
Regional Strategy

DEVELOPMENT GUIDE



**Vibrant and Sustainable
Communities**



Regional Strategy Development Guide

Published by:
Environment and Local Government
Government of New Brunswick
P.O. Box 6000
Fredericton, New Brunswick
E3B 5H1
Canada

gnb.ca
February 2023

ISBN XXX
22-00224

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Introduction

Regional service commissions (RSCs) must have a regional strategy adopted and approved by their board of directors before July 1, 2023. This document is a step-by-step guide for RSCs in drafting their regional strategies with a focus on elaborating the mandatory strategy requirements defined in the **Regional Service Delivery Act** (RSDA) and accompanying regulations. Following the guide will ensure that RSCs are meeting their legal requirements related to the regional strategy and ensure that they are meeting the minimum service expectations for each new mandated service (economic development; tourism promotion; community development; regional transportation; cost-sharing for regional sport, recreation, and cultural infrastructure; and the public safety committee).

The regional strategy is an important opportunity for the local governments and rural district in a region to collaborate, together and with various stakeholders, on regional priorities with respect to the mandated services of the RSC. The mandated services are closely related under a common objective of sustainable and inclusive regional growth. Local entities collaborating under this common objective will foster a more comprehensive regional approach to growth in New Brunswick that will lead to quality-of-life improvements for regional residents and create opportunities for economic growth, tourism promotion, and community development. It will also help regions attract entrepreneurs, newcomers, and visitors from outside the province

Form and Content

RSCs are responsible for drafting their own regional strategies. Provincial departments and agencies will be available to provide insight and participate in discussions as RSCs must ensure they are taking provincial priorities and plans into account. RSCs may use their own strategic planning processes and templates as long as their regional strategies meet the minimum requirements defined in the RSDA and accompanying regulations. Specifically, regional strategies must include:

- A vision statement.
- A statement of the method of development of the strategy.
- A statement of the stakeholder engagement that was conducted as part of the development of the strategy.
- A statement of the First Nations engagement that was conducted as part of the development of the strategy.
- A strategic assessment of each component of the RSC's mandate which:
 - considers the current level of service in the region and the level of service expected in the future,
 - examines the links between that component and other mandatory services, and
 - takes into account provincial priorities related to that component and how these relate to regional priorities.
- A statement of regional goals to be achieved during the period to which the strategy refers, which shall take into account, at a minimum, the components of the RSC's mandate and other collaborative initiatives undertaken by the RSC.
- A plan to implement the goals.
- Performance targets to monitor progress in achieving the goals and their implementation.
- An accountability framework specifying reporting requirements.

The Department of Environment and Local Government (ELG) has provided a **strategy template** to accompany this step-by-step guide. RSCs may use the template or develop their own framework as long as they meet the minimum requirements defined in this guide, the RSDA, and its accompanying regulations.

Restrictions and Considerations

While RSCs will have a lot of flexibility in determining their own strategy, there are a few restrictions and considerations to keep in mind during the strategy development process.

- RSCs cannot acquire or hold securities, provide loans or guarantees, or borrow money for the purposes of economic development.
- RSCs cannot engage in investment attraction, workforce development, export development, or the providing of business or human resources management supports that duplicate an existing service provided by the provincial government.
- RSCs cannot duplicate existing provincial services and must ensure that their activities do not impede provincial programs. It is strongly encouraged that RSCs also consider what services are provided by federal, local, or not-for-profit sector organizations and not duplicate those offerings.
- RSCs should not make plans that conflict with provincially regulated Crown lands and resources. Crown lands and resource decisions are under the authority of provincial legislation, and all matters pertaining to their management are the responsibility of their respective provincial departments.
- RSCs entering funding agreements or service agreements with departments, agencies, or third parties may need to consider associated deliverables, specific timelines, or other obligations and requirements in the development or implementation of their regional strategies.

STEP 1:

Form a Steering Committee

The RSC should form a steering committee to lead the development of their regional strategy. The committee should include the RSC chief executive officer (CEO) and the directors of the mandated services (whether they be internal staff or third-party service providers). The steering committee can hire outside expertise to manage any part of the process. The first action of the steering committee should be to draft a work plan that clearly establishes the responsibilities of each team member, specifies due dates, details when meetings will happen, and what resources are available. This would include detailing who the lead for each mandate area is on the steering committee. The steering committee should also provide their RSC board of directors with monthly progress reports (depending on the board of directors meeting schedule).

While the steering committee will provide direction and oversight, much of the strategy development work should be conducted by mandate-specific standing committees. Many of these committees already exist, but the RSC may leverage external groups for outside expertise. For example, the region's Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Forum could be leveraged as a standing committee focused on workforce development. Mandate-specific standing committees will be able to provide specialized knowledge and identify actions related to their relevant mandated service. RSCs should also consider inviting RSC staff members, staff from partner organizations, local government representatives, First Nations representatives, and community stakeholders to participate in the strategy development process through the standing committees. When the standing committees have completed their work the steering committee should validate it, compile it into the finalized regional strategy, and present it to the board of directors.

It is vital that RSCs also work closely with the provincial government where their strategies may intersect with provincially administered programs or areas of jurisdiction. This relationship is best initiated in the planning process and RSCs are encouraged to invite provincial departments or agencies to participate (or be consulted in) the strategy development process. In cases where RSCs require clarification on provincial matters, or where RSCs wish to collaborate with provincial departments, ELG can help foster connections.

STEP 2:

Conduct a Strategic Assessment

The strategic assessment is a vital component to the strategic planning process and will inform the development of the mandatory components of the strategy. At minimum, the strategic assessment must consider the following for each mandated service.

- What is the current level of service in the region? This should include existing government, not-for-profit, and private sector services, as well as services provided to First Nations communities and organizations and agreements with First Nations, if applicable.
- What is the RSC's desired level of service in the region? This should also include considering what the RSC needs to do to achieve the desired level of service and the unique service needs and interests of rural and urban residents.
- How is the service interconnected with other mandated services?
- What are the current provincial priorities related to the service and how do they intersect with regional priorities?

RSCs should also consider doing a formal strategic assessment of the region, such as a SWOT analysis, for the mandated services as well as the territory covered.

- **Strengths:** Characteristics of the service that can help achieve the goal.
- **Weaknesses:** Characteristics of the service that may represent obstacles to achieving the objective.
- **Opportunities:** External factors that may be helpful in achieving the goal.
- **Threats:** External factors that may represent obstacles to achieving the objective.

Gathering key regional information and statistics may be a helpful exercise to provide context for the strategic assessment. Understanding what the economic and social make-up of the region is using data may unveil a better understanding of the region. RSCs should also generate a list of assets in the region such as major roadways, railways, ports, cultural institutions, recreation facilities, tourism attractions, educational institutions, medical facilities, and other relevant assets (always consider the five mandate areas).

STEP 3:

Conduct Stakeholder Engagement

RSCs must conduct engagement that should at minimum involve key regional stakeholders related to the mandated services. The strategy development methodology and stakeholder engagement processes that have contributed to the adoption of the regional strategy must be detailed in the strategy document. RSCs must also engage First Nations in the region (Step 4). These activities should focus on the findings of the strategic assessment with the context of developing a regional vision and goals. The feedback gathered can be used by the RSC to revise the strategic assessment itself and should influence the development of the vision and goals at Step 5 and Step 6.

STEP 4:

Conduct First Nations Engagement

As a model for good governance, RSCs should conduct First Nations Engagement that involves those Nations that fall within the geographical region that is serviced by the RSC. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs is available as a resource for more information.

STEP 5:

Develop a Vision Statement

The regional strategy must include a vision statement. RSCs are a forum for local governments and the rural district in a region to coordinate and align their vision toward sustainable regional growth. A vision should be forward looking and aspirational, describing an idealistic future state. The regional strategy may also include mission statements. Mission statements should be action-based statements that declare the purpose of the RSC in relation to the mandated services.

STEP 6:

Establish Regional Goals

Regional strategies must set clearly defined priorities with goals related to the new mandated services of RSCs (economic development, tourism promotion, community development, regional transportation, cost-sharing for regional sport, recreation, and cultural infrastructure; and the public safety committee). RSCs will set their own goals but they should at a minimum address the priorities detailed in this section. This will ensure that RSCs are meeting the minimum service levels for each mandated service.

6.1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The economic development role for RSCs is defined in the Regional Economic Development Mandate Implementation Guide and can broadly be divided into three mandates areas: supporting investment readiness, supporting workforce development and labour force growth, and supporting a healthy business community. At the onset RSCs should develop goals that address the priorities detailed in the bullets below.

- Develop an action plan to support investment readiness in the region, aligned with ***Opportunities NB's strategic plan***, focused on promoting the region as an investment ready location. This includes defining a shared vision for regional economic development, creating (or improving) profiles of regional assets, creating regional value propositions, and serving as a liaison for new investors in the region (in partnership with Opportunities NB).
- Develop a regional labour market partnership (LMP) forum or participate in the existing forum. Through this forum:
 - Develop a regional workforce development and labour force growth strategy focused on five high-level indicators (should data not be available, more specific regional measures may be considered): population growth, labour force participation, labour force growth, employment growth, and the retention rate for newcomers.
 - Map out newcomer retention services in the region.
- Collect data indicators on the regional economy that support investment readiness and workforce development (including available lands and buildings for development, regional labour market data, major training programs, industrial parks, and other assets).
- Develop regional marketing activities (considering synergies with tourism related activities).
- Support a healthy business community by mapping out existing business support services in the region and considering if there is a role for the RSC to offer non-financial support to businesses in their region without duplicating existing services.¹

¹ Should RSCs develop any economic development goals related to the agriculture, aquaculture, and fisheries sectors, they must be in alignment with the Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture, and Fisheries (DAAF) ***2021-2025 Local Food and Beverages Strategy***. RSCs must not duplicate any service offered by DAAF and should continue to utilize and collaborate with DAAF's Business Growth branch on business development services for growth of established and new businesses in food-related sectors.

6.2. TOURISM PROMOTION

The tourism promotion role for RSCs is defined in the *Regional Tourism Promotion Mandate Implementation Guide*. At a minimum RSCs should develop goals that address the priorities detailed in the bullets below.

- Establish, or appoint an existing, Regional Destination Marketing Organization (RDMO) offering services to the entire RSC territory and has a membership representative from all the region's stakeholders.
- Develop a regional tourism strategy, aligned with the **provincial tourism strategy**, that includes a tourism marketing plan with a bilingual digital presence, implementation plan, and dedicated budget (considering synergies with economic development related activities).
- Participate in and contribute to co-operative marketing partnership opportunities established by the Department of Tourism, Heritage, and Culture. This includes partnering on advertising campaigns as well as provincial owned digital marketing channels such as the tourism website.
- Create and execute regional marketing initiatives, programs, partnerships, and digital channels based on the tourism marketing strategy. This may include a regional and bilingual website or social media channels to promote the region and increase awareness.

6.3. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The existing **Community Inclusion Networks (CINs)** will be integrated into the RSCs and form the basis of the community development mandate. Specifically, RSCs will identify actions aimed at bringing improvements in five "CINable areas" detailed in the **New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan**,² three of which are detailed in this section with the other two falling under the regional transportation and recreation mandate areas, respectively. The **Economic and Social Inclusion Act** requires that plans related to these five "CINable areas" be reviewed every two years. Further, the existing provincial and regional **Community Capacity and Resiliency work** will be aligned to leverage existing goals, structures, partners, initiatives, and implementation plans in common priority areas, strengthen capacity, and avoid duplication. At a minimum RSCs should develop goals that support the priorities detailed in the bullets below.

- Make investments through a new social finance fund to increase the capacity and sustainability of social enterprises within non-profit organizations in New Brunswick (CINable).

² The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan has identified several priority actions under three pillars focused on achieving impact in economic and social inclusion. These three pillars are income security, coordination of programs and services, and inclusion and healthy communities. CINable areas are priority actions in which CINs (and now RSCs) have a key role to play.

- Improve access and reducing wait times for mental health and addictions services (CINable). RSCs can work with regional health authorities and the Department of Health to help identify community support services and be a partner in planning for service delivery in the region.
- Develop or expand existing school food programs at all schools in the region (CINable).
- Develop additional goals focused on making improvements in the four “high impact areas” of the Community Capacity and Resiliency Framework:
 - Economic security and employment,
 - Stable housing and a healthy built environment,
 - Health, social service, justice, and education systems, and
 - Environmental sustainability.

These areas have clear implications and connections to other mandated services. For example, much of the work conducted under the economic development mandate may have implications in economic security and employment. Sport and recreation have connections to a healthy built environment. Some goals established under regional transportation may impact all these priority areas. Given this, some goals established under other mandated services may have links to community development.

6.4. REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION

RSC regional transportation services should be consistent with New Brunswick’s inclusive and sustainable transportation framework, which is currently under development. At a minimum RSCs should develop goals that address the priorities detailed in the bullets below.

- Conduct a regional scan of existing transportation services in the region.
- Develop a regional integrated transportation strategy that considers inter-municipal, inter-regional, and inter-provincial transit connections.³
- Develop a regional transportation service by leveraging existing transit services and/or developing new ones. If they exist in the region, leverage, and support volunteer-based transportation initiatives.
- Develop and implement regional transportation goals to increase accessibility, affordability, and availability of transportation services (CINable).

³ Some regions have already conducted this analysis. Where applicable, leverage work that has already been completed.

6.5. SPORT, RECREATION, AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE COST-SHARING

RSCs will provide a forum for the local governments and rural district in a region to share the costs of major sport, recreation, and cultural infrastructure projects. Given this, RSCs can provide a regional scope to recreation planning. At a minimum RSCs should develop goals that address the priorities detailed in the bullets below.

- Identify and assess existing infrastructure, including school facilities and with consideration for post-secondary education and privately owned facilities.
- Conduct a strategic assessment to identify challenges, gaps, and opportunities in the region related to sport, recreation, and cultural infrastructure. Also identify potential incentives to encourage communities to collaborate on infrastructure development addressing the issues identified in the strategic assessment.
- Develop regional priorities with respect to new, renovated, or expanded regional or sub-regional infrastructure relating to sport, recreation and culture.
- If applicable, detail plans for the development of potential future cost-sharing agreements.
- Work with partners to provide inclusive opportunities for sport, recreation, and leisure activities for residents living in vulnerable conditions, including low income New Brunswickers (CINable).

6.6. PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

RSCs are required to establish a public safety committee to coordinate police, fire protection, and emergency measures planning services. The public safety committee will have the following role:

- **Policing:** Enhance communication and build relationships between communities, regions, and policing authorities, and help identify key issues and priorities regarding policing services in the region.
- **Fire protection:** Exchange information on issues regarding fire prevention and suppression services and explore ways in which sustainability and effectiveness may be improved through enhanced cooperation, sharing of resources, and the strategic purchases of specialized equipment.
- **Emergency measures planning:** Exchange information, identify issues and consider potential actions with provincial officials relative to emergency measures planning.

6.7. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to these required goals, there are a few other areas that RSCs should include in their regional strategy.

- **Existing mandated services:** Since their creation in 2012 the RSCs have been successfully providing solid waste management services and planning and building inspection services. This document provides no specific guidelines related to these existing mandated services. RSCs should consider adapting and integrating any existing strategic planning in these mandated areas into their new regional strategy.
- **Voluntary collaboration areas:** RSCs are encouraged to continue fostering collaboration in other areas. For example, collaborative initiatives led through the public safety committee, the continued success around cost-sharing for airports, local by-law enforcement, engineering services, or geographical information systems services are all positive regional initiatives that RSCs should continue to build upon and strengthen. Any regions that adopt additional voluntary collaboration areas should include those services in their regional strategy.
- **Additional social focus:** Any regions that adopt an additional social focus, to address pressing social issues such as homelessness, poverty reduction, and mental health will include those services in their regional strategy. This work will be planned and implemented in close collaboration with relevant departments and agencies.

STEP 7:

Develop and Implement a Plan with Performance Targets

The regional strategy must include an implementation plan that details the actions that the RSC will take to achieve their goals and provide for performance targets associated with each goal or action. The implementation plan must include:

- Each action the Commission shall take to achieve its goals.
- Performance targets for each action that shall be taken.
- The schedule for each action to be taken or major milestones to be achieved.
- The division of the RSC responsible for each goal.
- The list of external stakeholders involved in its implementation

The **strategy template** that accompanies this guide includes an implementation plan template. RSCs may use this template or develop their own framework so long as they meet the minimum requirements defined in this guide, the RSDA, and its accompanying regulations.

As noted, the implementation plan must detail performance targets for each goal or action. Performance targets are commonly known as key performance indicators (KPIs) and are measures that will be used to track the RSC's success in achieving their mandate and goals. KPIs should be aligned in areas where the services have been outsourced to a third party. Measures should be, as much as possible, data driven. When considering what measures to use keep in mind what data is publicly available and what indicators are within the power of the RSC to collect, either on their own or with support from stakeholders and local governments.

STEP 8:

Develop an Accountability Framework

Regional strategies must detail an accountability framework for reviewing the success of the RSC in achieving its goals. The accountability framework must specify at what point the board of directors will review the regional strategy. At a minimum, the RSC board of directors must be provided with strategy progress updates focused on the status of the implementation plan twice a year. A progress update must also be included in the RSC's annual report. The RSC board of directors must also conduct a comprehensive review of the region strategy at the conclusion of the regional strategy term. For example, if the RSC approved a five-year regional strategy, the review would take place at the end of the five-year cycle. The purpose of this review would be to evaluate the overall success of the regional strategy to inform the next regional strategy. The progress updates and comprehensive review will be conducted by the RSC CEO and be presented to the RSC board of directors at the times specified in the accountability framework. Both documents should specify which goals have been achieved including if performance targets have been met under the context of celebrating successes and considering how shortcomings can be improved upon.

STEP 9:

Finalize the Regional Strategy and Receive Required Approvals

After completing steps 1 through 8, the RSC should be able to compile the work completed to date into a cohesive regional strategy. In general, the strategy outline would follow a form like the one defined in the **Form and Content** section of this document or presented in the **strategy template** provided by ELG. RSCs may use their own strategic planning processes and templates so long as their regional strategies meet the minimum requirements defined in the RSDA and accompanying regulations.

Once the draft document has been compiled the RSC may want to consider reviewing the now comprehensive document with the mandate-specific standing committees and the strategy development steering committee. **The draft strategy must also be shared with ELG.** The department will review the strategy to ensure it complies with the RSDA and regulations and ensure that any implications for provincial departments and agencies have been properly considered and accounted for in the document.

Once the draft regional strategy has been reviewed by ELG it should be submitted to the RSC board of directors for approval. The regional strategy must be adopted and approved by the board of directors before July 1, 2023. It must be renewed at minimum once every five years, but the board of directors can choose to renew their strategy at an earlier date as needed. The regional strategy, the assessment report, and annual strategy progress updates should be made available to the public in accordance with the RSC's obligations under the *Official Languages Act*.

Conclusion

The regional strategy is more than a requirement, it is an important opportunity for the local governments and rural district in a region to collaborate towards a more prosperous region and province. The new mandate areas are closely related under a common objective of sustainable and inclusive regional growth. The regional strategy should ensure that these areas are not siloed from one another and are integrated for the best interest of the region.

It will be important to ensure that the regional strategy process does not end with the completion of the document. It is vital that, in addition to the requirements under the accountability framework, progress on the implementation plan be regularly monitored by the individuals responsible for its implementation. Proper strategic planning and monitoring is vital to success.