



Blind River

Corporate Strategic Plan and
Economic Development Strategy

ACTION PLAN

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Acknowledgements



The work of the Project Team was enhanced by the participation of the Project Advisory Committee made up of community representatives with skills, knowledge and expertise relative to their respective group. The insight and contribution provided by the members of this committee has been instrumental to the overall process. The contributions made by the members of the Town, its staff, survey respondents and stakeholders who agreed to be interviewed, provided great value to the development of this plan. While assembled by the Project Team, the following document is a true reflection of the wide-ranging and insightful ideas of numerous individuals and groups who are actively engaged in the various facets of tourism and economic development. A complete list of the Committee members can be found in the Town of Blind River Corporate Strategy & Economic Development Plan.



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The Town of Blind River retained Collins Barrow SNT and Markey Consulting (the Project Team) to develop a Corporate Strategy & Economic Development Plan. The long-term goal of this project is to identify and implement strategic initiatives that will result in job creation and new investments within the community.

The Action Plan has been developed to guide the community through the development and implementation process. The purpose of the action-oriented tool is to ensure that the Town and its stakeholders have a user-friendly, practical document to support the implementation of the recommendations.

The plan contains a series of recommendations for initiatives that have emerged as a result of the research findings documented in the Corporate Strategy & Economic Development Plan. The ideas identified in the document incorporate the feedback received from the secondary research, community surveys, stakeholder consultations/focus groups and Best Practice findings. The recommendations are based on the results of the research conducted through the project process. The background information can be found in the accompanying Corporate Strategy & Economic Development Plan which consists of a compilation of stakeholder feedback and research and provides the background analysis, evidence and rationale for each of the recommendations outlined in in this document.

Action Plan

This plan outlines a series of recommended projects and programs for implementation over the short to long term. The guidebook has been presented in a format designed to facilitate ease of use in finding and adding information, as well as monitoring the implementation process.

The recommendations have been developed based on the outcomes of the consultation and survey process. This community input combined with a Situational Analysis, SWOT and Best Practice review provides the foundation required to develop strategies and actions to assist with the growth of the community. The research process highlighted within the Corporate Strategy & Economic Development Plan, led to the identification of initiatives that connect directly to identified weaknesses and opportunities within the community.

To foster change and strengthen the economy, the town of Blind River must work collaboratively with local and regional stakeholders and prioritize investment readiness, target sector development and communication. The following diagram identifies the three main goals with specific strategies to achieve success.

Mission

Providing quality services and leadership that reflect the social, cultural, environmental and economic needs of the community, while creating regional partnerships and managing resources in a fiscally responsible manner.

Vision

Driven by extraordinary volunteers and supported by its community leaders, Blind River is a vibrant and prosperous town that has established itself as a year-round destination and ideal community in which to live and do business.

Strategic Focus Areas



Focus Area

INVESTMENT READINESS

BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION	INVESTMENT ATTRACTION	ENTREPRENEURSHIP
Existing businesses are important to the community and its economy. With a renewed BR&E program we will gain insights that will provide impetus for strategic entrepreneurial development and business recruitment. Through a sustainable framework this program will provide the mechanism to collectively work with our existing businesses to build a stronger economy and entrepreneurial base.	We need need to attract inward investment in order to create economic diversity, maintain and expand infrastructure and to increase our ability to meet the needs of local residents and businesses. Through an efficient, simple, and streamlined system that makes it easier to start, expand, and operate businesses while protecting public regulatory goals we will position Blind River as “business friendly” for years to come.	A strong community needs a variety of strong local businesses. Entrepreneurs are crucial to fostering economic growth and development within Blind River. They create businesses, businesses create jobs and people with jobs spend money. Through a focused education and peer learning program we will foster entrepreneurship within our community

SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

TOURISM	RETAIL AND SERVICES
Through the development of new tourism products and by enhancing the overall Blind River experience, visitors to the community will have more to do and see. As such, repeat business will increase, stays will be extended and overall interest in the community will rise resulting in new businesses and job creation. In order to attract visitors from neighbouring cities and beyond, an overall theme and beautification program that will properly showcase our community, quality accommodations, overnight RV parking, a vibrant retail sector and new, authentic experiences will be established.	Smart, successful retail development is a vital part of our community’s economic development program. Through a more diversified retail sector and shop local incentives and programs, repeat business will be created and local residents will be encouraged to spend more locally. A revitalized downtown business core, with more businesses, and a unique and unified look showcasing the historical aspects of the area will create a tourism asset as well as simplify access to local residents to local goods and services.

Recommendations

The following provides a summary of the recommended projects and programs that were identified during the evaluation process. The strategies represent action items based on the corresponding goals. Each strategy ties with an over-arching goal, which collectively builds upon the overall plan.

The solutions are intended to provide actionable and realistic initiatives. The strategies to accomplish the initiatives are listed within the document and describe the following items:

WHAT	• <i>Proposed Initiative</i>
WHY	• <i>Rationale</i>
HOW	• <i>Recommended Actions</i>
WHEN	• <i>Anticipated Timeframe*</i>

→ Short Term	0-12 months
→ Medium Term	1 year- 3 years
→ Long Term	3 years +

FUNDAMENTAL FACTOR: Local Economic Development (LED) is acting to ensure that the economy of your community grows faster than your population, so you have the extra resources in the future to finance improvement. This is achieved when public, business and non-governmental sector partners work collectively to create better conditions for economic growth and employment generation. LED is thus about communities continually improving their investment climate and business enabling environment to enhance their competitiveness, retain jobs and improve income. Inefficient or weak business environments impede businesses from starting up, expanding, modernizing or surviving. In order to ensure that communities and regions are well positioned to encourage and accommodate growth several fundamental factors must be considered and addressed.

Goal 1: Investment Readiness



TO INCREASE BLIND RIVER'S ABILITY TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN BUSINESSES THROUGH A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO INVESTMENT READINESS.

Recommendation 1: Business Retention & Expansion (BR&E)

Existing businesses are important to the community and its economy. Not only do existing businesses generate job growth (an estimated 60% to 80% of net job growth in localities across the country are estimated to come from existing local businesses), but these businesses make investments into the community already. They invest in facilities, train labor, pay taxes, contribute to social activities, and generate demand for their suppliers and service providers. Further, existing businesses are some of the best ambassadors for recruiting new firms to the area. Finally, if a business is growing, it may be targeted by another community's recruitment efforts.

WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Develop and implement a regional BR&E program	<p>Up to 80% of net new jobs and capital investment in any economy are generated by existing firms.</p> <p>Existing firms provide more return on investment in smaller, rural areas where entrepreneurial and recruitment opportunities are limited.</p> <p>It's ten times more cost effective to work with existing businesses than to attract new ones.</p> <p>In economic development, the only time you are interacting with actual customers is through business retention and expansion. Recruitment prospects are unrealized opportunities that have no actual experience as a customer in your market area.</p> <p>The insights gained through systematic BR&E efforts provide impetus for strategic entrepreneurial development and business recruitment.</p> <p>It provides existing private sector firms with a seamless customer contact and service experience.</p> <p>It provides a sustainable framework for success by harnessing various stakeholder organizations for a common purpose.</p> <p>Provides a mechanism to seamlessly tackle future entrepreneurial and recruitment needs. Everyone understands their role and responsibility and how they fit into a larger team context.</p> <p>BR&E programs tell your existing businesses that they are the primary concern and focus of your organization and area.</p>	Short Term + Ongoing	<p>Identify regional partners and establish leadership team</p> <p><u>Submit a funding application</u></p> <p>Develop questionnaire</p> <p>Recruit and train interview team</p> <p>Establish response team</p> <p>Coordinate and undertake interviews</p> <p>Collect and analyze data responses</p> <p>Deal with "red flag" issues</p> <p>Identify key themes and issues</p> <p>Develop recommendations</p> <p>Implement recommendations</p> <p>Develop ongoing formalized long-term BR&E program (including targets)</p>

▀▀ ***It would be important to build local business to increase revenue for the municipality.*** ▀▀

Recommendation 2: Investment Attraction & Entrepreneurship

Creating and maintaining an efficient, simple, and streamlined system that makes it easier to start, expand, and operate businesses while protecting public regulatory goals should be a short-term priority and will go a long way in positioning Blind River as “business friendly”.

Standardize forms and procedures to provide efficiency and predictability;

Provide sufficient resources to enable swift and competent regulatory consideration; and

Utilize online technology and other available tools to streamline the permitting process.

WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Develop a formalized process to advocate for economic development and business expansion opportunities	To build capacity throughout the community to ensure Economic Development professionals, BRDC staff and Board members, Chamber of Commerce Board Members, Council and Municipal staff are aware of tools, programs and resources for businesses development.	Short term	<p>Establish a formal committee focused on investment attraction, business development and entrepreneurship. Clearly identify roles and objectives. Develop an annual plan TOGETHER for economic development in Blind River.</p> <p>Hold regular review team meetings to improve communication, reduce duplication and provide updates on status of projects.</p>



There is a lack of transparency for economic growth and development planning. Council does not seem to support new ideas.





WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Establish a Project Technical Review Team & develop a pre-application process	<p>A technical review team will provide a coordinated approach to projects while decreasing “turf issues” and duplication.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and board time and energy is saved. • Confusion is reduced for the applicant. • Provides for review and comment that offers protection for the applicant and the issuing authority from complaint after a decision is rendered about issues or concerns not addressed due to lack of opportunity for input by other boards; organizations and departments. • Identifies critical issues / problems early in the process. • Allows sharing of a site’s history and/or anecdotal information about the site. • Enables creative solutions to design issues, perceived impacts, and community benefits. <p>Developing a pre-application process will allow for an informal review of a development in concept design stage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permits identification of potential issues, both for Blind River and the developer. • Establishes relationships early in the process. • Alerts developer to potential community needs. • Reviews all permits and permissions required. • Reviews time schedules for permitting. • Reviews applications for completeness before filing. • Allows a community to coordinate its response to a development proposal. • Helps departments to find solutions which meet the needs of multiple boards and commissions without conflict. 	Short Term	Establishing a single point of contact to improve clarity and productivity for both the applicant and the Town. This could be the BRDC or a designated individual within the Municipality.







***There is not much help for a person to get started
UNLESS you know someone.***

WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Streamline the permitting process through standardized forms and the use of online technology	<p>Standardized, predictable, timely, and transparent regulatory and permitting processes are needed to provide businesses and investors with the certainty they need to make decisions about where to invest and grow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for uniformity of materials to be analyzed during the project review process. • Minimizes conflicts and delays in application review due to misunderstanding about what materials and information must be provided. • The applicant may better plan for the expected length of time for project review and action by the reviewing board on the application. • Plan submittals are likely to be more complete upon application submittal, minimizing delays during review caused by requesting and waiting for additional information. • Neighbors and community leaders as well as the permit granting authorities have a clear sense of what developers must provide, and what is not required 	Short Term	<p>Develop an online and hard copy User's Guide to local permitting and development</p> <p>Include flow charts, checklists, contact information, costs, timelines to make the process seamless and user friendly</p>

 ***We need to provide incentives to attract new business.***
We need to make it easier for them to get their permits and keep taxes low since they are the ones making our town more attractive...




WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Educate current and potential entrepreneurs on local opportunities	<p>Entrepreneurs are crucial to fostering economic growth and development within Blind River. They create businesses, businesses create jobs and people with jobs spend money.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate network formation, peer learning, and mentorships 	Short Term	<p>Host a community based economic fair for entrepreneur-minded individuals providing an opportunity to meet other like-minded individuals, hear about some of the region's greatest innovations, and get to know what the area has to offer for its entrepreneurs.</p> <p>Advertise the event through the Chamber of Commerce, the Business Centre, the BRDC, the Town and in business classes at colleges and universities within the region (SSM & Sudbury).</p> <p>Host a similar event focusing on programs and resources available to high school students to encourage youth entrepreneurship.</p>



There has not been any new commercial development in the community for several years. The Chamber of Commerce and BRDC should develop strategies to attract new businesses by promoting the Town's strategic location between two large urban centres.





WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Support businesses with recruitment and retention challenges due to limited HR capacity, lack of knowledge regarding tools and resources available to them, and employment related trends.	Increase employer capacity to attract and retain qualified staff.	Medium Term	<p>Engage employers to consider alternative approaches by introducing them to a range of considerations over a period of time through a variety of methods including electronic or in-person, webcasts, newsletters or a series of interactive workshops and/or speakers. Topics could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relevance and application of employee engagement strategies • The value of training • Resources available to employers to help address their HR needs • Career advancement and career ladders • Engagement with high schools • Managing the Millennium Generation • The value of work placements and how to get the most out of them • How to develop recruitment packages to promote employment opportunities including creating documents such as a company overview, job descriptions, benefit information, company website, etc... • Interview processes • Retention strategies

▀ *There is no leadership for economic development.* ▀

WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available funding programs for internships/ co-ops, apprenticeships, training • Concrete tools / practices / approaches (sector based panel of best practices and success stories) <p>Develop, promote and distribute employer resources related to NOCS descriptions, wages, employment trends, etc...</p> <p>Support business in accessing funding including the development of applications</p> <p>Host breakfast session for seasonal employers to encourage collaboration and the development of creative solutions to address recruitment and retention issues tied to seasonal work.</p> <p>Establish regular roundtable discussion among employment related service providers and the business community to encourage communication, foster relationships and identify and address challenges such as essential skills training and other employment barriers.</p> <p>Partner with the Chamber of Commerce to showcase employment opportunities in Blind River</p>


It's difficult to engage and secure/retain tradespeople but I do not see signs of initiatives to correct that.


WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
<p>Collaborate at the regional level to provide programs and services; share resources and assets to reduce costs and improve quality.</p> <p>Connect new and existing entrepreneurs with resources, business supports and networks</p>	<p>Starting a business can be a daunting process. Streamlining information will serve to facilitate the process and decrease the level of anxiety that may deter potential entrepreneurs from moving forward.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness for potential entrepreneurs, existing businesses and partner organizations regarding available tools, programs and resources 	<p>Short to Medium Term</p>	<p>Consider gaps in the local business ecosystem and ways in which different programs can be connected to each other, then use existing resources from partners to create information packages for businesses available online and through hard copy distribution.</p> <p>Increase awareness of programs and services to the business community by hosting workshops, presentations and seminars on a consistent and regular basis.</p> <p>Partner with complementary organizations to fund a speaker series as part of Chamber of Commerce social events where various service providers can share information about their services and programs with the business community.</p> <p>Area EDOs to collaborate to increase the number of half day/full day regional workshops and seminars to address the needs of businesses.</p>


We should have a committee of business stakeholders that will ensure that we are aligned in our efforts to grow entrepreneurship in our Town.


Communication Considerations

Investment Attraction is an extremely competitive marketplace. According to the Economic Developers Council of Ontario, there are an estimated 200 economic development organizations in the Province, 600 in Canada and thousands throughout North America, not to mention other parts of the world.

The approach to investment attraction has become increasingly sophisticated. Often with the support of provincial and federal levels of government, communities across the country are gaining a better understanding of what competitive advantages and disadvantages they have, which markets hold their best opportunities and are becoming much more prepared to respond to investment inquiries.

A number of efforts are occurring in the region. First, investment attraction occurs on the Provincial and Pan Northern Ontario levels – through the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, and various entities that are dedicated to business recruitment and retention (e.g. MNEM; CFDCs). Second, within the Province, most cities and towns have an ongoing economic development and marketing effort. In addition, organizations such as Chambers of Commerce all engage in marketing efforts. Further, certain cities have established collaborative efforts (e.g. ONEDC). Each of these entities is working hard to attract new businesses and industries and encourage entrepreneurship into their catchment area, which represents a highly active and competitive environment. Investment attraction can be a

costly endeavour and as such efforts should be made by the Town to coordinate with the BRDC to take advantage of partnerships and alliances with regional partners to communicate its key advantages as an attractive location for development.

Internal

The following outlines specific initiatives and steps to be taken for successful internal communications as they relate to Investment Readiness.

AGREE ON HOW TO COORDINATE MARKETING AND INVESTMENT

ATTRACTION EFFORTS: The first step is to agree on how the different marketing efforts undertaken within the region will be coordinated and can be used to complement – rather than contradict – the other ongoing efforts. This includes coordination of print material, websites, working together to retain existing businesses, and coordinating approaches to leads. **IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE TOWN WORK WITH THE BRDC** and take a proactive and collaborative approach to Investment Readiness. They should also take advantage of the resources and expertise of the Greater Sudbury Development Corporation (GSDC) and the Sault Ste Marie Economic Development Corporation to the maximum extent possible to support their marketing efforts.

FOCUS ON BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION. For business retention, public relations, and strong relationship marketing are essential.

Ongoing business visitation and other forms of one-on-one conversations to gauge satisfaction and learn about this business needs is essential. Following up with specific actions to meet their needs – including advocating for local businesses and forming partnerships – is vital to produce concrete results for the existing business base.

CREATE A BUZZ AROUND BUSINESS SUCCESSES. Supporting businesses that are growing is an essential retention strategy and building the sense that businesses can be successful in this community is a vital part of this effort. Ideas for creating this buzz include:

- Invite key realtors and developers on familiarization tour of Blind River.
- Create a “Growth Flash” email news brief that provides regular updates about business successes – whether its honors, major contract awards, expansion plans, new partnerships. The news briefs would heighten the visibility of businesses that are doing well, create a buzz around success stories in the community, and make these success stories available to everyone who is involved in marketing within the region.
- Develop a list of business successes on the Town website and Economic Development site in order to showcase concrete examples of business success.
- Develop relationship with the media and create periodic stories about growth and success in the community.
- Honor businesses that are successful.
- Host economic fairs and quarterly semi-annual open house sessions to inform the public about new programs, opportunities and successes.

FOLLOW UP ON EVERY LEAD TO RECRUIT A BUSINESS. Business recruitment is a highly opportunistic event. The businesses that are considering a move provide the absolute richest opportunities, and marketing efforts focused in this way have a much, much higher probability of generating impact than a cold-call to a business that is not considering relocation at all. Leads will generally come from a direct inquiry, information from a partner, or through interviews and one-on-one conversations with existing businesses in the area. Following up on every single opportunity is crucial. Follow-up can be an in-person meeting, a telephone call or email, sharing information with the partner to distribute to the lead, or sending information directly to the lead about the community and offering to be of assistance in connecting them with the right portion of the region and with partners that fit their needs.

ESTABLISH A LOCAL BUSINESS AMBASSADOR PROGRAM. Designed to start positive conversations about a community, business ambassador programs are an affordable means of attracting new business investment. The intent of developing an Ambassador program would be to utilize local business leaders to promote Blind River as a great place to do business to their business partners, suppliers, clients and contractors. The Blind River Ambassador program could be developed in partnership with other organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and the BRDC in an effort to encourage local business leaders to act as Blind River’s Ambassadors in their daily business interactions, and identify opportunities to attract new investment to the community.

PROVIDE REGULAR UPDATES TO PARTNERS, COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND STAKEHOLDERS ON PROGRAMS AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS.

Develop e-newsletter/website/social media to keep industry updated on progress. A quarterly update can also be provided to residents and businesses via water bills and tax bills.

USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY ABOUT EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

Develop a series of social media-based communications highlighting area employers and potential career opportunities targeting young professionals regarding employment and lifestyle (e.g. Youtube; Snapchat; Instagram). Create videos and/or other tools to post to Facebook, website and other social media channels targeting parents, educators and community at large. Videos could include interviews, testimonials and success stories from participants in skilled trades, tourism and entrepreneurial training programs.

RESPECT THE VALUE OF FACE-TO-FACE. Hold informal bi-weekly face to face meetings between Town staff, BRDC staff, Chamber of Commerce etc... (early morning coffee works well) to brainstorm and update one another on ongoing projects. This will help build bridges, strengthen relationships, improve communication and is a great way to bounce ideas off one another in an informal non-judgemental setting.

DEVELOP AND SHARE COMMUNICATION TOOLS FOR CONSISTENT

MESSAGING. Develop professional presentations and videos that showcase the community for investment, resident relocation and tourism. These will help to ensure consistent messaging and can be provided to stakeholders and partners to use at industry events, conferences, trade shows or for speaking opportunities.

External

In developing an IA strategy it is imperative to consider what influences people’s decision to locate their business in a given area. Research indicates that while there are a number of motivators, the key factors are that of cost, reduced “red tape” or streamlined permitting processes, availability of labour and proximity to market. This said, while businesses definitely consider these factors when establishing themselves in a new location, the decision is also greatly influenced by quality of life considerations for their future employees. Most notable among these are the availability of suitable housing, clean environment, safety, health care services, educational opportunities, cost of living, natural amenities, community appearance and household income.

In essence, a community is a “product” to developers and businesses, therefore successful recruitment can be best accomplished with a consumer based model. There are many different communication vehicles available today that you can use to get your message out to your target audience. These include traditional approaches such as brochures, trade show banners and profile sheets along with web-based methods which include things such as social media and web applications as well as hosting special events.

The following encompasses key recommendations for tools to be developed for media relation and promotion purposes. Said tools will be utilized to promote Blind River to all target markets.

MEDIA RELATIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Editorials • Fact sheets • News releases • Backgrounder • Image & Video Bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website • Site Visits • Ribbon Cuttings / Press Conferences
TRADITIONAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad templates (print) • Brochure • Image & Video Bank • Billboards • Vehicle Wraps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posters • Profile Sheets • Power Point Presentation • Community Profile
WEB BASED	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CMS based website • LinkedIn • YouTube • Facebook • Search Engine Optimization (SEO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case Studies • Testimonials • Image / Video Gallery • Community Profile

When determining how to reach the target audiences, it is often about how to put together the right mix of methods, including Internet based as well as traditional, to get the “biggest bang for the marketing buck”. Cognisant of the limited financial resources faced by the Town, we have attempted to exercise as much marketing creativity as possible to enable Blind River to leverage even a modest budget allocation. Below are recommendations on how to best position Blind River as being “open for business”.

DEVELOP AN INDEPENDENT WEB PRESENCE. When contemplating a location for their business, site selectors, developers and entrepreneurs seek information in a variety of ways, however their primary source for researching information about potential locations is through community and/or EDC web sites and other Internet based venues. Past research tells us that potential businesses, regardless of their sector or size, use the web as a tool to search out new locations. They often use the community web site as a quick filtering tool - if the website looks good and it has the information they want and need, they will spend more time checking out the site and are more likely to make direct contact. The reverse also holds true – if the site looks old and outdated or is cumbersome and difficult to navigate, people are quick to move on to the next site and community. Another advantage to using a focused web site as a major attraction tool is that it is available 24/7/365 to those in other jurisdictions and time zones. Making it easy for this to take place just makes good sense. However, web sites are just one e-tool with Facebook, Twitter, and other social media avenues the list seems almost endless in how potential new businesses can connect with a community.

Online marketing has become the primary and most effective means of marketing for investment attraction, resident attraction and tourism. While Blind River already has a municipal website dedicated primarily on residents, the development of an investment attraction specific website should be deemed a priority. Regular maintenance and upkeep of the website will be important to ensure information remains relevant and up to date.

WEBSITE

A study by Development Counsellors International (2011) asked site selection professionals to indicate the features most important to the usefulness of an economic development focused website. The survey results indicated that the following 15 features are key (listed in order of importance):

- Incentives information
- Workforce statistics
- Demographic information
- Database of available buildings / sites
- Comparisons to competitor locations
- List of leading local employers
- Target industry information
- Staff contact information
- Quality of life information
- Local schools information
- Testimonials from local companies
- User-generate content / Blog

SOCIAL MEDIA

The steps of developing a social media strategy (which is recommended prior to becoming active on social media outlets) include:

- Identification of target audiences: Identification of current target audiences with highest potential to be reached through social media
- Key messaging: Refinement of current messaging for social media and for the specific target audiences identified.
- Strategy and tactics: Strategy that ties together audiences and messaging and lays out actionable tactics such as social media platforms, types and examples of updates, etc.
- Launch plan and a sustainability guide: Organization of strategy and tactics into launch and implementation plan integrated with key milestones; development of guide for sustainable ongoing social media utilization.

DEVELOP COLLATERAL MATERIAL. Before any conversations occur with potential businesses, marketing material is needed to provide key information about the community. The collateral material should include a community profile which outlines local and regional demographics, business statistics, and information about vibrant/growing sectors, testimonials from existing businesses and specific advantages to locating in Blind River. The collateral should be professionally designed and printed. It should include the key marketing messages to resonate with the different target markets and be business / investment focused.

PRINT COLLATERAL: Print collateral will be an important marketing tactic for Blind River and should be used to promote the community for business attraction, retention and expansion opportunities. Blind River should develop a few different pieces of collateral that can be given out during events, provided at partner locations, uploaded to the website and provided when requested directly. The print collateral should provide contact information and direct readers to the website for more information.

INFORMATION SHEET – QUICK FACTS / LURE PIECE

The information sheet will be a quick synopsis of the Blind River including incentive information, commercial rental rates, key benefits of doing business in the community, traffic counts etc. This tool can be handed out during tradeshow and conferences; emailed or mailed out to specific targets. These can also be given to realtors and partners who can then distribute it in their own office or when they go to tradeshow etc. This tool should include a call to action to lead prospective businesses to the website.

UPDATED COMMUNITY PROFILE

Although Blind River has an existing community profile, it should be updated and formatted to include specific information sought by site selectors (see website list above) as well as details about available employment lands. The revised profile should be a user-friendly resource which serves as the key reference tool for potential investors seeking information about opportunities within the community.

POSTCARD / AD TEMPLATE

A postcard can be developed which can be handed out during tradeshow and conferences; or be mailed out to certain areas. Additionally postcards can be given to partners who can then distribute them in their own office or when they go to tradeshow etc.

The postcard template can also be used as an ad template for placement in magazines, and certain print pieces. Both of these can be completed simultaneously.

CONTACT GROWING BUSINESSES NOT CURRENTLY LOCATED IN THE REGION AND EDUCATE THEM ABOUT BLIND RIVER. Identifying and contacting businesses that are growing and may benefit from a location in the region is a common component of any economic development marketing effort. The challenge is that while this is the most difficult, most expensive, and most time-intensive component of an Investment Attraction marketing effort, it is also likely to yield the fewest results. However, it presents opportunities to speak with growing businesses in growing sectors, promote the region, and will ripple into “word of mouth” marketing for the area.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

Investment Readiness is a continuous and systematic process and its success greatly depends on gaining buy-in at every level. It is essential that the various stakeholders in Blind River come together to make decisions about a desired outcome in order to ensure complete adoption of direction and objectives. Such decisions, whenever possible, should be made by consensus and all factors should be considered.

Ultimately, if the Town of Blind River is to succeed in establishing itself as a desirable location to do business, it must reposition itself not only in the eyes of its target market but also be consistent with the desires and aspirations of its residents. Such a vision needs to be shared and based on a collaborative model that has as its core a solid formula for local decision making. We are confident that this attraction and retention marketing strategy will help provide the tools to help the community to achieve its goals.

Goal 2: Sector Development



TO FOCUS ON BEST BET SECTORS FOR FUTURE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT.

Recommendation 1: Tourism Development



Through the development of new tourism products and by enhancing the overall Blind River experience, visitors to the community will have more to do and see. As such, repeat business will increase, stays will be extended and overall interest in the community will rise resulting in new businesses and job creation.

Activities is the third largest segment of travel at \$129B and is growing faster than the total travel market. It will reach \$174B globally by 2020 (Phocuswright, 2017)



WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Develop an overall theme to be used as a basis for tourism attraction, community improvement and beautification efforts	<p>Small enhancements can make a big difference when creating a welcoming and attractive environment. By creating a vision/look, the town, private residents and businesses can contribute to the theme by purchasing flowers or other items in matching colour schemes, adding lights, etc. sparking unity and building a sense of community.</p> <p>It is important to involve the arts community in all efforts associated to the beautification process. This includes local artists to paint benches and garbage cans. Local musicians/buskers can perform live and provide recorded music for speaker system.</p>	Short Term	<p>Connect all beautification efforts (see examples below) to the selected theme:</p> <p>Painted “landmarks”</p> <p>Benches</p> <p>Flowers</p> <p>Overall lighting</p> <p>Garbage cans</p> <p>Picnic areas/tables</p> <p>Painted murals</p>
Revisit potential of establishing an RV park / campground	<p>Significant work has been done to determine the feasibility of an RV/ campground; results were positive.</p> <p>It is supported by locals</p> <p>New council will be seeking a quick win</p> <p>There is a clear need given the geographic location of Blind River</p>	Short Term	Assign a resource to assess the initial findings and identify potential challenges in order to pro-actively mitigate issues at the outset.
Develop a transportation service for people and purchases	Creates a linkage between downtown and the marina, encouraging visitation and spending.	Short to Medium Term	<p>Develop a bike share program as both a mechanism to get visitors to and from the marina but also to encourage active transportation among residents.</p> <p>Include taxi service information on bikes for people who wish to have their purchases transported from town to the marina.</p>


Giving main street a themed look, revitalizing old and empty buildings, better use of seasonal decorations and vegetation, outdoor activities.


WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Develop new and enhance existing tourism experiences, activities and events	Focusing on the unique activities, hidden gems, and local secrets to develop interactive experiences that pique visitors' interests and passions will benefit everyone in the community through increased visitation, length of stays, and spending.	Short to Medium Term + Ongoing	<p>It is recommended that new products focus on interactive and authentic experiences that truly showcase local people, history and culture.</p> <p>Examples of potential product are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bilingual historic walking tours • landmark treasure hunt • music and food "kitchen parties" • boat tour programs that include stops and themes such as stargazing, sunset tours, blues cruises • guided fishing tours • craft making with local artists • yoga on the beach • SUP yoga • paint parties at the marina • moonlight kayak tours • stargazing workshops • outdoor movies at marina • canoe and kayak races • regatta • drone races and demos • remote control boat races on the river • ice sculptures workshops • light shows and displays • post concert musical petting zoo


“We need to focus on an asset and promote it, Shore of Lake Huron, pearl of the North Channel, come stay at the campground on the shore of the lake and enjoy swimming, fishing, sailing and exploring...just up the shore a bit explore the islands, learn the history.”


WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Enhance beach facilities and programming	<p>Attraction of day trippers</p> <p>Provides an activity for VFR and people camping in the area which may result in extended stay</p> <p>Increased awareness about access to beach from business district</p>	Medium Term	<p>Add seating areas to encourage people to stay longer</p> <p>Clean and maintain beaches and facilities</p> <p>Rent children's toys</p> <p>Purchase old style ice cream truck to station at beaches</p> <p>Partner with Manitoulin for a beach hopping program</p> <p>Rent metal detectors and host treasure hunts on the beach</p> <p>Host sandcastle building workshops</p>
Enhance programming on Boom Camp Trails	Hosting trail-based activities and events on a regular basis that inter-connects with the local culture and heritage will draw visitors and increase local trail use and support.	Short to Medium Term + Ongoing	<p>Use the trail asset to provide specialty programs and events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haunted trail walk • Scavenger hunts • Capture the flag • Fish fry • Guided full moonlight walks with bonfire • Themed races (lumber run; haunted Halloween run; northern craft beer run; etc...) • Kayak, Bike, Run triathlon


Nothing happens at the marina to attract people to that beautiful place.


WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Enhance services at marina through private / public sector partnerships	<p>The marina is a key asset that is underdeveloped.</p> <p>Multiple opportunities exist for private sector businesses</p> <p>Multiple opportunities exist for revenue generation and program development</p> <p>Already have a large number of boaters visiting the area – this can be built upon.</p> <p>Marina development is supported by residents</p>	Short to Medium Term + Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sea-Doo rentals • Tubing • Harbour taxi to and from Manitoulin (existing demand from low Island) • Fishing rod rentals • Kayak / canoe / SUP rentals • Licensed patio and restaurant • <u>Multi-person bike rentals</u>
Develop “accessible tourism” as a niche opportunity	<p>The worldwide growth rate of persons with disabilities or with special needs is higher than population growth.</p> <p>According to Statistics Canada, more than 5.3 million Canadians (almost 16% of the population) are living with some form of disability that affects their level of freedom, independence or quality of life. Of that number, over 200,000 are children and youth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible tourism is a growing market. • It is multi-customer; it seems that for every person with disability, an average of 1.5 people travel as well • It can boost the image of the destination • It has a significant impact on reducing the seasonality of certain destinations • It generates more than the average revenue resulting from conventional tourism • Blind River can position itself as the accessible tourism leader for Northern Ontario 	Medium to Long Term	<p>Accessible tourism training and certifications</p> <p>Encourage private sector operators to adapt equipment to provide experiences to visitors with disabilities</p> <p>Partner with organizations that promote accessible tourism destinations</p>

WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Leverage regional tourism initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> resources in place ground work has already been completed in many instances marketing support 	Short to Medium Term + Ongoing	<p>Contact regional partners to determine the potential role for Blind River and leverage existing programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group of Seven Lake Huron North Channel cycling route Manitoulin Island Cycling Advocates (MICA) to partner of development of routes and a boat service for cyclists Champion the return of the “Dennie” canoe and kayak race



A FOCUS! Take a look around and see what other communities have come up with. Make a plan. Do a little bit every year.



Recommendation 2: Retail / General



Through the promotion of community assets, visitors will be attracted to the region and local residents will feel a sense of community pride.

WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Undertake a leakage analysis	<p>A leakage study quantifies the level and type of spending that occurs outside the geographic boundaries of a specific community by its residents. Leakage refers to money that “leaks out” of the local economy through expenditures on goods and services. Understanding this can help Blind River:</p> <p>look closely at specific market segments to determine which economic areas have the greatest potential for recapture of economic leakage which can then influence business attraction efforts</p>	Short-Term	Source funding and contract firm to undertake analysis
Undertake comparative analysis of commercial property rental inventory	To educate area landlords about competitive pricing and assist them with promotion of their properties to fill vacancies	Short to Medium Term	<p>Undertake a comparative analysis of similar sized communities and markets to determine average rental costs</p> <p>Work with realtors, landlords and private land / property owners to develop database and encourage regional promotion</p>

There isn't enough choice so people go elsewhere for variety and better selection.



Main Street should be a welcoming shopping and visiting experience. Businesses close too early. Parking should not be metered. Garbage cans on site. Buildings are deteriorating and run down...

WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Shop local incentives and programs	<p>Developing loyalty programs for residents and repeat visitors provides incentives to increase repeat business. Programs such as this provide an ideal opportunity to track and measure the success of marketing campaigns.</p> <p>Increases local spending in businesses vs. travelling to Sault Ste-Marie or Sudbury</p> <p>Increases community pride</p> <p>Increases visibility for chamber and goodwill as members of the community see how it is helping local businesses</p>	Short to Medium Term + Ongoing	<p>There are many incentives that can be considered, for example:</p> <p>Expand existing “shopping bag” program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bags should be distributed by marina and tourism information centre staff to individual visiting the community to encourage local shopping. • Develop and include coupon book for local stores (cost to businesses to include couple with discount for Chamber members) • Create an awareness campaign about bag program as part of ambassador program <p>Chamber of Commerce “shop local” bumper stickers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One vehicle / individual spotted “shopping local” per week receives a branded coffee mug and a gift card for a chamber member business. • A photo is snapped of the happy, surprised winner and he/she is invited to plug what they love best about the community, their favorite restaurant, store, etc. all of which is posted on social media. <p>Receipt collection campaign</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect receipts all month from people who shopped locally to be put in draw for “community cash” which can be used at chamber member businesses <p>Shop local rewards program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a rewards program (there are apps for this) to encourage local shopping


It is a struggle for an existing business or a new business to flourish in Blind River. There are so many factors that draw potential customers to other venues out of town... particularly shopping for groceries. Also online shopping has been made very convenient.


WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Establish a permanent pop-up and info centre in vacant space	<p>Increase traffic to downtown</p> <p>Provide affordable retail space for local crafters / makers</p> <p>Provides one stop location for community information (visitors & residents)</p>	Short to Medium Term + Ongoing	<p>Use vacant space downtown to provide a shared space for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an arts collective/ pop-up • local crafters / artists • downtown tourism information location • wifi-hub for boaters and travelers
Assist local businesses in becoming accessible	<p>Creating a level of ease and simplicity for visitors to access the community with ease is critical when attracting people of all ages and accessible requirements.</p> <p>Promotes age-friendly community by incorporating accessible assets, clear sidewalks from snow, ensure pathways to businesses through snow banks are created, etc.</p> <p>Allows all types of families with varying needs to visit the area by ensuring basic requirements/standards are met.</p> <p>Encourages year-round foot traffic to downtown businesses</p>	Short to Medium Term + Ongoing	<p>Incorporate colourful/branded ramps to remove the steps into buildings to make strollers, wheelchairs and walkers simpler to navigate.</p> <p>Incorporate snow removal standards to ensure pathways are clear of snow and ice to make parking and walking easier.</p>
<p>Develop and implement formal Community Improvement Plan (CIP)</p> <p>Establish historic downtown core of well-maintained older buildings mixed with a progression of building styles (façade conditions)</p> <p>Establish theme</p>	<p>Through the development of an incentive program with interest free loans and non-repayable contributions, encouragement will be provided to businesses to improve private buildings. Programs may include interior renovations, signage, facades and lighting designed to standardize and improve the community.</p> <p>A unique and unified look to the community will entice tourists to visit, explore and stay within Blind River, increasing their economic spend. A unique theme will draw visitors to the area and drive traffic downtown.</p>	Short to Medium Term + Ongoing	<p>Programs may include interior renovations, signage, facades, lighting and dock enhancements designed to standardize and improve the community.</p> <p>Dock improvements are essential to encourage businesses along the river to improve infrastructure. This could lead to additional boaters stopping at local businesses and the possibility of visiting other areas in Blind River.</p> <p>Create new business opportunities by Identifying highest and best use for under-utilized vacant spaces.</p>

WHAT	WHY	WHEN	HOW
Outdoor cafés/bistros	<p>Provides visitors with a place to sit and enjoy the area and encourage longer visits. This discourages people from ordering food and eating it in their vehicles.</p> <p>Encourages people to get off of the HWY to visit the community, which may result in additional spending.</p>	Medium to long term	<p>Amend current by-laws (if necessary) to allow licensed sidewalk cafes</p> <p>Provide incentives to restaurant owners through CIP to purchase patio furnishings, heaters, etc.</p> <p>Encourage use of local foods</p>

 ***We have businesses that cannot thrive because the community as a whole does not support local as they should. Local businesses close up shops early even on a Saturday..... a prime example is the local drug store.***


 ***Clean up Main Street and in behind it on waterfront - could use for parking lot and close Main Street off in Summer to traffic - make it a walking area - outside patios etc.***


Communication Considerations

Developing the tourism and retail sectors in Blind River should not focus on marketing, but rather on product development and capacity building at the local level. Understanding what motivates your target market and what is likely to get them engaged is essential and will enable the community to focus its efforts based on anticipated effectiveness and the resources necessary to implement them. As such the following communication recommendations should not be confused with a promotion strategy, but rather approaches to improving the overall tourism and retail landscape of the community.

This project's intent is not to identify tactics and strategies to attract tourists but rather to help develop a mechanism to engage stakeholders and encourage collaboration which will in turn support operators and organizations in their efforts to better serve visitors. Once the community has developed a strong network and inventory of niche retail and tourism experiences, marketing strategies geared at visitors and residents will naturally be developed. Below are initiatives that should be implemented in concert with the development of new products and experiences to ensure a seamless and successful transition into the marketplace.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS FOR CIP DEVELOPMENT. Ensure that the business community is consulted when developing the recommended Community Improvement Plan to get buy in and enlist early adopters and to identify actual needs (e.g. support with facades, exterior / interior renos, downtown only vs. community wide eligibility, theme, etc.)

HOST AN EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP. Wherever visitors originate, tourism trends the world over point to new type of visitors: consumers seeking experiential, life-enriching vacations that involve culture, nature, the outdoors and learning. The Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC), in its 2012-2016 Corporate Plan, identifies key segments of the tourism market and what tourists look for in choosing a vacation. Thirty-five percent of the global tourism market is described by the CTC as “Learners” – tourists interested in history, connecting with their roots, and seeking out cultural and historical aspects of their destinations. These visitors want “authentic experiences” that focus on local culture and foods, allowing them to engage all of their senses. They want to get ‘behind the scenes’ and be enriched by the people and places they visit. They are seeking local, educational, experiential and professionally-presented experiences. Hosting a workshop specifically focused on engaging local stakeholders, individuals (including youth) and businesses to identify specific themes and products for development will stimulate ideas, entice new business development and result in the creation of new or enhanced experiences for the area.

ESTABLISH A TOURISM COMMITTEE. This can consist of establishing a new committee under the Chamber of Commerce or be an extension of the existing recreation committee's mandate. The goal would be to develop an annual plan tied to product development and collaborative marketing with a focus on leveraging regional partners.

DETERMINE AND DEVELOP BLIND RIVER'S BRAND IDENTITY. Brand identity for destinations is becoming more critical in terms of meeting visitor perceptions about value and experience. A community's brand identity should reflect its culture, heritage, people and values.

DEVELOP A COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR PROGRAM. Educate all Blind River residents about the amenities, activities and businesses throughout the region. By creating local ambassadors, residents will understand the importance of promoting the community. Through education about what Blind River offers, the brand values and position the community holds and the type of tourists the community attracts will help locals understand the tourism picture. This relatively low budget yet high return initiative will result in the following.

- Create an inviting atmosphere for visitors
- Local businesses/residents can inform visitors about the area activities, stores, restaurants and amenities
- Encourage community pride and support of local businesses

TRAIN FRONT LINE WORKERS. Local education and awareness campaigns should be developed to teach front-line workers about available products/ services. This should include those traditionally considered to be employed in the tourism and hospitality sector (e.g. front desk, tourism information, servers etc...) as well as other individuals who deal with the public (e.g. taxi drivers, gas attendants, retail workers etc.) and may influence their decision to visit, stay and spend. Potential tactics and tools to assist in training and keeping people informed include,

- Event listing / calendar
- List of restaurants and hours of operation
- List of tourism activities / experiences available in the area
- Maps
- Open houses and familiarization tours
- Customer service training

ENHANCE WAYFINDING. Enhance the recent wayfinding efforts with additional signage and maps for display throughout the community as a means of driving traffic to local businesses and enticing visitors and flow-through traffic to make repeat visits or extend their stay.

- Maps: Community at large (downtown core/info centre / marina).
- Maps: smaller version at restaurants / gas stations
- Printed maps circulated throughout the business community to share with tourists as they come to the area.
- Upgrade/ create street signage and directional signage reflecting selected community theme
- Change messaging on digital sign to focus on visitors as opposed to residents

FOR THE FUTURE

When determining the appropriate approach for a marketing strategy for Blind River, it will be important to develop a plan that uses the right mix of promotional tactics that will make the greatest impact considering the marketing budget. Cognisant of the limited financial resources faced by most municipalities, it is highly recommended that Blind River leverage every opportunity possible for collaboration and cross promotion. The following represents the key players who have a direct role in supporting the growth of the Blind River economy. From providing funding support, to facilitating access to communities, to ensuring consistency in promoting the area, each of these groups has a key role to play and must be connected and engaged.

COLLABORATOR

Blind River Development Corporation
ELNOS
Regional municipalities; First Nations; Metis
Business community
Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC) / Small Business Enterprise Centre
FedNor
Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (MNDM) / Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC)
Chamber of Commerce; DMOs
Ministry of Transportation (MTO)
Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR)
Regional Economic Development Corporations (SSMEDC; GSDC)
Algoma Kiiwabe
Tourism Northern Ontario
Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation (OTMPC)

As projects are implemented, the following checklist of marketing to do's may be considered.

- Host a variety of community sessions to engage residents and the business community about the overall goals and strategies. Develop a professional presentation to target groups on a reoccurring annual basis. Groups include, but are not limited to:
 - Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors/Staff
 - Town Council/Municipal Staff and Boards / Committees
 - Service Clubs
 - Regional organizations
 - Educational institutions
 - Financial institutions
 - First Nations
 - Metis
 - Arts Community
 - Historians
 - Economic development agencies/organizations
- Develop a plan to ensure strong communications internally and externally to maintain momentum.
- Develop a visual unifier / theme that clearly represents the Blind River brand.
- Encourage businesses to adopt the theme within their own marketing strategies when applicable.
- Increase presence on social media through photographs, video and blogs.
- Partner with Tourism Northern Ontario, Algoma, Northeastern Ontario Tourism to ensure Blind River is a regional player in upcoming initiatives.
- Maximize use of the Northern Portal to ensure relevant content for Blind River
- Create loyalty programs for visitors and residents to encourage support

The recommendations identified within the Blind River Economic Development Action Plan are intended to offer strategies to support Blind River in its efforts to drive economic growth and stability. The recommendations have been developed based on the needs reflected from the research findings presented in the Strategy Report based on the information gathered during the research phase of the study, the following key critical success factors are evident.

The key findings are addressed within each action item and are associated with the strategies and overarching goals highlighted in the Long-Term Plan. To achieve results, partnership development and stakeholder engagement is an essential component to delivering the outcomes. Pilot projects are recommended as a way to test new initiatives to determine community support.

1. An advisory committee focusing on economic and community development can assist with leadership and direction. Consideration should be given to what this group entails, sitting members, terms of reference, etc. Strong and effective yet collaborative leadership will be the key to the success of Blind River's efforts. Key roles for the leadership organization are to direct the execution of the strategy, act as the conduit for communication among stakeholders and partners and provide links to other regional initiatives and resources. A strong and focused coordinating body will help guide the implementation of the recommendations and marketing communications strategy. Regular communication with the community stakeholders is critical.
2. Municipal interest and support for investment attraction, tourism and downtown marketing and development initiatives must be predominant and openly expressed through the community-at-large.
3. It cannot be overstressed that economic development involves many players. There is a need for these players to ensure the most effective possible communication and collaboration. The current disconnect between organizations in Blind River must be addressed and rectified if there is any hope of implementing recommendations. Partnerships need to be built and strengthened and roles clearly defined to ensure the best use of resources and improve the community's chances of success.