

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- SouthGrow Regional Initiative is a member-driven, non-profit regional economic development alliance for south central Alberta. The south central Alberta region extends to Fort Macleod to the west, stretches to the Montana border to the south, encompasses the County of Warner and Municipal District of Taber to the east and includes Vulcan County to the North. Twenty-seven communities are involved in the regional initiative that serves the south central region of Alberta.

SouthGrow Regional Initiative's mission is "Creating Opportunities ... to accelerate and enhance quality of life, development and sustainability for the communities of the SouthGrow Region of Alberta."

- SouthGrow Regional Initiative's core goals are to:
 - Foster a south central Alberta shared vision for regional economic development.
 - Create new economic development opportunities in the region.
 - Encourage and enhance shared services among communities through cooperation.
 - Provide south central Alberta with a unified voice on regional priorities.
- SouthGrow Regional Initiative has members and partners. The Managing Board consists of up to 10 elected representatives from a First Nation (1), city (1), towns (4), villages (3) and municipal districts and counties (1). Core Committees include the Strategic Collaboration Committee, Marketing and Communications Committee, and the Economic Development and Innovation Committee. Other committees and taskforces that address economic development can be established as needed. In 2006, the Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership was developed in partnership with Economic Development Lethbridge and Alberta Southwest. This Memorandum of Understanding has now lapsed and the partnership will be reviewed at the start of the 2010-2011 operational year. Staff is comprised of the Director and Client Service Representative from Alberta Finance and Enterprise as support and a part-time project manager hired by SouthGrow.
- Projected Revenue and Expense Statements are included in the Business Plan, with various sources of funding identified and expenditures for initiatives projected. A per capita of \$0.35, provincial government funds and additional leveraged funds are needed to implement this plan.
- SouthGrow's level of activity is dependent on leveraging base (member per capita and Alberta Finance and Enterprise annual contribution) funding. The level of activity in Year One of the business is high due to the availability of one-time Community Trust funding. Subsequent year activity can increase if additional one-time funds are available through various sources.
- Priority initiatives over the three years under each core business include:

BUSINESS 1: Strategic Collaboration

Working with member communities, industry/ business, government and others to build economic development capacity by providing training, to foster a south central Alberta shared vision for regional economic development and shared services opportunities and to provide south central Alberta with a unified voice on regional economic development priorities.

Objective 1: Develop and build partnerships

Activities:

- Continue visitation programs.
- Ensure SouthGrow is responsive to member needs.
- Develop Regional Industry Sector Committees (Ad Hoc/Standing) - eg. Productivity Networking Group.
- Review existing and develop new policies that improve the governance of SouthGrow as an organization, increasing accountability, transparency and credibility.

Objective 2: Prepare and mobilize communities to respond to opportunities

Activities:

- Assist communities to improve their readiness, capacity and ability to respond to investment inquiries by presenting seminars and workshops, guidelines and templates.
- Identify regional, community and business training requirements to assist with economic development in the region.
- Provide training to member communities in the area of economic development, volunteer development, investment attraction, marketing, and other areas identified.
- Continue to develop tools which provide site selectors and investors information on the region and its advantages.

Objective 3: Increase level of shared services within membership

Activities:

- Explore shared services opportunities amongst members (e.g. shared sustainability project).
- Develop and build the website to encourage sharing of knowledge and information among membership.

BUSINESS 2: Marketing and Communications

Promoting SouthGrow Regional Initiative as an effective regional alliance for economic development and as an excellent place to live and do business.

Objective 1: Develop and promote SouthGrow Regional Initiative within the region.

Activities:

- Continue with internal and external awareness programs by developing and giving presentations and personal selling sessions to member organizations as well as industry/regional/provincial/national associations.
- Continue the annual Recognition Event celebrating the creation of opportunities within the region.
- Develop and distribute quarterly newsletter.
- Develop and distribute Annual Results Report and have Annual General Meetings.
- Develop and distribute regional news releases.
- Continue to develop the website as a premier source of information on the region.
- Sponsor/coordinate events that promote cooperation and information sharing.

Objective 2: Develop and promote SouthGrow with business/industry/government regionally, provincially, nationally, and internationally.

Activities:

- Continue with internal and external awareness programs by developing and giving presentations and personal selling sessions to member organizations as well as industry/regional/provincial/national associations.
- Develop a three-year branding and marketing initiative based on SouthGrow's strengths, including water for economic development.
- Continue to communicate information and opportunities based on studies spearheaded by the Economic Development and Innovation Committee.
- Develop "Success Stories" that are occurring within the region to showcase the people, products and pride of SouthGrow,
- Participate in or coordinate cooperative marketing efforts.

BUSINESS 3: Economic Development and Innovation

SouthGrow Regional Initiative works with member communities, regional businesses/industry and government to facilitate and create new and existing economic development opportunities in the region by targeting regional, provincial, national and international markets.

Objective 1: Identify and review economic development/investment attraction opportunities.

Activities:

- Undertake a study to identify niche and emerging industry opportunities in the region.
- Continue to emphasize Water for Economic Development.
- Ensure Productivity stays at the forefront in the region as a means to improve bottom line success.
- Build on and develop Alternative Energy opportunities in the region.
- Ensure innovation and commercialization gaps have been closed.
- Develop economic development site selector information and tools.

Objective 2: Undertake joint initiatives to realize economic development/investment attraction opportunities.

Activities:

- Partner with organizations and economic development agencies on projects of mutual interest. Cooperative efforts could include joint studies, joint attendance at and/or hosting of trade fairs, joint promotions/advertising, shared distribution of promotional materials, joint grant applications, cooperative company targeting and networking.