

# NCLGA COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARDS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CATEGORY



the **City** of  
*Dawson Creek*  
BRITISH COLUMBIA  
*"the Capital of the Peace"*

## Executive Summary

The City of Dawson Creek has recently contracted tourism delivery services to Spectra Venue Management and has worked with Laura Plant Consulting and developed event strategy (*appendix I*). Dawson Creek has successfully been hosting events for many years, but stakeholders understand the opportunity to strategically coordinate efforts to increase the impact of hosted events – festivals, cultural and sporting events, meeting, weddings, etc.

Laura Plant Consulting was contracted to develop the strategy – reviewing previous plans, interviewing stakeholders, researching other destinations and formulating an implementation plan.

## What is Event Tourism?

Dawson Creek has been successfully hosting events for a long time – including sport and cultural events, corporate meetings, and weddings. For a community of its size, it could be argued that it is punching above its weight in terms of success with event tourism. And all this activity is having a positive impact:

events bring visitors to the community - helping to both diversify the economy and bring competitive opportunities for local sport clubs and teams. Sport events give Dawson Creek families the opportunity to stay home and not to have to travel to every competition. Cultural events provide entertainment and build community and help retain a quality of life that assists in keeping people in the community and attracting business investment that is considering northeastern BC communities as a home base. Therefore the development of an Event Strategy, rather than just a sport tourism strategy made the most sense for Dawson Creek.

*“What gives us an advantage over communities such as Grande Prairie, Fort St John, and even Prince George is our multi-plex and events centre.”*

~ Mayor Dale Bumstead

In 2018, BC Business Magazine produced their fourth annual ranking, measuring a city’s attractiveness as place to work. New to this year’s process was a gauge for quality of life. Dawson Creek was ranked #2, after Fort St John. Event tourism can contribute to quality of life and help ensure that Dawson Creek remains a vibrant community for current and future residents.

## ***But how much will it cost?***

Event tourism provides a new focus of effort for Dawson Creek. Tourism Dawson Creek has a successful history marketing the community as a destination, strategically located at the beginning of the historically-significant Alaska Highway. This event tourism strategy is meant to compliment Tourism Dawson Creek’s leisure market activities by reallocating some internal resources to strategically add event tourism to the marketing mix. ***Event Tourism can be added to the marketing and product development activities conducted by Tourism Dawson Creek within the existing TDC budget - the current City of Dawson Creek financial contribution remains unchanged.***

## Tourism Dawson Creek – Focus of Effort

Marketing & Product Development		Visitor Services
Leisure Traveller: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Alaska Highway explorer</li> <li>○ Short-haul Peace region explorer</li> <li>○ VFR (visiting friends and relatives)</li> <li>○ Sector-specific explorer (birding, etc.)</li> </ul>	Event Tourism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Event participants</li> <li>○ Event spectators</li> <li>○ Conference/meeting attendees</li> <li>○ Weddings and reunions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Visitor Centre</li> <li>○ Mobile VC at events</li> <li>○ Alaska Highway House</li> </ul>

Many communities begin their tourism strategies with a need for a unique brand. What is it that sets their community apart from everyone else? Dawson Creek already has that. Being Mile 0 of the Alaska Highway is something Dawson Creek owns that no one else can; this is invaluable and should not be lost when building an event tourism strategy. The leisure traveler looking to explore the Alaska highway, interested in historical and cultural experiences and those looking to explore the Peace region and other parts of northern BC should all continue to be encouraged to visit Dawson Creek.

In addition to being a historic mile marker, the Mile 0 name is in use by some event clubs in the community, such as the Mile Zero Cruisers, the Mile Zero Figure Skating Club and the Mile 0 Meltdown at the Encana Events Centre (EEC). There is an opportunity to grow and capitalize on the brand by incorporating the name into tournaments and events to further leverage the brand and raise awareness of the name.

However, brands are much more than logos or a slogan. To be successful brands need to be based on quality product. Marketing brings visitors once, but a quality product keeps them coming back. Dawson Creek has the draw of the Alaska Highway and should continue to promote this product and provide a centre to service these visitors. Adding the tactic of promoting Dawson Creek events presents an additional tourism opportunity. Delivering quality events that keeps people coming back is key and dedicating resources to an event tourism office can help, and is recommended as part of this strategy.

Visitor Centre staff resources can be utilized in the off-season to support event tourism activities while the busy summer season could have the Visitor Centre staff more engaged in servicing visitors at events. Visitor service trends are moving toward online channels and incorporating mobile centres, such as Dawson Creek’s visitor centre trailer. However, in Dawson Creek, being located at the start of a major travel route requires a unique need for a physical location, with RV parking.

### ***Why invest in events? Because they are worth it.***

Dawson Creek undertook four economic impact assessments in 2017 – two festivals and two sporting events. The events ranged in both size and scope, attracting a diverse audience to Dawson Creek and each producing beneficial economic activity to both the city and the province.



Collectively, in hosting these four events in 2017, the event organizers spent approximately \$3.5 million on various goods and services to ensure successful operations. The only event with any capital expenditures was the World U-17 Hockey Challenge who invested \$41,000 in facility upgrades to host the event. The combined spending of out-town participants, delegates, family members, spectators and other people who visited Dawson Creek for these events, in combination with the expenditures made by the organizers of each event, totaled \$6.5 million, supporting \$10.2 million in economic activity in BC , including \$8.4 million of economic activity in Dawson Creek.

These expenditures supported \$3.4 million in wages and salaries in the province through the support of 60 jobs, of which 46 jobs and \$2.5 million in wages and salaries were supported in Dawson Creek. The total net economic activity (GDP) generated by these four 2017 events and festivals were:

\$6.0 million for Canada as a whole

\$5.5 million for the province of BC

\$3.7 million for Dawson Creek

For this event tourism strategy, the consultant also researched 7 sport tourism communities and determined the transferable lessons:

- A sustainably funded event tourism strategy is an important part of successful event hosting
- A one-stop shop can assist event organizers and assist with bidding, hosting and measuring impact of events
- A well-managed event calendar ensures coordination of marketing and event attraction to fill need periods and maximize impact of events
- Event hosting grants provide funding for targeted events based on strategic timelines
- Volunteer recruitment and recognition benefits all events
- Leveraging the destination brand for event marketing is important
- Collaboration amongst all partners is key to clarifying roles and delivering the best events
- Local event organizers can benefit from the development and sharing of resources and tools
- Measuring and communicating the benefits of event hosting is critical for on-going support
- Accommodation stakeholders can be engaged in sponsoring events and/or coordinating stream-lined booking process for event participants/organizers

An analysis of Dawson Creek's current situation shows that the destination has invested in, and developed, strong brand equity with Mile 0 of the Alaska Highway. The Visitor Centre greets visitors traveling the Alaska Highway and visiting other regional attractions, and the mobile visitor-servicing trailer attends events in destination. The Tourism Dawson Creek staff have shown a dedication to the tourism

industry and developed partnerships with regional and provincial marketing effort that need to be maintained. Incorporating an event tourism focus - to the existing leisure traveler market - provides opportunities to attract additional visitors to the community.

Dawson Creek has successfully hosted many events from agricultural fairs to car shows to concerts, conferences and sport events. Each of these events relies upon the relationships that have been built over time and the countless years of volunteer dedication. Not every community has a fall fair approaching its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Dawson Creek has invested in facilities, such as the Lakota Agriplex and the Harry Morrow ball fields, to name a few and the community is home to a very high standard venue – the Encana Events Centre. Hockey Canada, hosts of the U17 World Hockey Challenge event, acknowledges the local know-how and ability to get things done right in Dawson Creek - the collaboration with the City Council was unique in Dawson Creek for this hockey event, whereas in other communities it has been more self-serving. And the volunteers and community pride were overwhelming. This groundwork is fundamental for success with future event hosting.

Implementing the Event Tourism Strategy is a work in progress, and we continue to work through the recommendations in the strategy and build our Event Tourism platform in Dawson Creek. In June of 2019 the City of Dawson Creek in partnership with Spectra Venue Management entered into a five-year hosting agreement with Hockey Canada (*appendix II*). This partnership will create a long-term certainty in a location for Hockey Canada and their events and support the Event Tourism Strategy that was recently implemented. This agreement will be a great benefit for the City of Dawson Creek and the Peace region as it will bring positive economic and social impacts.

In 2019 we were able to establish our Event Tourism office and work with community groups and sport associations to help put Dawson Creek on the map and bring people to our community. In 2019 we also created the *Show your Badge Program* where local businesses joined to offer a discount or incentive to shop local, we then provide this opportunity to people coming into our community for events to drive business into our community (*appendix III*). We will continue to build our platform and look to host events and explore other opportunities to diversify the events within our community and to attract people and businesses into our community.

Overall Event Tourism is thriving in Dawson Creek and although we have been doing it for quite sometime, having a strategy and a direction is allowing us to focus on the bigger picture and help to diversify Dawson Creek and make it the best place to invest, work, live and play. In diversifying what we have to offer, we truly believe that we are telling people that Dawson Creek is Open for Business!