

Best Practice

Regional Partnership to Operate and Improve Kindersley Airport

CONTACT

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THE PRACTICE

The Town of Kindersley and five surrounding rural municipalities (RMs) joined together in a regional governance partnership to oversee management and maintenance of the Kindersley Airport. These six municipalities adopted a democratic process of one member-one vote on the Kindersley Regional Airport Board. They share equally in the operational costs, working to create a capital reserve for upgrades and improvements.

THE PROCESS

In 2007, changes in the town engineering staff led to a review of the overall operation of the airport. As part of this review, town council and administration examined the effectiveness of its current Airport Advisory Board. Long-term strategic planning was initiated. It was recognized that many users from throughout the region used the airport, not just residents of the town. More rural municipalities were invited to join the Board and be part of this planning effort. During strategic planning sessions, the airport board identified the following airport strengths to be promoted to other municipalities in the region:

- Brings business and commerce to the region;
- Brings visitors and tourists to the region;
- Provides a base for agricultural aviation services; and
- Provides a base for flight training.

One of the important factors to the municipalities is the need for medivac flights to ensure immediate medical assistance when needed. The importance of maintaining and improving this certified airport as a critical asset became more apparent through planning sessions. Airport usage and needs were defined. Strategic planning led to the restructuring of the airport board during 2007. The board reviewed its membership, ensuring that critical stakeholders were represented. Throughout 2008, with assistance from town staff, the board reviewed and recommended new airport rules and regulations, fee structures and lease agreements.

This reorganization allowed for voting representation by additional municipalities wishing to participate with financial contributions. These partners were willing to be financial partners if their role included voting authority in financial matters as well as input into operations and upgrades of the facility. Under a newly formed constitution embedded in an updated town bylaw, the original three rural municipalities and the town formed the Executive Committee of the Board, committed to financial contributions and a one member-one vote process. They agreed to cost share operational expenditures, with a view to considering capital expenses as well. In 2008, after this comprehensive reorganization and recruiting and process, the council

of the Town of Kindersley passed Bylaw 06–08, a Bylaw to establish the Kindersley Regional Airport Board and its authority, and to provide for Airport Rules and Regulations, Fees and Lease Agreements. This updated bylaw signaled to the RMs that the town was willing to forge more regional partnerships to enhance the quality of services and life in the region. The board was specifically named the Kindersley Regional Airport Board for this reason. Consultation was and continues to be an important part of this initiative.

The West Central REDA assisted by sending out initial letters of invitation to surrounding rural municipalities. REDA personnel were also involved in the strategic planning and board organization sessions. When requested, current airport board members, particularly town council members, have attended RM council meetings to explain, promote and encourage more participation and membership. From the outset, individual council members from each municipality were tasked with taking the concept forward to their respective councils for approval and support. It was very important that everyone involved understood the significance of the partnership. Financial contributions were not necessary for municipalities to join the board, but doing so provided them with voting authority. Through ongoing discussions and conversations about the importance of the facility to the region, and the adoption of a democratic governance model, the concept has gained support and buy-in from an increasing number of municipalities.

The critical resource requirement in this effort has been time. The town contracted the services of a local consultant to start the strategic planning process in late spring 2007, which town administration has continued to facilitate. REDA staff time was also required. Support from town administration, engineering and asset management departments continues to form an integral part of the Board's successful operation. This initiative is highly important to the town and so the town CAO regularly attends meetings and assists with follow-up.

THE RESULTS

The airport is now positioned to operate in a surplus financial position. Airport board meetings are well attended and highly functional. Each municipality has a financial stake and interest in the facility, and is taking a keen interest in the operation and capital needs. The RMs have initiated discussions about a capital reserve, which is critical considering the limited access to capital funds in the past.

LESSONS LEARNED

The success of such a venture should be communicated on an ongoing basis – through the media, in meetings, and over coffee at local restaurants. Praise and recognition for the vision and leadership of those involved needs to be acknowledged at every opportunity. The focus must be on the benefits of the "investment" rather than on "costs". The region will benefit immensely from this initiative, as it lays even more groundwork for further regional partnerships and co-operation. This initiative clearly shows that the combined efforts of many can accomplish much more than one working alone.