

# Rabbit Lake Economic Development Framework

This is a framework for developing a comprehensive plan for economic development in Rabbit Lake Nation. What we describe is the development of a long-range program and the system to support it as well as short-range initiatives that represent the first steps in building that system. It is not enough to build a system that takes four years to build because of the political imperative of bringing results to the community before the next election.

## The Big Picture

The overall program would have four major components: capacity building; small business development, enterprise development and a financial engine. These four components will be carried out by a core team consisting of five people. In the outline to follow we will explain how this system will actually work to generate sustainable prosperity, how it will be funded, and the steps we must take in the short run to begin building the system.

### **Small Business Incubation**

- training
- business plans
- support
- marketing
- accounting

### **Enterprise Development**

- Rabbit Lodge
- Crafts Workshop
- Culture Project
- Rodeo Centre
- Rabbit Park

### **Core Team**

Economic Development Officer  
Finance and Marketing Specialist  
Small business enterprise expert  
Human resource specialist  
Administrative support

### **Financial Engine**

- Loans
- Proposals
- Grants

### **Capacity Building**

- training
- coaching
- wellness

### *Capacity building*

This refers to all the training and education needed to help people move from where they are to higher levels of functionality and capacity to participate in a developing economy. We can tentatively identify four levels of capacity ranging from totally unemployable and dysfunctional to completely independent and capable of holding a job and owning a business. The capacity building task we face is moving people up this ladder through coaching, training opportunities, and various kinds of on-the-job experience. This program needs to continue for Band employees addressing life skills, wellness and job skills. And all of this needs to be part of the capacity development program.

Category	Indicator	Support Needed
Unemployable and dysfunctional	does not seek employment, substance abuse, ill health, does not benefit from normal employment programming support, special needs	healing, sheltered workshops, life skills, sheltered work experience, remedial learning
Marginally employable and wounded	frequently absent from work, frequent conflict, low level of productivity, personal crises	healing, workshops, life skills, work experience, more responsibility and rewards that go with it.
Employed and working on themselves	can hold a job in right kind of environment, advancing in personal and job skills	life skills, job skills, wellness, technical support and coaching, specialised training, career planning
Leaders	Creatively using their own gifts, emotionally competent, have good relationships, manage money, healthy families, hold a job on or off reserve, capable of running own business with support	opportunities for learning, access to funding, job opportunities, on-going wellness work, personal wellness work.

### *Enterprise Development*

This line of action focuses on the development of larger business ventures that can employ substantial numbers of people but are too large to be taken on as a business venture by private individuals at this time. Examples of this currently include Rabbit Lodge, the Rodeo Centre, Rabbit Park, and Cultural Tourism. Opportunities in this area include a road building company, eco-tourism, and a native arts and crafts corporation.

Each enterprise will stand on its own and the core team will provide the technical and financial support for the start up and the first few years of operation. The core team will first focus on bringing Rabbit Lodge into a profitable position. A second and related enterprise that can be given immediate support is the formation of a Native Arts and Crafts Corporation that will provide a training and marketing outlet for Native artists.

This will be tied directly with the lodge. A third and also related business is cultural tourism beginning with the further development of the dance theatre on the grounds of Rabbit Lodge. The fourth business opportunity is developing the Rodeo Centre into a facility that can be rented to the public.

#### *Small Business Development*

This line of action consists of a small business incubation program that will work with people of capacity to identify viable businesses, develop business plans, and secure outside funding and financing. It will go on to provide small business services as well as coaching and technical support related to marketing, inventory management, personnel management, legal issues.

#### *Financial Engine for Growth*

This line of action involves securing and managing the funds necessary to drive prosperity development in all of its aspects. Initially it will involve developing relationships with banks and other credit institutions related to securing guaranteed loans and financial advice. It also involves significant dollars from government and private sources that can be used to make the shift from dependency to prosperity.

Ultimately the goal of this financial engine will be to produce surplus wealth from the network of businesses and related activities that can be channeled back into social and economic development. Political sovereignty is not possible until economic independence is achieved. You cannot negotiate with the people who are giving you money to negotiate.

### **The Core Team**

These lines of action cannot be carried out by one person. A team of professionals is required consisting of an economic development coordinator, a finance and management specialist, a small business enterprise specialist, a human resource development specialist. A person to provide administrative support to this team will be imperative. We anticipate filling one of these positions with a CESO volunteer.

A critical element of this core team in the first year is a community economic futures planning team. The role of this team of four people is to engage each household and clan in the community in thinking about and participating in the new economic initiatives. The team will visit every household, hold focus group meetings, and sponsor cultural events. Their mandate will be to assess economic needs, monitor economic behavior, solicit input, and explain projects.

In the longer term, the core team and the entire system it creates may be incorporated as a community economic development corporation. In order to protect this vital function of nation building from shifting political sands and special interest groups within the community.