

Coastal Communities Social Procurement Initiative



INNOVATION SUPPORT FUNDING: SUPPORTING INNOVATION LEADERSHIP ACROSS INDUSTRY SECTORS

Process improvements, adaptation to emerging technologies, creatively seizing opportunities are all key attributes of innovation. And while ‘invention’ is sometimes the simplest description of innovation, finding ‘new ways of doing things’ is more often the reality.

Thanks to the recent recapitalization of \$10M from the Province of BC, a new funding stream focused on supporting innovation was launched in spring of 2018. The program has been designed to enable communities, business and industry to seize innovation opportunities or adapt to change and new technology. Up to \$100,000 is available to support initiatives that drive innovation, productivity, and competitiveness in key sectors.

“When we developed this new funding stream, we were hoping that the region would respond with projects which exceeded our vision,” says Line Robert, CEO of the Island Coastal Economic Trust. “The range of inquiries and

applications we have received has not disappointed, spanning a wide range of sectors, and some of those may be game changers for key industries.”

One of those sectors, where innovation is to be expected, is the technology and creative sector.

Recognizing that innovative entrepreneurs have better success when they are supported with mentorship, education, and co-working space, a group of partner organizations on the Upper Sunshine Coast used the Innovation Support program to fund development of their ‘**Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Incubator**’ project.

The project features an incubation function with targeted startup and entrepreneurial supports and a wide range of programming designed to support the growth of the broader tech and creative sector in the region.

“This project is a direct outcome of the partnership’s recently completed

Creative Economy Roadmap,” explained ICET Chair Josie Osborne. “It’s an excellent example of the Trust’s model to support community economic development and innovation from strategic development through to implementation.”

The project is a joint initiative between Powell River Educational Services Society, Vancouver Island University, the City of Powell River and other regional organizations and funding partners.

“It’s not just about supporting growth-oriented businesses or attracting new startups,” explained Julie Jensen, one of the project leads from Vancouver Island University. “It’s about creating and energizing a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in Powell River.”

From a more ‘traditional’ perspective of innovation, scientists at the BC Centre for Aquatic Health Sciences are working with the shellfish industry and North Island College to provide early detection of norovirus in oyster tissue and seawater.

As the primary shellfish growing area in BC, operators in Baynes Sound have a vested interest in early detection of the disease. Outbreaks in recent years have meant closures to harvesting, and lost sales. Innovation Support funding will help provide shellfish growers with new **norovirus detection technology** that is more accessible, reliable and expedient than current methods.

Finally, in a project that brings together local governments from Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast, the Innovation Support funding stream is supporting a **region-wide ‘Strategic Procurement’ initiative**, leveraging government spending for community benefit and social good.

‘Strategic Procurement’ also known as ‘Social Procurement’, is a relatively new phenomenon in North America. The concept allows for purchasing decisions to include requirements for broader benefits, aligned with community needs, such as employment of vulnerable or targeted populations, apprenticeships

for youth or other community-based contributions.

The project is focused on creating a centralized support hub, providing expertise, training, materials and other supports communities may need to implement strategic procurement. The project also includes a focus on educating the supply side, to ensure private sector companies are also ready for the shift in procurement practices.

The current phase of the initiative is focused on community outreach and education and, as project lead Kristi Fairholm-Mader explains, the response has been great.

“From the initial nine communities, membership has grown to sixteen,” states Fairholm-Mader. “What we didn’t anticipate was the level of interest at the provincial level, who are looking at ways to be involved.”

And strategic procurement isn’t just a concern for large municipalities with significant purchasing budgets.

“We’ve seen the greatest interest from rural communities, who may not have the expertise or staffing capacity to implement strategic procurement,” Fairholm-Mader explained. “Our success has been in adapting practices demonstrated in larger urban centres for use in small communities, and already, some are moving into implementation.”

Validating the project’s goal, in the first few months since launching there has been strong uptake from communities of all sizes, as well as from private sector suppliers engaging in the process.

“These early Innovation Support projects are just the tip of the iceberg,” states Robert. “We now have some very exciting projects in the pipeline, which will demonstrate how new technology can modernize key sectors like tourism and showcase what our region’s leadership and innovative companies can do.”



Creative Economy Roadmap

“It’s about creating and energizing a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in Powell River”

- JULIE JENSEN



Norovirus Early Detection Tool

