

Performance Results for 2020-21 CF West Yellowhead

Community Futures (CF) is a program that supports community economic development and builds the capacity of communities to realize their full sustainable potential. The purpose of the CF Program is to help communities develop and implement *local solutions to local problems*.

Community Futures Performance Results	2020-21
<i>Strong rural community strategic planning and implementation</i>	
1. Total number of community-based projects (new & on-going)	59
2. Total number of local and regionally-based community strategic plans developed and/or updated	8
<i>Rural access to business development services</i>	
3. Total number of business training session participants	760
4. Total number of business advisory services	1783
<i>Rural access to capital and leveraged capital</i>	
5. Dollar value of loans	\$3,230,534
6. Total number of loans	106
7. Number of jobs created/maintained/expanded through lending ¹	373

Despite the COVID-19 global pandemic, Community Futures West Yellowhead had a very successful year supporting and implementing the Community Futures program in the West Yellowhead region. CFWY focused on delivering business coaching, business training, business financing and economic development in Jasper, Hinton, Edson, Yellowhead County, Grande Cache, and its surrounding cooperatives. Our organization weathered successful changes and administered the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF) while ensuring that the work of the organization met the vision and strategic priorities set by the Community Futures West Yellowhead Board of Directors.

The first lockdown in March and April 2020 presented opportunities to Community Futures West Yellowhead to engage more businesses through coaching and information services than we have ever had before in the West Yellowhead. Staff and Board were engaged in supporting businesses in understanding the first round of lockdown restrictions with grace and integrity as staff worked from their homes and transitioned to virtual meetings and workspaces. CFWY embraced the pandemic as an opportunity to incorporate much needed changes to technology. We updated our computer workstations, changed program delivery to virtual environments, incorporated Facebook Live into our communications with our region and embraced TEAMS and Zoom to have face-to-face contact with each other and our Board when we were not able to meet in person. With help from the new RRRF loan portal, loan applications moved online and we used the new loan portal for a host of financial

¹ Estimated at the time of lending

products for our clients. A new booking system on our website for clients to book with our coaches enhanced our coaching program, and our second year of SMARTstart hosted new businesses through a virtual training and mentoring program throughout the region. Board meetings were also held online through Zoom. Technology became a much-needed discussion in the organization as we launched measures to ensure cybersecurity and website development were important priorities within the organization.

Our biggest challenge was administering the Regional Relief and Recovery Fund. CFWY did not anticipate the volume of applications that we would process; but understanding that the tourism industry is one of the main industries in the region, it is not a surprise that we financed a total of \$2,643,105 to 94 businesses and maintained 328 jobs in the West Yellowhead. Despite the additional workload expected to maintain this expanded loan portfolio over the next four years, we can be reassured that CFWY has helped almost 100 businesses survive the economic crisis caused by the global pandemic. CFWY staff and Board are proud that CFWY could contribute to the recovery of these businesses in the West Yellowhead.

Between the first and the second lockdown, in September and October 2020, CFWY staff and Board completed business walks in all five communities in our region. CFWY invited partners from around the region to visit local businesses and have a casual conversation about the local economy with business owners. Business owners could communicate their successes, challenges, and opportunities during the economic challenges of COVID-19, and any impacts that the economic crisis was having on their businesses. Taking advantage of what would become a small window to reach out to our businesses in their business spaces will help us chart the road to recovery in the West Yellowhead in the next fiscal year.

Community Futures West Yellowhead focused on our core services of business coaching, business training, business financing and community economic development in 2020/2021. Our core services continue to be the foundation of our organization and as seen in our Minimum Performance Standards, continue to be the core of our work in the West Yellowhead region. In addition, CFWY introduced new programs and ideas in 2020/2021 that were tremendously successful and through our strong and resilient teamwork, look forward to what we can accomplish in the next year. Here are some of our highlights from 2020/2021.

Moderator of Business Analyst Forum

Our Business Analyst, Tim Shain, worked virtually with the BAs and CFNA to create a business analyst forum through the lockdowns in the pandemic and it has now transformed from bi-weekly to monthly meeting. This forum allowed Business Analysts in the province to meet to ensure that the network was strong, BAs continued to have mental health support through working virtually and shared training and tips during the RRRF programming. This forum has grown under Tim's leadership and is a powerful tool to connect individuals in a valuable position in our CF offices in the province.

Economic Diversification and Energy Transition in the West Yellowhead

Funded through the Panwest Rural Opportunities Fund, this two-year project is led by our Small Business Coach, Benita Smit. This project intends to focus on the next steps to combat the shift away from a resource-based economy in the West Yellowhead and start to capitalize on the region's economic potential by diversifying into other industries, specifically renewable energy and tourism. Highlights of the first year of the project include: our

General Manager participating in the Energy Futures Community Conversations on a monthly basis; a Processing Procurement workshop with a panel of speakers and almost 50 participating businesses; a marketing workshop and coaching program; business walks throughout the region in September and October 2020; building relationships to support newcomer and Indigenous entrepreneurship in the region; and engaging local youth in energy literacy and transition.

Grande Cache and Edson Business Liaison positions

Using Regional Relief and Recovery operating dollars, CFWY made the decision to expand our staff to create two new positions in Grande Cache and Edson. The West Yellowhead is very large geographically and the organization was challenged to reach our clients to offer our core services in Edson and Grande Cache. These positions enabled us to have more “boots on the ground” and CFWY has reached more clients in Edson and Grande Cache thanks to the work of Renee Fehr, Grande Cache Business Liaison and Heather Cokes, Edson Business Liaison. The position in Edson also strengthened our relationship with the Town of Edson who contributed to the creation of this position. The position in Grande Cache increased and grew our relationship with our Indigenous partners and clients and with the surrounding cooperatives in the Municipal District of Greenview.

Town of Edson Loan Program

The Town of Edson provided funds to Community Futures West Yellowhead to administer a three-year recovery loan program. These loan funds are intended to support existing businesses and startups over the next three years in Edson as the community heads into recovery from the COVID-19 economic crisis. This loan program enables small businesses to engage in new and innovative ways to pivot in a changing economic reality and encourages startups to begin their entrepreneurial journey in Edson.

Jasper Downtown Revitalization

Through strategic surveys with businesses and residents in Jasper, CFWY partnered with the Municipality of Jasper for a CARES project focusing on a discussion of downtown revitalization. The goals of the project were to understand the desire of local downtown revitalization; generate support and buy-in from Jasper’s business community to participate in the process; and work with the Municipality of Jasper to understand downtown revitalization for future planning. This exciting economic development project was funded by CFWY, the Municipality of Jasper and a CARES grant from the Government of Alberta.

Hinton Business Plan Project

Building on the work of the Alberta Northern Rockies Tourism Alliance (ANRTA) and the Tourism Industry Business Retention and Expansion (TIBRE) project completed in 2019/2020, CFWY conducted two major activities to meet the needs of growing tourism entrepreneurship in Hinton. Working with the Discover Alberta Northern Rockies (DANR), our Community Liaison, Jax Delisle, built a marketing plan and started marketing initiatives to help local tourism operators collectively work together to market their tourism products in Hinton. A second feature of this project was to build five business plans to help create active and viable tourism products for the Hinton area. The five business plans included: night market; travel escape room; e-bike rentals; ATV rentals; and a flower and bird watching app.

Grow Yellowhead in Yellowhead County

CFWY learned how to “pivot” with this economic development project in 2020 as our original project plan included opportunities for residents and farmers to come together to share local food through various events throughout

Performance Results for 2013-14 CF West Yellowhead

the West Yellowhead. Grow Yellowhead is a joint initiative between CFWY and Yellowhead County that started in the spring of 2016 and is based on a multi-phased approach to promoting local food in the West Yellowhead region. Funded by CFWY, CARES and Yellowhead County, the third phase of the project was changed during the pandemic to ensure that farmers and food processors received marketing coaching and training to get their food products online. We have increased accessed to our online database through [Grow Yellowhead – A Yellowhead County local food initiative \(wordpress.com\)](#) and increased resident access to local products through our Facebook page Grow Yellowhead.