

FACILITATIONGUIDE

March 2014



FORWARDFOCUS

Accelerating Economic Development in Alberta Communities



This Facilitation Guide has been prepared as part of the development of the Forward Focus planning process. These planning processes will be used in community and economic work across the province of Alberta.

Forward Focus Facilitation Guide

This Facilitation Guide has been prepared as part of the development of the Forward Focus planning processes. This document should be read and used in conjunction with the Forward Focus – Research and Assessment document (March 2014).

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1. Introduction

This section covers the background to the Forward Focus planning process.

1.1 What is Forward Focus?

Forward Focus takes existing tools and weaves the processes together, resulting in a validated Community Economic Strategic Planning process, based on sound data, with set priorities that determine the actions for moving forward.

1.2 Brief Background to Forward Focus

The Entrepreneurship and Regional Development Branch (ERDB), as part of the Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education (IAE) Ministry provides information, tools and pathways to economic development agencies, communities and businesses. This is to enable the support of decisions that encourage growth of local and regional economies.

It had been identified that, while there were a number of tools for communities to access when developing their economic strategic planning needs, there was a need for guidance on how to access, interpret and apply the readily available information. The types of learning were previously delivered in a stand-alone manner, without any logical thread connecting the processes.

There was a need to create a Facilitation Guide, to be utilized by ERDB staff when delivering Forward Focus to the target audiences. In September 2013, there was a Forward Focus Trial Run Session, in which the ERDB staff was introduced in a training day to the whole process, as well as the other components. This was useful in order to get input, finalize content and ascertain the timing and pace of the entire process, through a test simulation run through with a fictitious town called Any Town, Alberta (the hypothetical community) with the staff members (hypothetical stakeholders.)

The evaluations from this training session highlighted some confusion around a number of the components, and how they could fit together. As a result of this session, the IAE decided to undertake more detailed research and assessment of the tools, and create this Facilitators Guide, which would guide participants through the process.

1.3 Definition of Economic Development

“Economic Development is the process of developing, diversifying and maintaining sustainable economic, social and political environments, in which balanced growth may be realized, increasing the wealth of the community.” – Economic Developers Alberta

It generally refers to the sustained actions of policy makers, economic development professionals and communities that promote the standard of living and economic health of a specific area/region.

In the broadest sense, policies of economic development encompass three major areas:

- Governments undertaking to meet broad economic objectives such as price stability, high employment and sustainable growth. Such efforts include monetary and fiscal policies, regulation of financial institutions, trade and tax policies.
- Programs, which provide infrastructure and services such as roads, parks, affordable housing, crime prevention and higher levels of education.
- Job creation and retention through specific efforts in business finance, marketing, neighbourhood development, workforce development, business retention and expansion, technology transfer and real estate development. This is a primary focus of economic development professionals.

2. Facilitator Preparation

The facilitator preparation phase of the Forward Focus planning process involves the pre-facilitation process of engaging with the client/community on their needs, the scale of the community and the intensity of the planning process that they wish to embark upon. This will be a process to gain an understanding of the perception of the economic development issues and opportunities impacting the community.

2.1 Profiling the planning process – Scale and intensity

These are the critical questions to explore with the client/community –these are the questions that will help identify the most appropriate intensity of the planning process to fulfill upon their specific goals.

1. What is the scale of the community?

Small <10,000	Medium 10,000-50,000	Large >50,000
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2. What is the depth of the envisaged planning process?

Small	Medium	Large
Example: Simple single issue project or small scale project	Example: Development of local economic development and action plan	Example: Large full scale long term planning project with extensive input

3. What level of resources is the client/community willing to allocate to the planning process? (These resources may include ‘in kind’ regarding time/people/finances)

Minimal	Moderate	Extensive
<\$5k	\$5-20K	>\$20k

The figures include estimated in-kind contributions. It is important to determine the total level of involvement and contribution, including people’s time dedicated to the planning and implementation work and sessions. In addition, it is important to determine the degree of commitment to broader stakeholder engagement, and how this will affect the resources allocated to the planning process.

Based on exploration of the above questions with the client or community, the level of intensity of the planning process (Low, Moderate or High) should be determined. This will likely be an iterative process, to explore the best approach to suit the client needs. This will help ensure expectations on both sides are realistic and attainable.

2.2 Designing the planning process

Through the pre-facilitation session with the client/community, the planning process and pathway can be designed. There are three suggested pathways based on the desired intensity of the planning process, taken from the above three questions and the divergence into low, moderate, and high intensity.

Note: The phase and tools below are outlined in detail in the following sections of this Guide.

Phase	Low Intensity	Moderate Intensity	High Intensity
Contextual Setting	Community Perceptions	Community Perceptions	Community Perceptions
Visioning	Future Game Prairie Canada Module 1: Introduction to Concepts /Materials Module 2: Playing the Future Game Module 3: Debriefing the Future Game Module 4.2: Strategic Economic Development	Future Game Prairie Canada Module 1: Introduction to Concepts /Materials Module 2: Playing the Future Game Module 3: Debriefing the Future Game Module 4.1: Team Building/Collaboration Module 4.2: Strategic Economic Development	Future Game Prairie Canada Module 1: Introduction to Concepts /Materials Module 2: Playing the Future Game Module 3: Debriefing the Future Game Module 4.1: Team Building/Collaboration Module 4.2: Strategic Economic Development Module 4.3: Decision Making/Future Thinking Scenario Planning (Optional) What is the vision
Priority Setting	Analysis of main issues	Analysis of main issues	Analysis of main issues
Action Planning	Reality Check	Development of Action Plan	Identifying inputs, outputs and activities
Implementation	Interventions	Performance Measurement and Outcomes	Performance Measurement and Outcomes

2.3 Time scale of planning process

There will be different time scales based upon the intensity of the Planning Process, ascertained in conjunction with the client or community. The following sections outline how the various tools, and portions of tools, can be 'bolted' together to provide a coherent planning sequence, based on different levels of intensity of planning. The various tools will need to be woven together, and facilitation will be required to maintain the threads through the discussion and planning process.

2.3.1 Low Intensity Planning Process – Planning Workshop Timeline

This proposed Low Intensity pathway is designed for relatively short and simple planning exercises. It limits the face-to-face workshop time to 9 hours, and is designed to produce some focused outcomes. The limitation is that it does not deeply examine priorities or action steps, but these are assumed to be relatively obvious and simple. It does help set the context of the actions in the larger economic and decision-making framework.

	Low Intensity	Time Scale
Contextual Setting	Economic Indicators and Economic Dashboard Community Perceptions	1.0 hr. 1.0 hr.
Visioning	Future Game Prairie Canada Module 1: Introduction to Concepts / Materials Module 2: Playing the Future Game Module 3: Debriefing the Future Game Module 4.2: Strategic Economic Development	3.0 hrs.
Priority Setting	Analysis of Main Issues	1.0 hrs.
Action Planning	Reality Check	1.0 hr.
Implementation	Interventions	2.0 hrs.
Total Time Scale		9.0 hrs.

This sequence of tools uses the simplest components of the available and recommended tools. This sequence uses portions of the Business Vitality Alberta process, which has proven effective in simple planning processes, and small community settings, in work done in Alberta. This process is easy to facilitate and should provide useful insights and outcomes. The Business Vitality Alberta Reality Check and Interventions will help ensure a connection between the priority setting and actual actions identified.

2.3.2 Moderate Intensity Planning Process – Planning Workshop Timeline

This proposed Moderate Intensity pathway is designed for more detailed and sophisticated planning exercises. It limits the face-to-face workshop time to 15 hours, and is designed to produce focused outcomes, and would be ideal for developing a longer-term strategic action plan that would have multiple outcomes. The limitation is that it does not deeply examine the longer-term strategic future, but would be ideal to identify 5-year plans. It does help set the context of the actions in the larger economic and decision-making framework, and examines medium and short-term actions and priorities in detail.

	Moderate Intensity	Time Scale
Contextual Setting	Economic Indicators and Economic Dashboard Community Perceptions	3.0 hrs.
Visioning	Future Game Prairie Canada Module 1: Introduction to Concepts /Materials Module 2: Playing the Future Game Module 3: Debriefing the Future Game Module 4.1: Team Building/Collaboration Module 4.2: Strategic Economic Development	4.0 hrs.
Priority Setting	Analysis of main issues	2.0 hrs.
Action Planning	Development of Action Plan	3.0 hrs.
Implementation	Performance Measurement and Outcomes	3.0 hrs.
Total Time Scale		15.0 hrs.

The sequence of tools uses the robust components of the available and recommended tools. In addition, extra time is allocated to exploring the economic environment via the Economic Indicators and Economic Dashboard. The Future Game is used to explore both the medium-term vision and the key collaborations required. There would be options to use a different mix of the Future Game debrief modules, depending on the specific application of the planning process.

2.3.3 High Intensity Planning Process – Planning Workshop Timeline

This proposed High Intensity pathway is designed for more detailed and sophisticated planning exercises. It allocates some 38 hours to face-to-face workshop time, and is designed to produce highly focused outcomes, and would be ideal for developing a larger longer-term strategic action plan that would have multiple outcomes. This process would be ideal in a regional context or for larger populations. This process is designed to deeply examine the longer-term strategic future, and would be ideal to identify 5-20 year plans. It helps set the context of the actions in the larger economic and decision-making framework, and examines medium, short-term and long-term actions and priorities in detail.

	High Intensity	Time Scale
Contextual Setting	Economic Indicators and Economic Dashboard Community Perceptions	3.0 hrs.
Visioning	Future Game Prairie Canada Module 1: Introduction to Concepts /Materials Module 2: Playing the Future Game Module 3: Debriefing the Future Game Module 4.1 Team Building/Collaboration Module 4.2 Strategic Economic Development Module 4.3 Decision Making/Future Thinking	6.0 hrs.
	Scenario Planning (optional)	10.0 hrs.
	What is the vision	2.0 hrs.
Priority Setting	Analysis of main issues	4.0 hrs.
Action Planning	Identifying inputs, outputs and activities	3.0 hrs.
Implementation	Performance Measurement and Outcomes	4.0 hrs.
Total Time Scale		32.0 hrs.

The sequence of tools uses the most robust components of the available and recommended tools. The Future Game is used in conjunction with Scenario Planning to explore the long-term vision and key competitive advantages. The proposed timeline does not include any detailed broader engagement sessions, and these would be recommended for the High Intensity process.

3. Forward Focus - Key Facilitation Techniques

This section covers key facilitation techniques to apply during the planning process.

3.1 Running the Sessions – Facilitation Tips and Techniques

This section covers some recommended facilitation tips and techniques. The facilitation of the process is critical, and facilitators cannot rely solely on the tools to ‘get the job done’. Creating the linkages through the process; maintaining the rigor; and, challenging local assumptions are all key facilitation skills and approaches required to produce a quality outcome.

3.1.1 Branding the Process – Forward Focus

To build and create a cohesive brand, it is recommended that the planning processes are branded under the Forward Focus banner. This will provide recognition and consistency with clients and within GOA. Given that the process includes specific parts of existing tools and planning approaches, this will require both recognizing those tools, and holding them together under the Forward Focus brand. To accomplish this, it is suggested the integrated planning PROCESS be identified as Forward Focus, acknowledging that unique TOOLS are used and have their own relevant methodology and background.

3.1.2 Weaving the process together

The planning process outlined in previous sections incorporates parts of existing tools. A key facilitation skill will be to weave these tools together into an integrated and coherent process. This will require using some consistent language to create threads through the planning. Failure to do this may result in the process appearing haphazard or incoherent, and to participants it may feel like jumping from one exercise to the next. Creating a seamless flow of delivery, where each step and exercise builds on the next will be a critical facilitation element.

3.1.3 Level of intensity relates to levels of sophistication

The sub-text to the design of the level of intensity in the planning process, relates also to the level of sophistication of the planning process. The more intense, the more complex is the content dealt with during the planning cycle. Facilitation styles and the degree of challenge posed to the participants should be adjusted to reflect these levels. The low intensity approach is not designed to robustly challenge current thinking or the status-quo, rather it is more about aligning and focusing action around a specific issue. On the other hand, the high intensity approach assumes a much greater use of data and the tools to challenge current thinking and expand people’s mindset and planning horizons.

3.1.4 Using Economic Indicators

The Economic Indicators give the facilitator and the client or community the context for the region that they are involved with, during the planning process. Statistics give a snapshot of the region in which the planning process takes place, regarding population, size of region, industry growth trends, employment levels etc. The relationship of context to content is essential in starting a strategic economic planning process. There has to be an understanding of the context and background in the area, in which the planning process is taking place. The key issues to examine in the economic indicators include:

- Critical trends, and benchmarking against provincial or other regional trends
- Areas of stagnation and decline

Key questions to ask of participants should revolve around what does the data and indicators tell them about their economic health, now and in the future. Used well, indicators can tell the historic picture, but also help forecast future economic vitality and areas of emerging growth or decline.

3.1.5 Using the Future Game to create the vision

While the specific visioning process needs to be designed and defined by the unique situation and intended outcomes, there are some key principles that run across most successful regional processes. These include:

- **Aspirational in nature** – a vision by its nature should be aspirational. That is, it describes a preferred future and is largely devoid of ‘fixing a problem’ type thinking. It has a quality of inspiration to it that motivates and engages people in action towards something that is meaningful and desirable.
- **Future focused** – the vision that is articulated is at some defined point in the future. The key take away from the Future Game sessions is where do you want your community to be in 20 years time.

The use of the Future Game in Low and Moderate intensity planning processes changes perspective about the future and enables the group to think about their vision. However, in these processes, a bridging conversation, and facilitated process, is required to help the group define a basic vision. In the High Intensity Planning Process, the completion of the visioning phase would come through Scenario Planning. Regardless of the approach, when working on the visioning, it is critical to tie it back to what the community has learned so far from the economic indicators work.

3.1.6 Using Scenario Planning approaches

Scenario Planning is not yet a formalized tool included in the Forward Focus toolkit and there is a potential role for it within the High Intensity Planning Process. However, the concept of scenario thinking has application in each of the proposed planning pathways. At the completion of the Future Game (when people are introduced to the concept of variable plausible futures), there is an opportunity for people to examine possible simplistic scenarios, such as best case and worst case. This can help as a bridge conversation or exercise to begin formulation of a vision.

3.1.7 Priority Setting

Using the Analysis of Main issues for the community or region are identified. During this process, key assets are identified, and this begins to help identify priorities that can build and complement existing assets and strengths.

3.1.8 Action Planning

Different tools have been recommended for use at differing levels of intensity of the planning process. Tools have been suggested to match the level of time commitment and sophistication of each planning pathway.

3.2 The Follow Up

The planning processes outlined in previous sections are intended to leave the client group or community with a clear action plan and moving into the implementation phase. Whilst not specifically covered in the proposed planning pathways, it is strongly recommended that some follow-up is conducted with the client groups within 3-6 months after the planning process is complete. This will accomplish two key objectives:

- Communicate to the client group that you are interested in their progress and their success. During a planning process, a relationship of trust is built between the facilitator and the group, and revisiting their progress respects this trust relationship. This in itself can often be the spur for more motivation in the implementation, which will typically begin to flag 3-6 months after planning is completed.
- Assessment of the Forward Focus planning process and outcomes being achieved. As part of building a learning culture, the opportunity to review and reflect on the planning process with the participants will help identify strengths and weaknesses of the process. This information can then be used to refine the planning pathways and application of various tools.

It is suggested that some formalized evaluation is developed and incorporated in the Follow-Up phase.

4. Discovery Phase

4.1 Research statistical information for the community

Description: This will consist of pre-facilitation session research and initial meeting with CAO, EDO and key decision makers by the facilitator

Estimated Completion Time: 2 hours

Learning Objectives: Determine trends from statistical information for the community in relation to key items such as:

- Population
- Labor force
- Agricultural
- Energy
- Income
- Establishments with employees
- Investment
- Accommodation use
- Inventory of major products
- Community Background

Examination of external factors, which could change these trends, such as:

- Global warming
- US economy
- Oil and Gas market volatility
- Asian markets

Action: Research the Economic Dashboard <http://economicdashboard.albertacanada.com> (this gives all the overall Alberta statistics in relation to the following areas: Labor, Business Performance and Ownership, Construction and Investment, Consumer Section, Demographics and Population, Economic Accounts and Productivity, Energy and Other) This is a snapshot of Alberta's current real time economic state.

Action: Select area and collect statistics relevant to the brief.

Major Projects – Regional Economic Indicators

<https://www.albertacanada.com/business/statistics/inventory-of-major-projects.aspx>

- Select Regional Economic Indicators
- Select Region
- Select area – relevant to the brief
- Collect relevant statistics that will give an overview of the economy and other aspects of that community.

4.2 Meeting with CAO, EDO and Key Decision Makers

Estimated Completion Time: 2 hours

Learning Objectives:

- Expand the knowledge of economic development in the community.
- Determination of common thread of thinking and attitude around economic development in the community (Pessimistic or Optimistic?)
- Engagement of the community in the discussion about planning needs

Action: Ask EDO for the history of economic development in the community and outline that a survey will be carried out with a working group from the community.

Discuss:

- Process of the Survey – formation of working group (12 people), distribution of paper survey to group, 10-20 minutes to fill out the survey and the results will be tabulated and provide a comparison of the community with other communities with regards to business vitality through perception.
- Discuss how the survey results will be used.
- Leaders' perceptions of economic development.
- Past economic development strategies.
- Burning issues.
- Land use/by laws/identification of potential conflicts.

Learning Objectives: Determine the time and monetary commitments of various intensity processes

- What is the scale of the community?
- What is the depth of the envisaged planning process?
- What is the level of in-kind contribution (hours)?
- What is the level of monetary contribution to planning and implementation?

Discuss: the above commitments with CAO/EDO/key stakeholders.

Action: Determine level of intensity.

Action: CAO/EDO to distribute the survey to ascertain community perceptions.

4.2.1 Writing the Community Perceptions Report

It is an option to refer to the Business Vitality Alberta Manual for assistance in writing this report.

Include:

- Commonalities within the surveys
- How does this community compare to others?

5. Facilitation of Low Intensity Planning Processes

This proposed Low Intensity pathway is designed for relatively short and simple planning exercises. It limits the face-to-face workshop time to 9 hours, and is designed to produce some focused outcomes. The limitation is that it does not deeply examine priorities or action steps, but these are assumed to be relatively obvious and simple. It does help set the context of the actions in the larger economic and decision-making framework.

You will have:

- Undertaken pre facilitation work regarding statistical research for the community
- Met with the EDO/CAO to determine the community context and explained the survey. They would have formed a working group of 12 to complete the surveys.
- Run the surveys with the working group
- Collected the results and written the Community Perceptions report.
- You will have determined that this is a low intensity planning process.

5.1 Contextual Setting

Estimated Completion Time: 2 hours

5.1.1 Economic Development Conversation

Say Economic Developers of Alberta define economic development as the process of developing, diversifying and maintaining sustainable economic, social and political environments, in which balanced growth may be realized, increasing the wealth of the community.

Ask participants to address the following questions in their groups. Group members should pay attention to similarities among responses/trends and make note of anything that strikes them as particularly interesting

- What is your definition of Economic Development?
- What has worked well in economic development in the community?
- What has worked less well?
- What does successful community economic development look like in your community?

Start the activity. Allow 20 minutes for the completion of discussions.

Walk around the room and observe team discussions. **Answer** any questions that the teams might have.

Give a one-minute warning

Stop the activity

Ask volunteers from each group to share highlights from their discussions

Say The community now has consensus of what economic development means and has also identified what success could look like for this community.

Say We are now ready to start the economic development planning process.

5.1.2 Survey Results

Say A selection of the community was asked a series of questions in the survey.

Present the Survey Findings to the group

Ask the group to discuss their thoughts on the findings from the Survey.

- Were there any surprises in responses from the community?
- Were there any surprises in the comparative result with other communities?
- Where do you think improvements can be made?

Write down people's responses to the above questions

5.1.3 Economic Indicators Statistical Research Findings

Present the findings on the statistical research carried out at pre facilitation phase. Outline the research findings from:

- Real Time Economic Dashboard
- Major Projects Inventory
- Employment Statistics
- Demographics
- Agricultural Trends

Note down the statistics on whiteboard/flipchart or prepare these on handouts and distribute to group.

Ask the group to discuss the statistics in relation to these questions:

- Were you aware of the economic trends that impact upon this community?
- Are you surprised by these statistics?
- Do you understand your sphere of influence as a community – what you can impact and what you cannot?
- Do you understand the role that economic trends play in decision-making?

5.2 Visioning

Estimated Completion Time: 3hrs

5.2.1 What is Visioning?

Make notes from the Visioning section of the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document regarding:

- Understanding the power of vision and visioning processes
- Key principles to shaping a shared vision

Discuss with group the power of vision and visioning processes, and the key principles to shaping a shared vision, from the notes made from your preparation.

Refer to the Visioning Tools section from the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document. The section on the Prairie Canada Future Game connects Visioning with this tool. Read this section to the group, or summarize.

5.2.2 Prairie Canada Future Game™

Refer to Prairie Canada Future Game Facilitators Guide and conduct session from this guide. This will involve:

- Introduction and Orientation
- Module 1: Introduction to concepts and materials for the PCFG
- Module 2: Playing the Prairie Canada Future Game
- Module 3: Debriefing the Prairie Canada Future Game
- Module 4.2: Strategic Economic Development

Say: The Future Game highlights the importance of having a vision for the future. Such a vision can help guide decision making and priority setting.

Ask participants to discuss what characteristics would represent their preferred vision for the future. Work with the group to formulate a simple vision statement, or a list of key aspects of their desired future.

5.3 Priority Setting

Estimated Completion Time: 1 hour

Refer to the Priority Setting section in the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document.

Discuss with group the importance of Priority Setting, from the research carried out above. Introduce the notion that there are tools that have been identified in Forward Focus that will assist them with priority setting.

5.3.1 Analyzing the main issues

It may be useful to refer to the Competitive Training Tool for this section

Say Through contextual analysis and visioning, the community can now focus on what should be done to implement the vision. Issue analysis is now necessary in order to break down vague or complex issues into manageable and prioritized components.

Say here are the steps for priority setting.

- State the issue to be addressed. For example: What are the issues and challenges that prevent our community from attaining their vision for the future?

- Separate the issue into its many parts. So, with structured brainstorming create statements that begin with terms such as ‘ How to..’ or ‘I wish..’ For example, ‘I wish that our children would stay in the community rather than move away’ or ‘How do we attract foreign investors to our community?’
- Identify the major themes that emerge from this brainstorming. For example, many of the ‘I wish’ and ‘How to’ statements are about the need for better infrastructure, employment opportunities and telecommunication.
- Prioritize the themes into categories such as essential, important, of concern and unimportant.
- Give reasons for this ranking.

5.4 Action Planning

Estimated Completion Time: 1 hour

Refer to the Action Planning section of the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document. Print off the Reality Check.

Read this to the group from the Action Planning section of the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document:

Having gone through the contextual setting, visioning and priority setting phases in the strategic planning process, action planning is now key. Action planning is the way to make sure that the vision is turned into reality, taking into account context and priority.

The action plan should include the following information:

- What actions or changes will occur
- Who will carry out these changes
- When they will take place, and for how long
- What resources (i.e., money, staff) are needed to carry out these changes
- Communication (who should know what?)

The Action Plan aims to identify a series of discreet and focused actions that can be achieved in a relatively short time frame. In most cases, these actions are intended to be catalytic, such that they provoke new ideas and actions, and begin the process of economic innovation and systemic change within the regional economic systems. Recommendations are targeted to specific local actions that can help steer the region towards the preferred future.

5.4.1 Reality Check Form

It is recommended that only 2 to 3 follow up actions should be worked upon. These should be short in duration (less than 6 months) and with a minimal use of resources. Business Vitality Alberta provides an example of this in their manual.

Distribute the Reality Check Form to the group.

Read through the form to the group – which will outline:

- Success – what will the successful action look like?
- Purpose – What is the main goal of this action?
- Commitment- is the commitment there from the community to undertake this? If not, what needs to be done in order to obtain this commitment?
- Leadership – Who has the skills to lead this action?
- Time Frame – How long will it take to accomplish this action? Are there any political, economic or funding factors that may hinder or help the timeframe?
- Finances/Resources – What financial resources are needed to tap into? Are there any organisations that can assist this action?
- Your recommendation
- Next Steps

Explain that this form will need to be filled out per action that has been identified.

5.5 Implementation

Estimated Completion Time: 2 hours

Refer to the Implementation section of the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document. **Make notes** of the seven useful interventions from the Business Vitality Alberta Manual (Page 7) as this gives useful information for this phase.

Say the Implementation phase is the realization and execution of the action plan. This entails setting up action groups and ensuring that the action plan is implemented, through measurement of outcomes. Outcomes should be measurable. A few key performance measures should be identified to track the outcomes and determine whether they have been reached, partially reached or not reached at all. It is not enough to define outcomes. Outcomes must be measurable. Measures are used to assess whether or not outcomes are being achieved and what kinds of changes have occurred. What is measured is determined after the

outcomes have been chosen. If you measure regularly, you can use the information to determine whether your economic development strategic plan is on track or not. Subsequently, if needed, you can change your policies or activities to adjust the direction.

Indicators can be measures, numbers, facts, opinions, or perceptions that help measure progress towards change. Indicators can be qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative indicators are judgments and perceptions expressed as non-numerical values, such as behaviors, processes and institutional changes. Quantitative indicators are measures of quantity expressed as a numerical value such as a percentage or size of investment or number of jobs retained. I.e.) Increase in/Decrease in/Number of/Percentages

Say we all know the fate suffered by so many organizational plans and strategies – a long lonely life on the shelf, while everyday life takes over. That is why the decided upon actions must be realistic and why they need to persistently kept on the front burner. Find a process to keep them there, such as reporting progress at each meeting, or on a quarterly timeline.

5.5.1 Useful Interventions

Outline to the group that communities who have used the Business Vitality process, have come up with a number of actions over and over again. These are:

- Beautify your downtown
- Buy local
- Attract tourists
- Attract new residents
- Organize technology forums and other business forums
- Enhance communication
- Retain and engage youth with entrepreneurship training

Suggestion: The Business Vitality Alberta Manual can provide more details on these interventions.

6. Facilitation of Moderate Intensity Planning Processes

This proposed Moderate Intensity pathway is designed for more detailed and sophisticated planning exercises. It limits the face-to-face workshop time to 15 hours, and is designed to produce focused outcomes, and would be ideal for developing a longer-term strategic action plan that would have multiple outcomes. The limitation is that it does not deeply examine the longer-term strategic future, but would be ideal to identify 5-year plans. It does help set the context of the actions in the larger economic and decision-making framework, and examines medium and short-term actions and priorities in detail.

You will have:

- Undertaken pre facilitation work regarding statistical research for the community
- Met with the EDO/CAO to determine the community context and explained the survey. They would have formed a working group of 12 to complete the surveys.
- Run the surveys with the working group
- Collected the results and written the report.
- You will have determined that this is a moderate intensity planning process

6.1 Contextual Setting

Estimated Completion Time: 3 hours

6.1.1 Economic Development Conversation

Say: Economic Developers of Alberta define economic development as the process of developing, diversifying and maintaining sustainable economic, social and political environments, in which balanced growth may be realized, increasing the wealth of the community.

Ask participants to address the following questions in their groups. Group members should pay attention to similarities among responses/trends and make note of anything that strikes them as particularly interesting

- What is your definition of Economic Development?
- What has worked well in economic development in the community?
- What has worked less well?
- What does successful community economic development look like in your community?

Start the activity. Allow 20 minutes for the completion of discussions.

Walk around the room and observe team discussions. **Answer** any questions that the teams might have.

Give a one-minute warning

Stop the activity

Ask volunteers from each group to share highlights from their discussions

Say The community now has consensus of what economic development means and has also identified what success could look like for this community.

Say We are now ready to start the economic development planning process.

6.1.2 Economic Indicators Statistical Research Findings

Present the findings on the statistical research carried out at pre facilitation phase. Outline the research findings from:

- Real Time Economic Dashboard
- Major Projects Inventory
- Employment Statistics
- Demographics
- Agricultural Trends

Note down the statistics on whiteboard/flipchart or prepare these on handouts and distribute to group.

Ask the group to discuss the statistics in relation to these questions:

- Were you aware of the economic trends that impact upon this community?
- Are you surprised by these statistics?
- Do you understand your sphere of influence as a community – what you can impact and what you cannot?
- Do you understand the role that economic trends play in decision-making?

6.2 Visioning

Estimated Completion Time: 4 hours

6.2.1 What is Visioning?

Make notes from the Visioning section of the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document regarding:

- Understanding the power of vision and visioning processes
- Key principles to shaping a shared vision

Discuss with group the power of vision and visioning processes, and the key principles to shaping a shared vision, from the notes made from your preparation.

Refer to the Visioning Tools section from the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document. The section on the Prairie Canada Future Game connects Visioning with this tool. Read this section to the group, or summarize.

6.2.2 Prairie Canada Future Game™

Refer to Prairie Canada Future Game Facilitators Guide and conduct session from this guide. This will involve:

- Introduction and Orientation
- Module 1: Introduction to concepts and materials for the PCFG
- Module 2: Playing the Prairie Canada Future Game
- Module 3: Debriefing the Prairie Canada Future Game
- Module 4.1: Team Building and Collaboration
- Module 4.2: Strategic Economic Development

Say: The Future Game highlights the importance of having a vision for the future. Such a vision can help guide decision-making and priority setting.

Ask participants to discuss what characteristics would represent their preferred vision for the future. Work with the group to formulate a simple vision statement, or a list of key aspects of their desired future.

6.3 Priority Setting

Estimated Completion Time: 2 hours

Refer to the Priority Setting section in the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document.

Discuss with group the importance of Priority Setting, from the research carried out above. Introduce the notion that there are tools that have been identified in Forward Focus that will assist them with priority setting.

6.3.1 Analyzing the main issues

Say through contextual analysis and visioning, the community can now focus on what should be done to implement the vision. Issue analysis is now necessary in order to break down vague or complex issues into manageable and prioritized components.

Say here are the steps for priority setting.

- State the issue to be addressed. For example: What are the issues and challenges that prevent our community from attaining their vision for the future?
- Separate the issue into its many parts. So, with structured brainstorming create statements that begin with terms such as ‘How to..’ or ‘I wish..’ For example, ‘I wish that our children would stay in the community rather than move away’ or ‘How do we attract foreign investors to our community?’
- Identify the major themes that emerge from this brainstorming. For example, many of the ‘I wish’ and ‘How to’ statements are about the need for better infrastructure, employment opportunities and telecommunication.
- Prioritize the themes into categories such as essential, important, of concern and unimportant.
- Give reasons for this ranking.

6.4 Action Planning

Estimated Completion Time: 3 hours

Refer to the Action Planning section of the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document.

Read this to the group from the Action Planning section of the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document:

Having gone through the contextual setting, visioning and priority setting phases in the strategic planning process, action planning is now key. Action planning is the way to make sure that the vision is turned into reality, taking into account context and priority.

The action plan should include the following information:

- What actions or changes will occur
- Who will carry out these changes
- When they will take place, and for how long
- What resources (i.e., money, staff) are needed to carry out these changes
- Communication (who should know what?)

The Action Plan aims to identify a series of discreet and focused actions that can be achieved in a relatively short time frame. In most cases, these actions are intended to be catalytic, such that they provoke new ideas and actions, and begin the process of economic innovation and systemic change within the regional economic systems. Recommendations are targeted to specific local actions that can help steer the region towards the preferred future.

6.4.1 Develop an Action Plan

Say a plan creates the framework for accomplishing a task. Action planning provides a method for identifying, sequencing and analyzing the activities necessary for goal and project completion. It also creates accountabilities and deadlines, including development of ongoing intelligence to ensure that the plan remains relevant.

- Identify through brainstorming all of the actions required to realize the plan.
- Sequence these to reflect the logical project activities. This is an iterative effort – the order may change during subsequent analysis of deadlines, potential problems and scheduling.
- Identify the controls for the plan. These controls measure the progress of the action plan. They indicate who is accountable for which action, as well as deadlines and milestone dates.

6.5 Implementation

Estimated Completion Time: 3 hours

Read section on Performance Measurement and Outcomes in the Measuring Up document (Pg. 16).

Say Recently economic development organizations have turned their attention to measuring outcomes to demonstrate accountability. For example, has the economic development plan broadened the industrial or commercial base? Has it increased the number of jobs in the region? Increasingly economic development organizations are using a performance measurement framework to monitor and assess the results of their economic development plans.

6.5.1 Performance Measurement and Outcomes

Having read the Measuring Up document, you will notice that this will include:

- Linking activities to outcomes
- The relationship between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes
- Planning for success
- Short, medium and long term outcomes

Measuring Up identifies Performance Measurement and outcomes as key in the implementation phase.

- **Planning:** Engagement of analyst or staff member who is familiar with the process of collecting and reporting on performance data. Decide on a methodology that measures the inputs and outcomes. Identify measures for the outcomes and engage stakeholders to generate a list that can be used to track outcome performance. Decide on targets and who is accountable for measuring outcomes.
- **Measuring:** Collecting performance data in the implementation phase through to and beyond the results phase. The closest performance data related to and reflecting implementation are usually the immediate outcomes.
- **Check and monitor** the performance against the targets. Take corrective action to stay on track if needed.
- **Reporting:** Employ the performance data to monitor the strategic plan and to ascertain if it is achieving the desired outcomes. Use the performance data to rethink some activities or to change tactics if the desired outcomes are not being achieved or if different but favorable outcomes are reached. Collect data regularly – monthly, quarterly, semi-annually or annually. Performance reports are very important and should be tailored for the different audiences i.e.) stakeholders, funders, etc.
- An important part of the process is the **communication** of progress and success in reaching outcomes. This is an essential component in the performance measurement framework. It builds trust in the economic development activities, helps secure future support and strengthens partnerships with stakeholders.

7. Facilitation of High Intensity Planning Processes

The High intensity pathway is designed for more detailed and sophisticated planning exercises. It allocates some 38 hours to face-to-face workshop time, and is designed to produce highly focused outcomes, and would be ideal for developing a larger longer-term strategic action plan that would have multiple outcomes. This process would be ideal in a regional context or for larger populations. This process is designed to deeply examine the longer-term strategic future, and would be ideal to identify 5-20 year plans. It helps set the context of the actions in the larger economic and decision-making framework, and examines medium, short-term and long-term actions and priorities in detail.

You will have:

- Undertaken in depth pre facilitation work regarding statistical research for the community
- Met with the EDO/CAO to determine the community context and explained the survey. They would have formed a working group of 12 to complete the surveys.
- Run the surveys with the working group
- Collected the results and written the Community Perceptions report.

7.1 Contextual Setting

Estimated Completion Time: 3 hours

7.1.1 Economic Development Conversation

Say: Economic Developers of Alberta define economic development as the process of developing, diversifying and maintaining sustainable economic, social and political environments, in which balanced growth may be realized, increasing the wealth of the community.

Ask participants to address the following questions in their groups. Group members should pay attention to similarities among responses/trends and make note of anything that strikes them as particularly interesting

- What is your definition of Economic Development?
- What has worked well in economic development in the community?
- What has worked less well?
- What does successful community economic development look like in your community?

Start the activity. Allow 20 minutes for the completion of discussions.

Walk around the room and observe team discussions. Answer any questions that the teams might have.

Give a one-minute warning

Stop the activity

Ask volunteers from each group to share highlights from their discussions

Say The community now has consensus of what economic development means and has also identified what success could look like for this community.

Say We are now ready to start the economic development planning process.

7.1.2 Survey Results

Say Perceptions from a selection of the community were asked a series of questions in the Survey. A comparison is formed with an average of 30 communities in Canada, and from this we will see how this community compares.

Present the Survey Findings to the group

Ask the group to discuss their thoughts on the findings from the Survey.

- Were there any surprises in responses from the community?
- Were there any surprises in the comparative result with other communities?
- Where do you think improvements can be made?

Write down people's responses to the above questions

7.1.3 Economic Indicators Statistical Research Findings

Present the findings on the statistical research carried out at pre facilitation phase. Outline the research findings from:

- Real Time Economic Dashboard
- Major Projects Inventory
- Employment Statistics
- Demographics
- Agricultural Trends

Note down the statistics on whiteboard/flipchart or prepare these on handouts and distribute to group.

Ask the group to discuss the statistics in relation to these questions:

- Were you aware of the economic trends that impact upon this community?
- Are you surprised by these statistics?
- Do you understand your sphere of influence as a community – what you can impact and what you cannot?
- Do you understand the role that economic trends play in decision-making?

7.2 Visioning

Estimated Completion Time: 18 hours (Prairie Canada Future Game– 6hrs + Scenario Planning – 10hrs + What is the Vision – 2hrs)

7.2.1 What is Visioning?

Make notes from the Visioning section of the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document regarding:

- Understanding the power of vision and visioning processes
- Key principles to shaping a shared vision

Discuss with group the power of vision and visioning processes, and the key principles to shaping a shared vision, from the notes made from your preparation.

Refer to the Visioning Tools section from the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document. The section on the Prairie Canada Future Game connects Visioning with this tool. Read this section to the group, or summarize.

7.2.2 Prairie Canada Future Game TM

Refer to Prairie Canada Future Game Facilitators Guide and conduct session from this guide. This will involve:

- Introduction and Orientation
- Module 1: Introduction to concepts and materials for the PCFG
- Module 2: Playing the Prairie Canada Future Game
- Module 3: Debriefing the Prairie Canada Future Game
- Module 4.1: Team Building and Collaboration
- Module 4.2: Strategic Economic Development
- Module 4.3: Critical Decision Making and Future Thinking

7.2.3 Scenario Planning

Scenario Planning is not yet a formalized tool included in the Forward Focus toolkit and there is a potential role for it within the High Intensity Planning Process. However, the concept of scenario thinking has application in each of the proposed planning pathways. At the completion of the Future Game (when people are introduced to the concept of variable plausible futures), there is an opportunity for people to examine possible simplistic scenarios, such as best case and worst case. This can help as a bridge conversation or exercise to begin formulation of a vision.

7.2.4 What is the vision?

Say we now know what a vision is and the key principles to shaping a basic vision. However, success requires leveraging or developing the competitive advantages within the community in order to realize the vision. It cannot be realized unless one or more competitive advantages exist. This moves the basic vision to a different level. We need to identify the community's current and potential competitive advantages in order to create a stronger vision statement.

Ask the participants to brainstorm the competitive advantages of their community.

Say it doesn't take long to create a long list of perceived as well as potential advantages. It is now important to assess which ones are really competitive advantages and to leverage only the strong ones. These advantages are the valued, rare and complex/hard to recreate advantages that your community has above other communities. This helps us realize that where many communities fail around their visioning, is that they try to leverage weak competitive advantages. The goal of a community should be to either develop new competitive advantages or exploit existing strong ones.

7.3 Priority Setting

Estimated completion time: 4 hours

Refer to the Priority Setting section in the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document.

Discuss with group the importance of Priority Setting, from the research carried out above. Introduce the notion that there are tools that have been identified in Forward Focus that will assist them with priority setting.

7.3.1 Analyzing the main issues

Say through contextual analysis and visioning, the community can now focus on what should be done to implement the vision. Issue analysis is now necessary in order to break down vague or complex issues into manageable and prioritized components.

Say here are the steps for priority setting.

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- Separate the issue into its many parts. So, with structured brainstorming create statements that begin with terms such as ‘How to..’ or ‘I wish..’ For example, ‘I wish that our children would stay in the community rather than move away’ or ‘How do we attract foreign investors to our community?’
- Identify the major themes that emerge from this brainstorming. For example, many of the ‘I wish’ and ‘How to’ statements are about the need for better infrastructure, employment opportunities and telecommunication.
- Prioritize the themes into categories such as essential, important, of concern and unimportant.
- Give reasons for this ranking.

7.4 Action Planning

Estimated Completion Time: 3 hours

Refer to the Action Planning section of the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document.

Read this to the group from the Action Planning section of the Forward Focus Research and Analysis document:

Having gone through the contextual setting, visioning and priority setting phases in the strategic planning process, action planning is now key. Action planning is the way to make sure that the vision is turned into reality, taking into account context and priority.

The action plan should include the following information:

- What actions or changes will occur
- Who will carry out these changes
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- What resources (i.e., money, staff) are needed to carry out these changes
- Communication (who should know what?)

The Action Plan aims to identify a series of discreet and focused actions that can be achieved in a relatively short time frame. In most cases, these actions are intended to be catalytic, such that they provoke new ideas and actions, and begin the process of economic innovation and systemic change within the regional economic systems. Recommendations are targeted to specific local actions that can help steer the region towards the preferred future.

7.4.1 Identifying inputs, outputs and activities

Read the Measuring Up Guidebook (Pg. 13-20). **Print** out Figure 4 on pg. 15 for distribution to the group.

Measuring Up addresses action planning as ‘An activity is an action item that requires resources such as people, money or technology. These resources are called inputs. Activities are the actions you take as part of your strategy to achieve your outcomes.’ (Pg20) The logic model that Measuring Up advocates is a planning tool, which shows graphically the links between the inputs, the outputs and the results (outcomes). It allows for the testing and ability to ascertain if the correct resources and actions are being allocated to reach both short and long term objectives. The activities of an economic development strategy could include the following programs, surveys and projects.

- Creating a business mentorship program
- Developing a tourism marketing strategy
- Preparing a survey
- Designing a website
- Conducting workshops
- Delivering training

These are action steps. They are not evidence of either the successful completion of action (outputs) or the success of a plan (reaching outcomes).

Distribute the Figure 4 handouts

Say this diagram, from Measuring Up, shows the relationships between inputs (resources), activities, outputs (products) and outcomes.

7.5 Implementation

Estimated Completion Time: 4 hours

Read section on Performance Measurement and Outcomes in the Measuring Up document (Pg. 16).

Say Recently economic development organizations have turned their attention to measuring outcomes to demonstrate accountability. For example, has the economic development plan broadened the industrial or commercial base? Has it increased the number of jobs in the region? Increasingly economic development organizations are using a performance measurement framework to monitor and assess the results of their economic development plans.

7.5.1 Performance Measurement and Outcomes

Read the Measuring Up document (Pgs. 14-20). Having read the Measuring up document, you will notice that these will include:

- Linking activities to outcomes
- The relationship between inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes
- Planning for success
- Short, medium and long term outcomes

Measuring Up identifies Performance Measurement and outcomes as key in the implementation phase.

- **Planning:** Engagement of analyst or staff member who is familiar with the process of collecting and reporting on performance data. Decide on a methodology that measures the inputs and outcomes. Identify measures for the outcomes and engage stakeholders to generate a list that can be used to track outcome performance. Decide on targets and who is accountable for measuring outcomes.
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- **Check and monitor** the performance against the targets. Take corrective action to stay on track if needed.

- **Reporting:** Employ the performance data to monitor the strategic plan and to ascertain if it is achieving the desired outcomes. Use the performance data to rethink some activities or to change tactics if the desired outcomes are not being achieved or if different but favourable outcomes are reached. Collect data regularly – monthly, quarterly, semi-annually or annually. Performance reports are very important and should be tailored for the different audiences i.e.) stakeholders, funders, etc.
- An important part of the process is the communication of progress and success in reaching outcomes. This is an essential component in the performance measurement framework. It builds trust in the economic development activities, helps secure future support and strengthens partnerships with stakeholders.

8. References

This Facilitation Guide should be read in conjunction with the Forward Focus – Research and Assessment (March 2014) report.

Additional useful references include:

Business Vitality Alberta (Alberta Urban Municipalities Association)

<http://www.auma.ca/live/AUMA/toolkits+%26+Initiatives/Business+Vitality+Alberta>

Prairie Canada Future Game™ (PCFG)

<http://eae.alberta.ca/economic-development/regional-development/community-tools/prairie-canada-future-game.aspx>

Economic Indicators

<http://albertacanada.com/business/statistics/regional-economic-indicators.aspx>

Competitive Advantage Tool

“Control your Destiny or Someone Else Will” (J. Calof, R. Marcoux, W. Robinson 2010)– Regional and Community Economic Development Planning: An Exciting Role for Competitive Intelligence.

Measuring Up

Measuring Up! Performance Measurement for Economic Development: A Guidebook for Economic Development Practitioners (2013) Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

ERDB Best Practices Tool Kit

<http://eae.alberta.ca/apps/econ-toolkit/best-practices.asp>

Economic Dashboard

<http://www.economicdashboard.albertacanada.com>



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