



INTERIM ACTION PLAN

ATTRACTION AND RETENTION STRATEGY

February 2009

BACKGROUND

Motivated by the impacts of the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic, the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC) was established in 2005 to “work to ensure sustainable development and resiliency” in the north-central region of British Columbia bounded roughly by Smithers, Valemount and Mackenzie. A key function of the OBAC is the development of a series of regional response strategies. When complete, these strategies are expected to address eleven high-priority subject areas ranging from industry sectors to community services.

Each of the regional response strategies will provide an up-to-date profile of the current situation, analyze the opportunities and challenges associated with each subject area, and recommend a series of immediate and longer-term actions. Although each strategy is developed with broad stakeholder involvement, the final product remains advisory in nature – identifying what could be done by senior and local governments, industries, public institutions and others.

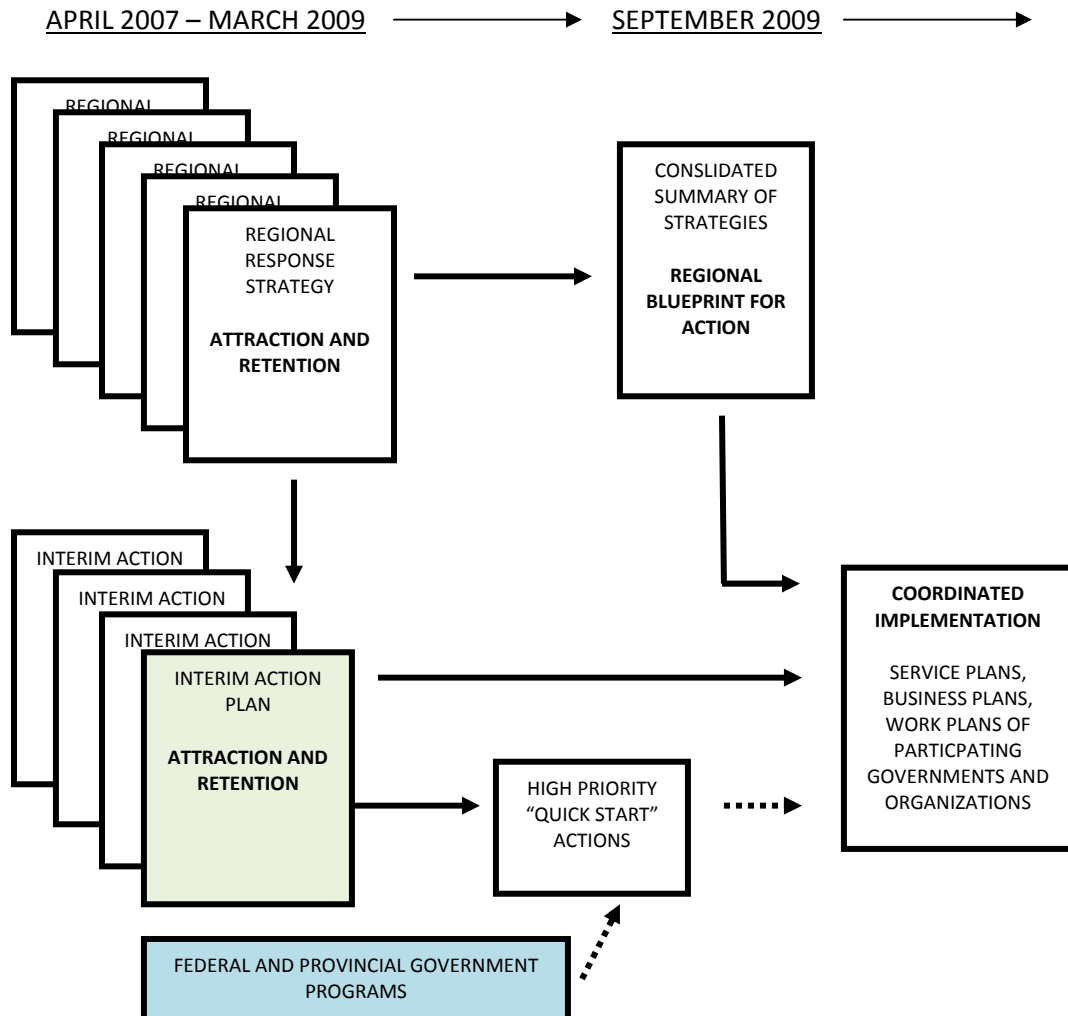
The Attraction and Retention Strategy is the fifth of the regional response strategies to be released (December 2008), and sets out four objectives and five broad recommendations. To support the recommendations, 22 specific actions are proposed. As each successive regional response strategy is developed, it is expected that there will be many common and interdependent recommendations and actions. In particular, this strategy is very closely linked to the Community Social Services and Supports Strategy which was released concurrently.

The economic circumstances that have developed over the past several months, plunging the country into a recession, increase the urgency to act on this strategy. Governments at all levels are looking for ways to help small, rural and resource-based communities become more resilient and able to maintain their populations and economies over time.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Interim Action Plan is to identify what work can effectively take place now, in order to ensure that

- a. High priority (important and immediate) opportunities are addressed in a timely manner, and
- b. Individuals and organizations whose mandate it would be to undertake specific activities are informed and engaged in implementation.



As more of the regional response strategies are completed the Interim Action Plans will inform the implementation activities of a variety of government and non-government organizations. During that period it is expected that a longer-term implementation structure will be developed.

KEY OBAC ACTIONS SUMMARY

OBAC does not have the mandate or resources to take on implementation of most actions in the regional strategies, including the Attraction and Retention Strategy. However, in line with its role to advocate for regionally important community interests, it will work to see they are addressed. In many situations, the OBAC function will be to communicate the opportunity, encourage partnerships and advocate for action by the appropriate government or organization.

OBAC will actively encourage the appropriate parties to advance all the recommendations and specific actions identified in the Strategy. It is understood, however, that this does not mean that every action will be completed exactly as it is currently described – as work progresses and circumstances evolve, actions are expected to fall into a number of categories:

- a. Addressed through existing initiatives,
- b. Implemented as described,
- c. Intent is achieved, but through different means, and
- d. Deferred or dropped with reasons.

In general, however, the intent of the recommendations will be carried forward.

Concurrent to the completion of regional response strategies, OBAC will work with other levels of government to determine what type of collaborative model is best suited to oversee the implementation, monitoring and adaptation of strategies over the longer-term. This is a fundamental requirement if the benefits from OBAC's investment in strategy development are to be realized.

In the interim, the following actions provide important and immediate opportunities which should be pursued with OBAC leadership:

1 Work with senior governments, regional organizations and the private sector to develop options for the establishment of a regional economic development agency

- *Regional approaches to economic development have been identified as a best practice; they provide the economies of scale needed for effective rural economic development*

Target: convene a discussion with appropriate governments and organizations to develop a specific proposal by October 31, 2009.

2 Initiate service enhancements that assist self-employment

- *Access to information on opportunities, market research and training is needed by many potential small business owners.*

Target: work with service providers to do a gap analysis and action plan by December 31, 2009.

3 Work with senior governments to ensure funding for services remains in place for a transition period

- *This includes education, health, and other services which may otherwise be reduced during the MPB transition period.*

Target: A coordinated submission on behalf of local governments by October 31, 2009.

4 Establish baselines and track progress

Target: Put in place a regionally based method to credibly track progress toward the objectives set out in the Strategy, including documenting the baseline, by June 2009. (See example below).

Appendix 1 describes each specific action and identifies steps the OBAC will take to encourage and advocate for implementation.

EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE MEASURES AND TARGETS

As part of the interim action planning process, a proposed performance measure and target will be determined for each recommendation.

1. Continue to diversify and strengthen the region's economy.

Proposed success measure:

Information source:

Proposed target:

2. Market the region's considerable assets which make it a desirable place to live, work, play and invest.

Proposed success measure:

Information source:

Proposed target:

3. Provide assistance to the region's young people and other residents to access training, obtain jobs and facilitate growth in self-employment opportunities.

Proposed success measures:

Information source:

Proposed target:

4. Further identify and develop the services and amenities required to attract and retain young people, seniors, skilled workers, professionals and others.

Proposed success measures:

Information source:

Proposed target:

5. Develop and implement improved service delivery models to better meet health care and education needs.

Proposed success measures:

Information source:

Proposed target:

APPENDIX 1

Appendix 1 is based on the “specific actions” set out in Chapter 6 (pages 28-38) of the Integrated Regional Infrastructure Strategy.

Actions colour coded yellow indicate an immediate opportunity for OBAC



Actions colour coded green are considered to be already underway



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Recommendation 1: <i>Continue to diversify and strengthen the region's economy</i>				
Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
a) Support local government in establishing a Regional Economic Development Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A regional approach has been identified as essential to success. There are presently many regionally-based organizations, but none with a singular mandate for economic development. Work is required to develop the model (mandate, business model, funding source etc.). A collaborative effort between all levels of government is required. 	All levels of government Existing regional organizations with an interest	Even if the resources eventually come from other programs or the enterprise becomes self-funding, start-up financing will be required.	There are options for the OBAC role: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> OBAC can act as a catalyst to initially bring the various parties together, assuming that the work will then carry on. OBAC can take a more direct leadership role to convene the parties, develop options and proposals, and be the incubator for a regional program and agency.
b) Implement OBAC's industrial sector strategies. Resource industries are an initial priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 			Develop and follow through on interim action plans and a long-term diversification plan incorporating sector strategies.
c) Ensure that municipalities continue to be supported by the province during periods of sudden economic downturns and decreases in tax revenue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This needs to be part of the provincial (and federal) policy approach - protect the assets so communities rebound effectively. Linked to infrastructure strategy and Community and Social Services and Supports Strategy. 	Local governments Province Federal Government	There will be significant costs to maintain transfers and possibly increase grants when less revenue is being generated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor the condition of member communities Advocate for policy and program solutions that are regionally relevant

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Recommendation 2: Market the region's considerable assets which make it a desirable place to live, work, play, and invest.				
Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
a) Develop an Omineca Brand that highlights the assets of the region and its communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a strategic initiative that could have wide-reaching effects if successful Consider involving citizens in proposing the brand - probably requiring a "name" (identity) and a "tag line" as well as a visual logo. 	Local governments and First Nations Economic development organizations Community organizations	Regardless of the process chosen to select the brand (which may require some funding), there will need to be some \$ to develop it into a marketing/regional identity tool.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find an appropriate organization to lead this initiative.
b) Develop and implement a regional marketing program. The Golden Raven cultural program may provide a good model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This should be done in conjunction with action 2(a), as the brand will be part of the marketing strategy. 	Regional body involving governments, business and economic development interests.	Cost will be based on further work to develop a program and business model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find an appropriate organization to lead this initiative.
c) Support local initiatives that strengthen community identity (i.e. build on Aboriginal Awareness Day)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These should be locally driven, but there may be an advantage to some regional coordination and marketing. 	Local governments, including First Nations. Local community and cultural organizations.	Volunteers and local sponsorships. Some provincial programs are available for local events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage members to continue or undertake local initiatives.
d) Improve the availability of information on the region's considerable environmental assets and outdoor recreational opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In addition to signage, encourage further development of self-guided tours etc. There are already a number of resources in bookstores. 	Tourism associations Local governments Provincial government	Installation and maintenance of signs can be quite expensive, however using signs at key locations can be effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage members and regional organizations to address this.
e) Create welcoming initiatives to integrate new residents quickly and effectively into the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-based organizations may be able to network to share techniques 	Local governments Business associations Community groups	Mainly volunteers and local sponsorships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage members and regional organizations to address this.

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Recommendation 3: Provide assistance to the region's young people and other residents to access training and obtain jobs and facilitate self-employment opportunities.

Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
a) Identify the human resource and skilled worker needs of emerging and existing employers. Asses both demographically and by industry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is work being done in this area, but it may not be well coordinated, regional in perspective, or sufficiently forward looking. Look at Service Canada programs for opportunities 	Regional organizations (existing or proposed economic development agency - action 1(a))	Initial cost of assessment plus periodic upkeep. Actual \$ requirement is modest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage education and employer organizations to work together on this. Support proposals to senior governments.
b) Provide more diverse training opportunities through the local colleges and UNBC to meet the identified training and skills needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education / training institutions do work to address this but there must be clear demand, plus funding to both develop and deliver programs. 	Province - Advanced Education and Labour Development Business and Post-secondary organizations	If training is not paid for by the industry or the participants, then the cost falls to the province. Actual costs will depend upon the programs chosen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage education and employer organizations to work together on this. Support proposals to senior governments.
c) Support improved HR practices by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify the human resource management skills of small employers in the OBAC Identifying the capacity of small businesses to access available supports and the human resource service needs of small employers. Develop additional services to address any human resource management gaps that emerge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are programs in existence through both private and public sector providers. The issue may involve confirming demand and/or coordinating the participation of small businesses. Consider convenient (e.g., weekend or evening) programs within communities. These may be full or partial cost-recovery. 	Business organizations could take on a leadership / coordination role.	Some sponsorship funding may be available through senior governments, NDIT or other foundations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage business organizations to address this.

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Recommendation 3: Provide assistance to the region's young people and other residents to access training and obtain jobs and facilitate self-employment opportunities.

Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
d) Actively address barriers that prevent individuals from participating in the local labour market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involves building on existing programs and activities. Any innovative programs to learn from? 	Employment service providers Province Federal Government Education Providers	Depends on the program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage service providers, governments and business to work on this.
e) Use a "Fair Labour Market" approach and mechanism provide incentives to employers to take on first time workers, recent graduates, and apprentices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	Province of BC Employer/business organizations	Can be significant costs depending on the program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support local business and employer organizations' proposals to senior governments
f) Expand the range of services provided by established local employment service providers ensuring that they are able to service all community members rather than just 'unemployed people'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	Provincial and Federal Governments	Costs driven by the individual program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support local business and employer organizations' proposals to senior governments
g) Ensure that local economic development services identify self-employment opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May need to be supported with access to some very basic training or support (e.g., setting up a bookkeeping system, collecting GST etc.) 	Economic development organizations Local governments	This can be locally driven at minimal cost.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage service providers, local governments and business to work on this.
h) Work across organizations to find ways to retain the immense expertise in forest workers and expand opportunities to leverage this into training and mentorship opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linked to some of the above actions (e.g., self-employment opportunities and skills) 	Province of BC Employer / business organizations	Time and \$ involved to provide coordination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and support local business and employer organizations to address this.

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Recommendation 4: Further identify and develop the services and amenities required to attract and retain young people, seniors, skilled workers, professionals and others.

Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
<p>a) Develop a Regional Amenities Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate and exchange information relevant to attraction and retention across all communities in the region • Identify synergistic opportunities for First Nations and other communities in the region • Utilize the amenities provided in Smithers and Prince George to better position the region's smaller communities to attract and retain people. (e.g. the "two hours from service" best practices approach) • Identify and develop amenities needed to retain youths and seniors (and other specific groups to be identified.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could be a "next phase" for the work undertaken by OBAC 	<p>Governments Community and business organizations</p>	<p>The development of a strategy is likely to be required between \$50 and \$100k plus in-kind efforts. This may be eligible for funding through the NDIT.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a lead organization (existing or new), or if OBAC continues to operate past 2009, adopt as a project in the next work plan.
<p>b) Consider using employment programs to improve recreational and cultural facilities, as well as day care and other social service facilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will need to be built into federal and provincial government program criteria 	<p>Federal and Provincial Governments</p>	<p>There may need to be some "implementation" or project management funding. The labour portion would be provided through the employment program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage senior governments to incorporate this into program design.

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Recommendation 4: Further identify and develop the services and amenities required to attract and retain young people, seniors, skilled workers, professionals and others.				
Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
c) Develop an International Migrant Strategy which includes the determination of the groups which should be targeted and identification of and development of services and amenities which will attract these migrants. Priorities for initial “targeting” are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certain skilled workers and professionals • Entrepreneurs; (the Federal “Entrepreneur Immigration Program” may be an important tool) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	Federal and Provincial Governments Business organizations	Some funding may be required to carry out the research and develop a strategy. There may be opportunities to cost-share between governments and NDIT.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a lead organization and encourage governments and business to undertake this work, or • If OBAC continues to operate past 2009, adopt as a project in the next work plan.

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Recommendation 5: Develop and implement improved service delivery models to better meet health care and education needs				
Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
a) Pilot an initiative designed to bring the courses to the people. Fully utilize modern communications technologies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent technology has improved the options for quality distance learning. • My be able to leverage existing or planned public communications infrastructure 	Education and training providers. Province.	The costs of a pilot will likely be quite modest if the basic infrastructure is in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage providers and governments to take a lead role.

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Recommendation 5: Develop and implement improved service delivery models to better meet health care and education needs

Specific action (from Strategy)	Comments and/or tactics	Contacts and/or responsibilities	Cost considerations	OBAC function
	(e.g., video conferencing). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linked to regional infrastructure strategy and community services and supports strategy. 			
b) Develop a strategy designed to improve the delivery of health care across the region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize modern communications technology (where possible share the education infrastructure) Distance diagnosing, mobile clinics, and childhood development services are important examples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work has been underway for the past several years to improve health care technology 	Northern Health Province of BC	Development (or updating) of a strategy may be \$50k to \$100k. Implementation costs will depend in the options chosen and timelines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the province, NHA and others to pursue this.
c) Post-secondary institutions in each community, in conjunction with the local high schools, collaboratively determine what technology resources are available to support alternative educational options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires local response. 	Secondary and post-secondary institutions at the local level	Minimal direct cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through member governments, encourage a community-level response.
d) Ensure that health and education funding and services will remain in place for up to up to five years following major economic downturns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This needs to be a government policy 	Provincial and Federal Governments Local Governments and service providers	Potentially significant costs relative to revenue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate with senior governments for this policy and the necessary funding to implement it.