

2021 Huron County | Economic Development

Business Retention and Expansion Project

Final Report | May 31, 2022



Contents

- 3 Acknowledgments**
 - 3 Land Acknowledgment
 - 3 Volunteers
 - 4 Huron BR&E Taskforce
 - 4 Provincial Staff Advisors

- 5 Introduction & Summary**
 - 5 What is a BR&E?
 - 6 Why Undertake a BR&E Project?
 - 6 Objectives
 - 7 County of Huron Profile

- 8 Project Methodology**
 - 8 Project Timeline
 - 8 Survey Development
 - 8 Participants
 - 9 Huron BR&E COVID-19 Adaptations
 - 10 Data Analysis
 - 10 Stakeholder Engagement

- 11 Data Summary**
 - 11 Profile of Respondents
 - 12 Results Overview
 - 13 Identified Survey Themes

- 14 Recommended Goals and Action Plans**
 - 15 Business & Sector Supports
 - 17 Infrastructure Improvements
 - 18 Workforce Issues

- 20 Appendices**



Acknowledgments

Land Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge that the land we stand upon today is the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Neutral peoples. We recognize the First Peoples' continued stewardship of the land and water, and that this territory was subject to the Dish with One Spoon wampum, under which multiple nations agreed to care for the land and resources by the Great Lakes in peace.

We would also like to acknowledge and recognize the Upper Canada Treaties signed in regards to this land, which include Treaty #29 and Treaty #45 1/2, and our roles as treaty people, committed to moving forward in the spirit of reconciliation, gratitude, and respect with all First Nation, Métis and Inuit people.

Volunteers

Thank you to all the volunteers who dedicated their time and efforts to the Huron County BR&E Project:

Brian Keller
Leah Hachey
Bryan Vincent
Linda Kistner
Carolyn Clubbe
Lois Lee
Carolyn Young
Lori Anderson
Dan Nicholson

Lorrie McFadden
Doug Yeo
Mary Lercel
Dustin Bloechinger
Molly Towton
Irelyn St. Onge
Nicole Johnston
Jennifer Barnes-Siebert
Sam Gowanlock

Jim lee
Sharlene Bolen
Jim Lynn
Sherri Peet
Jordan Nairn
Trevor Hallam
Karen Stewart
Winona Bailey

Huron BR&E Taskforce

The project was guided and supported by a Project Taskforce composed of the following members:

Paul Nichol, Community Futures Huron
Susan Carradine & David Mackechnie,
Downtown Goderich BIA
Dave Tiffin, Blyth BIA
David Sparling, Wingham BIA
Laura Connolly, Exeter BIA

Sandy Garnet, Central Huron BIA
Rebecca Hawkins, Municipality of
Bluewater
Carolyn Young, Libro Credit Union
Jan Hawley, Municipality of Huron East
Vicki Lass, OMAFRA

Provincial Staff Advisors

The Huron BR&E Project is supported by staff of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA):

Rian Omollo, Economic Development
Specialist

Cheryl Brine, Agriculture & Rural
Economic Development Advisor

We wish to thank all the business owners and operators who participated in the Huron BR&E surveys. Thank you also to the Province of Ontario's Rural Economic Development (RED) program for providing partial funding for the Huron BR&E Project.

Introduction & Summary

What is a BR&E?

An internationally recognized economic development tool, first introduced to Ontario in 1998 by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), the business retention and expansion program (BR&E) is a community-based initiative intended to foster local businesses' and economic growth.

An action-oriented approach to economic development, the BR&E plan focuses on nurturing existing businesses, and prioritizing community efforts. BR&E fosters economic development by learning more about challenges and opportunities to retaining and growing businesses and developing action plans to address these concerns as part of the community's economic development strategy.

The main BR&E survey is a comprehensive questionnaire composed of the following sections:

- Business Information
- Business Climate
- Future Plans
- Business Development
- Workforce
- Community Development

Sector specific surveys were also often provided in addition to the main BR&E survey. These sector survey covered the following industries:

- Agriculture
- Downtown Retail
- Local Food
- Manufacturing
- Mining
- Natural Resources
- Retail
- Tourism

Why Undertake a BR&E Project?

Existing businesses are already invested in the community

It's important to leverage the fact that existing businesses are already established and invested in the community. Studies have shown that anywhere between 74% and 90% of new jobs within a community come from existing businesses. Furthermore, it is much easier and less expensive for a community to retain existing businesses than to attract new businesses to the community.

BR&E Projects can provide an early warning system

Businesses in every community close each year for a variety of reasons. This year it has only been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these closures could be averted if the businesses were connected with the existing support resources such as our Economic Development programs and services.

Importance of an economic recovery from COVID-19 pandemic

This is an ideal time to check in with the Huron County business community to learn of what the new business needs are as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The feedback we receive from businesses will be essential in developing an economic recovery strategy.

Objectives

The Huron County BR&E Project was guided by the following objectives:

Short Term Objectives:

- Build and improve relations with existing businesses
- Build capacity within the community and strengthen relationships between organizations
- Identify the positive and negative attributes of the community as a place to do business
- Identify and address immediate concerns and issues of individual businesses through an assessment and referral process

- Let existing businesses know how much they are valued in the community
- Collect business and market data to support economic development planning
- Establish and implement a strategic action plan to support existing businesses

Long Term Objectives:

- Strategic economic development plans to support businesses
- Increase the competitiveness of existing businesses
- Enable business development, investment, job creation and growth
- Foster and enhance the environment for business development

County of Huron Profile

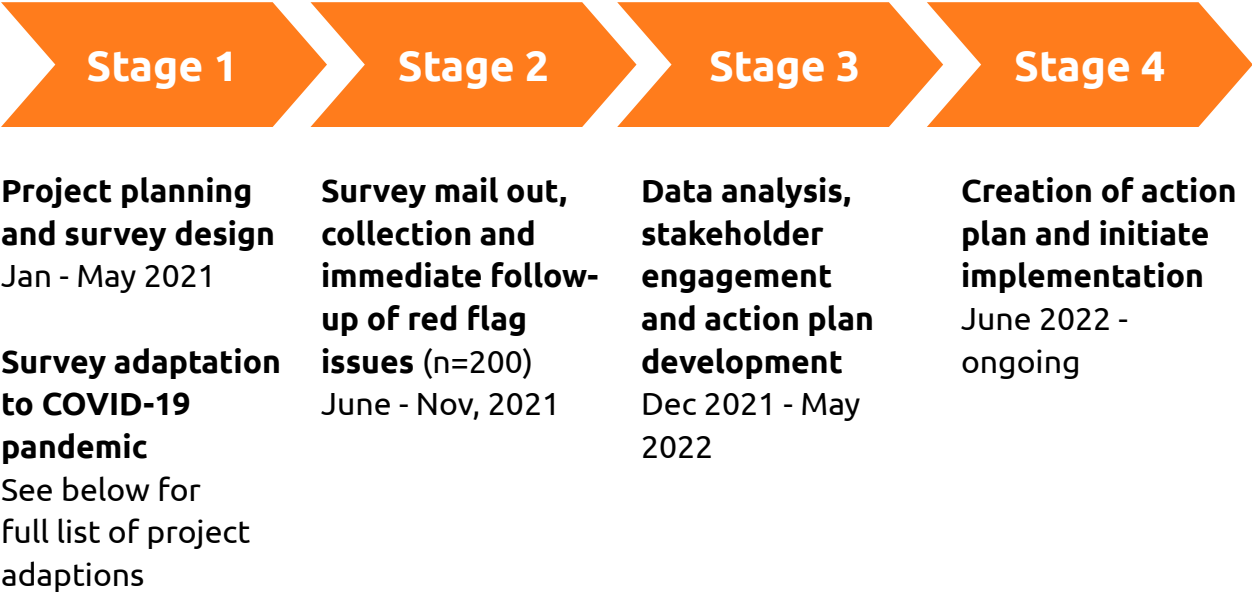
Huron County, Ontario's West Coast, is located along the shores of Lake Huron. This vibrant rural community is the most agriculturally productive county in Ontario, and a leader in numerous areas of agricultural technology and innovation.

Here, urban amenities unite with rural benefits making any one of our nine municipalities the right fit for business and family:

- Heritage buildings, streetscapes and homes
- 100 km of golden coastline
- Lush countryside and fertile fields
- Extensive walking, biking and ski trails
- Excellent health care facilities
- An abundance of educational and cultural opportunities

Project Methodology

Project Timeline



Survey Development

The main Huron BR&E survey, along with all eight sector specific surveys, were developed based on the standard OMAFRA BR&E surveys. In order to capture information specific to Huron County businesses, and in consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the standard surveys were redesigned to cater to the needs of the Huron business community.

Participants

The Huron BR&E Project team compiled an up to date list of all the existing businesses in Huron County, along with each business' location, contact details and primary sector based on North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes, if available. A total of 3,360 Huron County businesses were compiled into this list across all sectors and geographic locations. All businesses contained within this comprehensive business list were mailed a BR&E survey package and were requested to participate. A total of 723 businesses completed and returned their survey during the collection stage from June to November, 2021, leading to a response rate of 21%.



Huron BR&E COVID-19 Adaptations

The Huron BR&E Project team had initially anticipated delivering surveys via traditional methods, however, over time during the planning phase it became clear that the team needed to adapt to the social restrictions that came with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Utilizing the counsel and guidance of the project task force and OMAFRA advisors, the project team was able to swiftly and effectively modify the survey methodology plan to be conducive to the limiting social restrictions.

Among those adaptations include:

Standard BR&E

1. In-person interviews
2. Volunteer record answers
3. Volunteers return completed surveys to project coordinator
4. Surveys are manually inputted and analyzed
5. Surveying timeline is short and highly intensive

Huron BR&E Adaptations

1. Surveys mailed to businesses
2. Volunteer connected over the phone and supported respondents as needed
3. Surveys were returned via pre-paid mail
4. Surveys were processed through a digital survey scanning and analysis software
5. Surveying timeline was longer and less demanding with multiple mail-outs

Data Analysis

Following the completion of the survey collection phase of the project, the survey results were aggregate and analyzed for emerging survey themes by Economic Development department staff. The analysis of the survey data led to the development of 3 high-level key themes as listed below on page 13.

Stakeholder Engagement

Once the survey results had been analyzed and the team had developed key themes, local stakeholders were engaged in the form of virtual group roundtables. The purpose of these roundtables was to review the data summary reports, discuss key findings, identify gaps based on industry and local knowledge, and develop goals and actions.

Virtual roundtable sessions required the use of Google Jamboard software to engage participants in brainstorming activities in the development of goals and actions. The stakeholder groups that were engaged in this process were:

- Huron County Economic Development Department
- Huron County Economic Development Board
- Huron County Planning Department
- Economic Development Municipal Roundtable Committee
- Sustainable Huron Steering Committee
- Industry specific stakeholder groups
- Partner Municipalities

Data Summary

Profile of Respondents

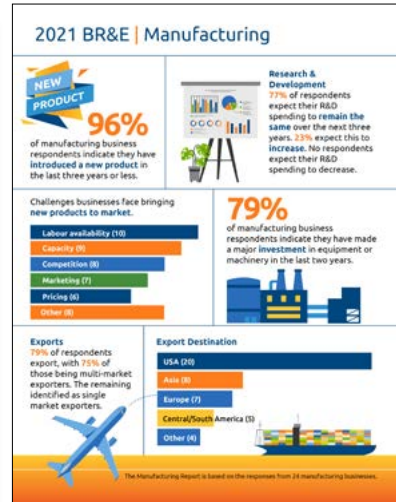
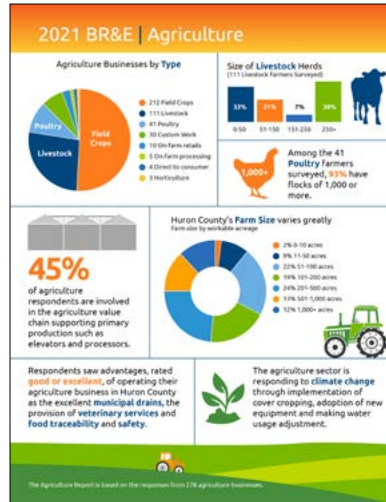
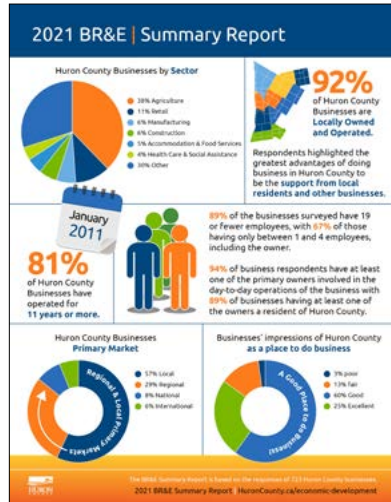
Over the course of 6 months, 723 surveys were collected from Huron County businesses across all nine partner municipalities and spanning various sectors, resulting in a 21% response rate (see below).

Municipality	Surveys	Total Business Count	% of Municipal Businesses	% of total return
ACW	48	310	15.5%	6.6%
Bluewater	83	403	20.6%	11.5%
Central Huron	86	460	20.9%	13.3%
Goderich	72	355	20.3%	10%
Howick	38	197	19.3%	5.3%
Huron Eats	137	577	23.7%	18.9%
Morris-Turnberry	54	270	20%	7.5%
North Huron	68	258	26.4%	9.4%
South Huron	99	530	18.7%	13.7%
Unknown	28	N/A	N/A	3.8%
Total	723	3,360	21.5% (avg)	100%



Results Overview

High-level survey results have been compiled and illustrated to convey key survey highlights. Refer to appendix 1 for full main survey data summary report.



Read the results of the Huron County BR&E:
www.HuronCounty.ca/economic-development/BRE

Identified Survey Themes

The results of the BR&E survey have highlighted a number of high-level themes:



Recommended Goals and Action Plans

The results of the Huron BR&E Project will serve as the basis for the department's strategy plan over the next 3-5 years. Staff workplans and departmental objectives will be developed under each of our 3 key themes.

1. Business and Sector Supports
2. Infrastructure Improvements
3. Workforce Issues

Theme 1

Business & Sector Supports

Goal

Develop a suite of beneficial supports to businesses and build on strategic partnerships with sector organizations

Actions

Implemented:

- Dispatching of the Digital Service Squad to businesses in need of digital asset development
- Building on existing collaborative relationships with key sector and community organizations (e.g. bi-weekly municipal roundtable meetings to provide support and collaborate with municipal partners, chambers of commerce, BIAs, etc.)
- Launching of Ontario's West Coast Visitors Guide based on BR&E feedback
- Supporting Local Economic Development (SLED) Huron County led funding program, providing support to business community - 2022 version focused on BR&E priorities
- Application of Supporting Local Economic Development (SLED) funding programs, providing support to business community
- Business support, co-working and innovation center opened to support businesses along lifecycle, facilitate business networking, support digital nomads and provide working spaces to those now working from home digital desks

Currently being implemented:

- Reinvigorating Taste of Huron brand to support agriculture along the value chain
- Development of succession planning materials and training opportunities
- Development and promotion of a county-wide events calendar
- Coordination of courses requested by agriculture industry such as face to face WHMIS

Future plans:

- Develop youth entrepreneurial programming beyond currently offered services
- Curate interactive and flexible workshop opportunities
- Improve consistency of county-wide tourism-oriented branding, messaging and product development
- Future plans will evolve with the development of the departmental strategic plan

Theme 2

Infrastructure Improvements

Goal

Facilitate the improvement to infrastructural elements including rural energy access, rural internet availability, attainable housing, transportation and active transportation

Actions

Implemented:

- Business support, co-working and innovation center opened to offer access to broadband internet

Currently being implemented:

- Continue to engage in targeted conversations with business community members on infrastructure challenges and potential solutions

Future plans:

- Striking a housing taskforce
- Focus on collaborative advocacy for infrastructural improvements with key industry stakeholders
- Future plans will evolve with the development of the departmental strategic plan

Theme 3

Workforce Issues

Goal

Address and improve the various challenges surrounding the county-wide labour force shortage, as it relates to employee attraction and retention

Actions

Implemented:

- Hiring of a full-time Tourism and Hospitality EDO
- Ontario's West Coast launched a targeted workforce recruitment project
- Strengthening of partnerships with key industry-empowering groups such as The Technical Training Group and helped to bring pre-apprenticeship training to the county
- Creation of materials and information sessions on how to effectively participate in co-op, intern and apprenticeship programs

Currently being implemented:

- Develop workforce action plan and apply for funding to implement action plan (RED application submitted)
- Collaborate with local service providers to coordinate and align services for greater impact on workforce issues
- Highlight immigration success stories as they address workforce related challenges
- Partnerships formed between Huron Manufacturing Association and primary agriculture producers to deliver health and safety training to seasonal farm workers

Future plans:

- Forming of an HR networking group to:
 - Train small businesses on HR related topics including effective recruiting techniques, health & safety protocols, and employee mental health awareness programming
 - Maintain an ongoing conversation with HR professionals across the county
- Youth engagement
- Future plans will evolve with the development of the departmental strategic plan

Appendices

Appendix 1: Main Survey Data Summary Report