



Subject: *Business Technical Assistance Program*
To: Corporate and Residential Services
Date Prepared: 1/3/2024
Related Motions:
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Approved by: Adam Clarkson, Director

Summary

The 2023-24 Operating Budget includes \$10,000 to pilot a new service focused on providing entrepreneurs in East Hants access to professional consulting services to help with business planning, operations, and growth. During the budget discussions, Staff identified that before proceeding Council would receive an update on the pilot service. This report provides an overview of new service before staff start implementation.

Financial Impact Statement

The business plan and \$10,000 budget for this new pilot service were approved by Council as part of East Hants 2023-24 Operating Budget.

Recommendation

Staff are recommending that the Corporate and Residential Services Committee recommend to Council to approve the Business Technical Assistance Program pilot service.

Recommended Motion

That the Corporate and Residential Services Committee recommends to Council to approve the Business Technical Assistance Program pilot service.

Background

The Economic and Business Development Division provides a support service to local businesses to help them identify, navigate, and address challenges and opportunities in their business operations. This service helps individual businesses one-on-one, and overall contributes to a resilient business community in the region. Last year, over 100 requests for service were received from local businesses through the Business Support Service.

Over the past number of years, Economic and Business Development has received an increasing number of requests for service from businesses looking for more specialized technical assistance in business planning, start-up, and operations. Unfortunately, Council's current Business Support Service is unable to provide this specialized level of support due to the constraints of staff resources, expertise, and time. The Economic Development Plan identifies that continuing to support business start-ups, and growing business support programs is a key action of the strategic goal to grow investment in East Hants. To help accomplish this goal and to further support the local business community, Council approved, as part of their 2023-24 Operating Budget, \$10,000 to pilot a new service

focused on providing entrepreneurs in East Hants access to professional consulting services to help with business planning. Economic and Business Development has been working to develop this pilot Technical Assistance Program through a contract with the Nova Scotia Centre for Entrepreneurship Education and Development (CEED).

The Centre for Entrepreneurship Education and Development is a not-for-profit-based organization that is committed to advancing and supporting the spirit of entrepreneurship in Nova Scotia for more than 30 years. Their goal is to help build successful and innovative businesses that contribute to a vibrant and entrepreneurial Nova Scotia.

Discussion

This new pilot service in East Hants will offer two programs: The Incubator Program for local entrepreneurs and the Accelerator Program for existing businesses. These two programs are part of CEED's core program offering and Economic and Business Development have worked with CEED to customize and develop the programs to fit the unique rural and suburban diversity of East Hants businesses and industries.

The Incubator Program will be an intensive six-week program that includes expert guidance from entrepreneurial advisors with over 20 years of experience starting, scaling, and empowering businesses. The Incubator Program will bring aspiring entrepreneurs together to validate their ideas and work as a group to make those ideas a reality. The program is focused on active, dynamic conversations to promote experiential learning, peer collaboration and critical thinking. The discussions push participants to examine their business concepts and to understand their plans potential. During the six-week program, participants will learn to understand and communicate their value proposition, refine their business roadmap and ideas, develop a dynamic business model, cultivate the mindset needed to plan and succeed, actively conduct customer discovery and validation, and learn tactics to manage finances for profitability. The program will include fifteen hours of interactive curriculum delivery, three one-hour, one-on-one advisory sessions, and a three-month subscription to Live Plan, an online business plan platform, where the participants will develop a fundable and actionable business plan.

The Accelerator Program is focused on the needs of existing businesses that may be trying to scale or are facing a challenge in their growth. Through six intensive sessions, tailored to small and mid-size enterprises (SMEs), participants are guided by entrepreneurial advisors with extensive expertise in starting, scaling, and empowering businesses. In this program, participants will combine design thinking with specific business acceleration principles, tools, and methodologies, design and plan their organizational foundation and business acceleration model, challenge growth assumptions and hypotheses, benefit from peer-to-peer participation and professional advisory sessions, develop their growth strategy and business model, balance their resources with the processes necessary to establish an active organizational structure, learn to ensure a pleasing customer experience. The program includes fifteen hours of interactive curriculum delivery and three one-hour, one-on-one advisory sessions.

These two programs are currently partially funded by the Government of Canada through the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA). This has provided East Hants the opportunity to maximize the pilot service's budget. This will enable a greater number of participants to take part in the programs and to access additional one-on-one advisory services as needed, than if East Hants were funding the service alone. It is anticipated that the program will be able to accommodate 20-30 entrepreneurs and businesses.

Applications to the programs will be received through an on-line portal and evaluated by Economic and Business Development staff. Evaluation of applications will be competitive and based on alignment with East Hants' key sectors (Construction, transportation, retail, manufacturing, and multi-industry supply chain), business support focus areas (Continuous improvement and productivity, sustainable practices and solutions, digital adoption, automation and technological solutions, exporting and trade opportunities, and tourism product development), and geographical locations.

In addition, as part of East Hants' Contribution Funding Agreement with the Province of Nova Scotia and the Memorandum of Understanding with the Halifax Partnership, businesses in neighboring rural areas of HRM will also be eligible to apply. Economic and Business Development are currently working with the Halifax partnership on the operational details and logistics of this component. This will help East Hants grow our regional approach to Economic Development and provide meaningful support to both Municipality's business communities.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

- East Hants Strategic Plan - Economic Prosperity - Objective 5: Attract and Retain Investment
- East Hants Economic Development Plan - Objective 2: Support Business - Key Action: Continue to support business start-ups, and consider business support funding programs.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Municipal Government Act - s. 65

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The business plan and \$10,000 budget for this new pilot service were approved by Council as part of East Hants 2023-24 Operating Budget.

Alternatives

1. Corporate and Residential Services could recommend to Council to provide additional direction to Staff.

Attachments

None.