



THE ANTIGONISH AREA PARTNERSHIP BEST PRACTICES FOR ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY ECONOMIC GROWTH PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP

1) A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

a) From The beginning...

- i) In the late fall of 1999 several concerned citizens in the Antigonish area decided to propose a new model for addressing economic issues facing the Town and County of Antigonish. As a result of a series of meetings with various organizations and people in the area, Profile Antigonish, a volunteer community group, was created.
- ii) Profile Antigonish quickly became a locus of activity and creative thinking in the Antigonish community. Thanks to generous support from the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, Profile Antigonish was able to complete two project phases by the end of 2003. Phase One was a study and report that provided strategic directions and priorities for the organization and Phase Two, *Branding Antigonish*, achieved the creation and implementation of a brand identity for the area.
- iii) During the development of *Branding Antigonish*, the Profile committee decided to engage the services of an experienced marketer to come to the area and explain the power and practice of effective brand management. In cooperation with the Antigonish Chamber of Commerce, Profile Antigonish hosted an event featuring Dr. Michael J. MacDonald, of Aird Associates, and formerly President and CEO, Greater Halifax Partnership, as keynote speaker. Dr. MacDonald's presentation inspired the more than 100 business people present to look at a form of public-private partnership for economic growth for our area.

b) The Antigonish Economic Summit

- i) During the fall of 2002, a sub-committee of Profile Antigonish was formed with the purpose of studying the concept of a private-public partnership for the Antigonish area. The committee proposed the development of a community consultative event called the "Antigonish Economic Summit". The purpose of the Summit was to engage the community in an intensive exercise to address various economic growth and community development issues, and set a course for the community.
- ii) The Summit, held in May, 2003, was truly a community affair, with over 150 delegates from all sectors of the Antigonish community attending. Summit Chair, Dr. MacDonald, led the delegates through an intensive day of activity. The keynote speaker for the event was Mr. Leonard Lee, founder of Lee Valley Tools. The end result was an overwhelming desire for the establishment of a public-private partnership for economic growth.
- iii) The Summit itself received operating capital from two sources. 75% of the budget was raised through generous support from the Antigonish business community, the balance through a grant from ACOA. The total budget for the development and delivery of the Summit was \$40,000. In addition countless volunteer hours and in-kind support made the Summit a resounding success. The Summit Report is appended to this document.

c) The Launch Plan

- i) The Summit's resolutions were addressed through the formation of the Antigonish Area Partnership Launch Plan Committee. Their task was to create the organizational structure, its overall philosophy and principles, its target action areas, and the process for launching the actual partnership. That committee met during the summer of 2003 and prepared its report to the community. That report is appended to this document.
- ii) Concurrent with the development of the Launch Plan, representations were made to the provincial government through Antigonish MLA, Angus MacIsaac, to secure a contribution toward the costs associated with the establishment of the Partnership. An application was developed and delivered to Mr. MacIsaac in early fall of 2003. During the ensuing months representations were made to various community groups and municipal councils for an endorsement of the Launch Plan and support of the application for funds. Eventually, both municipalities, the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Agriculture, StFX University and a number of prominent businesses endorsed the application.
- iii) The community received the Launch Plan in September, 2003 at a Summit follow-up meeting. Delegates to the May Summit as well as other interested community members voted unanimous approval of the Launch Plan as presented. As a result the Launch Plan Committee was dissolved and, as called for in the Plan, a new committee was created under the guidance of consultant Dr. MacDonald.

2) THE PARTNERSHIP LAUNCH

a) The Launch Committee

- i) The Launch Committee included early investors to the Partnership. The committee was responsible for creation of the by-laws, appointment of an interim board, and the search for a President & CEO, as well as various tasks associated with establishing a new business. In his consultative role, Dr. MacDonald assumed the role of interim CEO. The Interim Board included Irene MacLeod, Eric Atkinson, Daniel Ross, Paul MacLean, Gary Cusack and Dr. MacDonald, ex officio.

b) Committee tasks

- i) The committee, referring to the Launch Plan, created the by-laws and, thus, facilitated the legal establishment of the Antigonish Area Economic Partnership Society, a not-for-profit private business registered under the Societies Act of Nova Scotia.

c) Search for and hiring of President & CEO

- i) The Interim Board appointed a Search Committee to carry out the process of seeking, interviewing and hiring the President & CEO of the Partnership. The Search committee included Dr. MacDonald, Irene MacLeod, Gary Cusack and Ramsay Duff.
- ii) The Search Committee advertised locally, regionally and nationally, and received a number of applications. In the event, four applicants were selected for interviews. Interviews were held, and as a result the committee recommended the appointment of Mr. Brian G Segal as President & CEO.

d) The first permanent Board of Directors

- i) The Interim Board formed a Nominating Committee, as required in the new by-laws, to nominate the first permanent Board of Directors of the Partnership. On January 5, 2004, the

new Board was elected by the Interim Board. All members of the Interim Board stepped down and the permanent Board took office. The Board then proceeded to ratify the by-laws as presented by the Interim Board. They next considered the recommendation of the Nominating Committee, and confirmed the appointment of Mr. Brian G Segal as President & CEO. The Permanent Board included: Irene MacLeod, Chair, H. Ramsay Duff, Vice-Chair, Ken Sims, Chair, Audit Committee, Alanna Bresson, Corporate Secretary, Mark Gabrielleau, Shawn Wilkie, Gary Cusack and Brian G Segal.

3) STEPS TO A PARTNERSHIP

- a) While the above constitutes an historical overview and chronology of the establishment of the partnership, the process of actually conceiving and creating this organization required a number of vital ingredients that must be present in any community to provide context and motivation. We emphasize that this project was the end result of a process that capped three years of community effort to define a model and a plan of action.

i) Preparing the community – Profile Antigonish Phase One

- (1) The creation of Profile Antigonish was an important step leading to the Partnership. After years of division and fragmentation leading to a major crisis of community confidence, which became focused on a proposed highway bypass relocation, the creation of Profile Antigonish was the beginning of a necessary healing process. Through bringing a broad spectrum group together to focus on common interests, previously confrontational parties discovered each other’s strengths and concerns and began to develop the ability to communicate meaningfully and to trust each other.
- (2) The Phase One Report proved categorically that the community had a deep asset base, but was challenged to develop those assets in a coordinated, harmonic manner due to the fragmented conditions noted above.
- (3) The Phase One Report pointed the way to the healing process – a community branding and pride project that would force everyone to focus on positives and develop a new community culture of unity. The old divide and conquer tactics of the past were at last seen as counterproductive energy holding the community back, and, in effect, crippling its ability to employ its rich arsenal of assets in a more strategic manner.
- (4) The Phase One report also highlighted the major challenge to this area – a changing demographic which indicated a high loss rate of young, educated people, and a declining base of risk capital as the older generation prepared to retire. Not enough young capital was going to be available to move the community forward into the 21st century.
- (5) As these trends became evident at the local level, a new attitude developed in the business community. Those dedicated to building their businesses and having a healthy asset to pass off to their children realized that complacency in the face of change is actually regression.
- (6) As a result of this activity Profile Antigonish members became highly focused on the future, and with the very important assistance of the SFX Enterprise Development Centre, began planning the next phase. The stage was set for Phase 2 – *Branding Antigonish*.

ii) Creating a community identity – Profile Antigonish Phase 2

- (1) The *Branding Antigonish* project was the major recommendation of the Phase One Report. The project called for a professional approach to identity building, positioning and

marketing in order to arm the community with a modern set of tools. This was identified as a vital step in preparing the community to take on the task of becoming a destination market. It was also identified as an important contributing factor towards the reinvigoration of community spirit and a positive “can do” attitude.

- (2) A Sub-committee was formed to oversee the branding project. The committee worked with a design firm, selected from a tendering process, to develop options for community consideration. Over a period of approximately 10 months, the designers and committee considered many aspects of the Antigonish values quotient, held community meetings in five locations around Antigonish town and county, and conducted a cultural values and preferences survey as a sidebar to the Antigonish Economic Summit.
- (3) Ultimately a design and positioning statement was chosen and approved by the Profile Antigonish committee. The positioning statement “Big Heart - Great Minds” was determined to sum up the two greatest assets of the area – generous hospitality and a highly educated and capable community.
- (4) Upon completion of the *Branding Antigonish* project it was determined that due to the duality of municipal governance, the brand could logically reside with the soon to be created Antigonish Area Partnership.

iii) The Antigonish Economic Summit

- (1) When the business community experienced the exposure to a superior branding program by way of Dr, MacDonald’s presentation to the Chamber of Commerce in May, 2002, a spark was ignited. This new-found energy was a vital component in the steps that led to the establishment of the AAP. It provided the context for the massive community participation and buy-in without which the project could not succeed.
- (2) Spurred on by requests from our business community for the investigation of the private-public partnership concept, Profile Antigonish agreed to meet with Dr. MacDonald and explore the potential for a P-3 organization in a small community like Antigonish. Dr. MacDonald agreed to take on the role of consultant in our effort to establish a partnership. His first recommendation was that we hold a community economic summit. The summit would be a community event that would at once provide input from the citizens of the area, and also provide for an opportunity to develop a vision for the next steps of the project.
- (3) A sub-committee of Profile Antigonish, the Antigonish Economic Summit Organizing Committee was formed and began the work of organizing the event. Early on the committee realized that a substantial budget was going to be required to satisfy the project’s many needs. A small group of committee members set out to raise the money in the community. As well, working with our local ACOA representative, the committee developed an application for a grant.
- (4) The success of the community fund-raising effort was stunning. In just short of two weeks the committee raised over \$30,000 from area businesses. As well the committee was successful in obtaining a \$10,000 grant from ACOA under the SCIF fund programme. This result is remarkable in that 75% of the total cost of the Summit was borne by our business community. The clear will of the community to find a new way of developing our economy was strongly express through this tangible vote of confidence in the organizers and the process.

- (5) The logistics of organizing the Summit were very demanding. Fortunately, through the generosity of a local events planner and the resources of the StFX Enterprise Development Centre, a strong, dedicated working group put the event together – with style.
- (6) Aside from the main objective of obtaining community participation, advice and buy-in to the partnership process, one of the primary functions of the Summit was to begin the effort of rekindling and building community pride leading to an increase in the overall confidence level of the community.
- (7) The Summit was carefully designed from start to finish to have a level of presentation, content and overall quality that would clearly demonstrate what the community could do given the appropriate resources and will. The response was wonderful. The overall weight of opinion gathered in surveys at the event was that the Summit was a resounding success. Most respondents wanted to repeat it very year. The medium and the message resonated with the community.

iv) Creating and implementing the Antigonish Area Partnership Launch Plan

- (1) As noted above, the penultimate step in creating the Partnership was the creation, adoption and implementation of the Launch Plan. The creation of this plan required a committee populated by a strong group of community activists. The committee members were drawn from Summit delegates who had indicated an interest in participating further in the project. That committee is listed in the Appendix of the Launch Plan appended to this document.
- (2) Due to the broad spectrum representation of the Launch Plan Committee, the authors were able to draw upon a wide range of issues and values which would inform the plan. Early on in the process it was agreed that the proposed Partnership would have to be “rooted” in the values of the community, and that it should promote growth suitable in harmony with the character to the community.
- (3) While the Greater Halifax Partnership model provided an important set of principles upon which to build, the committee realized that the model would have to be redesigned to suit the Antigonish Area. Various areas of sensitivity had to be taken into account. The committee ultimately recognized that the investment regime would have to change from the Halifax model to one which was, at once, more inclusive of small enterprise, as well as confidential with respect to each investor’s commitment. Investment was then set a floor level of \$1,000 with no upper limit. Each investment would be a negotiated amount, and all investments would be kept confidential save the executive committee and the auditors.
- (4) Investment was further defined as cash or “in-kind” with the proviso that all in-kind must represent an otherwise cash expenditure, be cost and quality competitive, and be used up during the period of its duration (usually annual).
- (5) As regards to structure, the committee recognized the unique nature of the Antigonish area, and provided for a Board of Directors that would reflect the major forces affecting economic growth in the community. The Board would include a maximum of sixteen members of which ten were to be nominated from the general investor pool, and six would be so-called “institutional directors” representing the two municipal governments, the Chamber of Commerce, the health sector, the university president and the President & CEO of the Partnership. Those directorships would be filled by the incumbents at the time.

- (6) The Partnership was designed to be a private not-for-profit business owned and managed by the Board with a professional office staff. Furthermore, early on, it was decided to recommend the maintenance of a small staff with the principle of out-sourcing many services in the community as a way of stimulating the local business environment.
- (7) The Launch plan, which is appended to this document, was completed in 6 weeks and presented to the community in September 2003. At a meeting of delegates to the May Summit and others, including representatives from both municipal councils, the university, health sector, agriculture and primary resource sector and the business community among others, the plan was presented and unanimously adopted by those assembled.
- (8) The Launch Plan was also presented to the municipal councils, the university and the Chamber in an effort to gather support for an application to the Province for a contribution towards the establishment of the Partnership. Those endorsements were forthcoming and an application was made to Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations by way of our local MLA, Angus MacIsaac.
- (9) On November 14, 2003 the Launch Committee was informed that a provincial government contribution of \$50,000 had been approved.

4) THE PARTNERSHIP IS LAUNCHED

- a) With the approval of the application to SNSMR, the Launch Committee was able to forge ahead aggressively. At the Summit, organizers stated that they hoped to have the Partnership up and running by the end of the 2003 Calendar year. That objective was in close sight.
- b) The Committee immediately engaged Dr. MacDonald as project consultant and to serve as interim President & CEO. Dr. MacDonald headed up the CEO search process and also helped the AAP organize its interim Board, draft by-laws and other documents necessary for the legal establishment of the Partnership.
- c) Upon receipt of applications for the President & CEO position, the search team selected four from the field and scheduled interviews in late December.
- d) Interviews were conducted, and Mr. Brian G. Segal was selected as the superior choice from among a strong field of finalists. It was agreed to present this recommendation to the permanent Board as soon as it could be set up.
- e) Dr. MacDonald then worked with the interim Board to nominate the first permanent Board of Directors, and, on a meeting held on January 5, 2004, the Interim Board stepped down and the permanent Board took control of the Partnership. Mr. Segal was formally offered the position by the new Board, and accepted pending successful negotiation of a first contract.
- f) The contract was finalized and accepted by the Board of Directors and Mr. Segal, and by end of January, 2004, the Antigonish Area Partnership was launched with a permanent Board and a President & CEO.

5) TWO MONTHS IN

- a) We present this section in order to illustrate how the immense amount of preparatory work, community consultation and professional assistance paid off.
 - i) By the end of March, 2004, roughly two months after the Partnership began full operations the following benchmarks had been achieved:

- (1) **Investment:** As at March 30, 2004, the AAP consisted of 30 investors with a pool of \$210,000. To date all revenue, save the contribution from SNSMR, is private sector. Excepting the very significant StFX investment, the average investment per business is \$4,000 annually. This indicates a healthy buy-in on the part of the business community, and a strong desire for this model to work successfully for economic growth.
- (2) **Infrastructure:** The AAP office is fully operational in an attractive office in downtown Antigonish. All technology and refits were completed by early February, and an open house was held on February 16, 2004.
- (3) **Staffing:** Aside from the President & CEO, the AAP employs a full-time Office Manager. This position is a secondment from StFX as part of their investment. That individual's complete employment package is covered by the University as a portion of its investment in the Partnership.
- (4) **Programs:** The AAP is currently engaged in the following:
 - (a) **Measuring Antigonish:** A project that, upon implementation, will deliver a set of current indices representing a spectrum of statistical information including reports on economics, demographics and consumer trends. The project will provide important, up-to-date information for our key sectors as well as tracking information and trends analysis for measuring the progress of the community's economic growth as compared to similar communities across Canada.
 - (i) The project is being guided by a diverse consultative committee of 16 participants, with a smaller working group of 5 including three economists, a business professor and the CEO of the Partnership.
 - (b) **Thinking Outside of the Big Box:** This project, now in preliminary stages, will address significant changes coming to the Antigonish area through the impending arrival of a new mass retailer, a hugely expanded supermarket, an influx of new hotel rooms, and some significant changes at both the university and in the downtown core. The project will result in an investor event featuring a recognized expert in repositioning as well as panelists and a forum.
 - (i) As a spin-off to this project, the AAP has offered to provide facilitation services to the business community as they seek ways to address the coming challenges.
 - (c) **AAP Round Table Strategic Consultation:** As part of the project to build the AAP's strategic plan for the next 12 months from the investors up, the AAP is planning a series of "round table" meetings with investors and selected others. These discussions will take place over a period of about six weeks, culminating in a major investor event to formally adopt a strategic plan. This process reinforces the Partnership's commitment to build the organization with the investors, and in response to the investors' needs.
 - (d) **Events Planning and Coordination:** The Partnership has been approached by the hospitality/recreation sector to help solve a problem related to scheduling and the efficient use of existing facilities. We plan to provide oversight for a process that may evolve into the creation of a full-time job in the private sector.

- (e) **Marketing and Promotion:** The Partnership has embarked upon a comprehensive marketing and promotion campaign which will include printed and digital collateral, a web presence, advertising in various media and the Ambassadors Program which will employ the resources of our investors as the travel and network across the globe. We also plan a series of events during which we will be presenting various keynote speakers with selected expertise who will address issues related to our investors' priorities.

6) CONCLUSIONS

a) Lessons learned

- i) Community economic development employing the economic growth model of private-public partnership requires several indispensable ingredients;
 - (1) A community “champion” who is willing to invest an uncommon amount of energy and leadership to drive the process forward;
 - (2) Expertise in the form of a consultant(s) experienced in this kind of project, and capable of drawing a diverse set of elements together. The consultant must have a strong network in both the public and private sectors, and a proven track record of success. Communities need that kind of outside validation to buy into the local champion’s energy;
 - (3) Access to strategic resources to help organize and provide logistical support for the project. In the case of the AAP, the management and staff of the StFX Enterprise Development Centre was indispensable;
 - (4) A willing business community, prepared to pay the freight and support the process; without their extraordinary contribution in both cash and kind, the Summit, and ultimately, the Partnership, could not have been achieved.
 - (5) Support from the municipalities and from the local Chamber of Commerce as well as, in our case, the Federation of Agriculture and StFX University. These institutional participants were vital to the inclusive and pervasive nature of the community’s involvement and investment in the process.

b) Resources required

- i) We estimate that, including cash resources and the impressive amount of in-kind expenditure and support, this community processed approximately \$250,000 in cash equivalents of which \$55,000 represents provincial contributions towards the Profile Antigonish project, \$10,000 represents ACOA’s support for the Antigonish Economic Summit, \$50,000 represents the SNSMR partnership launch contribution, and \$30,000 represents private sector cash support for the Summit. The remaining approximately \$105,000 represents a conservative estimate of in-kind services, mostly at a highly professional level, which were essential to success.

We take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of all those who have made such a major contribution to the success of this project and the future of our community.