



ANNUAL REPORT

2017-2018

ALBERTA'S ENTREPRENEURIAL HUB



T - together
E - everyone
A - achieves
M - more

Word cloud containing names: Krista, Sheila, CONAN, BARRY, Delilah, Lori, Hussam, Wendy, Witty, Modest, and others.

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“Focused on delivering exceptional client service”



2017/18 was an exciting year at Business Link. We saw another increase in the number of aspiring and existing entrepreneurs coming to us for our free one-to-one support and guidance. The growth in the number of clients from 4,306 in 2015/16 to 7,214 in 2017/18 reflects the incredible value clients see in the services we provide. But this growth could not be managed if we didn't have staff focused on delivering exceptional client service. I am regularly in awe of the amazing commitment and passion of the Business Link team.

We also continue to work closely with our partners to ensure that our clients receive the best possible supports, and it has been incredibly rewarding to see the successes that many have achieved. Our team has worked hard to ensure that all Albertans are aware of Business Link. Our partnership and outreach activities last year alone allowed us to reach 46 communities in every corner of the province.

The past year also saw the evolution of a key partnership. In May 2016, a devastating fire hit the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB). As RMWB transitioned its focus from getting businesses back to business post-fire to supporting operational businesses in the new normal, they recognized that they did not have local support dedicated to addressing the needs of business startups. We were pleased to collaborate with them to have a resource on the ground to meet this need.

Whenever you choose to come to us, Business Link looks forward to being part of your business journey. After all, just because you're in business for yourself, doesn't mean you're in business by yourself.

Sincerely,

Gord Sawatzky
Executive Director



A NOTE FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS CHAIRPERSON

“A better way of life”

Business Link is focused on helping Albertans create their own opportunities and developing economic ventures that serve the needs of our communities. As part of our mandate to help Albertans, we have expanded our services to every corner of the province by enhancing the many ways that we connect with our clients.

Geographic expansion isn't the only way we reach out to support our communities: we help business people from diverse backgrounds, ranging from First Nations and Métis-owned businesses to youth and, most recently, laying the groundwork for a program launched next fiscal year which supports new Canadians as they seek to establish a foothold in the Canadian economy.

We are proud of the way our talented and dedicated staff work to help build a better way of life by assisting our many clients with their questions and concerns.

Sincerely,

David Allwright, PhD
Business Link Board of Directors Chairperson



MSICHANA

LORNA MUTEGYEKI

A Business Link Success Story

With both a CPA and MBA, Lorna Mutegyeki had always worked for large organizations and been responsible for huge budgets. Starting her own business had its challenges, but this was always her big plan for life. She dreamed of equipping and empowering women through the work she did and wasn't getting that satisfaction from the corporate world.

A couple of years ago she began planning for Msichana, a social enterprise which is all about women's empowerment; in fact, the name means "young woman" in Swahili. In Uganda, the company is working to equip women with the skills they need to run a successful business of their own. While they are training them to be seamstresses, they are also working with them on their personal life goals and how they can achieve them. In Canada, this translates into women realizing their power through their life choices—like the clothes they buy—and also their power to embrace who they are, whatever their body shape is.

What significant milestones have you reached?

Msichana officially launched in December 2017 with a pop-up shop at NAIT. Lorna was nervous about the event, as she wasn't sure if Edmontonians would want the product the way she was offering it. The fabrics and patterns are a deviation from the norm here, but she really wanted to incorporate the spirit of the women who make the pieces and where they come from into the products. After the launch, Lorna saw that not only did people accept what she was doing, they loved it! Keeping the momentum

going, Lorna held a second pop-up event in February 2018.

In March, Lorna opened a small shop at The Collective in St. Albert. The company doesn't just sell clothes; it also provides a

really important experience for people. It was important that the physical space allowed customers to have that cultural experience and build a connection with the brand. Even with these milestones behind her, Lorna knows that her biggest milestone yet was having the first woman graduate from the program in Uganda, to go on and start her own thriving business.

How have we helped you?

Lorna is quick to mention that she has had a lot of support with her business. In terms of planning for the business, she found great help from the self-employment program through Anderson, where she was able to build structure into things and was also introduced to us at Business Link. We helped her with her market research, saving her time and helping her to determine where her customers were. She took that information and did some really valuable primary market research with her potential customers. Since starting the business, she's received ongoing support from Business Link and other organizations such as NAIT, Startup Edmonton, and Publicity Room.

What tips would you share with other entrepreneurs?

Over the past years of planning for and running her business, Lorna has learned some great lessons to share with other entrepreneurs or hopeful business owners. She's a proponent for getting help, and early, as she knows that time can be saved by taking advantage of the support offered by local service providers. As well, she found great value in getting out there and doing it—taking a minimum viable product and getting it in front of potential customers.



Lorna in her workshop (photo by Leigh Kovessy)

Partnered on
120
EVENTS

Partnered with
46
ORGANIZATIONS

PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

It takes a community to support successful business owners

We believe that providing quality advice, support, and resources for entrepreneurs all across Alberta is something no organization can do alone. We're fortunate in Alberta to have so many organizations that work together to support entrepreneurs, and we're proud to be part of this ecosystem.

By sharing our resources, we can be more effective at reaching more entrepreneurs and have greater diversity in our support services available.



ALBERTA MOTOR ASSOCIATION

The moment a small business owner decides to take the leap and register their business is often a big step and a great opportunity for us to provide additional support at a time when there are many questions left to be answered. We are so thrilled to continue to grow our partnership with AMA and in our second year of full-time on-site business support, we helped Albertans almost 600 times!



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO

Since the Horse River Wildfire in 2016, Business Link's partnership with the RMWB has expanded from supporting the original Back to Business Resource Centre (BBRC) to providing on-site advisory support throughout the year. This year we were excited to welcome a new team member in order to continue this program full-time. Working with the RMWB has been intensely rewarding, and our Business Facilitator is now available exclusively for entrepreneurs in the RMWB!



FUTURPRENEUR

Albertans aged 18-39 continue to be the largest demographic of people thinking of starting a business, so we continue to work with Futurpreneur, maintaining our co-location partnership. As we continue partnering on events and outreach, the collaboration has allowed us to better support young startups with one-on-one support and market research.

We collaborate with numerous organizations and stakeholders all across the province to better serve Alberta's small business community. Our partnerships reach far beyond the ones highlighted above through events, outreach, and workshops.



"At the end of the day, my dream is a global village of women who support each other and build each other up."

— Lorna Mutegyeki

ALBERTA-WIDE EVENTS

2017-2018

Hosted or participated in

515 EVENTS

REACHED

12,241 PEOPLE

across the province



ALBERTA-WIDE

With staff in three locations (Edmonton, Calgary, and Fort McMurray), we were able to reach 12,241 people through training and events. 182 people accessed lawyers, accountants, and other professionals through our Ask an Expert services both on location and remotely. 858 people learned about market research, taxes, Google Adwords, and everything in between via our remote access webinars.



NORTH TO SOUTH AND EAST TO WEST

In Fort McMurray we were thrilled to be welcomed to the community as we participated in 14 events with incredible partners like Futurpreneur, Northeastern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association (NAABA), and Keyano College, among others. We also hosted our first event on Nailing Your Pitch on the First Try with Craig Elias and the Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce. Along with our partners from AWE, BDC, Futurpreneur, ATB, and the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, we presented during the Ready to Launch—Women in Business events in Fort McMurray, Red Deer, and Lethbridge. Also in southern Alberta, we participated in the Chinook Entrepreneur Challenge by training participants on market research and attending the awards event to network with entrepreneurs and other service providers. We went as far west as Jasper, presenting on market research to the Alberta Indian Investment Corporation (AIIC) Youth Camp, and as far east as Lloydminster, teaching entrepreneurs all about small business financing.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

International Women's Day falls in March, so we decided it would be the perfect time to highlight, celebrate, and boost women entrepreneurs. In Edmonton and Calgary, we hosted over 200 people at our networking events which featured a special showing of the film *Dream, Girl*. We celebrated women entrepreneurs in Fort McMurray, too, where 45 people came together to discuss the particular challenges women face in their community. This important month also saw our own Holly Atjecoutay awarded by Minister of Status of Women, Honourable Stephanie MacLean, for her participation in the Government of Alberta Status of Women Mentorship program.



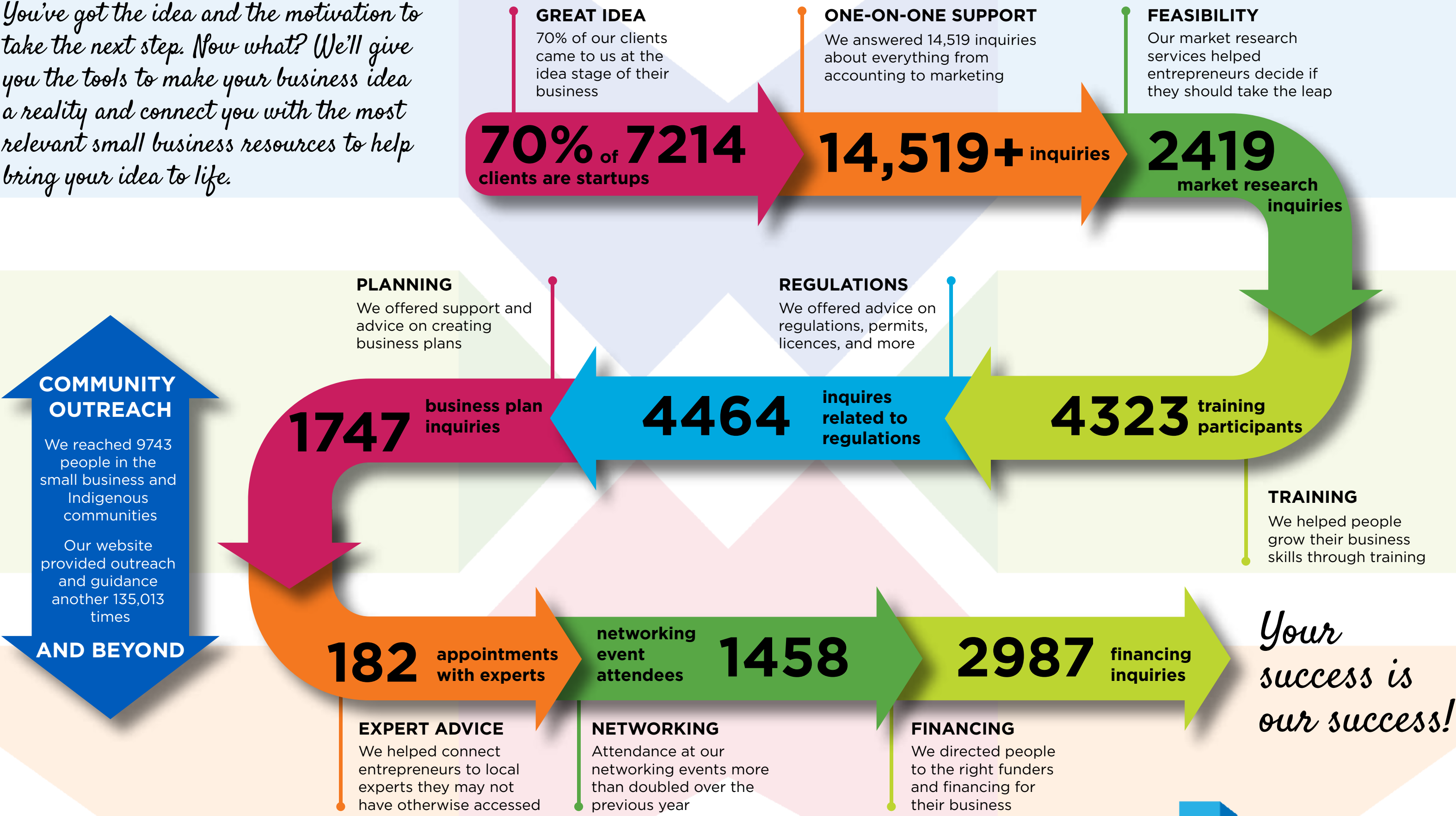
INDIGENOUS OUTREACH

Being able to bring our services directly to Indigenous communities is a part of our mandate that we are especially proud of. We travelled to 35 Indigenous communities, reaching over 1300 individuals! Highlights included the Siksika and Alexander First Nations Job Fairs and the Métis Nation of Alberta 89th Annual General Assembly. We went to Tsuut'ina ten times this past year, for a variety of presentations and workshops, reaching 65 people in that community alone.

THE ROAD TO YOUR SUCCESS

2017-2018

You've got the idea and the motivation to take the next step. Now what? We'll give you the tools to make your business idea a reality and connect you with the most relevant small business resources to help bring your idea to life.



CORPORATE CREE CONSULTING

DEBORAH GREEN

A Business Link Success Story

Deborah Green is a Cree woman from Piapot First Nation in Saskatchewan, and has lived in Blackfoot Territory for the past 20 plus years. When Alberta's economy went into a recession, Deborah's position in diversity recruitment was eliminated. Deborah saw her circumstances as an opportunity to pursue her dream, which led to the creation of Corporate Cree Consulting in 2017.

Consulting services utilizing Indigenous ways of knowing

Corporate Cree Consulting delivers diversity-focused human resources and employment consulting services to a broad range of clients. They also offer clients the creation of strategies and policies for diversity in the workplace pertaining to the four disadvantaged groups in Canada (as defined by the Employment Equity Act), and can also facilitate workshops or deliver presentations or keynote speeches.

Deborah's business is unique in that her services stem from a foundation in traditional cultural perspectives, and she has an unbreakable link to her ceremonies, knowledge and traditions. Deborah affirms that customization is the unique value delivered by Corporate Cree Consulting, and that cookie-cutter services are not something they offer.

The foundation of Deborah's consulting is based in the truths of Indigenous people in Canada: "some of it is beautiful, some of it is ugly, and some of it is horrible." The end result is that all her work is done towards leaving a legacy and paving a path for future generations so they can exist in a Canada that is less challenging than Deborah's and her parents' generation.

"I don't believe in 'one size fits all' within Indigenous work."

— Deborah Green

"[I am] part of the generation that has been directly impacted and affected by the Canadian history of residential schools and the Sixties Scoop ... These experiences have made me very passionate about making a change for future generations so they are not as impacted by those legacies of Canadian history."



Deborah Green

One of Deborah's passions is creating meaningful connections between individuals. She refers to this segment of Corporate Cree Consulting as Moccasin Connections. She feels fortunate to have met so many people from across Canada over the course of her career, and she loves to link those people together. Deborah is also a strong promoter of the hashtag #supportindigbiz, which she uses very often, and encourages others to do so as well.

Helpful entrepreneurial resources

Deborah highlights that the Indigenous Services team at Business Link really helped in her journey, and is a great starting point to get a general idea of what is involved in starting your business. She also found the webinars and workshops offered at Business Link very helpful. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) was another major support for Deborah, and they offer a fantastic toolkit for women starting businesses, which is available on their website.

Learning by example

Deborah emphasizes that, particularly in Indigenous business, mentorship is crucial because as a rule, the Indigenous community is all about role modeling. Indigenous business is a communal driving force that is holistic and rooted in leaving a legacy for future generations.

Along with another Indigenous female entrepreneur, Deborah offered a mentorship program through NWAC to support Indigenous women who are starting businesses. Deborah emphasizes that Indigenous youth entrepreneurs are integral in the landscape of Indigenous small business.

"Not only can the youth learn from us, but we can learn from them. They are so driven, determined, and influential."

Indigenous Services Highlights

The **Indigenous Business Services Facebook Group** exists for our Indigenous clients and other interested parties to meet and engage with other users and our Indigenous Business Facilitators. We welcome all 400+ group members to share information of value to the Indigenous business community in Alberta. We also encourage users to create conversations and network with others who find value in the group.

In partnership with **teconnect Lethbridge** and the **Regional Innovation Network of Southern Alberta**, we hosted the inaugural **Indigenous Entrepreneur Summit in Lethbridge** this year. 30+ Indigenous entrepreneurs, 11 service providers, and six presenters gathered for an opening prayer from a local Blood Tribe Elder followed by breakout discussions, networking, and keynote speaker Melrene Salory of Native Diva Creations.

In February, our team facilitated entrepreneurship training for 14 attentive and engaged members of the **Big Horn reserve of Stoney Nakoda First Nation** enrolled in the **NorQuest College Hospitality and Tourism Certificate Program**. Although the training was hospitality specific, some members of the group expressed interest in starting small businesses on reserve—from tattoo shops to gas/convenience stores. We were honoured to attend the graduation and present the graduates with a certificate recognizing their accomplishments!

Key achievements:
21 Indigenous businesses created, maintained, or expanded | **24** Indigenous jobs created | **35** First Nations and Métis communities visited | **76** business training presentations | **113** events with service providers and other organizations | **1979** Indigenous clients served through one-on-one support or training | **4141** Indigenous outreach connections created or enhanced

2017-2018

BARCOUNTRY

MATHIEU PLAMONDON AND KOLE KUNTZ

A Business Link Success Story

Have you ever been out hiking, fishing, or camping, and had a craving for a premium cocktail, but didn't want to lug around the heavy ingredients? If that's the case, BarCountry Dehydrated Cocktails is the company for you! The owners Mathieu and Kole are adventurers themselves, so they know packs are tight on space. All you need is a flask of your desired alcohol, some water, and one of their dehydrated cocktail mixers to enjoy your drink of choice at the end of a gruelling day.

How did you get into business?

For Kole and Mathieu, it was a long process to get to where they are today. When they met as bartenders in Calgary, they combined their knowledge of making great cocktails with their passion for the outdoors and started their company. Neither of them has a background in food chemistry, so they had to discover if creating a product like this was even possible. In early 2016 they started their research and product development phase and reached out to Business Link for help building their business plan and doing market research to validate their idea. After creating something new from scratch and trying some really disgusting stuff along the way, they were successful in getting a delicious product to market when they launched their first few mixers in March of 2017.

"It will never be perfect the first time. There is a lot of work that needs to be done continuously to be where you want to be."
— Mathieu and Kole

What significant milestones have you reached?

Just six months after their initial launch, Kole and Mathieu were meeting their sales goals and had a few local stores carrying their product. They created a buzz by attending trade shows, educating consumers, and running a successful ATB BoostR crowdfunding campaign. More recently they've completed their cohorts at ATB X and District Ventures, where they worked on growing the business, connecting with other entrepreneurs, and pitching their product to investors. At the beginning of 2018, they attended a trade show in Denver, and things have been growing exponentially since then. As they've shifted their focus to wholesale and retail, they've signed a distribution deal with an outdoor supplies retailer and have deals with MEC and Cabela's to carry their product in Canada. Through connections they made at the tradeshow and distributors carrying their product, they are now in over 500 retailers in the US!

What tips would you share with other entrepreneurs?

Mathieu and Kole became many things as they got their business up and running: food scientists, salesmen, and, most importantly, entrepreneurs living their dream. They learned a lot during that time, and have some great tips to share with anyone hoping to be successful in business.

They are huge proponents of sticking with your vision. You are the one who knows where you want your business to be and will be the one making decisions, so while you might receive external help, stick to your vision.

Another strategy is to learn from other businesses; it's always worth it to reach out and grow.

Last but not least, take time to realize your accomplishments along the way! It's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day, but you need to take a step back and appreciate all that you've done.



Mathieu Plamondon and Kole Kuntz

TEAM

2017-2018 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

David Allwright, Bow Valley College
Renae Barlow, Economic Development Lethbridge/tecconnect
Sherri Chisan, University nuhelot'jine thaiyots'j nistameyimākanak Blue Quills
Tema Frank, Frank Reactions
Stanford Hsu, NIRIX
Chris Izquierdo, Devfacto
Bob Marshall, Campus Innovation Consulting Group Inc.
Shawna Miller, Smithco Enterprises (o/a Subway)/ Louco Enterprises
Angus Ng, Alberta Motor Association
Chad Saunders, University of Calgary
Marie Soprovich, Aquarian Renovations
Chantelle Svensen-Lewis, Svensen Neighbour Recruiting Inc.

2017-2018 STAFF

In 2017, we said goodbye to several valued team members and welcomed new staff. Thank you to Krista Burdeyney, Cherie Klassen, Delilah Mah, Meredith Perich, and Brittany Prout for your service at Business Link.

Leadership Team

- Gord Sawatzky, Executive Director
- Suzanne Ebelher, Director, Client Services
- Marissa Schmidt, Marketing Manager
- Lori Todd, Controller

Administration

- Conan Wong, IT Specialist

Client Services

- Lorin Dunford, Business Advisory Team Lead
- Audrey Allotey, Business Advisor
- David Bayda, Senior Business Advisor
- Angela Groeneveld, Business Facilitator
- Jean-Jacques Mitakaro, Business Advisor
- Kari Morton, Senior Business Advisor
- Wendy Muise, Business Facilitator—Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
- Dale Schaub, Business Facilitator—Central Region
- Sheila Shand, Business Facilitator
- Barry Yewchuk, Research Advisor
- Hassan Mulji, Business Advisor—Intern
- Beth Warcholak, Research Advisor—Intern

Marketing

- Rebecca Calder, Marketing Coordinator
- Joette Forcier, Events and Programs Coordinator

Indigenous Services

- Holly Atjecoutay, Indigenous Business Facilitator
- Tina Lanceleve, Indigenous Business Facilitator
- Sammy Zoerb, Indigenous Business Support Facilitator



L-R, back: Meredith Perich, Holly Atjecoutay, Lori Todd, Jean-Jacques Mitakaro, Marissa Schmidt, Audrey Allotey, Suzanne Ebelher, Dale Schaub L-R, front: Conan Wong, Sammy Zoerb, Kari Morton, Sheila Shand, Tina Lanceleve, Cherie Klassen, David Bayda, Gord Sawatzky, Delilah Mah

2017-2018 BUSINESS LINK FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Statement of Financial Position as of March 31, 2018

Assets	2018	2017
Current Assets	\$ 443,768	\$ 345,064
Tangible Capital Assets	109,916	120,896
	\$ 553,684	\$ 465,960

Liabilities and Net Assets

Current Liabilities	\$ 186,540	\$ 144,233
Other Liabilities	—	5,275
Net Assets	367,144	316,452
	\$ 553,684	\$ 465,960

Statement of Operations Year Ended March 31, 2018

Revenue	2018	2017
Federal Funding—Core	\$ 851,407	\$ 851,407
Provincial Funding—Core	850,000	693,087
Project Funding	372,235	616,502
Amortization of Deferred Contribution	5,275	10,959
Other	132,717	79,225
	\$ 2,211,634	\$ 2,251,180

Expenses

Salaries and Benefits	\$ 1,482,315	\$ 1,441,069
Occupancy	195,058	248,719
Travel	70,829	71,468
Client Outreach	36,880	57,869
Amortization	32,030	47,021
Other	343,830	359,919
	\$ 2,160,942	\$ 2,226,065

Excess of Revenue over Expenses	\$ 50,692	\$ 25,115
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ABOUT BUSINESS LINK

Business Link is Alberta's entrepreneurial hub. We are a nonprofit organization that helps people navigate the steps toward starting their own businesses. We provide one-on-one support and guidance, market research, access to experts, training, networking opportunities, and specialized support for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

INFORMATION ABOUT OUR SERVICES

Business Link's team of in-house startup experts are there to support you all along the way. Whether you have specific questions or are just feeling a little lost, we have answers.

Business Link can help you:

- understand and navigate the startup process including regulations and licensing
- provide market research expertise to help validate your idea
- review your business plan
- explore financing options
- get connected with resources and support in the business community, including access to local business experts
- get educated about business essentials by local professionals
- share and collaborate with other small business owners

INDIGENOUS SERVICES

Business Link acknowledges the rich and diverse history of Indigenous people in Alberta. Our Indigenous Services team travels across the province to increase awareness of entrepreneurship and provide Indigenous-specific business training directly within First Nation and Métis communities. We also serve First Nation, Métis, and Inuit entrepreneurs and small business owners through one-on-one advice and guidance. Our focus is on ensuring that our Indigenous clients receive the best possible supports, and we work closely and collaboratively with other service organizations, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to maximize the help our clients receive.

CONTACT BUSINESS LINK

For help anywhere in Alberta, call us at our toll free number or send us an email.

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Email

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or fill out the form online at <https://businesslink.ca/contact-us>

Phone

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