of a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*, the Strategy highlights key workforce strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats:

#### Strengths

- EI benefits have stabilized over the past several months and declined for income assistance recipients between March/December 2009;
- Sustained development of the aquaculture industry on the North Island;
- Several First Nations with proactive economic development strategies and partnerships;
- The interest in and development of renewable energy projects; and,
- Several best practices initiatives in and adjacent to the region.

#### Weaknesses

- Dependency on resource industries;
- High unemployment and low labour force participation rates within the Aboriginal population;
- Government funding cutbacks in education and training;
- School closures and the reduction of career and work-based education programs;
- The continuing trend of population decline and out-migration; and,
- Inadequate coordination in labour market planning.

#### Opportunities

- The Aboriginal population offers a source of opportunity for employers to recruit, hire and train new entrants;
- Employers were interested in coordinated workforce development initiatives;
- There is support for a coordinating body for workforce development;
- Expansion of the North Island tourism sector with an emphasis on adventure and eco-tourism;
- The third largest cluster of potential wind and run-of-the-river energy generation capacities in BC;
- The Ministry of Housing and Social Development recently announced its new *Employment Program of British Columbia*, which provides \$360 million in programming including Employment and Labour Market Services; and,
- The Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development provides an additional \$111 million for labour market and immigration programming and \$1.88 billion for public post-secondary education institutions and programs.

#### *Threats*

- Strategies need to be developed to address the out-migration of young people who leave the North Island region;
- Competition and recruitment pressures from other regions;
- The need to reverse or minimize population declines;
- Low labour force participation rates and high unemployment among the First Nations population;
- Post-secondary education providers need to have a stronger local presence in the region;
- More community, social and recreational services and lifestyle amenities are needed in the region;
- The impact of changes in public policies on vulnerable rural communities, including increased regulations and “red tape” and the centralization of government offices and services.

A number of **key workforce challenges and gaps** were identified in the research and consultation for this Strategy. They are summarized below:

#### *Employer Gaps*

1. Lack of employer engagement;
2. Gaps between employers and among industry sectors; and,
3. Small employer human resource capacity gaps.

#### *Education and Training Delivery*

1. Insufficient access to needed post-secondary education in the region;
2. The challenge of delivering training and other services on the ground in small rural communities;
3. Shortage of secondary school work experience /career programs; and,
4. Need for applied post-secondary programs for niche industry needs.

#### *Coordination Issues*

1. The need for clear regional leadership for workforce planning and development;
2. Lack of integration of economic planning between the regional and community levels;
3. Lack of coordination among service providers and other stakeholders across the North Island, dedicated leadership; and,
4. Lack of a multi stakeholder leadership body for workforce planning and strategy.

#### *Engagement of First Nations and Those Under-Represented in the Workforce*

1. Lack of First Nations employment in the face of high unemployment;
2. Lack of coordination amongst First Nations in the North Island;
3. Other Underrepresented groups; and,
4. Youth.

#### *Funding Gaps and issues*

1. Inadequate funding generally for education, training and employment development; and,
2. Lack of understanding of funding mechanisms and capacity to link needs and funding.

Employers and other key North Island stakeholders focused throughout the project on the fundamental question of how to ensure that a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* “is not another report that sits on a shelf for lack of an **effective implementation plan.**” They came up with the following recommendations:

- There needs to be “champions” to lead and promote the implementation of the strategy, supported by a paid coordinating position. The champions would be members of a steering committee and chair sector advisory committees.
- Employers must be involved in implementing the strategy and should be represented on the steering and advisory committees.
- The strategy should be focused on a small number of priority projects, with a clear action plan, achievable goals, and well-defined, measurable outcomes.
- The measurable outcomes should have clear deliverables and indicators of successful implementation and should be measured on a consistent and regular basis and communicated to North Island stakeholders.

#### **Strategic Direction and Vision**

It is critical that the vision and plan of a North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy is rooted in the economic and social vision of the sum of the parts of North Island. The **vision for the Strategy** is:

The *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* is a regional action plan fully endorsed and implemented by local governments, Aboriginal organizations, education and service providers, employers, and residents. The Strategy is linked to the region's economic and social vision and plans. It addresses economic development and human resource challenges that would otherwise impede employment opportunities in healthy local businesses and industries.

The *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* is built on existing regional strengths to attract and retain workers in the region. Shared knowledge and resources among North Island communities and industry sectors support the implementation of relevant education, training and workforce development programs and services to new entrants, existing workers, and unemployed, underemployed and under-represented labour force groups.

The *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* is based on the following **core principles**:

1. North Island stakeholders are engaged in a collaborative manner to maximize the development and employment of residents minimizing competition for human resources.
2. Local communities, businesses, and employers are supported by plans, programs and services that assist with recruitment, retention, training and skills upgrading of employees and job-seekers that enable growth and diversification of the economy.
3. Growth in the business and service sectors through stable employment will result in improved community services and quality of life within the region.
4. The retention of residents on the North Island and the attraction of new migrants enhance community and industry growth, and contribute to a sustainable, diversified economy in the region.

There are four **long-term goals** as a platform for realizing the vision and supporting the principles of the *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*.

1. A fully supported and implemented action plan for attraction, recruitment and retention of employees on the North Island led by local government, employers and service providers that is assessed annually against targeted outcomes.
2. A comprehensive operational strategy to address the high unemployment among First Nations that is coordinated by First Nations representatives, employers and service providers which results in annual increases to First Nations labour force participation rates and employment.
3. An effective, locally-based education and training system that is planned and coordinated to meet the needs of local industry, job seekers, students and workers by delivering relevant secondary, post-secondary education, training and skills upgrading to meet North Island requirements.
4. A formal coordination and cooperation protocol among North Island communities, governments and First Nations that steers and measures the implementation of the *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*.

It is expected that an effective and sustained North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy will yield **several key outcomes** for the region over the next three to five years:

1. A sustainable structure to lead, champion and support a North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy.
2. Increased capacity of small businesses to effectively manage and utilize human resources.
3. Sustainable and effective attraction and recruitment of businesses, families and workers into the region.
4. Support of local and regional economic development and diversification through workforce development.
5. Integrated (geographic and sectoral) workforce planning and implementation.
6. Responsive education and training strategies and programs to support workers, job seekers, families and employers in the region.
7. Mechanisms to match labour demand and labour supply to maximize employment and business opportunities.
8. Enhancing First Nations' and Aboriginal people's participation in regional and local economies and employment.
9. Job seekers become independent, through achieving and maintaining sustainable labour market attachment.
10. Job seeker skill development is coordinated to meet human resource needs of employers.

### Ten-Point Action Plan

The most important aspect of the Strategy is a detailed **Ten-Point Action Plan** which is organized into two key parts:

#### Strategic Building Blocks

1. Regional Workforce Leadership and Champion Structure;
2. Regional Workforce Accord;
3. Stakeholder Action Planning Tables;
4. Integration of Regional Economic and Workforce Planning and Action; and,
5. Regional Employment and Workforce Coordination.

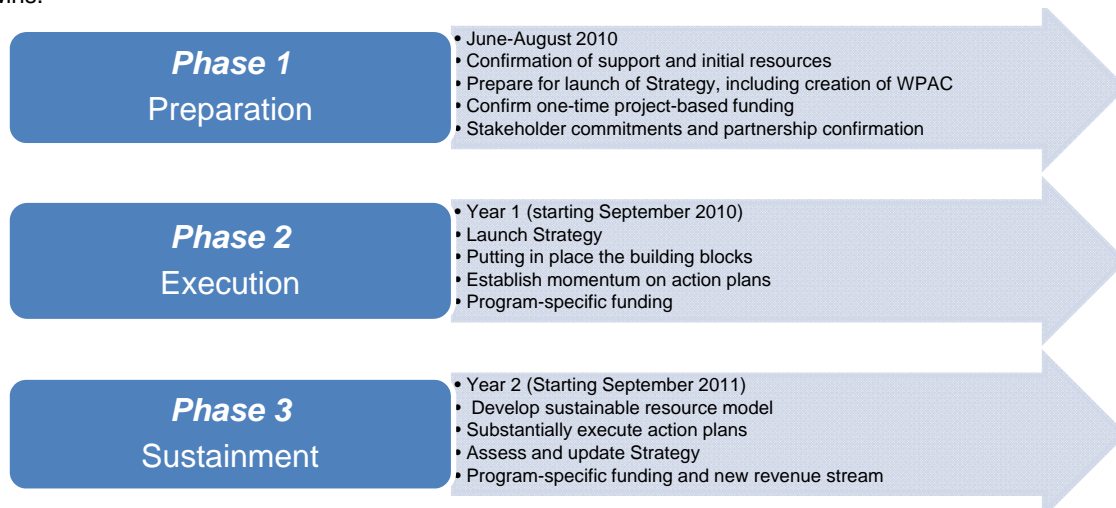
#### Tactical Action Plans

6. Workforce Attraction, Recruitment and Retention Action Plan;
7. K-12 Action Plan;
8. Post-Secondary Education Action Plan;
9. Workplace-Based Training Action Plan; and,
10. Labour Market Information and Accountability.

Each of these ten points is detailed in main body of this document. Fundamentally, when presented with this framework, an overwhelming majority of the 69 participants at a June 2, 2010 stakeholder forum supported the **Ten-Point Action Plan** – both the Strategic Building Blocks and the Tactical Action Plans. Their work before and at the forum has been incorporated into the **Ten-Point Action Plan**.

### Implementation

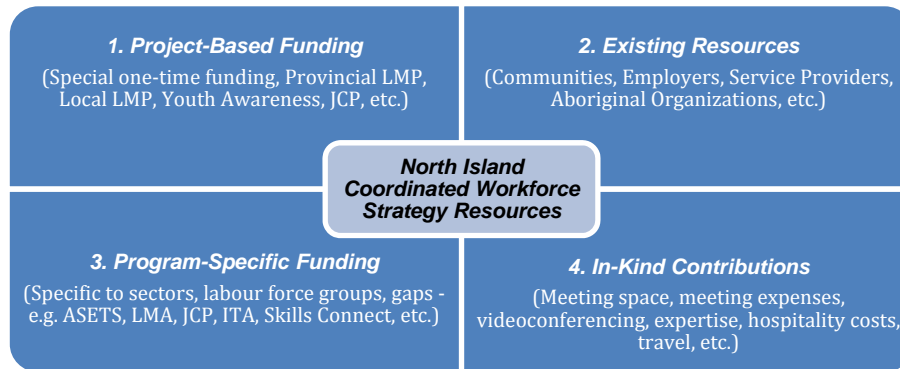
Generally, the approach for implementing a North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy is to **initially focus on a small number of priorities in the first year**, establish the leadership structure and other building blocks, establish momentum by starting to execute the action plans and achieving some “early wins.”



The multi-dimensional aspect to this **approach on resources** is highlighted in the figure below:

1. Confirming funding to resource the first year of establishing the Strategy structure, the “building blocks” (#1 to #5), including **project-based funding** to hire a full-time or near full-time Manager/Coordinator. If key stakeholders support this Strategy and structure, there is a reasonable chance of obtaining funding from provincial and/or federal programs to resource the initial phase. This first year of seed funding will enable the structure, staff person, partners and stakeholders to explore and confirm or create a more sustainable revenue stream for the core funding.
2. Part of the initial phase will require the leadership structure and staff person to confirm whether existing resources possessed by service providers and other stakeholders can be budgeted for implementing parts of the Strategy. The Strategy cannot overlook possibilities for utilizing these **existing resources**. The other aspect of this part of the resource approach is having a good grasp of existing programs that may be of use to employers and other stakeholders in the region. Our experience is that many employers – particularly very small businesses – do not have a good awareness of existing programs that may be of use to them.

3. As the specific action plans in points #6 through #10 are planned and executed, there are several government programs that could come into play, many of which provide **program-specific funding**.
4. The resource approach for this Strategy includes encouragement of **in-kind contributions** from all stakeholders, for example, to cover the costs of meetings, event and hospitality costs.



The potential funding sources for each element of the Ten-Point Plan need to support one or both types of funding needed for the Strategy: 1) Project-based funding and eventually sustained funded to resource the strategic “building blocks” of the Strategy; and 2) Program-specific funding and other specific sources targeted at each tactical “action plan.” Examples of the many programs are provided in the main body of this document.

While a local **Labour Market Partnerships (LMP) Program** funded the research and development of this Strategy, perhaps a provincial LMP may be the best option for providing the resources to start to implement the Strategy. The LMP Program “provides funding to encourage and support employers, employee or employer associations, community groups and communities in developing plans and strategies to improve their capacity for meeting human resource requirements and implementing labour force adjustments” (*Labour Market Partnerships Program Policy*, Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development).

When one reviews the “eligible” activities of the LMP Program, the program appears appropriate for supporting what this Strategy outlines. **The LMP Program could be an instrument for implementing a coastal or rural communities workforce initiative and use the North Island region and this Strategy as a pilot or demonstration project.**

As the Strategy is planned and implemented, it will be important for the leadership structure and other North Island leaders to meet with **senior officials in key provincial ministries** to discuss opportunities for partnerships, building on existing successes and resources, and new funding opportunities for elements of the Strategy. The key ministries are identified in the main body of this document.

Ultimately, successful implementation of a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Development Strategy* depends upon regional governments, First Nations, employers, and service providers. These stakeholders will have to **plan together and work cooperatively** to realize the goals and action plans of the Strategy. There is a collective will for a Strategy and the building blocks have been put in place. What remains is for the **energy and goodwill of North Island stakeholders to be harnessed and put into action** to achieve the goals of the *North Island Coordinated Workforce Development Strategy*.

**In addition to obtaining useful input on the Strategy, the June 2 Stakeholder Forum in the region was used as a gauge of the level of support for and commitment to the *Ten-Point Action Plan* among key stakeholders. Based on the response from the majority of the 69 participants, there is strong support for this Strategy and its implementation in an expeditious manner, by putting in place the recommended leadership structure and obtaining seed funding.**

**Congratulations and thank you to all North Islanders and other individuals and organizations who contributed to this Strategy!**

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Human Capital Strategies (HCS) wishes to acknowledge and thank the Project Steering Committee members for their continuing support and contribution to this project:

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Neil Smith, RDMW (Chair)              | Ardie Bazinet, Village of Port Alice      |
| Ken Crewe, Marine Harvest Canada      | Darin Kennedy, Neucel Specialty Cellulose |
| David Mitchell, Community Futures     | Gord Patterson, Keltic Seafoods           |
| Doug Preston, North Island Employment | Patti Smedley, District of Port Hardy     |
| Grace Smith, Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw    |   |

Without the leadership of Neil Smith and Greg Fletcher of the Regional District of Mount Waddington, this Strategy would not have been initiated nor completed.

HCS also wishes to recognize the over 200 other individuals, mostly North Islanders, whom participated and in and contributed to the project through forums, interviews, action planning sessions, surveys and other activities.

Thank you also to Gordon Patterson and David Mitchell for providing all photos used in this document.

## 1. INTRODUCTION



This document provides the rationale for and outlines the elements of a proposed *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* (the “Strategy”). For purposes of this Strategy, “North Island” refers to the area within the boundaries of the Regional District of Mount Waddington (RDMW), unless otherwise noted. This is a *regional* strategy that is intended to achieve the synergy of its “parts” – several communities, First Nations, and other stakeholders who live and work as North Islanders.

This North Island region includes some of the most rural and remote territory on Vancouver Island. North Island’s natural resources provide most of its jobs and represent much promise through innovative forestry practices, aquaculture, renewable energy, eco-tourism, etc. This Strategy is about transition – supporting the economic transition of small rural communities into a self-sustaining, prosperous regional economy through effective and coordinated workforce development. Successfully implemented, this Strategy will transform the North Island region into a best practice example for rural economic and workforce development.

In addition to building on the work of earlier research and planning sponsored by the North Island Post-Secondary Education Committee (NIPSEC) and other agencies, this Strategy reflects 7 months of research and consultation undertaken under the oversight of the RDMW and a Project Steering Committee composed of 9 regional stakeholders, including 3 employer representatives. This Strategy has been developed for and with the Project Steering Committee, and is based on consultation and research involving over 200 individuals, almost all located within the North Island region. Human Capital Strategies (HCS) was retained by the RDMW and the Steering Committee to research and develop this Strategy through the 3 project goals highlighted in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
**Project Goals**

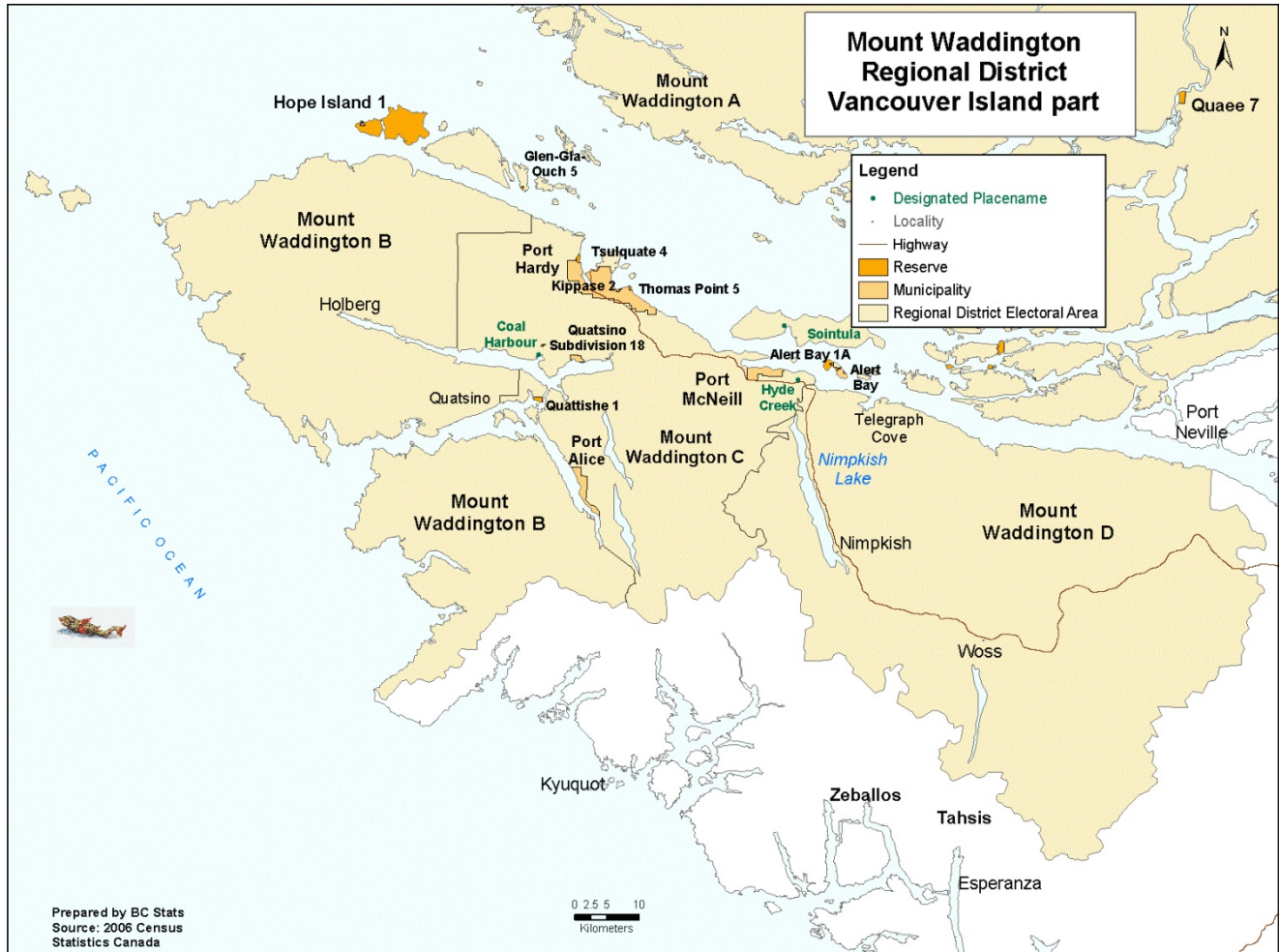


This Strategy will provide solutions to economic development challenges resulting from insufficient human resources being in place to fill employment opportunities on the North Island.

Scope

Figure 2 provides a map of the RDMW, the geographical scope for this Strategy.

**Figure 2**  
**Map of the Regional District of Mount Waddington**



The RDMW encompasses the northern third of Vancouver Island and a large area of the adjacent mainland. While relatively small in population (approximately 11,500 people), the region is one of the most important timber-producing areas in Canada; and one of the largest producing areas for farmed salmon, as well as home to one of the few specialty cellulose mills in North America.

The region is composed of the following communities: Alert Bay, Coal Harbour, Hyde Creek, Malcolm Island, Port Alice, Port Hardy, Port McNeill, Quatsino, Winter Harbour/Holberg and Woss. Over 26 percent of the region’s population is Aboriginal, with several First Nations and Tribal Councils: Da’Naxda’xw-Awaetlala First Nation, Gwa’sala’Nakwaxda’xw Band, Gwa-Wa-E nuk Tribe, Kwakiutl Band, Kwicksutaineuk Band, Mamalilikulla Qwe Qwa Sot Em Band, Musgamagw Tsawataineuk Tribal Council, ‘Namgis First Nation, Tlatlasikwala First Nation, Tsawataineuk Band, Quatsino Band, Whe La La U Area Council, and the Winalagalis Treaty Group. Six of these First Nations and the local governments of the region recently signed a *North Island Regional Protocol Agreement* to establish a cooperative framework that will lead to bilateral or multi-party agreements to address specific issues or mutual interest.

For purposes of this Strategy, “workforce development” includes education, employment, and job training and related services designed to match labour demand and labour supply, thereby helping employers create a skilled workforce and helping individuals to succeed in the workplace. This definition is adapted from a RDMW presentation at this year’s Rural Summit in Port Hardy. According to this presentation, *North Island Employment* defines, “coordinated workforce development” as the alignment of public policy and resources, employment services, education, and training and skill development systems so that they meet the human resource needs of employers and the employment, learning, and career goals of employees and job seekers.

Coordination of a variety of factors will result in greater success. These factors include: the matching of job opportunities directly with the relevant education and training programs; securing adequate funding for education and training programs; inclusion of groups under-represented in the labour force; sharing resources and knowledge among communities and sectors of the economy. This Strategy will build on existing strengths and add value where possible to attract and retain people – including reducing out-migration – in the region.

Figure 3 shows the interface of and coordination among community, economic development, Aboriginal and business organizations working together to address employer human resource needs, education and training needs of learners, and employment and career development services for job-seekers.

**Figure 3**  
**A Coordinated Model of Workforce Development**



Source: Doug Preston, *North Island Employment*, October 2009

The absence of a Coordinated Workforce Strategy is not an option; without pre-emptive workforce and economic development action, the North Island will continue to lose people, businesses, infrastructure and quality of life. Further, a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* will not eliminate all of the challenges facing their economy. However, it will allow the people and organizations of North Island to take a degree of control over their future in the region within which they choose to live, work and do business.

The urgency for the implementation of a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* is reflected in the need to address the following themes:

- Align all North Island stakeholders moving forward in a coordinated and collaborative way, rather than encouraging competition for human resources. The outcome will be to maximize benefits from limited resources: Synergy – the sum of the whole is always better than the individual parts.
- Support businesses, other employers and communities in the region by providing concrete tools, resources and strategies with which to attract, recruit, train and retain workers with the skills needed to survive, grow and diversify in North Island.
- Lead to growth in the service and supply sector and all the benefits derived from stable or growing employment levels. In turn, this will result in the improved quality of life within the region.
- Support employers by decreasing the risk to their enterprise if they can depend on a sustained well-trained workforce. Business confidence in the attraction and retention of a skilled workforce means they can turn their attention to other challenges.
- Support job seekers and employees by aligning their skill development with the human resource needs of employers.

### **Strategy Outcomes**

The successful and sustained implementation of a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* will create the potential to attain the following workforce development outcomes in the longer term:

- Increased employment;
- Reduced skill and labour shortages;
- Increased participation of Aboriginal peoples in education, training and employment;
- Increased participation of other under-represented labour force groups (e.g. at-risk youth, immigrants, persons with disabilities, visible minorities, older workers);
- Employer human resource needs are addressed;
- Economic Growth is supported by a skilled workforce and responsive service delivery;
- Ultimately, the increased attraction, retention and development of the North Island workforce will increase labour productivity and business and industry competitiveness.

### **Process for Developing this Strategy**

Over the course of its project work, HCS and the Project Steering Committee maintained a consistent focus and approach to develop a practical strategy for workforce development on the North Island that would both offer immediate benefits and continue to add value over time.

Built on existing reports and analysis and consultation with and feedback from a broad range of employers and stakeholders, the research has incorporated socio-economic assessments and local needs, requirements and advice as a foundation for a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* that will have significant impact on human resource planning and skills development on northern Vancouver Island and the adjacent mainland area. This approach was based on four essential undertakings:

1. A review of key, recurring findings in a range of labour market reports and analysis on the North Island completed over the past several years that was incorporated into a Secondary Research Report. Over 25 reports and analytical studies were reviewed and utilized by HCS as a platform for undertaking research and consultation with North Island stakeholders to confirm ongoing issues and concerns.
2. A December stakeholder meeting assessed the findings from the secondary research and a follow-up poll prioritized current issues, concerns and suggested solutions. Over 35 employers, service providers, and local government representatives participated in the day-long session and 17 stakeholders completed the poll, identifying issues and concerns and proposing best practice examples to address them.
3. Throughout January 2010, an on-line survey of over 300 North Island employers was conducted. Sixty completed responses were received, delineating workforce recruitment, retention and

training needs and forecasting workforce development requirements and suggested actions to address them.

4. In March, Action Planning Sessions were held in Alert Bay, Port Hardy, Port Alice and Port McNeill involving over 60 North Island residents representing government, First Nations, employers and associations, and education, training and service providers. The purpose of the sessions was to validate the work done to date, identify priority issues and possible solutions, and obtain commitments to action by the participants in implementing a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*.



As a culmination of these four approaches, a June 2, 2010 forum was organized to provide feedback on a summary of the draft Strategy. It was attended by 69 stakeholders whom expressed a high degree of support. This included unqualified support and commitment to be involved from organizations such as Hardy Bouys, Keltic Seafood, Marine Harvest Canada, North Island College, North Island Employment, and others. There was also general support expressed by the Port Hardy and Port McNeill Chambers of Commerce, other individual employers, and local governments and First Nations in the North Island region.

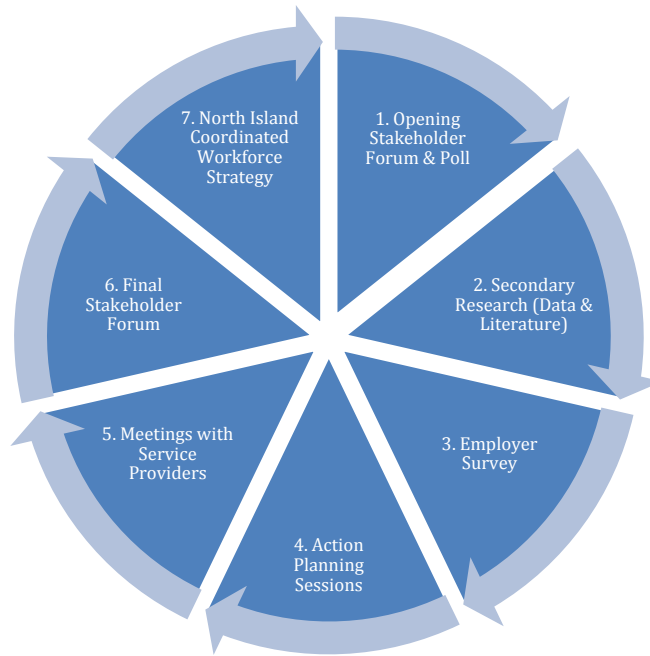
The main concerns expressed during the plenary discussion were two-fold: 1) Will employers “step up to the plate” to implement and be a part of key elements of this Strategy? 2) Is the Strategy too broad, too daunting for a region of fragmented stakeholders to address all at once? The feedback received at the June 2<sup>nd</sup> Forum and subsequent follow up submissions have been taken into account in the final Strategy document.

Figure 4 illustrates the key activities leading to the development of this Strategy.

In all of the steps, there was a consistent and strong consensus on four key areas of concern that should be the primary focus in identifying and developing solutions and strategies to workforce development on the North Island:

1. Attraction, recruitment and retention of workers and future labour force entrants;
2. Modification of education and training delivery systems to facilitate local coordination/linkages between employers and service providers;
3. Better training access and employment participation for Aboriginal people; and,
4. Coordination and cooperation between communities, government agencies, and training and service providers, and employers in the region facilitated by formal agreements and protocols.

**Figure 4**  
**The Strategy Research, Consultation and Development Process**



These key areas will drive the strategic direction, action and implementation parts of this Strategy. First, it is important to set the stage for the “what” and “how” of a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* by highlighting the strategic and labour market contexts, and the current workforce gaps and challenges.

## 2. STRATEGIC ECONOMIC AND LABOUR MARKET CONTEXT



In order to fully address these key areas for workforce development and to formulate a viable strategy with a clear action plan, achievable goals and measurable outcomes, it is important to review and assess the recent and current socio-economic and labour market conditions affecting the North Island.

In this regard, the history of the North Island is characterized by its resource-based economy and dependent upon market demand for products derived from it such as timber, lumber, fish products and extracted ores. As well, North Island communities are similar to other resource-based communities – rural, isolated, and very reliant on the industries that drive the economy. When the markets for the resource products change or access to the resource itself is restricted through regulation, scarcity or depletion, population declines, and community services and amenities are severely affected. Another characteristic of such economic change is transition, and the North Island, its economy and labour market, has been marked by transition for the past two decades as newer industries and their operating and human resource requirements emerge. Examples of these newer industries are aquaculture, tourism, gravel extraction, and solar, wind and run of river power development.

There are several key factors that impact and influence labour market and human resource development in the North Island region. As noted above, the most important of these is the resource-based nature of the North Island economy. As Table 1 shows, North Island communities' reliance on resource-based jobs far exceeds BC averages.

**Table 1**  
**Resource Employment Index for RDMW Municipalities and Unincorporated Areas, 2006**

| Indicator                         | Municipal Areas      |              |            |            |                              |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|------------|------------|------------------------------|
|                                   | Alert Bay            | Port McNeill | Port Hardy | Port Alice | BC Municipalities (BC = 100) |
| Resource Employment Index (POW)   | 70                   | 357          | 152        | 770        | 100                          |
| Place of Work Jobs                | 325                  | 1,520        | 1,730      | 460        | 1,802,280                    |
| Resource Employment Index (POR)   | 80                   | 371          | 290        | 478        | 100                          |
| Place of Residence Jobs           | 320                  | 1,600        | 1,975      | 400        | 2,092,765                    |
| Overall Resource Employment Index | 75                   | 364          | 226        | 634        | 100                          |
|                                   | Unincorporated Areas |              |            |            |                              |
|                                   | RDMW A               | RDMW B       | RDMW C     | RDMW D     | RDMW Reserves                |
| Resource Employment Index (POW)   | 153                  | 433          | 213        | 542        | 85                           |
| Place of Work Jobs                | 275                  | 115          | 90         | 325        | 270                          |
| Resource Employment Index (POR)   | 244                  | 457          | 269        | 419        | 215                          |
| Place of Residence Jobs           | 405                  | 100          | 460        | 185        | 445                          |
| Overall Resource Employment Index | 207                  | 444          | 260        | 497        | 166                          |

Source: *Community Economic Performance in ICET Region*, Island Coastal EconomicTrust

The major resource industries in the North Island are forestry and fishing, and as they have declined over the past two decades due to global economic conditions and regulatory policy changes, there have been significant job losses and limited opportunities for labour force development. Mirroring the decline in resource industries, the overall population of the RDMW has fallen throughout the past

decade from 13,111 in 2001 to 12,341 in 2006, a decline of 8.1 percent. BC Stats projects this trend to continue through 2011 with a further 6 percent drop and for the next 25 years with a further potential decline of 17 percent.

The geographic realities of the North Island also influence its economic and labour market development. Access to North Island communities is limited to the two lane Island Highway, BC Ferry transport and small airline routes through Port Hardy.

Like other BC communities and regions the median age of the population is rising due to demographic shifts, but for the North Island there is an additional implication. As a survey report in 2006 for the North Island Post Secondary Education Committee (NIPSEC) revealed:

When asked about life plans, 30% of Grade 12 students indicated that they plan to leave the North Island Region and never return; 49% plan to leave but may return in the future; 15% prefer to stay but are willing to leave for work or school; and 4% identified with the statement “this is my home and I’m not leaving.” Data were similar for grade 8 students. Results from First Nations students indicate a stronger desire to stay in the region than that seen in non-Aboriginal students, but 66% still indicate a preference to leave (Bruce and Bryan Rutley, *North Island Post Secondary Education Needs Assessment*, 2006).

Addressing this trend and proposing options to reverse are essential for a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* because it has serious negative impacts for employers regarding new labour force entrants and future workforce requirements.

Other factors influencing the North Island labour market are part of the bigger picture faced by other Island, BC and Canadian regions. These include economic, demographic, social and cultural realities, trends and issues that impact labour force development as well as social and family requirements such as housing, daycare and recreations services. All of them impact and influence a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, economic change has reduced the region’s ability to depend on the resource-based economy. Closure of the Island Copper Mine in Port Hardy in 1995 represented the loss of a major employer, resulting in thousands of residents moving from the region. Changes in fish populations and consequent changes in regulation have resulted in severe decreases to the commercial fishing industry, although aquaculture has demonstrated significant growth opportunity over the past decade. In addition, declines in the forest industry have heightened the difficulties of depending on resource extraction as the driver of the economy. By 2000, the North Island saw three-quarters of its fish plants, including the Maple Leaf facility in Port Hardy, close for business. In 2004, the Port Alice mill shut down, although it has subsequently reopened under Neucel Specialty Cellulose in 2006 and recent investment by Chinese interests are promising for market expansion. As well, there has been growth in the tourism and services sectors and their contribution to the North Island economy, but this growth has not offset the losses in tax revenues and employment with the downsizing of resource industries. However, primary industries like forestry, while in decline overall, continue to be significant for the region, which is reflected in the expected growth rate of 3.5 percent between 2008 and 2013. (BC Stats, *BC Regional Employment Projection Model, 2008-2013*).

As previously mentioned, there has been an increase in the median age of residents in the region which likely can be attributed to younger workers moving from the region seeking better employment opportunities. This is demonstrated in the Table 2 from Statistics Canada, showing a change in population, participation rates, employment, and employment rates 2006 versus 2001.

**Table 2**  
**RDMW Labour Market Indicators, 2001 and 2006**

| Mount Waddington Region     | 2001  | 2006  | Change |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|--------|
| Total Population 15 & Older | 10120 | 9290  | -8.2%  |
| In the Labour Force         | 7560  | 6615  | -12.5% |
| Employed                    | 6750  | 5890  | -12.7% |
| Unemployed                  | 810   | 720   | -11.1% |
| Not in the Labour Force     | 2560  | 2675  | 4.5%   |
| Participation Rate (%)      | 74.7  | 71.2  | -4.7%  |
| Employment Rate (%)         | 66.7  | 63.4  | -5.0%  |
| Unemployment Rate (%)       | 10.7% | 10.9% | 1.9%   |

Source: Statistics Canada, *Census 2006*.

The decline in population is projected to continue going from 12,341 in 2006 to 11,290 in 2015. Most worrisome for the North Island labour market is the continued out-movement of younger workers as other districts on Vancouver Island and British Columbia in general will experience demand pressures to recruit labour force participants.

Ference Weicker & Company in its preliminary report for the Vancouver Island Economic Alliance (VIEA), *Vancouver Island Collaborative Workforce Strategy*, forecasts that 180,000 new workers will be required by Vancouver Island employers between 2006-15, and that demand will only be met by aggressive recruitment and in-migration. In the same report, employers in North Island projected an annual growth rate of -2 percent in overall number of employees, reinforcing the need for a comprehensive workforce development strategy if younger labour force entrants and participants are not going to be lured away to employment opportunities elsewhere. This is particularly critical given that nearly 27 percent of the North Island is under the age of 19, 10 percent between ages 20-29, 12 percent between ages 30-39, and 28 percent between ages 40-55 – the prime labour force participation demographic.

Another critical labour market factor for the North Island is the Aboriginal population. As Table 3 illustrates, the Aboriginal population as a percentage of total population (over 26 percent) is significantly higher than the BC average at four percent.

**Table 3**  
**Total population by Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal ancestry, RDMW, 2006**

| Total Aboriginal Ancestry Population      | 3055        | 26.28%        |
|---|-------------|---------------|
| <b>Adjusted Total Aboriginal Ancestry</b> | <b>2283</b> | <b>19.17%</b> |
| Namgis                                    | 632         | 27.68%        |
| Whe-la-la-U                               | 183         | 8.02%         |
| Kingcome                                  | 187         | 8.19%         |
| Gilford                                   | 55          | 2.41%         |
| Hope Island                               | 5           | 0.22%         |
| Quatsino                                  | 234         | 10.25%        |
| Kwakiutl                                  | 305         | 13.36%        |
| Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw                     | 482         | 21.11%        |
| Métis                                     | 200         | 8.76%         |
| <b>Non-Aboriginal ancestry population</b> | <b>8570</b> | <b>73.72%</b> |
| <b>Adjusted Non-Aboriginal ancestry</b>   | <b>9627</b> | <b>80.83%</b> |

Source: RDMW adjusted population data and Census 2006, Stats Canada

The percentage of Aboriginal people is projected to increase, and, as elsewhere in BC, has high unemployment and low labour force participation rates. A report prepared for Canadian Policy Research Networks in 2009, *Investing in Aboriginal Education: An Economic Perspective*, pointed out the following:

- The Aboriginal population is much younger than the population average, with a median age in 2006 of only 26.5 years, compared to 39.5 years for all Canadians.
- If the Aboriginal population’s employment and participation rates reach 2006 non-Aboriginal levels by 2026, it is projected that the Aboriginal population will account for 19.9 percent of labour force growth and 22.1 percent of employment growth between 2006 and 2026 (Andrew Sharp and Jean-Francois Arsenault, 2009).

This is echoed in a labour market demand profile for the North Island College Region prepared by the North Vancouver Island Aboriginal Training Society that, the Aboriginal youth (15 – 24 years old) population in the region of 3,360 accounts for 19.2 percent of the youth population in the region. As with the Aboriginal population across the province, the Aboriginal population in the region is younger and faster growing than the non-Aboriginal population (North Vancouver Island Aboriginal Training Society, *Labour Market Demand Profile for North Vancouver Island, 2008*).

Although detailed labour force statistics for the Aboriginal population are hard to come by, especially on a regional scale, it is possible to reach some general conclusions about Aboriginal people in the North Island. With the exception of Alert Bay where, based on the 2006 Census, 47 percent of the population is Aboriginal and the labour force participation rate is 77.3 percent and the unemployment rate is 4.4 percent, the three most rural community areas with predominant Aboriginal populations show a markedly different profile, as Table 4 shows.

**Table 4  
Aboriginal Labour Market Indicators on Three Reserves in RDMW**

| Reserve Area | Total Population | Aboriginal Population | Labour Force | Participation Rate (%) | Employment Rate (%) | Unemployment Rate (%) |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|--------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Kippase      | 271              | 250                   | 115          | 56.1                   | 41.5                | 21.7                  |
| Quatsino     | 235              | 230                   | 100          | 62.5                   | 43.8                | 25                    |
| Tsulquate    | 435              | 420                   | 125          | 44.6                   | 26.8                | 40                    |

Source: Census 2006, Stats Canada

The Kippase, Quatsino and Tsulquate reserve areas show unemployment rates 3-5 times higher than other areas of the North Island and BC in general. This is keeping with other aboriginal communities when compared with non-aboriginal communities. As negative as these statistics are, they point to opportunity for employers facing future skills shortages.

In addition, employers working independently from each other to address labour force development issues have restricted the regional district’s ability to facilitate economic development, thereby reducing effective coordination with communities, government, First Nations, and business. This has led to duplication of effort and generated conflicting or inconsistent messages to current and future workers. However, the NIPSEC Survey found that employers expressed a willingness to re-direct training funds from out-of-region courses to in-region training if programs could be implemented locally, and 72 percent were interested in participating in a regional strategy to coordinate training programs.

**North Island Labour Demand and Supply**

In terms of overall employment within the North Island based on the 2006 Census, the following tables break down distribution by municipality and more rural regions. The first part of Table 5 is employment

by place of work (POW) and the second part is by place of residence (POR).

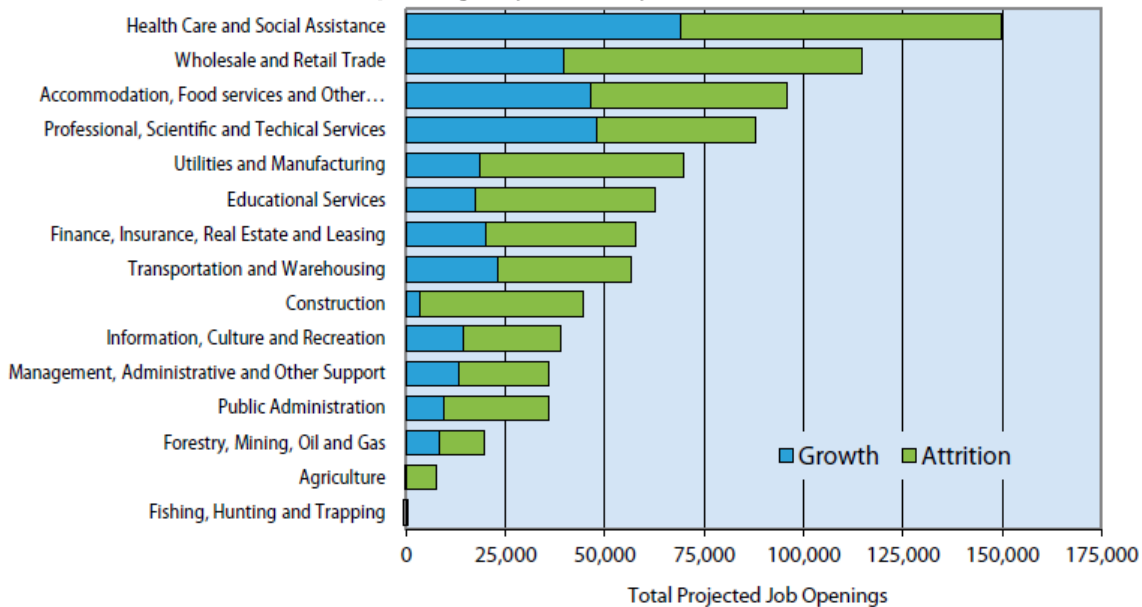
**Table 5**  
**Employment Change (2001 - 2006), by Place of Work, RDMW**

| Employment in Municipalities, by Place of Work, 2001-2006 |           |           |                       |  |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------------------|--|
| Municipality  | 2001      | 2006      | 2001-2006 Growth Rate | Place of Work Employment Growth Index (BC=100) |
| Alert Bay   | 295       | 325       | 10.20%                | 119  |
| Port McNeill  | 1,545     | 1,520     | -1.60%                | -19  |
| Port Hardy  | 2,100     | 1,730     | -17.60%               | -206   |
| Port Alice  | 775       | 460       | -40.60%               | -475   |
| BC  | 1,660,090 | 1,802,280 | 8.6%                  | 100  |
| <b>Non-Municipality</b>                                   |           |           |                       |  |
| RDMW A  | 285       | 275       | -4%                   | -41  |
| RDMW B  | 140       | 115       | -18 %                 | -208   |
| RDMW C  | 175       | 90        | - 49%                 | -567   |
| RDMW D  | 405       | 325       | -20%                  | -231   |
| BC  | 1,660,090 | 1,802,280 | 8.6%                  | 100  |

Source: Community Economic Performance in ICET Region. Island Coastal Economic Trust

Chart 1 shows trends in employment growth patterns in BC's future labour market, including significant growth (combination of new jobs and openings from attrition) in Health Care, Trade, Accommodation and Food Services, and Professional/Scientific/ Technical Services sectors in BC to 2017.

**Chart 1**  
**Job Openings by Industry, BC, 2007-2017**



Source: Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, Ten-Year Employment Outlook for BC, COPS BC Unique Scenario, 2007-2017. 2010.

Another key trend is the fact that the large proportion of future new job openings in BC will require some degree of post-secondary education or training. According to the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development (*Ten-Year Employment Outlook for BC: 2007-2017, 2010*), over three-quarters of new openings will require some post-secondary education, including certificate, diploma, degree and apprenticeship credentials. These overriding trends will be reflected in the North Island region.

Table 6 shows the overall employment picture by sector for the North Island from the *Census 2006*. While regional stakeholders have concerns about the reliability of this data and it is now four years old, it does provide an order of magnitude snapshot of employment before the latest economic downturn.

**Table 6  
Employment in RDMW by Industry, 2006**

| Industry Sector   | Employment  |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Goods Producing Sector</b>                             |             |
| Agriculture (including Aquaculture)                       | 400         |
| Forestry, Fishing, Mining, Oil & Gas                      | 1280        |
| Utilities   | 20          |
| Construction  | 300         |
| Manufacturing   | 410         |
| <b>Sub-total</b>  | <b>2410</b> |
| <b>Services Producing Sector</b>                          |             |
| Retail & Wholesale Trade                                  | 835         |
| Transportation & Warehousing                              | 400         |
| Finance, Insurance, Real Estate & Licensing               | 170         |
| Professional, Scientific & Technical Educational Services | 300         |
| Business, Building & Other Support Services               | 180         |
| Educational Services                                      | 390         |
| Health Care & Social Assistance                           | 450         |
| Information, Culture & Recreation                         | 195         |
| Accommodation & Food                                      | 470         |
| Other Services  | 215         |
| Public Administration                                     | 445         |
| <b>Sub-total</b>  | <b>4050</b> |
| <b>Total Employed</b>                                     | <b>6460</b> |

Source: BC Stats, *Community Facts*

While it fared better than other parts of Canada, BC's economy shrank in 2009 for the first time since 1982 – the worst downturn in our country since the Great Depression (BC Stats, *Economy Shrinks for the First Time Since 1982*, Issue 10-22, June 4, 2010). During the global economic downturn of the last almost two years, further economic restructuring of the BC and North Island resource sector employment has occurred and Employment Insurance (EI) claimants and Income Assistance (IA) cases have increased and are now leveling off. For example, in the North Island region, EI and IA clients as a percent of population aged 19-64 increased from 3.6 percent in September 2007 to a high of 11.7 percent in March 2009, and leveled off to 7 percent by September 2009 (BC Stats, <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/lss/iaui/iaei4.pdf>). Despite this trend, the Mount Waddington region continues to show signs of a labour supply surplus. In North Island Employment's last three years of job postings, job numbers have declined from 632 to 328; while its number of clients served has increased from 1,090 to 1,456 (NIEFS Database, 2010). This reflects the need to retool and retrain significant portions of the region's workforce.

In terms of looking forward, Table 7 shows employment projections to 2013 in the North Island College region for Goods Producing and Service Producing industries. While the NIC region includes four regional districts of which RDMW is one, it is interesting to note that employment in Forestry (3.5

percent), and in manufacturing sectors such as Wood Products (2.5 percent), Mineral Products (2.0 percent), and Metal Fabrication and Machinery (2.5 percent) have the highest projected annual growth rates. Services in Computer Systems (2.4 percent) and Health and Social Assistance are projected to be the fastest growing service producing industries.

**Table 7  
Employment Projections by Industry, North Island College Region, 2008-2013**

| Industry Category                       | Estimated Employment |               | Avg. Annual % Change Over 5 Years |
|---|----------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|
|   | 2008                 | 2013          |                                   |
| <b>Goods Producing Industries</b>       |                      |               |                                   |
| Agriculture                             | 1,500                | 1,550         | 0.6                               |
| Forestry                                | 2,660                | 3,120         | 3.5                               |
| Fishing, Hunting & Trapping             | 600                  | 600           | 0.1                               |
| Oil & Gas                               | 60                   | 60            | 1.5                               |
| Mining (non Oil & Gas)                  | 840                  | 770           | -1.6                              |
| Services to Mining                      | 200                  | 210           | 0.4                               |
| Utilities                               | 420                  | 420           | 0.2                               |
| Construction                            | 7,420                | 6,930         | -1.3                              |
| Mfg.-Food & Beverages                   | 1,560                | 1,660         | 1.2                               |
| Mfg.-Wood Products                      | 1,210                | 1,380         | 2.8                               |
| Mfg.-Paper Products                     | 1,740                | 1,790         | 0.6                               |
| Mfg.-Printing                           | 170                  | 130           | -5.0                              |
| Mfg.-Rubber, Plastics & Chemicals       | 90                   | 100           | 2.7                               |
| Mfg.-Mineral Products                   | 200                  | 220           | 2.0                               |
| Mfg.-Metal Fabrication & Machinery      | 340                  | 390           | 2.5                               |
| Mfg.-Computers, Electronics, Electrical | 20                   | 30            | 1.8                               |
| Mfg.-Transportation Equipment           | 240                  | 270           | 1.7                               |
| Mfg.-Other                              | 530                  | 560           | 1.3                               |
| <b>Total Goods Producing</b>            | <b>19,800</b>        | <b>20,170</b> | <b>0.4</b>                        |
| <b>Service Producing Industries</b>     |                      |               |                                   |
| Wholesale Trade                         | 1,530                | 1,630         | 1.3                               |
| Retail Trade                            | 10,250               | 10,710        | 0.9                               |
| Transportation                          | 3,520                | 3,760         | 1.4                               |
| Finance, Insurance & Real Estate        | 3,420                | 3,600         | 1.1                               |
| Professional-Business Services          | 2,310                | 2,450         | 1.2                               |
| Professional-Computer Systems           | 340                  | 380           | 2.4                               |
| Professional-Other Services             | 920                  | 1,000         | 1.7                               |
| Management/Administrative/Other Support | 2,890                | 3,000         | 0.7                               |
| Education                               | 5,410                | 5,460         | 0.2                               |
| Health & Social Assistance              | 8,410                | 9,350         | 2.2                               |
| Information, Culture & Recreation       | 2,980                | 3,140         | 1.1                               |
| Accommodation & Food Services           | 7,230                | 7,760         | 1.4                               |
| Other Services                          | 3,010                | 3,100         | 0.6                               |
| Government                              | 4,870                | 4,860         | 0.0                               |
| <b>Total Service Producing</b>          | <b>57,080</b>        | <b>60,200</b> | <b>1.1</b>                        |
| <b>Total All Industries</b>             | <b>76,880</b>        | <b>80,370</b> | <b>0.9</b>                        |

Source: BC Stats, BC Regional Employment Projection Model, 2008-2013.

Table 8 shows the same College region data by major occupational categories. While all occupations in the region are projected to grow by 0.9 percent, Health (2.1 percent) and Natural & Applied Science (1.1 percent) occupations stand out as the fastest growing ones, with Health jobs contributing the single largest number of new jobs (460) during this period.

**Table 8**  
**Employment Projections by Occupational Category, North Island College Region, 2008-2013**

| Occupational Category   | Estimated Employment |               | Avg. Annual % Change Over 5 Years |
|---|----------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|
|   | 2008                 | 2013          |                                   |
| Management occupations  | 6,960                | 7,240         | 0.8                               |
| Business, finance & administrative occupations                          | 11,240               | 11,760        | 0.9                               |
| Natural & applied sciences & related occupations                        | 3,480                | 3,660         | 1.1                               |
| Health occupations  | 4,430                | 4,890         | 2.1                               |
| Occupations in social science, education, government service & religion | 6,080                | 6,350         | 0.9                               |
| Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport                       | 1,990                | 2,070         | 0.9                               |
| Sales and service occupations   | 20,610               | 21,670        | 1.0                               |
| Trades, transport and equipment operators & related occupations         | 14,170               | 14,270        | 0.1                               |
| Occupations unique to primary industry                                  | 4,720                | 5,030         | 1.3                               |
| Occupations unique to processing, mfg. & utilities                      | 3,200                | 3,420         | 1.3                               |
| <b>All occupations</b>  | <b>76,880</b>        | <b>80,370</b> | <b>0.9</b>                        |

Source: BC Stats, BC Regional Employment Projection Model, 2008-2013.

Issues of labour supply are influenced by a broad range of factors including demographics of the student and working age populations, economic cycles and industry restructuring, the real and perceived availability of regional jobs, the offering of labour market focused education and training programs, in and out migration patterns, and socio-cultural considerations, such as housing costs and availability, daycare, living conditions, and the availability of services and amenities.

In demographic terms, Table 9 shows the North Island overall population by age groups. Aside from the disturbing drop in the overall population, this table shows that over 57 percent of the population is the prime workforce participation cohorts between ages 15 – 54, although as Chart 3, from the *Census 2006*, illustrates the percentage of the population under 45 shrunk by 11 percent between 2001 and 2006.

**Table 9**  
**Population by Age Group, RDMW, 2006 and 2001-2006 Change**

| Age Group            | Population in 2006 | Distribution in 2006 |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| 0 - 4                | 730                | 6.27%                |
| 5 - 14               | 1590               | 13.65%               |
| 15 - 24              | 1540               | 13.22%               |
| 25 - 34              | 1205               | 10.35%               |
| 35 - 44              | 1780               | 15.29%               |
| 45 - 54              | 2205               | 18.94%               |
| 55 - 64              | 1620               | 13.91%               |
| 65+                  | 1000               | 8.59%                |
| Census Total 2006    | 11670              | 100%                 |
| Adjusted Total 2006  | 11910              |                      |
| % change (2001-2006) | -11.00%            |                      |
| Median Age           | 40                 |                      |

Source: *Census 2001 & 2006*, Stats Canada

This downward trend in the prime working age population reflects the difficult economic conditions and the increasing out-migration of young people about to enter the labour market and labour force participants relocating to job opportunities.

Although the labour force participation rate in the North Island was 71.2 percent in 2006, the unemployment rate was 10.96 percent. The participation rate for males was 77.1 percent and 64.7 percent for females – both comparable to BC as a whole. If these numbers indicate that labour force participation is at or near capacity, it will be crucial to expand the economy and foster industry growth in order to create employment opportunities for the youth entrants’ cohort over the next several years. This would include expanding workforce education and training programs and creating career pathways in key target sectors – initiatives that have increased in priority since the economic downturn in 2008.

Based upon NIEFS client statistics in its 2009 Annual Report (Table 10), there is a core potential workforce on the North Island enrolled in skills upgrading and job search activities, and as the table below illustrates, the number of their clients enrolled in employment oriented programs represents a source of future recruits for North Island employers.

**Table 10**  
**North Island Employment Foundation Society, Port Hardy Clients by Program, 2009**

| Funder                            | Program                        | Number of Clients |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Service Canada (ELMS)             | Employment Assistance Services | 1,456             |
| Coastal Employment Network (MEIA) | Community Assistance Program   | 34                |
| GT Hiring (MEIA)                  | BC Employment Program          | 35                |
| Service Canada (ELMS)             | Youth Services Canada          | 28                |

*Source: NIEFS Annual Report 2008/09, North Island Employment Foundation Society*

Although there is a core potential workforce engaged in skills development and employment training programs as the table above illustrates, the ability to place these people is dependent upon employers with a demand for new employees. In this regard, BC Stats in its February 2010 report, entitled *Establishment/Location Counts*, showed that for the Mount Waddington Regional District businesses with employees dropped from 630 in 2001 to 354 in 2009. Addressing business decline is a key component in population retention and workforce development.

The area of education and training has been raised consistently in reports dealing with youth and workforce entry in the North Island. The 2006 NIPSEC survey of grade 8 and 12 students found that 83 percent reported barriers to attending post-secondary programs. Cost was the main barrier identified by 52 percent, followed by meeting entry requirements (28 percent), difficulty in finding appropriate programs (22 percent) and distance (21 percent). In terms of addressing current and future labour force supply and also to deal with employers’ demand for skilled workers, the need for innovation in post-secondary education and training programs and their methods of delivery have been recurring priority issues.

The same survey found strong support for the Port Hardy Campus of North Island College (NIC) becoming a campus with permanent full-time programs, but overriding economic conditions and government funding restraints have mitigated against development since 2006.

As Table 11 shows, after total “unduplicated headcount” enrolment peaked in 2007/08, and has declined since then, enrolments in Academic, Development, and Health and Human Service programming have increased in the last one or two years in Port Hardy.

However, Industry Training and Continuing Education enrollments have declined in recent years, with the exception of Tourism (“Short Entry-Level”) enrolments, which have continually increased since 2005/06. It should be noted that while the Trades, Technical and Tourism category of programs shows very little activity, some programs in this area are delivered through Industry Training and Continuing Education.

**Table 11**  
**North Island College Enrolment Trends, Port Hardy Campus, 2003/04-2009/10**

| Year                                     | Unduplicated Headcount |              |              |              |              |              |              |
|--|------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|  | 2009/10                | 2008/09      | 2007/08      | 2006/07      | 2005/06      | 2004/05      | 2003/04      |
| Academic                                 | 193                    | 146          | 260          | 291          | 242          | 257          | 264          |
| Developmental, Aboriginal and IE         | 111                    | 86           | 71           | 82           | 99           | 135          | 111          |
| Health, Human Services & ABT             | 115                    | 99           | 90           | 191          | 180          | 175          | 22           |
| Industry Training & Continuing Education | 614                    | 782          | 863          | 642          | 644          | 708          | 487          |
| Trades, Technical and Tourism            | 5                      | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            | 0            |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>1,038</b>           | <b>1,113</b> | <b>1,284</b> | <b>1,206</b> | <b>1,165</b> | <b>1,275</b> | <b>1,148</b> |

Source: North Island College data table, 2010, North Island College

It should also be noted that according to NIC, its enrolments have increased over the last decade as a proportion of the total 15-35 year old cohort.

Lastly, regarding labour supply, immigrants make up less than nine percent of the current population, and because they tend to locate in communities where previous immigrants have settled, the rural nature of the North Island is not a strong attraction in this regard. Given the population size and demographics of the North Island, in-migration, whether from other parts of BC and Canada or internationally, has to be key element in workforce development in the longer term. This points to the need for a clearly focused strategy that promotes the strengths of the region – its natural beauty, recreational opportunities – coupled with a strong industry base and secure employment as the foundation for attracting skilled immigrants and migrants from elsewhere in Canada.

The issue of the attraction and better utilization of existing and new immigrants and foreign workers in the North Island region, like for many rural communities outside major centres – is a sensitive one. Stakeholders and citizens do not want to see jobs go to people not already living here if there is a supply of unemployed and underemployed people.

While this is a valid concern for North Islanders, it is hoped it is a short-term phenomenon; if the regional economy grows and diversifies in a way many want it to, the region will need to look at how to attract people from outside the region, including immigrants and people from other parts of the BC and Canada. Recently, BC's Minister of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development was quoted as saying, "Immigration is the key to future economic growth in BC," adding, "Even though the economy has slowed down, skilled labour shortages remain" (Victoria Times Colonist, June 18, 2010, p. B1). While one can dismiss this as a current reality in the Lower Mainland, Victoria and a few hot spots such as the Northeast region of the province, demographic factors and the attainment of economic objectives in the North Island region will make it a reality eventually. The other consideration is that attracting workers and families to the region is very much linked with the needed business attraction that municipalities are pursuing. The expansion or relocation of a few major companies in the region is all it may take to create a very tight labour market that requires attracting new workers.

### Training for What?

A key consideration throughout the development of a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* has been the issue of job training. Training programs, funding and delivery will continue to be at the forefront as this Strategy is implemented. A fundamental component of the training issue is the basic question: Training for what? This question has two components:

1. Training for specific jobs and skills upgrading to maintain performance at a high level; and,
2. Training of a more general and portable nature but skills focused to better prepare trainees for a variety of jobs based on changing labour market demand.

Both types of training are valid and valuable, but the first achieves its greatest effect in a buoyant economy and labour market and is best suited to large, stable employers. The second is less job-focused and more trainee-focused and is designed to provide portable skills that cut across industries, so that in stressed economies and tight labour markets, workers are more marketable to a range of employers. In a resource-based economy – for example, one reliant on forestry and forest products – in good times, specific job training is in high demand, but when a downturn occurs, workers with general training and portable skill sets are the most likely to remain and find alternate employment.

As a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* is implemented in this rural economy in transition, focusing on general training and skills development would appear to make sense for both new labour force entrants and workers who may need to move between industries. However, this will not help the declining population if workers with portable skills seek employment opportunities or are recruited by employers out of the region.

In 2006, NIPSEC commissioned an employer “need assessment” survey of 45 employers. The results provided both general and specific employment opportunities that would be well served by appropriate training and funding programs. That research, coupled with the completed primary research in support of the Strategy provide a solid data base and answers to the “for what” question as it applies to the North Island.

To help address the dilemma of “training for what”, it is useful to look at the Employer Survey conducted for this project and how North Island employers described their training needs. The survey was sent to approximately 300 employers in the region. Sixty employers responded to the survey; approximately a 20 percent response rate. The respondents included essentially all large and medium-sized enterprises as well as many small businesses. Its findings include the following:

- Thirty-two percent of the responding employers are in resource/primary industries, the largest being fishing and forestry (both 6.25 percent). Twenty-one percent are in tourism and hospitality; 32 percent in other services; almost 6 percent in manufacturing; and just over 4 percent in construction.
- Almost 14 percent of responding employers project an increase in full-time employees of 25 percent or higher over the next three years. Almost half (49 percent) of respondents project some degree of increase in full-time employees. Over 7 percent expect to increase by more than 50 percent. A total of 10 percent of responding employers anticipate a reduction in full-time employees over the next 3 years, most of which expect a one to 10 percent decline.
- Hardest to fill jobs among responding employers are management and business/finance/administration (29 percent), sales and service (21 percent, most of which are tourism/hospitality jobs), trades/transport/equipment operators (16 percent), and processing/manufacturing/utilities (9 percent).
- Top reasons for hard to fill vacancies are “no qualified staff available” (21 percent), “difficult to attract people into this type of career” (13 percent), “compensation – can’t afford to pay” (10 percent), and “seasonal work” (almost 10 percent). Another 5 percent of respondents identified a lack of work ethic among jobseekers and the remoteness of their location as reasons.
- Among young people (15 to 24), responding employers find the most lacking transferable skills to be life skills (attitude, punctuality, hygiene, and customer relations), problem-solving and oral communication. “Computers” was the least lacking.
- In terms of what strategies are needed in the region to address workplace needs and turnover with an aging workforce, responding employers rate in-house training (16 percent of respondents) the highest, followed by greater use of flexible schedules (by 15 percent), succession planning (by 13 percent), and youth programs (e.g. Skills for Success Youth Program) (by 11 percent).
- Interestingly, 65 percent of employers indicate that the post-secondary education system does not meet their needs in terms of training and skills development programs for *new and existing*

*workers*. The most cited reasons behind this were most a lack of needed training programs in the region, particularly for specialized and tourism-related jobs (partly due to lack of critical mass in numbers of potential students).

- Responding employers employed 145 Aboriginal people, including one that employed 80. Fifty-nine percent of employers did not currently employ Aboriginal people. However, two-thirds (67 percent) of respondents indicated a willingness or interest in recruiting Aboriginal people into their organization. A further 25 percent indicated “maybe”, and 8 percent said “no.”
- When asked if they are prepared to collaborate with other employers, service providers (e.g. NIEFS, NIC, etc.), to develop funding sources to match employment needs, 73 percent of employer responded affirmatively.

While this project has added new data on labour and skill demand in the North Island region, there is not yet a complete and comprehensive database that addresses the training “for what” question. Alternatively, a “composite” approach has to be used to piece together various sources of primary, secondary, administrative and anecdotal (i.e. “intelligence”) together into a picture of demand.

It is known that generally across all regions of the province job openings will be more prevalent in Health Care, Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services and Professional and Technical sectors. It is also known that across provincial economy, jobs requiring some level of post-secondary education or job training will grow more than lower-skilled jobs.

From BC Stats regional employment projections for the North Island College region, jobs in Forestry and resource-based Manufacturing (e.g. Wood Products, Mineral Products, Metal Fabrication and Machinery, Electronics, and Transportation Equipment), and in Professional Computer Systems and Health and Social Assistance sectors will grow faster than the provincial and regional average. BC Stats also projects employment in occupations in Natural and Applied Sciences, Health, Primary Industry and Processing/Manufacturing/Utilities will grow faster.

From the VIEA Ference Weicker survey (2009) of companies in the RDMW, technical and skilled trades occupations, customer service skills, and soft skills such as interpersonal and problem-solving skills were identified as the greatest need. These jobs/skills were corroborated as a continuing need by the Employer Survey for this project, and skilled jobs in tourism/hospitality and processing/manufacturing sectors were also identified.

Another “proxy” for employment opportunities is major employers in the North Island region. These include such private and public sector employers as Western Forest Products, Neucel, Le Mare Lake Logging, Marine Harvest Canada, Keltic Seafoods, Orca Sand & Gravel, Hardy Buoys, Ministry of Forests and Range/BC Timber Supply, School District 85, Vancouver Island Health Authority, etc.

Further, anecdotally, we are aware of employment in such industries as aquaculture (both finfish and shellfish). Marine Harvest Canada has 550 direct personnel from Campbell River and north, including 120 First Nations workers and 150 personnel who reside in Port Hardy, or 260 of who reside in the RDMW. Approximately 20 percent of the population of Port Hardy works in the aquaculture field.

Keltic Seafood 75 jobs (low season) and up to 150 jobs in the summer months; 55 percent of its workforce are First Nations. Hardy Buoys employs 50-60 full-time employees, 60 percent of which are First Nations. Port Hardy is home to the Pacific salmon fleet and over 50 percent of the wild fish caught on the coast is landed at Port Hardy.

The Kokish River hydroelectric project will create 60 to 70 full-time jobs for the 2.5-3 year construction period, with an estimate of 50 percent local hires; and two full-time (electricians) jobs during the 40-100 years of operation. The Knob Hill Wind Farm will create 80 jobs during the one-year construction

period, and 10 full-time permanent “green-collar” jobs. Additional renewable energy projects are expected to arise in the North Island region.

While the above data and anecdotal information address the “training for what” question in a general way, a priority in the Strategy will be to develop a “made-in-North Island” labour market information composite model. One example of a creative way to address this could be the information that the RDMW regularly receives through provincial Crown Referral information on upcoming economic, land-use and other projects that go through government regulatory review. This information is advance “intelligence” that could be pieced together to provide employers and service providers with useful employment-related information.

### 3. NORTH ISLAND STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS



Based on the research and consultation – including the preceding context – undertaken for the development of a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*, this section highlights key workforce strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

#### Strengths

- Although the economy remains weak, the numbers for those receiving EI benefits has stabilized over the past several months (8.2 percent in January 2010) and declined for IA recipients between March – December 2009 from 6.2 to 5 percent indicating that declines have stabilized and an economic upturn is on the horizon.
- The RDMW labour market appears to be weathering the economic downturn without significant closures to business establishments going from 521 in 2007 to 517 in 2008 (the most recent numbers available).
- Recent government trade initiatives in China may bring some relief for the market losses experienced by the forest sector over the past decade and create hiring opportunities, as will the recent investment in Neucel by Chinese interests. Additionally, the recent decision by the Chinese Government to grant Canada favoured tourist status creates an enormous opportunity to expand the tourism sector on the North Island.
- Sustained development of the aquaculture industry on the North Island holds the potential for local economic development and job growth, particularly among the Aboriginal population.
- Several First Nations with proactive economic development strategies and partnerships and a willingness to partner as equal partners with businesses and communities.
- The interest in and development renewable energy projects such as solar, wind and run of river power sources holds great potential for economic and job growth on the North Island, which has abundant resources of these energy sources. Of particular note are the two recently approved BC Hydro purchase agreements for wind and run of river energy in the Regional District.
- Best Practices – As we have undertaken secondary and primary research throughout the project period a number of examples of where employers, First Nations, education and service providers and other stakeholders have worked together in specific situations to create excellent results. Given that these best practice examples may not have been widely communicated or shared there is value in examining them individually in consideration of their application by other stakeholders, sectors etc. The best practice examples that have occurred within the North Island region and neighbouring areas are of course the easiest to access but there may be some that are applicable from other parts of Vancouver Island or beyond. Best practice examples identified during the course of this project's research are referenced below. These are examples only and there are many more:
  - ❖ Industry/post-secondary education partnership between Vancouver Island University and Marine Harvest;
  - ❖ Tourism and Forestry Accord, Council of Tourism Associations and Port McNeill;
  - ❖ Discovery Community College Carpentry training in Bella Bella;
  - ❖ North Island Employment Foundation Society's job training programs and analysis of labour market information;
  - ❖ Strategic Forest Management partnership with North Island College and NIEFS (Natural Resource Occupational Skills Certificate);
  - ❖ North Vancouver Island Aboriginal Training Society (e.g. mining training partnership);

- ❖ Marine Harvest –First Nations partnership including Kitsoo First Nation;
- ❖ Northern Opportunities Trust programs and partnerships in the Northeast region of BC (as well as examples in from other regions of the province).

## **Weaknesses**

- With its dependency on resource industries, the economic downturn of the past eighteen months has hit the RDMW hard with Employment Insurance (EI) beneficiaries rising from 4.1 percent of the working age population to 9 percent and Income Assistance (IA) recipients increasing from 2.3 percent of the overall population to 3.9 percent from September 2007 to September 2009.
- High unemployment and low labour force participation rates (with the exception of Alert Bay) continue to characterize the First Nations population on the North Island, exacerbated by the rural nature and isolation of aboriginal communities.
- Government funding cutbacks have impacted NIC education and training program delivery on the North Island, and with RDMW employers emphasizing the need for increased local delivery of skills training for current and future workers, this is an area requiring innovative options to meet demands. Cost-recovery programming remains a significant impediment to local training initiatives in rural communities – largely beyond NIC’s control.
- School closures and the reduction of career and work-based education programs as a result of budget constraints, coupled with lack of coordination and planning with employers and business representatives, have also adversely impacted workforce development opportunities for students and new labour force entrants.
- The continuing trend of population decline, particularly among students and younger workers seeking opportunities unavailable locally, undermines the region’s ability to grow its economy and hampers RDMW employers planning for future operations. However, in a recently completed poll (April 2010) of School District 85 students in grades 10,11 and 12 undertaken by NIC, 91 percent of 179 respondents indicated that they planned to pursue post secondary education after graduation. Of this number, 30 percent intend to enroll at NIC rather than leave the North Island (*Strategic Planning Survey – North Island Region Secondary School Students*).
- Although the need for coordination in labour market planning has been identified in previous reports and surveys, it appears that there has been little progress to date – particularly in engaging local employers in working towards cooperative solutions on a sustained basis.

## **Opportunities**

- The higher than average aboriginal population on the North Island offers a source of opportunity for employers to recruit, hire and train new entrants for their enterprises and operations if human resource development and workforce training strategies are put in place.
- Recent labour market reports showed that RDMW employers were interested in coordinated workforce development initiatives and redirecting funds spent on human resource development to local initiatives if effective coordination could be achieved. In support of this interest, the NIC survey cited above found that 58 students in grades 10-12 intended to enroll in trade or technology program at the college.
- A new public transit system was launched in July 2008 in order to provide the Region with better access to Campbell River and other communities and this provides an opportunity for workers to gain easier access to job opportunities on the North Island.
- There is a perceived need and support for a coordinating body for post secondary education and workforce training, but the effective participation of RDMW employers is crucial for it to achieve success.
- Expansion of the North Island tourism sector with an emphasis on adventure and eco-tourism and the Cape Scott region hold potential for employment growth.
- Sub-sectors like independent power and sand and gravel extraction for export are under ongoing

development and could become fully operational during the workforce strategy timeframe creating a demand for skilled workers and the need for new and innovative workforce training programs.

- The RDMW has the third largest cluster of potential wind and run-of-the-river energy generation capacities in BC and development of this area could create a demand for highly trained and skilled workers, as could industry growth in solar energy, requiring a locally driven, post secondary education and workforce training strategy. These include the recently BC Hydro-approved Kokish River run of river project (partnership between Namgis First Nation and Brookfield Renewable Power) near Port McNeill and the Knob Hill Wind Farm project (Sea Breeze Energy) near Port Hardy.
- The Ministry of Housing and Social Development has recently announced its new *Employment Program of British Columbia*, after two years of consultations. It will be important during the start-up of the implementation of this Strategy to understand and explore the unique, new and positive features of this new program with North Island service providers, including a single point of entry, a flexible menu of supports and services, partnership opportunities, of course its funding opportunities. One of this Ministry's key goals is to achieve "An integrated and responsive employment and labour market." The EPBC, for the first time, truly integrates existing provincially-funded Employment Programs and current federally-funded Employment Programs and Services (Labour Market Development Agreement), and provides a total of \$360 million for such programming (Ministry of Housing and Social Development, *Business Transformation Project Stakeholder Information Package*, May 11, 2010).
- The Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development provides an additional \$111 million for labour market and immigration programming and \$1.882 billion for public post-secondary education institutions and programs. It will be critical for the leaders who implement the North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy to work closely with this Ministry to bring its objectives to life in this region: that "British Columbians are able to fulfill their potential through access to quality educational and training opportunities"; and that "BC's workforce is flexible and responsive to the changing and future needs of the provincial economy" (Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, *2010/11-2012/13 Service Plan*, March 2010).

## **Threats**

- The delivery of workforce training and post secondary education are tied together and strategies need to be developed to address the out-migration of young people who leave the North Island to pursue post secondary education and training and careers in other locations.
- As the economic downturn ends and BC industry begins to pick-up and expand, the demand for skilled workers will once again become a focus and driving force, making the need for a coordinated workforce strategy on the North Island essential to keep and attract employees in order to offset recruitment pressures from other regions.
- The recent trend in out-migration of the working age population, especially younger new entrants, from the RDMW will have to be reversed if the district economy and labour market are to remain competitive and realize opportunities to grow. This means reversing population declines over the past decade and forecasted to continue over the next twenty years.
- The unacceptably low labour force participation rates and high unemployment among the First Nations population must be addressed. The three AHRDAs operating in the RDMW have been created to work in these areas, and local employers, industry associations and training deliverers need to coordinate with them to increase workforce training and employment for First Nations people in North Island enterprises.
- Post secondary education providers need to have a stronger local presence in the North Island in order to develop working relationships with local government, employers and other service providers and to partner in the modification of program funding and delivery tailored to smaller community requirements.

- Success in North Island workforce development requires more than a stable economy and business growth and must include community, social and recreational services and life style amenities that offset its rural nature.
- During this project, many stakeholders have expressed concern about how the impacts of changes in public policies can dramatically affect a small vulnerable rural region through increased regulations and “red tape” and through the centralization of government offices and services. Through centralization, government itself can add significantly to the attrition of local skill sets and working families from the area, particularly as consultancy firms and other services are quick to follow them south.

## 4. KEY GAPS AND STRATEGIC CHALLENGES



The various broad economic and demographic challenges for the North Island are well understood as evidenced from the secondary and primary research components of the Workforce Strategy development. In addition a number of very specific workforce challenges and gaps have been identified. They have also been well referenced in the research and documented accordingly. It is important to focus on those that are considered to be the “key” gaps or challenges, and within the context of a Coordinated Workforce Strategy.

### Employer Gaps

#### 1. **Lack of employer engagement**

It has been evidenced through the research that employer involvement in multi stakeholder initiatives past and present has been lacking and this has been partly responsible for failure to implement initiatives developed in the past (i.e. Rutley Report and recommendations initiated by NIPSEC). As far back as the 2006 report it was stated that amongst employers “(72 percent) were interested in participating in a yet to be defined regional plan and that an additional 12 percent said they could participate but that was contingent on what was planned.” Our recent Employer Survey, consultations and action planning sessions have reflected the same issue five years later.

#### 2. **Gaps between employers and among industry sectors**

Employers large and small appear to be working independently of one another without a systematic or significant level of coordination or collaboration. This restricts the RDMW’s ability to address the challenges to investment, expansion of business, attraction and retention of employees and results in costly duplication of efforts. When asked in our recent Employer survey if they (employers) are prepared to collaborate with other employers and service providers (e.g. NIEFS, NIC, etc.) to develop funding sources to match employment needs, 73 percent of employers responded affirmatively. In addition, there appears to be little or no collaborative connection between the key industry sectors within the North Island be they well established or emerging. Within the sectors themselves there is little evidence of unified strategies.

#### 3. **Small employers human resource (HR) capacity gaps**

Small employers readily responded to our Employer survey indicating that a lack of resources in terms of funds, in house expertise, and money prevents small employers from being able to develop basic HR programs including training, succession planning, attraction, and retention strategies. Geographical isolation and competition are cited as deterrents as well.

### Education and Training Delivery

#### 1. **Insufficient post-secondary presence in the region**

Up to present there has been a shortage of post secondary education facilities in the North Island, indeed there has been a reduction of facilities evidenced by North Island College reduction in service availability. This factor coupled with the isolation from other facilities down island reduces the ability for making potential employees job ready or enhancing the skills of

those already employed. This also leads to out migration for skill development with a resulting further decline in employable population short and long term.

A significant majority of 65 percent of employers indicated that the post-secondary education system does not meet their needs in terms of training and skills development programs for both new and existing employees.

**2. *The challenge of delivering training and other services on the ground in small rural communities***

With small populations located in rural areas or isolated communities the Post Secondary Education providers cite the lack of “critical mass” in class sizes as a limiting factor to allow the school to have funding provided to them to be able to offer the education and training required in the North Island. This is especially true of the publicly funded schools such as North Island College or Vancouver Island University. Private institutions of course have additional cost implications.

**3. *Shortage of secondary school work experience /career programs***

While there are some dual credit and employer/secondary school partnerships there is great opportunity to develop this further. It was clear in the action planning meetings that employers, both large and small, are prepared to become more involved. This kind of work experience training at the secondary school level can focus on a variety of occupations and not only the trades areas. There is a gap of students understanding the workplace environment as well as the foundation skill expectations of employers. In our Employer Survey a full 30 percent said they are not participating at all with the school system on work experience and career opportunities with only 7.5 percent at a high level of participation. More than 50 percent of employers indicated they were not even aware of these types of programs.

**4. *Need for applied post-secondary programs for niche industry needs***

Newly developing industries in the aquaculture, forestry, and tourism sectors require specialized training that has not been available in the North Island region. Although perhaps not as critical as other more fundamental post-secondary gaps that have been identified, the lack of available local programs for training may limit the industry developments themselves or limit the ability for local citizens to avail themselves of the local opportunities presented for meaningful employment.

## **Coordination Issues**

**1. *Lack of clear regional leadership for workforce planning and development***

It is pretty self evident by virtue of the need for development of this strategy and the strong indications from the secondary and primary research that workforce planning and development leadership has not occurred with fragmented efforts based more on survival during the recent down turn in the economy and before that, closure of the Utah Mine near Port Hardy. NIEFS and RDMW signed an MOU in 2008, the initiative that led to the strategy.

**2. *Lack of economic planning at the regional and community level***

There is no indication of any recently developed community economic plans. That which exists at a regional level is quite sparse and conceptual, largely due to a limited budgetary capacity for regional economic development and very real difficulties in achieving local political consensus on critical areas of development policy. It would seem that a sound regional economic plan which is in development, would need to be interactive with local community plans which reflect the unique values, opportunities, and issues in the various community and rural areas. Achieving community economic development plans will be challenging in the climate of First Nations treaty negotiations and no funds or capacity for implementation.

**3. *Lack of coordination among service providers and other stakeholders across the North Island, dedicated leadership***

In order to effectively implement a workforce strategy among an array of stakeholders including employers, employer representatives, employment, education and training providers, municipalities, First Nations, service providers, there needs to be leadership and resources to create and maintain the momentum and coordination required. At present such human and financial resources do not exist.

There is a number of unconnected and diverse service providers in the region and outside included in the above-mentioned mix. Without coordination among them as well, unhealthy competition and perhaps even duplication of services could result. The best case for effective service delivery is where there are partnerships and collaborative agreements between the service providers designed to meet the needs of clients and employers.

An example of an approach that is built on collaboration and partnerships is NIEFS work to link LMDA, LMA and BCEP funded labour market services in order for all unemployed people to be able to access employment services out of its Port Hardy employment centre. This coordination has also resulted in the retention of community-based services that had been targeted to become itinerant. To support coordinated workforce development NIEFS has initiated formal Memorandums of Understanding with Regional District of Mt. Waddington, North Vancouver Island Aboriginal Training Society, and North Island College, and is in the process of renewing a cooperation agreement with SD 85.

An outcome of these collaborative approaches was the development of this labour market study to develop a North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy.

**4. *Lack of a multi-stakeholder leadership body for workforce planning and strategy***

Aside from the need for leadership described in the previous bullet there is also no “steering committee” for lack of a better term to drive the strategy implementation over time and to ensure accountability of measuring performance and achievement of planned initiatives. Existing organizations such as NIPSEC have mandates that currently are far too limiting and stakeholder representation that does not reflect the key partners for workforce development.

**Engagement of First Nations and Those Under-Represented in the Workforce**

**1. *Lack of First Nations employment in the face of high unemployment***

The aboriginal population in RDMW is 26.28% of the total compared to 4% in B.C. as a whole. But at the same time, unemployment of Aboriginal people generally exceeds that of non-aboriginal people by a wide margin. Therein lies opportunity. In our Employer Survey 60% of employers indicated that they did not currently employ aboriginal people but 92% indicated strong or qualified willingness to employ aboriginal people. There is great opportunity for employers to recruit, hire and train new entrants if appropriate human resource development workforce strategies are put in place.

**2. *Lack of coordination amongst First Nations in the North Island***

There are several First Nations and additional sub-groups of Aboriginal people spread over the large geographical area of the North Island in rural settings often separated by water or significant distances. Although there are individual examples of excellent best practice initiatives it would seem that that employers and educators would be in a much better position to work with First Nations at a higher coordinating level with respect to training and employment opportunities. Perhaps the Memorandum of Understanding recently signed off by all levels of government in the RDMW, including the six First Nations, affords such an opportunity. Our Employer survey indicated that 69% of employers are unaware of local

programs such as those offered by the North Vancouver Island Aboriginal Training Society and North Island College that are intended to enhance aboriginal employment. It is also unclear if any of the 200 Metis people in the region have any employment and training linkages with the Metis Nation BC or other Aboriginal organizations.

**3. Other Under-represented labour force groups**

There is a strongly held view that even with maximum practical, realistic employment of Canadians, B.C. residents, residents of the North Island, the demographic challenges associated with an aging population and job growth will leave a substantial employment gap. Already in many areas outside the North Island, new Canadians are becoming an integral part of the strategies to overcome this gap with very good success. In the North Island, employers indicated in our Survey that immigrants in the workforce are a relatively low priority because there are currently sufficient numbers of unemployed people in the region to fill jobs. This notion needs to be challenged given the overwhelming evidence of employee shortages in the near future regardless of current circumstances. Women and people with disabilities were also recognized as being under represented in the North Island workforce.

**4. Youth**

Young labour force entrants are recognized as both our greatest opportunity and a significant challenge in terms of attraction and retention. Their mobility and job readiness are the key issues. A 2006 NIPSEC study indicated that 79% of grade 12 students in the North Island indicated they would leave the area for some period of time with a large percentage indicating on a permanent basis. Even among aboriginal students 66% indicated they planned to leave the North Island. Aside from the lack of post secondary training opportunities available in the North Island previously identified as a gap, the recent Employer Survey indicated that employers find the most lacking transferable skills to be life skills (attitude, punctuality, hygiene, customer relations) problem solving and oral communication.

**Funding Gaps and Issues**

**1. Lack of funding**

This was previously identified as a barrier for post secondary institutions in relation to their funding formulas and the “critical mass” issue. This would appear to hold true for local governments and employers as well. When employers were asked if lack of funding for training is considered to be a significant barrier to training programs within their organizations, 53% responded that this was the case.

**2. Lack of understanding of funding mechanisms and capacity to link needs and funding**

There are of course basic limitations in budgets of organizations, be they governments, education providers, or private and public sector employers. However, there are a significant number and variety of funding mechanisms that match training needs, training organizations and employers. What is lacking is knowledge about the programs themselves, how the components must be linked and the entity on the ground to go after them. There are examples in nearby communities where there has been significant success i.e. NIEFS in the Campbell River region, and the feasibility of implementing such measures on the North Island holds much promise.

**Stakeholder Recommendations on Workforce Development**

In this regard, employers and other key North Island stakeholders at four Action Planning Sessions held in early March 2010 focused on the fundamental question of how to ensure that a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* “is not another report that sits on a shelf for lack of an effective implementation plan,” and came up with the following recommendations:

- There needs to be “champions” to lead and promote the implementation of the strategy, supported by a paid coordinating position. The champions would be members of a steering committee and chair sector advisory committees.
- Employers must be involved in implementing the strategy and should be represented on the steering and advisory committees.
- The strategy should be focused on a small number of priority projects, with a clear action plan, achievable goals, and well-defined, measurable outcomes.
- The measurable outcomes should have clear deliverables and indicators of successful implementation and should be measured on a consistent and regular basis and communicated to North Island stakeholders.

There also was general agreement that a key undertaking of a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* should be to consult with and engage federal and provincial departments and agencies to obtain program funding and support for North Island employment and training initiatives. A key first step is the identification of existing resources in support of workforce development, including service gaps and a supporting asset map. This is needed so all key stakeholders understand how their recommendations can best be implemented without duplication of existing resources and so new funding is appropriately targeted to service gaps.

### **Synthesis of the Challenges of a Rural Regional Economy**

A section of the *Strategic and Operational Business Plan 2010/2011* of RDMW’s Economic Development Commission aptly sums up the North Island region’s challenges and opportunities:

*Our diversity and passion as communities can sometimes create dysfunction, particularly when evaluating the impacts of economic activity from very different perspectives. The forestry sector and the public sector are our largest employers, with both wild and aquaculture fish processing representing major contributions to the regional economy. Key to the success of these large employers is our small businesses who support them every day.*

*More opportunities will exist in all these industries and activities in the future, but opinion remains divided on what the costs and benefits of some opportunities really are. The limitations of seasonal tourism and our high precipitation levels pose a direct challenge to sustainable job creation through the tourism sector. A qualitatively and quantitatively challenged public education system is a worry for communities trying to retain working families and offer even basic post secondary education and training that matches labour market trends. An island-wide regional development dialogue that largely focuses on the urban service sectors, external labour recruitment and international image consultation sadly fails to meet the needs of the North and Mid Island rural economies. We are currently challenged by high levels of property absenteeism in some of our communities. Corporate structures and their interactions with the communities are not always what they could be, leading to a lack of opportunity where more should exist.*

*Of additional concern is our region-wide demographic decline, which challenges the tax base and is already costing our smaller communities dearly in terms of local schools. Our local firms are some of the best around and we need to create more in this vein across all the economic sectors. With a new regional transit system and a community health network moving those services forward, a regional approach is now taking root through necessity.*

## 5. STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR A NORTH ISLAND COORDINATED WORKFORCE STRATEGY



### A Regional Vision

It is critical that the vision and plan of a North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy is rooted in the economic and social vision of the sum of the parts of North Island. While a number of local governments and communities have economic development plans and Official Community Plans, these are not integrated into an overall vision and plan, with the exception of the Business Plan of the RDMW's Economic Development Committee.

Below is the RDMW Committee's vision:

*The Regional District of Mount Waddington is a diverse landscape of unsurpassed natural beauty. Our region's distance from and comparative size to larger centres is an asset that makes our communities unique, safe and desirable to live in. We have considerable resources over a large land base that can and must be developed sustainably for our communities' social, economic and environmental health. This includes our forest, mines, water, fish and wildlife resources and alternative energy.*

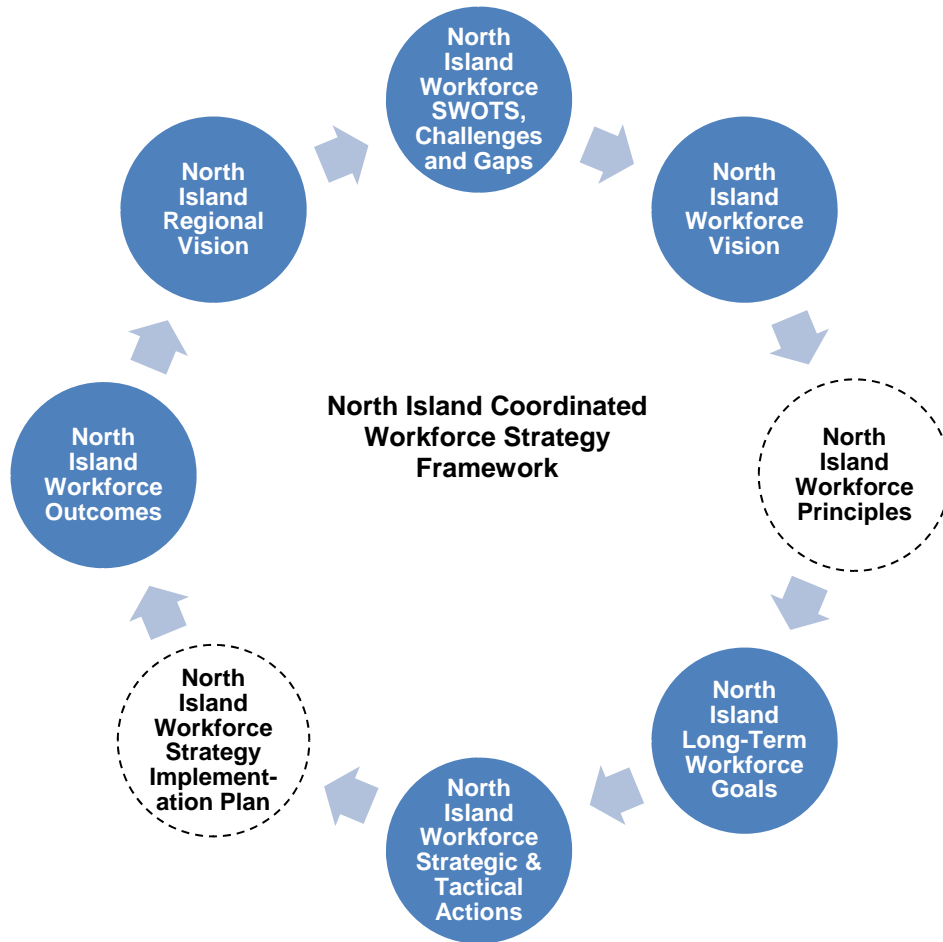
*Our full potential in the tertiary (service) sector has not yet been achieved. Tourism in particular is poised to scale new heights in the next decade as the balance of economic sector activities change. The sense of community, wherever you live on the North Island, is what brings people to come and stay. Coupled with relatively low property tax burdens and real estate values, there are good arguments for relocating here when opportunities arise.*

*Most of the essential services available in larger centres are here and we have a vibrant range of community organizations run by committed individuals. The North Island boasts a culturally rich and growing First Nations population who are today playing an increasingly critical role in the social and economic destiny of the region. The Regional District welcomes the rugged individual seeking to get away from it all for a day, month, and year or even longer.*

Figure 5 provides a conceptual framework for the sequencing of elements of the strategy. It starts with an economic vision for the North Island region. Based on the workforce SWOTs, challenges and gaps earlier covered in this document, a strategic direction is proposed, including a workforce development vision. This in turn drives what are the long-term workforce goals in the Strategy and both strategic and tactical actions. These are sequenced as filter through principles that shape how the Strategy is implemented.

The actions will be planned and executed through a detailed action plan leading to desired short- and long-term outcomes. In turn, the workforce outcomes will support and facilitate the achievement of a North Island vision.

Figure 5



### North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy Vision

The *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* is a regional action plan fully endorsed and implemented by local governments, Aboriginal organizations, education and service providers, employers, and residents. The Strategy is linked to the region’s economic and social vision and plans. It addresses economic development and human resource challenges that would otherwise impede employment opportunities in healthy local businesses and industries.

The *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* is built on existing regional strengths to attract and retain workers in the region. Shared knowledge and resources among North Island communities and industry sectors support the implementation of relevant education, training and workforce development programs and services to new entrants, existing workers, and unemployed, underemployed and under-represented labour force groups.

### Principles

The *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* is based on the following core principles:

1. North Island stakeholders are engaged in a collaborative manner to maximize the development and employment of residents minimizing competition for human resources.
2. Local communities, businesses, and employers are supported by plans, programs and services that assist with recruitment, retention, training and skills upgrading of employees and job-seekers that enable growth and diversification of the economy.

3. Growth in the business and service sectors through stable employment will result in improved community services and quality of life within the region.
4. The retention of residents on the North Island and the attraction of new migrants enhance community and industry growth, and contribute to a sustainable, diversified economy in the region.

A more detailed list of operating principles should be developed by the Strategy's leadership body during the implementation planning and start-up of the Strategy. Considering NIEFS' experience in workforce planning and development, it has a comprehensive list of principles for Coordinated Workforce Development that provides a strong framework for implementation.

### **Long-Term Goals**

There are four long-term goals as a platform for realizing the vision and supporting the principles of the *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*.

1. A fully supported and implemented action plan for attraction, recruitment and retention of employees on the North Island led by local government, employers and service providers that is assessed annually against targeted outcomes.
2. A comprehensive operational strategy to address the high unemployment among First Nations that is coordinated by First Nations representatives, employers and service providers which results in annual increases to First Nations labour force participation rates and employment.
3. An effective, locally-based education and training system that is planned and coordinated to meet the needs of local industry, job seekers, students and workers by delivering relevant secondary, post-secondary education, training and skills upgrading to meet North Island requirements.
4. A formal coordination and cooperation protocol among North Island communities, governments and First Nations that steers and measures the implementation of the *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*.

These long-term goals will be realized through the development, implementation and evaluation of focused workforce strategies and measurable action plans managed by North Island stakeholders under the leadership of an ongoing, representative coordinating body.

### **Strategy Outcomes**

It is expected that an effective and sustained North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy will yield several key outcomes for the region over the next three to five years:

1. A sustainable structure to lead, champion and support a North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy.
2. Increased capacity of small businesses to effectively manage and utilize human resources.
3. Sustainable and effective attraction and recruitment of businesses, families and workers into the region.
4. Support of local and regional economic development and diversification through workforce development.
5. Integrated (geographic and sectoral) workforce planning and implementation.
6. Responsive education and training strategies and programs to support workers, job seekers, families and employers in the region.
7. Mechanisms to match labour demand and labour supply to maximize employment and business opportunities.
8. Enhancing First Nations' and Aboriginal people's participation in regional and local economies and employment.
9. Job seekers become independent, through achieving and maintaining sustainable labour market attachment.

10. Job seeker skill development is coordinated to meet human resource needs of employers.

A North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy alone will not magically create significant jobs and economic activity; however, it will position the region to seize economic and employment opportunities as they arise, and mitigate risks of further economic shocks and transition. The *lack* of an effective strategy will ensure that the region and local communities do not realize such growth.

## 6. NORTH ISLAND COORDINATED WORKFORCE STRATEGY TEN-POINT ACTION PLAN

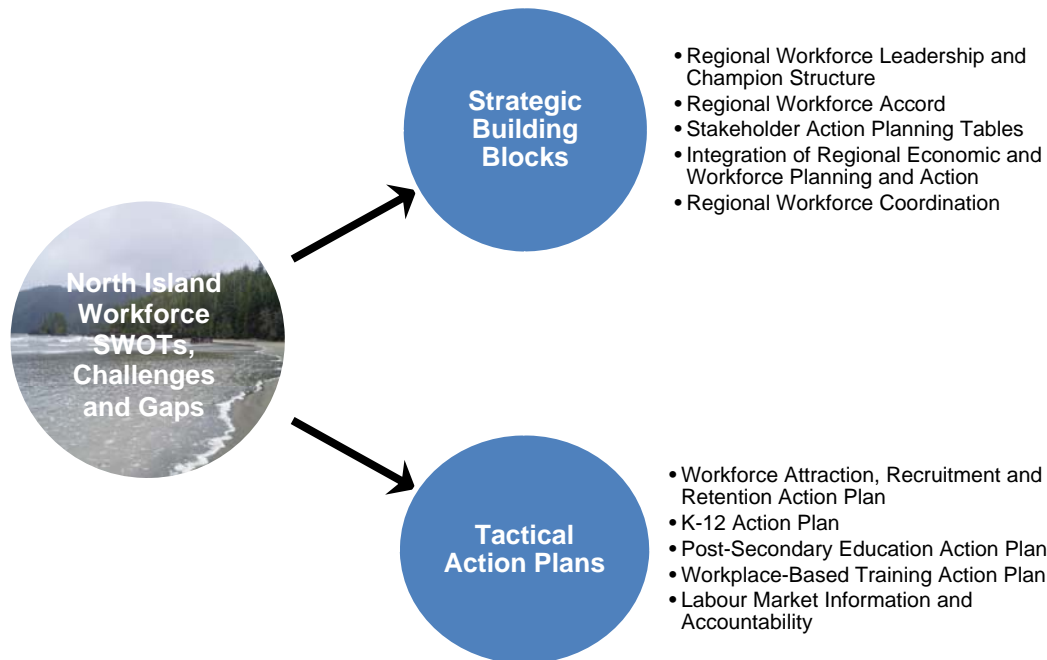


In order to achieve the vision, goals and outcomes of a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*, we have developed the following **Ten-Point Action Plan**, as per Figure 4. The ten interrelated key areas for action may be summarized as – “**Strategic Building Blocks**” and “**Tactical Action Plans.**”

Each element of the *Ten-Point Action Plan* addresses key North Island workforce challenges and gaps identified in earlier sections of this document. **this is the full version**

The strategic elements of the Ten-Point Action Plan (Figure 6) put the basic structure, building blocks, and agreements in place. They will provide a successful and sustainable foundation on which to build momentum and achieve the desired outcomes. The Tactical Action Plans will “breathe life” into this Strategy and provide practical, concrete implementation actions.

**Figure 6  
Ten-Point Action Plan**



### A. Strategic Building Blocks

#### 1. Regional Workforce Leadership and Champion Structure

The first essential building block for this Strategy is to put in place leadership made up of regional champions representing the right mix of stakeholders that is committed to leading and promoting a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*. This leadership will work within a structure that: has a positive vision of the future economy and associated workforce; has the ability to engage and

influence stakeholder leadership and their delivery systems and will stimulate information sharing, linked planning and coordinated action in a manner responsive to business human resource needs. The proposed “North Island Workforce Planning and Action Committee” (WPAC) structure is described below:

Composition (to be nominated by each constituency)

- 1 RDMW
- 4 Municipalities
- 1 Aquaculture/Marine
- 1 Tourism/Hospitality
- 1 Forestry
- 1 Health and Human Services
- 2 Small Business (Chamber Appointees)
- 2 Other Industries (e.g. Construction, Mining, Renewable Energy, etc.)
- 2 First Nations/Aboriginal Organizations
- 2 Organized Labour
- 1 Vancouver Island University
- 1 North Island College
- 1 Private Training Institution
- 1 School District 85
- 1 North Island Employment
- 1 Community Futures Mount Waddington
- 2 At-Large (e.g. youth, older worker, retiree)

Executive Committee (to be selected from within WPAC)

- 1 RDMW
- 3 Employers
- 1 Organized Labour
- 1 First Nation/Aboriginal Organization
- 1 Post-Secondary Institution
- 1 School District
- 1 Municipality
- 1 Employment Service Provider
- 1 CFMW

*Chair* – Elected by the Committee and also chairs Executive Committee.

*Staff* – 1 full-time paid Manager/Coordinator (a priority if funding can be found; if not, an existing agency staff person whose position is expanded to include the responsibilities of this role); seek one-time funding for 1 year, allowing time for WPAC and staff person to generate on-going revenue stream to fund the position and other things.

*Legal Entity* – In the short term, the Committee is attached to an existing legal entity. Over time it may create its own incorporated society. It is recommended that the RDMW, a community-focused, neutral regional economic body, serve as the initial coordinating vehicle.

*Sub-Committees/Task Forces*– The Committee may create sectoral, geographic or issue-specific standing committees and/or time-limited task forces as needed (see below).

*Reporting* – The Manager/Coordinator reports to the Committee through the Chair; operationally, this position would report to RDMW staff as long as it is the legal entity to support this structure.

*Scope* – Post-secondary education and training, secondary school education, workplace training and skills development, workforce recruitment and retention, labour market development and employment development; pursuing program funding opportunities; implementation and evaluation of Strategy

Employer Human Resource Council – The WPAC will create a Council of employer human resource practitioners with operations in the North Island region. It will be chaired by an employer WPAC member and include individuals from health care, forestry, aquaculture, tourism and other sectors.

The Council will have responsibility for sharing HR information and best practices with the WPAC and employers and service providers in the region and providing guidance on recruitment, employment practices and training. It will be a vehicle for recommending workplace skills programs that can be shared among employers and small businesses.

While all stakeholders will be important contributors to and champions for the Strategy, a very critical success factor will be significant, sustained and meaningful employer participation and engagement in the leadership structure and in the Strategy as a whole. Leading (larger) employers, industry groups, and Chambers of Commerce will be critical in ensuring this.

On the risk side, having so many stakeholders and issues involved in the leadership structure and Strategy implementation could represent too broad of a focus and fragmented implementation. The structure and Strategy should be staged so it starts small, focuses a few priorities early, and as it achieves momentum, then start to build on this base of champions and results.

## **2. Regional Workforce Accord**

In order to support the leadership structure and formalize commitments to action and implementation of the Strategy, a formal agreement among local governments, First Nations, major service providers, and key industry and business groups is important.

This could take the form of a brand new North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy “accord” or “memorandum of understanding” or it could be tied to an existing agreement such as the North Island Regional Protocol Agreement. Strong consideration should be given to building on an existing agreement to avoid starting from square one. Signatories to a North Island Workforce Planning and Action accord or MOU would be linked to the composition of the leadership committee, as illustrated in Figure 7.

## **3. Stakeholder Planning Tables**

In order to allow for focused action planning away from the leadership committee table, this Strategy calls for three “tables” to facilitate action planning and reinforce integration. Each table – Industry Sectors, Aboriginal Groups, and Service Providers – would be linked in an advisory role to the leadership committee.

### **Industry Sector Planning Table**

Composed of representatives of each of the key industrial sectors on the North Island – forestry, fishing and aquaculture, resource extraction, tourism and hospitality, renewable energy and health and social services – this table would hold action planning sessions with employers and service providers to develop workforce development strategies for each sector with tangible goals and measurable targets and outcomes. Members of the Industry Sector Table will draw from employers in the region, but also may be members of the WPAC. To ensure coordination between industry sectors and the other two tables, the two chambers of commerce on the North Island could be enlisted as an oversight and screening vehicle.

### **Aboriginal Planning Table**

Representatives of North Island First Nations, Aboriginal organizations and Métis Nation BC will be invited to participate at this table. The table’s first task will be to consider an appropriate coordinating vehicle to ensure that action strategies and implementation plans address the new federal Aboriginal

Skills, Employment and Training Strategy (ASETS) that was created in April 2010. ASETS will focus on three strategic priorities: 1) Supporting demand-driven skills development; 2) fostering partnerships with the private sector and the provinces and territories; and, 3) putting emphasis on accountability and results.

**Figure 7**  
**North Island Workforce Planning and Action Accord**



Under ASETS, partnerships with bands, training agencies, ministries and employers will be a priority when providing financial contributions to First Nations organizations. The North Vancouver Island Aboriginal Training Society (NVIATS) now operates under ASETS and could be considered after review by the First Nations Table as an appropriate coordinating vehicle for First Nations workforce initiatives and to ensure that employers and service providers are informed and active participants. Existing band education and training managers/ coordinators will also be considered as participants in the coordinating body.

It should also be noted that there are many government programs not specifically targeted at Aboriginal people but that can be used to support Aboriginal education, training and employment along with supporting other labour force groups.

**Service Providers Planning Table**

This table will consist of senior representatives from School District 85, North Island College, Vancouver Island University, NIEFS, and other service agencies (e.g. Discovery Community College). It will formulate education, training and foundation skills development initiatives for labour force

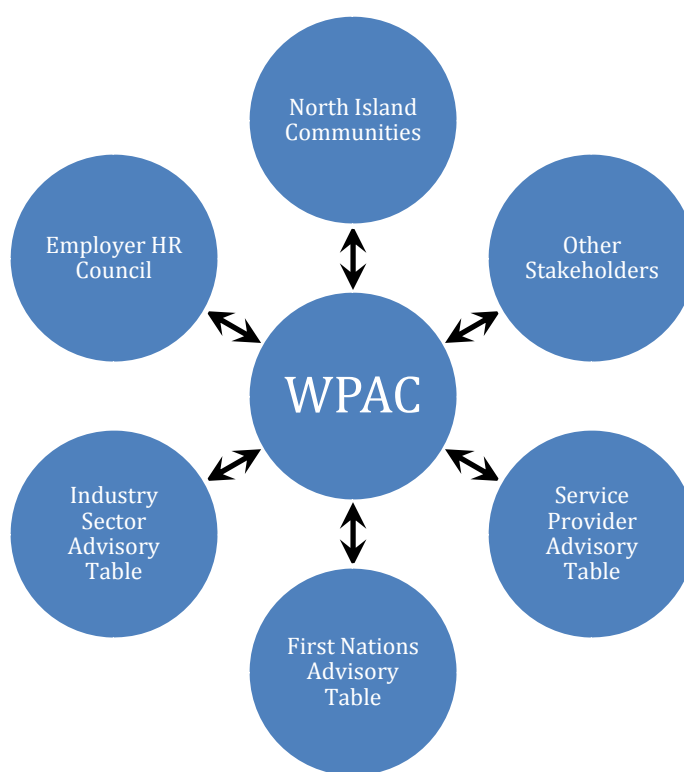
entrants, the unemployed and existing workers and ensure that they are reviewed and supported by employers, First Nations, community and government stakeholders on the North Island prior to being brought forward to the leadership committee. Logically, the three tables should be developed after the WPAC is created and a manager/ coordinator position is in place to provide support and coordination.

**The role of the North Island Post Secondary Education Committee (NIPSEC)**

This organization has attempted to provide a leadership role in addressing many of the issues identified within the scope of this Strategy. Given the recommendations contained in this strategy including the WPAC and related advisory tables it is incumbent on stakeholders to review the status of NIPSEC, considering options that include integrating it with the WPAC, modification of its mandate, or disbanding the Committee. The timing of this review should not take place until after the WPAC is in place. Members of that new organization may include NIPSEC participants who are in a good position to identify duplication and other considerations.

Figure 8 presents the overall structure of the Strategy, including the leadership structure (WPAC) and the other parts connected with it.

**Figure 8**  
**North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy Structure**



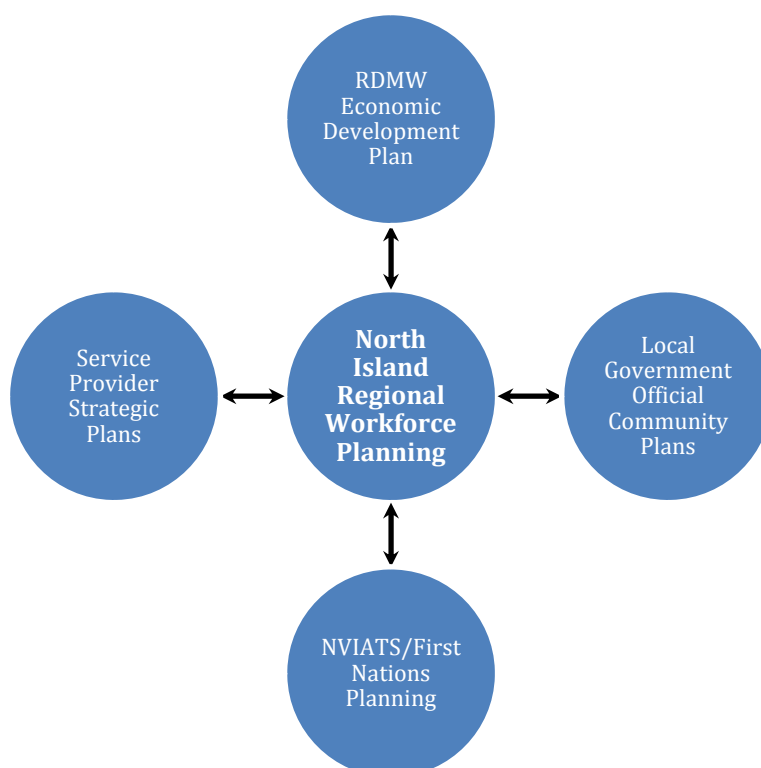
**4. Integration of Regional Economic and Workforce Planning and Action**

A component of the North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy will be the integration of workforce and economic development and community planning and action, as per Figure 9. As the first step in this important process, the WPAC should review existing community economic development plans and ensure that they are reflected in the overall Workforce Development goals and objectives and complemented by *Workforce Development Accord*.

In addition to local governments, post-secondary institutions, the school district and other service agencies in the region need to undertake and consult on strategic planning in order to set and implement priorities. Integrated planning supports coordinated efforts for economic, employment and workforce development.

It is recommended that the *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* reflect the new economic development plan of the RDMW and also be connected to local community economic plans.

**Figure 9**  
**Integration of North Island Economic and Workforce Planning**



An initial Summit should be organized by the WPAC after a *Workforce Development Strategy Accord* has been finalized and at a point in the strategy planning and implementation where progress on actions and initiatives can be reported and feedback and review can be provided (e.g. perhaps at the end of Year 1). Participants in the Summit would be expected to provide critical comment on actions and deliverables and influence next steps. As clients of the *Workforce Strategy*, Summit participants should also advise on the timing of subsequent meetings – whether annually or another timetable – to review economic development and strategic plans and initiatives related to workforce training and development.

## **5. Regional Employment and Workforce Coordination**

As both the review of reports and analysis of the North Island over the past decade and the recent employer survey and action planning sessions have demonstrated, coordination among governments, employers, First Nations, and service providers has been the key missing ingredient in attempts to address education, training, and employment shortfalls and recruitment and retention of workers. As NIEFS states in its *2010 Community Consultation on Workforce Development Report*, success in creating employment opportunities will only be achieved by:

- Recognizing that the labour market will no longer solve the issues faced by employers and job seekers, and that planned interventions are required to address labour skills shortage issues;
- Ensuring that all the individuals and organizations involved in work force development know each other, know what resources and services they offer, and share information, plans, knowledge, and expertise;
- Building on the knowledge, skills, and capacities of the individuals and organizations concerned with work force development in Campbell River and the North Island; and,
- Improving the alignment of all stakeholder efforts in supporting work force development through a shared vision.

There are two fundamental tests for the WPAC and its sector tables:

1. The articulation and implementation of workforce strategies and action plans that are supported by stakeholders and when measured, demonstrate tangible positive results; and,
2. There is coordination of efforts by governments, employers, First Nations and service providers in implementing the initiatives and working towards the intended results.

Once the WPAC and its three tables have developed and agreed on workforce strategies and action plans and have established the framework and vehicles for coordination among the stakeholders in implementing them, a clear communications and marketing plan must be put in place to ensure that local employers, workers, jobseekers, and students and their parents are aware of the initiatives and opportunities to participate. Mechanisms that provide ongoing information and updates on the strategies and action plans and also encourage feedback from participants need to be considered and implemented. These are crucial for both buy-in by North Island residents and to ensure the continuing relevance of initiatives in meeting the goals of the overall Workforce Strategy in addressing labour market weaknesses, challenges and opportunities.

Other components of the *Ten-Point Action Plan's* strategic building blocks and tactical action plans that follow – such as the planning tables, the workforce accord and initiatives to better connect employers to key stakeholder groups – also address and support overall coordination of efforts, but the main vehicle to manage and ensure a cooperative effort in implementing a *North Island Workforce Strategy* is the WPAC itself.

### **Coordination between Stakeholders in Mount Waddington and Comox-Strathcona Regional Districts on Training Outside of the North Island Region**

A major theme that stands out in our secondary and primary research is the desire to see greater post-secondary training and education opportunities located in the North Island. We endorse that concept as reflected in our recommendations for the many reasons that North Islanders have provided. We hope and expect that as this Strategy is implemented there will be an increase in local delivery and resources.

Without taking away from the importance of the foregoing, we need to recognize and accept that there will be significant training that will take place in Campbell River and points south that can benefit North Islanders and be directly applicable to local employment opportunities. We recommend that the WPAC consider this to encourage training/education participation by North Islanders outside of the North Island when this is the best or only option. This should be addressed by the Advisory Tables that are put in place to support the work of the WPAC.

The structure of the WPAC should facilitate needed coordination but the ultimate assessment will be the sustained efforts of all stakeholders over time.

## B. Tactical Action Plans

The following Tactical Action Plans reflect input throughout the project research and consultation process, including suggestions made most recently at the June 2, 2010 stakeholder forum.

Appendix 1 contains more detailed action plans only as illustrative examples of what could be done at the concrete level. Once a leadership structure is in place and the Strategy is implemented, whoever is responsible and participating can use these action plans as a starting point to build on and refine, including updating timelines, sequencing, specific tasks and roles.

It is also important to point out that it will not be possible to implement these action plans all at once. Therefore, the leadership structure should review them and make a decision on focusing on one or two of them or small parts of each of them in the first year.

### **6. Workforce Attraction, Recruitment and Retention Action Plan**

A key element of initiating the action plans in the *Workforce Strategy* is developing an “asset map” of community amenities and service provider agencies both in the region and outside of the North Island but providing service to the region. The asset map should include an inventory of a) infrastructure and health, social service, housing services, etc.; and b) workforce programs, projects and services, as well as linkages between agencies and service providers. The asset map will also delineate gaps where programs and services are needed and which areas and stakeholders are being missed. As tool to promote and encourage coordination among stakeholders in implementing the *Workforce Strategy* it should be widely shared this widely with employers, industry groups, service providers and government funding agencies. There could be two versions of the asset map: an overall regional one; and community-specific ones. Once completed, the asset map(s) will:

1. Identify what programs and services are working (i.e. promising practices);
2. Align gaps and needs with funding opportunities;
3. Make for more efficient use of scarce public and private funds for service delivery.

There also needs to be continuing/on-going communication with employers, First Nations and service providers about existing programs and services provided in the region, and the asset map should be a useful tool for achieving this. It will also be a vehicle for sharing labour market information, environmental scans, strategic plans, business plans and training plans between stakeholders.

Employers keep emphasizing – in the surveys of this project and most recently in Town of Port Hardy interviews with aquaculture companies – the importance of life skills, customer service, skills, basic communication skills and a positive attitude.

#### **Joint Community Attraction and Recruitment Strategies**

Local governments and industry sectors need to work together to develop and implement attraction strategies to increase the population by attracting and encouraging businesses, workers, and families to locate in the North Island. Once local partnerships are created and the capacity is put in place to do this, such strategies can be ramped up and scaled down as necessary subject to economic, demographic and other fluctuations or cycles.

The breadth and focus of attraction and recruitment initiatives can be occupational (certain skill sets and credentials), sectoral, labour force groups (e.g. Aboriginal youth, recent immigrants, etc.), regional (other parts of Vancouver Island and BC), national and international.

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### **Connecting Employers and Service Providers**

It is recommended that a mentoring program be established for key sectors to work with employers and job-seekers/employed. Employers can be assisted in planning for human resource requirements for their operations by assessing growth patterns, forecasting skill needs and succession planning and articulating and advertising their current and future requirements in terms of clear knowledge, skills, and experience factors so education providers can tailor their program planning to meet these needs.

Future labour force entrants and current workers can be mentored to shape their learning and training to employer needs and local labour market demand forecasts. Employers should be encouraged to engage the school system and talk to students about job opportunities. They should also be expected to provide work experience opportunities and summer employment to students.

### **Connecting Employers and First Nations**

As the employer survey revealed there is an interest and willingness among North Island employers to work with First Nations and create employment for them, but there is a clear lack of knowledge about programs and services that could facilitate this. First Nations need to be better coordinated in working with local industry to increase employment opportunities for their members. Understanding employer human resource requirements and skill needs is an essential step in ensuring that training program funds are directed to areas that meet local industry demand. A First Nations Table that engages employers and service providers is an important step in creating this linkage. A next step will be to match First Nations training funding to local industry skill requirements. A third step will be to facilitate work experience placements for First Nations trainees as they pursue their training.

Also, First Nations are near finalizing agreements around economic development projects – these will be great opportunities to partner with First Nations to design and deliver job training targeted at occupations and skills needed in these projects.

### **Attracting and Recruiting Interprovincial Migrants**

Strategies to attract interprovincial migrants have to be tied to local industry and labour market growth, with the exception of attracting retirees for lifestyle reasons. A vibrant economy with employment opportunities is a cornerstone of attraction and recruitment, but in the near future as the economy improves, competition for skilled employees will once again become intense. Marketing the lifestyle qualities of the North Island will be essential, and this includes the natural environment, affordable housing and living costs, recreational opportunities, and access to quality health care services in addition to career employment opportunities. A solid marketing campaign should be considered – one that targets areas where workers have experienced job losses and economic downturns. But first, local employers have to be engaged, and as above when connecting them to service providers, their employment forecasts and skill requirements must be clearly understood and incorporated into a marketing and recruitment strategy.

Initiatives to attract workers from other parts of BC and Canada to the North Island will be easier to implement than foreign worker recruitment strategies, but they will still require a concentrated, partnership effort among employers, local associations, and service providers.

As the best practice examples from other Canadian communities demonstrate, competition for skilled workers is intense. Partnership arrangements between employers, service providers, and government program officials that focus on developing information strategies and targeted initiatives to address hard to fill vacancies and skill sets and should include promotion campaigns and job fairs in regions that offer good potential returns.

Initiating contact and working with national and provincial industry associations and sector councils can provide access to sector job posting services, increasing awareness of jobs available in the North Island.

Opportunities to promote local employment and business development should be seen as a vehicle to supplement the local labour force and/or create jobs.

### **Attracting and Recruiting Immigrants**

The attraction of immigrant workers to the North Island should be a two-pronged strategy targeting not only those who reside in foreign countries currently but, equally, those who have recently immigrated to other parts of Canada and who are still in transition to find better employment and living opportunities. Promoting and marketing the affordability of living on the North Island and stable career employment will be a strong attraction to those who have recently immigrated to large, more expensive cities and areas and are under-employed or working at entry level jobs. Key service provider supports such as English language training classes, settlement assistance and foreign credential recognition processes will enhance recruitment strategies and marketing campaigns.

Working with the school district and NIC to offer international education opportunities will also enhance the recognition of the North Island as an immigrant friendly destination.

Even with well-developed local labour force recruitment strategies in place, plans and initiatives to recruit workers from other parts of the province, the country and internationally will also be needed. Also, even though international migration to the North Island is low, immigration programs to recruit foreign workers and attract offshore business investment hold a great deal of potential. The Federal Government has initiated accelerated processes for employers to recruit foreign workers to address skill shortages, and this opportunity will be explored through strategy development with local employers and federal and provincial immigration officials.

Aspects of immigration that need to be explored with the RDMW, local Chambers of Commerce, and civic officials are the business, investor, and provincial nominee programs. Recent studies have shown that immigrants who start businesses or invest resources in currently operating enterprises create an additional three to five jobs in their destination communities (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005).

A valuable tool in recruiting new workers, whether from offshore or recent immigrants from other regions, is the offer of retraining or skills upgrading to those who move to the region to fill job vacancies. As service providers, including NIEFS, have noted, the retraining and retooling of displaced workers pays positive dividends as both a labour retention strategy and as a strategy to address pending critical skill and labour shortages.

### **Promoting Infrastructure**

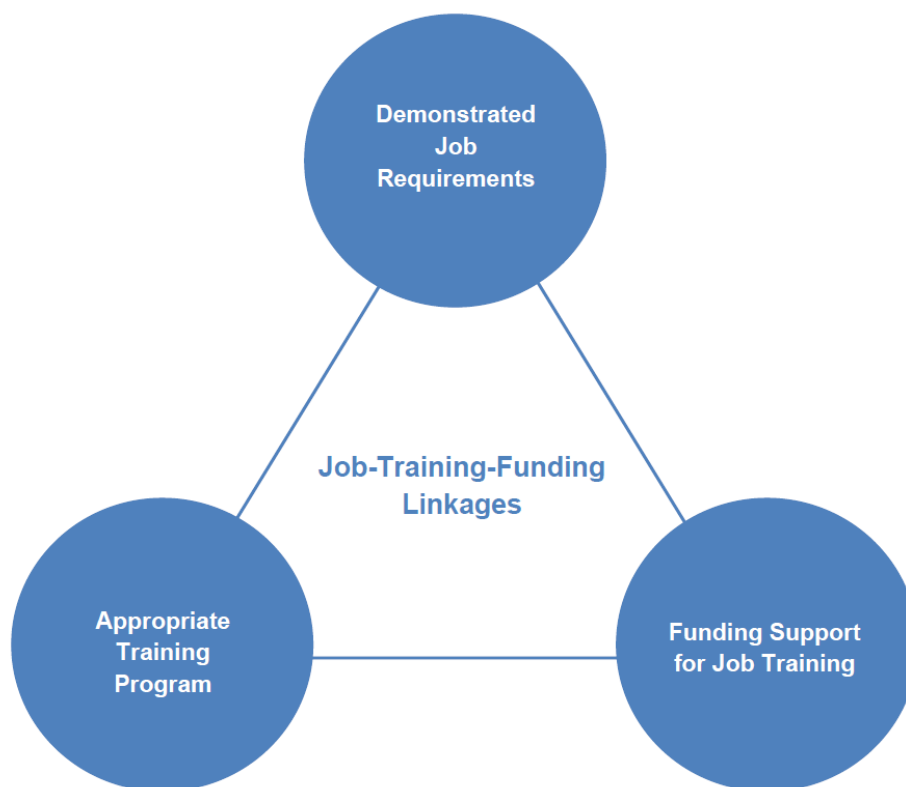
Workforce development alone will not address barriers and obstacles to have the people with the necessary training, skills and knowledge to support economic and business development. In fact, the Strategy will be less impact if the region and individual communities do not work together with senior-level governments on infrastructure needs. Workforce development has to be complemented with infrastructure initiatives to facilitate training, employment and retention of citizens and workers. These include adequate transportation, housing, childcare and social services.

### **Linking Funding to Training for Jobs**

Based on the need to link funding to training and jobs (Figure 10), the WPAC in addressing the 'training for what' question should initially focus on developing the asset map of service provider agencies both in the region and outside of the North Island but providing service to the region, including an inventory of programs, projects and services, as well as linkages between agencies and

service providers. The asset map will also delineate gaps where programs and services are needed and which areas and stakeholders are being missed.

**Figure 10**  
**Linking Funding to Training for Jobs**



The Service Provider Table – with NIC, VIU, Discovery College and NIEFS as members – is positioned to provide employers with a clear picture of labour market services on the region. Building on the asset map, the Service Provider Table should follow up with employers to create a skills inventory showing what skills are being met, where the gaps and shortfalls are, and forecasts on future skills based on business growth.

These steps will position the WPAC and the *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* to address the “training for what question” with its stakeholders and enable service providers such as NIC and NIEFS to tailor their programs to best meet the needs of North Island residents.

## **7. K-12 Education Action Plan**

As studies over the past decade and the recent employer survey and action planning sessions have noted, the continuing loss of young people from the North Island to pursue education, training and job opportunities elsewhere is the biggest obstacle to be addressed in order to reverse population decline and ensure a stable future workforce for the region’s employers and communities. At the June forum, stakeholders spoke about “reinforcing pride in being a member of the community,” “youth inclusion and involvement,” and “the need for children to feel valued in the community.”

Efforts to reverse the region-leaving trend and empowering youth must focus on the K-12 system and not be delayed until young people are preparing to leave it. Improved linkages with the education system should include:

- Initiating dialogue between employers, secondary education, parents and trustees;
- Reviewing delivery of co-op education models both at secondary and post secondary level;
- Establishing a linkage with Junior Achievement program;
- Establishing a regional liaison person to connect high schools with businesses;
- Offering some student training off site at work places;
- Work place training programs needed in schools (e.g. how to function in the workplace courses, creating mock work environments, “working” classroom and entrepreneurial training);
- On-the-job training needed for high school counselors and teachers in leadership;
- Producing an “On-the-job training 101 Workbook” that is targeted at youth;
- Better funding of secondary school career programs such as SSA, ACE-IT, Career Advisory Centres, etc.

The lead agencies could be the School District and Chambers of Commerce; and supporting agencies could be North Island College, Vancouver Island University, Community Futures Mount Waddington, Service Canada, and Employment Service Providers.

### **Dialogue with Individual Employers**

As the employer survey and action planning workshops demonstrated there is a continuing requirement to enhance the capacity of employers to address their specific human resource issues. Typically, 60 to 80 percent of a region’s economic growth occurs as a result of the expansion and diversification of existing businesses and enterprises. This suggests that initiatives are needed to support established employers (who have set human resource practices) to review their traditional practices and consider, for example:

- What is their target population to recruit from?
- How is recruitment currently taking place?
- How successful are their recruitment efforts?
- How well are they incorporating emerging HR trends i.e. employee recognition programs into their workplaces?

There is a significant economic need to assist local employers to address their human resource issues. The workforce is changing. The “millennials” (young people born between 1985 and 1995) have very different expectations of work from their predecessors. Integrating modern human resource practices into the workplace will go a long way to increasing the successful recruitment and retention of local young people – the main group that is looking outside the North Island for career opportunities.

### **Secondary School Career Programs and Partnerships**

The process of pro-actively fostering the development of the area’s future labour force for the benefit of individuals, employers and the local economy is a process that will require a collective effort at the community-level. First and foremost, partnerships between employers, school staff, parents and students must be developed and sustained. Secondary school career programs such as Secondary School Apprenticeship (SSA), Accelerated Career Education – Industry Training (ACE-IT) should be encouraged and funded. Along with efforts to implement these programs, Career Centres should be established and staffed in the high schools to offer career advice and guidance to students and parents and as forums for employers, chambers of commerce and industry associations to engage young people and explore job shadowing, work experience and summer employment opportunities.

At the June forum, many participants emphasized the importance reinvigorating apprenticeship programs; the School District 85 Superintendent invited employers to participate on an advisory committee and will be making Secondary School Apprenticeships one of her priorities – this is a great start to achieving the above.

North Island Employment has had school-to-work partnerships with School District 85 in the past and has several current ones with other school districts. It would be a good partner with the School District, employers and others to work on this action plan. The school-to-work transition can be better facilitated by ensuring secondary school students leave school with a solid base of basic employability skills (communications, customer service, team-work, positive attitude to the workplace, etc.). This was clearly a prime interest to employers surveyed for this project.

In order to reverse the trend of young people leaving the North Island to pursue education and training, a persistent and coordinated effort must be put in place that engages students to look at local career options from grade eight through to graduation.

## **8. Post-Secondary Education and Training Action Plan**

Over the past few months, NIC has undertaken a planning and consultation process to determine future service levels. The College continues to partner with employers to deliver trades technical training and certificate programs in information technology and tourism and hospitality, but program funding and class size requirements based on numbers of spaces makes it challenging to offer programs in the rural and smaller communities found on the North Island.

A positive example of NIC partnering with a regional community was the former program delivery centre in Alert Bay, which was well received, widely supported and very effective in delivering foundation and skills development programs, and should be revisited by the sector table as a model for further niche program development in North Island communities.

Another current example is partnerships between Strategic Forest Management, North Island Employment and Discovery Community College regarding a Carpentry training program in Alert Bay and an innovative forestry training program elsewhere in the region. These programs are directly tied to actual employment opportunities. Another example is Community Futures Mount Waddington's upcoming management of a series of Job Creation Partnership projects in the North Island region.

Apprenticeship at the post-secondary level also was raised at the June 2010 forum, both for First Nations and other young people. A holistic approach, mapping of students' interest, career planning with parents and students, career exploration and work experience and mentorship programs are all part of this solution.

Since being designated as a university in 2008, the former Malaspina University-College, now Vancouver Island University (VIU), has assumed a broader mandate and geographic responsibility and is slowly determining what presence it can have on the North Island. VIU is developing an effective post-secondary education/industry partnership with Marine Harvest, and as this evolves it should be assessed a vehicle for broader application with North Island employers and communities.

Discovery College in Campbell River is a private training institution that offers a range of career technical programs and works closely with employers. It has delivered innovative training in isolated communities on the North Island, and its principals are interested in expanding program services to employers. A singularly successful initiative in this regard was the delivery of carpentry training by Discovery College to residents of Bella Bella. The College's experience and ability of developing and delivering training in smaller and rural communities presents opportunities for the *Workforce Strategy* to explore pilot delivery for First Nations and rural communities.

As the Strategy unfolds, there is a clear opportunity for joint planning and strategy development between NIC, VIU, Discovery College and local employers facilitated by the WPAC. To do this effectively, there must be one focal point and leadership vehicle. In this regard, the future of NIPSEC must be addressed.

It should be noted here that NIC and VIU have a bilateral agreement to work together on common parts of their mandate in the North Island and other regions of Vancouver Island. They are working closely to provide the right mix of learning opportunities in the North Island region. Also, all public post-secondary education institutions on Vancouver Island signed an MOU recently to work together. These kinds of agreements are mechanisms which the implementers of this Strategy can tap into as they move forward.

One of the first priority areas to be explored by the Service Provider Table is the development of niche programming that addresses the needs of the local labour market and employers. On a pilot basis, the delivery of flexible workplace-focused courses that offer entry-level skills in career areas in demand by North Island employers should be explored. This initiative should be aimed at high school students, recent graduates, unemployed job-seekers and workers. This should utilize NIC's and VIU's technology in the area of distance learning, online learning and video-conferencing.

## **9. Workplace-Based Training Action Plan**

Workplace-based training should be a component of the Service Provider Table. It will succeed in direct proportion to the amount of coordination and cooperation between employers and service providers. Upgrading the skills of workers and keeping them current on evolving trades and technical requirements is a key means for increasing business competitiveness and profitability. More efficient and effective operations grow and offer the potential to recruit new workers from local labour market entrants such as students and First Nations people as well as new workers from outside the region – essential steps to stabilizing and increasing the North Island population.

Over the past five years, modifications to existing skills program delivery has seen a marked increase in the availability of modular training programs and computer-based distance delivery of both apprenticeship and skills upgrading through the workplace. This is an essential part of the mandate of the BC Industry Training Authority and its funding of colleges and private trainers. The WPAC and its Service Provider Table, once in place and operational, will be well-positioned to work with employers and training providers to develop a needed skills inventory and put in place plans to access and implement workplace skills training program resources and supports.

At the June 2010 stakeholder forum participants emphasized the need for “training to come to workers and employers” in the region, to build apprenticeship programs, and utilize and promote job-shadowing among employers.

Working with local employers to develop a skills inventory also provides the opportunity to put in place integrated plans and implement pilot programs to deliver training on a cooperative basis to groups of employers and their workers using workplace facilities. Pilot initiatives can address both particular skills upgrading and foundation, communications, team and computer skills where these are needed. The WPAC manager/coordinator should be given initial responsibility to work with local businesses and employers to develop a skills inventory. The Service Provider Table can formulate an approach to implement programs to address the skills needs, including a marketing and recruitment plan to attract out of region workers.

Another valuable facet of the skills inventory will be to assist secondary schools and employers to look at future career opportunities and job openings on the North Island and to encourage students to pursue studies that lead to employment opportunities in these areas. This will assist in the K-12 Action Plan (i.e. delivery of SSA, ACE-IT) and other work experience initiatives including job shadowing and mentoring.

Existing operations, such as NIEFS skills assessments, training delivery and Job Bank components, should be incorporated in the Action Plan and delivered locally in partnership with employers.

## **10. Labour Market and Service Provider Information and Accountability**

Collecting, aggregating, analyzing and disseminating local and regional labour market information (LMI) – tailored to the North Island region – and data on service provider data is a key part of a successful workforce strategy. This enables decision-makers to plan, develop and execute appropriate strategies to address employer, worker and job-seeker needs in the region. There are number of relatively untapped (or under-tapped) databases of information including employer and service provider data and government data such as that which originates in the Crown Referral process and the Major Projects Inventory.

Service providers with operations in the region are always looking for current intelligence on what skills and tools employers, communities and First Nations need in order to design and deliver education, training and employment programs and services. This Strategy includes developing a regional capacity for providing such information, including linking LMI to strategic planning, and enabling small businesses to use such information.

An important part of adding value to existing data is a) bringing it together into a comprehensive data base of the North Island region; and b) sharing such information with key agencies and decision-makers, such as employers, job-seekers, communities and service providers. It will be important to factor LM information into agreements that are developed during the “building block” phase of this Strategy and beyond.

Information on available programs and services and data on program and service outputs and outcomes is also an important part of this element of the Strategy. Such information will create a heightened awareness of existing services as well as providing examples of effective practices and opportunities for partnership. Some service provider data will also provide employment, skill and training demand information for planning purposes. .

An important part of this Strategy is to ensure accountability, firstly by tracking and measuring its results, and secondly, by reporting on performance and adjusting the Strategy accordingly. This will include – once the Strategy is in full force – benchmarking for certain education, training and employment outcome indicators, including by sector, occupation, community and workforce development intervention.

The last part of this action plan will be the development of an Accountability Framework for this Strategy. This will be developed under the oversight of the leadership structure WPAC? and will include a plan for monitoring, measuring, evaluating and reporting on Strategy results through annual reviews, reporting to both stakeholders (“shareholders”) and financial sponsors of the Strategy who in some cases may be one and the same.

## 7. STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION



Generally, the approach for implementing a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy* is to initially focus on a small number of priorities in the first year, establish the leadership structure and other building blocks, establish momentum by starting to execute the action plans and achieving some “early wins.”

Figure 11 summarizes a recommended three-phase implementation strategy for the *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*.

**Figure 11**  
**Phased Strategy Implementation**



Upon completion of the June 2 Stakeholder Forum and anticipated strong support for the Strategy – with or without adjustments, the summer months can be used for preparing for implementation of the Strategy, confirmation of resources, including start-up/seed funding and partner contributions. It will be critical to obtain funding to fill the Manager/Coordinator position. This period can also be used to establish the inaugural WPAC structure and identify initial priorities.

Phase 2 would involve the actual implementation of the Strategy, first putting the basic building blocks in place, and then starting to establish momentum in the specific action plans. For the latter, applications for project-based funding could be developed in order to resource some of the action plans.

Phase 3 would start after the first complete year of implementation when an on-going source of funding is confirmed to support the structure and Manager/Coordinator position. It would also provide an opportunity to assess the first year and update the Strategy; and to really start to achieve traction and results with the tactical action plans.

## **Communication**

Communication will be an important aspect of the implementation of this Strategy in each phase and in each element of the Ten-Point Action Plan. Building on the open and broad communication used throughout this project, the important communication stage will start with a June 2 forum with stakeholders to release the draft version of this Strategy. This will be important because strong support shown by stakeholders will increase the chances of obtaining support from government funders and service providers for this Strategy.

Then in the first phase – during June-August of this year – the sponsors of this Strategy will need to prepare for its launch in the fall. This includes obtaining commitments from individuals and organizations to participate in the leadership structure, confirming seed funding and contributions from stakeholders, working on a regional Accord, and preparing for a launch event. It is intended that the current Steering Committee will lead these activities including the creation of WPAC. It is expected that some members of the Steering Committee may transition into WPAC. Once funding for a Strategy Manager is confirmed and a person is hired, communication will be important to announce this and to build a communication network between this person, key stakeholders, and the various parts of the Strategy structure.

During the start-up of the Strategy implementation and in putting the building blocks in place, communication will be very important in engaging key stakeholders including key employers, business/industry groups, service providers, Aboriginal organizations, communities and local governments.

It is recommended that the newly created WPAC, its Advisory Tables, and Strategy Manager, review best practice examples and develop mechanisms for their shared communication and application to similar opportunity situations. As the Strategy is implemented in Year 1, it will be important to achieve momentum and communicate accomplishments and results to stakeholders. Communication will also be important in annual reporting to stakeholders, including funders and partners, and to demonstrate accountability.

## **Resources and Funding**

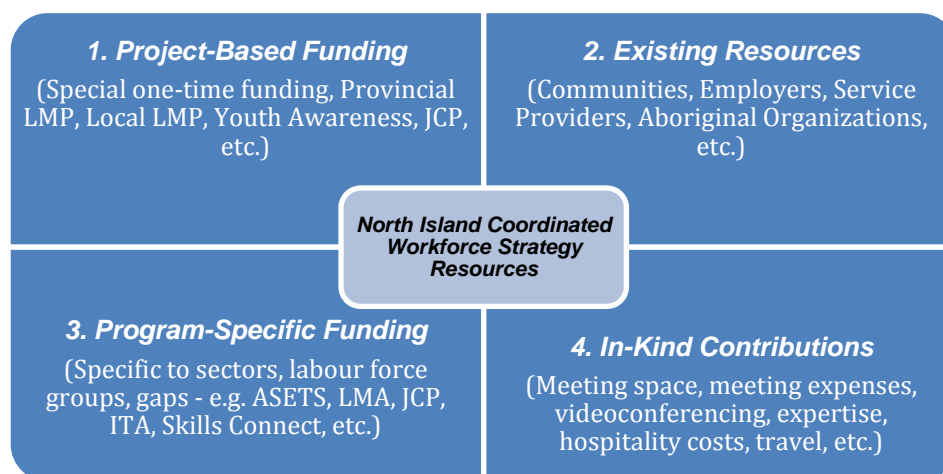
The approach for resourcing this Strategy and the *Ten-Point Action Plan* is multi-dimensional and iterative. We know plausible sources of funding are currently available; these should be pursued. Confirmation and use of these funds will contribute to the proposed structure, including a plan to have a person on the ground in place; then the structure and person will pursue more targeted resources relating to the proposed specific action plans.

As part of early implementation of the Strategy, a contingent of North Island leaders (ideally also WPAC members), local mayors, business leaders should arrange a visit to Victoria to meet with key ministries (Ministers and/or senior officials) with the new Strategy in hand to discuss funding programs and other supports.

The multi-dimensional aspect to this approach on resources is highlighted in Figure 12 and is described follows:

1. Confirming funding to resource the first year of establishing the Strategy structure, the “building blocks” (#1 to #5), including project-based funding to hire a full-time or near full-time Manager/Coordinator. If key stakeholders support this Strategy and structure, there is a reasonable chance of obtaining funding from provincial and/or federal programs to resource the initial phase. This first year of seed funding will enable the structure, staff person, partners and stakeholders to explore and confirm or create a more sustainable revenue stream for the core funding.

**Figure 12**  
**Approach to Strategy Resources**



- Part of the initial phase will require the leadership structure and staff person to confirm whether existing resources possessed by service providers and other stakeholders can be budgeted for implementing parts of the Strategy. Collectively, employers, industry associations, RDMW, CFMW, and service providers such as School District 85, North Island College, North Island Employment, Discovery Community College, etc. manage a number of projects and programs and are active in North Island communities. The Strategy cannot overlook possibilities for utilizing these existing resources.

The other aspect of this part of the resource approach is having a good grasp of existing programs that may be of use to employers and other stakeholders in the region. Our experience is that many employer – particularly very small businesses – do not have a good awareness of existing programs that may be of use to them; there are several – for example:

- BC Training Tax Credit Program;
- Apprenticeship Job Creation Tax Credit;
- Apprentice Incentive Grant;
- Small Business Internship Program;
- Workplace Training for Innovation Program;
- Skills Connect for Immigrants;
- Several industry association managed programs delivered throughout the province under the Labour Market Agreement funding for small business groups;
- Programs such as the Targeted Wage Subsidy Program under the Labour Market Development Agreement.
- Funding to Employment Assistance Services (EAS) contractors and unemployed clients through Employment and Labour Market Services (ELMS) for Employment Insurance (EI) Part II employment programs and services.

Another possibility is to access existing resources under the authority of industry and employer groups that may be useful. An example is the BC Construction Association STEP (Skilled Trades Employment Program) that includes specialized mentoring and coaching for Aboriginal people, recent immigrants, women, and under-employed persons. Through its Vancouver Island chapter, BCCA can make these services available to construction employers in the North Island region.

3. As the specific action plans in points #6 through #10 are planned and executed, there are several government programs that could come into play. For example, a key part of the K-12 Education Action Plan is to work with the School District to enhance its career programming including confirming employer champions to establish a base of Secondary School Apprenticeships in the region. Another element of the Plan is for major employers and industry groups to establish a speakers' bureau on career options. There are funding programs and in-kind resources that can be accessed to support this.
4. The resource approach for this Strategy includes encouragement of in-kind contributions from all stakeholders, for example, to cover the costs of meetings, event and hospitality costs.

The potential funding sources for each element of the *Ten-Point Action Plan* need to support one or both types of funding needed for the Strategy: 1) Project-based funding and eventually sustained funded to resource the strategic "building blocks" of the Strategy; and 2) Program-specific funding and other specific sources targeted at each tactical "action plan." Examples of the many programs – in addition to those listed in #2 above) include the following:

- Funding and other resources of existing service provider programs, services and projects (e.g. Discovery Community College, NIC, NIEFS, School District 85, Strategic Forest Management, Vancouver Island University, etc.);
- Employer/industry cash and in-kind contributions;
- Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Program (administered locally and provincially);
- Youth Awareness Program (administered via LMP Program);
- Job Creation Partnerships Program and other Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) programs (Ministry of Housing and Social Development [HSD]);
- Aboriginal Skills, Employment and Training Strategy (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada [HRDSC]);
- Aboriginal Training for Employment Program (Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development [ALMD]);
- Several Labour Market Agreement Programs (ALMD);
- Welcome BC and several other immigrant employment and bridging programs (ALMD);
- New Horizons for Seniors (HRSDC);
- ITA (i.e. Accelerated Credit Enrolment in Industry Training [ACE-IT], Youth Exploring Skills to Industry Training [YES2IT], Secondary School Apprenticeship [SSA]);
- Ministry of Education (e.g. School Community Connections);
- Existing service provider programs, services and projects;
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada funding to First Nations;
- Existing LMI, LMI tools and program information (ALMD and others);
- Pilot funding for ALMD/HSD/BC Stats/Service Canada for regional LMI research, analysis and dissemination.

While a local Labour Market Partnerships (LMP) Program funded the research and development of this Strategy, perhaps a provincial LMP may be the best option for providing the resources to start to implement the Strategy. The LMP Program "provides funding to encourage and support employers, employee or employer associations, community groups and communities in developing plans and strategies to improve their capacity for meeting human resource requirements and implementing labour force adjustments," and it "addresses labour market issues through partnerships" (*Labour Market Partnerships Program Policy*, Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development).

When one reviews the "eligible" activities of the LMP Program, the program appears appropriate for supporting what this Strategy outlines. The LMP Program could be an instrument for implementing a

coastal or rural communities workforce initiative and use the North Island region and this Strategy as a pilot or demonstration project.

As the Strategy is planned and implemented, it will be important for the WPAC and other North Island leaders to meet with senior officials in key provincial ministries to discuss opportunities for partnerships, building on existing successes and resources, and new funding opportunities for elements of the Strategy. The key ministries are (in alphabetical order):

- Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development;
- Ministry of Community and Rural Development;
- Ministry of Education;
- Ministry of Housing and Social Development;
- Ministry of Small Business, Technology and Economic Development; and,
- Other line ministries as appropriate vis-à-vis specific actions plans and sectors.

The key senior officials are Regional Managers/Directors, Executive Directors, Assistant Deputy Ministers, Deputy Ministers responsible for education, training, labour market partnerships, immigration, regional development, small business, economic development, education and post-secondary education, etc.

### **Critical Success Factors for Successful Implementation**

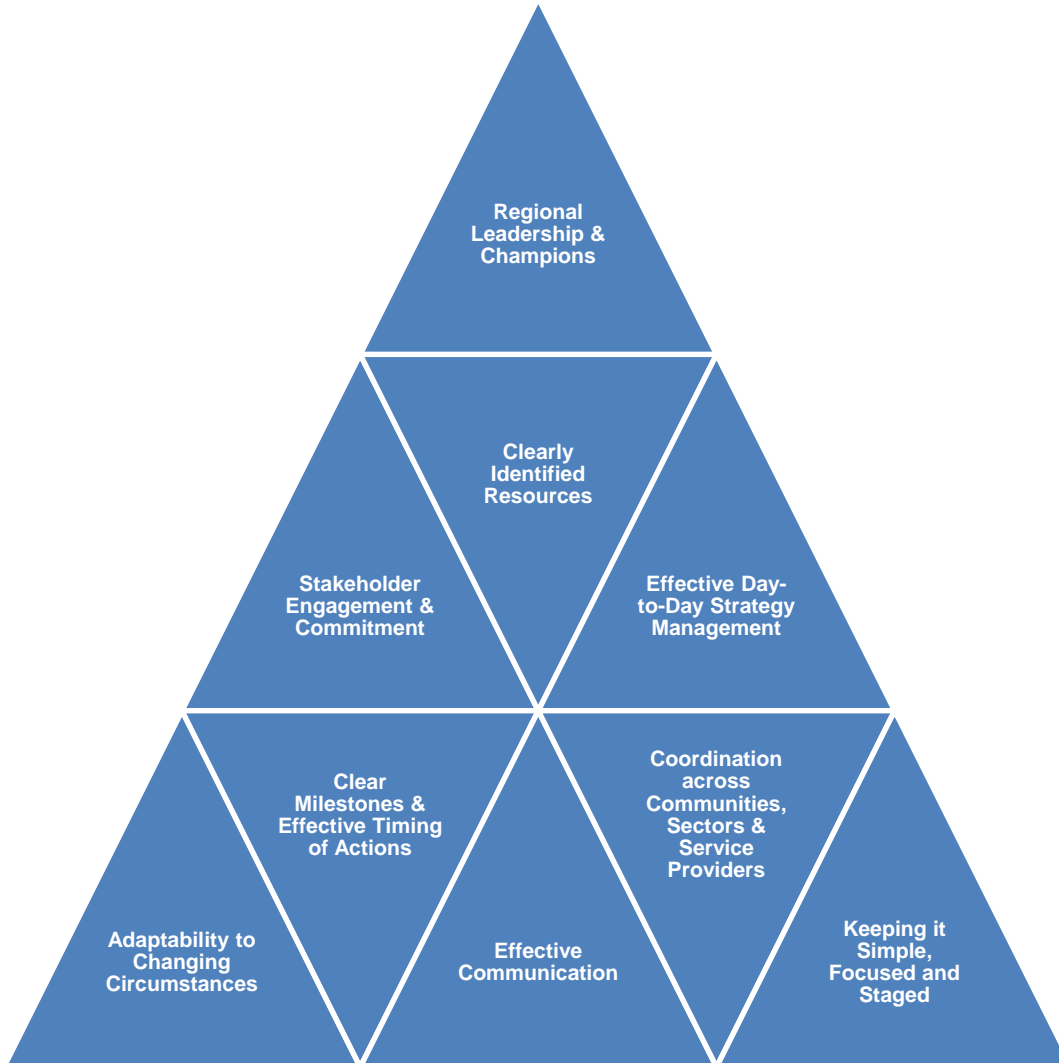
The diagram below visually summarizes the various building blocks that will be required for the successful implementation of the *North Island Coordinated Workforce Strategy*. The preceding sections of the Strategy have identified in specifics, the elements and actions that make up of the more generally described parts of the structure in Figure 13 on the next page. Failure to adequately address any of these factors will risk the success of the Strategy.

Ultimately, successful implementation of a *North Island Coordinated Workforce Development Strategy* depends upon regional governments, First Nations, employers, and service providers. These stakeholders will have to plan together and work cooperatively to realize the goals and action plans of the Strategy. There is a collective will for a Strategy and the building blocks have been put in place. What remains is for the energy and goodwill of North Island stakeholders to be harnessed and put into action to achieve the goals of the *North Island Coordinated Workforce Development Strategy*.

**In addition to obtaining useful input on the Strategy, the June 2 Stakeholder Forum in the region was used as a gauge of the level of support for and commitment to the *Ten-Point Action Plan* among key stakeholders. Based on the response from the majority of the 69 participants, there is strong support for this Strategy and its implementation in an expeditious manner, by putting in place the recommended leadership structure and obtaining seed funding.**

**Congratulations and thank you to all North Islanders and other individuals and organizations who contributed to this Strategy!**

**Figure 13**  
**Strategy Implementation Critical Success Factors**



## IN YOUR WORDS...

### **“Population/Employment Decline Twenty-Two Years Ago”??**

**Remarks by Ardie Bazinet  
(Port Alice Village Councillor, Special Education Worker, NIPSEC Chair, Resident)**

**Presented at Action Planning Session – March 3, 2010**

*Why the urgency?*

*The people at this table today are here thanks to the re-start of the pulp mill.*

*The mill is “the” example of how vulnerable the North Island is. When we were at the crisis point our neighbours realized what a devastating situation this would be not just for Port Alice but for the entire North Island. People wouldn’t just move to Port Hardy or McNeill and enroll their kids into schools. People would move away, including those living in our neighbouring communities who also worked at the mill.*

*And the tax base; well the Regional District wouldn’t want to go there. But re-cover we did, and for awhile we grew with new hires. Our school blossomed from 40 students to over 80; we felt confident about receiving monies for a marina, as was identified by the Provincial Government as a necessary part of our transition; Copper Coast is here; new doctor; re-opened arena; Polaris is soon to open its doors; life is good – for about five minutes.*

*There is a transient feel with the new people hired. They move on and our school numbers plummet. Some live down island with their families and refer to work here as “going into camp.”*

*Services, DFO and WFP are being centralized down island.*

*Graduating students are being encouraged by North Island College to attend NIC in Courtenay.*

*The North Island is struggling to keep the employees it does have let alone educate, re-train or attract new residents.*

*We seem unable or unsure of what new industry or business we could attract and how.*

*We are feeling the urgency of decline.*

*What do we know?*

*Tourism will play a part in enhancing our area; it is a piece of the puzzle.*

*Education is economic development. Universities/specialty schools stabilize communities, hire a variety of people and draw students from around the world. For example: climate engineering and environmental studies.*

*We on the North Island have all the flora, fauna, ocean and affordable waterfront for this to happen. We also have alders that grow like bamboo – the new hardwood floor. Speaking of floors, the energy source is lying on the cut forest floor.*

*We need new employers and we need them and their employees located on the North Island.*

*We need a marina.*

*We have to support the industries and businesses that we do have with trained workers and educated students starting at the secondary level and into post-secondary.*

*We really need to support one another. Each community on the North Island is unique and we should celebrate this facet. Recognize the benefits of each place and support our differences while acknowledging we are not independent of one another. This is collaboration.*

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## APPENDIX 1 – PRELIMINARY TACTICAL ACTION PLANS

### #6 – Workforce Attraction, Recruitment and Retention Action Plan

| Key Action   | Key Participants  | Resources  | Timelines                 |
|--|---|--|---------------------------|
| <p>1. Establish sector table and with input from First Nations and service provider tables:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>plan, develop &amp; conduct workshops for local employers on needs, HR practices</li> <li>provide labour market &amp; HR planning information</li> <li>invite participation &amp; input from government, First Nations &amp; service providers</li> <li>develop pilot HR plans &amp; recruitment strategies</li> <li>provide summary &amp; follow-up to all participants</li> </ul> | <p>Local employers from key sectors<br/>Government, First Nations, service provider representatives</p> | <p>Coordinator<br/>Meeting facilities<br/>HR planning materials<br/>Program funding and support information<br/>Workshop facilitator and resource person</p> | <p>Sep-Oct 2010</p>       |
| <p>2. Develop pilot labour force recruitment strategies based on workshops:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>draft strategies that address priority concerns utilizing government &amp; service provider programs</li> <li>develop recruitment campaign &amp; promotional website</li> <li>conduct follow-up meetings interviews to ensure concerns are addressed</li> </ul>   | <p>Sector Table members<br/>Employers<br/>Chamber of Commerce representatives</p>                       | <p>Coordinator<br/>Development funding</p>   | <p>Nov 2010-Mar 2011</p>  |
| <p>3. Develop comprehensive sources of federal &amp; provincial program resources (Asset Map) &amp; share with local employers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>prioritize industry sectors for need, readiness in recruitment &amp; retention initiatives</li> </ul>   | <p>Sector Table members<br/>Employers</p>   | <p>Coordinator<br/>Development funding</p>   | <p>Nov 2010- Mar 2011</p> |

|   |                                |  |                         |
|---|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• facilitate meetings between employers and government program managers</li> <li>4. Prepare materials for a North Island recruitment &amp; retention campaign:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• operationalize a website</li> <li>• distribute promotional brochures &amp; employment packages to industry associations, government branches &amp; recruiting agencies</li> <li>• target job fairs &amp; employment expos</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <p>WPAC &amp; sector table</p> | <p>Coordinator<br/>Development funding</p> | <p>Apr 2011-ongoing</p> |
|---|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------|

#7 – K-12 Education Action Plan

| Key Action  | Key Participants  | Resources  | Timelines               |
|---|---|--|-------------------------|
| <p>1. Develop a strategy &amp; implementation plan to engage School District 85, local employers &amp; business associations in implementing work-oriented programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hold planning sessions with SD staff &amp; employers to review &amp; prioritize career programs &amp; initiatives</li> <li>• develop classroom presentations for local employers on career options &amp; opportunities</li> </ul> | <p>Service Provider Table members<br/>                     Chamber of Commerce representatives<br/>                     WPAC Coordinator<br/>                     Local employers<br/>                     HR managers<br/>                     SD 85 administration<br/>                     Teachers</p>        | <p>Coordinator<br/>                     Planning materials</p>           | <p>Sep 2010</p>         |
| <p>2. Explore opportunities for &amp; schedule:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• job site visits</li> <li>• job shadowing opportunities</li> <li>• weekend &amp; summer employment jobs</li> </ul>  | <p>Coordinator<br/>                     Local employers<br/>                     HR managers<br/>                     SD 85 administrators<br/>                     Teachers<br/>                     Service Provider Table<br/>                     SD 85 administration<br/>                     Employers</p> | <p>Travel<br/>                     Dedicated employer resources</p>      | <p>Sep 2010-ongoing</p> |
| <p>3. Engage employers &amp; teachers to deliver secondary school industry training programs on a cooperative basis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SSA</li> <li>• ACE-IT</li> </ul>  | <p>Service Provider Table<br/>                     SD 85 administration</p>   | <p>Coordinator<br/>                     Dedicated employer resources</p> | <p>Sep 2010-ongoing</p> |
| <p>4. Consider hiring or designating a full-time industry liaison officer employed by the school district to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• liaise with employers, industry associations &amp; chambers</li> <li>• facilitate contact &amp; coordination with NIC &amp; other post secondary providers</li> <li>• coordinate industry training &amp; work experience programs</li> </ul>   | <p>Sector Table<br/>                     SD 85 administration</p>   | <p>Coordinator wage<br/>                     Travel costs</p>            | <p>Sep 2010-ongoing</p> |

|   |   |   |                          |
|---|---|---|--------------------------|
| <p>5. Establish school career centres and vocational/technical programs geared to local industry needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• regularly schedule employer input geared to local industry needs</li> <li>• provide LM information &amp; career options</li> <li>• provide post secondary education &amp; training materials, prerequisite requirements &amp; program schedules</li> </ul> | <p>Sector Table<br/>SD 85 administration<br/>College &amp; post secondary representatives<br/>Coordinator</p> | <p>Teacher wage<br/>Facilities<br/>Resource materials</p> | <p>Sep 2010-ongoing</p>  |
| <p>6. Coordinate with NIC and post secondary institutions for career planning sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conduct parent/student planning sessions</li> <li>• arrange counseling interviews with students</li> <li>• explore program delivery options utilizing local employers and workplace training</li> </ul>  | <p>Sector Table<br/>SD 85 administration<br/>College &amp; post secondary representatives<br/>Coordinator</p> | <p>Coordinator<br/>Facilities<br/>Materials</p>           | <p>Nov 2010-annually</p> |

#8 – Post-Secondary Education Action Plan

| Key Action  | Key Participants   | Resources   | Timelines        |
|---|--|---|------------------|
| 1. Transfer post secondary mandate from NIPSEC to Service Provider Table: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify planning and development role of Table</li> <li>• Ensure that membership has employer representation</li> <li>• Balance career education &amp; employment training with other post secondary programs</li> </ul>   | WPAC   |   | Sep 2010         |
| 2. Ensure that Table membership & focus is broadly based by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Including NIC representation</li> <li>• Adding VIU representation</li> <li>• Encouraging private trainer participation</li> </ul>   | WPAC   |   | Sep 2010         |
| 3. Develop implementation plans based on North Island realities & requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Niche programs that reflect geographic reality &amp; rural nature of North Island</li> <li>• Pilot program delivery that coordinates between employers &amp; is not tied solely to class size</li> <li>• Incorporates existing plans but reflects workforce strategy priorities for key industries and First Nations participation</li> <li>• Consider recruitment &amp; retention priorities &amp; migration marketing and promotion plans as they develop</li> </ul> | Service provider table<br>First Nations table<br>Sector Table<br>Coordinator<br>Employer<br>First Nation bands<br>NIC, VIU, private trainers | Dedicated pilot program funds AVELD, ITA, post secondary institutions | Jan 2011-ongoing |

|   |  |  |                         |
|---|--|--|-------------------------|
| <p>4. Assess employer coordination and develop workplace-based skill programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan onsite delivery of apprenticeship and skills upgrading programs utilizing employer facilities and equipment</li> <li>• Explore program component delivery utilizing several employers and workplaces</li> <li>• Develop on line delivery, and modular components to facilitate completion</li> <li>• Develop foundation and entry-level pilot program delivery in rural and First Nations communities</li> </ul> | <p>Service provider table<br/>Coordinator<br/>Employers<br/>First Nations<br/>NIC, VIU, private trainers</p> | <p>Dedicated pilot program funds AVELD, ITA, post secondary institutions</p> | <p>Jan 2011-ongoing</p> |
|---|--|--|-------------------------|

#9 – Workplace-Based Training Action Plan

| Key Action   | Key Participants   | Resources  | Timelines       |
|--|--|--|-----------------|
| <p>1. Conduct a Skills Needs Inventory with local employers that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• includes the current technical skills and upgrading requirements of existing workers</li> <li>• addresses foundation, communications, team and computer skills</li> <li>• provides forecasts for future skill needs and recruitment aimed at secondary school students</li> </ul>   | <p>Service Provider Table<br/>Employers<br/>Coordinator</p>  | <p>Survey materials</p>                                  | <p>Dec 2010</p> |
| <p>2. Develop a Workplace-Based Training Action Plan that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strategies to deliver skills upgrading through modular programs, distance delivery</li> <li>• cooperative workplace program delivery to groups of employers &amp; workers</li> <li>• increased participation in apprenticeship and cooperative education programs</li> <li>• pilot initiatives to market and recruit from outside the region</li> </ul> | <p>Service Provider Table<br/>Employers<br/>Industry associations<br/>Coordinator<br/>ITA<br/>NIC, VIU, private trainers</p> | <p>Dedicated funding &amp; program resources<br/>TBD</p> | <p>Mar 2011</p> |
| <p>3. Secondary school implementation strategy including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• employer school visits &amp; tailored learning based upon Skills Inventory</li> <li>• increased participation in SSA &amp; ACE-IT</li> <li>• job shadowing, mentoring &amp; summer employment initiatives</li> </ul>  | <p>Service Provider Table<br/>SD85<br/>Employers<br/>ITA<br/>Coordinator</p>   | <p>Dedicated program resources TBD</p>                   | <p>Sep 2011</p> |

|  |   |                            |                 |
|--|---|----------------------------|-----------------|
| <p>4. Develop &amp; implement a labour market information distributions component including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• local LMI regularly updated &amp; circulated to employers</li> <li>• providing job bank &amp; client skills assessment information to employers</li> <li>• incorporating job matching &amp; placement functions in an accessible format</li> </ul> | <p>Service Provider Table<br/>Employers<br/>NIEFS</p> | <p>Coordinator<br/>TBD</p> | <p>Sep 2010</p> |
|--|---|----------------------------|-----------------|

**#10 – Labour Market and Service Provider Information and Accountability Action Plan**

| Key Action   | Key Participants  | Resources  | Timelines   |
|--|---|--|---|
| 1. Collect/synthesize existing labour market information (LMI)   | Staff person in partnership with service providers, communities and key employers | Part of seed funding for start up of Leadership Structure and building blocks (including staff person) | Develop a plan for this by October 2010   |
| 2. On-going scanning of training demand and gaps   |   |  | List of occupations and training needed by                                      |
| 3. Collect new LMI   |   |  | December 2010   |
| 4. Collect and synthesize service provider information (program, service, client, input, output, outcome data, etc.) | Staff person  | In-kind contributions from service providers, key employers and members of the Leadership Structure    | Implement LMI work January 2011<br>Start to collect data from service providers |
| 5. Provide reports on and regularly disseminate regional and local LMI and service provider data and successes       | Leadership Structure and staff person   | Potential pilot project funding from ALMD/ HSD/BC Stats/Service Canada                                 | Initial reports by Spring 2011  |
| 6. Develop a Strategy Accountability Framework that defines Strategy goals, inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes    | Staff person and members of Leadership Structure                                  |  | By December 2010  |
| 7. Regularly communicate Strategy performance and results  | Leadership Structure and staff person   |  | On-going  |
| 8. Annually assess Strategy performance and adjust accordingly   |   |  | Annual report by August 2011  |