



Making a difference...together

Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area
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Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development & Innovation
Regional and Rural Development Unit
Rural Policy & Program Branch
Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program
(REDIP) Economic Diversification Grant Application

September 25, 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of the Capital Regional District Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area, we welcome the opportunity to support the REDIP- Economic Diversification application being submitted by the Rural Islands Economic Partnership Society (RIEP) to fund the expansion of the RIEP's Rising Tide Business Services to foster local economic growth across BC's rural, remote and coastal communities via equitable high speed internet access and community centred collaboration.

RIEP's Rising Tide Business Services will leverage the technology of the Connected Coast Network.

This letter confirms our support for RIEP's grant application.

As you are aware, today many of BC's rural, remote, and coastal communities are continuing to face challenges obtaining the economic benefits provided through access to equitable high-speed internet. In particular:

- a. Local businesses in Southern Gulf Island communities are often unable to depend on current internet services to conduct online-based business; engage remote workers, and use internet-based business tools;
- b. Internet-based employment requires fast and reliable internet access to professional, educational and informational resources required to attract, support and retain local employment;
- c. In our Southern Gulf Island communities, an increasing digital skills gap hampers local workforce opportunities;
 - Rapidly changing digital technologies, processes and platforms are ever changing.
 - Ongoing learning is critical to adapt, be knowledgeable, and competitive
 - Access to digital marketing and technology experts is often cost prohibitive and assumes larger budgets. This creates a barrier for our rural and remote small businesses; limiting their growth and ultimately local economic capacity building.

We are familiar with the Strathcona Regional District's, Connected Coast Project and it's work to bring high-speed connectivity to BC's rural, remote and coastal communities.

We've learned that RIEP's Rising Tide Business Services has for two years been successfully supporting start-ups, MSME's, First Nation Economic Development Corps and community-based

non-profits across the Islands and the Coast. They've been delivering these cost-effective, digital solutions with minimal overhead and profit-margin.

We believe that through a mutual relationship with the Connected Coast, RIEP's Rising Tide Business Services will be able to effectively expand its program and services to fully support an activated coastal digital economy. With sufficient funding this program will be able to insure ongoing delivery of hands-on rural and inclusive business solutions combined with current, practical information and education.

Furthermore, we are confident that RIEP and the Connected Coast Network will be able to effectively combine their resources to leverage the benefits of a 'connected coast'. In doing so, a rural and remote coastal network of business chambers, employment growth programs and First Nation economic development organizations will have greater access to tools and services that facilitate the growth of knowledge and digital literacy for rural-remote coastal businesses.

We anticipate that rural island and remote coastal communities will have increased access to:

- Quality and cost-effective digital services and solutions;
- The educational and employment benefits of increased connectivity through partnerships with training and skills development organizations for delivery of Digital Economy & Literacy Webinars;
- Free digital marketing coaching for some 500 small businesses located along the Connected Coast network;
- SkillsUp Training for First Nations Coastal communities - building capacity for community members to deliver services to Indigenous-led businesses;
- Ongoing learning to adapt, be knowledgeable, and competitive re: AI use-management, and shifts in the 'Metaverse' platforms;
- Increased remote work opportunities;
- All the benefits of community-owned assets and infrastructure.

We are enthusiastic about supporting this grant application as it will provide considerable resources, expertise, and education that can be leveraged to support business opportunities and community well-being for our rural, remote and coastal communities.

The Capital Regional District SGI Electoral Area fully supports the RIEP-REDIP application and believes it will be an important contribution for realizing enduring and inclusive business retention and expansion for the communities located in the Southern Gulf Islands.

Sincerely,



Paul Brent
Capital Region Electoral Area Director,
Southern Gulf Islands

