

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WINNIPEG'S IMPACT REPORT: Q3 2024

Uniting to drive economic development

Encompasses July, August and September 2024



**ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT**  
WINNIPEG



**TOURISM**  
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INDIGENOUS BUSINESS FORUM

# CEO's report

## A message from Ryan Kuffner

One year into my role as EDW's President and CEO, my focus has been clear: building strong, strategic relationships that are essential to EDW's mission. These trusted partnerships enable us to make meaningful impacts and fulfill our responsibilities. This past year provided an invaluable opportunity to establish the right connections needed to advance EDW's goals effectively.

In the past quarter alone, there are numerous occasions where our team worked to strengthen key relationships. Together with our Talent & Workforce Development leadership team, we met with councillors and the executive team at the City of Winnipeg to discuss our organization's efforts in attracting and retaining both local and international talent, as part of our ongoing commitment to inform our city shareholders.

Regarding the Province, I've been continuing to build relationships through key meetings with Ministers, Deputy Ministers and members of the Premier's office. These engagements are helping us to strengthen ties and deepen collaboration with the provincial government to advance our shared priorities.

For the first time since the pandemic, Natalie Thiesen, our Vice President of Tourism and I presented in person to the Manitoba Hotel Association in September. This meeting was an opportunity to renew our relationship with key stakeholders in the tourism industry and share EDW's priorities and upcoming initiatives to grow the local tourism economy.

Our unique model of having a tourism and economic development agency under roof caught the attention of Destination Canada (DC), our federal tourism agency. As such, I was asked to serve as Vice-Chair of a task



**"From strengthening relationships to establishing a dynamic leadership team, we're setting the stage for impactful change."**

force on investment in the tourism industry along with engaging with other CEOs at North Star—where the leaders of destination management organizations across Canada meet. These are examples of how I'm getting to know the tourism industry on a deeper level and fostering new relationships in these areas.

Advancing inclusive economic development remains a key priority. On September 17, EDW hosted an event focused on economic reconciliation, featuring an all-Indigenous panel moderated by EDW board member Dr. Stephen Borys.

Our team invited Indigenous businesses and our Corporate Partners to attend, reinforcing our commitment to strengthening relationships with the Indigenous business community and providing a platform for important conversations around economic reconciliation.

I'm proud of the progress we've made this past year in laying a strong foundation. From strengthening relationships to establishing a dynamic leadership team, we're setting the stage for impactful change.

As our team continues to evolve and focus on our key priorities, we remain committed to driving economic growth for our city with a collaborative approach.

**Ryan Kuffner**  
President & Chief Executive Officer, EDW



# Our progress

## Our top-line results:

YES! Winnipeg NPS

73



Estimated economic impact of YES! Winnipeg

\$158.5M



Tourism Winnipeg NPS

93



Estimated economic impact of Tourism Winnipeg

\$30.5M



Net Promoter Score (NPS): Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a metric used to gauge customer loyalty and satisfaction by asking customers how likely they are to recommend a company's products or services. Calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors (unhappy customers) from promoters (loyal supporters), NPS ranges from -100 to +100. A higher score indicates better customer loyalty and satisfaction.

# Selling Winnipeg

## Team operations

Selling Winnipeg highlights our team's continued efforts at enhancing Winnipeg's profile and appeal as a destination for tourism, business, investment and media recognition on both national and international stages.

Q3 highlights include:

### Great Outdoors Comedy Festival

Our team was excited to witness the success of the Great Outdoors Comedy Festival (GOCF) held from July 19-21, 2024, at Assiniboine Park. This highly anticipated festival brought together more than **22,000 attendees** and headline acts such as Bill Burr, Nate Bargatze and Gerry Dee. Our marketing team also worked closely with festival organizers on a promotional partnership through our digital platforms to drive event sales.

The event generated an estimated **economic impact of \$6.2 million** for the city. As GOCF continues to expand across North America, we are proud to see Winnipeg highlighted as a key destination for the foreseeable future, further solidifying our city's reputation as a premier host for large-scale events.

### TEAMS Conference (Travel, Events and Management in Sports)

Our team recently participated in TEAMS: Travel, Events, and Management in Sports, the world's leading conference and expo for the sports event industry, held September 23-26, 2024, in Anaheim. This influential event brought together more than **1,000 decision-makers** from the sports event sector, including CEOs, executive directors, and event managers from major sports organizations. Tourism Winnipeg conducted 30 appointments with clients, generating **five** opportunities for future event hosting.

### Meeting Planners International (MPI) 'The Event'

Our team had a strong presence at MPI's The Event, a leading conference for event and meeting planner professionals. With educational themes focused on inclusivity, diversity, AI integration, and industry standards, the event attracted meeting and event experts from across Canada. Our booth activation, inspired by the Winnipeg+ marketing campaign and modelled after the popular real estate show Selling Sunset, successfully highlighted Winnipeg as a top destination.

The event offered valuable networking opportunities with other destinations and companies across North America, conducted 43 meetings with hosted buyers and resulting in **seven** leads.



# Promoting Winnipeg

## Summer campaign success

Tourism Winnipeg's long-term partnership with Expedia Group continues to drive local hotel bookings in 2024. Featuring ads on Expedia's booking platforms and a dedicated Winnipeg landing page, the campaign contributed to **25,000 room nights** and **31,600 visitors** from January to September, generating **\$4.6 million in gross booking revenue**. The campaign targets both Canadian and U.S. travellers, highlighting Winnipeg as a must-visit destination.

## Live in Winnipeg campaign update

Our unique Live in Winnipeg digital marketing campaign, which leverages Winnipeg's designation as the #1 place in Canada to raise kids, (according to the Globe & Mail's feature data report) continues to drive awareness of our city as a destination for families. The campaign, which is targeting major cities in B.C., Alberta and Ontario, continues to drive traffic to a landing page where users can learn more about life in Winnipeg with a family: <https://www.liveinwinnipeg.com/families>.

### Campaign stats (as of Q3):

- **8.4 million ad impressions**
- **50,500 clicks**
- **12,103 campaign** landing page users with highest proportion visitors from Toronto and Calgary

## Head north, American friends

Our dedicated U.S. targeted tourism campaign continues to drive clicks to our campaign landing page, which provides U.S. visitors considering Winnipeg with everything they need to know about visiting their friends to the north. Since its launch in March, the campaign has garnered **960,000 impressions** and **8,600 clicks** to the landing page, down slightly from the previous quarter. There is also growth in sales of the Winnipeg Attractions Pass among U.S. users, with 28 per cent of pass sales coming from U.S. users in Q3, versus 23 per cent in Q2.

## International Congress and Convention Association

Tourism Winnipeg earned international recognition for its unique Winnipeg+ marketing campaign, which highlights Winnipeg's exceptional events and meeting spaces, after being named a finalist in the International Congress and Convention Association's prestigious (ICCA) Best Marketing Award for 2024. Our destination is up against fellow finalists Visit Oslo and Tourism Australia for the award. The awards ceremony will take place on October 23 at ICCA's 2024 Congress.

# Business retention, expansion and attraction

In Q3, our team completed **19 BRE meetings**, **1 FDI profile** and **15 talent needs assessments**.

We delivered **170 services** to businesses, which led to **\$106 million in capital invested**, **241 net new full-time jobs**, and **four Economic Outcomes Facilitated (EOF)\***.

## EOF successes

**Big Freight Systems**, a leading Canadian flatbed and specialized trucking company based in Steinbach and Winnipeg, Manitoba, was actively involved in Economic Development Winnipeg's talent recruitment mission to the U.K. and Ireland in Q2. As a result of this initiative, Big Freight is on track to hire **31 qualified jobseekers** by December 2024, with average salaries ranging from \$50,000 to \$85,000.

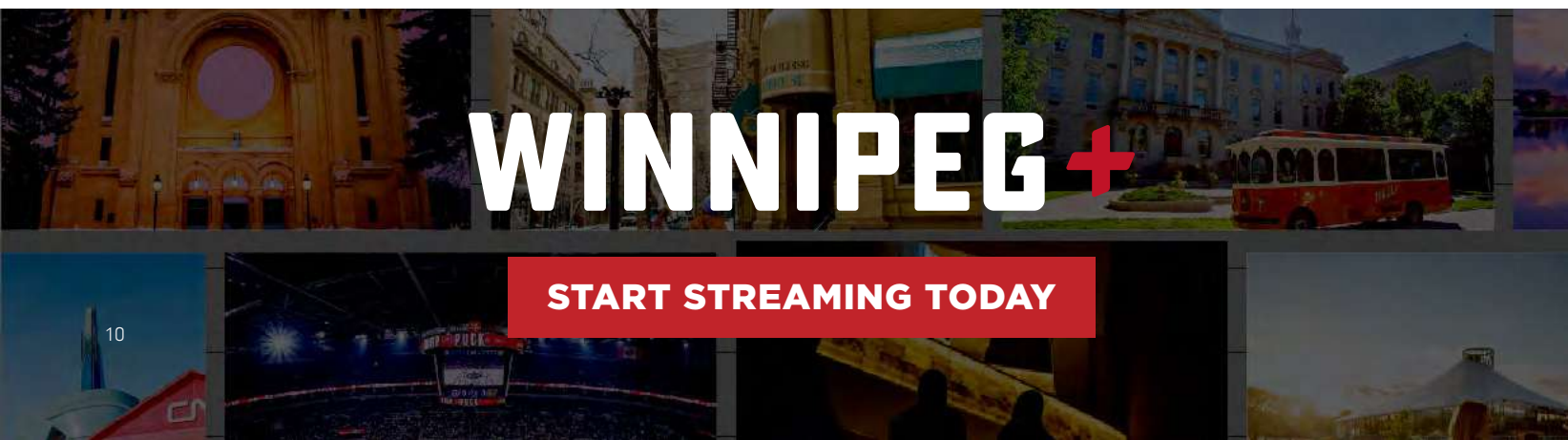
**Todd & Sargent**, a leading provider of custom design, engineering and construction solutions for the feed, grain, flour and industrial sectors, specializes in concrete slip form construction (a method of pouring concrete into a continuously moving form) and millwright installation (the setup and maintenance of machinery). The company is reinvesting in Winnipeg with a **\$1 million capital investment**. This expansion will initially create **12 new full-time jobs**, with the potential to grow to 20 as the operation matures.



**Fastfrate Group**, a leading provider of end-to-end supply chain solutions, is expanding its presence in Winnipeg by constructing a new facility on 25 acres at CentrePort, developed by CentrePort Canada Rail Park. This development represents a **\$55 million capital investment** and will create **150 new full-time positions** in the region. Fastfrate has grown from an LTL and intermodal carrier into a diverse group of companies offering a full suite of transportation services across Canada and the U.S., including logistics, cross-border LTL/FTL, warehousing, distribution, and final mile solutions.

**Brar Natural Flour Milling Inc.**, a family-owned business specializing in the production of specialty flours for the South Asian market, is undergoing a major expansion in Winnipeg. This growth will make Brar the largest flour mill in North America, enabling the company to meet increasing demand from retail stores, **restaurants**, and food manufacturers across the continent. The expansion represents a **capital investment of \$50 million** and will create **40 new full-time jobs**.

Economic Outcomes Facilitated (EOF): In our sales process, the ultimate milestone is achieving an EOF, which is marked when a client signs a YES! letter. The letter is private sector validation of the value we have provided them through our service offering and ensures we only claim successes when our clients validate that success. The letter provides EDW with the client's confirmation of the number of jobs expected to be created at maturity, the dollar value of capital invested, and the new payroll generated thanks to our efforts. EOFs are ultimately considered "wins" by our team and communicated accordingly.



# Investment project pipeline

## Q3 results

Our team closed Q3 with an investment project pipeline of:

**587**  
Leads

**335**  
Prospects

**95**  
Qualified opportunities

### Our efforts included:

#### Tri-City initiative with Calgary and Edmonton

Economic Development Winnipeg partnered with Burns McDonnell and Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) for a familiarization tour, showcasing Winnipeg's investment potential. This tour offered participants the opportunity to gain firsthand insights into Winnipeg's unique assets, infrastructure and growth potential.

The delegation visited key sites including CentrePort Canada, RRC Polytech's advanced mechatronics programs, and Winnipeg Richardson International Airport's air cargo facilities, uncovering new business opportunities and fostering meaningful connections.

#### Site Selection Magazine

For the seventh year in a row, Winnipeg has been selected by Site Selection magazine as one of Canada's best locations to invest. The publication recognized Economic Development Winnipeg for spearheading the city's economic growth. Winnipeg made the list, which is based on capital investment and related job creation, assessed on both a cumulative and per-capita basis. Our organization's client-centric approach helped Winnipeg secure significant economic contributions, including **\$476.6 million in capital investment** and the creation of **527 new jobs** between June 1, 2023 and May 31, 2024.



# Talent & workforce development

As of Q3, the Work in Manitoba job portal (WIM) included **62,270 job seekers** and **1,647 Manitoba employers**—the decrease in employers compared to Q2 resulted from a system clean-up to remove businesses not meeting portal criteria. The Year 3 Project Plan was approved by the Government of Manitoba in mid-September, following a delay due to reductions in federal funding for workforce development initiatives.

These reductions impacted provincial budgets and required adjustments to the project. Despite these challenges, the team successfully adapted the project, securing the necessary funding to continue supporting the portal, which plays a key role in attracting both local and international job seekers to Manitoba.

#### Strengthening connections with post-secondary institutions

Our Talent team engaged with key contacts in Career Services and Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) at Red River College Polytechnic, Manitoba Institute for Trades

& Technology, The University of Winnipeg, Canadian Mennonite University, Booth University College and the University of Manitoba. These partnerships will bring more qualified jobseekers into the Work in Manitoba portal to match with employers and better connect businesses with opportunities to employ and mentor the next generation of local talent.

#### Newcomer Employment Hub amalgamation

The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce's Newcomer Employment Hub has officially been amalgamated into the Work in Manitoba job portal, administered by Economic Development Winnipeg. This strategic alignment consolidates efforts and provides a unified platform to connect employers and job seekers. The talent team onboarded six new partner agencies (Immigrant Partnership Winnipeg, The Immigrant Centre, Newcomers Employment & Education Development Services (N.E.E.D.S.) Inc., Success Skills Centre, Opportunities for Employment (OFE) and Seven Oaks Immigrant Services) and their associated employers/jobseekers.



The University of Winnipeg  
Downtown campus



# Winnipeg in the news

Tourism media coverage highlights our city's visitor assets. In Q2, this included **125 articles/media mentions**, some of which appear in different outlets, for a total **earned media value\* of \$5,348,000**, bringing 2024's total EMV to **\$16,979,000**.

## Top headlines included:

***4 Affordable Places to Travel You May Be Overlooking***  
by Jamie Davis Smith, AARP

***Eight Reasons to Get Away This Fall*** by Nina Kokotas Hahn, Chicago Magazine

***CITY GUIDE: Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*** by Pamela Brossman, American Bus Association Destinations Magazine



\* Earned media value (EMV) is a metric in marketing that calculates the value of publicity gained through promotional efforts rather than paid advertising. It measures the worth of media exposure obtained through channels like social media, press coverage, and word-of-mouth, estimating the equivalent cost of achieving the same exposure through paid ads.

# EDW in our community

EDW in our community highlights the foundational local work that supports and amplifies our broader initiatives, which in turn enhances Winnipeg's profile. Our dedicated efforts within the community help fuel our success in promoting Winnipeg in all markets. The local activities and partnerships that fuel our efforts include:

## Talent Attraction & Workforce Development presentation to the City of Winnipeg:

As a follow-up to the Corporate Narrative presentation to the City of Winnipeg in June, we met with the mayor, several city councillors and other key city officials to discuss Winnipeg's talent landscape and EDW's role and services provided in the talent ecosystem.

We presented an overview of the current state of talent in the city, drawing on official labour force statistics and projections alongside our own insights from business and stakeholder engagement. Additionally, we shared EDW's Talent Attraction and Retention Strategy, which focuses on local, national and international job seekers and is built around key pillars of attracting, connecting, mobilizing and retaining, providing practical solutions to some of the projected workforce challenges.

## Manitoba Hotel Association presentation

Natalie Thiesen, Vice President of Tourism and Ryan Kuffner, President and CEO of EDW presented together to the Manitoba Hotel Association, followed by a Q&A session. This is the first time since the pandemic that Tourism Winnipeg has presented to association members. It was an opportunity for EDW to connect with local hotels to better understand their challenges, renew our relationship with key stakeholders in the tourism industry and share EDW's priorities and upcoming initiatives to grow the local tourism economy.

## EDW inclusive growth event

On Sept. 17, Economic Development Winnipeg (EDW) hosted Inclusive Growth: Leveraging the Economic Strength of Indigenous Businesses in Winnipeg at the Wyndham Garden Winnipeg Airport Hotel on Long Plain First Nation. This event brought together our investors, tourism partners, government stakeholders and Indigenous business leaders to explore collaboration opportunities and celebrate Indigenous businesses' contributions to Winnipeg's economy.

The panel featured Michelle Cameron, founder of Dreamcatcher Promotions; Andrew Lawson, President & CEO of Lawson Consulting & Surveying; Lisa Meeches, Co-Founder of Eagle Vision Inc.; and Herb ZoBell, Vice President Commercial Financial Services, Indigenous Markets at RBC who shared their experiences and insights on advancing economic reconciliation. Dr. Stephen Borys, Director and CEO, Winnipeg Art Gallery-Qaumajuq and EDW board member moderated the conversation.

Key topics included the importance of partnerships, the challenges of scaling Indigenous businesses and initiatives supporting inclusive economic growth. We listened to Indigenous businesses share their real challenges and call on of us to take meaningful steps, such as increasing procurement from Indigenous-owned businesses. The discussion highlighted how leveling the playing field for Indigenous businesses is essential for Winnipeg's future prosperity.



## Equinox Ceremony at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights

This event was an Indigenous ceremony that took place on Sunday, Sept. 22nd, 2024. There was drumming, song, prayers and a community feast to welcome fall as the season. It is always a special event that is well attended by community, museum staff and board members, and the public is welcomed to attend. Frances Wellink, Director of Business Development, Tourism and Kathy Tarrant, Vice President, Marketing, Communications and Corporate Partnerships from EDW attended.

## Hannover Messe Roadshow

Our Director of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) presented at the Hannover Messe Roadshow on Sept.19. Organized by Next Generation Manufacturing Canada (NGEN), the roadshow promotes participation in Hannover Messe, the world's leading advanced manufacturing show in Germany, where Canada will be the host country in 2025. EDW, in collaboration with the Province of Manitoba, is coordinating a Team Manitoba approach to showcase the region's strengths and opportunities in the advanced manufacturing sector.

## Heat treatment for Manitoba manufacturers

Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, Economic Development Winnipeg, Manitoba Aerospace, Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, and the Vehicle Technology Centre have partnered to assess the heat treatment processes used by Manitoba manufacturers. To build out our ecosystem, the first step is to identify the gap. The goal is to determine whether a business case can be made to offer these services locally, improving accessibility and reducing the need to outsource these critical processes.

## Indigenous Tourism Manitoba Conference

Our Tourism Winnipeg team members attended the 2024 Indigenous Tourism Manitoba (ITM) Conference, held at the Wyndham Garden Winnipeg Airport Hotel. The event focused on capturing the essence of Indigenous storytelling and cultural experiences while fostering connections and collaborations among participants.

Attendees were empowered with valuable insights from industry leaders, experienced remarkable Indigenous talent and gained inspiration through innovative ideas and authentic cultural experiences. The conference served to strengthen partnerships and collaborations within the Indigenous tourism sector. In addition, there was an opportunity to meet with market ready Indigenous members one of one basis to support the preparation of attending Rendez-vous Canada next year.

## Consider Canada City Alliance (CCCA) fall board meeting

Alberto Velasco-Acosta, Vice President International represented EDW at the fall board meeting of the Consider Canada City Alliance (CCCA) in Quebec City in mid-September. The CCCA comprises the economic development agencies of Canada's 14 largest cities.

During the meeting, the group discussed a project to be submitted to our respective federal Regional Development Agencies for funding to enhance our respective presence in the U.S. market. The board also learned about new federal tax credits designed to incentivize investments in Canada's clean energy sector.



## EDW in the news

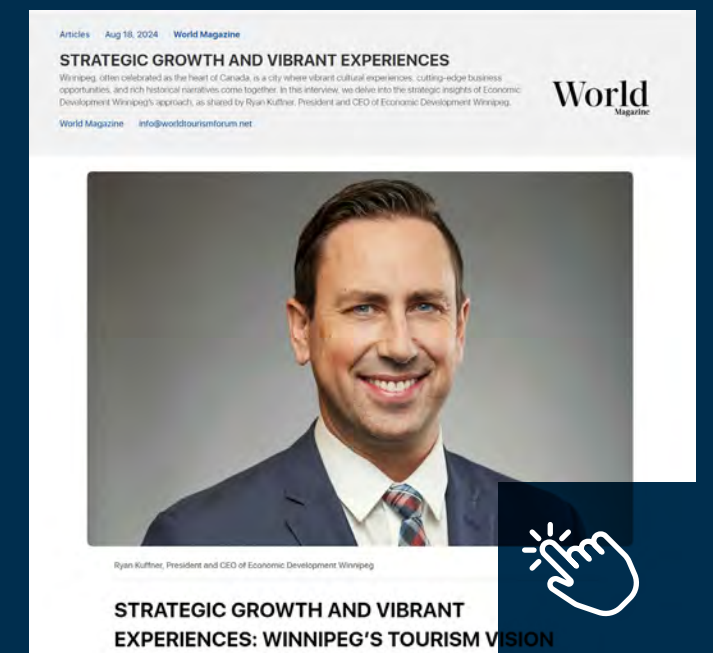
EDW's earned media coverage highlights our organization's activities and features our expertise on economic development initiatives, which included 55 articles valued at \$707,102.00 in EMV\* in Q3.

### Top headlines included:

**Canada's Best Locations 2024**, by Adam Bruns, Site Selection

**Ten to watch**, by Geoff Kirbyson, Manitoba Inc.

**Strategic Growth and Vibrant Experiences: Ryan Kuffner on Winnipeg's Tourism Vision**, World Magazine



\*Earned media value (EMV) refers to the dollar value of positive mentions in traditional, online and social media. Our media and influencer marketing monitoring tools provide these values.

## Corporate partnerships

YES! Winnipeg

**101**

Investors contributed  
\$1,090,000

Team Winnipeg

**44**

Partners contributed  
\$343,000



# Our people

EDW is committed to ongoing learning and actively supporting the community, while fostering the growth and development of its team members. Here we focus on our team and learning, and our activity in the community.

## National Indigenous Residential School Museum of Canada

Our EDW staff fulfilled a meaningful commitment by completing their visits by the end of Q3 to the National Indigenous Residential School Museum of Canada. This visit was an important step in our ongoing journey toward understanding and supporting economic reconciliation. The experience deepened our awareness of the history and impact of residential schools, aligning with our organization's dedication to integrating reconciliation into our work.

## Harvest Manitoba volunteer day

On July 17, our team volunteered at Harvest Manitoba, contributing to packaging and sorting efforts to support families in need. Staff were divided into groups, packaging more than 900 dozen eggs, debulking 795 bags of chicken, and ensuring the quality of canned and packaged goods. This initiative helped supply vital resources to daycares, schools, food banks and soup kitchens. The day not only supported the community but also provided an opportunity for staff to connect over a shared experience, boosting morale and strengthening team bonds.

## United Way Walk This Way event

Economic Development Winnipeg continued its support of United Way Winnipeg, kicking off our 2024 campaign on Friday, Sept. 13, with team members attending the United Way Winnipeg Walk this Way event. So far this quarter, EDW has raised \$360 and is committed to hosting three additional fundraising events to support the campaign.

## Truth and Reconciliation week activities

EDW staff participated in a variety of events in the week leading up to September 30, in observance of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, focused on deepening our understanding of reconciliation and our role in the process. Activities included:

### September 23, A New path for EDW:

Knowledge-Keeper Ray Coco Stevens opened the week with a prayer song, followed by Ryan's insights on our inclusive economic development journey this past year culminating in the establishment of the Indigenous Advisory Council. Dennis Meeches shared his perspectives on economic reconciliation and his work with the National Indigenous Residential School Museum.

### September 25, Indigenous businesses and impact:

Kathleen Bluesky, Chief Executive Officer of Treaty One Development Corporation and Lorne Pelletier, Senior Economic Advisor to the President of the Manitoba Métis Federation, shared valuable insights into their current economic development projects, the positive impacts these initiatives have on our city and province, and discussed areas of potential partnership within the mandate of EDW.

### September 26, Making sense of Call to Action 92:

Salena Starling, President & Chief Executive Officer of the Community of Big Hearts, an Indigenous-owned business, shared insights on Call to Action 92 and its implications, along with her personal story, highlighting the challenges she faced as an Indigenous youth.



## Student Youth Tourism Association (SYTA) Board appointment

Our Business Development Manager of Travel Trade, Sarah Robinson, has been appointed to the SYTA: Student & Youth Travel Association board of directors.


Robinson has an extensive background in the international tourism industry, particularly in marketing, business development, and designing cultural and student youth experiences. Her expertise in the student youth market, recent co-chair t in hosting the successful 2023 SYTA Annual Conference in Winnipeg, participating on the SYTA's diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) Committee, along with her commitment to sustainable travel will be valuable assets to the Board of Directors. Sarah's appointment to the board provides access to valuable industry insights, networking, and influence over industry trends in this growing market. It enhances Tourism Winnipeg's visibility and allows us to promote our city's offerings to decision makers in the market, while staying updated on best practices and emerging opportunities.

SYTA is the premier association of businesses dedicated to providing life-enhancing travel experiences to students and young people.

## Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) Board Appointment

Our Director of Business Development in Tourism, Frances Wellink has been appointed to the Board of Directors as Director of Events with PCMA – Canada West Chapter. With her extensive background in events, Frances is well-positioned to contribute to PCMA's mission of enhancing the effectiveness of meetings, conventions, and exhibitions.

Serving members from Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, this role provides Frances valuable opportunities for networking, professional development, and connecting with potential clients, while helping promote the value of the industry through education and collaboration within the events community.

A photograph of Rosa Walker, President & CEO of Indigenous Leadership Development Institute, Inc., speaking at a wooden podium. She is wearing a black top and has short grey hair. The podium features a decorative Indigenous-style pattern. The background is softly blurred with warm lights.

Rosa Walker, President & CEO  
Indigenous Leadership Development Institute, Inc.  
World Indigenous Business Forum

# Spotlight Feature: World Indigenous Business Forum (WIBF)

## Building bridges and boosting economies: Winnipeg secures World Indigenous Business Forum

Behind every major business event success story is a community of dedicated people working together. That's exactly what made Winnipeg's bid to host the 2026 World Indigenous Business Forum (WIBF) a reality.

With more than 1,000 delegates from 20 countries expected to gather here, the forum isn't just about the \$3.1-plus million in economic impact—it's about showcasing Winnipeg as a global hub for Indigenous business events, reconciliation and collaboration.

This landmark achievement didn't happen overnight. It was the result of years of relationship-building, planning, and a shared vision among local leaders, Indigenous organizations and government officials. Tourism Winnipeg, a division of Economic Development Winnipeg (EDW), played a key role in securing the event, but as Tourism Winnipeg's Director of Business Development Frances Wellink explains, it's about much more than the numbers.

"It all starts with building relationships to open doors," says Wellink. "When securing an event of this magnitude, it's a big ask for a city. I commend my colleague Lynnea Adrian for rallying support from the community at multiple levels when submitting this bid."

Winnipeg's strengths as a host city were a major selling point. The city's diverse Indigenous community and hundreds of Indigenous-owned businesses positioned it as an ideal destination for the forum, but success didn't just rest on demographics. It was the collaborative spirit—between the city, Indigenous leaders, and business partners—that made Winnipeg stand out.

"We engaged leaders across the community to generate excitement and support," says Lynnea Adrian, Business Development Manager for Tourism Winnipeg. "And now those partners are asking how they can be involved in making the WIBF a success."

### Years of preparation, a moment of success

While the WIBF had long been on Tourism Winnipeg's radar, the process gained momentum when SFA-connect, a London-based lead generator, flagged the opportunity in March 2023.

"From the moment we received the lead, everything began to click," Adrian says. "We spoke to Rosa Walker, the local representative, and the president of the Indigenous Leadership Development Institute Inc. (ILDII), and the community really rallied around us."

For Walker, whose organization founded the WIBF in New York in 2010, bringing the forum home to Winnipeg is a dream come true. "We're a Winnipeg-based organization, so to finally have the forum here in Winnipeg is amazing," Walker said. "We're the only Indigenous forum in the world focused exclusively on business. The values that the Board aspire to is that we will have more Indigenous people participate in the economy - locally, nationally and internationally and learn from each other."

The process of securing the WIBF also involved strategic coordination with local and national government entities, Indigenous organizations, and various stakeholders. From the Mayor of Winnipeg to Indigenous Tourism Canada, the letters of support made a significant difference.

"It's a testament to Winnipeg's uniqueness," Walker adds. "So many different groups coming together to make this happen—that's what sets us apart."

### Overcoming challenges with creativity and innovation

While collaboration fueled much of the success, securing funding presented a challenge. The City of Winnipeg through The Special Events Marketing Fund (SEMF) and managed by Tourism Winnipeg was unfortunately not enough to cover the hosting fee. But a new and complementary solution emerged.

"Destination Canada's International Convention Attraction Fund (ICAF) was brand new," Adrian says. "The new funding source ensured we had a seat at the table to compete alongside large, top-tier cities and bring this event to Winnipeg."

Thanks to the ICAF, SEMF and the overwhelming community support, the WIBF is projected to generate significant economic benefits for Winnipeg—directly through hotel bookings, dining and tourism, and indirectly through heightened awareness of the city's Indigenous business community.

### A legacy beyond economics: promoting Indigenous culture and collaboration

The economic impact, while substantial, is only part of the story. The WIBF will help foster deeper relationships and understanding around Indigenous culture and business, creating a legacy in the city and beyond.

"This forum is about more than just business," says Walker. "It's about truth and reconciliation, and about showing the world how Indigenous communities can thrive."

Winnipeg's rich Indigenous history and its journey toward reconciliation are expected to resonate deeply with the international delegates.

"We share the experience of colonization with Indigenous people around the world," Walker notes. "But Winnipeg is at the forefront of reconciliation efforts in Canada. That will have a profound impact on our international guests."

### Looking ahead: Winnipeg's future as a global hub for Indigenous business events

Hosting the WIBF is just the beginning.

For Tourism Winnipeg and EDW, it's a stepping stone toward making the city a preeminent destination for Indigenous business events.

"We're helping Indigenous leaders and communities receive the recognition they deserve," Adrian says. "And we'll continue to focus on attracting more Indigenous events to Winnipeg. This is about creating long-term growth and collaboration."

Wellink echoes this optimism, stressing the importance of relationship-building in their approach.

"By being authentic and listening, we'll continue to secure more Indigenous events in our city," says Wellink.

"A common expression I've heard at events we've secured is 'you start as a client and end as a friend' and I think the warmth of the people of Winnipeg will continue to attract more interest."

The announcement that Winnipeg will host the 2026 WIBF will be made at this year's forum in Albuquerque, New Mexico in October. Tourism Winnipeg representatives will be there, ready to generate even more excitement and bring the experience home to Winnipeg.



Frances Wellink, Director of Business Development and  
Lynnea Adrian, Business Development Manager



**"This forum is about more than just business, It's about truth and reconciliation, and about showing the world how Indigenous communities can thrive."**



# Q3 2024

**W** ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT  
WINNIPEG

**W** TOURISM  
WINNIPEG

**W** YES!  
WINNIPEG