

REGIONAL ECONOMIC PLANNING

Experience shows that collective action by communities to jointly pursue regional priorities yields greater success than isolated, fragmented community actions. Collaborative regional economic planning takes into account infrastructure, labour force, environment and socio-economic circumstances to build an integrated long-term plan to achieve shared economic priorities. Effective regional economic planning is inclusive, comprehensive, aligned with key sectors and connected to regional and world markets. It helps develop competitive advantages by connecting a region's assets with necessary infrastructure, education, innovation and business supports.

“The socio-economic inter-dependency of communities is self-evident – the stronger the ‘spokes,’ the stronger the wheel ... without the hub the wheel cannot turn.”
*Mayor Howard Whent,
Municipality of Wawa*

The regions of Northern Ontario do not fit a “one-size-fits-all” approach. They have differing areas of expertise, geographic connections and markets. Creating regional economic zones recognizes their distinct nature and also the interconnectedness of urban, rural and Aboriginal communities.

Economic regions capitalize on local strengths in a way that makes greater use of financial and technical resources, builds stronger, more inclusive networks and creates sustainable employment. Nearly every jurisdiction in Canada has a model of regional economic planning. In implementing regional economic zones, northerners can benefit from best practices and build a model that best serves the North.

Plan of Action

1. Establish regional economic zones in Northern Ontario as an inclusive, collaborative mechanism for long-term economic development, labour market, infrastructure, land-use, cultural and population planning, which will:
 - a) Engage urban, rural and Aboriginal communities, business, labour, economic development organizations, research and education sectors, service delivery organizations and other non-government organizations.
 - b) Reflect sector/corridor initiatives and the interconnection of urban, rural and Aboriginal communities in a regional plan that is comprised of:
 - An economic plan identifying key regional sectors, niche products, cultural planning and trade and export opportunities,

- A regional capital plan identifying strategic community, transportation, information and communications technology, education, research and health infrastructure,
 - A service investment plan for key regional services and amenities,
 - A labour market development plan that attracts, retains and develops highly qualified personnel with market-relevant skills, supports participation of underrepresented groups and creates education and training strategies to meet anticipated workforce needs.
- c) Develop implementation plans that coordinate collective actions and leverage investments through partnerships of the public and private sectors.
- d) Base capital investments and operational funding on an accountability framework, including a service level agreement, performance measures and regular monitoring and evaluation.
- e) Proceed with implementation of regional economic zones within a year. Establish a technical advisory group to examine approaches of other jurisdictions and provide input on proposed principles/models for regional economic zones in the North. Begin regional economic planning pilots among interested communities.
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2. Invest in Geographic Information System community information networks to provide an inventory of regional assets and community/economic data.
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3. Introduce a leadership development program for northern community and business leaders (especially youth) to support new planning approaches.