



Atlantic Youth Entrepreneurship Summit
StFX University, Antigonish, NS
May 13-15, 2011

Summary Report

Submitted to:

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Summary of Experience

The Atlantic Youth Entrepreneurship Summit held in Antigonish, Nova Scotia from May 13th-15th, 2011 was a very valuable experience! It provided opportunities for youth to be engaged and learn how to become better leaders in their communities and provinces. One great speaker, Peter Kenyon, a community economic developer from Australia, quoted JFK in saying that “leadership and learning are indispensable from each other.” This summed up the goal of the conference to enable youth to learn more about becoming leaders in their communities either through a business and/or community economic development. Another great quote that summed up the experience of the summit was that “none of us is as strong as all of us. I know when we all work together, we can do it.” (Unknown).

Mr. Kenyon and other great speakers at the summit were able to showcase new ways to identify and develop opportunities in communities and regions around the world. He gave one great example of a small rural community in Australia called Beechworth. This was a small town of 3000 people in the middle of the country about an 8 hour drive from the nearest city. They had become a desolate town where businesses had shut their doors for good due to the lack of business. This did not deter one entrepreneur who decided to open up a bakery in the town where he bought a building for just \$10,000. He grew his business with the philosophy that the “purpose of a business is to find and keep business,” and that he was “in business to build relationships.” He now gets visitors from around the country and the world that make the trek just to visit his bakery. His business is now an 8 million a year business that serves 800,000 customers a year with 76 employees. This has spawned a huge economic boost to his town with additional businesses starting up just to accommodate the influx of visitors to the town. This example taught me that knowing and being an ambassador for your town and region is a key ingredient to being successful. Mr. Kenyon concluded that “helping businesses you’ve already got do better in your region will help grow and increase investment in your region.” It is opportunity identification from the inside out rather than the outside in. It is working with what we’ve got rather than focusing all our energies on attracting what we don’t have and may never get.

All participants at the summit had great opportunities to be fully engaged during the development of provincial action plans for each Atlantic province. We were able to have a say in how our province should look at the recruitment and retention of youth in all parts of the province. The Honourable Susan Sullivan, Minister of Innovation, Trade & Rural Development was present and was presented with the top 5 suggestions from the Newfoundland & Labrador group. They were as follows: 1. Tax Incentives for Youth Entrepreneurs 2. Modification of existing programs to better service youth. 3. Isolation Allowance for all of NL. 4. Business Attraction program specifically for Rural NL. 5.

Establishment of regional business incubator centres at various government buildings throughout the province.

The Youth Summit provided me the opportunity to engage with and learn more from other youth in Atlantic Canada! It provided new insight in how things could work in my community and region. It gave me additional tools and contacts to work with in becoming a better leader in my community by being more engaged with youth and others in the community! The overall experience has taught me that leadership is inspiring others by your own actions!



(Oliberte Shoe Company – Great example of growing a business with difficult issues to overcome.)

Knowledge Transfer to the Region

I am eager and anxious to share all that I have learned with my colleagues and stakeholders throughout the region. Any feedback I give will include a summary of my experience, but more importantly some new ideas that have stemmed from attending the summit. It will suggest looking at more engagement of youth in our region, having more businesses engaged in growing the economy of the region, community capacity building presentations/workshops throughout the region and more much that will look at things such as “Linking Entrepreneurship to Long Term Economic Growth.” Conferences such as this one provide valuable professional development to learn new techniques and share knowledge with the rest of Canada and the world. We are all so similar in our issues, but yet often so different in how we find our solutions.



(Youth Entrepreneurs Panel – Great Knowledge Transfer)

Youth Engagement and Leadership Grants Program

I was able to source additional funds, along with a subsidy for the conference fee from StFx University, to offset costs for Nordic for encouraging me to attend this worthwhile conference. This program is phenomenal in that it gives youth an opportunity to attend very valuable conferences outside the province. Without the grant provided, it would have been much more costly for me to attend the conference due to associated costs! The grant provided truly enabled me to learn more about youth engagement and leadership development. It provided avenues for new ideas and possible solutions in understanding my role as a leader in my community. The youth grant program is a great program that's providing youth from the province a new opportunity to become better participants and leaders in their communities.

Conclusion

Learning at the summit was designed to help participants further their knowledge, share their perspectives and experiences, contribute their ideas and put their new knowledge to use. Workshops were organized in a stream based format with concurrent sessions organized around four learning streams: (1) Linking entrepreneurship to long term economic growth, (2) Strengthening of entrepreneurial skills, (3) Leadership Development and (4) Social Innovation and Enterprise. This gave me the opportunity to learn new skills that can be applied to my job as an economic developer in my region. It is my goal to link all opportunities identified to long term economic growth. This can be through anything from business expansion to new social enterprises such as the daycare centre initiative we are currently working on at Nordic.

I am able to transfer my new found knowledge and skills to stakeholder groups through opportunity management sessions, workshops and through networking with various partners throughout the region. Attending this summit has been a positive learning experience for me and has truly given me new skills to build upon in my position with Nordic. One great quote from a regional trail promoter noted “I will market my neighbour as well as I market myself.” This exemplifies fostering economic development throughout our region.

It is with great appreciation and thanks to my Executive Director and the Board of Directors for allowing me to take advantage of this professional development opportunity. Ongoing professional development is important to me and I value the board’s identification of this same goal. I also had the opportunity to share my experiences with my family and have started my son out early in exposing him to the wonderful world of academia and entrepreneurship. As it is often noted, it is never too early or too late to learn new things!



(My Son Michael and I at the Teepee in front of the Business School)