



REGIONAL DISTRICT OF FRASER-FORT GEORGE

Robson Valley Region Economic Development Marketing Program Review & Strategy

2020 - 2022

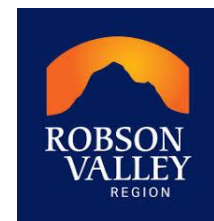


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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Through a partnership between the Village of McBride, Village of Valemount and the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, the Robson Valley Region Economic Development Marketing Program (RVR Marketing Program) promotes and markets the area from Albreda to Dome Creek as a place to live, work and invest. Since 2013, the program has used a wide range of marketing activities to attract people and investment to the region.

In 2019, Illuminata Marketing was commissioned to conduct a review of the RVR Marketing Program to:

- Determine the effectiveness of the current program
- Identify opportunities to strengthen and update the program to ensure resources are optimized amongst intended markets

The review process took into consideration the context in which the region operates, trends and best practices, stakeholder feedback as well as current marketing efforts.

This document outlines the key findings from the review and outlines marketing strategies and recommendations for the RVR Marketing Program on how to leverage strengths, optimize resources and capitalize on marketing opportunities moving forward.



PLANNING CONTEXT

BACKGROUND

To gain an understanding of the context in which the Robson Valley Region Economic Development Marketing Program operates, the following are highlights from a review of relevant background documents, strategic plans and statistics.

ROBSON VALLEY REGION MARKETING PROGRAM CONTEXT

The RVR Marketing Program is a three-way partnership between the Village of McBride, Village of Valemount and the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George with the shared economic goal of promoting opportunities to live, work and invest in the Robson Valley Region (RVR)

The *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy (2013)* was designed to be an “investment attraction strategy to attract new business investment and inspire existing businesses to invest in diversifying the regional economy and create more sustainable economies”. The strategy built upon the *2010 Robson and Canoe Valleys Economic Opportunities Plan* and identified five investor sectors considered to be the area’s high priority investment targets:

AGRICULTURE INVESTORS



TOURISM INVESTORS



GOVERNMENT SERVICES

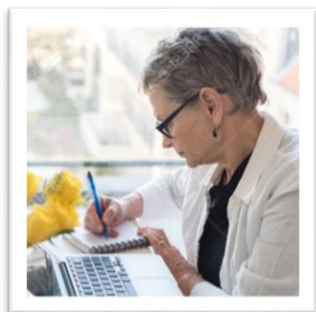


LONE EAGLE INVESTORS



FORESTRY INVESTORS

LONE EAGLE INVESTORS



Description: Early retirees who have had a successful career or business venture. They are often migrating from the Lower Mainland of B.C, Edmonton, or occasionally from Europe.

Investment Mix: The following from the *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy* indicated where in the investment life cycle the Robson Valley Region should be focusing its efforts with respect to Lone Eagle investors.

Further Investigation	Partnership Development	Product Development
There is no need for further investigation. RVR has been receiving this type of investment for decades. Members of the community are generally agreeable to this type of investment.	Given the importance of community to these investors and the number of “ordinary people with extraordinary stories” in the RVR, it would be beneficial to include community members directly in the attraction effort.	The competitive disadvantages are somewhat out of the communities’ control. While the communities should push to ensure social, recreational and health services remain and are improved, they are not necessary to be successful.

Competitive Advantages & Disadvantages: The *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy* outlined key competitive advantages and disadvantages for Lone Eagle investors.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sense of community - pride of place is important to the Lone Eagle Investor▪ Natural beauty - scenery but also associated with high calibre outdoor recreation▪ Property - available at competitive prices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Remoteness - particularly from a major international airport▪ Program budgets - economic development and community-led projects are limited▪ Education - sustainability of schools and lack of post-secondary may be a concern for Lone Eagles with families

Tourism Investors



Description: Agricultural enthusiasts (i.e., college students/Lone Eagles/Willing Workers on Organic Farms) interested in opening an agri-tourism business such as a farm or ranch, or recreational tourists that are currently visiting the region.

Investment Mix: The following from the *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy* indicated where in the investment life cycle the Robson Valley Region should be focusing its efforts with respect to Tourism investors.

Further Investigation	Partnership Development	Product Development
Continuing to focus on tourism product development and marketing initiatives that appeal to Lone Eagles, existing residents, and tourists.	Partnerships between Valemount, McBride and tourism businesses/organizations in the RVR are not well developed and coordination as well as regional sources of funding need development. Promotion at an RVR level needs to be supported by other levels of government when looking at international markets.	There is enough demand to support further development of accommodations and the quality of tourism product. There is a need to focus on non-winter activities to round out the sector. For example, attracting snowmobilers in the summer through managed ATV initiatives, agricultural tourism and family activities.

Competitive Advantages & Disadvantages: The *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy* outlined key competitive advantages and disadvantages for Tourism investors.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing tourism visitation and tourism businesses Mountain landscape and outdoor recreation opportunities Quality of life factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remoteness - particularly from an international airport Valemount and McBride are not currently collaborating with respect to tourism marketing Lack of data about the tourism industry, such as occupancy rates, to quantify the RVR opportunity

Agriculture Investors



Description: Current farming families from elsewhere in BC, second career farmers from Lone Eagles target markets, and particularly those interested in value-added businesses.

Investment Mix: The following from the *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy* indicated where in the investment life cycle the Robson Valley Region should be focusing its efforts with respect to Agriculture investors.

Further Investigation	Partnership Development	Product Development
<p>As the number of businesses in this space expands, new opportunities for collaboration and cooperative businesses may become possible.</p> <p>Non-traditional forestry products such as blueberries may present new opportunities.</p>	<p>The Community Futures is leading initiatives based on the agriculture sector.</p> <p>Grassroots organizations that support local farmers are important allies in the development of the sector.</p>	<p>Addition of an abattoir proposed in RVR would open up opportunities.</p> <p>Storage facilities or climate controlled transportation could open up new markets.</p> <p>Developing farm gate sales, improving farmers markets and a more robust local food brand.</p>

Competitive Advantages & Disadvantages: The *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy* outlined key competitive advantages and disadvantages for Agriculture investors.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community of farmers is supportive, family oriented, willing to share knowledge and work collaboratively Land and climate are conducive to successful cultivation and livestock rearing Natural beauty of the RVR, its scenery and outdoor recreational activities attract healthy active people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distance to markets can be a barrier for producers hoping to reach beyond the surrounding region Restrictive regulatory environment governing the sale of meat and processed goods Availability of workers to support a successful farm is a challenge for expansion Small land parcels suitable for market gardening and agri-tourism businesses are lacking; leasing can discourage substantial investment

Forestry Investors



Description: Forestry businesses that are small, with less than 20 employees, who can be positioned for growth, and lacking a particular wood supply (e.g., cedar, small diameter, large logs). Ideally entrepreneurs will have 5-10 years of experience in the industry.

Investment Mix: The following from the *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy* indicated where in the investment life cycle the Robson Valley Region should be focusing its efforts with respect to Forestry investors.

Further Investigation	Partnership Development	Product Development
<p>Retention initiatives that identify and support new business opportunities for existing companies are worth further investigation.</p> <p>Debate is still circulating on the merits of various alternative energy ideas and other uses for residual wood and fibre.</p> <p>Clear business plans are required for many potential investments in the bio-energy sphere.</p>	<p>Partnerships between the communities and their respective Community Forests are important to develop a shared image and investment strategies for the RVR.</p> <p>Provincial and Federal legislators need to be onside for important changes that will have positive local impacts.</p>	<p>The variety of forestry producers that operate in the RVR demonstrate that new products and businesses could develop that will utilize the specific supply of wood available.</p>

Competitive Advantages & Disadvantages: The *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy* outlined key competitive advantages and disadvantages for Forestry investors.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local community forests have the ability to supply wood fibre to local businesses Available and experienced workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distance to market Reliability of the power supply

Government Services



Description: Investment from government is retained through positive ongoing relationships with decision-makers, and by supporting personnel recruitment

Investment Mix: The following from the *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy* indicated where in the investment life cycle the Robson Valley Region should be focusing its efforts with respect to Government Services.

Further Investigation	Partnership Development	Product Development
None required for retention because targets are clearly defined. Government services that could be attracted are not immediately evident so research needs to be done.	Relationships with political representatives are critical to identifying opportunities and potential negative developments.	Success in attracting new government initiatives will depend on identifying a niche and putting a business case together.

Competitive Advantages & Disadvantages: The *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy* outlined key competitive advantages and disadvantages for Government Services.

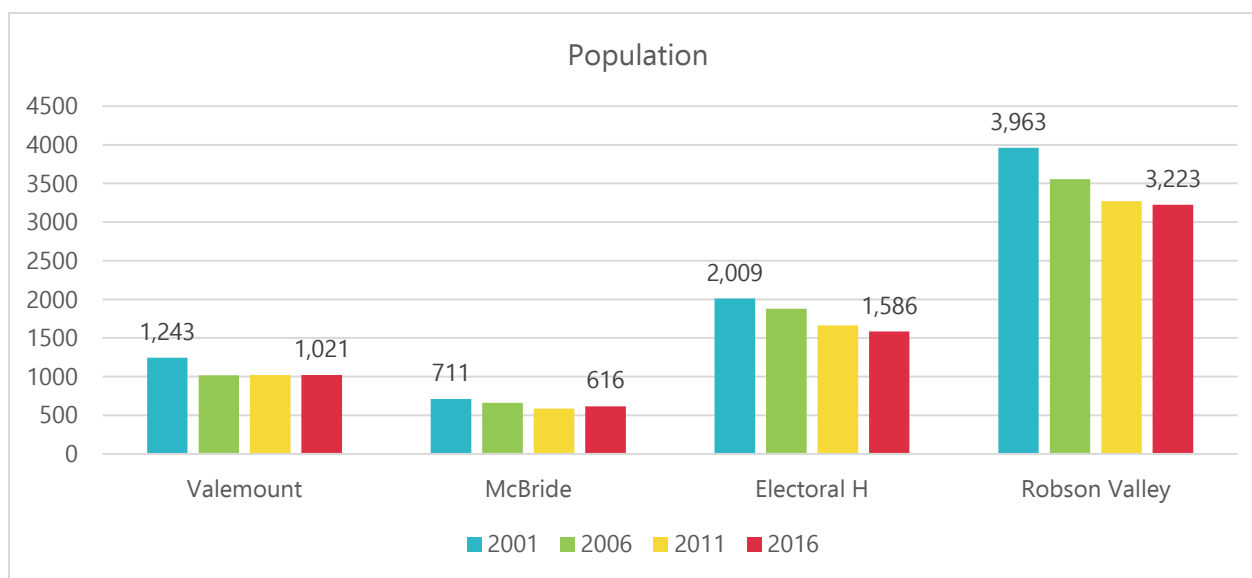
Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Quality of life and outdoor recreation opportunities for personnel recruitment▪ Positive political and administrative relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Employment for spouse▪ Remoteness relative to regional centres

REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The following provides a demographic profile of the Robson Valley Region, with the latest data from Statistics Canada.

Population

According to Statistics Canada Census data, the Robson Valley Region's overall population has continued to decline since 2001 (down 18% compared to 2001) and sits at 3,223 residents as of 2016. However, the decline has slowed and there was only a 1.5% drop between 2016 and 2011. And, in fact, McBride showed a 5% increase in population between 2011 (586) and 2016 (616).

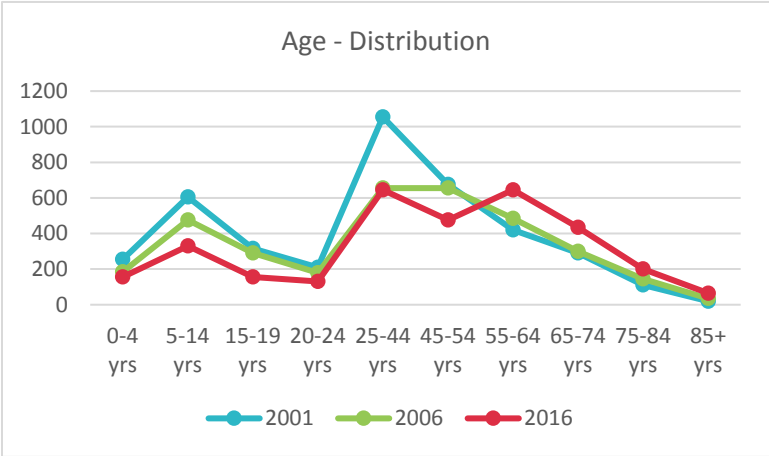


Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016

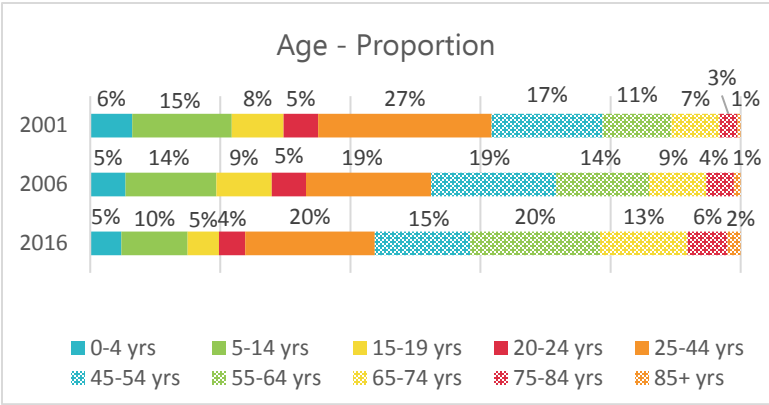
Note: Robson Valley figures reflect sum of data for Valemount, McBride and Electoral Area H

In the Robson Valley Region as a whole, there has been a significant shift away from younger residents of children and families to those who are older. Between 2001 and 2016, there have been decreases in every age segment for those 54 years and younger in comparison to increases in every age segment for those 55 years and older.

In 2016, children up to the age of 19 years represent 20% the Robson Valley Region population (compared to 30% in 2001), while seniors those 65 years and older represent almost 22% of residents (compared to 11% in 2001). The percentage of those 20 to 54 years old have remained fairly consistent around 55%.



Source: Statistics Canada 2016 and Regional District of Fraser-Fort George: Robson-Canoe Valleys Economic Development Opportunities Plan 2010
 Note: Data not available for 2011



Source: Statistics Canada 2016 and Regional District of Fraser-Fort George: Robson-Canoe Valleys Economic Development Opportunities Plan 2010
 Note: Data not available for 2011

Education

Educational attainment levels in 2016, based on the highest certificate/diploma/degree for residents aged 15 years and older, tend to be lower across the Robson Valley Region in comparison to the rest of the province. There is a significantly higher percentage of residents who have not graduated from secondary school and a lower percentage who have a university degree. On the other hand, Robson Valley Region residents are more likely to be educated in the trades than the rest of BC.

Education 2016	Valemount	McBride	Electoral H	RVR	BC
No certificate, diploma or degree	23.4%	25.8%	20.3%	22.3%	15.5%
Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate	37.7%	29.2%	28.8%	31.8%	29.4%
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	9.7%	13.5%	14.4%	12.7%	8.8%
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	16.0%	16.9%	16.6%	16.5%	18.1%
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	2.3%	2.2%	5.5%	3.9%	3.6%
University certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above	10.9%	13.5%	14.4%	13.1%	24.6%

Source: Statistics Canada 2016

Income

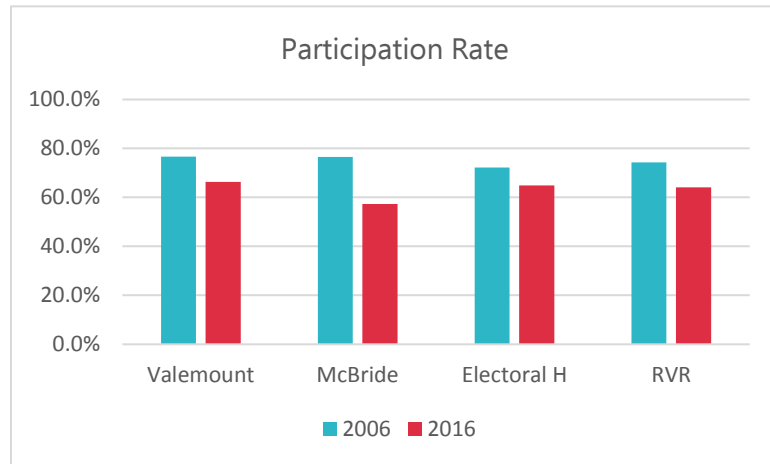
Both personal and household income tend to be lower for Robson Valley Region residents in comparison to provincial levels.

Median Income 2015	Valemount	McBride	Electoral H	BC
Median total income in 2015 among recipients	\$30,208	\$25,301	\$26,163	\$33,012
Median total income of households in 2015	\$51,392	\$44,672	\$53,632	\$69,995

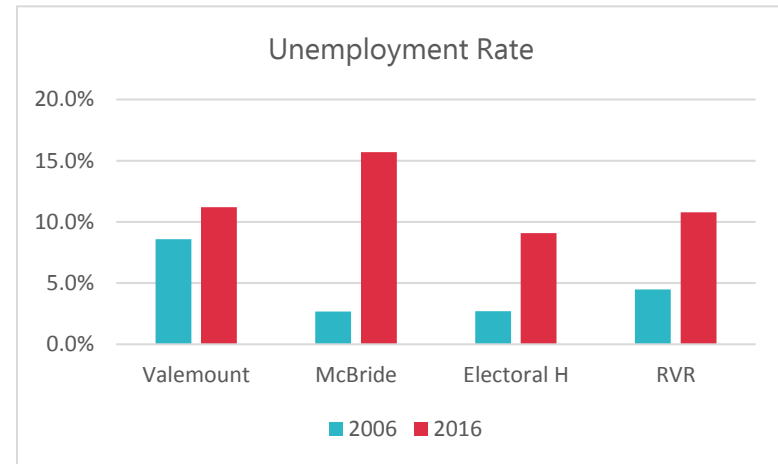
Source: Statistics Canada 2016

Labour Force

The labour force participation rate, measured by the percentage of those aged 15 years and older active in the labour force, has dropped in all communities across the Robson Valley Region from 2006 to 2016. In comparison, the percentage of those participating in the labour force but are unemployed has increased significantly during that same time. This corresponds with the *State of the North Report (January 2018)* which stated “Unemployment rates within most regions in northern BC have been rising since 2014.”



Source: Statistics Canada 2006, 2016



Source: Statistics Canada 2006, 2016

For those Robson Valley Region residents participating in the labour force, agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting is the largest industry, followed by accommodation and food services and health care and social assistance.

RVR Labour Force by Industry 2016	
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	18.5%
Accommodation and food services	13.2%
Health care and social assistance	9.4%
Retail trade	9.1%
Transportation and warehousing	8.8%
Manufacturing	5.9%
Public administration	5.9%
Construction	5.6%
Professional, scientific and technical services	3.8%
Other services (except public administration)	3.5%
Educational services	3.2%
Real estate and rental and leasing	2.6%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	2.4%
Finance and insurance	2.1%
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	2.1%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	2.1%
Information and cultural industries	1.5%
Wholesale trade	1.2%
Utilities	0.6%
Management of companies and enterprises	0.0%

Source: Statistics Canada 2016

With respect to occupation, residents in the Robson Valley Region are most likely to hold a sales and service position. This is followed by an occupation as a trade, transport and equipment operator or a position in management.

RVR Labour Force by Occupation 2016	
Sales and service occupations	22.2%
Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations	19.8%
Management occupations	15.5%
Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations	10.5%
Business, finance and administration occupations	8.7%
Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services	8.2%
Health occupations	6.4%
Occupations in manufacturing and utilities	3.8%
Natural and applied sciences and related occupations	3.5%
Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport	1.5%

Source: Statistics Canada 2016

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

A review of strategic documents from the Villages of Valemount and McBride was conducted. The following outlines some relevant highlights as they pertain to the RVR Marketing Program.

Village of Valemount

Council Strategic Priorities Planning Document 2019-2022 (March 2019): The document outlined four strategic priorities: Communications, Community Health, Fiscal Responsibility, and Land Use Planning and Development Support. As part of the priorities, goals included “*liaise with organizations and senior governments on initiatives that will improve relations and better the community*” (e.g., the RVR Marketing Program).

Valemount’s Future - Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (March 2013): *Valemount’s Future* identified five priorities for success in order to achieve a desirable future for the village:

Priorities for Success	Valemount’s Priorities for Success
Valemount has identified five priorities that provide a high-level description of what is important for a successful future for Valemount’s community. With the <i>Long-term Sustainability Objectives</i> , these priorities can guide planning and decision making both day-to-day and for long-term strategic direction. [For meanings and explanations of <i>Priorities for Success</i> see ICSP page 17]	1.Enhancing the Valemount Experience
	2.Growing Economic Opportunities
	3.Strengthening Community Well Being
	4.Protecting and Enhancing our Environment
	5.Creating Success and Learning Together

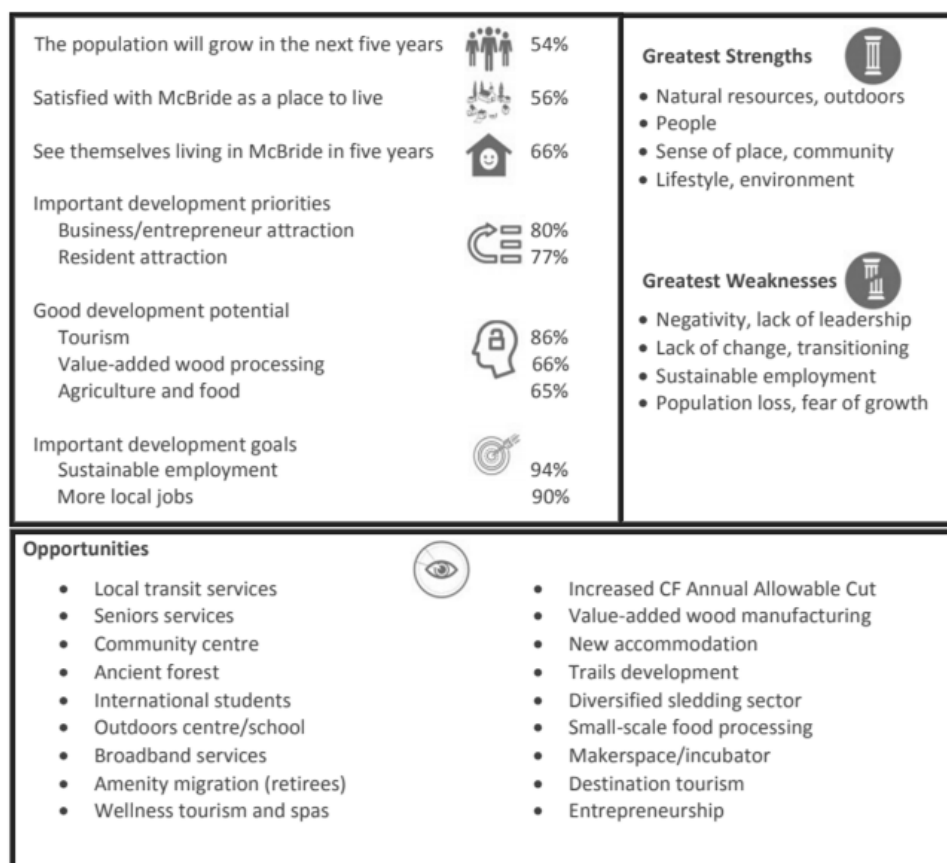
It went on to identify important areas of community life along with desired outcomes for those areas. The Economic and Employment Strategy Area focuses on “*bringing sufficient dollars into the community, and optimizing the impact of dollars within, in order to help support local services and attractive livelihoods. It also addresses opportunities for meaningful work, sustainable businesses and creating a positive climate for local businesses*”; and in turn, outlines a desired outcome of having travelers being “*attracted to the area experience, and many now live and support the community and local economy by fostering new and existing businesses.*”

Village of McBride

Village of McBride 2019-2021 Strategic Priorities and Initiatives: The document outlined four strategic priorities: Increase Economic Capacity & Community Development, Fiscal & Corporate Health, Asset Management & Risk Management, and Good Governance. For each priority, a number of initiatives were identified. Within the Economic Capacity and Community Development priority, initiatives included capitalizing on economic development initiatives as opportunities arise, implementation of Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) to support the promotion of McBride, create a positive atmosphere for business development and investment, and inventory undeveloped land and pursue future development.

Village of McBride Economic Development Action Plan Report (March 2018): The *Action Plan* identified the current situation in McBride as “*If McBride and area are to expand and diversify its job base, it must foster an environment conducive to the attraction and development of human and financial capital. It can utilize key strengths like low land costs, affordable housing costs, proximity to Prince George, Valemount, Jasper and Edmonton, and exceptional natural environment, while correcting weaknesses that inhibit job creation.*” The engagement process undertaken in developing the *Action Plan* indicated “*while residents are clearly satisfied with McBride as place to live and work, concern over jobs and economic activity is evident.*”

The plan identified six main goals to guide actions and four core themes encompassing fifteen strategies. The theme of Business Sustainability and Attraction outlined the following high priority initiatives that align closely with the RVR Marketing Program: Community Marketing and Promotion; Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction; and Attract Government Services. Included were a number of actions to support the initiatives, such as increasing communication with provincial trade officials/programs, linking McBride investment priorities into the RVR Marketing program, initiating discussions with government ministries and outlining a game-plan to re-establish government offices in the community.



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The RVR Marketing Program works closely with a broad range of stakeholders and partners including government representatives, community organizations and associations, business owners and community service providers. To gain insight into perceptions of the Robson Valley Region and the RVR Marketing Program, Illuminata Marketing conducted primary research with program stakeholders and partners as selected by the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George (Regional District).

Facilitated Workshop with RVR Steering Committee

- Dannielle Alan, Director Area H, Regional District, Chair
- Alan Frederick, Councillor, Village of McBride
- Sheila McCutcheon, CAO, Village of McBride
- Karen Dube, EDO, Village of McBride
- Silvio Gislimberti, EDO, Village of Valemount
- Kenna Jonkman, Development Services Manager, Regional District
- Renee McCloskey, Manager of External Relations, Regional District

In-Depth Interviews (in-person or via telephone)

- Jackie Edwards, Legrand Farms, member of RVR Advisory Committee
- Myles Bruns, Regional Manager, Thompson-Central Okanagan for Regional Economic Operations, Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skill Training
- Curtis Pawliuk, Manager, Valemount and Area Recreation Development Association
- Linda Fry, Secretary and former Chair, McBride Chamber of Commerce, member of RVR Advisory Committee
- Hollie Blanchette, Councillor for Village of Valemount and Chair, Valemount Chamber of Commerce
- Vicki Barrett, Realtor and President, McBride Big Country Snowmobile Association

Online Survey

An online survey was emailed to the District's list of stakeholders and also promoted on social media channels. The survey was completed by 244 respondents. Highlights of the respondent profile include:

- 8 in 10 respondents live in the Robson Valley (among which 44% live in McBride, 41% in Valemount, 17% in Dunster, 5% in Tête Jaune Cache and 3% in Crescent Spur). Of the 20% of respondents living outside the region, the majority (62%) live in Prince George.
- About half (53%) are over the age of 55, 31% are between the ages of 35 to 54, 24% are between the ages 18 and 34.
- Almost half (47%) of respondents are employed (either full or part-time), 34% are self-employed or a business/owner operator, and another 31% are either retired (20%) or semi-retired (11%).

- Respondents are from a range of stakeholder groups where 38% classify themselves as entrepreneurs or business owner/operators in the region while another 11% are thinking about opening/investing in a business in the region. Further, 19% are a community organization or association employee/committee member, 17% are government representatives and 13% are a community service provider employee/committee member. Twenty-five percent of respondents did not identify with any of the stakeholder groups asked about.
- Respondents and their organizations also represent a wide range of sectors. The sectors with the most respondents include government services (21%), tourism (19%), accommodation/food service (17%), agriculture (17%) followed by arts, entertainment and recreation (15%) and professional services (14%). Respondents also identify with the forestry (10%), healthcare (9%) and retail (8%) sectors, among others.

HIGHLIGHTS

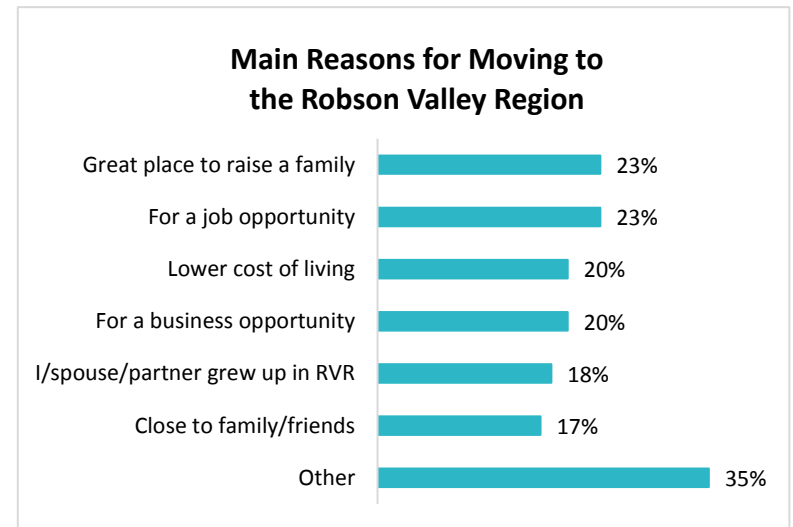
From the stakeholder engagement research (i.e., the workshop, interviews and survey), a number of key themes emerged regarding the Robson Valley and the RVR Marketing Program:

Different Things Have Brought People To The Robson Valley Region

Almost three-quarters (73%) of online survey respondents have lived in the Robson Valley Region for over ten years. Almost 10% have always lived in the region, and almost half lived elsewhere in BC before moving to the region, Another 29% are from Alberta and 22% are from elsewhere (including Saskatchewan, Ontario and UK/Europe).

People have come to the Robson Valley for many different reasons – in the stakeholder interviews and among steering committee members, reasons for moving to the region ranged from coming for a particular job opportunity, coming for a recreation program or recreation opportunities, moving to the area with family, spouse originally being from the area, the lower cost of living and wanting to live in a smaller community.

Given the online survey was emailed to a list of stakeholders, not surprisingly, a job (23%) or business (20%) opportunity was provided as a main reason for moving to the Robson Valley Region. The positive attributes of the area as place to live such as being a great place to raise a family (23%) and the lower cost of living (20%) were also mentioned. As well, over one-third stated having ties to or roots in the region (18% grew up in the region; 17% to be close to family/friends). Other reasons for moving to the Robson Valley included mentions regarding the beautiful landscape, to be close to the outdoors/nature, the slower and healthier lifestyle, the quiet and peace, and to retire.



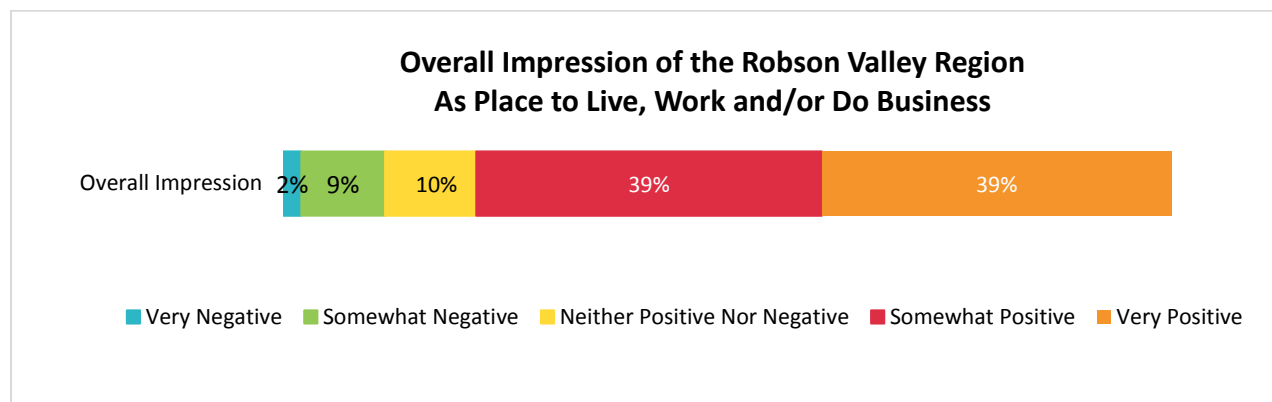
Base: Online survey, of those who live in RVR (n=194)

While Overall Impressions Of The Robson Valley Are Positive, They Come With Some Limitations

Generally, stakeholders tended to have a positive impression of the Robson Valley as a place to live, work and/or do business. However, when taking a closer look, these impressions came with a set of caveats and cautions for some.

In the stakeholder interviews, participants described their impression of living in the Robson Valley as “fabulous”, “untapped”, “natural”, “a great place to live, work and raise a family”, “great for families” and “lovely community”. As a place to work, stakeholders described the Robson Valley as being “hard”, having “no jobs”, and the “need to be creative and do multiple things”. As a place to invest, stakeholders mentioned the “lack of economic growth”, “population has dwindled and struggle to keep businesses open”, “resource sector downturn”, and the “need to be realistic of rural challenges in BC”.

Among respondents to the online survey, almost 8 in 10 (78%) survey respondents had positive impressions of the Robson Valley Region as a place to live, work and/or do business (39% very positive and 39% somewhat positive), while 10 % had a neutral impression and 11% had a negative impression. Although directional and not statistically significant, residents appear to be more positive when compared to those living outside of the Robson Valley.



Base: Online survey, all respondents (n=244)

Many of the reasons for positive impressions related to living in the Robson Valley and included comments about the beautiful scenery, access to the outdoors and nature, clean air and water, lifestyle, great for raising a family, supportive community, friendly people, safety/low crime, and the perception of affordable housing. Example verbatim responses include the following:

- *It is community minded (wonderful people), provides opportunities for outdoor recreation, it's affordable, beautiful scenery, feels like home.*
- *I like the people I have met who choose to live here. I like the scenery I see every day. We have a reasonably nice climate, clean air to breathe and good water to drink.*
- *Lifestyle, play right outside your door or drive 20 minutes to a majestic mountain with all kinds of options for play.*

- *It is a beautiful, relaxed place to live. It works for mine and my families way of life.*
- *People here are friendly and helpful. The town has essential services, but is not noisy or crowded. The real estate is affordable. The scenery is beautiful, and there are lots of opportunities for outdoor activities ... The internet connectivity here is good enough for me to be able to work from home. Living in a valley with so many farms means the food is significantly better than in most places I have lived. There is fresh produce in season, there are several good bakers, and good local restaurants.*

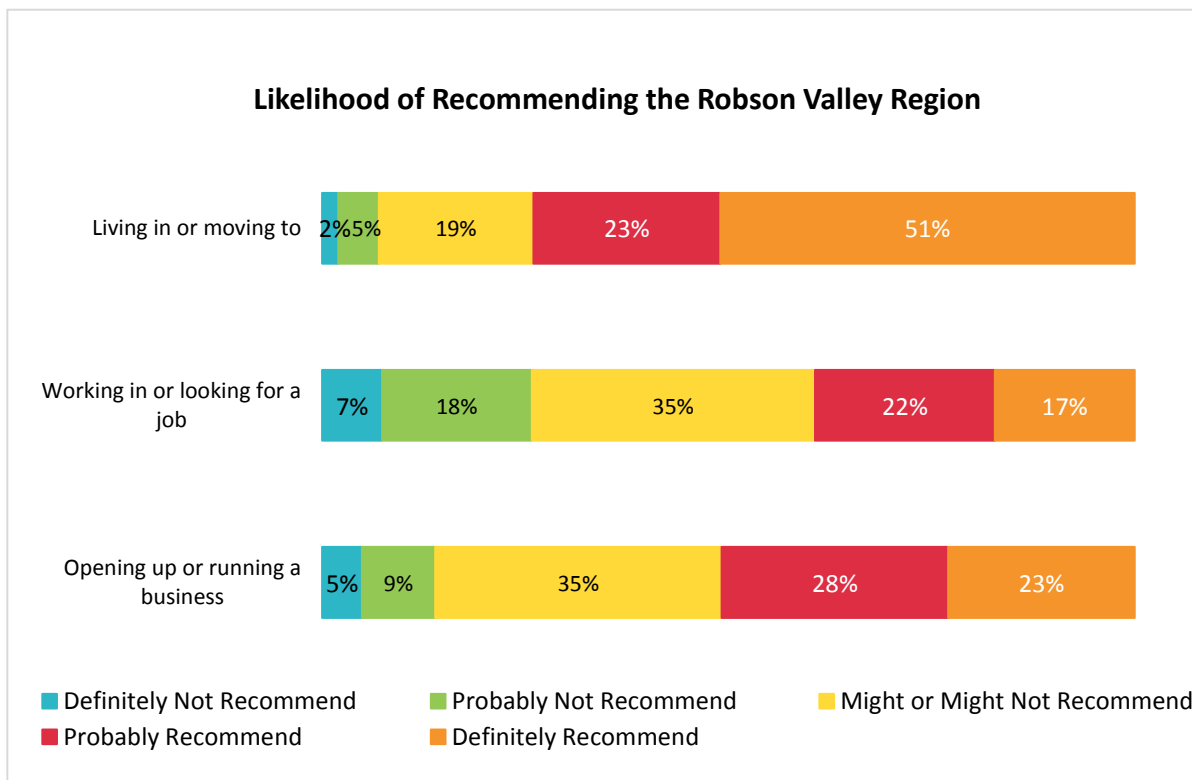
However, for many, the positive comments came with limitations, where respondents countered their positive comments with concerns about working, finding employment and running a business in the Robson Valley. Example verbatim responses include the following:

- *I love the Robson Valley as a place to live, but there needs to be better job opportunities for those who want to raise families here.*
- *Beautiful scenery and lots of amazing outdoor activities. Awesome place to live...good paying jobs are not common. childcare is scarce. Unless you have the right business idea many businesses can't stay afloat.*
- *It's a great place to live, and work if you can be flexible or adaptable about how you earn a living*
- *It's not for everyone, it is remote and there are limited amenities and could be difficult to find a house to rent. But if amenities are not important to a person and you can afford to buy a house, then it is a great place to live and do business. There is freedom and opportunity for enterprising people to make a life here. Also, a wonderful community to raise a family.*
- *There is potential there, but the village makes it hard for new business start-ups.*
- *Great place but the people can be close minded.*

The limitations voiced above were further echoed by those respondents who held negative overall impressions of the region as a place to live, work or invest. Comments related to the area being remote, the lack of services (e.g., including health care, education, childcare, internet, TV), challenges with local government (e.g., closed-minded, residents not being welcoming, small population and lack of industry, limited job opportunities, and the lack of affordable housing). Example verbatim responses include the following:

- *No jobs, no services, expensive.*
- *There are no jobs which will pay enough to have just one job.*
- *The people in this town are not inviting to new people nor do they like change. Have seen the older locals make it so impossible for new businesses to survive.*
- *Taxes and utilities are high for commercial properties. Therefore rent is high. Tenants difficult to pay rent. Also power outages.*
- *Not many jobs, hard if not impossible to find a place to rent. Can be very discouraging for people moving here with high hopes.*
- *There are many issues about living in the Robson Valley, ie: lack of affordable housing, limited stores, internet shutting down frequently, power outages, lack of daycare, lack of jobs that would support a family.*
- *Not much work or support when it comes to setting up a business or looking for employment.*

Further, while three-quarters (74%; 51% definitely and 23% probably) of online respondents stated they were likely to recommend the Robson Valley Region to a family member, friend or business associate when it comes to living in or moving to the Robson Valley Region, they were less likely to recommend opening up or running a business (51%; 23% definitely and 28% probably). Respondents were even less likely to recommend working in or looking for a job (39%; 17% definitely and 22% probably); and one-quarter would not recommend the Robson Valley Region.



Base: Online survey, all respondents (n=244)

Awareness Of The RVR Marketing Program Is Mixed

Awareness and knowledge about the RVR Marketing Program was mixed among interview participants. Most participants were aware of the brand and logo, and some were aware of the marketing materials such as the bags and posters. Some reported working closely with the program - e.g., work with the Regional District, sit on the Advisory Board, or have used the coasters, bags, rack cards, etc. Others stated they were more involved at the launch of the program but have had limited interaction since, and questioned if the program was still going. Some interviewees had questions about the goals and objectives of the program, ways they could get involved, or how they could support the program.

Awareness was also mixed among online survey respondents. Half (49%) had heard of the RVR Marketing Program, while three-quarters had seen the RVR logo before taking the survey. More than half (57%) had seen the printed materials such as posters, table tent cards, rack cards and the like.

Further, while more than half of survey respondents (57%) were aware of the discoverRVR.ca website, only one-third (34%) had ever visited the website. Among those who had visited the website, the most agreed (58%; 20% strongly and 38% somewhat) that the discoverRVR.ca website does a good job of providing information about living, working and investment opportunities in the Robson Valley Region.

Awareness and usage of the RVR Marketing Program's social media channels was lower with smaller proportions of respondents engaged in Facebook (15% like/following) and Instagram (8% following).

Perceptions Of The RVR Marketing Program Vary

Perceptions of the RVR Marketing Program among participants in the Steering Committee workshop participants and stakeholder interviewees are also mixed. The program was generally viewed as beneficial in that it is well received and brings the communities together to collaborate and share the same message despite the limited budget. Some felt the visual identity, website and social media are working well. However, others felt the logo was "soft", or they had not visited the website recently or had not visited the program's social media channels. And while the use of success stories and videos was noted as something that is positive, others the opportunity to better distribute and share the videos was also mentioned.

In terms of challenges, comments related to the limited program budget, declining momentum of the program and limited activity. Others mentioned opportunities to revisit program objectives (e.g., promote, attract, retain, etc.), have a more targeted focus, develop and share a story with others, promote externally outside of the region, and clarify roles and responsibilities of the marketing coordinator, the partnering governments as well as the Advisory Committee.

Success Of The RVR Marketing Program Is Unclear

Workshop and interview participants had a difficult time commenting on how good of a job the Robson Valley Region has done in attracting investment.

When Steering Committee members were asked how good of a job the Robson Valley Region has done in attracting investment in the various sectors, ratings were soft across the board due to significant challenges within each sector. Participants could only provide a few examples of new investment for the Lone Eagles sector; however, it was difficult to tie the examples directly to the influence of the RVR Marketing Program. Further, while participants acknowledged the program provides some information about opportunities on the website/social media and highlights successes through the videos, they also mentioned the need for the program to better promote to the investment sectors outside the region (e.g., tradeshow, magazines, highlighting gaps in business services, communicating opportunities available).

Among interview participants, opinions about how good of job the RVR Marketing Program has done in building local brand awareness and promoting goods and services from the Robson Valley Region were mixed. Some had more positive perceptions (e.g., “done quite well”, “pretty good” and “pretty well for what I’ve seen”) while some were more neutral or less positive (e.g., “middle of the road”, “not very well” and “nothing”). Also, most interview participants were unable to comment on whether the RVR Marketing Program has helped potential investors find information, put potential investors in contact with key economic representatives or attract investment to the Robson Valley Region.

When It Comes To Marketing, Lone Eagles, Agriculture and Tourism Investors Were Identified As Priority Sectors

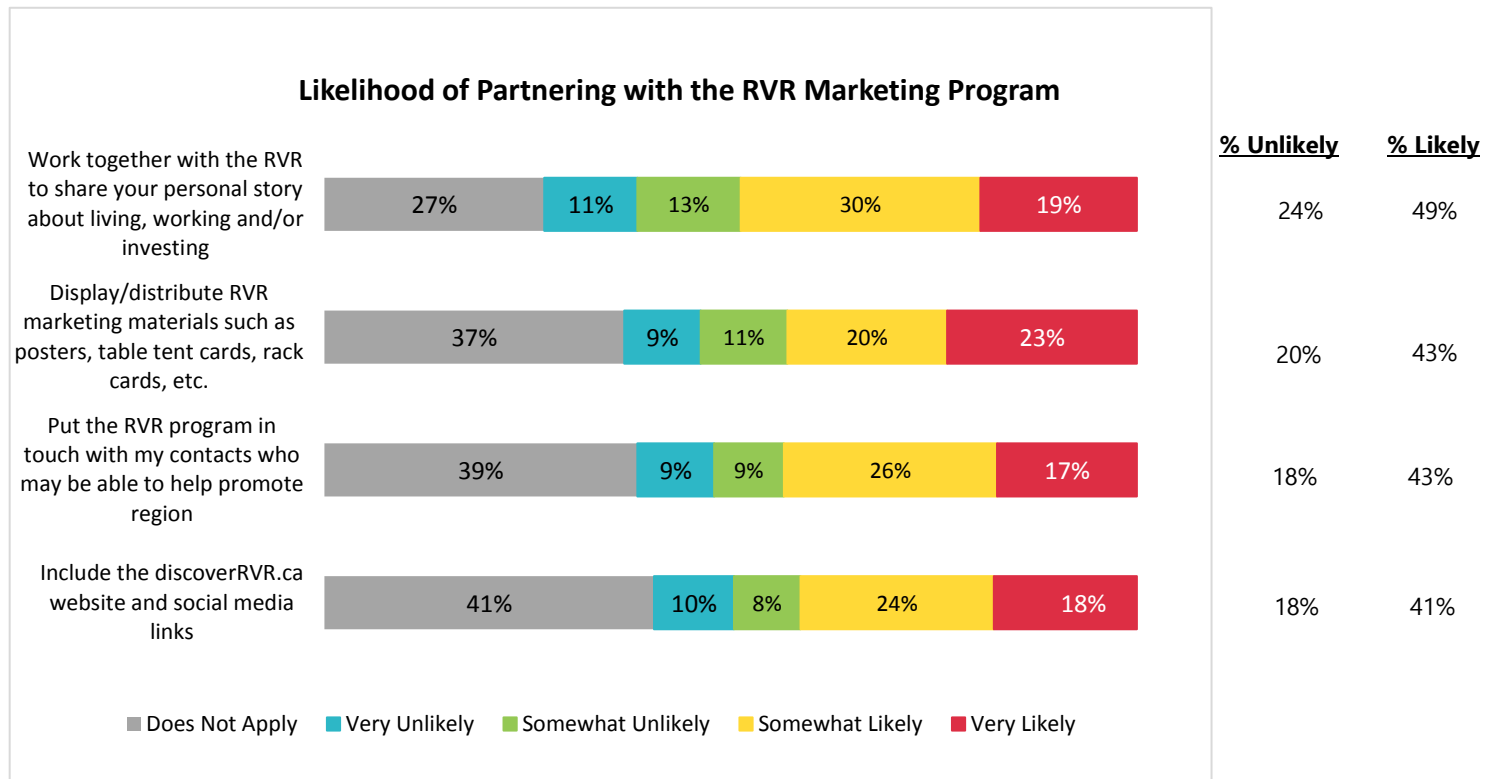
When Steering Committee members were asked which sectors should be marketing priorities for the RVR Marketing Program, Lone Eagle investors, Agriculture investors and Tourism investors surfaced as priority sectors. For Lone Eagles, reasons included there being fewer barriers and less external/government influence thus allowing them to enter the market right away. For Tourism investors, reasons included potential of an already strong tourism sector with tourists already coming, along with available space to operate businesses catering to this market. For Agriculture, reasons included government support for local producers and trends towards buying local, as well as opportunities to highlight the diversity of agriculture in the region. Among workshop participants, there was consensus that the Forestry and Government Services sectors should not be a marketing priority at this time.

There Is Interest In Partnering With The RVR Marketing Program To Promote Region

Stakeholders appeared to be interested and willing to work in partnership with the RVR Marketing Program to help promote the Robson Valley Region. When online survey respondents were asked how likely they would be to partner with the RVR Marketing Program in various ways, respondents were most willing to share their personal stories about living, working and/or investing in the Robson Valley (49%; 19% very likely and 30% somewhat likely).

Respondents were somewhat less willing to display/distribute RVR marketing materials (43%), put the RVR Marketing Program in touch with contacts (43%) or link to the RVR website/social media channels (41%).

However, a portion of those surveyed felt the proposed partnering opportunities did not apply to them/their organization. When those respondents were excluded from the results, the willingness to partner with the RVR Marketing Program increased – putting in touch with contacts (71% likely), including links (70%), displaying/distributing materials (68%) and sharing personal story (66%).



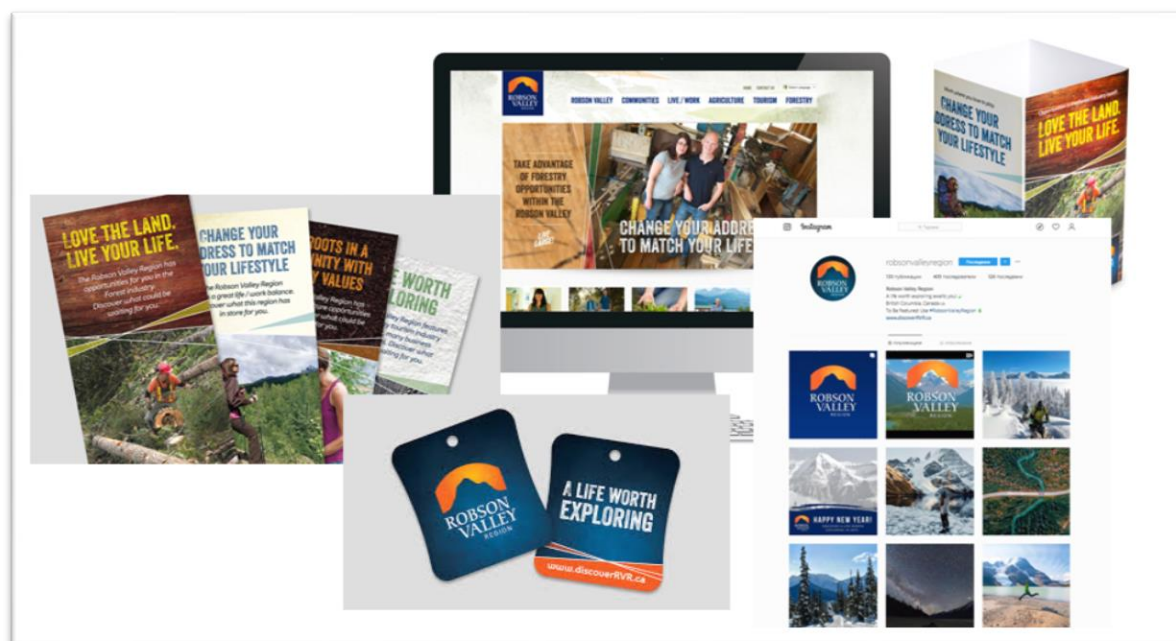
Base: Online survey, all respondents (n=244)

MARKETING AUDIT

Along with the findings from the stakeholder engagement research and a tour of the Robson Valley, Illuminata Marketing conducted a review of the RVR Marketing Program's activities based on materials provided by the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George and those publicly available (e.g., via the program website, social media, etc.). The following highlights some key observations regarding the RVR Marketing Program's marketing and communications efforts:

CONSISTENT USE OF VISUAL IDENTITY AND MESSAGING ABOUT FEATURES AND ASSETS OF THE ROBSON VALLEY REGION

With 75% of survey respondents having seen the logo, the RVR Marketing Program appears to have been somewhat successful in establishing the brand's visual identity. Further, a fairly consistent look and feel can be seen across various marketing materials and touchpoints, and marketing efforts have been consistent in highlighting and promoting the lifestyle, features and assets of the Robson Valley (e.g., outdoor adventures, friendly communities, healthy living, scenic landscapes, etc.), through both messaging (e.g., "land of opportunities", "a life worth exploring", "living large", "live your life", etc.) and images (e.g., imagery seen in videos and used on print materials, social media, etc.).



THERE APPEARS TO BE LIMITED AND INCONSISTENT COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT THE RVR MARKETING PROGRAM ITSELF

While half of survey respondents had heard about the RVR Marketing Program, a few interviewees commented on being unsure about whether the program was still currently in place (e.g., with momentum at launch but waning in recent years), what has been happening with the program (e.g., Results? Successes? Wins?), what the intentions and goals of the program are (e.g., is it investment attraction, retention or expansion?), and what types of things could be done to get involved with or support the program.

Aside from the document entitled “RVR – General Information Guide”, there is very limited to no information about the program itself (e.g., what it is, its purpose and goals, who’s behind it, etc.) in other marketing and communication efforts such as the discoverRVR.ca website, social media or print materials. Also, there is little context provided when the RVR Marketing Program is referenced in the media (e.g., news articles in The Goat) or promotional posters (e.g., the unveiling of the videos).

Further, the naming convention for the program is not always presented consistently – sometimes it is called “Robson Valley Region Program”, other times it is “Robson Valley Economic Marketing Program”, or “Robson Valley Region Economic Development Marketing Program” - and coupled with messages being put out by the “Robson Valley Tourism” initiative, this could potentially be causing confusion.

As well, descriptions of the program differ:

- *“The Robson Valley Region program is a strategy to identify and capitalize on the economic opportunities that exist for communities in the Canoe and Robson Valley. The Robson Valley Region program focuses on five sectors to attract new business and inspire existing business to diversify and expand to create a more sustainable economy.” – RVR – General Information Guide document*
- *“The Robson Valley Region economic marketing program is a partnership of the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, the Village of McBride and the Village of Valemount. The program promotes opportunities to live, work, and invest in the Robson Valley Region. The program is multi-faceted and features a combination of online, video and printed marketing materials to spread the word about the many opportunities in the area. The program was launched in 2013 and focuses on five sectors to attract new business and the inspire existing businesses to diversify and expand to create a more sustainable economy. These five sectors are agriculture, forestry, tourism, professionals and active retirees and government services.” – Regional District of Fraser-Fort George Media Release, October 2019*



THERE APPEARS TO BE A MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE MARKETING APPROACH AND INTENDED AUDIENCES

The RVR Marketing Program has a diverse range of audiences to which it markets and promotes the Robson Valley Region. For the most part, RVR marketing efforts have been more of a “shotgun” approach where the same tactics and materials (e.g., website, social media, rack cards, promotional items, etc.) have been used to reach all audiences; for example, whether they are potential investors or whether they are partners working with the RVR Marketing Program, and whether they are currently living within the Robson Valley or whether they are living outside the region. Aside from investor sector specific content on the website and rack cards, there appears to have been limited use of targeted marketing to date with specific activities developed and geared to specific audiences.

And, while much of the program’s focus to date has been on increasing awareness and buy-in of the RVR Marketing Program among local communities and those within the region, only 49% of survey respondents were aware of the program indicating an opportunity remains to further engage those living within the Robson Valley Region.

Further, many marketing efforts and materials have been designed for the potential investor audience and a goal that those materials (e.g., website, rack cards, bags, tags, etc.) would reach those outside the region via local businesses and organizations; however, the approach to date has been indirect and relied primarily on potential investors visiting the region and coming across the materials and as such, the uptake of these materials going outside the region is unknown.

FURTHER, THIS MISALIGNMENT CARRIES THROUGH TO THE MESSAGING

Much of the current messaging around the RVR Marketing Program is focused on resident attraction and the benefits, features and assets of living in the Robson Valley Region. Although this may be a main draw and attraction for moving to or investing in the region, when taking into consideration the range of audiences for the program, there appear to be some gaps with respect to the messaging.

- Some marketing efforts and materials have been designed with the specific target investor sectors in mind. For example, there are specific website sections/pages with content specific to each sector, as well there are individual rack cards for Tourism investors, Forestry, Agriculture and Lone Eagles. Also, the success story videos highlight examples within the various target sectors, and broad overarching messages relevant to the sectors such as “opportunities are waiting here for you”, “open a business where you love to play” and “good inventory of available rural and agricultural land” or “healthy tourism industry” have been included. However, aside from these broad messages, there appears to be a lack of specific information and data backing up the investment opportunities that would be helpful for potential investors.
- The messaging in current materials tends to have a focus on “resident attraction” geared towards those living outside of the region (e.g., highlighting the lifestyle and benefits of living in the Robson Valley region). However, as mentioned above, program efforts to date have been on generating awareness and buy-in of local communities within the region. However, for the local audience, there is little information about the RVR Marketing

Program itself, why it is important for the region, the benefits of supporting the program and ways to partner with the program to help promote the region.

- For those locals and businesses within the Robson Valley, there is also a lack of messaging relating to business diversification and expansion opportunities.

MARKETING TOOLS PROVIDE A GOOD FOUNDATION; OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE THEM MORE ENGAGING AND USER-FRIENDLY

The RVR Marketing Program has been utilizing a range of marketing touchpoints to promote the Robson Valley including the discoverRVR.ca website, social media channels (e.g., Facebook and Instagram), print/marketing collateral (e.g., posters, rack cards, tent cards, flag signs, sandwich boards, posters, stickers, etc.). These efforts provide a solid base from which the Robson Valley Region has been marketed. However, there are a number of opportunities to improve their overall impact by taking a more strategic approach in determining which touchpoints will best meet audiences' needs, how materials are displayed and distributed to reach audiences, as well as by enhancing messaging and the user-friendliness of some of the materials. Some examples include:

- **Rack cards** – RVR Marketing Program rack cards were seen on display in visitor centres and at some local businesses. However, the rack cards were not always visible (e.g., on the bottom row of materials), not all investor sectors were available (e.g., only the forestry piece but not the others) or not available at all (e.g., Prince George airport). Further, while the messaging for the rack cards provides broad messaging for each sector, the unique features and benefits of the region for that sector and a call to action are not always clearly highlighted.
- **Website** – The discoverRVR.ca website contains information about living in the Robson Valley Region as well as information for the various target sectors. It also highlights success stories of entrepreneurs living within the region. However, the structure of the website may be confusing as it has a large number of pages, some with large amounts of text while others with very little content, making the site feel a bit repetitive and navigation a bit cumbersome. There is also a lack of investor-focused data and information about current investment opportunities in Robson Valley Region.
- **Social Media** – While the base of followers/likes has increased over the past year (from 559 Facebook Likes in December 2018 to 711 in December 2019, and from 355 Instagram followers in December 2018 to 410 in December 2019), only 15% and 8% of survey respondents stated they “Liked” or “Followed” the RVR Facebook and Instagram pages. Further, while the social media channels tend to showcase “lifestyle” content (e.g., the nature and outdoor aspects), there is limited “economic development” content that may be important to potential investors.
- **Videos** – The program has a collection of videos showcasing stories about successful individuals and businesses in the region. The videos appear to have generated high levels of exposure (e.g., *Of Bikes and Business* received 16,000 views on Facebook in 9 months, and *CE Organics* received 6,900 views in 10 months) and engagement (e.g., the videos are the most shared content on the RVR Facebook page). Given the high levels of exposure and engagement, there is an opportunity to continue to add to the video collection and leverage the videos to engage key audiences.

OPPORTUNITY FOR FURTHER ENGAGEMENT, BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE REGION

In addition to maintaining marketing materials and tools such as the website, social media channels and print materials, the *Robson Valley Region Marketing Coordinator Services Work Plan* identified a number of engagement responsibilities. This includes visits, meetings, contact with local organizations (both familiar and unfamiliar with the RVR Marketing Program), connecting with agencies, attending events, etc. With mixed awareness and knowledge about the RVR Marketing Program and waning momentum among stakeholders, it appears there may be an opportunity to further engage the local community and provide ongoing communication about the program and its progress. As well, as the initial approach was focused on those within the region, there may be an opportunity to extend engagement efforts outside of the Robson Valley in order to be more proactive in gaining exposure among relevant audiences outside the region.

SWOT

Based on the background review, stakeholder feedback, review of current efforts and an understanding of the context in which the RVR Marketing Program operates, the following SWOT analysis highlights the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as it relates to marketing and promoting the Robson Valley Region as a place to live, work and invest. Strengths and weaknesses are used to describe the internal environment while opportunities and threats are used to describe the external environment.

STRENGTHS

- Marketing foundation in place (e.g., target investor sectors outlined in *Investment Attraction Marketing Strategy*, existing messaging, Coordinator work plan outlining responsibilities, RVR logo, and tools such as website, social media channels, videos)
- Consistent application of RVR logo/visual identity
- Video success stories receive positive feedback and high number of shares on Facebook
- Base of stakeholders already working with the RVR Marketing Program
- Program provides opportunities for communities to come together and discuss and collaborate
- Regional assets consistently highlighted throughout communications
- Positive impressions about the Robson Valley Region
- Interest and potential support among stakeholders; potential partners willing to take part in sharing information and offering ideas

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of targeted approach to development and distribution of marketing materials, as such efforts may not be reaching intended audiences
- Lack of engagement and ongoing communication with target audiences
- Limited information about the RVR Marketing Program - limited awareness of program, lack of knowledge about current status of program
- Positioning and key messages are at times repetitive, unclear, disorganized
- Current lack of coordinator to oversee the program
- Limited marketing budget and staffing resources
- Lack of relevant data for specific target investor sectors (e.g., statistics, current investment opportunities, etc.)
- Lack of measurement/difficulty in tracking tangible results, success unclear

OPPORTUNITIES

- Positive lifestyle traits that can be leveraged – e.g., outdoor, natural, recreation, sense of community, quality of life, etc.
- Affordable housing and land; lower living and business costs
- Marketing opportunities presented by Lone Eagle investors, Agriculture investors and Tourism investors sectors
- Highlight positive perceptions of the region, available investment opportunities, success stories, tell the Robson Valley Region story
- Potential for increased collaboration with tourism organizations due to existing tourist base and tourism businesses in the area

THREATS

- Challenges/limitations with rural area - e.g., remoteness, unreliable internet, lack of housing, lack of jobs, sustainability of schools, etc.
- Challenges of running business - e.g., not enough customers/workers, linkages to regional supply chain, etc.
- Perceptions of communities within the Robson Valley Region not being open to change, both residents and governments
- Perception of local governments not being business-friendly
- Limited availability of land - e.g., housing, agricultural, land parcels, etc.
- Significant challenges in some of the target investor sectors beyond the program's control (i.e., Forestry & Government Services)



MARKETING OBJECTIVES

MARKETING OBJECTIVES

A key component for effective marketing is to define a core set of objectives that clearly outline what marketing efforts are striving to accomplish. In order to support the economic development opportunities and efforts of the Village of McBride, Village of Valemount and Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, the following objectives will guide the Robson Valley Region Economic Development Marketing Program's marketing strategies and activities over the coming three years:

- Build positive awareness of and interest in the "Robson Valley Region" as a place to live, work and invest among target audiences, both within and outside the region.
- Provide access to information and increase knowledge about the investment opportunities in the region
- Establish connections and increase engagement with key audiences
- Develop systematic processes and procedures for evaluating program efforts



TARGET AUDIENCES

TARGET AUDIENCES

The *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Strategy 2013* identified five target investor sectors: Lone Eagles, Agriculture, Tourism, Forestry and Government Services. And through the stakeholder engagement process, the RVR Marketing Program Steering Committee identified three target investor sectors as marketing priorities for the program: **Lone Eagle Investors**, **Agriculture Investors** and **Tourism Investors**.

When developing and implementing marketing strategies for the RVR Marketing Program, it will be helpful to go beyond the target investor sectors and further classify and define audiences. By understanding the various needs of specific target audiences, marketing efforts can be tailored in order reach them efficiently and effectively.

Further, to date, the RVR Marketing Program has taken a local approach with efforts to raise awareness and create buy-in among the communities within the region. While engaging with the local community will continue to play a role moving forward, further emphasis should be placed on proactively reaching key audiences outside of the Robson Valley Region.

POTENTIAL INVESTORS

Characteristics (Demographics/Psychographics)

The demographic and psychographic characteristics outlined in the *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Marketing Strategy* provide valuable and key insight into the three priority sectors of Lone Eagle investors, Agriculture investors and Tourism investors.

These demographics (e.g., age, gender, education, etc.) and psychographics (e.g., attitudes, motivations, values, etc.), will help further define potential investors which can then be used when developing and refining marketing efforts.

Lone Eagle Investors

Early retirees who have had a successful career or business venture. They are often migrating from the Lower Mainland of B.C, Edmonton, or occasionally from Europe.

- Empty nesters wanting to stay in touch with their young grandchildren who are current residents
- Successful professionals with a minimum of 10 years in the workforce, more likely 20 or 30
- Healthy recreationalists who love the outdoors, mountains and travelling
- Independent thinkers that enjoy the belonging of a close-knit community
- Looking for good investment opportunity and may own recreational property in the RVR
- In search of rural charms such as calm, clean environment and strength of community
- Expects urban amenities such as quality products and grocers, unique shopping and cultural events

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Come from an urban centre; current residents of communities east of the Rockies (Edmonton) or Lower Mainland, BC, on a smaller scale Europe ▪ Conducts research on potential locations including sector specific qualities and real estate by internet, and then visits the community, often more than once ▪ Appreciates economic development assistance, especially first-time investors
Agriculture Investors Current farming families from elsewhere in BC, second career farmers from Lone Eagles target markets, and particularly those interested in value-added businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Professionals interested in moving to the country and starting up a farm ▪ Young people, potentially with families that are passionate about the farming lifestyle ▪ Families who are currently farming in BC and interested in selling their land for profit and purchase land in a good growing area ▪ Farming families who may also relocate from further afield, such as from Europe or other countries ▪ Second career farmer entering farming after successful career or investment in other areas (maybe in mid-40's/early-50's) ▪ Often investing as a couple with a shared interest in the outdoors, the rural lifestyle, and enjoy farming ▪ Often have an empty nest, either because children have grown or because they do not have children ▪ Ideally, has some business experience and/or funds to invest in processing, packaging and marketing local produce ▪ Care about food systems and community ▪ Independent and adventurous ▪ Physically healthy, enjoy the outdoors and physical labour ▪ May have experience in farming
Tourism Investors Agricultural enthusiasts (i.e., college students/Lone Eagles/Willing Workers on Organic Farms) interested in opening an agri-tourism business such as a farm or ranch, or recreational tourists that are currently visiting the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth in their early 20's interested in local agriculture and agri-tourism, likely without start-up capital (Agri-tourism) ▪ Young families seeking a place to farm where they can own land, likely with some financing from the sale of a previous business (Agri-tourism) ▪ Youth in their 20's and early 30's who are passionate about winter motorized sport, potentially with some financing from current employment, or without start-up capital (Recreational Tourists) ▪ Early retirees seeking a new experience with savings that they are interested in investing ▪ Dedicated to their sport and/or passionate about the agricultural lifestyle ▪ Active and enjoy the outdoors ▪ Adventurous and seeking a new experience

Both Inside & Outside RVR

It is important to note that potential investors include both those living within the Robson Valley Region as well as those from outside the area. They may be residents looking to start or purchase an existing business or current business owners looking to diversify and expand their business. They may also be entrepreneurs or businesses from outside the region actively looking to open a business or relocate their existing business to the Robson Valley Region. Further, potential investors may also be visitors (e.g., such as a tourist, business traveler, someone visiting family and friends or owners of recreational property in the area) who after they visit the region may consider relocating to the area.

PARTNERS & INFLUENCERS

This audience is made up of partners who work directly with the RVR Marketing Program to actively market and promote the Robson Valley Region (e.g., organizations that help distribute marketing materials or include information/a link to the discoverRVR.ca website on their websites) as well as influencers who can help shape the opinions of others and encourage them explore and invest in the Robson Valley Region. These partners and influencers can be found both within and outside of the Robson Valley Region. Further, while some partners and influencers are economic development related (e.g., BC Economic Development Association), others may be sector-specific (e.g., Canadian Federation of Independent Business, BC Snowmobile Federation, WWOOF Canada, etc.).

Partner and influencer audiences include:

- Local Businesses – particularly those within target investor sectors or those with the ability to reach key audiences (e.g., accommodations, tourism operators, local farmers markets, etc.)
- Associations/Organizations – range from economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, tourism DMOs, sector-specific associations, etc.
- Government – includes local, regional, and provincial government parties including elected officials and economic development offices/departments
- Residents – includes those currently living in the Robson Valley Region as well as former residents living elsewhere, but still connected to the region
- Media – includes local, regional and national media and sector-specific publications



MARKETING STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

MARKETING STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Village of McBride, the Village of Valemount and the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George all have economic development efforts taking place through various programs and incentives to encourage investment in the Robson Valley Region. To support and promote these economic development efforts while working to achieve the marketing objectives outlined on page 35, the following recommended marketing strategies will assist in raising the profile of the region, generating interest and ultimately attracting investment to the Robson Valley Region. These strategies are designed to work in an integrated manner, where each strategy works in conjunction with the others.

- Strategy 1 – Brand
- Strategy 2 – Web & Digital Media
- Strategy 3 – Print Materials & Marketing Collateral
- Strategy 4 – Audience Engagement
- Strategy 5 – Evaluation
- Strategy 6 – Resourcing

Moving forward, the following will be key to the successful implementation of the recommended marketing strategies:

- Tailoring key messaging to specific target audiences and developing a toolbox of effective marketing materials to form a solid foundation upon which the RVR Marketing Program can then strategically reach and engage its key target audiences
- For the greatest impact, marketing efforts need to be focused on BOTH awareness and engagement – marketing tools without undertaking engagement efforts will not generate results, nor will engagement efforts without effective marketing tools
- Taking a more proactive approach in reaching target audiences outside the Robson Valley, while continuing to work with the local community
- Having the right resources in place to oversee and implement the RVR Marketing Program, both people and financial.

STRATEGY 1 – BRAND

More than just a name or logo, a brand is a sum total of how someone perceives a particular product, service or organization. Having key messaging that works in tandem to support the Robson Valley Region's logo and visual identity will help strengthen the RVR brand and increase the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

1.1 CONTINUE TO APPLY RVR VISUAL IDENTITY TO ALL TOUCHPOINTS

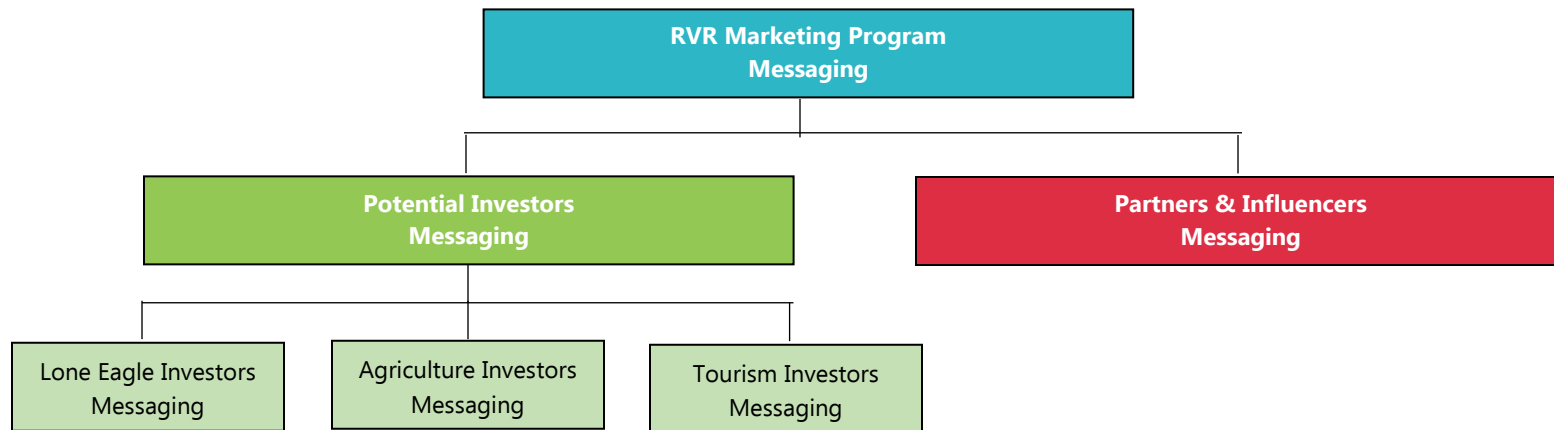
A brand's visual identity can consist of a logo/wordmark, colour palette and font/typography. The RVR visual identity has been consistently applied to the majority of the program's marketing materials and touchpoints.

- Moving forward, ensure all marketing materials fully incorporate the RVR visual identity, where applicable (e.g., pieces such as the *RVR General Information Guide* do not currently incorporate the colour palette and font/typography)
- While logo guidelines play an important role, consider removing the "Logo Usage and Access" section from the discoverRVR.ca website. As the primary target audience for the website appears to be potential investors, these guidelines may not be relevant for this audience. This information may be better placed on a page geared at partners and influencers outlining ways to support and partner with the program (e.g., such as including the RVR logo on materials), and inviting interested parties to get in touch for more information and access to the logo files and guidelines.

1.2 REFINE MESSAGING PLATFORM

A messaging platform is the foundation which guides all communications and marketing efforts. There is an opportunity to clarify and better organize the RVR Marketing Program's key messages to reduce repetition, maximize impact and tailor messages for the range of target audiences.

- With key audiences identified, organize and develop key messages based on the following structure/hierarchy:



- Outline key messages and develop a messaging platform by building upon existing communications (e.g., glean key messages from website and rack card content) and past strategy documents (*Splash Media Branding Presentation, Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Marketing Strategy*). In addition to overarching messaging, it is important to also include features & benefits (i.e., what's in it for them), proof-points that back up and support the messages, specific call to actions, and RVR contact information. Keep the following examples in mind:

RVR MESSAGING	
Key messaging that is relevant to all target audiences which should be front and centre in communications (e.g., used to introduce the region in an elevator pitch, highlighted on the home page of the website, etc.)	
Overarching	<p>The messaging should clearly articulate what the Robson Valley Region is, what it has to offer, and why one should choose the Robson Valley Region as a place to live, work and/or invest. Key points to highlight include the current lifestyle messaging already in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Robson Valley, A life worth exploring - Living in the Robson Valley Region is your chance to step away from the busy pace of city life, and embrace space, serenity, scenic views, community, outdoor adventures, and a life that anyone can afford. Your next adventure starts in the Robson Valley Region</i> ▪ <i>Discover what could be waiting for you</i> ▪ <i>Live Large</i>

Features & Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"Live Large" – beautiful clean mountain environment and a place that allows you to be independent and free from the rush of the city, with all the amenities</i> ▪ <i>Vibrant communities full of ordinary people with extraordinary stories</i> ▪ <i>Live in mountains close to nature and be active in every season</i> ▪ <i>Know your neighbours and enjoy a family-friendly small community</i> ▪ <i>Welcomes newcomers and it is easy to become involved in community life</i> ▪ <i>Live what you love everyday</i> ▪ <i>Recreational and lifestyle opportunities</i> ▪ <i>Rich with nature, fresh air, welcoming neighbours, locally grown food, outdoor recreation opportunities</i>
Proof-Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Statistics for Region & Communities - e.g., region geography, demographics, population, education, services, etc. ▪ Business - e.g., economic development initiatives, incentives, taxes, etc. ▪ Living in the Community - e.g., activities, amenities, recreation, arts & culture, etc.

POTENTIAL INVESTORS MESSAGING Broad messaging that may appeal to all potential investors, regardless of whether they are from within or outside the region.	
Overarching	<i>Live the mountain life and create your dream business in the Robson Valley Region</i>
Features & Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High quality property is available at reasonable cost ▪ Independence and the ability to own land, affordability ▪ Situated between three major centres ▪ Core services are available for individuals, or families (for those from outside the region)
Proof-Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overview of target investor sectors ▪ Real estate listings/rental listings ▪ Job postings ▪ New business information and tools, investor/business resources ▪ Businesses for sale, gaps in services ▪ Success stories/testimonials ▪ Statistics - # of businesses owners in community, % entrepreneurs, # of new businesses, etc. ▪ Economic development initiatives or incentives, where relevant

SPECIFIC INVESTOR SECTOR MESSAGING Key messaging that is specific to the three priority target investor sectors.			
Sector	Lone Eagle Investors	Agriculture Investors	Tourism Investors
Overarching	<i>Ideal move for those looking to escape the hustle of city life, and can work or live from just about anywhere</i>	<i>Back to our roots, growing our own food and living with family in a healthy sustainable way</i>	<i>Contribute to a tourism region that has a strong and growing reputation</i>
Features & Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offers great life/work balance ▪ Independent professionals run successful businesses from the Robson Valley Region ▪ Great for those who can work from anywhere; remote and virtual workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Own your own farm in beautiful surroundings, good air, soil, climate and a long growing season ▪ Land is available at a reasonable cost to support a farming family ▪ Good inventory of available rural and agricultural land ▪ Great growing conditions - virgin land suitable for organic farming, abundant water and sunshine and fertile soil ▪ Examples include root vegetables, cabbage, kale, garlic, greenhouses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Region draws healthy volume of tourism traffic ▪ Winter – snowmobiling, hiking, skiing, etc. ▪ Summer – mountains, water sports, hiking, ATVing, biking, etc.
Proof-Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opportunities in the sector – service gaps in the region ▪ Successful businesses/case studies ▪ Small business/entrepreneur statistics - % entrepreneurs, % small business, industries ▪ Small business resources ▪ Economic development initiatives or incentives, where relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Available agricultural land – listings ▪ Land characteristics and statistics ▪ Case studies on agriculture, organics, etc. ▪ Viable crops ▪ Economic development initiatives or incentives, where relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tourism indicators, statistics, occupancy rates, population increases during tourism season, attendance figures at events ▪ Successful tourism businesses ▪ Business opportunities complementing tourism businesses ▪ Economic development initiatives or incentives, where relevant

PARTNERS & INFLUENCERS MESSAGING

Key messages about the RVR Marketing Program to help ensure influencers and partners can easily access the information relevant to them.

Overarching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What is the Robson Valley Region Economic Development Marketing Program?▪ Goals/Objectives▪ Who's behind it/partners (e.g., Region District of Fraser-Fort George, Village of Valemount, Village of McBride)
Features & Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Why the Robson Valley Region?▪ Target investor sectors and top reasons to invest▪ Ways to support/partner program and promote the Robson Valley Region (e.g., Business Ambassador Program, generating WOM, display marketing materials, online/digital links, social media likes, shares and tags, etc.)▪ Benefits of helping to promote the Robson Valley Region (e.g., attract investment, benefits community as a whole, benefits businesses, grow customer base, etc.)
Proof-Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ List of current/new partners and supporters▪ Program process, successes and results (e.g., # of partners, # of new partners, # of events hosted or attended)▪ Case studies demonstrating how others are partnering with the program

- Further, to avoid confusion, outline naming conventions for the program – e.g., the program should be referenced as “RVR Economic Development Marketing Program” or “RVR Marketing Program” but not “RVR Program”.
- Apply the appropriate key messaging throughout all relevant marketing materials (e.g., website, printed materials, investment overview pieces, presentations, etc.).

STRATEGY 2 – WEB & DIGITAL MEDIA

The RVR Marketing Program has an established website and social media channels. However, opportunities exist to optimize the program's web/digital presence.

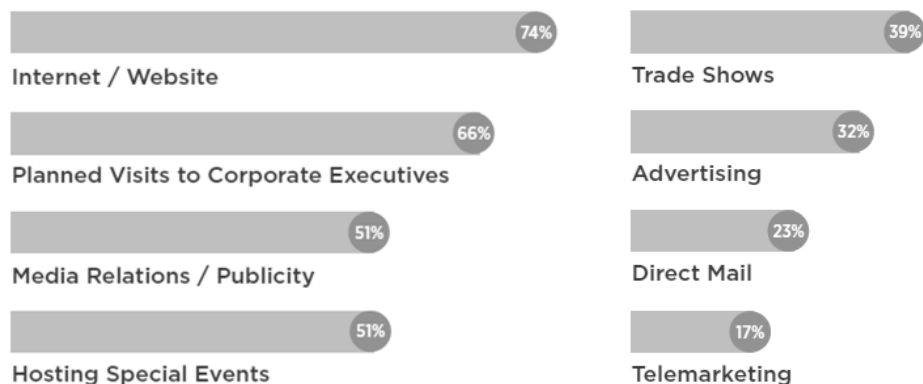
2.1 REFINE & ENHANCE DISCOVERRVR.CA WEBSITE

A well-designed website that has the right information and is user-friendly is a key component for any economic development organization.

BEST PRACTICE/CASE STUDY: IMPORTANCE OF WEBSITE & KEY CONTENT

A study by Development Counsellors International (DCI), *Winning Strategies in Economic Development Marketing 2017*, found that having an internet/website presence was the most effective marketing technique:

(% Rating 4 or 5 on a 5-Point Scale)



Further, 50% of corporate executives and 87% of location advisors stated they were likely or very likely to visit an economic development organization's website during their next site search. And only 9% stated they would be not at all likely to visit the website.

(continued on next page)

BEST PRACTICE/CASE STUDY: IMPORTANCE OF WEBSITE & KEY CONTENT

Respondents were asked to identify the top five most useful features of a website: incentive information (57%), demographic information (48%), searchable database of available buildings & sites (44%), workforce statistics (43%) and comparisons to competitor locations (39%).



The website imaginekootenay.com launched in late 2015 and brought together the work of two separate programs – Invest Kootenay and Work West Kootenay – creating a single hub of information for people interested in relocating to the area by highlighting employment opportunities, businesses for sale, as well as the many lifestyle benefits unique to the Kootenays.

Along with the website, Imagine Kootenay effectively leverages multiple strategies such as its strong brand and messaging, social media, print & marketing collateral, partnerships with stakeholders (e.g., multiple community partners, tourism DMOs, colleges, etc.), media relations and the like. Their integrated marketing approach has yielded results – as of 2017, more than 2,000 potential investors had registered their interest in the region and 35 verified investments listed opportunities representing \$9.8 million in direct investment.



As there are many layers and pages of information on website, there is an opportunity to improve the organization of the website and make it more informative and user-friendly.

- Conduct a review of the navigation and architecture of the website to identify ways to streamline the organization of the content and make it more intuitive. For example:
 - Identify ways to simplify the navigation, particularly for those who may not be familiar with the priority investor sectors (e.g., consider broader sections such as “About Robson Valley”, “Invest”, “Work”, “Move”, “Live”).
 - Look for ways to collapse and reorganize information so it can be accessed in a user-friendly manner (e.g., streamline the secondary navigation and reduce the number of pages by combining content into sub-categories of information).
 - Utilize landing pages to summarize and highlight key messages. These pages can then be used as access points and provide links or callouts to additional pages for more information, where needed.
- Prioritize information, update content and improve the user experience. For example:
 - Update content to incorporate the updated messaging platform. Ensure overarching messaging about the RVR is front and centre for all audiences, and look for ways to remove overlapping and repeating content.
 - Include tangible specific investor sector and economic-focused information and links to resources (e.g., news/events, community profiles, up-to-date demographic information, current investment opportunities, any incentives or relevant economic development initiatives). While the Region District and Village websites may contain some of this information, the goal for the RVR website is to act as marketing tool from a regional perspective and act as an initial gateway for audiences to find and access this information.
 - Work to reduce the amount of copy on the website and enhance the formatting of content (e.g., use sub-headings, bullet-point lists, rotating success stories/news, callouts, image tiles, etc.)
 - Add an “About the RVR Marketing Program” page with a high level of summary of the program and contact information for those interested in partnering or supporting the program.
 - Check content for accuracy and ensure links are live.
- Improve SEO and use of keyword research, title tags, meta descriptions, page content and page descriptions to increase traffic to the website and put the Robson Valley Region in the consideration set of those actively searching for a place to move to, work or invest.
- Consider adding fields to the “contact us” form to gain further insight into website visitors and potential leads (e.g., investor sector, how they heard about RVR, etc.).
- Ensure content is current and update as required.

2.2 REFINE & ENHANCE RVR SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

Social media serves many functions for economic development organizations, including promoting the brand, engaging with stakeholders, and driving traffic to websites. According to DCI, effective social media marketing incorporates, among other things: 1. useful, informative, and engaging content communicated in an informal tone; 2. visual elements, such as photos, videos, and infographics; and 3. elements that encourage engagement, such as calls-to-action (e.g., “visit our website”), trending or relevant hashtags, and “tagging” relevant users in posts.

There is an opportunity further leverage RVR social media channels to increase engagement, support key messaging and maximize exposure.

- Update the profile and background information on social media channels to reflect the updated messaging platform (e.g., About section on Facebook and YouTube, etc.) and utilize prime “real estate” (e.g., Facebook cover shot) to highlight key initiatives and keep content dynamic.
- Develop a content plan to ensure posts are consistent, on message, engaging and ongoing/timely.
- Continue to highlight lifestyle messaging and imagery, but also incorporate investor and economic development-focused content (e.g., local business features, acknowledge new businesses or expanded businesses in the Robson Valley Region, leading employers/employees and entrepreneurs, investor sector highlights, success stories, shop local initiatives, new program partners, events, news articles in publications about the Robson Valley Region, etc.).
- Use a variety of content types including images, video, contests, articles, and incorporate a strong call to action (e.g., “Learn More”, “Get Details” “Visit our website”, etc.)
- Use hashtags for the program (e.g., #robsonvalleyregion #robsonvalley #valemountbc #mcbridebc #dunsterbc #livelarge) and include questions in posts to increase engagement and encourage responses.
- Consider running promotions and contests to generate two-way interactions and word of mouth (e.g., contest around businesses and residents submitting their photos, stories, etc. showcasing why the Robson Valley Region is a great place to live, work and invest)
- Connect with other organizations (e.g., partners and influencers) and follow and like social media channels that complement the program to promote sharing of relevant stories (e.g., local businesses, associations, tourism DMOs, etc.), and tag organizations and users where relevant.
- Update the Robson Valley Region YouTube channel to include all available videos.
- Continue to monitor and track social media channels and respond to feedback when appropriate.

2.3 PROMOTE THE RVR THROUGH OTHER ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/INVESTOR SECTOR WEBSITES

In addition to the RVR and other local community websites, there are a number of other websites with listings that can help generate awareness of opportunities and provide information about the region.

- Leverage other websites, both economic development as well as target investor sector based, to promote the Robson Valley Region or the local communities, by seeking out directory listings and opportunities listings. Examples include:
 - townfolio.co (e.g., Valemount profile has not yet been claimed)
 - lovenorthernbc.com (e.g., McBride does not have a community profile)
 - britishcolumbia.ca (Trade & Invest British Columbia)
- Encourage owners of local businesses that are for sale or lease to list their opportunities to increase exposure for opportunities in the region (e.g., ventureconnect.ca, spacelist.com, youngagrarians.org, farmrealtor.ca, landquest.com, etc.).

2.4 EXPLORE USE OF DIGITAL ADS

Online ads are primarily used to drive traffic to an economic development website, but they can also help increase awareness of a brand.

- Explore supplementing print advertising and marketing collateral with online advertising opportunities.
- Explore placing banner ads on websites targeting potential investors, both general investment websites as well as investor sector specific websites (e.g., goodtimes.ca, westerninvestor.com, etc.)
- Continue to explore boosting posts on social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram to increase the reach of targeted content. Given the high engagement seen with the success videos, consider targeted boosts both within and outside the region.
- Ensure digital advertising, whether ads or boosted posts, are engaging and include key messages and call to actions.

2.5 CONTINUE TO BUILD IMAGE/VIDEO LIBRARY

Build upon the images used in current RVR marketing materials are successful in conveying the natural beauty, landscapes and lifestyle (e.g., recreational opportunities) the region has to offer.

- Build an image library of high-resolution photos for use on the RVR website, social media and other marketing materials.
 - Supplement the current nature/landscape type photos with those that feature entrepreneurs, businesses, community, events, etc.
 - Work with local businesses, partners, chambers of commerce, photographers to gather existing images, and identify what additional photos may need to be shot.
 - Explore running a contest to encourage businesses and residents to submit photos showcasing the region as a place to live, work and invest.
- Once distribution of current success story videos has been maximized, consider adding to the collection with new video(s).

STRATEGY 3 – PRINT MATERIALS & MARKETING COLLATERAL

Print materials and marketing collateral play an important role in providing key information to target audiences. While the program currently distributes printed rack cards for specific investor sectors and collateral that focus on generating awareness of the RVR brand (e.g. bags, tags and coasters), there is an opportunity to shift away from the branded collateral and further enhance print materials to focus on key marketing messages that resonate with the various target audiences.

3.1 DEVELOP REGIONAL PROFILE THAT HIGHLIGHTS COMMUNITY INFORMATION

A regional profile is often a key information resource for a potential investor or prospective resident. Currently, there does not appear to be a readily available regional profile about the Robson Valley Region.

- Create a profile for the region that provides an overview for those looking to start/purchase a business or considering a move to the region. In addition to information for the region overall, the profile should highlight community specific information for McBride and Valemount. The profile should include:
 - Map of region
 - Demographics
 - Cost of doing business overview – taxation, utilities, incentives, etc.
 - Quality of life/amenities – education, healthcare, recreation, etc.
- Design the profile to be user-friendly where specific information can be easily “gleaned” and include visual content to showcase the Robson Valley Region and help support the RVR brand.
- Make the profile available as an electronic version that is posted on the website and can be emailed to those who inquire. Also produce printed hard copies for distribution at meetings, tradeshow and the like.

3.2 DEVELOP INVESTMENT SPECIFIC OVERVIEW & UPDATE OPPORTUNITIES SHEETS

In addition to the regional profile, additional information pieces geared specifically to investing in the Robson Valley Region should also be available.

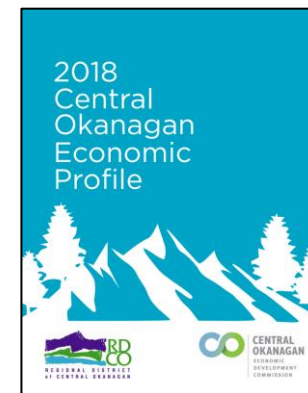
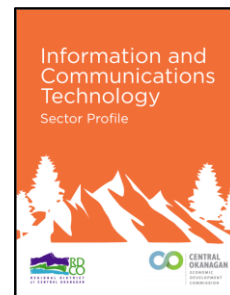
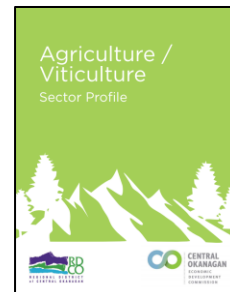
- Create an investment specific lure piece to act as a “general investment” marketing piece to provide “quick facts” and provide an overview of information for investors. This should include any incentive information, rental rates, key benefits of doing business in the community, etc. (see Strategy 2.1),

- Update the “Opportunities” sheets (Active Retirees, Agri-Food, Forestry, Business and Professional, and Tourism) currently found in the Economic Opportunities section of the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George website to reflect the RVR Marketing Program brand and updated messaging for each of the target investor sectors.
- Ensure that all the pieces include a call to action and directs prospective investors to the website and/or an RVR economic development representative.
- Make the overview and opportunities sheets available on the website, as well as in hard copy so they can be handed out during tradeshows and conferences, emailed/mailed to specific targets, or given to partners who can then distribute them.
- Phase out the existing RVR rack cards and replace with the investment overview and the revised opportunities sheets. The printed overview should be placed in all locations where the RVR rack cards are currently displayed. Also, work towards expanding distribution to other high-profile locations (e.g., Prince George Airport, Mount Robson Visitor Centre, etc.).

BEST PRACTICE/CASE STUDY: REGIONAL ECONOMIC & INDUSTRY PROFILES

As part of an ongoing strategy to shift focus from “lifestyle attractiveness”, the Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission (COEDC) developed an Economic Profile to promote the region and its seven communities and supplementary Industry Profiles highlighting the value proposition for five key sectors. With matching funding from the Global Affairs ICCI program, the Economic Profile highlighted the competitive advantages of the communities within the region with a site selection lens in mind, while the Sector Profiles showcased the high-growth industries of agriculture/viticulture, information & communications technologies, manufacturing/aerospace, healthcare and animation/film.

The project has had a reach of approximately 22,000 persons using a number of methods. This includes the COEDC email list, a social media campaign using Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Okanagan Young Professionals Instagram, distribution to federal and provincial partners, trade commissioners located in Canada, US, India and other international markets, and staff at the BC Trade and Investment Branch.



3.3 PROMOTE ASSET INVENTORIES

One of the most critical pieces of information that is required in responding to inquiries is the inventory of available opportunities for prospects looking to live, work or invest in the Robson Valley Region.

- Compile asset inventory based on ongoing information provided by key parties (e.g., Villages, Chambers of Commerce, real estate agencies, etc.) including:
 - Land for development – identify available or potentially suitable for industrial, commercial, residential, and mixed use
 - Land for agriculture – provide information on agricultural potential and land
 - Properties for commercial use – listing of buildings or spaces for lease that are available/suitable for commercial and/or industrial tenants and/or redevelopment
 - Potential business opportunities – highlight gaps in services that an investor can fill, businesses for sale, etc.
- Communicate and share asset inventories on an ongoing basis through various touchpoints such as an asset inventory sheet, highlighting opportunities on the website and social media, etc.

3.4 DEVELOP TARGETED PRESENTATIONS

When meeting with potential investors, partners and influencers, targeted presentations provide an avenue to focus on key messaging that is relevant to the audience at hand.

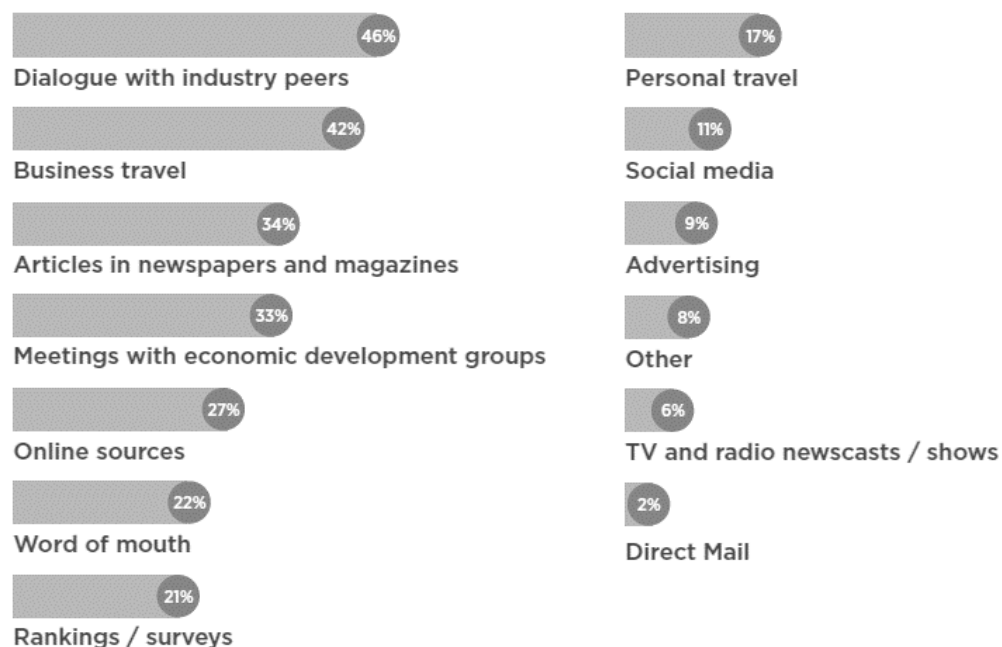
- Develop audience specific RVR branded presentations with targeted messaging:
 - For target investor sectors, highlight relevant key data/statistics and potential opportunities, etc.
 - For potential RVR partners, provide information about the RVR Marketing Program, ways to work together, how the program can assist their organization, success stories, etc.
- Incorporate success story videos into the presentation, where relevant
- Include a call to action with intended outcomes.
- Replace the “*RVR – General Information Guide*” document with targeted presentations that are also available in electronic format and can be emailed to interested parties.

STRATEGY 4 – AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Marketing tools such as websites, social media, investment overviews and the like all play a key role in generating awareness. However, there needs to be increased engagement with key audiences, both inside and outside the Robson Valley Region in order for the RVR Marketing Program to be successful.

BEST PRACTICE/CASE STUDY: LEADING SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Although many factors influence awareness of a location for investment purposes, *Winning Strategies in Economic Development Marketing 2017* has found that conversations with industry peers is the top influencer of perceptions of an area – and it has consistently been the leading source of information since 1996. The other top responses include business travel, articles in newspapers and magazines, and meetings with economic development groups.



4.1 IMPLEMENT FORMAL TOOL TO TRACK INVESTOR/PARTNER/INFLUENCER LEADS

While the *Robson Valley Region Investment Attraction Marketing Strategy* identified a “lead protocol”, there does not appear to be a formalized tool in place to track leads for investors, partners and influencers for the RVR Marketing Program.

- Establish a formalized tool to track potential leads, stakeholders and the like. The tool can be as simple as a spreadsheet or it can be a customer relationship management software platform. The tool should identify information such as:
 - Contact info (e.g., name, title, organization, email, phone number, etc.)
 - Source of first contact/interaction (e.g., met at tradeshow, click from website, who they talked to/met with, date, etc.)
 - Type of lead (i.e., investor, partner, influencer)
 - For Investors:
 - Investment interest (e.g., what sector, what location, etc.)
 - Prospect activities, (e.g., description of interactions such as info mailed, phone call, meeting, date of activity, who was involved, etc.)
 - For Partners and Influencers:
 - Type of partner/influencer (e.g., local business, government, media, association, etc.)
 - Engagement activities/interactions (e.g., they will distribute rack cards, they will display poster, follow-up phone call, date of activity, who was involved, etc.)
- The tool should be shared across key RVR representatives involved with the RVR Marketing Program to access and update.

4.2 ESTABLISH BUSINESS AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

To build upon the initial awareness generated within the region and continue conversations, the RVR Marketing Program should establish a “RVR Business Ambassador” program.

- Identify influential business leaders/organizations in the community (e.g., Valemount and Area Recreation Development Association, Chambers of Commerce, etc.) that have access to priority target investors whether as business partners, suppliers and/or as clients/customers to help promote the Robson Valley Region.
- The “RVR Business Ambassador” program can be developed in partnership with the McBride & Valemount Economic Development Offices in an effort to encourage key business leaders/organizations to act as RVR Ambassadors in their daily business interactions, and identify opportunities to attract new investment in the community.

- For ambassadors, clarify what it means to be an “RVR Business Ambassador”, what is expected of their role and what tools are available to help them (e.g., provide them with printed materials, outline gaps in services that their network can possibly fill, ensure they are aware of where to find information on the RVR website, etc.).
- Consider hosting a program launch event to raise awareness and hold annual meetings subsequently. Ongoing communication with RVR Ambassadors will help keep the program top-of-mind - inform them of new developments that may be of interest to their peers, share other ambassador success stories to act as inspiration and motivation.

BEST PRACTICE/CASE STUDY: AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Numerous communities have established “Ambassador” programs as a method to help promote economic development in the area.

As stated by the EDAC, Canada’s national organization of economic developers, *“Because of all the choices and marketing messages out there, an economic development brochure or a DVD has maximum impact when it is being handed over by a trusted source. Ambassadors bring a new level of credibility to your economic development efforts. They harness word-of-mouth potential to more effectively bring your brand to other businesses and skilled workers.”*

For example, the Niagara Economic Development (NED) has introduced an “Ambassador” program whereby individuals can become “Digital Ambassadors” by agreeing to share information on their own social media, or “Business Ambassadors” by meeting with potential investors, or by having their “Business Profile” highlighted by NED via a testimonial or as a success story. They’ve also simplified the process by creating a contact form, it’s user-friendly for both interested parties to submit information and NED to collect information.

NIAGARA AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Niagara Economic Development is introducing the Niagara Ambassador Program, designed to generate excitement and positive conversation about the region’s business climate. The program is intended to engage local business leaders, community leaders, and general cheerleaders for Niagara to promote Niagara as a great place to do business.

This program is open to anyone who loves Niagara and wants to be part of the conversation to positively grow our economy and community.

You can choose to participate in one (or all!) of the following ways:

- **Digital Ambassador** – we’ll email you Niagara facts, figures and news with pre-populated social media status updates that you can share across your social networks
- **Business Ambassador** – we’ll get in touch if there’s a business investor visiting Niagara, and they want to meet with similar businesses
- **Business Profile** – we would find out why you think Niagara is a great place for business, and would develop content around your experience to promote Niagara

BECOME AN AMBASSADOR

If you’re excited about being an agent to tell Niagara’s story, fill out our form below to get started.

4.3 LEVERAGE PUBLIC RELATIONS TO GENERATE EARNED MEDIA

Winning Strategies in Economic Development Marketing 2017 has found that media relations and publicity is one of the most effective marketing tools for economic development groups.

- Develop and maintain a media list of newspapers, websites, blogs, and publications, including contact name, position, etc. For example:
 - Local/Regional Media: The Rocky Mountain Goat, Valemount Community TV, Prince George Citizen, Prince George Daily News, Kamloops This Week, Kamloops Matters, The Jasper Fitzhugh, The Jasper Local, etc.
 - Provincial/National Media: BC Business Magazine, Business in Vancouver, BC Magazine, Douglas, Westworld BC, Maclean's, G&M Report on Business, etc.
 - Economic Development: Invest in BC, BC Broker, Canadian Business Journal, Western Investor, etc.
 - Target Investor Sectors: Snoriders West, SuperTrax, Good Times, Today's Senior, Small Farm Canada, Modern Agriculture, etc.
- Create effective, newsworthy media releases on business-related successes on an ongoing basis to maintain contact with media, particularly for local/regional publications. Also, ensure media releases are posted on the RVR website and social media channels.
- Identify and explore less conventional opportunities for media exposure such as submitting entries or pitches to TV shows like CBC's Still Standing
- Evaluate and explore paid advertising/media opportunities (e.g., print ads, digital ads, sponsored editorials, paid blogs, etc.) to ensure they are strategic and have the potential to generate awareness and exposure among target audiences, as needed.

4.4 EXPAND PARTICIPATION IN ASSOCIATIONS/ORGANIZATIONS

Belonging to associations and organizations relevant to economic development and target investor sectors will help expand industry networks, build relationships and also help keep abreast of industry trends and best practices.

- Identify the current various associations and organizations RVR representatives (e.g., the Regional District, the Economic Development Officers of McBride and Valemount) are already involved with and identify other associations and organizations (i.e., for general economic development and target investor sectors), that would be beneficial for the RVR Marketing Program. The following are some examples:
 - Economic Development: BC Economic Development Association, BC Rural Centre, Economic Developers Association of Canada
 - Target Investor Sectors: Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Wilderness Tourism Association of BC, BC Snowmobile Federation, agricultural education programs, etc.
- Leverage participation by attending events/conferences, delivering presentations, and accessing resources. For example, if the Economic Development Officer of McBride is already a member of the BC Economic Development Association, consider attending the annual Minister's Dinner – it allows for discussions with staff from ministry departments and networking receptions with BC Trade and Investment representatives.

4.5 EXPAND PRESENCE AT EVENTS, TRADESHOWS & CONFERENCES

The RVR Marketing Program should explore becoming a more active participant in selected events that can provide an opportunity to engage directly with key audiences and making connections. Given the need to expand the reach outside of the region, attendance at events can be an effective tool to generate awareness and knowledge about the region. As well, these events provide an opportunity for gathering intelligence about news on relevant industries, economic development best practices and the like.

- Working in conjunction with the “RVR Business Ambassadors”, start by researching and compiling a list of potential strategic business events, trade shows and conferences, with a focus on those taking place outside of the region. The list should be relevant to the region’s economic opportunities, geared towards the target priority investor sectors (e.g., business and entrepreneurship, tourism-related events, those promoting agriculture investment, etc.), and provide access to audiences from geographic areas identified based on information collected to date (e.g., elsewhere in BC, Alberta, and to a lesser extent areas such as Saskatchewan, Ontario, and UK/Europe).
- When attending events, consider whether to participate by simply attending or whether to having a table/booth set-up. Consider attending as a visitor/registrant initially and then determining whether it may merit having a booth in the future.
- Also, explore setting up an information booth at already scheduled events within the region to reach visitors (e.g., Farmers Markets, Robson Valley Music Festival, NWMRA Mud Races, Mount Robson Marathon, as well as conferences being hosted in the region).
- Display and distribute marketing materials, as appropriate. For example, if there is an opportunity to be included as a speaker, develop a targeted presentation and bring relevant investment overview and opportunities sheets; if there is a booth space, develop an engaging display complete with banners, success story videos on video loop, contest as means to gather contact information, and the like.

4.6 COMMUNICATE ON AN ONGOING BASIS

One of the challenges of the RVR Marketing Program to date has been that not everyone is aware of what is happening. Additional effort should be made to increase awareness of the work taking place and the successes achieved so that everyone is updated and informed on a regular basis.

- Whether it is a potential investor, partner or influencer who has reached out to RVR representatives, follow-up on every opportunity is crucial. Follow-up can be an in-person meeting, a telephone call or an email, and should be done on an on-going basis.
- To maintain engagement levels, provide regular updates on new developments relating to the RVR Marketing Program. For example, distribute quarterly updates through the website, social media, or publish and share press releases.
- Encourage “RVR Ambassadors”, local businesses, local chambers, partners, community associations/organizations, etc. to inform the RVR Marketing Program of related economic development and business news, and offer to help push out newsworthy announcements.

STRATEGY 5 – EVALUATION

While economic development has a number of performance measures (e.g., jobs created, capital investment, population shifts, etc.), it can be difficult to directly tie these to marketing performance. Moving forward, there are specific marketing metrics that can be used to help monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the RVR Marketing Program.

5.1 ESTABLISH & MONITOR MARKETING METRICS

Evaluate marketing activities on an ongoing basis to provide insight and guide future decisions, such as what efforts should continue, expand or be discontinued

- Identify and establish metrics to assess the various marketing activities undertaken. These can include:
 - Website traffic, including increase in unique monthly visits, sources of traffic, etc.
 - Public relations, including media coverage, impressions, positive editorial impact, key messages, etc.
 - Social and digital media engagement, including shares/likes/retweets, increase in followers, video views, etc.
 - Leads and inquiries, including number received, number of follow-ups, information packages distributed, etc.
 - Audience engagement, including number of “RVR Business Ambassadors” partnering with RVR Marketing Program, follow-up contact, number of meetings, number of events attended, etc.
 - RVR Marketing Program awareness shifts, gauged by replicating the online survey results
- Develop action items stemming from the results and outline areas for improvement.
- Share and report on the key results from evaluations and analyses on an ongoing basis.

5.2 REVIEW STRATEGIES ANNUALLY

Review marketing strategies on an annual basis to ensure the plan remains fluid and allows for the addition of new opportunities.

- Identify initiatives that have been completed and update strategies for subsequent years, as required.

STRATEGY 6 – RESOURCING

With recommended marketing strategies and activities outlined for the RVR Marketing Program, successful implementation will be dependent on the resourcing, both people and financial, allocated to support efforts.

6.1 REVISIT & CLARIFY ROLE/RESPONSIBILITY OF RVR MARKETING COORDINATOR

The RVR Marketing Program has had a part-time Marketing Coordinator whose role is to oversee the program. Working with the Steering and Advisory Committees for the program, the *Robson Valley Region Marketing Coordinator Services Work Plan* states the role was responsible for “maintaining the www.discoverRVR.ca website, developing and distributing marketing proposals and collateral materials, meeting regularly with business operators and stakeholders within the region and serves as the first point of contact for potential investors and new residents of the Robson Valley Region.” With the position currently vacant and the recent update to the marketing strategy and recommendations, there is an opportunity to clarify, and possibly redefine, the role and responsibilities of the RVR Marketing Coordinator.

- The recommended marketing strategies outlined in this document include some activities that may be considered “more marketing” and other activities that may be considered “more economic development.” The ideal candidate for this role would be a marketing professional with a background in economic development, or an economic development professional with a background in marketing. It may prove difficult to find an individual with this combination of skill sets. The Steering Committee should evaluate and determine which skill set better suits their requirements moving forward – for example:
 - If the role and responsibilities are more focused on activities such as lead generation, ongoing audience engagement through meetings and follow-ups, this may require a candidate with greater knowledge of economic development coupled with strong interpersonal, negotiation and persuasion skills.
 - This may then require the use of other contractors to carry out the more specialized marketing activities such as copy-writing messaging or graphic design to create an investment overview piece.
- The RVR Marketing Coordinator should continue to act as the “point person” and coordinator for the RVR Marketing Program, while continuing to work in collaboration with Steering Committee members. For example, the Marketing Coordinator can oversee the development of the regional profile but will need information and input from the Economic Development Officers of McBride and Valemount.

6.2 REVISIT & CLARIFY ROLE/PURPOSE OF RVR ADVISORY COMMITTEE

There may also be an opportunity to revisit the RVR Marketing Program Advisory Committee as it appears to have lost momentum and the current role and purpose is perceived to be unclear.

- Given the Marketing Coordinator is only a part-time position and Steering Committee members bring with them experience and expertise in other fields, consider establishing the Advisory Committee as a way to supplement human resources for the RVR Marketing Program.
- Appoint and leverage committee members with specific skills and abilities to help carry out activities for the RVR Marketing Program. For example, committee members can be “Business Ambassadors” for the program. If a committee member is from a Chamber of Commerce, that person can encourage local businesses to become “Business Ambassadors”. Or, if a committee member is familiar with social media, that person could be tasked with posting to the RVR Facebook/Instagram channels.

6.3 EXPLORE ADDITIONAL FUNDING

The RVR Marketing Program has an annual budget of \$50,000 (comprised of \$30,000 Northern Development Initiative Trust grant, \$10,000 Regional District of Fraser-Fort George, \$5,000 Village of McBride and \$5,000 Village of Valemount). The salary for the Marketing Coordinator has been the largest expense allocated to the annual budget to date. Assuming \$30,000 covers the coordinator salary and associated cell phone costs, there is only \$20,000 remaining for the implementation of marketing activities.

- Explore other additional available avenues for funding in order to increase reach and exposure of the RVR Marketing Program, particularly among target audiences outside the region.
 - Grant funding - Utilize the province’s economic grant funding database to search for potential funding sources for various marketing initiatives at the outset of implementation (e.g., Northern Development Initiative Trust Marketing Initiatives program).
 - Future budgets - The Regional District and/or Village Councils could choose to fund specific marketing initiatives through the annual budget process.
 - Partnerships - Partnerships can bring access to sources of funds that might not otherwise be available. For example, the RVR Marketing Program and the Valemount and Area Recreation Development Association could share exhibit space and costs at the 2020 Annual International Snowmobile Congress being held in Regina, SK. Or, there may be cooperative paid media opportunities (e.g., print ad or paid blog which could feature both the Robson Valley Region along with another partner or organization).

STRATEGY SUMMARY

The following overview of the recommended strategies for the RVR Marketing Program includes priority designation, timing, responsibility and estimated costs.

- **Priority and Timing:** The priority designation of “High”, “Medium” or “Lower” is based on factors such as timeliness (shorter- vs. longer-term actions), required marketing resources (both financial and staff), and required effort as well as impact on other existing or future marketing activities.
- **Responsibility:** With multiple partners involved in the RVR Marketing Program, responsibilities have been identified.
- **Estimated Costs:** Estimated costs have been outlined where additional/external third-party resources may be needed. The estimated costs have been allocated based on the assumption that the marketing budget will remain at \$50,000 annually over the next three years. Should this not be the case (e.g., additional funds become available), marketing efforts and estimated costs can be adjusted accordingly.

PRIORITY, TIMING & RESPONSIBILITY

STRATEGY	PRIORITY	TIMING YEAR 1	TIMING YEAR 2	TIMING YEAR 3	RESPONSIBILITY
STRATEGY 1 – BRAND					
1.1 Continue to apply RVR visual identity to all touchpoints	Medium	X	X	X	RVR Coordinator
1.2 Refine messaging platform	High	X			RVR Coordinator
STRATEGY 2 – WEB & DIGITAL MEDIA					
2.1 Refine & enhance discoverRVR.ca website	High	X			RVR Coordinator
2.2 Refine & enhance RVR social media channels	Medium	X			RVR Coordinator
2.3 Promote the RVR through other economic development/investor sector websites	Medium		X	X	RVR Coordinator & Village EDOs
2.4 Explore use of digital ads	Medium		X	X	RVR Coordinator
2.5 Continue to build image library	Medium	X	X	X	RVR Coordinator

STRATEGY	PRIORITY	TIMING YEAR 1	TIMING YEAR 2	TIMING YEAR 3	RESPONSIBILITY
STRATEGY 3 – PRINT MATERIALS & MARKETING COLLATERAL					
3.1 Develop regional profile that highlights community information	High	X		X	RVR Coordinator & Village EDOs
3.2 Develop investment specific overview & update opportunities sheets	High	X		X	RVR Coordinator & Village EDOs
3.3 Promote asset inventories	High	X	X	X	RVR Coordinator & Village EDOs
3.4 Develop targeted presentations	Medium		X	X	RVR Coordinator & Village EDOs
STRATEGY 4 – AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT					
4.1 Implement formal tool to track investor/partner/influencer leads	Medium		X	X	RVR Coordinator & Village EDOs
4.2 Establish business ambassador program	High	X	X	X	RVR Coordinator & RVR Steering Com.
4.3 Leverage public relations to generate earned media	Medium	X	X	X	RVR Coordinator
4.4 Expand participation in associations/organizations	High	X	X	X	RVR Coordinator
4.5 Expand presence at events, tradeshow & conferences	High	X	X	X	RVR Coordinator
4.6 Communicate on an ongoing basis	High	X	X	X	RVR Coordinator
STRATEGY 5 – EVALUATION					
5.1 Establish & monitor marketing metrics	Medium	X	X	X	RVR Coordinator & Steering Committee
5.2 Review strategies annually	High	X	X	X	RVR Coordinator & RVR Steering Com.
STRATEGY 6 – RESOURCING					
6.1 Revisit & clarify role/responsibility of RVR marketing coordinator	High	X			RVR Steering Com.
6.2 Revisit & clarify role/purpose of RVR Advisory Committee	High	X			RVR Coordinator & RVR Steering Com.
6.3 Explore additional funding	High	X	X	X	RVR Coordinator & RVR Steering Com.

ESTIMATED COSTS BY YEAR

YEAR 1	TIMING YEAR 1	ESTIMATED COSTS
STRATEGY 1 – BRAND		
1.1 Continue to apply RVR visual identity to all touchpoints	X	-
1.2 Refine messaging platform	X	\$4,500 - consultant
STRATEGY 2 – WEB & DIGITAL MEDIA		
2.1 Refine & enhance discoverRVR.ca website	X	\$5,000 - consultant/hosting
2.2 Refine & enhance RVR social media channels	X	-
2.5 Continue to build image/video library	X	Sponsor/donation prizing
STRATEGY 3 – PRINT MATERIALS & MARKETING COLLATERAL		
3.1 Develop regional profile that highlights community information	X	\$4,000 – consultant & production costs
3.2 Develop investment specific overview & update opportunities sheets	X	\$4,000 – consultant & production costs
3.3 Promote asset inventories	X	-
STRATEGY 4 – AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT		
4.1 Implement formal tool to track investor/partner/influencer leads	X	Start with Excel spreadsheet
4.2 Establish business ambassador program	X	\$500 - launch event
4.3 Leverage public relations to generate earned media	X	\$1,000 – writing/design/placements
4.4 Expand participation in associations/organizations	X	\$1,000
4.5 Expand presence at events, tradeshow & conferences	X	Included with Strategy 4.4
4.6 Communicate on an ongoing basis	X	-
STRATEGY 5 – EVALUATION		
5.1 Establish & monitor marketing metrics	X	-
5.2 Review strategies annually	X	-
STRATEGY 6 – RESOURCING		
6.1 Revisit & clarify role/responsibility of RVR marketing coordinator	X	\$30,000 – PT salary/WCB/cell
6.2 Revisit & clarify role/purpose of RVR Advisory Committee	X	-
6.3 Explore additional funding	X	-
ESTIMATED COSTS FOR YEAR 1		\$50,000

YEAR 2	TIMING YEAR 2	ESTIMATED COSTS
STRATEGY 1 - BRAND		
1.1 Continue to apply RVR visual identity to all touchpoints	X	-
STRATEGY 2 – WEB & DIGITAL MEDIA		
2.1 Refine & enhance discoverRVR.ca website	X	\$1,500 – updates/hosting
2.2 Refine & enhance RVR social media channels	X	-
2.3 Promote the RVR through other economic development/investor sector websites	X	-
2.4 Explore use of digital ads	X	\$1,000
2.5 Continue to build image/video library	X	Sponsor/donation prizing
STRATEGY 3 – PRINT MATERIALS & MARKETING COLLATERAL		
3.3 Promote asset inventories	X	-
3.4 Develop targeted presentations	X	\$2,500 – consultant to develop templates
STRATEGY 4 – AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT		
4.1 Implement formal tool to track investor/partner/influencer leads	X	-
4.2 Establish business ambassador program	X	\$500 – annual event
4.3 Leverage public relations to generate earned media	X	\$3,000 – writing/design/placements
4.4 Expand participation in associations/organizations	X	\$11,500
4.5 Expand presence at events, tradeshow & conferences	X	Included with Strategy 4.4
4.6 Communicate on an ongoing basis	X	-
STRATEGY 5 – EVALUATION		
5.1 Establish & monitor marketing metrics	X	-
5.2 Review strategies annually	X	-
STRATEGY 6 – RESOURCING		
6.1 Revisit & clarify role/responsibility of RVR marketing coordinator	X	\$30,000 – PT salary/WCB/cell
6.2 Revisit & clarify role/purpose of RVR Advisory Committee	X	-
6.3 Explore additional funding	X	-
ESTIMATED COSTS FOR YEAR 2		\$50,000

YEAR 3	TIMING YEAR 3	ESTIMATED COSTS
STRATEGY 1 - BRAND		
1.1 Continue to apply RVR visual identity to all touchpoints	X	-
STRATEGY 2 – WEB & DIGITAL MEDIA		
2.1 Refine & enhance discoverRVR.ca website	X	\$1,500 – updates/hosting
2.2 Refine & enhance RVR social media channels	X	-
2.3 Promote the RVR through other economic development/investor sector websites	X	-
2.4 Explore use of digital ads	X	\$1,000
2.5 Continue to build image/video library	X	Sponsor/donation prizing + \$2,500 new video(s)
STRATEGY 3 – PRINT MATERIALS & MARKETING COLLATERAL		
3.1 Develop regional profile that highlights community information	X	\$500 – update & reprint
3.2 Develop investment specific overview & update opportunities sheets	X	\$500 – update & reprint
3.3 Promote asset inventories	X	-
STRATEGY 4 – AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT		
4.1 Implement formal tool to track investor/partner/influencer leads	X	-
4.2 Establish business ambassador program	X	\$500 – annual event
4.3 Leverage public relations to generate earned media	X	\$3,000 – writing/design/placements
4.4 Expand participation in associations/organizations	X	\$10,500
4.5 Expand presence at events, tradeshow & conferences	X	Included with Strategy 4.4
4.6 Communicate on an ongoing basis	X	-
STRATEGY 5 – EVALUATION		
5.1 Establish & monitor marketing metrics	X	-
5.2 Review strategies annually	X	-
STRATEGY 6 – RESOURCING		
6.1 Revisit & clarify role/responsibility of RVR marketing coordinator	X	\$30,000 – PT salary/WCB/cell
6.3 Explore additional funding	X	-
ESTIMATED COSTS FOR YEAR 3		\$50,000