

Innovation: Strengthening Western Canada's Future



A WDP investment in the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) helped Team Canada race against the world's best in Sochi 2014's men's skeleton event. Eric Neilson, centre, and John Fairbairn, right, raced sleds developed at SAIT's Sports and Wellness Engineering Technology Institute, finishing 13th and 7th respectively. Fellow Canadian sledder Dave Greszczyszyn, left, is a member of Canada's World Cup team. Photo: Drew Gregory.

In today's fiercely competitive global marketplace, innovation is vital to economic growth. In Western Canada, innovation is in our DNA. The West isn't just "keeping up"; we're determined to lead the way for future growth and opportunity.

In order to succeed, we need to act strategically to draw on our strengths and secure our position as leaders in innovation. That's why WD is focusing on innovation as a top priority.

Not-for-profit organizations in Western Canada can get funding to support their business development and innovation capabilities through the Western Diversification Program ([WDP](#)). From [makerspace](#) to [Olympic sleds](#), WD has built strong relationships with cutting edge innovators and organizations that make it possible to help the West continue developing ideas flowing.

The Western Innovation ([WINN](#)) Initiative is another way WD is fueling an innovative West. With the first round of proposals being reviewed, more great business ideas can be commercialized, moving them from the test bench into the market. This will have a direct and positive impact on job creation and the economy.

WD is also an active pathfinder and facilitator, making it easier for western Canadian businesses to connect with research, development, and commercialization opportunities. We will continue to have an ongoing dialogue with our partners. With our upcoming Innovation Forum, we hope to build on our role as a facilitator and spark opportunities for collaboration.

By bringing together key players and investing in innovation infrastructure, WD is helping western Canadian businesses innovate today.

New Ways to Innovate: Building a Foundation for Innovation

The Honourable Michelle Rempel, Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification, met with over 150 stakeholders from Aboriginal communities, businesses, post-secondary education institutions, and provincial officials in 14 communities across Western Canada in a series of round table sessions. It was an informal opportunity to hear first-hand from leaders about their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities they face.

"There is a truly impressive culture of innovation among the people I met," said Minister Rempel. "They're bringing all their energy and creativity to the table to maximize their opportunities. At WD, our job is to help clear the path to ensure they continue succeeding."

Participants recognized the positive impact of WD's role as a convenor and facilitator of connections between business, academia, and government.

SMEs reported that it would be easier to get their innovations to market with more streamlined access to applicable government funding. WD is working to improve existing programs and try new processes to realize stronger investments in the West.

The momentum generated in the round table meetings will carry forward into future discussions about innovation in the West, starting with April's Innovation Forum. The Forum, a two-day event in Vancouver hosted by WD in partnership with [Mitacs](#) and the [Canadian Association of Defence and Security Industries \(CADSI\)](#), will focus on innovation and technology commercialization. It will also serve as a platform for western Canadian SMEs to engage with domestic and international innovators in business, government, academic, and key economic sectors.

Collaboration feeds progress. With this in mind, the Innovation Forum is another step in strengthening innovation in the West, and another way WD is helping Western Canada tap into its innovative spirit for a growing and prosperous future.

What We Heard

British Columbia – help medium-sized enterprises grow and build critical mass through better access to risk capital

Alberta – target large innovation infrastructure improvements to boost the entire system

Saskatchewan – increase innovation in manufacturing and construction to match competitors in the US and Europe

Manitoba – establish an Innovation engineering system, creating a reliable, scientific structure for