



April 2022

Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce
**Regional
Workforce Development
Strategy**

City of Grande Prairie | County of Grande Prairie | MD of Greenview | and Surrounding Communities



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The **Regional Workforce Development Strategy** is a collaborative project led by the Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the City of Grande Prairie, County of Grande Prairie, Municipal District of Greenview, Northwestern Polytechnic (formerly Grande Prairie Regional College), and Alberta Labour and Immigration.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the approximately 800 stakeholders who contributed their feedback, ideas and expertise to this community-driven study. Stakeholders include employers; employees; job seekers; Northwestern Polytechnic (formerly Grande Prairie Regional College)¹; the Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce; Indigenous communities, public administration and agencies municipal governments; the provincial government; employment service agencies; and community agencies.

We acknowledge the Treaty 8 territory – the ancestral and traditional territory of the Cree, Dene, as well as the Métis. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands since time immemorial. We recognize the land as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on.

¹ Grande Prairie Regional College received polytechnic designation and in March 2022 was officially rebranded “Northwestern Polytechnic.” From this page on, the document will refer to the postsecondary institute by its new name.

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1. THE REGION



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The Region is located in northwestern Alberta, Canada and includes the City of Grande Prairie, County of Grande Prairie, Municipal District (MD) of Greenview and the communities within their borders. This vast geographic area has a diverse economic base that includes forestry, oil, natural gas, coal, agriculture, construction and manufacturing, as well as tourism, hospitality and retail. The Region spans nearly 40,000 square kilometres and acts as a gateway and resource hub for northwestern Alberta. Its largest centre, the City of Grande Prairie, is located approximately 450 kilometres northwest of Edmonton. With high quality postsecondary education, a new hospital, skilled labour force, and significant business support, opportunities abound within the Region.

The northern part of the Region also benefits from a large trade area of about 290,000 people. Major rail, air and highway links, including the CANAMEX Corridor, provide a gateway to local and international markets. Further, the Region's economic generators and opportunities contribute significantly to Alberta's economy and its success in the global marketplace.

The Region is made up of the:

- City of Grande Prairie
- County of Grande Prairie
- MD of Greenview
- Town of Beaverlodge
- Town of Fox Creek
- Town of Valleyview
- Town of Sexsmith
- Town of Wembley
- Greenview Co-ops and Enterprises
- Horse Lake First Nation
- Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation

Any references to "the Region" within this document refer to this custom region.

2. BACKGROUND

From Data to Decision-Making

The Region, as defined on page two, is a lucrative market for businesses and industry due to its diverse economy, strategic location and urban-rural quality of life, giving it a strong competitive advantage. Yet, like many Alberta communities experiencing strong economies, several businesses in the Region are facing challenges attracting and retaining skilled talent. Labour market research and workforce development planning are aimed at ensuring there are enough workers with the right skills and support to drive strong economic growth in the Region. Access to such talent is critical for the growth of businesses, to ensure readiness to meet current and future needs, including the needs of emerging sectors, and to drive competitiveness in the global market.

While the Region's economy has long been a major strength, an evidence-based, collaborative approach to addressing workforce gaps and opportunities better positions local businesses and communities to compete in a rapidly changing economy.

The **Regional Workforce Development Strategy** is a development plan initiated and led by the Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the City of Grande Prairie, County of Grande Prairie, MD of Greenview, Northwestern Polytechnic, and Alberta Labour and Immigration.

The partnership has been working together with McSweeney & Associates since 2020. The Strategy is a "roadmap" providing direction and tangible actions to strategically help meet employment demands, establish a skilled and resilient workforce for today and the future, and tap into opportunities to drive a competitive environment across the Region. To fully comprehend the Region's workforce, extensive quantitative and qualitative research was undertaken resulting in the preparation of a Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment², a Target Sector Study, Sector Profiles, and culminating in this report, the Regional Workforce Development Strategy. Extensive industry and community consultation took place throughout every step of the project, with close to 800 stakeholders participating.

The following themes were generated based on the results of the focus groups and the findings from all research: (1) Attracting and Retaining Talent; (2) Partnerships and Collaboration; (3) Celebrating the Region. These themes formed the goals for the Strategy.

² All quantitative data found in the Regional Workforce Development Strategy is taken from the Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment, which was completed in December 2020. While the specific data points from the research may have changed due to COVID-19, the trends and themes throughout the data continue to be relevant.

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COVID-19 arrived in Canada in January 2020 and, as a result, project consultations and meetings were held virtually and by telephone. In February 2022 partners came together, in person, in Grande Prairie, to discuss the Regional Workforce Development Strategy draft report and to confirm the actions. While the specific data points from the research informing the Strategy may have changed due to COVID-19, the trends and themes throughout the data continue to be relevant.

Purpose - Regional Workforce Development Strategy

The purpose of the Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce Regional Workforce Development Strategy is to guide a coordinated and collaborative approach to workforce development in the Region. The five-year strategy is based on evidence collected through extensive research, and includes focused and achievable recommendations to:

- Address attraction and retention gaps and opportunities;
- Address knowledge and skills gaps between the current workforce and future needs; and
- Highlight and promote the Region's livability and vitality and our quality-of-life assets.

Regional Workforce Development Partnership

The creation of the Regional Workforce Development Strategy, including all phases of work leading up to its development, is the result of a partnership committed to a collaborative and coordinated approach to ensuring there are enough workers with the right skills and supports to drive strong economic growth in the Region - today and tomorrow. This strong and effective partnership is well-positioned to govern the implementation of the Strategy.

For More Information

To learn more about the Region's workforce development planning and initiatives, or to access the documents, visit the [Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce](https://www.grandeprairiechamber.com) website at www.grandeprairiechamber.com.

3. REGIONAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

This section outlines the goals, objectives and actions that are required to complete the five-year Regional Workforce Development Strategy.

A separate Implementation Plan, completed in consultation with the project partners, outlines in greater detail the following for each action: lead/facilitate; support; estimated resources required; steps to completing the action; and timing. The Implementation Plan is a “living” document that will be adjusted as required over the next five years and is to be used by the partners as a working document.

GOAL 1: Formalize and strengthen the existing partnership that has been in place since the inception of the Strategy.

OBJECTIVE: To have a partnership in place that recognizes the uniqueness of each community in the Region, understands the need for a regional focus on workforce development, and will implement and manage the Regional Workforce Development Strategy. This partnership will bring continued coordination and collaboration to workforce development in the Region.

ACTIONS:

1. Continue to drive workforce development planning in the Region through the existing partnership, which includes employees from the Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce, City of Grande Prairie, County of Grande Prairie, MD of Greenview, Northwestern Polytechnic, and Alberta Labour and Immigration.
2. Establish an annual budget to implement the actions for the Regional Workforce Development Strategy, communicate with partners the budget requirements and complete an integrated budget for the next five years.
3. Craft a Terms of Reference for the Regional Workforce Development Partnership for the next five-year term.
4. Establish a communications plan for this partnership to ensure communications are strategic; support and align with overall priorities of the Strategy; mitigate risks; and support open public communication and regular communication with partners' elected officials.

GOAL 2: Attract and retain talent to support local business and address the workforce gaps.

Attracting talent is a challenge for the Region as well as throughout rural Canada, particularly in northern locations. Not only is the Region competing against other areas across the country and the globe, but local industry is vying for the same talent.

OBJECTIVE: To integrate newcomers into the community and to support these residents during their transition into the Region to support business and workforce development.

ACTIONS:

1. Develop a newcomers' Employee Concierge Program that provides a personal touch to help new talent moving into the Region. This program will offer services to businesses for their strategic hiring and provide new employees and their families with realistic expectations of the Region before they arrive and help to integrate them into the Region upon arrival.
2. Work with the Dean of Students at Northwestern Polytechnic to develop a program and help provide support to integrate students into the community and encourage them to stay and work locally.

OBJECTIVE: To get a true understanding of regional childcare availability and its impact on workforce development.

ACTION:

1. Work collectively to develop a childcare inventory, gap analysis and childcare action plan for the Region.

OBJECTIVE: Universal access to high-speed internet across the Region, which is critical to the growth of business and improves the Region's competitive advantage.

ACTION:

1. Collectively advocate for and communicate the need to improve internet connectivity for everyone throughout the Region.

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OBJECTIVE: Help address the sense of isolation that may be felt by new residents in the Region.

ACTIONS:

1. Partner with community organizations and employers to develop or support programming to combat the sense of isolation felt by some members of the community.
2. Work with strategic partners, such as the Grande Prairie Airport and regional transit providers, to advocate for greater connectivity for the Region with the rest of Canada and the world.

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GOAL 3: Build partnerships and collaboration to support the attraction and retention of talent, skills development and training.

Continuing to build a stronger Region through collaboration will help to attract and retain talent. Developing, maintaining and finding new working relationships through partnerships with organizations, businesses, educational institutions, government, etc. will support unified and coordinated initiatives to strengthen the Region's competitiveness.

OBJECTIVE: To work with the local school districts and postsecondary institutions to help them better understand what the Region has to offer with regard to employment opportunities for students, and to help them find employment and keep them in the Region.

ACTIONS:

1. Connect local industries, specifically those in the identified six target sectors, with the education system including local school districts and postsecondary institutions to work together to promote job opportunities that are available locally.
2. Work regionally on connecting employers, secondary and postsecondary institutions, government and students to better coordinate and champion work-integrated learning.
3. Understand what work has already been done/is already underway in this area.

OBJECTIVE: To assist underrepresented groups in the workforce who live and work in the Region to help them to obtain employment or better employment and equal pay.

ACTIONS:

1. Work with Indigenous organizations to build relationships to lay the groundwork for economic engagement in the Region.
2. Lay the groundwork for more equitable opportunities for women in the workforce in the Region.
3. Identify other underrepresented groups and address opportunities for their workforce participation as needed and resources allow.
4. Understand what work has already been done/is already underway in this area.

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OBJECTIVE: To ensure that industry employees have access to suitable and attainable housing to enhance their quality of life and encourage them to settle and make the Region their home.

ACTIONS:

1. Understand what is being done across the Region with regards to improving the availability of attainable housing.
2. Work with the businesses to understand the housing needs required for their employees.

OBJECTIVE: To continue to network and collaborate with local businesses and organizations for workforce development.

ACTIONS:

1. Engage with stakeholders in the six targeted sectors to improve networks and collaboration in the business community, and to continue to participate in workforce development initiatives.
2. Strengthen the partnership with the Alberta Chambers of Commerce in order to obtain better labour force data specific to the Region.

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GOAL 4: Celebrate and promote the Region as a great place to live and work.

Accolades regarding the attributes of the Region came up often throughout the focus groups. There was a genuine and authentic admiration by the key stakeholders for the Region. This mindset and culture bode well for the Region.

OBJECTIVE: To improve marketing efforts and provide positive messaging through a cohesive, integrated and strategic marketing campaign for the Region.

ACTION:

1. Develop a marketing campaign for the Region. The campaign will include establishing an identity/brand, and a plan that drives strategic messaging and actions to promote the Region's uniqueness, and the benefits of working and living here.

APPENDIX

Project Summary

Understanding and addressing the Region's workforce capabilities, human resource and training needs, and the potential to develop specialized training partnerships are paramount. The Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment and the more recent consultations for this Regional Workforce Development Strategy revealed a range of issues that the Region needs to take into consideration to attract and retain workers to support and fulfill local business employment needs.

The business mix across the Region is economically quite diverse and therefore requires a diverse range of skilled labour. Table 1 highlights the difference in sectoral dominance, by number of businesses, for each of the three partner municipalities.

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Table 1: Distribution of Businesses in the Grande Prairie (GP) and Greenview Region - 2019³

Sector	The Region	MD of Greenview	City of Grande Prairie	County of Grande Prairie
Real estate and rental and leasing	15.5%	8.5%	18.5%	13.1%
Construction	12.2%	12.0%	11.8%	13.6%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	9.4%	31.8%	2.2%	16.3%
Professional, scientific and technical serv.	8.8%	4.8%	9.8%	8.6%
Unclassified	8.7%	5.9%	9.2%	8.3%
Other services (except public administration)	8.1%	7.1%	8.3%	7.8%
Transportation and warehousing	6.5%	6.1%	6.2%	6.7%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	6.1%	5.0%	5.0%	7.3%
Retail trade	4.9%	3.8%	6.1%	2.6%
Health care and social assistance	4.6%	2.4%	6.3%	2.4%
Finance and insurance	3.8%	2.2%	4.3%	4.1%
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	3.4%	2.6%	3.5%	3.3%
Accommodation and food services	2.1%	2.6%	2.4%	0.8%
Wholesale trade	1.8%	1.3%	1.9%	2.0%
Manufacturing	1.2%	1.9%	1.2%	1.1%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	0.9%	0.8%	1.1%	0.7%
Educational services	0.7%	0.4%	0.8%	0.5%
Management of companies and enterprises	0.6%	0.2%	0.6%	0.7%
Information and cultural industries	0.4%	0.3%	0.5%	0.2%
Utilities	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%
Public administration	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%

Source: EMSI 2020.Q2 based on Statistics Canada, Canada Business Registry, December 2019

³ Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment, December 2020, p. 7.

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Job posting analytics suggest that the strongest labour demand in the Region between March 2019 to March 2020 was within the following industries: Retail trade; Construction; Professional, scientific and technical services; Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services; Health care and social assistance; Accommodation and food services; and Manufacturing.⁴ Occupations with a large percentage of growth in job postings can be reflective of the fast-growing demand for a set of skills and qualifications that businesses are currently seeking, in a particular location.

The most significant gaps uncovered in the Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment included⁵:

- Access to Quality Jobs
- Critical Infrastructure and Programming
- Equal Access to Opportunity
- Quantifying the Labour Gap
- Hard to Find Skills
- Training Gaps

⁴ Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment, December 2020, p.14.

⁵ Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment, December 2020, pp. 47-48.

1.1. Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment

An evidence-based approach to workforce development is key to building and sustaining a healthy workforce and economic vitality. Responding to employer-expressed skills-gaps needs to meet expected and potential future growth, the Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce and its partners completed a Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment in December 2020. (The [Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment Executive Summary](#) is available online.) This study set out to develop an understanding of the Region's labour force strengths and also identify gaps in skills, training, services and infrastructure. Gathering this information was the first step toward developing a strategy to strengthen the regional workforce competitiveness. The process involved a thorough analysis of the regional economy and workforce, collecting and analyzing primary and secondary data to gain a complete 360° perspective of workforce and training needs.

Findings from the Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment informed the development of the Regional Workforce Development Strategy, to further support and plan for a strong and balanced labour force that will sustain current and future economic growth.

1.2. Regional Target Sector Study and Sector Profiles

Additionally, a [Regional Target Sector Study](#) was completed in May 2021. Based on existing specializations, employment capacity, competitiveness and growth trends, the Study identified those sectors fundamental to the Region's economic competitiveness and that also spur growth and opportunity for other local industries. As well, the analysis also shows how the Region's objectives align with provincial and national development goals. The six existing and emerging sectors identified were:

1. Renewable Energy and Clean Technologies

Subsectors within this sector consist of power generators; engineering construction; sewage and utility systems; and power transmission equipment manufacturing. As demand for sustainable energy generation and eco-friendly technologies rise, demand for outputs from the renewable energy sector will correspondingly rise.

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2. Forestry and Wood Product Manufacturing

Subsectors within this sector consist of logging; timber tract operations; and manufacturers of wood products (e.g., veneer, plywood and engineered wood products, house-hold furniture and kitchen cabinets). This sector is a key generator of jobs and producer of goods exported outside the Region. Specifically, in 2017, the Region's exports from the forestry and wood product manufacturing sector totalled \$1.01 billion, or 10.7% of total Region exports.⁶

3. Health Care and Life Sciences

Subsectors within this sector include establishments that manufacture pharmaceuticals, medicine and medical supplies. The sector is comprised of businesses engaged in providing health care to residents through diagnosis and treatment, residential care for medical and social reasons, or social assistance to those requiring such support.

4. Upstream and Downstream Chemical Product Manufacturing

Subsectors within the upstream chemical product manufacturing sector include producers of organic and inorganic chemicals; agricultural chemicals; and industrial gases. Upstream chemical product manufacturers are those who process goods earlier in the manufacturing cycle, closer to the original natural good.

Subsectors within the downstream chemical manufacturing sector include producers of personal care and cleaning products; dyes, pigments and coating; lubricating oils and greases; and processed chemical products and explosives. Downstream chemical manufacturers are those who process goods later in the manufacturing stages, as a product gets closer to the end of the production process and the final consumer.

Upstream and downstream chemical product manufacturers add value to naturally extracted goods and help diversify the economic opportunities for those extracted natural resources. This industry supports and cushions the natural resource extraction sector from international shocks.

⁶ Forestry and Wood Product Manufacturing Sector Profile, p. 6.

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5. Agriculture and Food Processing

Subsectors within this sector consist of farms; activities supporting farming; and beverage, dairy, meat and other food manufacturing. This industry is set up well to support the local economy, as demand for agriculture and food processing businesses is expected to grow over the next decade due to rising consumer demand and international free trade agreements.

6. Transportation, Logistics and Warehousing

Subsectors within this sector include air, rail and other forms of transportation; natural gas distribution; urban transit systems; and warehousing and storage. The infrastructure needed to support this sector is expensive and relies on continued investment from private and public institutions. In the medium to long term, this sector is expected to be heavily impacted by artificial intelligence, necessitating training and upskilling programs to support employers and employees.

The Regional Target Sector Study guided the development of six [Sector Profiles](#), providing a description of each of the sectors identified. The first section of each profile focuses on demographics related to the Region; the second section positions each of the sectors in the mind of the investor; and the last section assesses how and why the Region is the ideal place for businesses in that particular sector.

1.3. Regional Workforce Development Strategy

The final phase of research and planning is the creation of this document (and associated implementation plan), an evidence-based [Regional Workforce Development Strategy](#).

To read about the data that informed the Strategy and to stay up to date about the Region's workforce development planning and initiatives, visit the Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce website at www.grandeprairiechamber.com.

The Consultation Process

Since the inception of the project in 2020, extensive consultation took place throughout every step of the project, providing a strong foundation for the Regional Workforce Development Strategy. In total, approximately 800 stakeholders participated.

Consultation commenced in 2020 with the Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment. This community consultation was followed by virtual focus groups, a virtual working session, and an in person strategic directions and draft strategy consultation. During these sessions, there was representation from businesses/industry, including representatives from each of the six industry sectors; community organizations and agencies; school districts; Northwestern Polytechnic; Indigenous communities; the Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce; local municipalities; and the provincial government.

2.1. Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment Consultations

Primary data was collected through a consultation process where the business community, educational institutions, employment services agencies, Indigenous communities and agencies, job seekers, and employees in the Region were invited to provide input.

First, input was collected via one-on-one interviews with key workforce development stakeholders. Interview questions were open-ended in nature and covered labour-related aspects, including the identification of skills, training and crucial resource gaps.

Broad feedback was then collected by disseminating two online surveys across the Region (one for employers and another for job seekers and employees). Questions were mostly close-ended in nature and sought to identify labour market barriers and opportunities and prioritize the needs of labour market participants. The two online surveys were open from September 21st to October 31st, 2020.

Over 700 stakeholders participated in the Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment consultation process. This included 650 survey participants – employers, employees and job seekers. It also included 52 one-on-one interviews with businesses, government, Northwestern Polytechnic, employment service agencies and Indigenous public administration and agencies.

2.2. Focus Groups

The next step involved further collaboration with individuals from across the Region through focus groups, which took place in December 2021, and were held virtually due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Six focus groups were conducted, each exploring one of the six sectors. Building off the work and momentum of the Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment, the focus groups gathered greater insight into the real-world issues business/industry is facing regarding their workforce challenges.

Individuals invited to participate include representation from business/industry, health care, education, Indigenous communities and agencies, community organizations and local government.

The following themes were based on the results of the focus groups, as well as a thorough study of the Region including a Target Sector Analysis, Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment, document review and stakeholder interviews.

Theme 1: Attracting and Retaining Talent

The Region is facing a tight labour market. As calculated by Statistics Canada's Job Vacancy and Wage Survey, between 2015 and 2019, unmet labour demand grew most consistently for occupations in trades, transport, and equipment operators; business, finance, and administration; sales and services; and natural resources and agriculture⁷.

Attracting and retaining talent is a complex issue with barriers that should be addressed to make the Region one that is an attractive destination for talent.

For example, like Canada and Alberta, the Region relies on immigrants and non-permanent residents, particularly foreign temporary workers and foreign students, to fill jobs. The Temporary Foreign Worker Program has new rules and processes that has made bringing a foreign worker into Canada more complicated.⁸

In addition, such topics as internet connectivity, housing and childcare were raised by participants during consultations as potential barriers in the attraction and retention of talent. In some cases, additional information is required to learn more about potential gaps and/or specific issues.

⁷ Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment, December 2020, p. 19.

⁸ Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment, December 2020, p. 22.

On the other hand, many focus group participants discussed their own experiences of coming to the Region with the idea of staying for only a short time but instead staying for 10 to 20 years or longer because of the quality of life, strong sense of community and the many amenities the Region has to offer.

Theme 2: Partnerships and Collaboration

Organizations in the Region have built strong relationships and successful programs to support a competitive workforce environment. These partnerships should continue to look for opportunities to work together and collaborate, to support local businesses and job seekers, and to use the available resources (i.e., funding, knowledge, people, educational facilities, organizations) to most efficiently and effectively support the local businesses, avoid duplication and leverage the wealth of knowledge in the community.

Theme 3: Celebrating the Region

The Region offers an appealing urban-rural lifestyle; strong quality of life; excellent health care, cultural and recreation facilities; and educational institutions that provide a range of high quality training and programs close to home. As a larger regional centre supporting a trade area of approximately 290,000 people, the Region has the amenities of a much greater population than the 121,814 who reside here. Based on the feedback gathered through interviews with businesses, employers and job seekers, there is a need, however, to better promote these quality-of-life assets to areas outside of the Region.

2.3. Virtual Working Session

The Virtual Working Session was a key component in the consultation process for the Regional Workforce Development Strategy and built on the results from the focus groups and the Regional Labour Market Needs Assessment consultations.

In January 2022, the partnership reached out to key stakeholders to participate in the Virtual Working Session. The participants were represented by industry and a diverse range of community stakeholders. The themes from the focus groups became goals and the discussion was based on how to achieve the goals. The intended outcome of the Working Session was to gather input from the participants to develop a set of draft strategic actions that are doable

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and realistic, and that address the current and future labour force gaps and needs of industry and business.

Goal 1: Formalize and strengthen the existing partnership that has been in place since the inception of the Strategy.

GOAL 2: Attract and retain talent to support local business and address the workforce gaps.

GOAL 3: Build partnerships and collaboration to support the attraction and retention of talent, skills development and training.

GOAL 4: Celebrate and promote the Region as a great place to live and work.

Breakout sessions obtained participant feedback to drill down on best practices required to accomplish the goals for the Strategy and to begin to establish a set of doable and realistic actions.

2.4. Strategic Directions and Draft Strategy Consultation

Members of the partnership met in person in Grande Prairie in February 2022 to discuss and finalize the actions and review the draft Regional Workforce Development Strategy. The strategic, relevant and achievable actions found in **Section 3: Regional Workforce Development Strategy: Goals, Objectives and Actions** were agreed upon at this meeting and are to be implemented over the next five years.