

**Action Swift Current Business Retention and Expansion Program**

Every community needs to pay attention to their existing businesses. Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) has become a key element of local economic development efforts. While the attraction of new businesses and the encouragement of new business start-ups are important parts of an overall economic development strategy, many communities now recognize the need to do a lot more to assist existing businesses to survive and grow.

The BR&E challenge to a community is to capture business expansions while taking preventive actions to reduce the number of business closings and contractions. Action Swift Current, in launching this BR&E program, has the potential to improve its climate for existing business and thereby benefit from the continued presence and growth of the businesses already here.

There are two other key benefits to Swift Current from this program. First, Action Swift Current has learned business perceptions of community strengths and weaknesses. Second, it has built a team of diverse community leaders to address the identified issues over time. The knowledge gained, and the team(s) formed to act on that knowledge, will prove invaluable as Action Swift Current’s initiative move forward.

**Objectives**

Action Swift Current has four objectives:

- To build a positive business environment for success of local businesses and ultimately success of the community.
- To accurately assess the needs of business.
- To provide assistance to business that will help them to survive

economic difficulties and assist them with expansions that add new jobs.

- To build co-operation and consensus among businesses, local government and economic development organizations.

**Program Sponsors**

This program is sponsored locally by these organizations:

Acklands-Grainger
Agriculture & Exhibition Association
Bank of Montreal
Bank of Nova Scotia
Canadian Waste Services
City of Swift Current
Coca-Cola Bottling
CKSW 570/ FM94.1 Radio
Entrepreneurial Centre
Humpty's Family Restaurant
National Manufacturing of Canada
Pharmasave
Pioneer Co-operative Association
Prairie Post
Quest Management/Quest Business Centre
Red Carpet Coffee Services
R.M. of Swift Current
Royal Bank
Sask Tel
Saskatchewan Industry and Resources
Sask Energy
Shaw Cable
Southwest Booster
Southwest Community Futures Development Corporation
Southwest Credit Union
Southwest Regional Economic Development Authority
Standard Motors
Stark & Marsh Chartered Accountants
Strictly Business Magazine
Superior Meats
Swift Current Real Estate Association
Thrifty Foods
Tourism Swift Current
Trans Canada Shell

## **Program Organization & Leadership Team Development**

Action Swift Current's roots trace back to the fall of 2001 when the City of Swift Current and the Swift Current Chamber of Commerce invited individuals to information sessions on the Business Retention and Expansion program. The decision was made to go forward with a project. From these sessions citizens came forward to participate on the Leadership Team. A team of 21 people was developed. To exemplify collaboration and partnership a new organization was founded to be the entity through which the BR&E program would be launched and sustained. Action Swift Current is the nonprofit organization founded for this purpose (see [www.actionswiftcurrent.com](http://www.actionswiftcurrent.com)). Several committees of the Leadership Team were formed to plan and carry out the work plan for Action Swift Current.

Doug Howorko, Dawn Odegard and Melanie Friesen are three Leadership Team members trained and certified by Business Retention and Expansion International (BREI) in the BR&E process. Doug, Dawn and Melanie coached the BR&E process for Action Swift Current. During the winter/spring 2002 these consultants worked with the leadership team to orient them to BR&E and to plan the program.

The Leadership Team used their knowledge of Swift Current to develop a survey instrument based on a variety of business retention and expansion surveys used elsewhere. After consultation with Michael Darger, of the University of Minnesota, and testing with local businesses, the Leadership Team adopted the survey instrument.

## **Orientation and Volunteer Training**

The Leadership Team recruited additional volunteers who, along with Leadership Team members, would visit the selected

firms. In April 2002 the firm visitors attended orientation sessions to learn about BR&E techniques, review the survey and receive training on how to effectively conduct the firm visits.

## **Firm Visits**

The Leadership Team received a list of all registered businesses in the city from the City of Swift Current as well as a list of all the businesses in the R.M. These two lists were combined in a random method and from that list every third business was chosen. The Leadership Team found from that selection that it still needed to contact more businesses. Therefore, it went through the list once more and chose every fourth business. In total the Leadership Team approached 498 businesses including manufacturers. It also chose to approach 10 major manufacturers and 8 were completed.

During April through June the Leadership Team and volunteer visitors conducted 200 firm visits (including the four practice visits). Over half of the identified firms (256) confirmed that they would entertain a visit. However, Action Swift Current ran out of volunteer time after 200 visits were completed. Nevertheless, an impressive amount of person visits were made – a total of about 400 (200 visits \* 2 people per visit). Prior to the visits, the Leadership Team sent copies of the survey to the firms. Visitors worked in teams of two and took responsibility for arranging and conducting the interviews.

## **Red Flag Review**

After the surveys were completed and returned, the Leadership Team met in June to review each survey and decide on how the immediate follow-up would be handled.

### **Research Report Development**

The BR&E Leadership Team sent copies of the surveys to the University of Minnesota for tabulation and analysis. Jennifer Fitchorn, Roxanne Greaves, and Margretta Hanson entered the data into a spreadsheet and word processing files. A summary of the data was prepared for the research review meeting. At the research review meeting on August 14, 2002 a team of individuals (listed later in this section) reviewed the results and suggested projects that might respond to the firms' needs. Mr. Darger then drafted the report based on the input of the research review panel and other ideas. Contact an Action Swift Current Leadership Team member or a person listed in the front of this summary report to see a copy of the much more in-depth research report.

### **Leadership Team Retreat**

A four-hour retreat was held October 9, 2002. At this retreat, the Leadership Team set priorities on the major projects it will implement. A committee was established for each of the ten priority projects shown in this report (see below). If you have ideas, time or other talents to contribute to these projects, then please contact one of the people listed.

### **People Involved in Action Swift Current**

Three groups of people have been very important to Action Swift Current's success to date in its BR&E program. These include 1) the Leadership Team, 2) the volunteer visitors and 3) the firms visited.

#### **Action Swift Current BR&E Leadership Team**

See above for a description of the contributions of the following members: Corey Adam, Saskatchewan Abilities Council

Rhonda Alexander, At Home Realty  
Karen Bonesky, KBF Development, Entrepreneurial Centre  
Terry Brodziak, Southwest Community Futures Development Corporation / Southwest Regional Economic Development Authority  
Gordon Budd, Standard Motors and President, Swift Current Chamber of Commerce  
Al Chilton, Pharmasave  
David Forde, Southwest Credit Union  
Melanie Friesen, Quest Management Inc.  
Deborah Gauger, CKSW 570, FM 94.1 Radio  
Doug Howorko, Saskatchewan Industry and Resources  
Dawn Odegard, Saskatchewan Industry and Resources  
Pat Parrott, Sask Tel, Chairman of Action Swift Current  
Carl Parsons, Monte Carlos Restaurant  
Paul Rezansoff, Swift Current Allied Arts Council  
Marty Salberg, City of Swift Current  
Clay Thompson, Royal Bank, Secretary/Treasurer of Action Swift Current  
Chuck Thomson, Stark and Marsh Chartered Accountants, Vice Chairperson of Action Swift Current  
Desiree Unvoas, Tourism Swift Current  
Mike Vaughn, Canadian Waste Services  
Daryl Wall, R.M. of Swift Current  
Bernie Weinbender, Century 21

#### **Volunteer Visitors**

The following people helped the Leadership Team accomplish 200 firm visits:

Kelsey Adam, Coldwell Banker Accord Realty  
Sandy Arendt, SaskTel  
Joe Arling, Best Western Inn  
Marlene Arndt, Swift Current Chamber of Commerce & Tourist Centre  
Helen Arnold, Southwest Credit Union

Joe Axon, Human Resource Development  
Canada  
Syd Barber, Saskatchewan Environment and  
Resource Management  
Vivian Barber, Meyers Norris Penny  
Lance Baumann, 1<sup>st</sup> Step Studio of Skin  
Care and Hair Design  
Kathy Beattie, Canadian Tire Store  
Susan Bloye, Canada - Saskatchewan Career  
and Employment Services  
Lloyd Blyth, Sewer Doctor  
Joanne Booth, Cypress Hills Regional  
College  
Jeff Borden, Royal Bank  
Doug Bradshaw, Leisure Wheels  
Bryan Braun, Ashley Park School  
Kari Burnett, Entrepreneurial Centre  
Bryon Campbell  
Larry Carr  
Ken Clarke, Starlite Motosports  
Barry Cuthbert, Rittinger's Men's Wear  
Becky Cuthbert, SaskTel  
Karen Davidson, Southwest Community  
Futures Development Corporation  
Elaine Dickie, Coldwell Banker Accord  
Realty  
Karen Dickie, SaskTel  
David Doepker, Thrifty Foods  
Beth Doerksen, Beth's Draperies & Interiors  
Rob Ellery, Big Rig Wash  
Dale Evjen  
Patrick Ewert, Southwest Credit Union  
Rod Francis, Advantage Venture Systems  
Pat Friesen, Southwest Credit Union  
Kay Froese, Kruse Glass & Aluminum  
Wayne Gelowitz, Sears Canada  
Joyce Goodhand, Southwest Crisis Services  
Liz Gordon, Southwest Regional  
Intersectoral Committee  
Brad Gourlay, Swift Current Broncos  
Hockey Club  
Terry Gove, Cypress Hills Regional College  
Brad Gross, BMO Nesbitt Burns  
Arnie Guist, Southwest Credit Union  
Bep Hamer, Gramma Bep's Gourmet Foods

Glenn Hanke, The Bentley Retirement  
Community  
Lana Hankins, National Manufacturing of  
Canada  
Rhonda Haroldson, Curves for Women  
Michelle Hill, Academy of Learning – Swift  
Current  
Warren Hope, R. Warren Hope Certified  
Management Accountant  
Connie Horan, Canadian Imperial Bank of  
Commerce  
Judy Hornung, Southwest Credit Union  
Pam Hueser, Fauxtastic Arts  
Ray Hueser, Urban Forest Recyclers  
Cathy Illerbrun, SaskTel  
Adrienne Jensen, Southwest Regional  
Economic Development Authority  
Wayne Johnson, Southwest Credit Union  
Charlene Jones, Cypress Hills Regional  
College  
Curtis Keber, Wal-Mart  
Mike Kenopic, Canadian Tire Store  
Erin Kinney, Parkside Memorial Funeral  
Home  
Angie Kinney, Tourism Swift Current  
Michele Klein, Canadian Imperial Bank of  
Commerce  
Eunice Koehler, Lutheran Counselling  
Services  
Brian, Koop, SaskTel  
Metanathi Koutsogiannis, Kabos Family  
Restaurant  
Larry Kozun, Pioneer Co-operative  
Association  
Daryl Krause, McDonalds Restaurants  
George Kushner, Robinsons Electronics  
Brent Lachapelle, Brent Lachapelle's  
Painting & Decorating  
Bert Legault, Legault Agro  
Greg Lemon, Trans Canada Shell  
Dwight Lemon, Westmount Shell  
Harvey Lomax, The Salvation Army  
Dean MacLeod, Computer Solutions S.C.  
Roxanne Mamer, Royal LePage Dynasty  
Barrie Mann, Canadian Federation of  
Independent Business

Tim Marcus, City of Swift Current  
Jennifer McGregor, TD Bank Financial Group  
Glen McLaughlin, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration  
Lilly Jean McLeod, Sports Designs  
Bonnie Middlemiss, Sask Energy  
Glenn Moore, Southwest Community Futures Development Corporation  
Barry Neigel, Husky Car/Truck Stop & Restaurant  
Bob Neufeld, Southwest Credit Union  
Mike Orcherton, The Salvation Army  
Vim Parmar, Wheatland Machine Shop  
Jim Plewis, Standard Motors  
Darlene Regier, Talk of the Town Unique Esthetic Boutique  
Marlene Reidle, Meyers Norris Penny  
Terry Reidle, Standard Motors  
Kimberly Reiersen, Royal LePage Dynasty  
Syd Reimer, Southwest Credit Union  
Karen Richmond, Cypress Hills Regional College  
Ron Rif, Southwest Credit Union  
Maurice Robert, Royal Bank  
Wayne Roberts, Microage Computer Centres  
Ken Roh, Re/Max of Swift Current  
Dan Runcie, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Association  
Colleen Shaw, Southwest Credit Union  
Rick Shaw, Kal Tire  
Connelly Sherwick, Grasslands Group  
Russ Siemens, Swift Current Comprehensive High School  
Dianne Sletten, Canada – Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services  
Greg Smith, Stark & Marsh Chartered Accountants  
Dave Spencer, Swift Current School Division No. 94  
Joanne Sthamann, TD Bank Financial Group  
Jennifer Stolz, Canadian Waste Services  
Sherrie Svenson, Meyers Norris Penny  
Kevin Szakacs, Boston Pizza  
Scott Taylor, T.S. Metals

Bill Thacker, Days Inn  
Kim Vossen, Bank of Montreal  
Buck Wagner, W.W. Rentals  
Lynn Wagner, Danka  
John Wall, R.J. Moving & Storage  
Kay Wall  
Glenn Wallace, Home Hardware Building Centre  
Neil Wallace, SaskTel  
John Warkentin, Warkentin & Associates Appraisal Services  
Ken Warkentin, Royal LePage Dynasty  
Susan Wiebe, Canada – Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services  
Lexie Wiebe, SaskTel

### **Firms Visited as Part of Action Swift Current**

The following firms graciously hosted visits as part of the BR&E visitation:

A & R Water Wise  
Academy of Learning – Swift Current  
Acklands-Grainger  
Alternative Solutions Consulting  
Anderson Appliance Service  
Apex Tire & Auto  
Armstrong Implements  
Associate Family Physicians Clinic  
Batco Manufacturing  
Berggren's Gift World  
Bleakley Construction  
Boston Pizza  
Brent Lachapelle's Painting & Decorating  
Bridal Construction  
Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce  
Canadian Organic Certification Co-operative  
Canadian Waste Services  
Carlson Painting & Construction  
Casual Connection Clothing Co.  
Century 21  
Chinook Refrigeration & Air Conditioning  
Cinema Twin Theatres  
City Wok  
Civic Shopping Centre  
Clarica

Colorama Labs  
Comfort Inn by Journey's End (Swift  
Current)  
Computer Solutions S.C.  
Cooters Trucking Bobcat & Grading  
Crafty Ladys  
Creative Video  
Culligan Water Conditioning  
Curves For Women  
Dandy's General Store/Boomer's Video  
Danka  
Darbaryle Upholstering  
Décor Complete  
De-Kor Framing & Gallery  
Delta Rock & Sand  
Diane & Joanne's Hair Design  
Dickson Agencies  
Domco Construction  
Double "T" Computer Services  
Dr. McKechnie  
Dr. Noble Irwin Healthcare Foundation  
Dura Products  
Eldred Architect  
Elmwood Gold Club  
Empire Clothing Company  
Esquire Electrolysis Massage Therapy  
Centre  
Etcetera Etcetera  
Eyefx Media  
Fabutan  
Family Billiards  
Formula 1 Real Estate Service  
Garth's Carpets & Color Centre  
Getafix Auto Repair  
Gloria Marx Salon  
Goldenwest Radio  
Grandma Bep's Gourmet Foods  
Grasslands Group  
Hara Products  
Harvey's Oak Gallery  
Heartland Hobby and Craft Supplies  
Hillside Medical Clinic  
Hillside Travel Place  
Home Hardware Building Centre  
Houston Pizza  
Humpty's Family Restaurant

Imperial 400 Motel  
Imperial Hotel Restaurant  
Inland Concrete  
J.P. Home Works  
Jay Dee Equipment  
Joey's Only Seafood Restaurant  
John's Country Cafe  
Johnnie's Lunch Box  
Kabos Family Restaurant  
Kal Tire  
Karen Baldwin Secretarial Service  
KBF Development Services  
Klassen Quality Woodwork  
Kruse Glass & Aluminum  
Kurt's Take-Out & Catering  
Kwik Lube 'N' Exhaust  
Legault Agro  
Leisure Wheels  
Joe Leptick Oilfield Construction  
Linn's Hair Shop  
Little Explorers Child Care/Learning Centre  
Lone Star Electrical Repair  
Lorne Stephen's Salon  
Low Cost Towing  
Ist Step Studio of Skin Care & Hair Design  
Mason's Rad Repair  
McDonald's Restaurant  
Melhoff Electric  
Merriman & Company Certified  
Management Accountants  
Microage Computer Centres  
Minute Muffler  
Mom's Korner  
Murray's Menswear  
My Little Seamstress  
Myhr's Professional Accounting  
National Manufacturing of Canada  
National Trailer Parts Warehouse  
Nature's Nook  
Nimegeers Law Firm  
Nodge Manufacturing  
Office Outfitters  
The Optical Centre  
Optical Image Consulting  
Palliser Overhead Door  
Parkside Memorial Funeral Home

Paterson Grain  
Pharmasave  
Photo Works by Pam & Dale  
Pick-a-Deli  
Pioneer Co-operative Association  
Prairie Care  
Prairie Post  
Professional Upholstery & Carpet Cleaning  
Quest Management  
R. Warren Hope Certified Management  
Accountant  
Regier Honda  
Reinhart Construction  
Relics Consignment  
Rem Manufacturing  
Re/Max of Swift Current  
Rings & Things  
Rittinger's Men's Wear  
RJ Moving & Storage  
Roberston Implements  
Royal Bank  
Rum-Man Food Services  
Safari-Inn Motel  
Sangster's Health Centres  
Sarcan Recycling  
SaskTel  
Saskatchewan Abilities Council  
CAA Saskatchewan  
Scentiments Gift & Craft  
Shaw Cable  
Shopper's Drug Mart  
Smart Flowers & Photos  
Smitty's Restaurant & Lounge  
Source Point Therapeutics  
Kwan's Southside Greenhouse  
Southwest Credit Union  
Standard Motors  
Stark & Marsh Chartered Accountants  
Starlite Motosports  
Stateline Trucking Co.  
Stevenson Accounting  
Stitch Master  
Superior Engine Repair  
Superior Meats  
Superior Service Station Maintenance  
Superior Trucking & Earthmoving

Suzanne's  
Swift Administration and Management  
Services  
Swift Agencies  
Swift Autobody  
Swift Current & District Ambulance Service  
Southwest Agri Services  
Swift Current Bronco Hockey Club  
Swift Current Electrical Supply  
Swift Current Funeral Home  
Swift Current Mall  
Swift Current Physical Therapy  
Swift Current School Division No. 94  
Swift Current Steel & Salvage  
Swift Pit Stop Oil & Lube  
Swift Vacuums  
Swift Wheel Alignment  
Talk of the Town Unique Esthetic Boutique  
Tan Jay  
The Real Canadian Wholesale Club  
The Salvation Army Thrift Store  
Southwest Booster  
Tim Horton's Donuts  
Top Gun Yamaha  
Total Cents Hair Design  
Tourism Swift Current  
Training Zone Fitness Centre  
Trans Canada Shell  
Transport City  
Treen Packers  
Tune-A-Matic  
Urban Forest Recyclers  
Wal-Mart  
Warkentin & Associates Appraisal Services  
Warren's Funeral Home  
Wendy's Ladies Wear  
West End Grocery  
Westmount Shell  
Wheatland Machine Shop  
Wheatland Mall  
Work World  
WW Smith Insurance

### **Assistance from Others**

Using research on earlier BR&E programs, the University of Minnesota developed the approach used in the Action Swift Current program. This approach has been used in hundreds of communities across North America, Australia and elsewhere. Business Retention and Expansion International (BREI) adopted it for training professionals who wish to guide communities through BR&E programs. Action Swift Current received technical assistance from the following:

- Melanie Friesen, Doug Howorko, and Dawn Odegard have served as BR&E consultants (certified by BREI) for the program.
- The University of Minnesota's Business Retention and Expansion Strategies Program coordinated the data tabulation.
- Michael Darger, independent consultant, prepared the research report and this summary report.
- The program sponsors provided funds or other resources to conduct the program. See list on page 2 above.

### **Research Review Panel**

The panel reviewed the tabulated survey results, conducted a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and suggested potential actions that might be taken by Swift Current leaders in response to local firm concerns. The participants included:

Rhonda Alexander, At Home Realty  
Joe Axon, Human Resources Development Canada  
Karen Bonesky, KBF Development, Entrepreneurial Centre  
Myrna Braaten, National Manufacturing of Canada  
Hildor Braun, R.M. of Swift Current  
Terry Brodziak, Southwest Community Futures Development Corporation/South-

west Regional Economic Development Authority  
Al Chilton, Pharmasave  
Liam Choo-Foo, Swift Current School Division  
Neil Clarke, Cypress Hills Regional College  
David Doepker, Thrifty Foods  
Lee Friesen, Mooseworld  
Melanie Friesen, Quest Management /Quest Business Centre  
Deborah Gauger, CKSW 570, FM 94.1 Radio  
Henry Hildebrandt, R.M. of Swift Current  
Ron Hilton, City of Swift Current  
Doug Howorko, Saskatchewan Industry and Resources  
Ed Hyatt, East Side Church of God  
Bob Jamieson, City of Swift Current  
Brian Koop, Sask Tel  
George Kushner, Robinson Electronics  
Sandy Larson, Sask Tel  
Barb Lemon, Saskatchewan Industry and Resources  
Dawn Odegard, Saskatchewan Industry and Resources  
Tony Randall, Royal Canadian Mounted Police  
Maurice Robert, Royal Bank  
Marty Salberg, City of Swift Current  
Dianne Sletten, Canada - Saskatchewan Career and Employment Services  
Clay Thompson, Royal Bank  
Chuck Thomson, Stark and Marsh Chartered Accountants  
Desiree Unvoas, Tourism Swift Current  
Andrew Will, Regional Health Authority

### **Swift Current Economic Profile**

An economic profile of Swift Current was prepared for use by the Leadership Team. This profile gave an overview of population, income and employment trends in Swift Current, comparing it with other communities. To summarize, Swift Current has experienced flat population growth, significant aging compared to nearby

regional centers and the province, and personal income growth lagging Saskatchewan's and Canada's. Yet its unemployment statistics compare well to the region, which has had stronger employment than the nation as a whole.

For details see the full economic profile. It is part of the research report, which is available from Action Swift Current Leadership Team members or a person listed in the front of this summary report.

### Swift Current Survey Results

Following are the results of the survey of 200 businesses by Action Swift Current during April through June of 2002. The firm characteristics are summarized followed by priority projects selected by the Leadership Team. Survey results related to those projects are included in this summary. Additional survey results can be found in the Research Report.

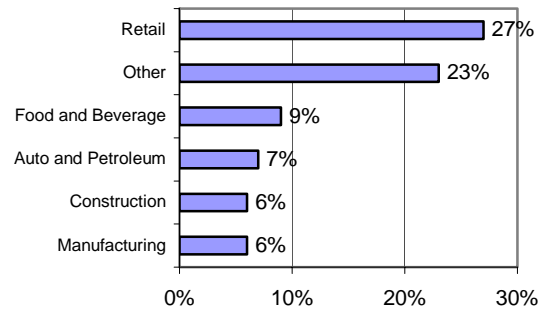
#### Firm Characteristics

The 200 firms visited represent a sample of 20 percent of the businesses in Swift Current (based on an estimate of 1,000 firms by the city). This is a very impressive number of visits accomplished, considering the extensive logistics involved in getting teams of volunteers to that many personal visits.

The largest number of visits was to retail firms (27%). This was followed by "other" (23%), food and beverage (9%), auto and petroleum (7%), and construction and manufacturing (6% each). See Figure 1.

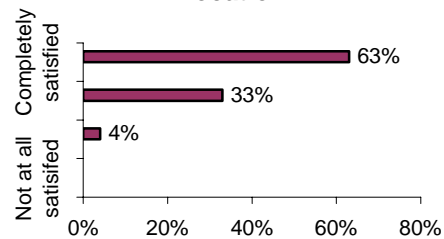
These firms employed 2,270 full time and 1,057 part time workers. The median number of employees is 5.5 yet the average is 17.2. This shows the skewing effect that the larger employers (e.g. seven firms had 100+ employees) had on the sample.

**Figure 1: Types of Firms  
Categories > 5%**



Fifteen percent of the firms have locations outside of Swift Current. Of these, 63 percent were completely satisfied with their Swift Current location and 33 percent were somewhat satisfied (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: How Satisfied are the Firms with Outside Locations with their Swift Current Location?**



#### Overview of BR&E Projects

Profitability is the key to the retention and expansion of firms. While the owners of a firm might be attracted to an area because it is a nice place to live or to raise a family, a firm can only survive if it makes a profit (revenues exceed costs). The same is the case for businesses that start in the community. The owners may be loyal to the community, but if they cannot make their business profitable they will close or move it; they do not have a choice.

In a market economy, making a profit is the responsibility of the firm management and its employees, not community groups, local or provincial governments. However, the actions of these groups can sometimes help firms become slightly more profitable. The priority projects outlined below are aimed at helping firms become more profitable and thus be able to survive and grow in the community.

**Swift Current Priority Projects**

The following ten selected projects are scheduled to start on November 26, 2002.

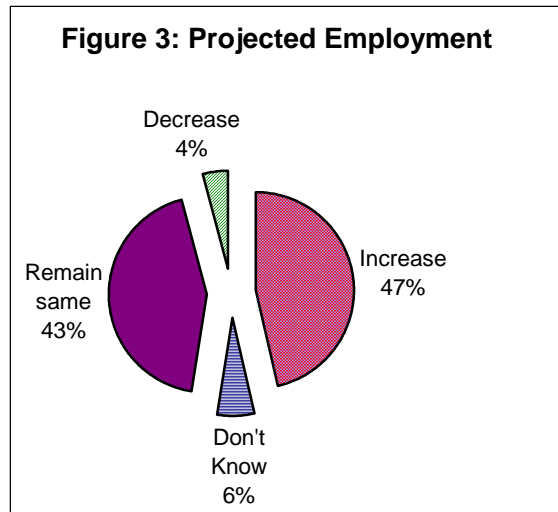
1. Create and Expand Education Opportunities in the Southwest Region
2. Reconnecting and Attracting Youth in Our Community
3. Community Support for the Creation and Sustainability of a Regional Health Centre
4. Discover Downtown
5. Identify and Respond to Key Issues for Senior Citizens
6. Build a Recognizable Vision, Identity or Brand for Swift Current
7. Co-ordination of Facility Development in City
8. Explore Value-Added Agriculture Initiatives
9. Follow up Facilitation with the Firms Planning to Expand
10. Regional Economic and Business Development

To expedite the initial project write-up and team organizing the preliminary co-chairs for each of these initiatives were Doug Howorko and Dawn Odegard. Each team is expected to select ongoing leadership. For more information or to get involved in a project please contact one of the volunteers listed under that project description.

**Projects Related to Improving Labor Availability and Productivity**

The Leadership Team selected two projects related to improving the community’s situation in labor availability and productivity (i.e. #1 and #2 below). Here are some compelling reasons that these projects were chosen.

About half of the firms projected an increase in employment (46%) and another 43 percent projected no change (See Figure 3). Yet 41 percent of the firms have difficulty recruiting qualified employees for this location.



Skills needed by the firms in at least some of their employees are shown in Table 1 below. Literacy skills were the most needed followed by sales, management, and basic computer skills.

**Table 1**  
**How important is it that some of the employees in this business possess these skills?**

Ranked by average score                      Average  
(4 = “very”, 1 = “not at all”)

Literacy skills	3.70
Sales skills	3.53
Management skills	3.29
Basic computer skills	3.13
Technical trade skills	2.90
Advanced computer skills	2.49
Community college	2.37
University	2.23

Out of 24 items ranked as an advantage or disadvantage to doing business in Swift Current, the “Availability of Skilled Labor” was rated as a disadvantage by 45 percent of the firms. This is the second highest disadvantage score given by the firms. Further, half of the eight manufacturers visited had a “major problem” with adequacy of worker skills. Finally, only a third of the firms deemed “Educated and trained labour force” as a positive factor in Swift Current (see Table 2 below).

**Project #1: Create and Expand Education Opportunities in the Southwest Region**

A comment heard from some firms in the open-ended data is that Swift Current sends its people away for training and they don’t usually return. Rather, they settle down somewhere else. This “brain drain” is a common complaint heard from rural prairie towns. Some members of the Research Review Panel decided that the best defense was a good offense. They suggested creating training programs in Swift Current that could become known across the province and beyond.

The short-term goal is to conduct a SWOT analysis of adult education for the Southwest.

The long-term goals are: a) Address and implement the findings of the SWOT analysis. b) Joint venturing between public and private sector to meet education needs.

The expected outcomes of this project are: a) Attract people to Swift Current and the southwest and keep them here. b) College and private institutions will grow.

**Volunteers:**

Michelle Hill	Karen Bonesky
Pat Parrott	Ken Roh
Dianne Sletten	Neil Clarke
Tim Marcus	Dawn Odegard
Doug Howorko	Bryan Braun
Dave Spencer	

**Project #2: Reconnecting and Attracting Youth in Our Community**

A major issue in rural communities on the prairies is the out flight of their youth. After putting major investments of time, energy and money into raising their children to adulthood, the community often watches them leave for economic opportunities in larger communities. Presumably this is happening to some degree in Swift Current based on flat population statistics and significant aging seen in the community.

The short-term goals for this committee are: a) Assess the role of existing organizations for youth. b) Support the Job Fair/Employer Showcase tentative for February/2003. c) Hold a youth issues forum (Grades 11, 12 to age 29).

The long-term goals are: a) Research possibility of an employer-youth networking system. b) Research the possibility of businesses being involved in the Universities/ College co-op program. c) Address and implement issues from the forum.

The expected outcome for this project is to reconnect and attract youth to our community.

**Volunteers:**

Erin Kinney	Karen Bonesky
Pat Parrott	Mike Kenopic
Kelsay Reimer	Joe Axon
Desiree Unvoas	Dawn Odegard
Neil Clarke	Doug Howorko

**Projects Related to Improving Swift Current’s Physical Environment**

Two projects were selected that are intended to improve the physical environment in the community (i.e. #3 and #4 below). Here is the supporting data from the survey.

The firms were asked to choose from a list of community assets that are attractive to new and existing businesses. On the positive side, the community was very strongly viewed as being attractive and a good location. There were several other relatively positive factors as well. On the other hand, only 27 percent viewed health care facilities as a community asset (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

**Which of the following factors are community assets or positive factors that are attractive to new businesses coming to this community and to existing businesses?**

Ranked by # of firms, from most to the least

Factor	% of firms
Community attractiveness	84%
Location	75%
Land availability	60%
Education and training facilities	59%
Public utilities	57%
Business costs	49%
Community attitude	46%
Taxation rate	37%
Lack of competition	37%
Information technology infrastructure	36%
Educated and trained labour force	33%
Business climate	33%
Transportation infrastructure	32%
Business support services	32%
Health care facilities	27%
Bilingual labour pool	5%

The survey also asks the businesses their opinions as consumers about the local shopping area (see Table 3). In this sense the businesses can be seen as a bunch of “tough customers”. They rated only one factor as “good”, five factors close to “fair”, five close to “good” and five in between “fair” and “good”. Physical factors included among the lower ratings include roadside signs (which received the lowest rating of 2.1), exterior appearance of downtown area (2.4) and parking signs (2.5)

**Table 3**

**As a Consumer, we would like your opinion on the local shopping area. Using the scale provided please indicate how well you think your shopping community does for each factor.**

Sorted by Average Score

(4 = "excellent", 1 = "poor")	Average Score
Public safety groups – e.g. lighting, security, police presence, etc.	3.1
Quality of merchandise available	2.8
Parking facilities	2.7
Accessibility for the handicapped	2.7
Exterior appearance of other retail areas in the community	2.7
Traffic flow on streets in the area	2.7
Competitive prices	2.5
Customer service	2.5
Parking signage	2.5
Uniform hours of operation	2.5
Display/presentation of products and services	2.5
Exterior appearance of the downtown area	2.4
Mix of businesses to attract variety of customers	2.4
Product Selection	2.3
Special events or promotions held in the shopping area	2.3
Roadside signs for advertising	2.1

**Project #3: Community Support for the Creation and Sustainability of a Regional Health Centre**

When prompted, 27 percent of the firms chose health care facilities as a positive factor attractive to new business and existing business (see Table 2 above). Three of the six small groups at the Action Swift Current panel review meeting selected the creation of a regional health care facility as a priority area for the Leadership Team. Some of the implications identified if a new health care facility does not happen are: losing health care professionals from the community, losing senior population to regional centres with modern facilities, migration of clients

to other regional centres, and ultimately some interruption of health care service.

Established entities are working in the community to establish a regional health care centre. Action Swift Current will be working with these entities.

The short-term goals for this project are:  
a) Write a letter to the Minister of Health, John Nilson, lobbying for the development of the hospital. (Enclose copy of final report). b) Begin communicating information on the status of the Regional Health Centre.

The long-term goals for this project are:  
a) Lobby to help build the hospital. b) Help with the recruitment and retention of professionals for the hospital in co-operation with other entities (e.g. HRDC). c) Create an environment that sustains integrated health care services encompassing extended entities (e.g. mental health services).

The expected outcome of this project is quality health care services developed and sustained to ensure the Swift Current business community is achieving growth and prosperity.

**Volunteers:**

Pat Parrott	Andrew Will
Rhonda Alexander	Stan Bacon
Tony Randall	Lynn Johnson
Dawn Odegard	Doug Howorko

**Project #4: Discover Downtown**

The exterior appearance of the downtown area only received a 2.4 score, which is closer to "fair" than "good". Fifty-two percent of the firms rated it as fair or poor. There were other related concerns reflected in the mediocre ratings given to parking signage, product selection, prices, customer service, mix of businesses, etc.

The Downtown Business Association exists in the community and requests that Action Swift Current and volunteers assist with this initiative.

The short-term goal for this project is to conduct a SWOT analysis of the downtown area. Some of the possible initiatives: banners on lampposts downtown to create atmosphere, improved signage directing people to downtown, create character of downtown by developing theme or brand (same as City brand or separate?), murals, improved bus service, overall coordinator for downtown, clean-up of streets and sidewalks in the spring, kiosks for posters (common area), display profiling history of former RCMP Supply Post, display profiling history of historic buildings, expand use of Bank of Montreal courtyard, research options for use of CPR buildings, use of sandwich boards, and development of a marketing package.

The long-term goal for this project is to assess and implement results of the SWOT analysis.

The expected outcome is to fill vacant buildings by increasing the number of downtown businesses and to generate more dollars in sales for merchants by creating a vibrant downtown community.

**Volunteers:**

- |                  |              |
|------------------|--------------|
| George Kushner   | Dawn Odegard |
| Len Ens          | Dave Doepker |
| Desiree Unvoas   | Pat Parrott  |
| Elysha Taylor    | Brad Gross   |
| Karen Bonesky    | Doug Howorko |
| Rhonda Alexander |              |

**Projects Related to Enhancing Swift Current’s Marketability to Seniors, Tourists and New Business**

The Leadership Team prioritized four follow-up projects in the area of marketing the community to seniors, tourists, and new business (i.e. #5, #6, #7, and #8 below). Here are the most salient survey results suggesting these follow-up opportunities.

Seniors are a relatively large part of the demographic mix in Swift Current. They make up a larger share of the consumers in town. The firms rate senior facilities as just a tad under “somewhat satisfied” (2.9). Another community service closely linked to seniors is medical health services, which scored second lowest among the 18 community services rated (see Table 4 below).

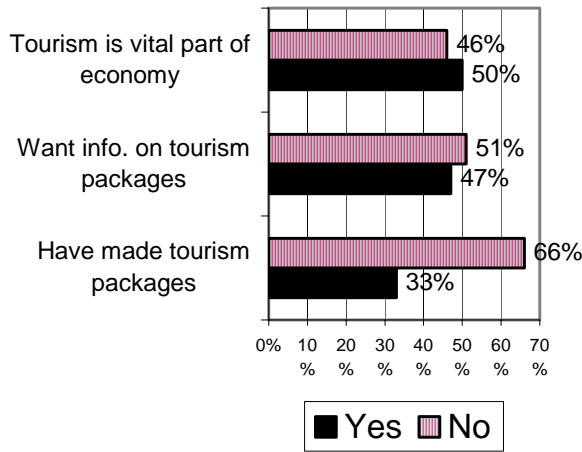
**Table 4**  
**Firms’ satisfaction with 18 community services**

Ranked by Average Score

(4 = “very satisfied”, 1 = “very dissatisfied”)	Average Score
Fire prevention and services	3.6
Schools	3.5
Health department permit	3.5
Policing	3.4
Garbage removal	3.3
Local community college	3.3
Child care services	3.3
Public utilities	3.1
Snow removal	3.1
Planning, zoning, and building permit	3.1
Street repair	2.9
Senior facilities	2.9
Federal approvals (i.e.: licensing)	2.9
Provincial approvals (i.e.: environmental, licensing)	2.8
Cultural/Recreational facilities	2.6
Industrial training	2.5
Medical health services for the community	2.4
Public transit	2.3

Tourism is viewed as a vital part of the economy of Swift Current by fifty percent of the businesses. A third of the firms had developed packages to attract tourists. Close to half of the firms are interested in information on developing packages attractive to tourists (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Tourism Questions**



Many firms mentioned basic sector employers that would provide employment, income and tax base benefits for the community. Sixteen called for more primary manufacturing to create jobs. Fourteen mentioned value-added agriculture (ethanol plant, meatpacking, etc.). There was also some interest in diversification in the energy sector (6), a casino (6), convention centre (4), expanded hospital (4), and more post secondary education (4). See Table 5 below.

**Table 5**  
**Which new suppliers of products or services would benefit the business community?**

sorted by frequency (loosely categorized from open-ended question responses, only frequency of > 4 shown)

Type of business	# of mentions
Don't know, N/A, have enough already, support local business	32
Primary manufacturing, create jobs	16
Value added agriculture (ethanol plant, meatpacking, etc.)	14
Shoe store	13
Office supply, paper, office equipment	11
More variety, competition, small business, or big box stores	10
Any business	10
Clothing (women's, children's, specialty)	9
Energy diversification (oil/wind: home offices, refineries, etc.)	6
Casino	6
Restaurants, bakery, coffee shop	5
Wholesaler, wholesale alliance or cooperative purchasing by business	5
Expanded/new health care or hospital	4
Convention centre	4
Post secondary education (new or expanded)	4

**Project #5: Identify and Respond to Key Issues for Senior Citizens**

The senior community in Swift Current is a relatively large part of the local demographics. Swift Current has a wealth of seniors. By using a valid, thorough process to respond to key needs and wants of these important consumers and citizens, Swift Current businesses may be able to realize valuable benefits such as increased sales, reliable senior employees, business opportunities and other benefits.

A short-term goal for this committee is to conduct a SWOT analysis of the senior's community with a long-term goal to address and implement the findings of the analysis.

The expected outcome is to make Swift Current an attractive place for seniors to live by meeting their needs (sports, culture, recreation for young active seniors, adequate health care facilities and services, independent seniors housing and extended health care facilities).

**Volunteers:**

George Kushner	Corey Adam
Bryon Campbell	Stu Dyrland
Ann Wiebe	Neil Clarke
Dawn Odegard	John Wall
Doug Howorko	Dianne Hanke
Glenn Hanke	

**Project #6: Build a Recognizable Vision, Identity or Brand for Swift Current**

The need for Swift Current to create a recognizable vision, identity or brand in order to differentiate itself from other communities was identified in the survey. This will create positive effects on the community's drawing power for tourism and as a regional shopping center and even perhaps for its ability to compete as a place to live and work.

The short-term goal for the project is to develop a co-coordinated approach on development and management of a new icon and supporting information to achieve an appropriate identity (brand) for Swift Current.

The long-term goals for this project are:  
a) Create positive perceptions and attitudes within Swift Current and abroad. b) To communicate the brand to other communities provincially, nationally and internationally.

The expected outcome of this project is to create new investment and wealth in the community.

**Volunteers:**

Dave Doepker	Doug Howorko
Lee Friesen	Marty Salberg
Desiree Unvoas	Al Bridal
Karen Bonesky	Pat Friesen
Al Chilton	Daryl Wall
Garry Brown	Dawn Odegard
Adrienne Jensen	Gordon Budd

**Project #7: Co-ordination of Facility Development in City**

In the survey results a few of the firms (6) suggested that the community induce visitor traffic by building a casino. On the other hand, a few firms (4) suggested that a convention centre be constructed to bring in the revenues that conventioners bring to a community. Within the community there are several projects with existing committees in the developmental stage (casino, performing arts centre, multi-use recreation facility). It was decided by the committee to not infringe on the existing committees but look at how Action Swift Current could enhance or assist with the existing committees.

The short-term goal is to identify the existing project committees and offer our services to enhance and assist them.

It was thought that a long-term goal would be for Action Swift Current to act as an umbrella group to link the entities with no redundancy and to assist in communicating the projects to the community.

The expected outcome of this project is to co-ordinate the facility development efforts with a possible joint venture in marketing and development information.

**Volunteers:**

Gord Budd	Dawn Odegard
Pat Friesen	Pat Parrott
Carl Parsons	Doug Howorko

Paul Rezansoff

Daryl Wall

Dan Runcie

Adrienne Jensen

Dawn Odegard

**Project #8: Explore Value-Added Agriculture Initiatives**

Fourteen of the firms called for businesses that would process agricultural commodities to add value and thereby capture revenue, job, and tax base benefits which are currently going outside of Swift Current. An ethanol plant and a meat packing plant were each mentioned more than once. At the Research Review meeting the wind industry (i.e. wind turbines) was suggested as another possible value-added industry to explore. Beyond that, 16 of the firms called for more manufacturing of any variety because of the spin-off benefit that primary industry creates for the rest of the economy. This is a combined 15 percent of the firms calling for more manufacturing establishments. A significant number of firms interviewed in the BR&E visitation process call for external recruiting – ten firms called for “any” new business to be added while 52 percent of firms called for more aggressive external recruiting.

The short-term goals for this project are:  
a) Co-ordinate meeting with related agricultural organizations. b) Conduct a SWOT analysis on the agricultural sector in the community. c) Research the pending Southwest REDA project of an Agriculture Forum.

The long-term goals for this project are:  
a) Respond to the findings of the SWOT analysis. b) Support agriculture initiatives in the community.

The expected outcome of this project is to have a vibrant, diversified community.

**Volunteers:**

Corey Adam  
Stu Dyrland

Doug Howorko  
Marty Salberg

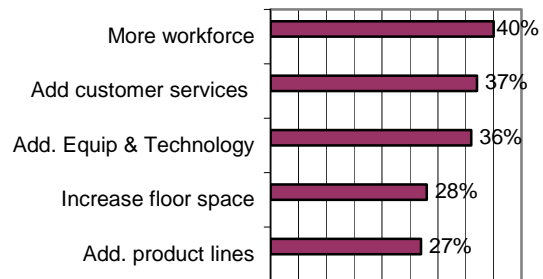
**Projects Related to Enhancing Retention and Expansion of Existing Firms through Technical and Development Assistance**

The Swift Current firms have significant expansion plans for the next two years. If the firms make these changes and expand their operations in the area, they will be an important source of economic growth for the community. Two projects are being initiated to capture this potential (#9 and #10 below). Here is the pertinent survey data.

Fifty-four percent of the firms plan expansions or to refine their marketing efforts in the immediate future. Asked another way, within two years, “are you planning to expand your operations in this community” elicited a positive response from 46 percent of the businesses. Only three percent are considering relocating outside Swift Current.

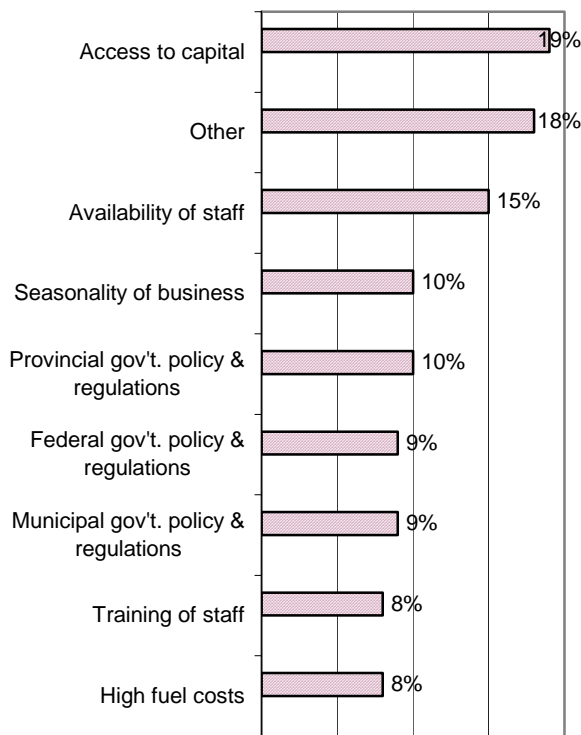
The implications of the firm expansion plans are multiple. Forty percent of the firms forecast more workforce. Over a third predict increased investment in equipment and technology (36%) and additional services for customers (37%). Increased building space (28%) and product lines (27%) are other big needs. See Figure 5.

**Figure 5: What Will Your Expansion Lead to?**



Twenty percent of the firms are experiencing difficulty with their expansion plans. Access to capital (19%) and availability of staff (15%) were the leading problems with several more clustered at eight to ten percent: seasonality of business; municipal, provincial, and federal government policy and regulations; training; and fuel costs. See Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Most Significant Barriers to Expansion**



Six businesses plan to close in the next two years. Four reasons were cited: loss of customers, lack of profits, retirement, and other.

**Project #9: Follow up Facilitation with the Firms Planning to Expand**

In the survey results there is a significant indication of plans to expand employment, land, buildings, equipment, etc. by the firms.

The short-term goals for this project are:  
 a) Identify the needs and concerns of businesses and identify who is addressing these issues.  
 b) Research history of experiences of businesses that have previously attempted expansion, this information will assist in dealing with issues and removing barriers.  
 c) React to survey results to create infrastructure for businesses wishing to expand.

The long-term goals for the project are:  
 a) Create resource information for the business community.  
 b) Form focus groups involving entities (e.g. human resource services; federal, provincial and civic governments; business facilitators; financial services; private sector; etc.) in order to meet with businesses in a confidential manner to provide support and information as needed.  
 c) Offer the above mentioned services to all businesses in the community of Swift Current on an ongoing basis.

The expected outcome of this project will be for the committee to earn the confidence of the business community and facilitate successful business expansions.

**Volunteers:**

- |                   |              |
|-------------------|--------------|
| Dianne Sletten    | Glenn Moore  |
| Chuck Thomson     | Doug Howorko |
| Bernie Weinbender | Joe Axon     |
| Karen Bonesky     | Vim Parmar   |
| Garry Brown       | Dawn Odegard |

**Project #10: Regional Economic and Business Development**

It was suggested at the Research Review Panel that the community needs to address the business community's fragmentation on issues concerning the development of Swift Current. For instance, whether to recruit new business and, if so, what kind? More business-to-business dialogue on these issues is needed and more facilitated dialogue across the community as well.

Swift Current will find it more difficult to move forward successfully without creating some consensus on these issues.

It is recognized that economic and business development of the city is closely related to effective partnerships with the RMs, towns and villages in the region. The city may not be able to house particular agricultural projects; however they are closely related to the development and maintenance of the projects that takes place in the region.

The short term goals for this project are:  
a) Action Swift Current to meet with the City and the R.M. of Swift Current to discuss the City's Economic Development Plan and develop the role of this committee.  
b) Recognize that economic and business development is a regional effort and initiate the development of an effective marketing package in co-operation with RMs, towns, villages, and the City.

Long term goals of the project are to:  
a) Develop a regional marketing package.  
b) Action Swift Current to become a partner in the City's Economic Development Plan

and assist where possible to complement the plan.

The expected outcome of this project is economic development resulting from joint co-operation in implementing the City's economic plan and effective communication with the public and other economic development entities. Another expected outcome is to have regional marketing initiatives take place.

**Volunteers:**

Doug Howorko	Myrna Braaten
Mike Vaughan	Karen Bonesky
Marty Salberg	Al Chilton
Melanie Friesen	Garry Brown
Adrienne Jensen	Gord Budd
Chuck Thomson	Dawn Odegard



The Leadership Team selected the projects. This summary report was written by Michael Darger with editorial assistance from Barbara Lemon and Doug Howorko of Action Swift Current.