

Community Futures Fraser Fort George

Regional Business
Liaison Outreach
Program
2023-2024

Acknowledgments

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Most importantly, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to the **210 small business owners** who generously shared their stories and experiences. Your willingness to dedicate time and provide insights has developed a robust picture of the state of the economy in our region. Your stories are the foundation of this project, offering critical perspectives that will drive future growth and support for the local business community.

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Project Overview

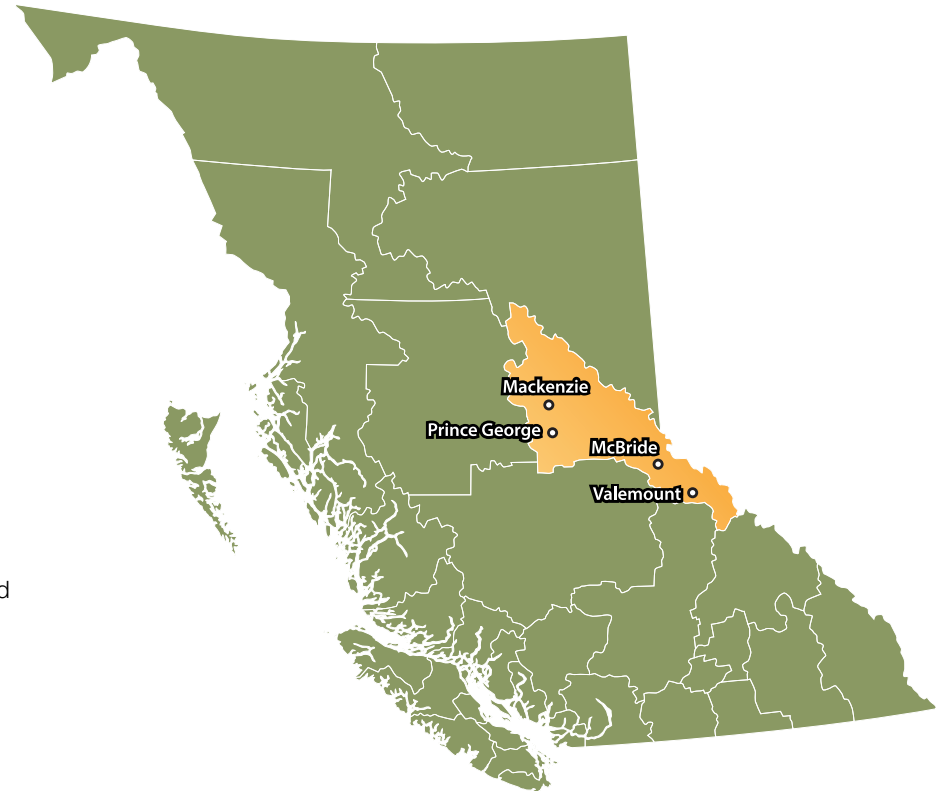


The Community Futures Fraser Fort George Regional Business Liaison (RBL) Project is a strategic initiative designed to support businesses and organizations across the Fraser-Fort George (FFG) region in adapting to significant economic changes influenced by forestry policy impacts and economic downturns.

This project, led by Community Futures Fraser Fort George, acknowledges the traditional land stewards of the Simpcw First Nation, the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, and the McLeod Lake Indian Band, emphasizing respect and recognition for their ancestral territories.

Funded by PacifiCan and the Northern Development Initiative Trust, the project involved collaboration with multiple regional partners, including local governments, chambers of commerce, and economic development professionals as well as the small businesses we interviewed. The project aimed to provide comprehensive support to businesses through qualitative interviews, resource provision, and strategic recommendations.

From July 2023 to July 2024, Regional Business Liaisons conducted qualitative interviews with 210 businesses and organizations in Mackenzie, Prince George, Robson Valley-Canoe and surrounding rural communities in Fraser-Fort George. The businesses selected for interviews were chosen based on availability across over 23 sectors, ensuring a representative mix through comprehensive outreach efforts, with no bias or preference in the selection process. The survey was designed to thoroughly explore Fraser-Fort George small business perspectives and broadly align with the first RBL project, enabling meaningful tracking of business health in the region over an extended period of time. The interviews focused on understanding the challenges and needs of local businesses, providing project staff with insights into the economic landscape, and identifying opportunities for growth and support.



Business Interviews

Mackenzie and Electoral Area G	55
Prince George and Area	100
Robson Valley – Canoe and Electoral Area H	55
TOTAL	210

Key Findings and Insights



Regional Commonalities

The Community Futures Fraser Fort George Regional Business Liaison Project highlights the diverse economic characteristics and challenges of Mackenzie, Prince George, and the Robson Valley-Canoe.

Common challenges include:

- economic instability
- staffing struggles
- need for diversification

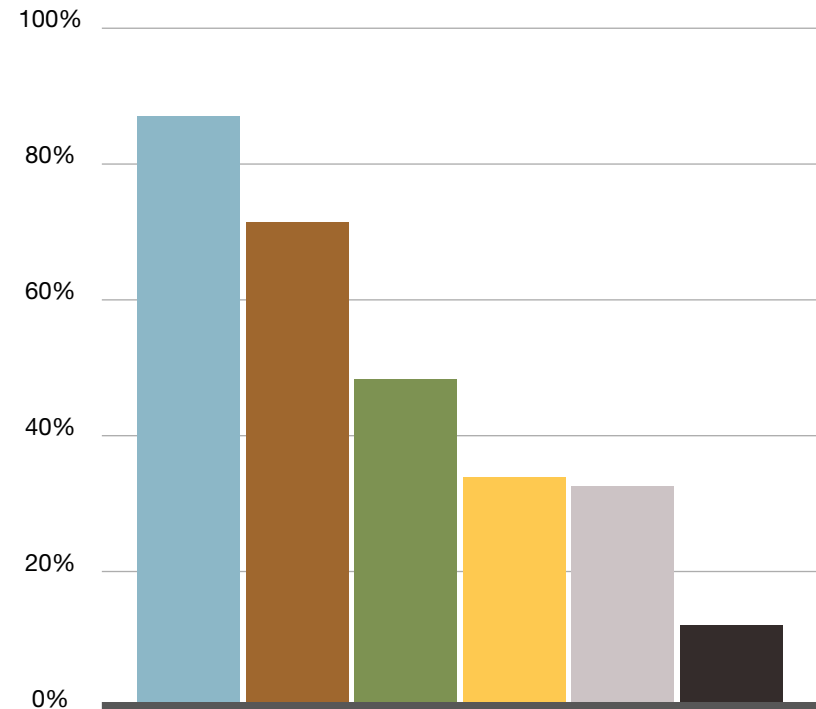
However, each region also presents unique strengths and opportunities. Mackenzie and the Robson Valley-Canoe focus on small and microbusinesses¹ with strong community ties, while Prince George benefits from a more diversified economy and access to more robust support systems.

Across these regions, businesses share common support needs: financial assistance, digital marketing and e-commerce training, and resources for sustainability practices. Tailored support programs addressing these needs will enhance the resilience and growth potential of the Fraser-Fort George business community. Despite varying revenue levels, all three areas primarily serve hyper-local markets, indicating potential and opportunities for growth and expansion.



¹ For the purposes of this project, business size is determined on number of employees and is classified as:

<5 Microbusiness	5-50 Small Business	50-100 Medium Business	100+ Large Business
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Organizational Outreach

- 85** Local (my town, municipality, district)
- 70** Regional (within Fraser-Fort George)
- 47** Provincial (British Columbia)
- 32** Inter-Provincial
- 31** National
- 11** International

Regional Analysis



Mackenzie

The economic landscape of Mackenzie is characterized by its small and microbusinesses, which are crucial to the local economy. The region has faced substantial adversity due to mill closures and forestry sector struggles, exacerbated by the pandemic. However, Mackenzie's businesses exhibit a strong entrepreneurial spirit, driven by family-run enterprises and a commitment to community resilience. There is a clear need for financial support, training in digital marketing and e-commerce, and resources for sustainable practices to foster growth and stability.

Prince George

As the largest urban center in the region, Prince George features a diversified economy that includes education, healthcare, retail, forestry, and manufacturing sectors. The city has shown remarkable resilience in recovering from the pandemic, aided by its robust support infrastructure and strong industry-academia collaborations. Businesses in Prince George continue to seek advanced financial tools, ongoing professional development in digital marketing, and support for large-scale sustainability projects to maintain their competitive edge and drive innovation.

Robson Valley-Canoe

The economy of the Robson Valley-Canoe relies heavily on forestry, tourism, and agriculture, making it vulnerable to sector-specific downturns and climate change unpredictability. The mixed economic impacts of the Trans Mountain Pipeline project further highlight the need for diversification and sustainable practices. Businesses in the Robson Valley-Canoe require comprehensive financial and educational support to navigate these challenges and leverage opportunities in community engagement and renewable energy solutions.

Quick Facts

Mackenzie

Interviews Completed: 55

*Mackenzie has a diverse range of businesses, from well-established enterprises to new start-ups. This mix fosters a balanced and resilient local economy, promoting both stability and innovation. **62% report diversifying their products and services and 58% making technological upgrades.***

Prince George

Interviews Completed: 100

*Many businesses in Prince George have experienced stable or growing revenues, with **77% reporting growth due to effective marketing, diversification, and post-COVID recovery strategies.** This indicates strong economic recovery and successful market adaptation.*

Robson Valley-Canoe

Interviews Completed: 55

*Businesses have adapted well, with **60% changing operations for efficiency and 51% adopting new technologies to enhance productivity. 24% of the businesses reported that they are flourishing and 63% report a growth in revenue.***

Community Comparative Analysis

Each community’s unique economic situation, geographic location, and culture create distinct characteristics and challenges for its businesses. The table below compares the current business climate in each community.

	Mackenzie	Prince George	Robson Valley-Canoe
Business Demographics and Revenue Trends	<p>Most businesses are small-scale, with 70% having fewer than 10 employees and 75% classified as microbusinesses.</p> <p>26% of businesses earn below \$50,000 annually and 26% earn over \$1 million.</p>	<p>The business landscape is diverse, featuring small, medium, and large enterprises. Additionally, 43% are family-run microbusinesses.</p> <p>28% earning less than \$50,000 annually and 22% earn over \$1 million.</p>	<p>There is a high concentration of small businesses. 98% report having fewer than 10 employees and 87% would be classified as microbusinesses with fewer than 5.</p> <p>31% of businesses earn below \$50,000 annually and 16% earn over \$1 million.</p>
Key Challenges	<p>Economic instability due to mill closures and forestry sector struggles.</p> <p>High burnout rates and difficulties in finding skilled workers.</p>	<p>High operational costs, including wages and overhead.</p> <p>Increased local and global competition requires continuous innovation.</p>	<p>Supply chain issues with delays and increased costs.</p> <p>Struggles with effective marketing strategies and finding skilled workers.</p>
Opportunities for Growth	<p>Diversification of products and services.</p> <p>Enhancing digital marketing and e-commerce capabilities.</p>	<p>Investments in technological upgrades to improve efficiency and reach.</p> <p>Strong industry-academia collaborations driving innovation.</p>	<p>Adoption of sustainable practices and renewable energy solutions.</p> <p>Leveraging unique regional attributes for tourism, local projects and export.</p>

Business Support Needs by Community

The table below outlines the business support needs for Mackenzie, Prince George, and the Robson Valley-Canoe, as identified during one-on-one interviews. It highlights the critical areas where each region requires assistance to address economic challenges, improve business capabilities, and promote sustainable practices. These support needs are essential for fostering economic stability, growth, and resilience within each community.

	Mackenzie	Prince George	Robson Valley-Canoe
Financial Support	<p>Critical need due to economic instability.</p> <p>Initiatives may include streamlined loan processes and increased grant availability.</p>	<p>Need for diverse financial tools to support technological upgrades and market expansion.</p> <p>Initiatives may include targeted financial incentives.</p>	<p>Comprehensive financial support needed for cash flow management and diversification.</p> <p>Initiatives may include subsidies for sustainable practices.</p>
Training on Digital Marketing and E-Commerce	<p>Notable gap in digital marketing capabilities.</p> <p>Initiatives may include comprehensive training programs.</p>	<p>Need for advanced training to stay competitive.</p> <p>Initiatives may include advanced digital marketing courses.</p>	<p>Limited access to training and resources.</p> <p>Initiatives may include accessible training programs and one-on-one coaching.</p>
Resources for Sustainability Practices	<p>High demand for resources in energy efficiency and sustainable sourcing.</p> <p>Initiatives may include financial incentives and educational resources.</p>	<p>Growing interest in sustainability with some businesses already adopting greener practices.</p> <p>Initiatives may include grants and expert-led training programs.</p>	<p>Strong emphasis on sustainability but high implementation costs.</p> <p>Initiatives may include expanded financial support and educational programs.</p>

What Businesses are Doing Well

Businesses in the Fraser-Fort George region excel in creating niche markets, maintaining strong community ties, providing exceptional customer service, and quickly adapting to changing circumstances due to their small size.

Mackenzie

Community Spirit and Resilience: Businesses in Mackenzie show strong community and resilience, with many family-run and self-employed enterprises forming the backbone of the local economy. This spirit fosters mutual support and collaboration among businesses.

Diversification and Adaptation: 62% of businesses have diversified their products or services, reducing dependency on a single revenue stream. Significant changes in technology and market expansion have been made, with 58% adopting new technologies and enhancing their marketing efforts.

Technological Adoption: Businesses have adopted new technologies to enhance productivity and service delivery. Specifically, 53% have implemented e-commerce platforms and CRM systems, aiding in better customer relationship management and operational efficiency.

Sustainability Practices: A significant majority (87%) of businesses are engaged in sustainability initiatives. These efforts focus on reducing their carbon footprint, supporting fair working conditions, and improving energy efficiency.

Industry Collaborations: Businesses have increased collaborations with other industries to share resources and knowledge. 49% have reported changes in industry collaborations, forming new business partnerships and participating in formal and informal working groups.

Prince George

Economic Diversity and Resilience: Prince George has a diverse economic base, including education, healthcare, retail, forestry, and manufacturing. This diversity has been crucial to the city's resilience and swift recovery post-pandemic.

Revenue Growth: Many businesses in Prince George have stable or growing revenues, with 77% reporting growth due to effective marketing, diversification, and post-COVID strategies.

Technological Advancements: Businesses have embraced digital transformation, with 83% enhancing social media presence and 70% improving websites. Significant investments in new technologies and AI have also been made.

Market Reach and Expansion: Businesses are leveraging digital platforms to expand their market reach locally and internationally. 76% primarily serve their local town or municipality, and 66% cater to the wider Fraser-Fort George region.

Community Engagement and Support: Prince George businesses benefit from strong community ties and support systems, which are vital for resilience and growth, providing access to funding, training, and advisory services.

Robson Valley-Canoe

Commitment to Sustainability: 83% of businesses in the Robson Valley-Canoe are focused on sustainable practices and renewable energy solutions, aligning with environmental responsibility. 58% have voluntarily made changes to address the 'triple bottom line' ("the three Ps": people, planet, and profit).

Community and Family Support: 59% say family support is crucial for business success in the Robson Valley-Canoe. Community networks and family ties provide a stable foundation for operations and growth.

Technological Adoption: 38% say technology is driving the most change to their businesses. Despite limited access to training and resources, businesses are adopting digital marketing and e-commerce strategies. Training programs and one-on-one coaching help build online capabilities.

Diversification Efforts: 69% have diversified products or services including introducing new options to attract different customer segments. 24% of businesses report that delivering high-quality products and services is a key success factor, with businesses emphasizing quality as a differentiator in the market.

Local Engagement and Tourism: Businesses are leveraging unique regional attributes for tourism and local projects. Enhancing community engagement and promoting local tourism initiatives are key growth areas alongside other sector development to mitigate sector specific vulnerabilities.

Gaps in Support

The results from the RBL project suggest that despite the resilience and entrepreneurial spirit of businesses in the Fraser-Fort George region, several gaps in support require attention to foster sustainable growth and economic stability.



Financial Assistance:

Mackenzie and Robson Valley-Canoe: Difficulties accessing loans and grants; need streamlined loan processes and increased financial support

Prince George: Requires diverse financial tools like low-interest loans, micro-loans, and investment opportunities for technological upgrades and market expansion.



Digital Marketing and E-Commerce Training:

Mackenzie and Robson Valley-Canoe: Notable gap in digital capabilities; need comprehensive training programs and workshops.

Prince George: Ongoing professional development needed in the latest digital marketing trends and e-commerce technologies.



Resources for Sustainability Practices:

Mackenzie and Robson Valley-Canoe: High implementation costs for sustainable practices; need financial incentives, educational resources, and technical support.

Prince George: Requires advanced resources and training to encourage large-scale sustainability projects and compliance with regulations.



Staffing and Workforce Development:

All Regions: Difficulties in finding and retaining skilled workers; need flexible work arrangements, continuous professional development, and partnerships with educational institutions.

Training Programs: Need support to upskill employees and improve retention rates; recruitment support and staff retention incentives are crucial.



Supply Chain and Market Access:

Robson Valley-Canoe: Significant supply chain issues; need support in developing robust supply chain management systems and finding alternative suppliers.

All Regions: Programs required to assist in entering new markets, including support for trade shows, market research, and export assistance.



Regulatory and Administrative Support:

All Regions: Struggles with complex regulations, high taxes, and bureaucratic hurdles; need simplified regulatory processes and better access to information.

Collaboration: Enhanced collaboration between businesses, local authorities, and industry associations to leverage shared resources and opportunities for innovation.



Community Engagement and Inclusion:

All Regions: Need more widespread Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) initiatives; businesses require training and resources to promote REDI discussions and practices.

Community Planning: Increased engagement in planning processes to align development with local needs and values.

Priority Areas for Building Resilience

The Regional Business Liaison (RBL) project has identified key areas where small businesses in the Fraser-Fort George region need support. These areas reflect both immediate and systemic challenges that have persisted over time.

- 1 Access to Capital and Financial Support**
Businesses struggle with securing funding, a complex challenge also noted in the previous RBL project.
- 2 Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity**
Poor digital infrastructure limits growth and competitive innovation, necessitating support for improved connectivity and technology adoption.
- 3 Sustainability and Environmental Practices**
There is an increasing need and desire for resources to help businesses implement sustainable practices.
- 4 Training and Workforce Development**
Labour and skill shortages are prevalent, requiring targeted training and upskilling initiatives.
- 5 Marketing and Business Development**
Many businesses lack effective marketing strategies, particularly in the digital space.
- 6 Navigating Regulatory and Compliance Issues**
Businesses need help understanding and complying with all levels of regulations. Regulations are not modernizing at the same rate as the business demands.
- 7 Support for Innovation and Diversification**
Encouraging businesses to innovate and diversify will help them stay competitive. Encouraging communities to diversify will create more sustainable business landscape which is less dependent on sector impacts.
- 8 Community and Network Building**
Strengthening business networks and fostering collaboration can mitigate feelings of isolation and provide succession possibilities.
- 9 Crisis Management and Business Continuity Planning**
The recent pandemic and climate instability highlight the need for robust crisis management plans.
- 10 Support for Specific Demographics and Developing Sectors**
Tailored programs are needed for retiring business owners, Indigenous-owned businesses, women-led businesses, and youth entrepreneurs.

Project Conclusion

The 2023-2024 Community Futures Fraser Fort George Regional Business Liaison Project highlights the resilience and entrepreneurial spirit of the Fraser-Fort George business community. By addressing local needs, fostering collaboration, and providing insights for targeted support, the project aims to encourage a thriving business environment. Continued partnerships between businesses, local authorities, and community organizations are essential for sustainable economic growth and improving business and residents' quality of life.

Tailored support programs and strategic initiatives are crucial for sustainable growth and community resilience. In the larger contexts of both British Columbia and the Fraser Fort George region, recognizing and addressing the unique economic, cultural, and environmental landscapes of Mackenzie, Prince George, and the Robson Valley-Canoe allows for more effective interventions when guided by existing assets, potential and interest. Promoting local economic diversification, sustainable practices, and leveraging regional strengths like tourism and developing sectors like renewable energy will enhance each subregion's resilience and growth potential and prevent them from being solely dependent on any single sector. This approach supports the economic vitality of the entire Fraser-Fort George region while also honouring the cultural heritage and environmental stewardship of traditional land stewards.

Businesses across the Fraser-Fort George region demonstrate resilience by embracing diversification, technological advancements, and sustainability practices. The project shows that microbusinesses are key economic drivers in the Fraser-Fort George region and that the efforts of the 210 businesses interviewed contribute well over \$68 million annually to the local economy, two thirds of which stays local. Strong community ties and support systems are crucial for business success. Each region has unique strengths and challenges, but all share an entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to growth and innovation. Addressing specific regional needs and leveraging strengths will help businesses achieve sustainable growth and contribute to a thriving local economy.

The project's success is attributed to the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders, including funding organizations PacifiCan and the Northern Development Initiative Trust. This collaborative approach has facilitated a deeper understanding of regional challenges and opportunities, enabling the development of strategic initiatives to support business resilience and growth.

Despite challenges from forestry policy changes and economic downturns, the region's businesses show resilience and entrepreneurial spirit. Continued collaboration, targeted support, and a commitment to sustainable development are vital for economic longevity and prosperity in the Fraser-Fort George region.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Comparative Analysis of Regional Business Liaison Projects

Overview

The Community Futures Fraser Fort George Regional Business Liaison (RBL) projects aimed to understand and support the business communities in Mackenzie, Prince George, and the Robson Valley-Canoe during two distinct periods: the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021) and the recent forestry policy impacts and economic downturn (2023-2024).

Methodology

Both projects employed qualitative interviews to gather in depth data from small business owners:

COVID-19 Project:

161 interviews from Mackenzie (55), Prince George (53), and Robson Valley-Canoe (53) focused on pandemic impacts, responses, and support needs.

Recent Project:

210 interviews from Mackenzie (55), Prince George (100), and Robson Valley-Canoe (55) exploring economic changes, challenges, and growth opportunities.

Key Findings and Insights

Economic Context and Challenges

COVID-19 Project:

Significant challenges in accessing relevant information and government support.

Highlighted highly complex problems such as microbusiness ineligibility for funding, new business struggles, and information overload.

Recent Project:

Continued economic instability due to forestry policy changes.

Increased operational costs, supply chain disruptions, and competition.

Emphasis on financial stability and diversification.

Support Needs

COVID-19 Project:

Financial support and streamlined funding processes.

Digital literacy and e-commerce training.

Development of regional economic coordinators and shared services for microbusinesses.

Recent Project:

Enhanced access to diverse financial instruments and grants.

Ongoing digital marketing and e-commerce training.

Support for sustainable practices and workforce development.

Adaptation and resilience.

COVID-19 Project:

Businesses exhibited resilience through diversification and adopting new technologies.

The need for clear and reliable information channels was paramount.

Recent Project:

Businesses continue to diversify and invest in technology, but face heightened competition and supply chain issues.

Strong emphasis on sustainability and community engagement.

Commonalities



Resilience and Adaptation:

Both projects highlight the remarkable resilience of businesses in the face of adversity.

Businesses have shown adaptability through diversification and technological adoption, whether responding to the pandemic or economic changes.



Need for Financial Support:

A critical need for financial assistance was evident in both projects. Streamlined loan processes, access to grants, and diverse financial instruments were consistently identified as essential support mechanisms, particularly if targeted to microbusinesses.



Digital Transformation:

The importance of digital literacy and e-commerce capabilities was a common theme. Businesses required training and resources to enhance their online presence and market reach during both periods.



Sustainability Practices:

Both projects underscored a growing focus on sustainability. Businesses expressed a need for resources and support to implement sustainable practices, reflecting an ongoing commitment to environmental responsibility.



Community and Collaboration:

Strong community ties and collaborative efforts were vital to business success in both periods. The role of local authorities, industry associations, and community organizations in providing support and fostering resilience was consistently highlighted.

Regional Specific Insights

Mackenzie:

COVID-19 Project:

Focused on the need for reliable information and support networks.
Showed resilience through diversification and technological adoption.

Recent Project:

Economic challenges from forestry policy changes persisted. Emphasis on diversification and financial support.

Prince George:

COVID-19 Project:

Showed a more stable revenue trend with a diversified economy.
Needs included financial options and digital training.

Recent Project:

Increased competition and inflation were significant issues. Continued focus on digital transformation and sustainability.

Robson Valley-Canoe:

COVID-19 Project:

Struggled with sector-specific vulnerabilities and supply chain issues.
Emphasis on sustainable practices and community support.

Recent Project:

Continued economic pressures with a strong focus on sustainability and community engagement. Need for comprehensive financial supports.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the Regional Business Liaison projects reveals the ongoing resilience and adaptability of businesses in the Fraser-Fort George region. The COVID-19 project highlighted the immediate need for financial support, digital literacy, and reliable information. In contrast, the recent project emphasizes continued financial stability, technological adoption, and sustainability practices. Addressing these evolving needs through tailored support programs will foster sustainable growth and economic resilience across the region.

Appendix 2: Mackenzie Summary of Findings

Mackenzie, part of the Fraser-Fort George region, hosts a diverse and resilient business community. This section highlights key challenges, opportunities, and strategic recommendations based on data from 55 local enterprises in over 20 different sectors. Mackenzie's business community is hardy and adaptive, leveraging diversification, technology, and community engagement to navigate challenges and seize opportunities. Continued support and strategic initiatives are essential for fostering a thriving business environment in Mackenzie.

Community Overview	Generations-old family businesses and passionate self-employed individuals form the foundation of Mackenzie's community. The town's business diversity includes women-owned and LGBTQIA2S+ enterprises, reflecting a commitment to sustainability and inclusivity.
Economic Context	Mackenzie has faced significant economic adversity, with mill closures and struggles in the forestry sector resulting in job losses and social impacts. Despite these challenges, the business community displays a dynamic entrepreneurial spirit.
Impact of COVID-19	During the pandemic, Mackenzie businesses struggled to find updated health and safety information and support programs. The lack of a trusted information source led to a call for clearer communication channels and stronger community connections.
Top Areas of Change since COVID-19	Significant changes include diversification (62%), technological upgrades and market expansion (58%), staffing adjustments (55%), revenue changes (53%), and industry collaborations (49%).
Recent Economic Downturn Effects	The economic downturn led to job losses (37%), increased stress (33%), and reduced spending (28%). Businesses are adapting through diversification, technology upgrades, and improved financial management. Significant employment challenges include retaining staff and coping with financial instability.
Financial Strain on Community	Reduced disposable income and cautious spending have impacted local businesses and community services. The economic downturn has strained the social fabric, reducing community engagement and affecting community programs and other social services.
Business Demographics	Small businesses with fewer than 10 employees constitute 86% of those interviewed, with 75% being microbusinesses with fewer than 5 employees. Supporting these small businesses and welcoming new ones is crucial for community development and economic resilience.
Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staffing: Difficulty in finding and retaining qualified staff impacts operational efficiency and service quality. 2. Inflation: Rising costs of goods and services strain financial resources. 3. Space Constraints: Limited space for operations and expansion poses significant challenges.

<p>New Vulnerabilities Businesses face new vulnerabilities in:</p>	<p>Staffing 33%</p>	<p>Funding Disruptions 24%</p>	<p>Overhead Increases 18%</p>
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<p>Safety Challenges and Accessibility Barriers</p>	<p>While 27% of businesses reported no significant safety difficulties, others face challenges in managing expectations and avoiding burnout. Accessibility barriers include inaccessible entryways and washrooms.</p>		
<p>Current Trends and Changes <i>Businesses have made significant changes to adapt to market conditions:</i></p>	<p>Diversification: 62% expanded products/services. Technology: 58% adopted new technologies. Marketing: 58% enhanced digital marketing efforts.</p>	<p>Staffing/Wages: 55% adjusted staffing and wages. Revenue: 53% saw changes in revenue. Industry Collaboration: 49% increased collaborations.</p>	
<p>Opportunities and Growth</p>	<p>Businesses identified opportunities in expanding physical space, diversifying products/services, enhancing marketing, hiring/training employees, and improving technology and online presence. Relocation trends show businesses moving to Fraser-Fort George for community support and lower living costs. Growth strategies include exploring new markets, promoting diversification, and leveraging regional connections.</p>		
<p>Community Engagement and Support</p>	<p>58% of businesses are familiar with the District of Mackenzie’s community plan. Discussions on Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) are limited, indicating a need for broader engagement. Family assistance, face-to-face community support, and industry group memberships are reported as the most useful resources for businesses.</p>		
<p>Sustainability and Preparedness</p>	<p>A significant majority (87%) of businesses in Mackenzie are actively engaged in sustainability initiatives, focusing on climate change, income inequality, natural resource conservation, human rights, fair working conditions, pollution reduction, and social justice, demonstrating a strong commitment to the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit.</p>		
<p>Measuring Success</p>	<p>Mackenzie businesses measure success through a combination of profitability, customer satisfaction, employee happiness, and community impact, emphasizing both financial and non-financial indicators to gauge their overall performance.</p>		

Appendix 3: Prince George Summary of Findings

Prince George, a vital economic hub in the Fraser-Fort George region, hosts a diverse and resilient business community. This project analyzed key challenges, opportunities, and strategic recommendations based on data from the 100 businesses interviewed in over 23 different sectors for the Regional Business Liaison project to foster a thriving business environment.

<p>Community Overview</p>	<p>Prince George boasts a mix of well-established businesses and new ventures, with a noticeable trend of start-ups emerging in the technology and green energy sectors. The diverse age range of businesses in Prince George, with start-ups and long-standing operations for over 20 years, creates a balanced and resilient economy that fosters both innovation and stability.</p>
<p>Economic Context</p>	<p>Historically reliant on forestry, mining, and transportation, Prince George has evolved into a central economic and cultural hub in Northern British Columbia, honoring its Indigenous heritage while adapting to global market changes and technological advancements, and serving as a catalyst for a thriving regional economy.</p>
<p>Impact of COVID-19</p>	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the local economy, with businesses in Prince George facing reduced customer footfall, supply chain issues, and shifts in consumer behavior. While the Community Futures Fraser-Fort George COVID-19 Outreach Program highlighted the resilience of many businesses, especially those with strong digital literacy, it also revealed significant challenges for new, women-led, and microbusinesses, emphasizing the importance of adaptability, community support, and access to resources for survival.</p>
<p>Top Areas of Change Since COVID-19</p>	<p>Businesses have faced significant changes, including rising inflation, supply chain disruptions, increased competition, labor availability challenges, and the need for technological investments, impacting operational expenses, profitability, and productivity.</p>
<p>Recent Economic Downturn Effects</p>	<p>The recent economic downturn has led to increased wages and economic stress, resulting in mental health challenges and reduced disposable income, impacting business revenues and employment.</p>

Business Demographics	Prince George's business landscape is diverse, with a significant portion being self-employed, family-run microbusinesses, woman-owned, and environmentally minded. Revenue distribution varies, with a mix of start-ups and established businesses.
Challenges	Businesses face challenges such as inflation, staffing issues, financial constraints, supply chain disruptions, increased competition, complex regulations, marketing difficulties, and environmental concerns.
New Vulnerabilities	New vulnerabilities include high staff turnover, financial difficulties, lease and property issues, economic uncertainties, cybersecurity concerns, and environmental factors like climate change.
Safety Challenges and Accessibility Barriers	Safety challenges involve avoiding burnout, maintaining work-life balance, managing safety due to crime and environmental hazards, and handling customer and staff behavior. Accessibility barriers include infrastructure challenges, location issues, and financial constraints limiting necessary upgrades.
Current Trends and Changes <i>Businesses have made significant changes to adapt to market conditions:</i>	Diversification: 67% expanded products/services. Technology: 41% adopted new technologies. Marketing: 66% enhanced digital marketing efforts. Staffing/Wages: 61% adjusted staffing and wages. Changed Operations: 60% adjusted their operations. Industry Collaboration: 46% increased collaborations.
Opportunities and Growth	Growth opportunities include green energy projects, technological innovation, local tourism, expansion, digital transformation, strategic partnerships, sustainability initiatives, market expansion, and workforce development.
Community Engagement and Support	Family and community support, both virtual and face-to-face, are crucial, alongside access to financial resources and training programs for skill improvement.
Sustainability and Preparedness	Sustainability practices are adopted by many businesses, focusing on environmental efforts and fair working conditions, with an increasing interest in emergency preparedness.
Measuring Success	Businesses measure success through revenue growth, customer satisfaction, employee well-being, and community impact, with aspirations for expansion, innovation, and positive community contributions.

Appendix 4: Robson Valley-Canoe Summary of Findings

The Robson Valley-Canoe business community is diverse and adaptable. 55 businesses were interviewed across 22 sectors with equal representation from McBride, Valemount, and rural areas to ensure a broad perspective. Notably, 30% of these businesses have operated for over 20 years. Small businesses with fewer than 10 employees make up 98% of those interviewed, and 87% are microbusinesses with fewer than 5 employees. Revenue distribution indicates resilience but highlights the need for growth opportunities.

Community Overview	<p>Established and family-run businesses, handed down through generations, form the backbone of the Robson Valley-Canoe community, alongside self-employed individuals pursuing their passions and creating a niche for themselves. Indigenous owned, women-owned, youth and LGBTQIA2S+ enterprises add richness to the community's fabric and while challenges persist, the Robson Valley-Canoe's commitment to sustainability and inclusivity lights the way forward.</p>
Economic Context	<p>The Robson Valley-Canoe and Electoral Area H, with its reliance on forestry, tourism, and agriculture, faced significant economic challenges even before COVID-19, leaving the local economy vulnerable to sector-specific downturns, while the Trans Mountain pipeline further intensified pressures. Business owners in the Robson Valley value independence and responsibility towards their customers, and they perceive their businesses as integral parts of the communities' identity.</p>
Impact of COVID-19	<p>COVID-19 altered business operations and strained supply chains in the region, leaving businesses struggling to survive while highlighting their nimble adaptability, resilience and urgent need for practical, sustainable solutions to navigate recovery and ensure long-term viability.</p>
Top Areas of Change	<p>Since COVID-19, businesses have seen significant changes in revenue models, diversification, staffing, operations, marketing, technology adoption, industry collaboration, and sustainability efforts.</p>
Recent Economic Downturn Effects	<p>Higher costs for essentials and high living costs impact purchasing power and staffing, leading to financial instability and mental health challenges. The departure of major infrastructure projects has reduced economic activity and hindered employee retention.</p>
Business Demographics	<p>An even number of businesses were interviewed in McBride, Valemount and the outlying rural areas, to gain as broad a perspective as possible. 30% of the businesses have been in operational for over 20 years. Regardless of location and revenue volume, small businesses with fewer than 10 employees constitute 98% of businesses interviewed.</p>

Challenges	Businesses face rising costs, supply chain disruptions, staffing difficulties, technological advancements, increased competition, environmental factors, forestry sector challenges, and food security issues.
New Vulnerabilities	The new vulnerabilities faced by businesses in the Robson Valley primarily revolve around staffing challenges, financial pressures, including fluctuating interest rates and access to grants, inflexible lease agreements, and a heavy reliance on business owners, which exposes operations to significant risk in the event of illness or burnout.
Safety Challenges and Accessibility Barriers	While 69% of businesses report no accessibility issues, safety challenges like managing behaviors (26%) and external factors (29%), along with difficulties in avoiding burnout (55%) and maintaining work/life balance (53%), significantly impact operational efficiency and employee well-being.
Current Trends and Changes <i>Businesses have made significant changes to adapt to market conditions:</i>	<p>Diversification: 69% expanded products/services.</p> <p>Technology: 51% adopted new technologies.</p> <p>Marketing: 58% enhanced digital marketing efforts.</p> <p>Staffing/Wages: 62% adjusted staffing and wages.</p> <p>Revenue: 76% saw changes in revenue.</p> <p>Changed Operations: 60% adjusted their operations.</p>
Opportunities and Growth	Businesses in the Robson Valley-Canoe region have key opportunities in expansion, community engagement, sustainable practices, technology adoption, partnerships, training, and marketing, with strategies focusing on market research, collaboration, technology investment, and skill development to drive growth and innovation.
Market Reach	Most businesses serve the local area and the region, with some expanding within British Columbia, to other provinces, and internationally.
Community Engagement and Support	Family and community support are crucial, with significant engagement in face-to-face interactions and virtual communities. However, Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) discussions are limited.
Sustainability and Preparedness	56% of businesses prioritize environmental sustainability, with 83% adopting sustainable practices, though only 46% have emergency plans, indicating a need for better preparedness.
Measuring Success	Business success is measured by employee and customer satisfaction, financial metrics, community engagement, operational stability, and unique business goals.
Successes and Dreams	Key successes include customer service, community engagement, financial stability, operational excellence, innovation, and employee satisfaction. Future aspirations focus on business expansion, technological improvements, community impact, and personal growth.



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