

SUPPORTING BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

# Strong Relationships Mean Quick Action for Quesnel's Business Support Team



BRIGHT IDEAS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## SYNOPSIS

Emergency response is nothing new for the City of Quesnel. Over the past few years, Quesnel has endured wildfires and mill closures that put pressure on the local economy and workforce. Although each challenge brings unique areas of focus, the proactive work the City does to build and maintain relationships consistently leads to efficient responses and action plans. This strong foundation has shown its worth, yet again, in mobilizing a COVID-19 pandemic response team.

## LOCATION

City of Quesnel

## REGION

Cariboo

## INNOVATORS

Quesnel Business Support Team

## ECONOMIC BASE

Manufacturing, Retail, Health Care



## INTRODUCTION

Emergency response is nothing new for the [City of Quesnel](#). Over the past few years, Quesnel has endured wildfires and mill closures that put pressure on the local economy and workforce.

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## THE OPPORTUNITY

In March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic effectively put the province of B.C. on lockdown, Quesnel was thrown into an emergency response scenario.

Given the existing relationships with the groups supporting business in the community, the City was able to pull together a [Business Support Team](#) in record time.

Each organization, including [Community Futures North Cariboo](#), [Quesnel & District Chamber of Commerce](#), [West Quesnel Business Association](#), [Quesnel Downtown Association](#), [South Quesnel Business Association](#), [Cariboo Regional District](#) and [District of Wells](#), recognized the importance of working together to make sure they weren't trying to do the same things and to best support the business community.

## THE STRATEGY

The [Business Support Team](#) came together in mid-March to address the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on small businesses in the Quesnel area.

They quickly defined two key goals: maximize the number of businesses that were able to access COVID-19 financial supports and maximize →



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local spending to keep cash flowing into the community. From there they identified areas for action and staff from each group committed to volunteer time and/or finances to two programs.

First, they created the Business Support Hotline, which was launched at the beginning of April. Many of the partners committed volunteer hours on the phones providing support and guidance to businesses in the community.

The team didn't wait for the phone to ring, and instead called each business in the community, with a second round of calls to each business that received assistance. Since then, the local Community Futures has offered to keep the line open in support of small business in the future.



The second initiative was communications and social media marketing focused. The City already manages the [LoveQuesnel channel](#), promoting local business through the Northern Development Initiative Trust's [LoveNorthernBC program](#), so they decided to increase post frequency and generate engagement with contests and new content. A series of #InQuesnel campaigns was developed, starting with 28 days of giveaways that launched at the same time as the Business Support Hotline. This campaign gave out one \$100 gift card for a local Quesnel business per day, resulting in the best-ever engagement on the Love Quesnel channel.

They've since hosted a series of week-long business support takeovers of the Love Quesnel page, a two-week local photo contest, and have more giveaways and a video campaign planned through the fall leading to the 2020 Christmas season.

The team also joined in existing successful platforms like [Support Local BC](#), selling gift cards online for Quesnel-based businesses, and the [Thought Exchange](#), providing a data-gathering platform to check the temperature of small businesses in the area, and share that information back with the community.

## SUCCESSES

- The Business Support Hotline reached out to 755 businesses, completing 219 intake forms for assistance, facilitating 119 referrals, and ensuring 152 follow-up connections were made.
- An average of \$18,803.62 had been received by funding applicants at the time of the follow-up call (June), with an estimated \$4.1 million received by businesses contacted by the hotline team.
- The hotline supported 41 cash-flow relief loans totaling \$205,000; and 22 Regional Relief and Recovery Fund loans totaling \$716,710.
- The hotline connected 25 businesses to digital marketing coaching through Community Futures.
- The 28 days of giveaways campaign through Love Quesnel saw 9,400 engagements and more than 1,300 entries – an all-time record for the platform.
- By including relationship building as a key pillar of the City's regular work, trust was already built, and they could bring together a response team quickly.
- Strong project management throughout the process helped to make sure the scope and objectives of the project were maintained.

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Identify the unique strengths of your project team members: everyone has something different to offer.
- Have regular check-ins: this helps to ensure that people feel comfortable completing the tasks you've assigned them to.
- Create scripts/process documents to so everyone is using the same messaging.
- Work with existing resources: the team used an existing social media channel to encourage local spending, and the City of Quesnel's licence to the [BC Economic Development Association's](#) BC Business Counts platform to manage the hotline calls.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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