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LearnSphere: Making a Difference

By Annette Comeau, CEO

LearnSphere is a vital and proactive member of Atlantic Canada's economic development community. As a non-profit devoted to offering learning and development solutions to help businesses and organizations prosper, our job is to work with those who want to scale, innovate, and grow domestically and internationally.

To our clients, we are a one-stop shop that houses all the content, services and technology required to meet their learning and development needs. Instead of piecing together a patchwork of solutions, clients can find the comprehensive solution they seek under the singular LearnSphere brand. By pooling resources under one brand, our lean, fit-for-purpose business model consistently proves that we can produce results that are not independently obtainable. For every initiative, we seek "best-in-class" content providers, regardless of where that expertise resides. Far from being a flow-through organization, we manage projects in house from start to finish, making LearnSphere staff an essential part of the implementation team.

Our two domestic lines of business include our learning practice and our program administration services. Beyond our offer of knowledge and skills development for Canadian organizations, LearnSphere has worked in over 20 countries, on projects ranging from a small-scale learning initiative in China to help train Canadian Immigration Integration Project (CIIP) office field staff; to a multi-year, multi-million dollar project that contributed to the development of a skilled IT labour force in central Africa.

I'm often asked how LearnSphere navigates and choose where it will serve the market next. The answer is simple: We are motivated by impact. Driven by a desire to make a difference, we choose projects that are evidence-based, demand-driven and client-centered. We design projects and programs with the explicit goal of creating a positive economic or social impact. Whether we're focusing on helping SMEs improve their export sales or improving governance within the healthcare sector, our formula is the same.

At the heart of every successful project or program that LearnSphere has developed is our commitment to excellence and our desire to bring value to those we serve.

And of course, these projects would not be possible without the support of our valued funding partners, including Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), the Province of New Brunswick, and the Province of Nova Scotia.

In this issue, we're pleased to bring you information about the breadth of services we provide nationwide for a range of organizations, and share the real-life, practical impacts our programming delivers every day. ■

Grow: Helping SMEs connect with Supply Chains Coast to Coast

By Laura Maynard

For nearly 25 years, LearnSphere has been helping SMEs succeed by providing learning and development solutions in response to tangible needs. Our newest program, Supply Chain 1-2-3, provides intensive learning on how to access and succeed in a wide range of sector-specific supply chain opportunities, both in Canada and abroad.

Supply chains can provide a source of profitable new markets for small and medium-sized enterprises, but they are often difficult to understand and even more difficult to penetrate. Figuring out how to engage with and sell into a specific supply chain can be daunting for SMEs.

To respond to this challenge, the innovative Supply Chain 1-2-3 program uses a blended learning approach to equip participants with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. The program was originally designed to help SMEs access the ocean technology and defence sectors, specifically SMEs in communities around Irving's Halifax Shipyard, Seaspan's Vancouver Shipyards and the Davie Shipyard in Quebec. Since the initial program launch in late 2017, LearnSphere has expanded and customized Supply Chain 1-2-3 for the food and beverage sector and is currently developing a unique offering specific to Indigenous SMEs seeking to grow their business in the oil and gas sector.

Our participants are reaping the rewards of the Supply Chain 1-2-3 program. Jeremy Hancyk, Operations Manager at Rockland Scientific, Inc. in British Columbia told us:

"Supply Chain 1-2-3 was a catalyst to implement systems, processes and measurement systems necessary to sustain a continuous improvement and lean operations culture in our growing company. We found approximately 75% of the content delivered was directly relevant to our current business and/or our forward-looking strategic plan. The eight hours of consulting included with Supply Chain 1-2-3 allowed me to work with subject-matter expert Dale Thibodeau to design and implement the Balanced Scorecard approach for our company.

During the course of Supply Chain 1-2-3, our management team came up with a list of the most

important KPIs in the company. Rockland has a leadership team with the skill and commitment to implement the Balanced Scorecard; what we were missing was the knowledge and experience to apply the Kaplan & Norton weighting technique necessary to apply attention where it's most needed. Dale's assistance helped us prepare a well-thought-out Balanced Scorecard.

Our cohort was a diverse group of engaged, experienced and fun professionals that I'm still in contact with through a LinkedIn group. Based on the value we received from Supply Chain 1-2-3, we're interested in other programs delivered by LearnSphere.

Supply Chain 1-2-3 was worth the investment."

Supply Chain 1-2-3 has also garnered interest from prime contractors looking for help to manage and create efficiencies in their own supply chains. The program not only helps build better subcontracting capacity, it also creates long-term economic value for all stakeholders involved in bringing products and services to market. Supply Chain 1-2-3 is the only program of its kind in Canada, boasting a foothold in the Atlantic provinces, British Columbia, and Quebec. ■

 Employment and Social Development Canada Emploi et Développement social Canada



Scale:

Strengthening Recruitment of Skilled Workers

By Joanne Marquis-Charron

The looming shortages of skilled labour in Atlantic Canada must certainly keep many small business owners awake at night. Given the region's current demographic trends, if businesses cannot find skilled labour now, how much worse will it be in five or ten years?

Research compiled by the Conference Board of Canada confirms that most small businesses focus on operational HR (finding one person to fill one vacant position in the next month) but have low awareness of strategic HR (planning for mission-critical or evolving positions for the future). Even if they do think long term, they lack the tools and confidence to initiate a solution.

Both the federal and provincial governments are working together to support initiatives that help small businesses navigate labour shortages. This includes large, comprehensive programs such as the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program (AIPP) that matches skilled immigrants with employers, as well as smaller programs designed to help small businesses build HR capacity.

LearnSphere was asked to propose an initiative to help equip small and medium sized entrepreneurs (SMEs) with tools and knowledge to address the dearth of skilled labour. Our solution, the Strategic Workforce Planning (SWP) Program helps businesses to address recruitment gaps by focusing on their medium to long-term HR needs, aligning those needs with their overall business strategy, and considering new ways to find potential employees from under-utilized labour pools.

As a participant in LearnSphere's SWP Program, Uni-Care Health Care in Miramichi NB received an in-depth gap analysis, coaching to build their HR assets, and on-going support to complete their strategic workforce planning strategy.

"Strategic Workforce Planning opened our eyes on how to properly recruit and retain skilled workers. We are reaping the rewards in all five of our locations, and it's such a relief to not worry about staffing," says Ashley Gillespie, Manager at Uni-Care.

In our line of work, we would be nothing without our employees. If you don't have skilled workers, you can't take on new clients, sometimes having to stop services with existing clients due to staffing issues. Our clients are very satisfied with our quality of care and are thrilled that they now have someone to count on every day."

For Uni-Care, LearnSphere's Strategic Workforce Planning program highlighted the gap that exists within many SMEs. It helped them to address the gap by identifying the necessity for effective workforce planning, and giving them tools to address it, in order to flourish in the face of the massive labour shortage that is upon us. ■



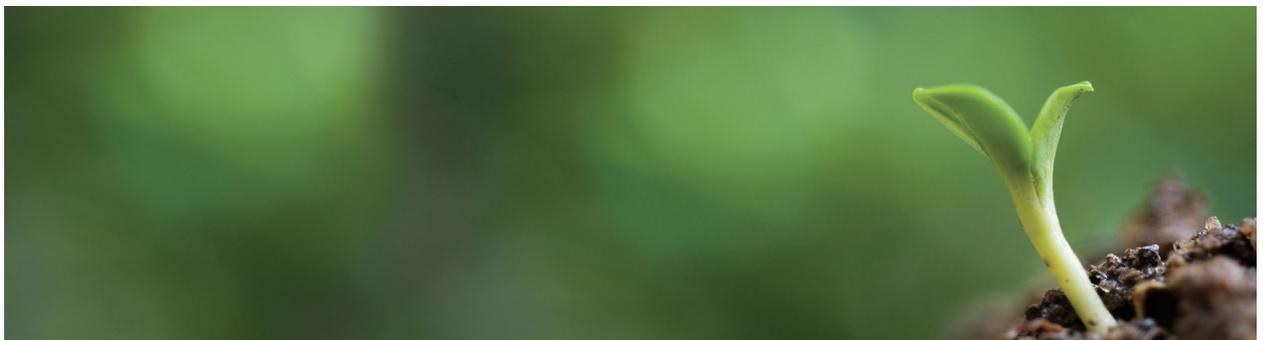
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Export: Proven Solutions for SMEs

By Amy Boudreau

We all know that exporting is vital to the Atlantic Canadian economy – it generates capital, drives investment, creates jobs and spurs growth. Federal research estimates that for every \$1 million in export sales, the economy sustains six full-time jobs. However, we also know that despite the known economic benefits of exporting, many Atlantic Canadian SMEs are not reaching their full export potential.

Recognizing that New Brunswick's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face several barriers when it comes to exporting, LearnSphere used its experience and expertise to design a program that reduces obstacles and ultimately improves trade outcomes. The program focuses on three pillars: the right information curated for easy access, the right knowledge and skills, and easy access to financial tools to enable SMEs to take action.

Over the past five years, LearnSphere has systematically implemented solutions under each of these pillars, creating a comprehensive offering, supporting new exporters through the export continuum:

- **ExportNB** (exportnb.ca) is a one-stop shop featuring a readiness self-assessment tool, a repository of trade-related information, a calendar of events, and a directory of NB exporters.
- **The Export Series** program builds SME knowledge and skills around exporting through a combination of classroom-based workshops, online content, and one-on-one coaching and consulting to help companies apply their learning.
- And finally, to fulfill the need for just-in-time financial assistance for tactical services that will support growth, we created the **Pan-Atlantic Export Market Access Program and E-Tools for Exporting Program (EMAP/EforE)**

But don't take our word for it, just ask Amir Akbari, co-founder and CEO of Anessa Biogas Software (formerly WEnTech Solutions) who has taken advantage of LearnSphere's offering. Anessa Biogas Software provides software solutions for the biogas industry in the simulation and optimization of anaerobic digestion plants. Its modelling software allows clients to assess potential anaerobic digestion projects with speed and sophistication and run existing plants for maximum returns.

In the fall of 2017, Amir started to focus on international markets. He participated in LearnSphere's *Export Series* learning program, which guides participants through the development of an export market strategy using the tools provided in the *ExportNB* portal. He also took advantage of the eight hours of consulting provided through the program, which he used to finalize his export plan.

In the spring of 2019, WEnTech Solutions applied for assistance under the *E-Tools for Exporting Program* to develop a digital marketing strategy for international markets. One of the big changes coming out of this project was the re-branding of WEnTech Solutions to Anessa Biogas Software.

"Our firm was able to accelerate our entry into international markets by having access to LearnSphere's tools," says Amir. "They helped us hone the development of our export plan, and as soon as we completed our rebranding, we were able to focus on the development of international markets. Anessa has been able to quickly reach clients in our target markets and complete international partnerships as we grow our sales pipeline." ■

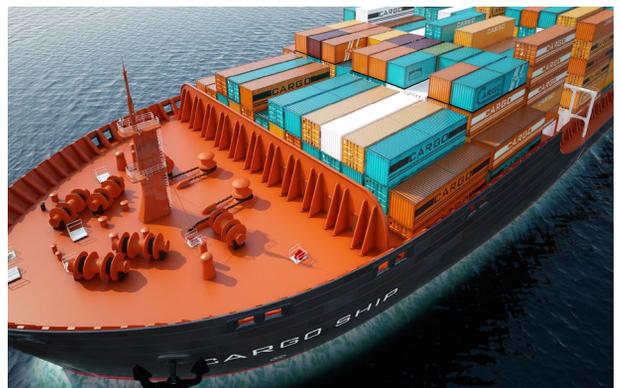


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Innovate: Out of the Lab and Into the Marketplace

By Annette Comeau

Today, we need innovators more than ever. From an economic development perspective, innovation is imperative for the Atlantic region's future prosperity.

Innovation is defined as the 'invention, diffusion and exploitation of new ideas.' It touches every sector of the economy. In agriculture, drones and other technologies now allow farmers to analyze historical crop data to maximize yields in future seasons. In the defence sector, gamification is being used to test concepts, strategies and potential outcomes in various scenarios through computer simulation. In the medical field, more accurate and precise testing equipment allows doctors to diagnose with more efficacy. While these are all examples of successful innovations in Atlantic Canada, the path to commercialization of an innovative product or service is not always easy.

Going from idea to market is not a linear process. Pathways from R&D funding to commercialization success can be iterative and unpredictable. Very few innovations will sell on the pure merit of the invention. We all know, for example, that the development of new technology to tackle climate change requires the expertise of talented researchers.

However, these same researchers are typically not prepared to solve many other critical problems necessary for successful commercialization.

Without the requisite outside expertise in commercialization, many innovations never make it to market.

This is where LearnSphere comes in.

With funding support from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), we have helped hundreds of researchers and innovators bring their ideas out of the lab and into the marketplace. Through our commercialization funding program (CCM), we offer "just-in-time, and just-enough" funding for strategic activities in the latter stages of innovation that requires outside expertise.

The strategic investment that companies receive through LearnSphere's CCM program is the breakthrough many need to launch and convert sales in new markets. Our commercialization funding program helps deliver Atlantic Canadian innovation and solutions to buyers across Canada and around the world, while creating jobs and growth here at home. ■



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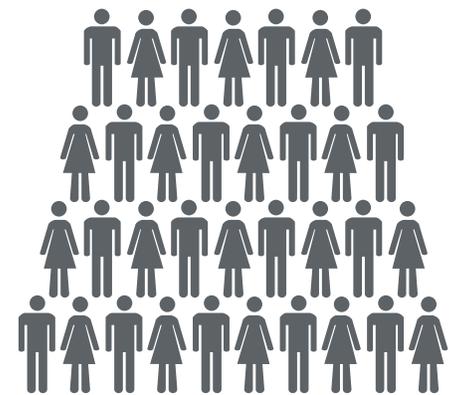


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- Export Development
- Supplier Development
- Workforce Planning
- Innovation & Commercialization
- Capacity-Building for NGOs



LearnSphere has designed and delivered training to **50,000+** people with **2,000+** organizations throughout Canada and in more than 20 countries worldwide.

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