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**To:** Engages-Mobilisation (WD/DEO) <wd.engages-mobilisation.deo@canada.ca>; Franceschet, Mary (WD/DEO) <mary.franceschet@canada.ca>; Louie Ghiz <louie@newmediamanitoba.com>

**Subject:** Western Canada Growth Strategy Input - New Media Manitoba

Dear Western Economic Diversification Canada,

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to join the important conversation around Western Canada Canada economic growth.

Please find attached our responses to the posted questions.

Regards,

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Thank you for the opportunity to join this exciting conversation about how to best stimulate growth in the Western Canadian economy. As an industry association, New Media Manitoba will be limiting our feedback to the area of Interactive Digital Media; as that is our area of expertise and where our comments will be most impactful.

When it comes to the future of the Western Canadian economy we believe that success will depend greatly on the collaboration of all of the different sectors in the economy as well as the stakeholders within each sector. Interactive Digital Media (IDM) has the potential to help many other sectors within Western Canada innovate, create efficiencies, and adapt to the tools and techniques required to do business in the digital age. IDM has touch-points in most sectors across the Canadian economy. Manitoba IDM sector has done specific work in the fields of Biosciences, Construction, and Agriculture to help them adapt to the ever-changing digital landscape of the modern economy. By way of an example, IDM has partnered with the construction sector to investigate how Virtual-Reality (VR) can be used to train crane operators, worked with the medical field in running design sprints to create new Intellectual Property (IP) that solves real world problems and impacts patients, and the broader marketing field to use Augmented Reality (AR) to enhance advertising and allow customers to visualize their products in their home. The interconnected nature of how knowledge-based sectors intertwine with, and support, more traditional portions of the economy underscore the benefit of a unified approach to economic support within Western Canada.

Our responses to the five questions posted for discussion are below:

1. *What does a stronger western Canadian economy look like 10 years from now?*

When looking at the Western Canadian economy as a whole we see the future digitization of all sectors of the economy as an important step into the future that needs to be thought through. This is an important opportunity to let the digital based sectors of the economy help bring some of the more traditional parts of the economy into the 21st century and make them competitive on a national, or international, stage. A stronger economy is one that is efficient and uses technology to be as nimble as possible to the changing needs of the global consumer.

2. *What are the best ways to spur new growth in western Canada?*

A stronger Western Canadian economy is one that embraces knowledge-based jobs and provides support and infrastructure to foster that growth. As an example of the kind of growth that can be achieved within the provinces of Western Canada is the Manitoba Interactive Digital Media sector. The Manitoba IDM sector has shown significant growth over the last six years with generated revenue growing from \$39 million to \$190 million. This type of growth can be achieved with a long-term economic plan in place that puts an emphasis on creating knowledge-based jobs. With a long-term economic plan in place the provinces within Western Canada can begin to craft initiatives and detailed support that will grow that sector. While these types of broad approaches to economic growth are helpful; industry-specific resources are also required to help the IDM sector to leverage their unique strengths over the next 10 years.

3. *What will help the Indigenous economy continue to grow?*

Knowledge-based jobs are high-paying jobs that are location independent. To bring tech-focused jobs, and the corresponding economic benefits, to indigenous populations outside of urban centres there needs to be a push towards connecting rural communities with high-speed internet. In addition to greater connectivity in rural settings another key hurdle to greater indigenous representation in the IDM sector is access to personal business networks. In addition, many job opportunities within the tech sector are had through leveraged personal business connections. To foster growth of knowledge-based jobs within the indigenous community we as a community need to work to extend these networks to the indigenous community.

4. *How can we improve economic participation in the west of underrepresented groups, including women, youth and new immigrants?*

Knowledge-based jobs are a significant area of growth for Western Canada. Knowledge-based jobs like developers, designers, and business development are poised to be an area of significant job growth over the next four years. We expect to see this growth happen predominantly within new grads and younger members of the workforce as the IDM industry aligns better with newer approaches to learning new skills such as self-paced online learning or classes that leverage different mediums. While we expect significant growth to come from new grads and younger workers it is important to note that there is a significant disconnect between the representation of underserved populations within the tech and the wider demographics of the population.

A recent study of the tech sector within Manitoba highlighted the economic opportunities of developing a more diverse and representative sector. A key strategy of greater participation in the economy of underrepresented populations is to address systemic hurdles that are preventing a wider range of people working within the tech sector of Western Canada. The key to bringing a more diverse population into the fold of IDM is to:

- **Start forming meaningful relationships across groups:** Having special advisory groups for underrepresented populations within each sector is key. Having an authentic and direct connection like that lets you craft initiatives that target specific issues facing those groups.
- **Upskilling individuals as early as possible:** New Media Manitoba has had great success with initiatives like Girls in Gaming which introduces video game design and programming concepts to girls in middle school/high school.
- **Provide support services that directly address entrenched hurdles that are preventing full economic participation:** For example, offering coworking spaces for female tech workers that provide child care services.

5. *How can governments, industry and western Canadians work together to grow the regional economy?*

With IDM being a knowledge-based industry, with high-growth potential, it would be ideal to see a delineation between broad resources that all companies could benefit from and the industry-specific resources that are needed to attain growth within this specific sector. Over the next few years there is an expecting of significant growth within Western Canada to the tune of five times the current revenue generated. We are already starting to see this rapid growth in Western Canada with examples like Ubisoft setting up a new major game development studio within Manitoba.

- **Government** - Should provide resources in two complementary forms:
  - Programs that provide broad economic support to address systemic hurdles to economic growth
  - Sector specific initiatives that have a better 'on-the-ground' understanding of the unique challenges preventing economic growth within that sector and what issues are feasible in addressing.
- **Industry** - Industry can foster the economic growth of the Western Canadian economy by continuing to push to fully engage underrepresented demographics in their workforce. A diverse and fully-engaged workforce will yield great economic returns.
- **The Public** - Western Canadians can best help economic growth by continuing to have the potentially difficult conversations around supporting populations that are under-engaged in the economy. By continuing these conversations we can begin to understand the hurdles preventing economic engagement and collectively support initiatives that address them.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a response, please let me know if you have any feedback or questions.

Sincerely,

Louie Ghiz  
Executive Director