



Northern  
Alberta  
Development  
Council



# Driving Innovation in northern Alberta

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## Proceedings Report

**Event Summary of the  
Innovation Opportunity  
Seminar held on  
February 3, 2016.**

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## Message from the Vice Chair



On behalf of the Northern Alberta Development Council, we are pleased to have hosted the Driving Innovation in Northern Alberta seminar held on February 3, 2016 in Athabasca, Alberta.

At the NADC, we understand that true success can only be achieved by working together. We are committed to working with northern organizations to explore opportunities for partnerships, and provide valuable information and resources to the people and businesses of our region to progressively contribute in the economy.

A continued priority for the NADC is to build partnerships among key stakeholders and leaders within Alberta's northern economies and communities. A partnership with the northern Regional Economic Development Alliances (REDAs) and Alberta Innovates Technology Futures (AITF) demonstrates the NADCs commitment to facilitating initiatives that cultivate growth and development of the north.

Following our engagement with the northern Regional Economic Development Alliances (REDAs) and in response to the feedback received, the Driving Innovation in Northern Alberta seminar was hosted in a northern Alberta community. This seminar was made possible in partnership with the NADC, northern REDAs and Alberta Innovates Technology Futures (AITF).

The feedback from this seminar was very positive and responses confirmed that the NADC is on the right track in implementing meaningful initiatives to help support the economic development needs of the north. This event is one example of the many partnerships that the NADC is currently involved in to address gaps in the north. We look forward to continued partnerships with northern communities and organizations working together to create a strong and resilient north.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Willard Strebchuk".

Williard Strebchuk  
NADC Vice-Chair

# Introduction

## The Northern Alberta Development Council

The Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) champions the cause of Alberta's northern economies and communities by exploring opportunities for growth and developing programs and services to facilitate this growth.

The Council is currently made up of 9 public members and a Vice-Chair. The position of Chair is traditionally held by a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) of Alberta. The Council reports through the Chair to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Council membership reflects the geographical, cultural and vocational diversity of northern communities.

## Current Members

Vice Chair, Williard Strebchuck, Whitecourt

Brian Allen, Grimshaw

Peter Braun, La Crete

Andre Harpe, Valhalla Centre

Ken Noskey, Peavine

Pat O'Neill, St. Paul

Brad Sakowich, Athabasca

Jason Schulz, Fort McMurray

Eva Urlacher, Cold Lake

## Mandate

As set out in the Northern Alberta Development Council Act, is to "investigate, monitor, evaluate, plan and promote practical measures to foster and advance general development in northern Alberta and to advise Government accordingly". The NADC supports the Provincial Government's commitment to prosperity by facilitating the development of a thriving and progressive northern economy.

## Vision

A stronger Alberta through a stronger north

## The NADC Region

Our region represents 60% of Alberta's landmass and 9% of the total population



## Executive Summary

Based on the current economic conditions, with the price of oil low and new projects and developments slowing, supporting a culture of innovation – **an environment that supports creative thinking to generate new or improved products, services or processes** – in the northern business community is vital to ensuring the north is sustainable in the long term. This is demonstrated by the Rural Economic Development Action Plan, which states that enhancing innovation and technology infrastructure can ensure rural businesses are positioned to be effective, efficient and competitive. Moreover, cultivating business competencies in the critical area of innovation can help to sustain businesses through times of economic change and propel regional growth.

The seminar, held in Athabasca, Alberta, on February 3, 2016 was a collaborative effort lead by the Northern Alberta Development Council in partnership with Alberta Innovates Technology Futures, Grizzly Regional Economic Alliance Society (Growth Alberta), Lesser Slave Lake Economic Alliance (LSLEA) and Northern Alberta Information Hub (Alberta HUB).

These partners had previously met to discuss the economic needs of the communities in northern Alberta and to brainstorm ways in which to partner to support business initiatives to address barriers and gaps. Innovation was a recurring theme of discussion, as was the development and support of existing businesses and entrepreneurs. Partners voiced sentiment that innovation, capacity building and connectivity may help diversify the economy and create a more resilient future for the north.

The resulting Driving Innovation in Northern Alberta seminar provided information on resources available to northern communities, including:

- Access to education on product, research and technology development;
- Knowledge on how to improve or launch products or services and market timing;
- Information on and access to potential funding sources;
- Access to new market opportunities;
- A forum to foster strategic partnerships with innovation and technology enterprises; and
- An opportunity to explore and potentially create a resource network (Regional Innovation Support Network) of like-minded businesses, entrepreneurs and service providers.

## Event Presentations

### Go Productivity: Innovating for Productivity ([Presentation](#))

Ken Chapman, Executive in Residence

[Ken@goproductivity.ca](mailto:Ken@goproductivity.ca)

Innovation is a critical component of all high performing companies and economies, including small businesses in Alberta. This session provided an overview of the process and best practices for implementing innovation at the small business level. Presentation messages and highlights:

- Productivity is the resourcefulness of your business: Leadership, Operations, Collaboration and Innovation;
  - It is important for companies to tap into and utilize the skills and expertise of their staff;
  - Create a culture where employees can contribute towards innovative ideas;
  - Build a climate for innovation and take time to brainstorm to bring clarity to ideas - “Planning is huge – Execution is divine”; and
  - Bring supply chain vendors and companies together to discuss how to work better, more efficient together.
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### National Research Council of Canada ([Presentation](#))

Kasturi Narayanan, Industrial Technology Advisor

[KasturiNarayanan@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca](mailto:KasturiNarayanan@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca)

The NRC-Industrial Research Assistance Program provides technical and business advisory services and financial assistance to help Canadian small and medium-sized companies build their innovation capacity and create high-paying jobs. Firms helped by NRC-IRAP are better equipped to perform R&D, commercialize new products and services for global markets, and access new markets. Through its balance of services and funding, NRC-IRAP supports over 10,000 firms annually. Various programs and partnerships were highlighted during this session including information on the proposal and application processes.

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### Alberta Innovates Technology Futures ([Presentation](#))

Matt Cornall, Technology Development Advisor

[Matt.Cornall@albertainnovates.ca](mailto:Matt.Cornall@albertainnovates.ca)

The presentation by Matt Cornall provided information on innovation, research and commercialization services delivering economic and social benefits to Alberta. This session reviewed the various programs and services, offering an innovation based one-stop-shop.

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**Rural Alberta Business Centre (Cold Lake) [\(Presentation\)](#)**

**Kathryn Hotte, Small Business Advisor**

**[Advisor@northeastrabc.ca](mailto:Advisor@northeastrabc.ca)**

RABCs provide advice and information services to entrepreneurs, small business owners, and managers at all stages of the business life cycle from the start-up to expansion to succession planning, assisting them in making informed business decisions.

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**Community Futures (Lac La Biche) [\(Presentation\)](#)**

**Stephen Evans, General Manager**

**[Manager@cflb.com](mailto:Manager@cflb.com)**

Community Futures offers a wide range of financial and business services from commercial loans, loan guarantees and equity financing up to \$150,000.00 to help start, purchase, and finance, modernize, refinance, or expand a business. The presentation reviewed program supports and services available through Community Futures, current projects and the various partnerships supporting the northern Alberta economy and local entrepreneurs.

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**Olds Institute [\(Presentation\)](#)**

**Mitch Thompson, Executive Director**

**[Mthomson@Oldsinstitute.com](mailto:Mthomson@Oldsinstitute.com)**

Mr. Thompson discussed the benefits of infrastructure enabled economic development and innovative internet based solutions that are driving growth in Central Alberta and growing profits for local entrepreneurs. In today's business environment the internet will revolutionize the way we live and work. Mr. Thompson shared some of his observations and successes being accrued in Olds that can be duplicated in northern Alberta. In Olds, numerous stakeholders assembled to identify and build the broadband project, this included 150 volunteers working on active committees. Mr. Thompson spoke about the experience in their different way of thinking resulting in different things occurring. In order to stay vibrant, compete in the economy, allow for industry growth, and become an attraction for businesses, it is important for communities to remain current in the broadband industry.

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**Business Development Bank of Canada ([Presentation](#))**

**Shannon Preus, Regional Manager, Corporate Relations & Partnerships**

[Shannon.PREUS@bdc.ca](mailto:Shannon.PREUS@bdc.ca)

Innovation as a Driver for Growth and Success -

Research conducted with Canadian entrepreneurs in a wide range of industries points to innovation as one of four key success factors in driving continued growth. Through innovation, companies can also implement successful diversification strategies which are another strong predictor of growth in small and medium sized enterprises. For many business owners, one of the challenges of innovation and growth is financing. This session provided learnings on the four key success factors that lead to double digit growth for Canadian businesses, including: 1) Be client centered, 2) Build a talent pool, 3) Innovate (surpass competing margins / ability to innovate, 4) Invest - to be the best, improve productivity, utilize advanced technologies. Lastly, messages on the importance of diversification; not to rely heavy only on a single client in the service sector, diversify and explore selling internationally.

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**Innovation Support Network, Lakeland College ([Presentation](#))**

**Lorne MacGregor, Ph.D., Director, Applied Research & Commercialization**

[Lorne.MacGregor@lakelandcollege.ca](mailto:Lorne.MacGregor@lakelandcollege.ca)

Mr. MacGregor discussed the utility of innovation networks which are attuned to the needs and culture(s) of their clients; benefits and how an innovation support network should function and a brief overview of starting or growing such a network. Measures of success, and the timing of such measures, was discussed in the context of the need for long-term sustained effort to truly create a culture of innovation. Shared benefits of innovation support networks and suggestions as follows:

- Keep networks personable and informal (with process and paperwork) and minimize bureaucracy (reduce pillars and policies);
  - Make referrals and offer supports available through personal service;
  - Be culturally sensitive;
  - Trust and communication between providers is essential; and
  - Building innovation takes time and to build the culture of change/ideas – and it can take a number of years to see most return on the dollar.
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## Go Productivity — Wrap Up

Ken Chapman, Executive in Residence

[Ken@goprodutivity.ca](mailto:Ken@goprodutivity.ca)

Mr. Chapman provided a summary of the conversations, presentations and key outcomes  
Actionable steps to start a basic innovation program in your business.

A number of key points and take a ways included:

- Tap into the many partnerships, opportunities and support organization available;
- There is no such thing as a crazy idea;
- Importance for Innovation, Collaboration, Culture Change and Creativity;
- Non-disclosure agreements; have open dialogue, talk about what's clear and disclosure outside conversation;
- Survival of the Fittest: Successful people are adaptive: how fast can you deliver?; how sustainable are you?; and, how resilient are you during hard times?; and
- Keep networks going – share and learn what others are doing, make and grow your contacts and network base

## Closing

Driving Innovation in northern Alberta showcased the potential impacts of organizations working together for a common cause; while many of the day's presentations highlighted the need for a collaborative systemic approach to economic development.

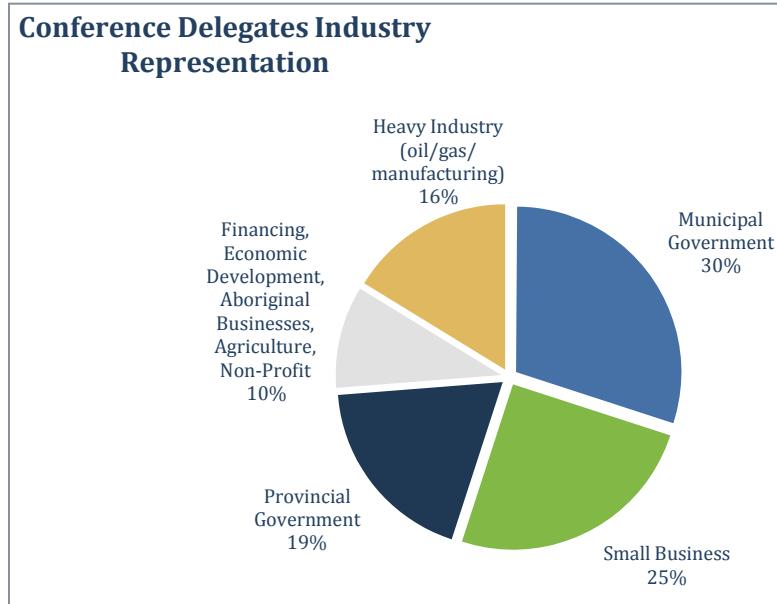
Topics such as the importance of broadband in rural northern Alberta were highlighted as a major area of interest to the participants. This has resulted in a partnership between the NADC, Economic Development and Trade and the northern Regional Economic Development Alliances to identify the broadband needs and challenges specific to northern Alberta. This partnership will provide a greater knowledge of concerns such as the current state of broadband and the potential barriers to economic growth.

Participants and speakers were keen on keeping the dialogue open through the potential of an informal innovation network. Feedback highlighted the need for more networking amongst business and economic support organizations, government and municipalities, industry, small and medium sized businesses and entrepreneurs. The magnitude of interest in learning opportunities related to the theme of innovation and business development supports assists the NADC in preparing for future events.

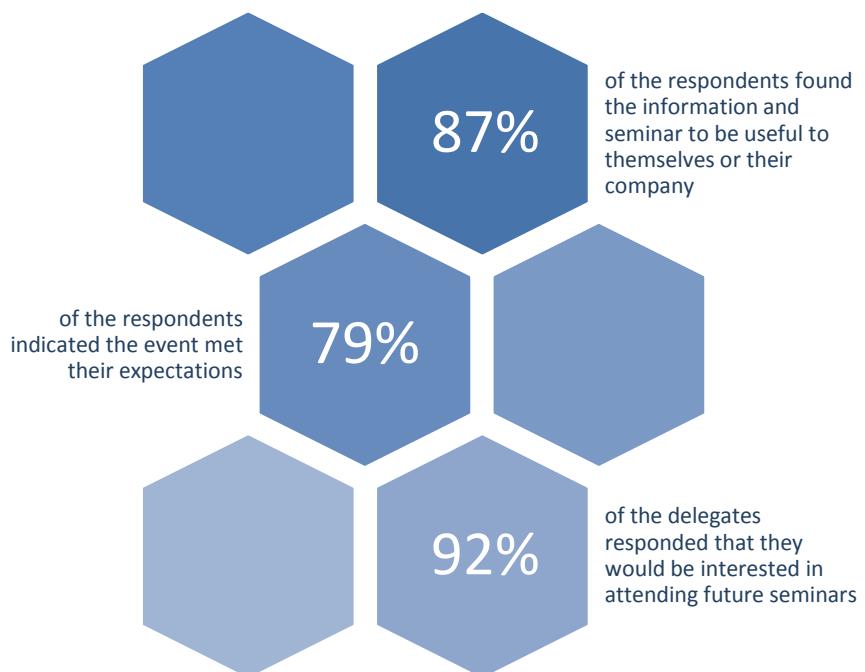
The Northern Alberta Development Council plans to continue supporting the north in its commitment to providing information and resources on innovation and best practices. A second Innovation Opportunity Seminar is being considered for the 2016-17 fiscal year.

## Seminar Evaluations

Of the 71 delegates in attendance 51 Evaluations were submitted. Evaluation results are summarized below.



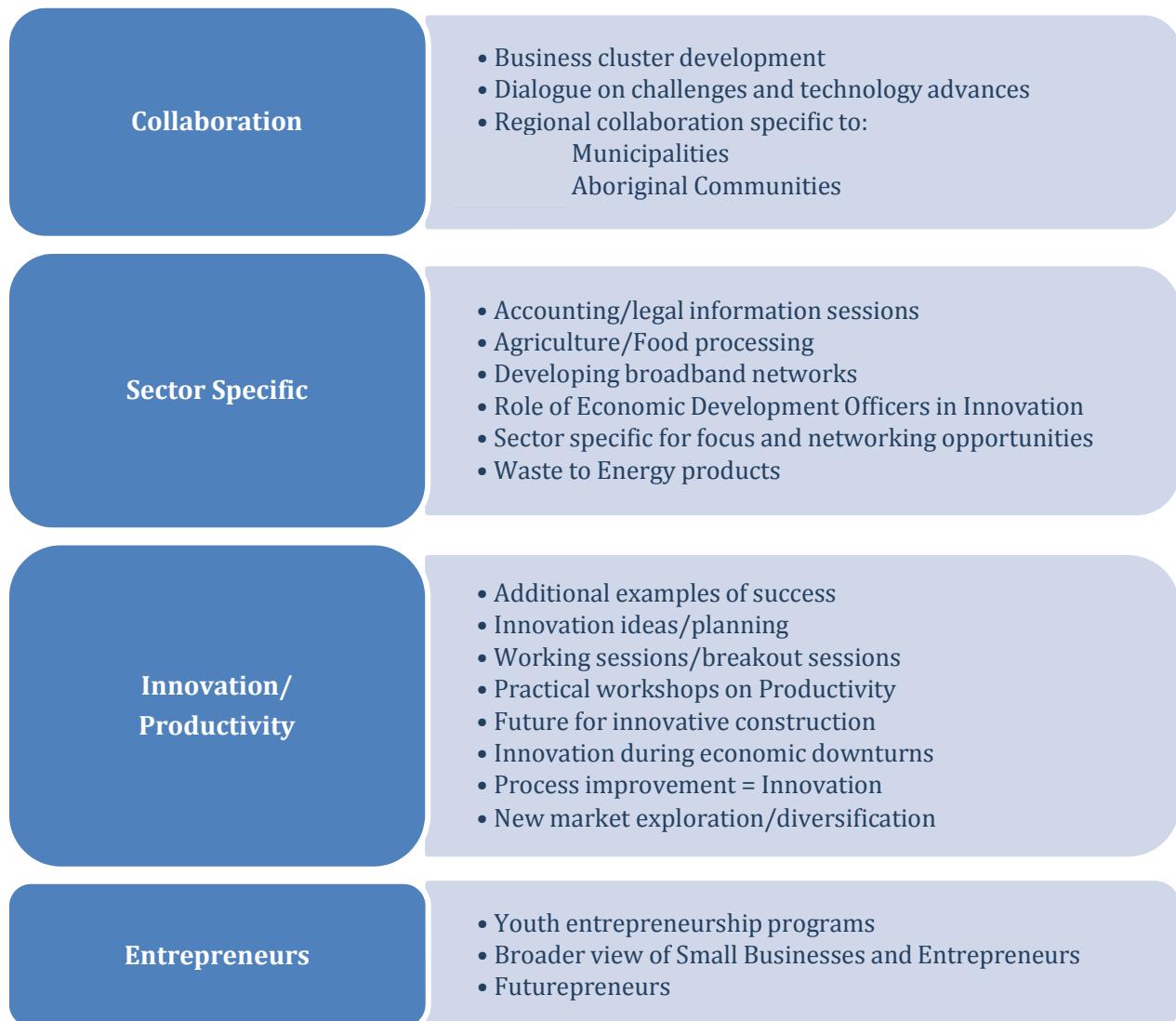
- 29% of delegates responded networking and collaboration being the greatest interest aspect of innovation; 12% responded funding for start-ups and expansions, 8% for creativity, 8% for application to small and medium sized companies; 8% technology, and 4% for entrepreneurship.



**Other topics of interest include:**

- ✓ Services and supports to the business community (TEC Edmonton, RABC, Go Productivity, business incubators, etc.);
- ✓ Access to broadband;
- ✓ Proven examples of innovations in northern Alberta;
- ✓ Getting inventions to manufacturing;
- ✓ Innovation creation and encouragement support in communities;
- ✓ Dialogue with delegates on challenges, struggles, goals and objectives;
- ✓ Market extension (meeting needs where no solutions exist or adapting a product/service for use in another market); and,
- ✓ Non-technical innovation.

**Recommended Future Seminar Topics (grouped into 4 themes):**





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