

2022-2023

SOUTHGROW **ANNUAL REPORT**



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CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE

First, I'd like to thank all of you on the board for your continued support as we sustain our current position and pursue new projects and collaborations to further the Economic Development of our region in a continually evolving, competitive world. I began last year's report with a quote from Dickens about "the best of times, the worst of times" and living in "interesting times", and here a year later we seem to be continuing in those times. I appreciate the commitment by all of you and your respective communities to the SouthGrow organization and the trust you have shown.

The attached reports detail the successes our organization has enjoyed over the past year. Great things have happened as always, and they are just the beginning.

One of the good things to happen this year of course is the reinstatement of full funding for the REDAs by the provincial government. It's always easier to do the job when you're not having to hit the reserves.

The Provincial Election saw several ministerial re assignments and we look forward to meeting this Fall with Ministers new and old to continue advocating support and collaboration for the REDA structure in promoting Economic Development throughout the province.

Items of emphasis in our region are the Agrifood, Agribusiness and Alternative Power industries. The highway three corridor, Canada's Premier Food Corridor, is finally receiving the attention it deserves from the government and we will make sure it remains front and center. As far as renewable energy goes we have heard some of the frustrations being voiced by our members over the way the industry at times seems to be running roughshod over best practices, proper land use, and true sustainability and we have started, and will continue, to take these concerns to the government to make sure you are heard.

I consider myself very fortunate to be able to work with an extremely talented and focused executive who dedicate their time and energy to make sure we move forward. With the management team of our Executive Director Peter Casurella, Director of Economic Development Kim Welby, and Marketing Manager Jessie Stilson it is always exciting to see what we have accomplished and what we are doing next.

I look forward to this next year because I know it is guaranteed to be "interesting"!



Mayor Jim Willett
Village of Coutts, "The Gateway to Alberta"
Executive Chair, SouthGrow

**"As long as there's coffee in the world, how bad can things be?"
– Cassandra Clare, City of Ashes**

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE & BOARD OF DIRECTORS & REPS

Executive Committee

Chairperson	Mayor Jim Willett	Village of Coutts
Vice Chairperson / Treasurer	Councillor Laurie Lyckman	Vulcan County
Director	Councillor John Turcato	MD of Taber
Director	Councillor Scott Akkermans	Town of Coalhurst
Director	Councillor Diandra Bruised Head	Blood Tribe

Board of Directors & Reps 2022 - 2023

Director	Councillor Colin Bexte	Village of Arrowwood
Director	Councillor Shayla Anderson	Village of Barnwell
Director	Mayor Gordon Reynolds	Town of Bow Island
Director	Councillor Marsha Jensen	Town of Cardston
Director	Councillor Roger Houghton	Cardston County
Director	Councillor Doug Fraser	Village of Carmangay
Director	Councillor Dale Pickering	Town of Coaldale
Director	Councillor Allen Kuizenga	County of Forty Mile
Director	Councillor Mark Sayers	Lethbridge County
Director	Councillor Robert Donnolly	Village of Lomond
Director	Mayor Byrne Cook	Town of Magrath
Director	Mayor Dean Melnyk	Village of Milo
Director	Councillor Shayne Johnson	Town of Milk River
Director	Councillor Henry de Kok	Town of Picture Butte
Director	Councillor Matt Evans	Town of Raymond
Director	Councillor Gary Bikman	Village of Stirling
Director	Councillor Alf Rudd	Town of Taber
Director	Mayor Raymond Coad	Town of Vauxhall
Director	Councillor Cole Dunham	Town of Vulcan
Director	Councillor Marty Kirby	Village of Warner
Director	Councillor Marsha Mason	Village of Champion
Director	Councillor Brad Schlossberger	Town of Claresholm
Director	Mayor Lorne Buis	Village of Foremost
Director	Councillor Ross Ford	Warner County
Director	Councillor Glen Alm	MD of Willow Creek
Director	Mr. Trevor Lewington	Economic Development Lethbridge
Associate	Mr. Phillip Wright	Milk River Cable Club
Associate	Mr. Mike Warkentin	Exhibition Park
Associate	Mrs. Cyndi Bester	Lethbridge Chamber
Associate	Mrs. Erin Crane	Tourism Lethbridge
Associate	Mr. Scott Alexander	Teralta
Associate	Mrs. Victoria Chester	Highway 3 Twinning Assoc.
Associate	Mrs. Michelle Day	Nikka Yuko Japanese Gardens
Associate	Mr. Rishikesh Kumar	FortisAlberta
Associate	Mr. Troy Grainger	Community Futures Lethbridge
Associate	Mr. Scott Donselar	Ridge Utilities

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S GREETINGS

I write to you today with a profound sense of gratitude and accomplishment as we gather to reflect on yet another year at the SouthGrow Regional Initiative. As I celebrate my fifth year as Executive Director, I am humbled by the unique impact that this organization has had on my own life. It has been a privilege to be part of such rewarding work, year after year, and to witness the incredible transformations that our collective efforts have brought about. I get out of bed every day with a motivating sense of purpose.

In the past year, we have seen several long-term projects come to fruition, yielding tangible and lasting results for the SouthGrow Region. It is a testament to the unwavering dedication and collaborative spirit of our team, as well as the faith that the Board has placed in us. Their trust has allowed us to pursue these projects with a long leash, empowering us to look after the best interests of the SouthGrow Region and push the boundaries of what is possible.

I would like to take a moment to express my heartfelt appreciation to the Executive Committee for their steadfast support and unwavering dedication to our organization. Your guidance and leadership have been instrumental in shaping our direction and enabling us to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve. Few people see the long hours these volunteers put in or understand the importance of what they do for all of us.

I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to our exceptional employees, Kim Welby and Jessie Stilson. Their hard work, ingenuity, and unwavering commitment have been the driving force behind many of our accomplishments. Without their dedication and passion, our successes would not have been possible.

Furthermore, I want to recognize and thank our close partners and supporters, including Linda Erickson, Trevor Lewington, Bev Thornton, Troy Grainger and Erin Crane. Your collaboration, generosity, and shared vision have been invaluable in advancing our mission and enhancing the well-being of southern Alberta. Together, we are creating a stronger, more vibrant region.

Finally, I would like to express my personal gratitude to the Board for their overwhelming attendance at the Truth and Reconciliation training held in Standoff last November. The experience was deeply moving, and it reinforced our shared commitment to fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Your presence and engagement spoke volumes about our collective dedication to healing and reconciliation.

As we celebrate our achievements over the past year, let us also look forward with renewed enthusiasm and determination. There is much more work to be done, and I am confident that together, we can continue to make a lasting and positive impact on the SouthGrow Region.

With sincere appreciation and warm regards,

Sincerely,



Peter Casurella, Executive Director

OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

The summary below details some of the operational highlights from the year.

Administrative Highlights

Renewed Partnerships: After receiving a funding decrease of 50% from the Government of Alberta in 2019, SouthGrow and our partners successfully advocated to Ministers Schwietzer and Horner in 2022 for renewed and increased funding as part of the twenty year partnership between our municipalities and the GOA. In the spring of 2022 SouthGrow delivered a report to Minister Schweitzer arguing convincingly for the restoration of the REDA funding. We organized a Chair's meeting with the Ministers in Edmonton, and this meeting produced a mandate to staff to study the issue and re-instate funding. In the fall of 2022 a commitment for \$125,000 per year was delivered, and then followed through on in the spring of 2023.

A Solid Plan: Along with the increased funding came the Economic Development in Rural Alberta Plan. This strategic plan published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, in collaboration with Jobs, Economy and Northern Development, contained the collected advice of rural economic developers from across the province. This plan has a clear mandate and role for partnership with the REDAs and we look forward to working on it together with the GOA.

Like-Minded Partners: This year also saw the City of Lethbridge decline continued partnership in SouthGrow which had the interesting effect of causing numerous City-organizations to step forward and request associate memberships with SouthGrow in order to keep the partnership alive. We have surged to 9 associate memberships across the region which are businesses or institutions with a vested interest in working with SouthGrow to grow the regional economy. The support of these organizations has been instrumental in advancing so many important partnerships and projects. Thank you!

The Team Levels Up: The Board also gave our team job title bumps this year as their expertise has expanded and responsibilities increased. Kim Welby is now the Director of Economic Development at SouthGrow and Jessie Stilson is the Marketing Manager. Well done and well-deserved!

Awarded for Good Work: At the Economic Developers Alberta Conference, SouthGrow won the Community Marketing Award for a large community for our Global Marketing work on behalf of the Southern Alberta Investment and Trade Initiative. SouthGrow managed to put the advantages of the agrifood economy of Southern Alberta in front of millions of people's eyes across North America and Europe... and we're doing it all again this year!

Strategic Collaborations

Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership: With investment pouring into Southern Alberta at breakneck speed, SAAEP switched their focus in 2022 to the future, working with the Energy Futures Lab and FortisAlberta to start defining what the future of Alberta's Electricity grid should look like to keep powering our rapidly growing industry in the face of change. We applied for two large-scale programs along with Fortis, worked with them to get wide-spread support for a new EV station demand rate so that small communities could afford to own and operate them, and worked with Fortis to get grant funding out to their communities and customers for subsidizing EV chargers across the region. With the Energy Futures Lab we presented to multiple government committees on the problems emerging in the energy space and the need for a unified vision. This resulted in a panel appointed by the Premier to chart a path forward. The work for next year will continue on this file.

Southern Alberta Investment and Trade Initiative: In 2021, SAITI partnered with Canada's Premier Food Corridor, Claresholm, and Vulcan County to build and fund a large global marketing program. We leveraged our collective money with the remnants of an old CARES grant for CPFC and by tapping into a new CanExport Grant. In 2022 we ran that marketing campaign with award-winning results getting 4.3 million views across North America and Europe. We also built 3 YouTube videos and secured a \$10,000 grant from Google, along with renewed grant funding from CanExport for continued work in 2023. The world does not know where or what Southern Alberta is, we are working to change that.

Canada's Premier Food Corridor and Canada's Western Gateway have become successful brands and SouthGrow continues to support them and wave their banners. CPFC's brand recognition continues to grow, as does CWG's, propelled firmly by our partners at Economic Development Lethbridge. This year we supported EDL's leadership to secure matching funds for expanding the work of CPFC substantially, with funding from Prairies Canada. The corridor looks set to expand from Lethbridge to Medicine Hat as well, with official provincial government support.



The Agrifood Hub at Exhibition Park is almost complete and SouthGrow traveled with our regional partners to the Future of Food conference in Ottawa where we helped sell the venue to 600 food industry professionals from across the nation. We are looking forward to the energy and opportunity that this venue will bring to the agrifood industry of southern Alberta.

Highway 3 Twinning Development Association: The H3TDA had a high-water mark this year. With the support of SouthGrow and ALL our partners on this project, the association received a promise from the Premier that Highway 3 will be twinned over 10 years. Alberta Transportation has built a 7-stage plan to accomplish that goal and seems to be aggressively driving forward with that mandate. Taber to Burdett will have construction starting this summer. Engineering is progressing on the Seven Persons to Medicine Hat section and a section in the Crowsnest Pass. Various stages of planning are being advanced on more sections.

Southwestern Alberta Regional Tourism Initiative: The regional tourism project we invested in last year blossomed into a \$321,000 project to expand regional tourism offerings, including multiple regional tours - The Southern Alberta Food Tours, the Highway 3 Ale Trail, and 3 Natural Resource Tour routes. That money is also funding the build out of all these tours into a variety of tour apps that gamify the experience for families. The partnership continues this next year with SouthGrow putting \$10,000 towards marketing these regional tours to get more people out and exploring the SouthGrow and Alberta Southwest Regions.

Marketing and Communication

Reconciliation: Community leaders from across southern Alberta came out to attend our Truth and Reconciliation training for municipal leaders event in Standoff. 70 people from across the region listened to Francis First Charger talk about the history of his people, interspersed with personal stories from his own life, unpacking the impacts of colonialism and system racism on the Backfoot people of southern Alberta.

Website Improvements: In partnership with Alberta SouthWest and Economic Development Lethbridge, SouthGrow purchased and integrated regional data tools into our websites, displaying accurate and good looking data sets to help with investment attraction and economic intel gathering across the region. We also just kept giving out sites a lovely facelift. ALL of our brands look a lot better this year than last year.

Economic Development Summit: In March we held our annual Economic Summit, securing sponsorships from Fortis, Tourism Lethbridge, and Community Futures, and hosted Economists Jack Mintz and Todd Hirsch to discuss the future of the regional economy with our attendees. We had a record breaking 115 attendees and it was a great time!

Economic Development

Agri-food: Our scholarship program grew this year to \$8000, and we added Red Crow College as an eligible institution. We gave out 3 scholarships of \$2500 each to deserving students and spent \$500 marketing the opportunity to young people across the region. Thank you to MNP Taber, Ridge Utilities, and Community Futures Lethbridge Region for your partnership and support!

Broadband: This year saw the completion of the POP site upgrades in Vulcan County and the completion of that project. The communities here have seen increasing investment in network upgrades from multiple service providers because of our work! To reiterate what was done, we built a P3 partnership that upgraded 6 POP sites on the SuperNet from 1 GIG to 10 GIGs, enabling vastly upgraded potential for connectivity.

EV Bus Pilot Project: After 3 years of work, this has finally come to fruition. The now \$402,000 vehicle funded by the FCM and the MCCAC has been ordered by the Town of Milk River and will be in operation before March of 2024 providing sustainable and comfortable transportation up and down Highway 4 for our seniors.

Investment Attraction: With Invest Alberta spreading their wings we spent our Agrifood conference attendance money on taking 25 regional representatives to Calgary for a day of meet and greets with the Invest Alberta and Invest Canada Teams. Relationship building efforts like this are creating direct connections between them and our people, facilitating investments. SouthGrow has repeatedly served as the on-the-ground contacts this year for investment attraction, helping to identify the right sites to compete for opportunities. We also completed Year 2 of our Targeted Lead Generation work with CIDEP, getting 8 high-quality introductions that have led to conversations with potential investors about opportunities in-region.

Labour Market Initiatives: SouthGrow worked hard this last year to promote the Rural Immigration Designation to our communities, hosting a workshop on it in September, and blasting out communications. The result has been a rapidly growing interest in the program. Building off of Claresholm's success, Taber launched their own program. Coaldale joined Taber's project and other communities are exploring partnerships with them as well. Bow Island, Foremost, the County of 40 Mile, Vulcan and surrounding communities, Cardston, and more are also looking into the program.

We also applied for, received money, and launched a grad retention program late in the year, to study what measures and efforts will help to keep graduates in southern Alberta. This project will conclude in the fall.

Solar for SouthGrow: Our flagship project has made substantial progress. SouthGrow plans to build a 4.5 MW solar array near Monarch. This year we secured the land, we secured the support of Lethbridge County, we secured Section 95 sign off form the GOA (we're allowed to actually do this), we received an NRED grant for some of the money needed for applications, and we received important support from FortisAlberta. Most importantly, we received support from Lethbridge County to help us find the funding we need to build the thing. It's a promising year ahead!

Supply Chain Identification: Our Supply Chain Identification project finally launched this year. Startup work is done, and we are moving into the data gathering stage in the coming year!

ZEVIP: By the end of the operational year, our EV Charging program was fully subscribed and with project completion notices starting to roll in. Through our work, we have enabled the construction of 241 Charging Stations! Partners are eager to work on



OPERATIONAL OUTCOME TRACKING 2022

An evaluation of the operational plan from 2022-2023 tracking our independently evaluated work items in our operational plan. SouthGrow met or exceeded most of its operational objectives. Several were not achieved. Where our outcomes deviated from our goals, explanations are provided.

1. Strategic Collaborations

Member Engagement

Activity: Annual Council Presentations.

Goal: The Executive Director will endeavor to deliver a direct report to council to 40% of our members on an annual basis. (12) Staff will also provide a once-per-year recorded update to all members that they can play for their councils, and will distribute the monthly Mayors and Reeves reports to the full board with

Target: 40% of members receive a report directly to council (12)

Progress: Completed 14 direct presentations to councils.

Status: COMPLETED

Outcome: Exceeded Target

Activity: Councilor Training (Reconciliation Training for Municipalities)

Goal: SouthGrow hosts a Reconciliation and Inclusion Training session for Municipal Staff and Councils that is attended by at least 40 individuals from across the region. This session will take place in quarter 1 or quarter 3 of the 2022-23 fiscal year (depending on scheduling conflicts and will be MC-ed by a member of our Board from the Blood Tribe, or their alternate.

Target: One session held in Q 1 or 3 of 2022. 40 registrants.

Progress: Event was held in Standoff in November of 2022.

Status: COMPLETED. EXCEEDED ATTENDANCE TARGETS.

Outcome: Event was sold out with 70 registrants. Feedback from was completed. Participants generally enjoyed the event although it was hard to hear the speaker.

Activity: Government Relations Committee

Goal: SouthGrow will convene a government relations committee of volunteers pulled from its members to re-develop communications and partnerships with the political leadership and bureaucracy of the Government of Alberta to grow collaboration for increase outcomes. This will include achieving a meeting with the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation, the Minister of Ag and Forestry and Rural Economic Development, and ADM or Director level meetings with Bureaucrats.

Target: Favorable communications are re-established with Government of Alberta Ministers and staffs for the re-establishment of partnerships.

Progress: Full formal committee did not materialized due to early promises by the GOA in spring 2022 that met our intentions and goals. GOA staff did what they said they would do. Renewed REDA funding was announced in October 2022 for the coming year with long-term commitments given.

Status: COMPLETED

Outcomes: REDA funding secured at \$125,000 for the coming year with commitments given by GOA staff for continuous funding for rural economic development beyond that.

Activity: Economic Development Summit

Goal: SouthGrow hosts a regional Economic Development Summit in March of 2023 that provides stakeholders with access to speakers and engagement on important economic development topics, trends, and issues that affect our region.

Target: Greater than 70 attendees from member communities, partners, and stakeholders.

Progress: Event was held on March 30, 2023. 115 registrants attended. Budget was a few hundred in the green.

Status: COMPLETED, EXCEEDED ATTENDANCE TARGETS

Outcomes: 115 registrants attended. Budget was a few hundred \$ in the green. Sponsored by 3 organizations.



Build and Sustain Collaborations

Activity: Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership – Community Energy Forum

Goal: SouthGrow will increase community awareness of opportunities in renewable energy by hosting a community energy forum that offers staff and councilors an in-depth look at the opportunities available in community energy, how to pursue them, how to fund them, and the benefits they bring; and we will host this forum in the early fall of 2022, before municipal budgets are set for the coming year.

Target: 50 staff and councilors, or other interested parties attend.

Progress: Event was planned and aggressively marketed, but signups were very low. Ticket sales not forthcoming, and decision was made to cancel event and cut losses. Re-worked key topics into Economic Summit, and held a webinar on Municipal Energy Management instead.

Status: CANCELLED, mixed outcomes.

Outcomes: Event was not held, and core metrics not achieved due to lack of signups. Lessons learned about event hosting and timing in post-pandemic space. Core conversation was added to Economic Summit event which was well attended. Webinar on Municipal Energy Management had 22 attendees and resulted in one community committing to pursue energy management, which led to Alberta SouthWest considering a regional energy management program for their 15 communities, or a subset of them.



Activity: Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership – ARRCUS Mapping Project

Goal: SouthGrow will integrate the ARRCUS renewable energy mapping tool provided through RINSA into the SAAEP website by Q3 of 2022. We will also encourage Palliser Economic Partnership to seek RIN funding to build out the tool to cover their region as well.

Target: ARRCUS delivers tool. RINSA pays Invoice and is thanked. SouthGrow integrates tool into websites by Q3 of 2022. SouthGrow and RINSA issue press release.

Progress: Work has been completed and project is live, paid for, and done. We are making additional improvements.

Status: **COMPLETED**

Outcomes: ARRCUS real-time energy data for SouthGrow and Alberta Southwest is live on the saaep.ca website. Very successful project.

Activity: Southern Alberta Alternative Energy Partnership – Government Education

Goal: SouthGrow will aim to present to one standing government committee on the opportunities and obstacles in nontraditional energy in Alberta. We will do so with the support of our SAAEP partners and our partners with the Energy Futures Lab.

Target: 1 presentation to a standing committee.

Progress: Invest Alberta has dedicated a full-time staff position to advancing renewable energy investments. This is a result of our collective efforts on this file. We presented to the Resource Stewardship standing committee in Edmonton and the UCP Energy Caucus online in the first week of February and followed up with a meeting with Minister Neudorf in February. A week later the GOA announced the establishment of a panel to develop a vision for the provinces energy sector. This was a direct result of our work. We've been officially invited by the Energy Futures Lab to participate in the next iteration of these conversations and will carry that work forward into the next operational year! We have also put together a budding coalition of rural municipalities to make policy recommendations in the coming operational year to address municipal concerns with renewable energy developments in agricultural settings with new municipal government input. Recent government commitment to a net zero by 2050 plan was additionally influenced by our communications. This has been a successful year.

Status: **COMPLETE**

Outcomes: Exceeded our goals. Presented to two committees and talked to several ministers. Premier has created a panel to develop a vision for the provinces energy sector. This was a direct response to our efforts. Invited to participate with provincial leaders in next stages of the development of this conversation. Work set up nicely for next year.

Activity: Southern Alberta Investment and Trade Initiative

Goal: SouthGrow maintains its participation and leadership in the Southern Alberta Investment and Trade Initiative, pursuing meaningful projects under its umbrella as detailed in other plan sections.

Target: At least one project is advanced under the brand within 2021 as detailed elsewhere.

Progress: Global ad campaign went really well. 4.3 million views over 7 months in our targeted audience. Created 4 YouTube ads with extra money. Got project refunded for coming year. Won an award for our work at the EDA Conference. CIDEP came through and delivered 8 high quality leads before the end of January.

Status: COMPLETED - AWARD WINNING RESULTS

Outcomes: 4.3 million views, 8 high quality leads from CIDEP, Award winning project, refunded for another year.

Activity: Canada's Premier Food Corridor and Canada's Western Gateway

Goal: SouthGrow supports the growth of sub-regional collaborations that promote industry clusters by convening them when necessary, hosting meetings, providing advisor services, connecting them with resources, and by actively using those brands in our own communications efforts. This support is ongoing and continual.

Target: CPFC and CWG remain active and managed by their own membership.

Progress: CPFC successful in their application to NRED for \$100,000 in matching funds for the corridor project. Prairies Canada likely to announce funding from the federal government soon. CWG slated for a funding application in coming year. SouthGrow has maintained and paid for the CWG website for the coming year.

Status: COMPLETED

Outcomes: CPFC going from success to success and soon to have funding and staff. SGRI has maintained and kept CWG alive. The brand remains present and part of the active marketing ecosystem.

The CPFC
Advantage

If you're in the business of food... you should be here!



Activity: Southern Alberta Tourism Collaboration

Goal: SouthGrow partners with Tourism Lethbridge and Alberta SouthWest to leverage partnership dollars to secure Federal funding for a robust regional tourism development project that enhances tourism product throughout south-central and south-western Alberta and provides a robust slate of services for local operators to help them recover and expand their operations. To this end we will expand our use of the Driftscape app to include regional tours with specific development of an Indigenous Tour, a Food Tour, and an Alternative Energy tour. In addition, we will provide support and training for regional operators to help them enhance visitor experiences and provide coaching and support for access to additional small grants or business improvement loans. Conversations are advanced with the EDA regarding province-wide rollout of municipal apps for broad impact.

Target: App Tech expanded, Three tours created and in use, One training event held, 50 Coaching points of contact, Advancement of conversation with EDA.

Progress: Grant applied for; deal struck with partnership. Letters of support submitted. Tourism Lethbridge has rolled out their first agri-food tour that was a deliverable from last year's funding. Excellent outcome for the level of our investment. Routes built into Driftscape app. Prairies Can funding approval is expected within the operational year.

Status: COMPLETED

Outcomes: Grant applications were successful on multiple fronts, and regional work is moving ahead with new routes developed, and funding support for Blackfoot Signage project from Tourism Lethbridge received. Tourism Lethbridge also sponsored our conference with \$5000 and hosted a session on regional tourism opportunities.

Activity: Highway 3 Twinning Development Association

Goal: SouthGrow supports the Highway 3 Twinning Development Association towards its goals by providing matching funding, board representation, in-kind support, and by helping to continually secure regional buy-in from our membership. SouthGrow ensures that the H3TDA remains a vibrant, active, and impactful organization.

Target: H3TDA maintains a slate of work advancing the goal, H3TDA appears to be on track to accomplish their strategic goals.

Progress: PriceWaterHouse Cooper completed Economic Impact Study. Premier Smith Announced that all of Highway 3 will be twinned over the next 10 years and has directed Transportation to make a plan to get it done.

Status: COMPLETED

Outcomes: Highway not twinned YET, but this is a high-water mark and SouthGrow has pulled hard on this in support. Alberta Transportation is proceeding as IF they have a mandate to twin the corridor over 10 years, which is promising.

Sustain or Expand Membership

Activity: Sustain Membership

Goal: SouthGrow sustains its paying membership within 10% of its current membership income levels (+ or - \$10,000).

Target: Retention of membership dollars within 10% of expected income level.

Expected membership income is \$96,515.00, so plus or minus \$9651.50

Progress: Willow Creek joined (+5165). Barnwell joined (+947). City of Lethbridge dropped out (-10,000). Associate members added: Economic Development Lethbridge (+200), Terralta (complimentary), Nikka Yuko (+200), Tourism Lethbridge (+200). Potentially more.

+/- is -\$3288 so we are within our tolerated variance.

Status: COMPLETED

Outcomes: Met membership retention goals. City of Lethbridge dropping out spurred multiple signups from organizations in the City. While this was a financial hit, it has increased our influence. Supporters at City Hall continue to participate in events and initiatives that we run, despite the majority of council (by 1 vote) having declined membership. Barnwell coming back onboard was a big win.

Activity: Expand Associate Memberships to Industry and Institutions

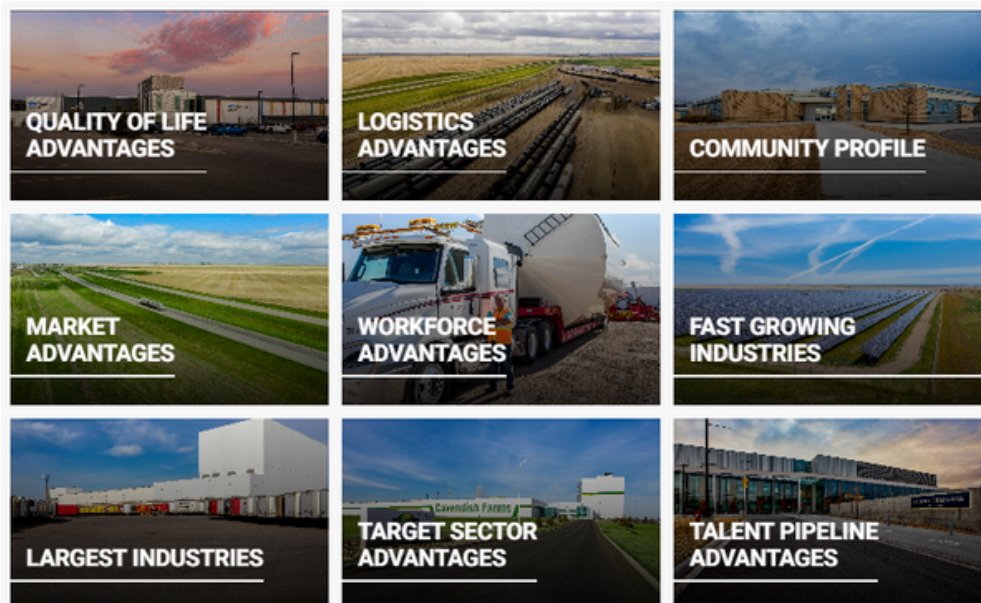
Goal: SouthGrow retains at least 2 existing associate members and adds 2 more for a total end of year of 4 associate members.

Target: 2 additional Associate Members within 2022 for a sustained total of 4.

Progress: Added EDL, Tourism Lethbridge, Teralta, and Nikka Yuko so far while retaining Lethbridge Chamber, Milk River Cable Club, and Exhibition Park. Total of 8 associate members.

Status: ON TRACK - EXCEEDED TARGET

Outcomes: Added 6, retained 3. Total is 9 now.



2. Marketing and Communications

Regional Promotion

Activity: Website Improvements

Goal: SouthGrow updates its easy-to-use WIX website with additional resources from its digitization program in 2020 and makes these resources available. Links are tested, content refreshed, and meta data improved for greater visibility and impact. Backlinks to core partner websites are added in a visible location before end of year.

Target: Website is refreshed by end of May 2022 with opportunities for additional improvements throughout the year.

Progress: Website has been re-built and published. Some additional work on investment attraction page to be completed, but this is underway and will be completed as we roll into next operational year with purchase of Local Intel tools and completion of work on SAITI.com site.

Status: COMPLETE

Outcomes: Website is fully refreshed. Additional improvements have been made. Social media is vastly improved as well with a rolling social media calendar that is actively populated.

Activity: Global Marketing Project

Goal: SouthGrow project manages a digital marketing campaign that was built in 2021 and funded in early 2022 by Canexport as part of the SAITI partnership. In 2022/23 we run a digital campaign that raises the profile of our region in target markets around the world, with particular emphasis on the United States, Canada, and Western Europe.

Target: SouthGrow has the campaign running by June of 2022 with our selected consultants. Campaign runs for a full 12 months. Collect meaningful data on penetration and conversions from this pilot for base metric in future campaigns.

Progress: Campaign completed. Actively ran 7 months. Created youtube videos for next year with extra money.

Status: COMPLETE

Outcomes: Ran campaign for 7 months. 4.3 million impressions. Award winning project. Built more assets for next year. Refunded project for next year.



Activity: SAITI FDI Test Drive Year 2

Goal: SouthGrow funds the delivery of a target FDI project aimed at identifying and starting conversations with 8 - 10 highly qualified investment leads with regional economic development officers from our contributing communities and conversations are assigned and ongoing by Q3 of 2022 and are in the CRM hosted for the region by EDL. Funding already provided by partners and Canexport.

Target: SouthGrow has the campaign running by June of 2022 with our selected consultant (CIDEP)

CIDEP delivers 8 - 10 leads. 8 - 10 high quality conversations opened with lead information captured in CRM for follow up.

Progress: CIDEP delivered 8 high quality leads by the end of January. Ben and Peter both met with the leads. Conversations started or ongoing.

Status: COMPLETED

Outcomes: Met minimum objectives for this task with 8 high quality leads delivered and engaged with.

Internal Communications

Activity: Newsletters

Goal: SouthGrow keeps its internal members and stakeholders well-advised of trends, opportunities, threats, and events that impact community and regional economic development. We also keep them well informed of Provincial Government initiatives.

Target: Newsletters are issued bi-weekly to a distribution list of anyone who wants it. Board members receive a daily Government Relations newsletter forwarded from the SouthGrow office.

Progress: Jessie retained for another year. Rolling forward. We have done some work to increase subscriptions. \$50.00 spent on advertising resulted in 2 signups. Targeted invitations likely to yield more results.

Status: COMPLETE

Outcomes: Increased distribution list. Hired a new student as we moved Jessie to full time on other work. Makayla Gross is our new newsletter production person, she won one of our scholarships.

3. Economic Development & Innovation

Ag-Tech Market Development

Activity: Ag-Tech Scholarship / Incentive Program

Goal: SouthGrow actively supports youth engagement in the Hi-Tech Ag sector by partnering with educational organizations in the region to deliver up to 4 scholarships to students attending Lethbridge College or the University of Lethbridge who plan to build a career in agri-food in southern Alberta.

Target: Up to 4 scholarships worth \$2500 each are awarded in the fall of 2022.

Applicants exceed 2021 numbers. (10)

Progress: Several donors identified. Bruce Warkentin, Ridge Utilities, AFSC. Bruce has committed \$2500.00. \$2500 from Ridge Utilities. Still \$2500 shy. Call out to go for first week of August. Got \$500 from Community Futures for a total of \$8000. Decided on 3 Scholarships of \$2500 each and pushed the call out. Used the remaining \$500 for marketing. Marketing has seen over 150,000 views of our ad. We received 21 applications this year, up from 11 last year. Scholarships awarded!

Status: COMPLETED

Outcomes: 3x students received \$2500 scholarships. We spend \$500 on marketing the opportunity and received many thousands of views on the ads. Students who won attended Red Crow College, Lethbridge College, and U of L. Next year, we need more developed guidelines for the program as it gets larger.



MNP LTD **RIDGEUTILITIES** **Community Futures** **SOUTHGROW**
Regional Economic Development

present:

Agri-food Futures Scholarship

3 awards of \$2,500 are available for students at the Lethbridge college or university.

APPLY TODAY

Learn more at southgrow.com

Activity: Agri-food Conference Representation

Goal: SouthGrow represents southern Alberta at least one global agri-food convention or trade show to build relationships and increase awareness of opportunities within the region. Furthermore, we collaborate with our partners to divide up conference attendance so that we have the maximum reach possible.

Target: One convention attended. 5 conversations started that lead to local introductions.

Progress: Tried to find attendees for SIAL conference in Montreal, unsuccessful. Everyone who could have gone was too busy. Decided to target FI Global in Las Vegas in November. Peter worked to go but prices spiralled and life got in the way. Held January 26th event in Calgary with Invest Alberta for regional partners to attend and build partnerships as we prepare for Regional Investment Readiness work with Invest Alberta. We filled the bus and had a great trip.

Status: COMPLETED

Outcomes: Took 30 people to Calgary for a day with Invest Alberta. Good relationship building and education event. Highly valued by all attendees.

Broadband Deployment

Activity: Terragraph Project for Below CRTC Speed Members

Goal: SouthGrow continues to organize and assist the efforts of our members in Vulcan County, the Highway 4 region, the Town of Cardston, and the Blood Tribe to move them towards high-speed status by utilizing terragraph technology or other solutions and partnerships. By the end of the operational year, at least 2 more communities will have instituted very high speed networks, and POP site upgrades will have been completed for all of the Vulcan County and Highway 4 sites.

Target:

5 POP sites upgraded in Vulcan County

2 POP sites upgraded down Highway 4

Town of Cardston Issues RFP for build or has advanced a partnership to complete build.

Stretch Goal: Blood Tribe has a partnership and/or a path towards deployment.

Progress: All Vulcan County POP sites upgraded and paid for. All Highway 4 POP sites upgraded and paid for. Town of Cardston issued their RFP, incumbent came back and promised upgrades for retraction of RFP. Upgrades underway in Cardston. Regional ISP's have all received UBF funding. MRCC, Wi-fibre, Explornet (among others) moving forward with 50/10 projects. Blood Tribe conversation has not advanced.

Status: COMPLETED

Outcomes: 50/10 for the region has been achieved and additional upgrades and redundancy are being built out. All invoices paid for the Vulcan County POP site upgrade project. Blood Tribe was engaged with but no action to move forward. Rep from Blood Tribe is eager to advance the conversation.

Labour Market Solutions

Activity: Introduction to Rural Immigration Pathways

Goal: SouthGrow will host a workshop for regional municipalities, chambers, large industrial stakeholders, and our economic development partners to introduce the region to the opportunity available through rural immigration streams to help provision the labour needs of the region and coach them on how to get started. Our goal will be to host a half-day event with 70 attendees, in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, to significantly raise the profile of the opportunity.

Target: 70 registrants.

Progress: Event was held in October. 55 people registered to attend. Only 25 showed up.

Status: COMPLETED

Outcomes: We missed our attendance target despite a very strong push to get attendees. Post-op revealed free tickets was the problem. Excellent session regardless. Key outcome: Coaldale has dedicated human resources to pursuing rural immigration status and developing the program in-house.

Community Supports

Activity: Community Ec Dev Resource Promotion

Goal: By Quarter 3 of 2022 SouthGrow provides resources to support community level economic development by delivering customized reports to our councils and their administrations that detail the supports and information already available to them, reminding them of their existence so that they can be leveraged. SouthGrow also increases the resources available on our website and through our newsletter, and works to increase readership of the bi-weekly newsletter.

Target: 30 reports sent out. Newsletter subscriptions increase by 50

Progress: Tools for communities complete and integrated into website. Letters sent out to all members informing them of tools. Newsletter subs increased past 50.

Status: COMPLETED

Outcomes: Resources completed. Targets reached.



How can we
help you?

Pilot Projects

Activity: Supply Chain Opportunity Identification Project (Import Replacement Project)

Goal: Together with Economic Development Lethbridge, SouthGrow launches a 2-year Supply Chain Identification project that profiles regional inputs and outputs from our 200 largest industrials, investment opportunities, red flags, and more, and captures that information in a database to begin matchmaking and the sharing of opportunities. This project is underway by summer of 2022 with a contractor hired and implementing the deliverables. Project moves into phase 2 by summer of 2023 for completion in 2024.

Target:

200 stakeholders contacted.

100 share their information

10 introductions made

10 red flags identified

10 business opportunities or investments identified.

Progress: All funding secured and signed for. RFP sent out. Submissions evaluated. Winner selected and contract awarded. Deadlines very behind due to Prairies Canada delay of 6 months from award to contract signing. Project initiated and setup work complete. Ready to go to interview stage.

Status: COMPLETE

Outcomes: Project funded and initiated.

Activity: Zero Emissions Vehicle Infrastructure Project (2-year)

Goal: SouthGrow manages the disbursement of ZEVIP funding from NRCAN to fund a wide array of charging infrastructure in the region. This project is completed by 2024 and involves an active partnership with the MCCAC allowing many of our member municipalities to get fully subsidized infrastructure, and institutions and businesses to get 46% matching funding for their projects. The full amount is successfully spent by project end in 2024.

Target: Est 1.7 million dollars in spend on infrastructure in the region.

2022 Target. Funding is secured, Project Manager hired, operational plan is on-schedule for completion.

Progress: Reached goals. Program is oversubscribed with over \$1.8 million in applications for only \$1.7 million in available funding. Applications are now closed!

Status: COMPLETE

Outcomes: Money has been fully subscribed. First station complete and commissioned. Many more to follow. 276 possible charging plugs enabled across Alberta. Admin funding made second employee for SouthGrow possible. Program helped us build strong relationships with Alberta Municipalities, ATCO Electric, FortisAlberta, Equus, the Energy Futures Lab, and others. The relationship capital we have accrued from this project has been immense. ATCO, Fortis and Alberta Municipalities want to jointly pursue another project together with SouthGrow as the lead delivery organization.

Activity: EV Bus Pilot Project

Goal: SouthGrow completes multi-year application process to get EV bus for highway 4 corridor funded, with funding landed within 2022 and bus purchased and operational in-region by Fall of 2022.

Target: Bus is purchased and delivered by fall of 2022.

Progress: FCM has approved budget increase of vehicle to \$407k (80%). MCCAC approved grant for remaining amount. Peaks to Prairies has offered free power for next 6-7 years, just have to fill out an application with William York. In process of buying bus from Crestline in Saskatoon.

There is some question about timelines for delivery that is being worked through.

Status: COMPLETED - timelines changed.

Outcomes: Fully funded, in process of ordering vehicle. We have got a \$402,000 EV handibus fully funded by granting organizations to service Highway 4. Bus has been officially ordered.

Targets of Opportunity

Activity: SouthGrow Power Project

Goal: SouthGrow advances the implementation of a < 5MW solar installation that will be owned and operated by SouthGrow the intent of funding the organization. Within the operational year, we will attempt to Identify eligible land, purchasers for the power, and a viable grid connection while completing a feasibility study. By the end of the operational year, we will reach the point where the Board will need to decide on a go-no-go for the project.

Target: All the information is available for the Board to make a fully informed go-no-go decision.

Progress: Land identified, project ready to go, Applications ready to submit, Working with Lethbridge County to identify correct funding stream for loan. Prairies Canada is viewing our grant application favorably. Have money to pay for application, trying to reduce cost by working with Fortis. Terralta has been amazingly helpful. Key concern, I don't want to drain our reserves in order to make this project happen because we need our reserves to fund pass through programs.

Status: COMPLETE

Outcomes: Project is advancing very nicely. We've reached that point there the Board can decide to go-no-go.

SPECIAL THANKS

To the **Government of Alberta**, Ministry of Jobs, Economy, and Innovation for their continued partnership.

To **Economic Development Lethbridge** for their continued partnership and belief in growing the economic strength of the region.

To **Alberta SouthWest Regional Alliance** for being the best neighbours a REDA could hope for and to **Bev Thornton** for her mentorship and guidance.

To the **Palliser Economic Partnership** for forging new relationships with us and working together for all Southern Albertans.

To the hardworking people of **Alberta Innovates and the NRC**, for supporting local innovators to grow new business in our region.

To **FortisAlberta** for ongoing partnerships that are helping our communities get the infrastructure they need in a changing landscape, and for your game-changing support of our Solar Project that is transformative in nature. You deserve the Community Partner award you won at EDA very much.

To the **Regional Innovation Network of Southern Alberta** for running so many programs that support entrepreneurs and innovators across the south.

To **Linda Erickson** for her continual support of our staff and organization. Your commitment to our shared goals every year is a blessing and an aid.

To **Community Futures Lethbridge Region** for your partnership in the past year on core projects.

To **Alberta Municipalities** for partnering with us on our EV infrastructure programs and for being such a support and help on webinars.

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To our energy-world friends, **Rishikesh Kumar, Jennifer Shillam, Leanne Kubiseski, William York, Brad Nickel** and the people of the **Energy Futures Lab** for helping us navigate this sector as it grows in importance, thank you so much for all you do!

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To the members of the **Executive Committee** who go above and beyond as volunteers to further the work of our alliance.

To the people of the **Highway 3 Twinning Development Association** who work hard to have our central agri-food highway twinned.

To our staff, **Peter Casurella, Kim Welby and Jessie Stilson** for giving of your time and talents to advance our mandate.

To **Minister Nathan Neudorf** in particular for going above and beyond to advocate for our region.

THANK YOU ALL!