

2014/2015 Regional Business Retention + Expansion Project



Final Report and Action Plan

WE WANTED TO KNOW HOW TO HELP BUSINESSES SUCCEED, SO WE ASKED THEM!

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BR+E Background

Business Retention + Expansion (BR+E) is an action – oriented and community based approach to business and economic development. It promotes job growth by helping communities learn about issues and concerns of local businesses, and set priorities for projects to address those concerns. The BR+E program is focused around in-person business visitation and a confidential interview process. Business interviews are conducted by trained volunteers utilizing a standardized survey to collect data on; business climate, future plans, business development, workforce development, and community issues. Analysis of the survey results is used to develop strategic actions that will assist in addressing the concerns of business and promote growth.

The Ontario BR+E program advises a four stage process. The first stage involves the project planning and business visitation phase, the second involves responding to business concerns, the third stage involves entering and analyzing data from the surveys, and the final stage is focused on creating action plans and introducing the final report to the community. Implementation of the plan is ongoing and the responsibility of the project partners.

Acknowledgments

The 2014/2015 Regional Business Retention + Expansion Project was made possible with the support and participation of the regional business community, and with project funding from:

- The Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (MNDM) 
- The Government of Canada 

The following organizations and municipalities partnered to provide project oversight through the Project Steering Team, and supported the project with cash and/or in-kind contributions:

- Dryden District Chamber of Commerce (DDCC)
- Patricia Area Community Endeavours (PACE)
- Northwest Training and Adjustment Board (NTAB)
- City of Dryden & Dryden Development Corporation (DDC)
- Township of Ignace
- Municipality of Machin
- Patricia Region Tourist Council (PRTC)

Project partners also recognize the support of the OMAFRA, Business Retention + Expansion program staff during the coordination of the project.



Project Objectives

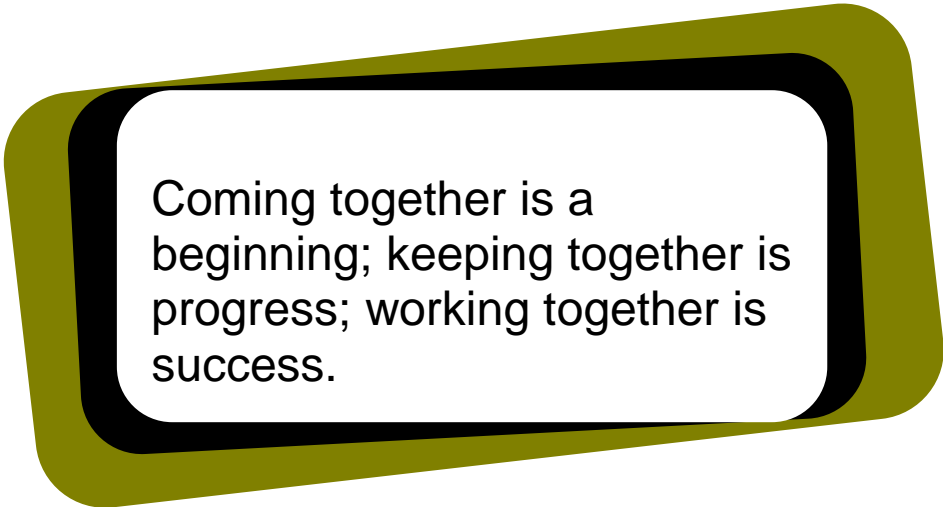
The objectives for implementing the Regional BR&E Project included short and long term goals for economic development in the region.

Short Term Goals:

- Improved communications with the business community
- Establish a current and relevant data base to support evidence based decision making and act as a baseline for future BR+E projects
- Gain a better understanding of regional business climate and issues
- Identification of specific strategies and achievable actions to help businesses
- Capacity development via the volunteers and steering team working together on a complex issue as well as skill development for future BR+E projects.

Long Term Goals:

- Increase business development and job creation
- Create a business friendly environment to promote business growth
- Inform municipal and organizational strategic planning



Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.

Project Coordination

The Dryden District Chamber of Commerce was responsible for the development and management of the Regional BR+E project via the Project Coordinator. The project partners formed the project Steering Team to champion the project, provide guidance and oversight, and to fill volunteer positions to work with the Project Coordinator on specific project tasks.

The Project Steering Team

In addition to providing local intelligence, making recommendations on project management, and establishing Performance Measurements for the project, the Steering Team assisted in the recruitment of Volunteer Visitors and Businesses. The Steering Team also researched and developed the community questions that were added to the Retention Survey that was used during the interviews.

The success of this collaborative project can be attributed to the enthusiasm and commitment of the members of the Steering Team. Over the 13 month duration of the project, the compliment of members varied due to volunteer and employment changes. The following individuals are acknowledged for their contribution to the Steering Team between Feb 2014 and March 2015.

James Cochrane	DDCC
Charlene Everett	DDCC
Stefanie Armstrong	DDCC – Data Analysis Working Group
Councillor John Carlucci	City of Dryden
Sandra Boyko	DDC – Data Analysis Working Group Coordinator
Nicole Gale	DDC – Visitation Coordinator
Sonja Wainio	NTAB
Brian Miles	PACE
Donna Pollock	PACE
Councillor Chicki Pesola	Township of Ignace
Tammy Rob	Municipality of Machin
Mike Loewen	PRTC
Liz Norman	MNDM – Data Analysis Working Group
Devon MacKinnon-Ottertail	Eagle Lake First Nation
Gwen Kurz	DDCC- Project Coordinator

Volunteer Visitors

A key component to the BR+E program is community involvement, specifically through the role of Volunteer Visitors. Volunteer Visitors for the Regional BR+E project were recruited and trained by the project coordinator to conduct in-person business visits and deliver the retention survey professionally and confidentially. A performance measure of 40 volunteer visitors was established by the Steering Team, and 42 individuals completed one of two training sessions held in May 2014. The Project Coordinator, in collaboration with the Visitation Coordinator established teams of 2 volunteer visitors, assigned businesses to the teams, and advised the teams of the contact person to schedule the business visit.

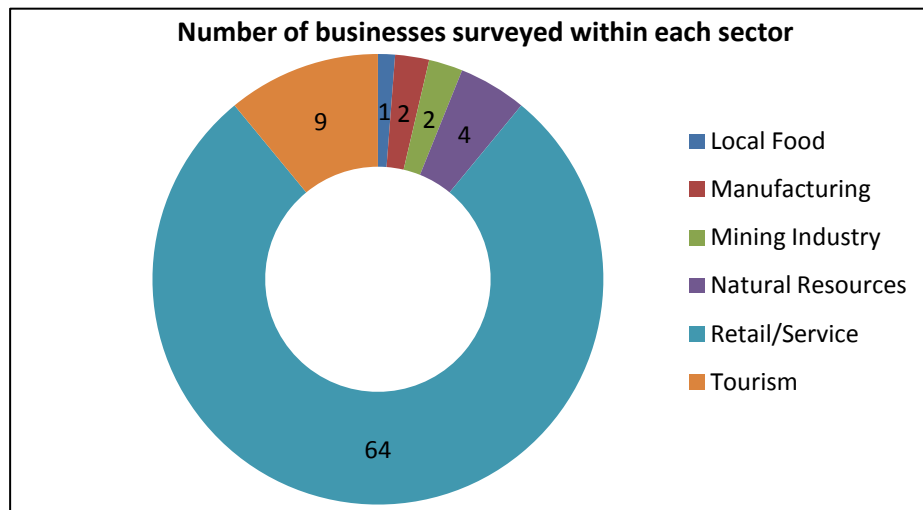
The Steering Team acknowledges the following individuals for their professionalism, and contribution to the project as a trained Volunteer Visitor:

- ❖ Angelina Anderson
- ❖ Dianne Apland
- ❖ Stefanie Armstrong
- ❖ Sandra Boyko
- ❖ Shelley Byers
- ❖ John Carlucci
- ❖ Anita Chandler
- ❖ Carole Coccimiglio
- ❖ James Cochrane
- ❖ Dayna DeBenedet
- ❖ Silvana Edenburn
- ❖ Allyson Euler
- ❖ Charlene Everett
- ❖ Nicole Gale
- ❖ Heather Gardner
- ❖ Holly Hanson
- ❖ Rick Hill
- ❖ Ruth Jacklin
- ❖ Debra Kincaid
- ❖ Ken Kurz
- ❖ Gwen Kurz
- ❖ Calista Livingston
- ❖ Natasha Lovenuk-Markham
- ❖ Charmon MacDonald
- ❖ Devon MacKinnon-Ottertail
- ❖ Jennifer MacNeill
- ❖ Rena Madden
- ❖ Brian Miles
- ❖ Liz Norman
- ❖ Tammy Oliphant
- ❖ Chicki Pesola
- ❖ Donna Pollock
- ❖ Michelle Price
- ❖ Lauren Priebe
- ❖ Tammy Rob
- ❖ Marjorie Salavich
- ❖ Janet Shaffer
- ❖ Trevor Szmon
- ❖ Patty Vann
- ❖ John Vincent
- ❖ Sonja Wainio
- ❖ Shannon Wogenstahl

The Visitation Program

The Steering Team established specific goals and performance measurements for the business visitation program to ensure fair representation from the business sectors and partner communities.

- The Steering Team established the performance measure of 75 businesses in total to be interviewed.
- The visitation program took place between June 6, 2014 and October 31, 2014. The original deadline was extended by one month due to scheduling challenges through the summer months.
- The process would be open to any business that was interested in participating. The Steering Team did not want the project to be perceived to be selective or unavailable to some businesses. Letters were mailed to 475 businesses in the project area advising them of the project and encouraging them to contact the project coordinator to be put on the visitation list.
- The Project Coordinator prepared interview packages for the visitation teams that included the BR+E Retention Survey with community questions, a confidentiality agreement, and follow up sheet. Completed packages were returned to either the Visitation Coordinator or Project Coordinator.
- A total of 82 businesses completed the Retention Survey; 63 from Dryden, 12 from Machin, and 7 from Ignace.
- Of the participating businesses, 78% were categorized as Retail/Service sector. This sector encompasses businesses from the financial, health, transportation, retail, accommodation, and food services.



Analysis of Survey Results

The Steering Team assigned the task of data input and analysis to a working group of Steering Team members. The Executive Pulse Program available through OMAFRA and the BR+E program was utilized as an efficient data management tool. The Project Coordinator and the Data Analysis Working Group participated in an Executive Pulse training webinar which enabled proficiency in using the program for input of the completed surveys and generating reports for analysis.

The Data Analysis Working Group generated and reviewed summary qualitative and quantitative reports from a regional perspective, as well as the individual communities. The analysis was focused on identifying consistencies in survey responses, both positive and negative. The working group was interested in discovering general information about the businesses, and learning about the specific strengths and weaknesses of the regional business environment in order to determine key opportunities for focused and strategic action planning.

The initial data analysis of the Working Group revealed the following four business development opportunities to be presented to the project partners and community stakeholders for further analysis with the goal of generating realistic strategies and achievable action plans for implementation:

- Workforce Development
- Regional Economic Development
- Municipal & Community Services
- Business Support Services

The Steering Team recognized that the strategies and actions that were a result of the final data analysis would be the most important component of the project's Final Report. Inclusion of all the summary reports in the Final Report would create a document so large that it would deter interested parties from downloading, printing, or reading the report.

All of the data summary charts generated from the survey responses are included in the Appendices to this report for anyone interested in additional analysis or using the data to support their work. The data is published as regional totals and also segregated into the three participating municipalities. Businesses located in the unincorporated areas are included in the data for the municipality they are geographically closest to. Inconsistencies in the number of respondents in the data summary charts are a result of survey respondents choosing to not answer a question, or the ability to select multiple responses to some questions. Additionally, particular attention was given to ensure that specific businesses could not be identified in the summary reports.

Business Survey Results

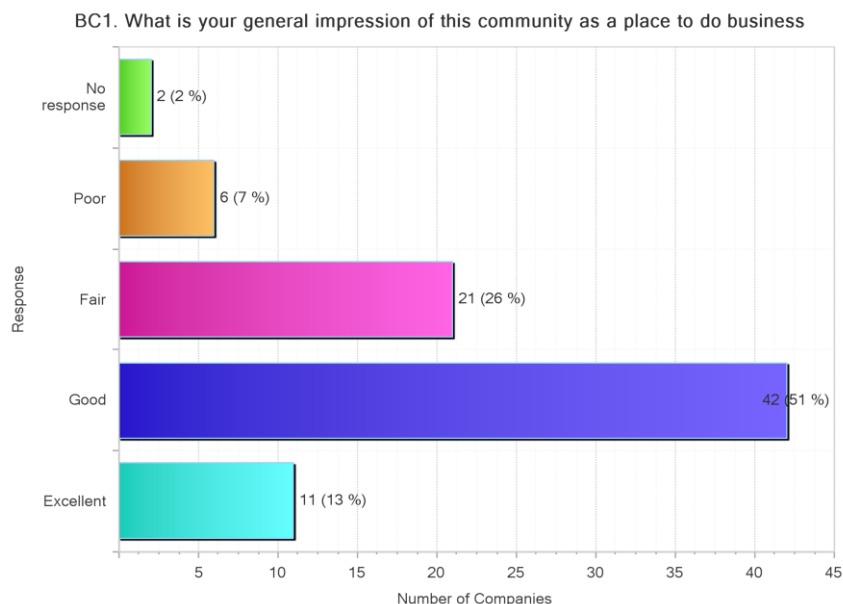
Survey Results - General Business Information

The first section of the survey asks questions on general business information in order to produce data on the business sector, size, and longevity.

- Retention Survey question: How many years has your business been in operation in this community?
 - 43% had been in business for more than 26 years
 - 23% reported operating between 11 and 25 years
 - 17% indicated 4-10 years of operations
 - 10% were in business for 1-3 years
 - 6% of businesses interviewed had been in operation less than 1 year

- Retention Survey question: Including owner/owners, how many employees work at this location?
 - 35% reported 1-4 employees
 - 27% reported 5-9 employees
 - 20% reported 10-19 employees
 - 18% reported more than 20 employees

- The data revealed that 64% of businesses were positive about doing business in their community, and that a net of 104 new jobs were created over the past 3 years.



Qualitative Survey Results – Survey Comments

The survey provided opportunities for the businesses to offer qualitative comments instead of choosing from a list or providing quantitative information. The following three survey questions and collated responses provide an overview of the regional business environment from the perspective of the business owners/operators and are a data resource for all four key opportunities. All survey responses are included in Appendix A.

- Retention Survey question: *What are the community's top 3 advantages as a place to do business?*
 - **Location** - Central in region, on TransCanada, natural resources
 - **Business Environment** - includes costs to do business, lack of competition, customer loyalty, supportive business community
 - **Quality of Life** - Friendly people, slower pace, recreation

- Retention Survey question: *What are the community's top 3 disadvantages as a place to do business?*
 - **Location** - Isolated, shipping expenses, distance to markets, climate
 - **Municipal Government** - Finances, economic development cuts, negativity
 - **Workforce** - Too few people, too few skilled workers

- Community Survey question: *What is the most significant change you would like to see in this region in the next 5 years? The responses have been compiled and the top 7 comments reported:*
 - **More people**
 - **Economic Development focused on business start ups and expansion**
 - **Tourism Development**
 - **Cultural Diversity**
 - **Positive Municipal Leadership**
 - **Airport Development**
 - **Youth Attraction**

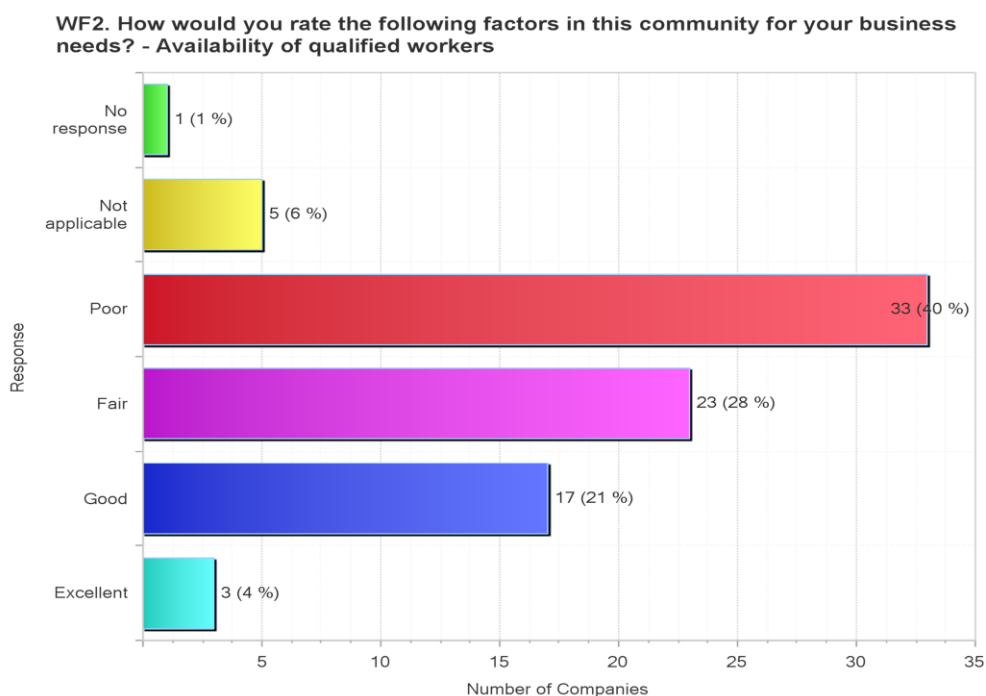
Survey Results - Key Opportunities

❖ Workforce Development

Workforce readiness and availability is a critical component to business development and growth. Bridging the gap between employers looking to hire and people seeking employment is an issue for communities across Ontario. The changing demographics in the project region combined with small populations and long distances between communities with no public transportation compound the issue. There are multiple organizations, agencies, and institutions in the region dedicated to workforce development. This BR+E project created opportunity for gathering data, sharing information and identifying synergies with delivery agents that will benefit employers and workers.

The following survey results highlight the workforce development issues identified by businesses:

- 68% of businesses reported that the availability of qualified workers was poor or fair
- 60% reported they had difficulty hiring and when selecting from a list identified the following hiring challenges:
 - 23% reported too few applicants
 - 32% reported lack of appropriate skills or training
 - 27 % identified lack of relevant experience
 - 17% reported 'other' – work habits or work ethic were most often identified in the comments
- 'Workforce' was identified as one of the community's top three disadvantages as a place to do business



❖ Regional Economic Development

The communities in the project region are challenged by small populations and limited resources, including economic development practitioners. The communities do benefit from strong connections due to shared labour force, customers, suppliers, transportations links, and government agencies and regional organizations. Municipalities in the project region are surrounded by unincorporated territories that are home to many businesses and residences that contribute to the regional economy but are not served or regulated by municipal by-laws. Federal and provincial governments support regional development initiatives through their funding programs and agencies, and they are an efficient use of resources.

The following summaries of survey results highlight the overall business environment of the region and opportunities for regional collaboration on projects that are regionally beneficial.

- The Retention Survey asked the business owner/operator to identify the geography of their primary market. Of the 82 business interviewed:
 - 49% identified their markets as regional
 - 30% identified their markets as local
 - 10% identified their markets as international
 - 7% identified their markets as national

- The survey included a series of questions about the businesses use of technology and internet services. 75% of businesses reported a high degree of dependence on internet technology for conducting business, and most were not currently experiencing any barriers to their technology use. Businesses located in more remote locations did report challenges with internet access and speed.

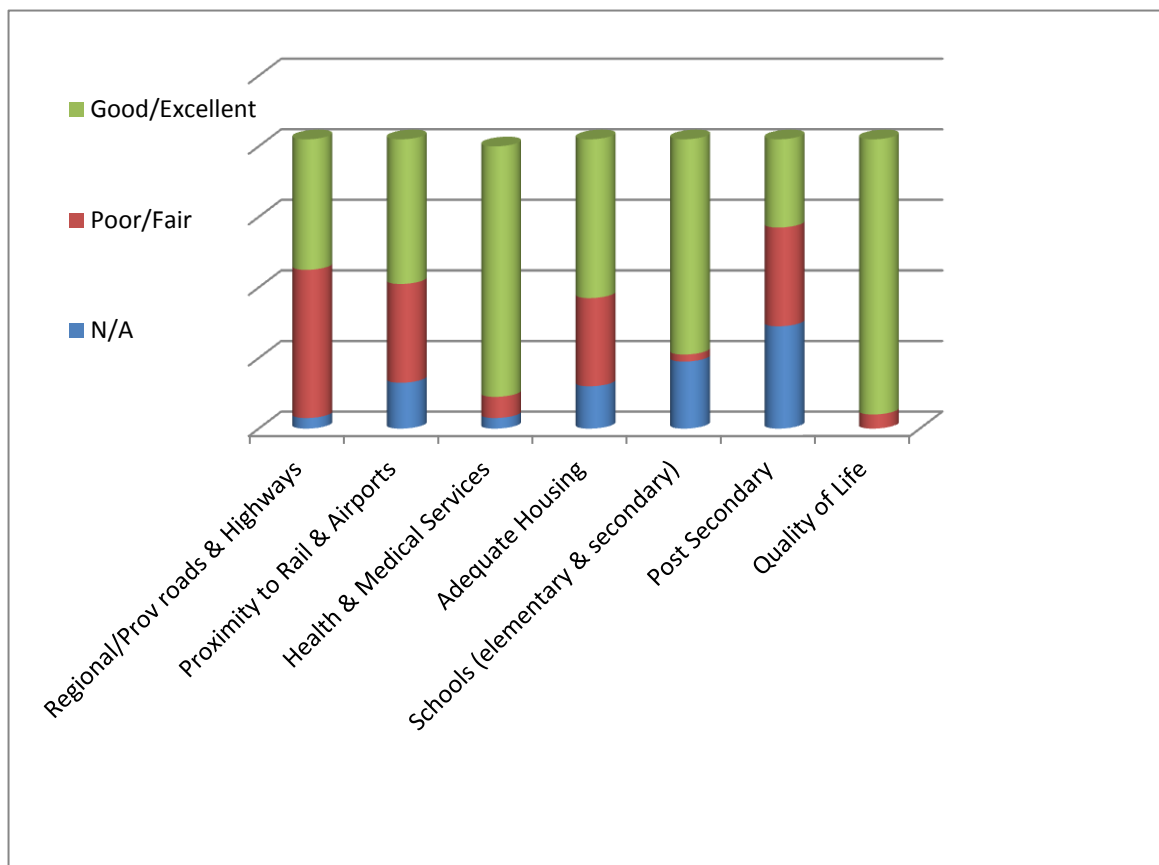
- When asked what activities or assistance would be beneficial to their business, three of the top four responses involve service delivery by regional agencies:
 - Workforce planning, employee training & attraction
 - Joint Advertising & Marketing
 - E-commerce, social media and online content workshops

❖ Municipal & Community Services

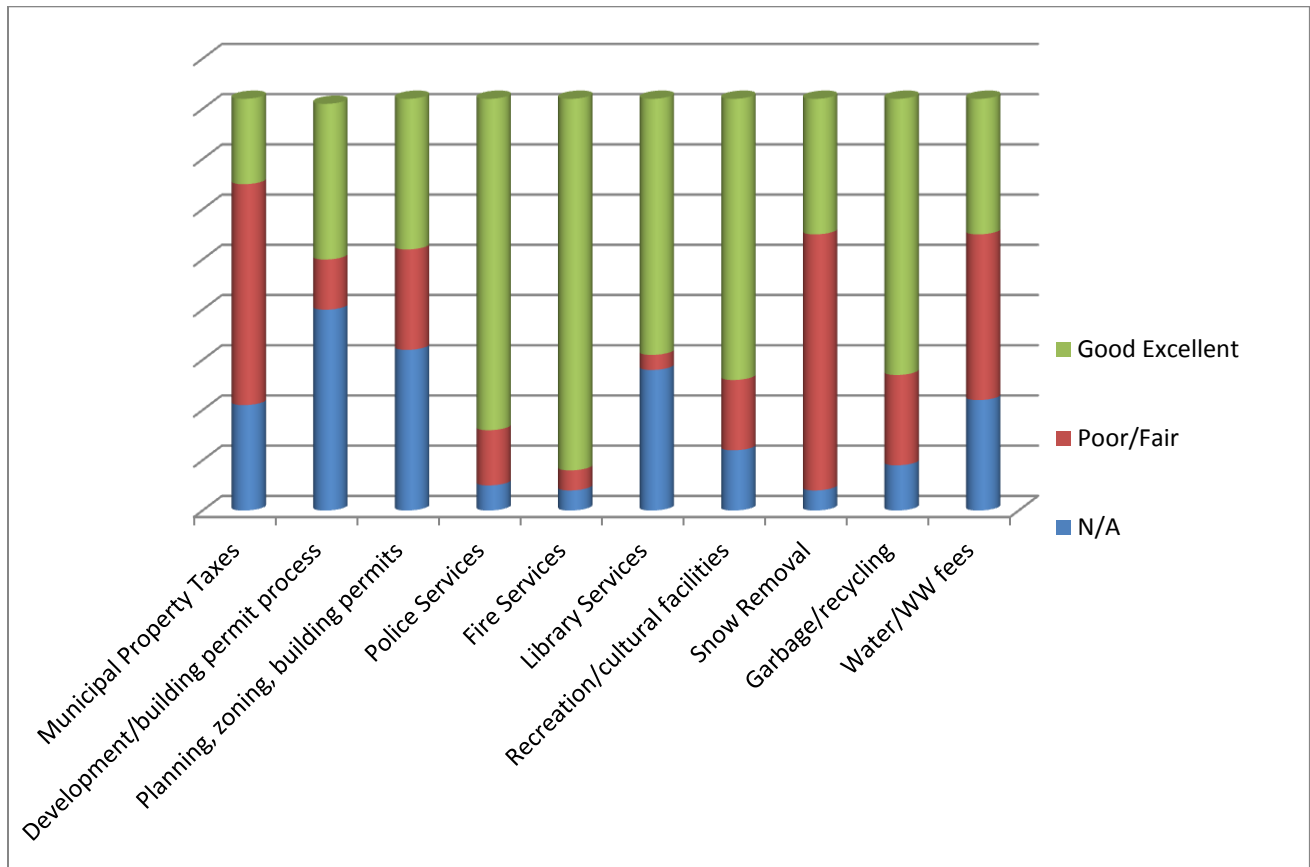
Municipal and community services have a direct impact on business development. Municipal by-laws, development charges, processes and political issues influence a business's ability and willingness to start-up, expand, or relocate. Community services such as health care providers, education institutes, transportation links, and overall quality of life impact businesses recruitment and retention of professionals and general workforce. The issues identified in the qualitative and quantitative data create opportunity for municipalities and other community stakeholders to better understand the needs of business and how a community can flourish through collaboration and idea exchange.

The following survey results highlight the opportunities for communities to support business development directly and indirectly.

- **Retention Survey Question:** *From the perspective of your business, please rate the following community services*



- **Retention Survey Question:** *From the perspective of your business, please rate the following municipal services*

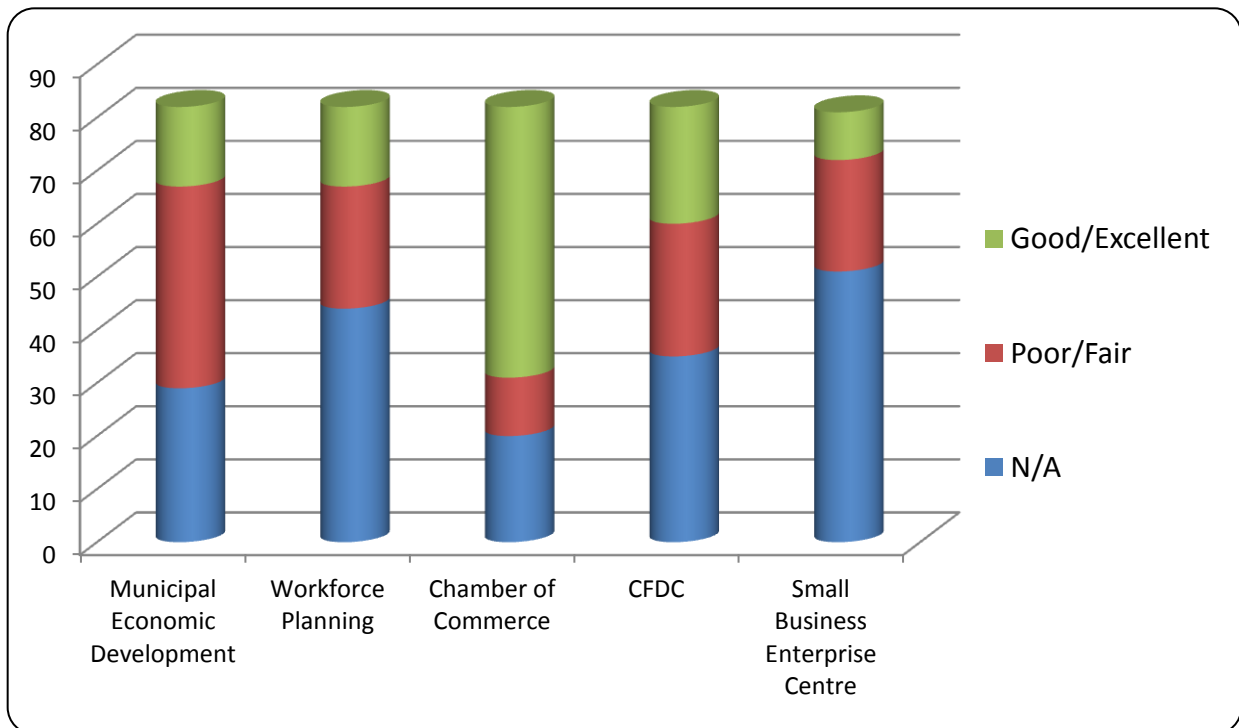


- Municipal Government was identified as a top 3 disadvantage to doing business in the community. Survey comments expressed concern about lack of communication about municipal plans, priorities, and notice of interruption to services that directly impact daily operations of business.
- Businesses across the project region rated availability of Health & Medical Services as good or excellent
- 72% of businesses that pay Municipal property taxes rated those taxes as Poor or Fair

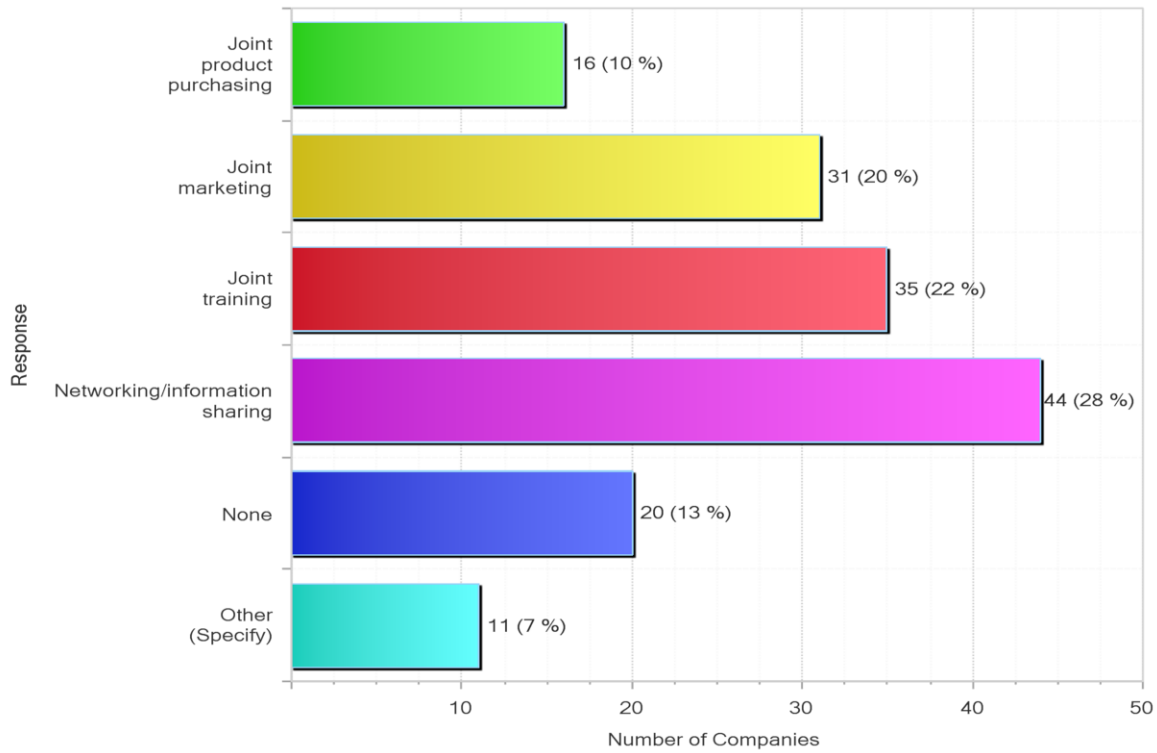
❖ Business Support Services

The survey data revealed that businesses are interested working together and receiving assistance from the business support agencies that offer business services across the region. This information creates opportunity for those support agencies to make informed decisions about the development of new programs, or partner on existing programs and activities to better meet the needs of existing businesses and entrepreneurs.

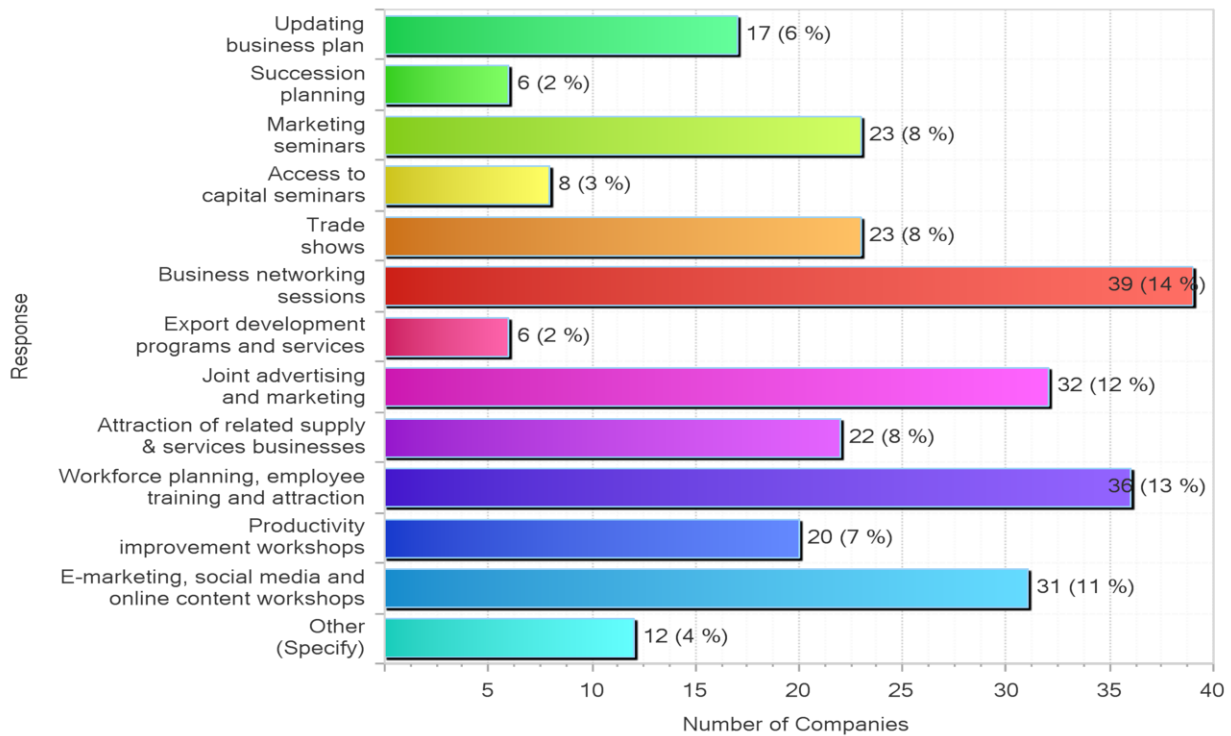
- When asked about future plans for their business:
 - 49% of owners reported they would remain the same
 - 38% were planning to expand
 - 5% were looking at downsizing
 - 8% were considering selling or relocating
- The Businesses that were looking at expansion plans reported their expansion would result primarily in increased workforce, new products or services for customers, and increased floor space.
- The majority of the Businesses considering selling or relocating indicated workload, personal reasons, or retirement at their reason.
- The survey asked the business to rate several organizations whose mandate is economic development. The data reveals that the majority of businesses surveyed had little to no contact with the business support agencies.



BD7. Are you interested in working co-operatively with other businesses in the community to pursue any of the following?



CD5. What assistance or opportunities would be beneficial to support your business



Survey Results - Community Specific Questions

The Steering Team added five Community Specific Questions to the Retention survey with the goal of learning about local issues and how they impact business. There were two questions about cultural sensitivity training, one question on housing, one question regarding a shop local campaign, and the final question focused on regional development. The following two questions and survey results were deemed relevant for the purposes of this report. The question and responses regarding regional development is reported on page 7. All survey results are available in the appendix.

- **Community Specific Survey question:** *Would your business be interested in participating in a Shop Local Campaign?*

	Dryden	Ignace	Machin	Total
Yes	45	4	9	58
No	17	1	3	21

- **Community Specific Survey question:** *Would your business benefit from customer service training focused on cultural diversity?*

	Dryden	Ignace	Machin	Total
Yes	35	3	6	44
No	26	3	6	35

Survey Results – Immediate Follow up

A priority for data analysis follow up involved compiling and mailing information packages to the 32 businesses that requested additional information through the interview process. Packages included fly sheets on government funding programs, apprenticeship and internship programs, and co-operative education programs.

Planning for Implementation

Community Stakeholder BR+Eakfast

On January 30, 2015 the Steering Team hosted a BR+Eakfast meeting to facilitate additional data analysis, and gather input from community stakeholders in order to confirm the four key opportunities, discuss the data, and generate realistic action plans for implementation by the project partners.

Invitations to the BR+Eakfast were sent to more than 180 individuals representing the project partners, participating businesses, volunteer visitors, and other identified community stakeholders; Dryden Regional Health Centre, Dryden High School, Dryden Literacy Association, Kenora District Services Board, Confederation College, Ontario Ministry of Colleges & Universities, and Northwest Employment Works.

The January 30, 2015 BR+Eakfast was held at the Dryden Regional Training & Cultural Centre and attended by 35 people. The project coordinator presented the survey results and the four key opportunities that were identified through initial data analysis:

- Workforce Development
- Regional Economic Development
- Municipal & Community Services
- Business Support Services

The attendees were assigned, based on their interest, to one of four table groups to discuss one of the key opportunities. Groups were asked to identify potential strategies and/or action items that would address the identified business concerns.

The following tables outline the Strategies, Action Items, Lead Agency, and proposed timeline as discussed at the BR+Eakfast and approved by the Project Steering Team.

Strategies & Action Plans

Legend of Acronyms

NTAB = Northwest Training & Adjustment Board	DHS = Dryden High School
DLA = Dryden Literacy	DDCC = Dryden District Chamber of Commerce
NEW = Northwest Employment Works	DDC= Dryden Development Corporation
MTCU = Ministry of Training Colleges & Universities	PACE = Patricia Area Community Endeavours

Opportunity: Workforce Development

Strategy	Action Items	Lead Agency	Timeline
Improve Workforce Readiness for Entry Level and Service Sector jobs	Create employee handbook for employers to give to new employees to improve retention	NTAB	2015
	Continued delivery of soft skills training	DLA/NEW	On-going
Strengthen connections and information exchange between agencies, organizations and learning institutions	Establish local task force to address transition of young workers from the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) to post secondary apprenticeship programs.	NEW/MTCU /DHS/DLA	2015
	Hold Canada Ontario Job Grant employer information event	NEW/NTAB	Completed February 26, 2015
	Host Co-op/Workforce Symposium	DHS	2016
	Utilize Chamber meetings and communication channels to share information about training programs	DDCC	On-going

Opportunity: Regional Economic Development

Strategy	Action Items	Lead Agency	Timeline
Invest in Tourism	Partner with Tourism organizations on marketing campaigns, highway signage	Municipalities/ DDC/PACE	2015
	Maintain Visitor Information Centres and Visitor Services	Municipalities	On-going
Promote the region as place to do business	Maintain community profiles as investment readiness tools. Invest in investment readiness activities.	Municipalities/ DDC/PACE	On-going
	Capitalize on transportation advantages and infrastructure such as the Trans Canada highway, highway 502, winter roads, Dryden Regional Airport and CP Rail for moving goods and services, particularly to the far north through investment in planning, advocacy, and maintenance	Municipalities/ DDC/PACE	Long term
	Support broadband expansion/upgrades throughout the region.	PACE	Long term
	Establish task force to investigate publishing a regional business directory	DDCC/PACE /DDC	2016
Focus on Regional Collaboration	Partner on regional development projects and opportunities for funding	Municipalities	On-going
	Provide ongoing support for regional EDO meetings	PACE	On-going
	Develop Regional Stakeholder Coalition with semi-annual networking meetings	DDCC/BR+E Steering Team	By Sept 2015

Opportunity: Municipal and Community Services

Strategy	Action Item	Lead Agency	Timeline
Establish proactive, “business friendly” communities	Educate and involve business community in annual municipal budget process, and establishing taxation strategies to ensure commercial and industrial tax rates are competitive	DDCC/DDC/ Municipalities	Immediate and On-going
	Systematic review of zoning bylaws and development by-laws to ensure processes are streamlined	Municipalities	On-going
	Develop Municipal Communications Plan to ensure consistent, positive messaging through media releases and public notices. Plan should include the following tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular newsletters • Identification of a Municipal Communications Officer • Utilizing social media • Consistent processes for information sharing on maintenance activities such as water flushing and snow clearing as well as emergency related information • Promotion of the general inquiries contact information 	Municipalities	2015
	Collaborate with community stakeholders on business improvement activities such as beautification and revitalization projects	Municipalities	On-going
	Adopt municipal economic development plans and provide resources for implementation. ***Plan should include implementation of Ontario BR+E program on regular basis	Municipalities /DDC	2015
	Develop and adopt a Municipal Strategic Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize public consultations and BR+E report as resource • Regular reporting on progress by annual report cards to community • Establish Performance Measurements – report year over year on activities to demonstrate ROI. 	Municipalities

Opportunity: Business Support Services

Strategy	Action Item	Lead Agency	Timeline
Improve communication channels between businesses, and the business support agencies, and community at large	Establish business networking program	DDCC	Immediate
	Develop partnerships with other business support agencies on delivery of business workshops and seminars	DDCC/DDC/PACE	Immediate
	Work with DAARN on cultural diversity training program for businesses	DDCC	2015
	Organize Funders Forum to inform and connect business with business support agencies, government programs/services/grants	DDCC	2015
	Develop ongoing informal business visitation program.	DDCC/municipalities	Immediate
	Establish task force to investigate and implement a 'Shop Local' campaign	DDCC /DDC/PACE	2015
Attract and retain young professionals in the region	Support establishment of Dryden Area Young Professionals Network	DDCC	Immediate
Support entrepreneurs and new business start up and expansion	Partner with organizations, and cooperative enterprises on initiatives that support entrepreneur development	NTAB /PACE DDCC /DDC	Immediate and ongoing
	Follow up with businesses identified in BR+E survey that are considering expansion.	DDC/ municipalities	Immediate

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Project Steering Team discovered the BR+E program to be informative, well supported by OMAFRA staff, and an effective tool for communicating with the business community. Specific recommendations for the implementation of the action plans identified in the final report are:

- Ongoing promotion of the successes of the Regional BR+E project, the Final Report and opportunities to deliver on the action plans. This could include presentations to project partners, community stakeholders, interested community groups
- On-going communication between project partners and the business community through regular updates on implementation of the strategies & action plans. The initial progress report to be released by the project coordinator before the end of September 2015.
- Business visitation programs, formal and informal, are a solid economic development tool for retention and expansion of businesses, and can also aid with investment attraction strategies. It is strongly recommended that the Ontario BR+E program be utilized on a regular basis in the region. Through the Executive Pulse Data Management Program a baseline of data has been established for the communities of Dryden, Ignace, and Machin. This database can be added to with future projects and results compared to the 2014/2015 project in order to identify trends, successes, or issues of concern.

The Project Steering Team appreciates the support and encouragement from the regional business community during the visitation program and at the BR+Eakfast on January 30, 2015. This project was dependent upon the willingness and openness of business owners and operators to share information about their operations, future plans, opinions, ideas, and unique stories in order to influence a positive business environment for themselves and future businesses. The Volunteer Visitors all reported positive interview experiences and a new appreciation for the challenges and successes of the businesses they surveyed.

Accessing the Final Report & Action Plan and Appendices

Digital files are available for viewing and download on the following websites:

www.drydenchamber.ca

www.dryden.ca

www.ntab.on.ca

www.pace-cf.on.ca

www.freemap.ca