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EMERGENCY SUPPORT ON ITS WAY FOR REGIONAL BUSINESSES

Immediate response services to help foster business adaptation and recovery during and post-COVID

COURTENAY, 2 April 2020 – Urgent support for the region’s businesses affected by COVID-19 will soon be available through direct, one-on-one service delivery programs developed in collaboration with Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET), Tourism Vancouver Island (TVI) and Innovation Island Technology Association (IITA).

With funding from ICET, two response programs have been set up with regional partners to help the tourism sector and other enterprises with rapid recovery in the face of economic and operational challenges.

“Businesses are striving to confront the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Michelle Mungall, Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Competitiveness. “We are all pulling together to provide these enterprises with guidance and innovative solutions. The quick action taken by the Island Coastal Economic Trust together with leaders from tech and tourism is admirable.”

TVI’s *Vancouver Island Coastal Tourism Resiliency Project* will provide tourism businesses with practical assistance as they navigate the current crisis, through to their eventual recovery, post-pandemic. IITA’s *Digital Economy Response Program (DER3)* will provide personalized technical and industry expertise to enterprises ready to adapt their business models to the digital economy.

“We recognize the region’s urgent need to provide flexible and immediate support in the short-term,” says ICET Board Chair Josie Osborne. “These two programs will help ensure a more efficient and effective transition towards economic recovery, so that businesses come out stronger in the long-run.”

The *Vancouver Island Coastal Tourism Resiliency Project* will offer a range of targeted assistance. The first phase will match businesses with Tourism Advisors to help navigate available resources and relief measures. Advisors will have access to subject matter experts and, as business needs evolve, provide one-on-one coaching and advisory services to facilitate business adaptation and recovery.

“The tourism industry has been especially hard-hit by the impacts of COVID-19 and programs like these will help people access support today and plan for recovery,” said Lisa Beare, Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture. “This is an important first step that builds on federal and provincial supports for people and businesses, and it will help us to be ready to welcome visitors back to B.C. as soon as it’s safe to do so.”

The *Vancouver Island Coastal Tourism Resiliency Project* will also include a range of customized digital resources and communication forums, tailored for the region and industry’s unique needs.

“This collaborative, business-focused and versatile response will allow regional enterprises and operators to adapt and recover from the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic,” says Anthony Everett, TVI’s President and CEO.

IITA’s *DER3* is a complementary rapid recovery initiative that will provide personalized services to companies ready to consider changes to their business models, adoption of digital tools and technology or other practices



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to better engage in the expanding digital economy. Participating businesses will be offered individualized advisory services including access to targeted tech sector expertise. The program will also create new opportunities for existing tech and digital solutions providers, strengthening and growing the region's tech economy.

"This situation is a major call to action for many businesses to make a swift and smart shift to the digital economy," says Graham Truax, Executive Director of IITA. "We're dealing with a Black Swan event that, at least in the short term, will change many consumer behaviours."

Both programs are expected to begin progressive implementation in early April. More details about both the TVI and IITA programs, including how to access services, will be communicated in the coming week.

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About the Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET)

Created and capitalized by the Province of BC in 2006, the Island Coastal Economic Trust's (ICET) mission is to create a more diverse and globally competitive North Island-Sunshine Coast and Central-South Island economy. In partnership with local and regional government, nonprofits and indigenous groups, ICET serves nearly half a million residents with a range of economic diversification funding programs and support services.

About Tourism Vancouver Island (TVI)

As one of five regional not-for-profit destination management and marketing organizations within the province, Tourism Vancouver Island's mission is to support Vancouver Island's evolution into a globally preferred travel and getaway destination. Governed by a volunteer board of directors, and as the official representative of Destination British Columbia, the association represents tourism stakeholders throughout the region, including Vancouver Island, Victoria and the Gulf Islands, as well as a stretch of mainland coast between Moses and Bute inlets.

About Innovation Island Technology Association (IITA)

For the past 20 years, Innovation Island has been instrumental in fostering and encouraging growth in the regional technology sector; serving greater Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands and the Sunshine Coast. As a non-profit service provider we are partners in the BC Acceleration Network, proudly delivering Innovate BC's Venture Acceleration Program and other services.

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