

Business Link Annual Report 2019-20: Message from the CEO

2020, WOW what a year it has been. On June 10, 2019 I started at Business Link, proud to be the newest member and leader of such an amazing organization. Over the course of 2019-20 a lot of changes have happened, but never did we think that the last two weeks of our fiscal 2019-20 year would present us with the biggest challenge and change we have ever seen as an organization or as a world.

What I can say is that I am incredibly proud of our entire team, in a year of change they responded to the COVID-19 challenge with tremendous grace under pressure and displayed incredible professionalism, dedication and enthusiasm.

But let's take a step back and talk about the year that was before COVID-19. The work that Business Link does in the Alberta entrepreneurship community is invaluable, and there are so many opportunities for us to expand our reach and our partnerships, and we really worked towards that over the last year. As any new leader to an organization does, I took a critical look at the organization with the outsider's lenses, and with my deep knowledge of the entrepreneur landscape and the entrepreneurial experience, looked at our team, our work and our communities for areas where we could revise and improve services. We also looked at some of the things we did and really challenged ourselves on whether we wanted to continue to do them.

So, what did we accomplish in 2019-20, well as you will see in this report we did amazing work with outreach and entrepreneurship support, but we also did things that no one sees or understands that make an incredible difference to how we support entrepreneurs. Here are just a few of those things:

1. We updated our IT infrastructure, moving all our systems into the cloud to increase access anywhere, anytime. As 50% of our team works remotely and from all over Alberta, this was vital to our ability to continue to grow and service entrepreneurs where they are when they need it.
2. We implemented new systems for tracking and accountability and integrated them for seamless service to our entrepreneurs and our staff. Our new CRM allows us to track the full client journey and integrate with all our social media and marketing platforms so we can track how and when our clients interact with us and serve them better. Our new HRIS, expense and project management platforms allow us to better manage our team internally, increase productivity and enhance tracking and accountability.
3. We built out new policies for working at home and working remotely. Having these in place in late 2019, helped us make the transition to working from home when COVID hit so much easier.



4. We increased our capacity to deliver customize programming. We decided to work with service providers and entrepreneurs to understand their needs, and then partner to create customized workshop that are developed on-demand to meet entrepreneurs' needs when they need it.
5. We built out a new organization structure and increased our leadership capacity, creating cross-functional teams and building performance management systems that give staff clear direction, action and attainable goals to make their jobs easier and them more productive.

And that is just a few of the initiatives that we undertook to meet the needs of entrepreneurs in the best way possible.

Finally, I want to comment on Business Link and our belief in diversity. Current events have shown more than ever before that there is no level playing field and that diversity is not valued by all people and in all circumstances. I would like to say that at Business Link, we don't just pay lip service to diversity. Many of our team members have experienced firsthand racism, and in the face of it all, they are still optimistic, hardworking and believe in the good in people. I am proud that I lead an organization the truly walks the talk when it comes to diversity. We are a diverse group of people from all walks of life – women, men, of different ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, religion and sexual orientation – and at the core of our beliefs and what we practice every day is the value that this brings to our organization. The different experiences each one of us brings, the recognition that we need to address these in what we do, the respect we have for each other and where we come from. I am proud that we as an organization can stand up and say we reflect the diversity in our society and we treat everyone with respect, equality and consider the experience and the person not colour, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

Finally, it cannot be said enough that without the support of our funders, the Government of Canada, Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Western Economic Diversification and Government of Alberta, Jobs, Economy and Innovation, we would not continue to be able to service entrepreneurs. Their ongoing support for almost 25 years has made a significant difference to Alberta's entrepreneurs, and we look forward to working with them for many more years as we work through the challenges that COVID-19 has put before us and Alberta entrepreneurs.



Thank you also to our board for their ongoing support, dedication and time to be involved with Business Link and their continued dedication to Alberta entrepreneurs.

Barbara McKenzie
CEO, Business Link

