

On the Ground Support for Small Businesses and Rural Communities with Community Futures

Small and medium-sized businesses drive an impressive 3.3 million private sector jobs across Western Canada, accounting for 92.7% of the region's business and a significant share of the West's economic output. Their impact is felt especially in rural communities, where they are a primary engine of economic growth and job creation.

In the dynamic western Canadian business sector, Community Futures (CFs) have been a [mainstay in rural communities](#) for more than 25 years. These organizations contribute an unparalleled understanding of local challenges and opportunities. As part of WD's Western Canada Business Service Network (WCBSN), the 90 CF locations operating across the West deliver tailored planning, program and service support that communities and businesses need to grow and prosper.

Entrepreneurs have easy access to one-on-one advisory services, classes, and business support. They can also apply for repayable loans to start, maintain or expand their business. Because each CF office is responsible for their own region, decisions are backed by a wealth of local experience and knowledge.

CFs also provide important support for community leaders, playing a crucial role in helping small communities plan growth and build capacity. Rural municipalities can leverage the knowledge and experience CFs offer in their planning activities, along with resources and programs designed to stabilize local economies and create job opportunities when small communities face industry changes.

Through the work of Community Futures, WD is making small differences that add up to big results at the community level and for Western Canada's economy.

The Western Canada Business Services Network connects entrepreneurs with business services and resources. Community Futures, Canada Business, Women's Enterprise Initiatives, and Francophone Economic Development Organizations are all part of this network that offer more than 100 points of service across Western Canada.

In the West? [Find one near you.](#)

After the Flood: Connecting Small Businesses with the Resources to Rebuild

Alberta's June 2013 floods displaced over 100,000 residents and left many businesses damaged or completely destroyed – particularly small, entrepreneurial businesses.

Community Futures (CF) offices in flood-affected areas have been working on the ground with business owners and community members to support rural economic recovery and return residents to their jobs and livelihoods.

[CF Highwood](#) and [CF Centre West](#) are located in some of the hardest hit regions, including the Town of



Photo of downtown High River during the flood. Photo Courtesy of Golden West Radio

High River, whose business community was decimated. In collaboration with WD, the two CFs created high-priority, low-to-zero per cent interest loans specifically for businesses that suffered physical damage or had significant decreases in revenue. With a much shorter application process, small business owners were able to quickly access capital to start rebuilding.

“CFCWest was very active in assisting small businesses

in our region recover from the 2013 flood,” said Patti-Jay Powell, Executive Director CF Centre West. “Our organization responded to local needs by creating a

special flood loan product for flood-affected businesses, and assisting flood affected businesses with advisory services and access to resources. Almost a year after the flood, the majority of Banff and Canmore businesses have recovered and we are still working with businesses in Bragg Creek that need additional assistance. ”

CF Highwood took on leadership and co-ordination roles during and after the floods. Its offices became both a staging area for task forces and a temporary home for displaced businesses. Partnering with community leaders and groups, CF Highwood also helped develop long term recovery plans and provide services for the town's rebuilding businesses.

“Initially we had 15 business clients directly affected by the devastating flood. As we began reaching out and communicating with our clients, it became immediately apparent that in order for a recovery to begin, we would need to quickly find and implement a support program,” said John Lockhart, General Manager, Community Futures Highwood. “We recognized that the program would need to be accessible to as many local businesses as possible in order to stimulate a full economic recovery. Therefore, we designed and implemented our own loan program and the reception has been great.”

So far, both CFs have seen businesses not only bounce back, but return stronger than before. A few small companies hurt by the flood are innovating and diversifying with new products, markets, and services, leading to higher revenues.