



Wintercity YXE

Researching the Best Practices for Winter Economic Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

The research study explores the potential transformation of Saskatoon into a vibrant and thriving winter city, capitalizing on the unique opportunities presented by winter. It emphasizes the significance of viewing winter as an opportunity rather than an obstacle, acknowledging that weather shapes a place's characteristics and experiences. Winter cities, including Saskatoon, have the potential to embrace winter's unique characteristics and create a community that flourishes during the colder months. By engaging in outdoor activities, celebrating winter festivals, and providing attractive environments, winter cities can foster a sense of community and economic vibrancy.

The WintercityYXE strategy serves as the foundation for the study, with a focus on the winter economy as one of the key themes. The strategy aims to activate

public spaces, promote diverse winter activities, and increase economic activity during the winter months. In addition to economic considerations, the study also adopts a social perspective, exploring how the winter economy can contribute to social well-being, inclusivity, and community development.

The research methodology combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. Interviews with key stakeholders provide in-depth insights, while a community survey gathers residents' opinions and preferences related to winter activities. By analyzing the data, the study aims to identify best practices and provide recommendations for supporting the winter economy and transforming Saskatoon into a more vibrant and inclusive winter city.



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FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigates the issue of winter economy in the city of Saskatoon through the lens of semi-structured interviews conducted with various partners and stakeholders. The interviews revealed prominent themes including **cultural shift and mindset, event consistency and variety, marketing and promotion strategies, the shift towards biking and walking, the promotion of the Meewasin Trail, and the impact of Wintercity Grants.**

CULTURAL SHIFT AND MINDSET

Although advancements in technology and winter gear have made outdoor winter activities more accessible and comfortable, the long periods of cold weather and limited daylight may have ingrained a preference for indoor activities and reluctance to engage in outdoor pursuits during winter.

Stakeholder interviews emphasize the profound impact of cultural orientations on winter activity involvement. A positive cultural attitude towards winter activities correlates with increased participation, tourism, and consumer spending, contributing to a thriving winter economy. On the other hand, a mindset viewing

winter as a time of hibernation can lead to lower participation and negative effects on local businesses.

Recommendations include **targeting and supporting activities for children and newcomers, facilitating outdoor experiences for newcomers, and utilizing festivals as platforms for celebrating winter activities** and integrating residents into the local winter culture. However, it is acknowledged that changing deep-rooted attitudes and behaviors is a complex, long-term endeavor that requires ongoing efforts and realistic expectations.

EVENT CONSISTENCY AND VARIETY

The importance of event consistency and variety in establishing Saskatoon as a winter city was emphasized by key stakeholders. It is necessary for events and activities to occur consistently over the years to build trust and engagement within the community. Inconsistent events can lead to frustration and hinder efforts to establish a winter culture. Maintaining reliability and continuity is crucial for promotional events to be effective and for the community to fully embrace winter activities.

Furthermore, maintaining event consistency is the key for ingraining the desired winter culture and transforming the community's mindset incrementally. Any form of inconsistency has the potential to undermine previous efforts and hinder progress in shaping the community's attitude towards winter activities.

To incentivize businesses to participate and more importantly continue in the winter sector, **some financial and non-financial incentives could be considered as a potential approach.** Businesses that actively engage in winter-related activities for an extended period could be offered a reduced tax rate. This approach aims to encourage businesses to continue their involvement in winter offerings and contribute to the overall development of the community's winter culture.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

The success of the winter economy and the achievement of a cultural shift are contingent upon effective communication and marketing efforts. One explanation for low participation in winter activities may be attributed to a lack of awareness or promotion of the available options, and limited exposure to winter-centric recreational opportunities. Without these crucial components, neither the winter economy can thrive, nor can the desired cultural shift take place. After examining the status quo, we identified some issues that need to be addressed regarding the marketing efforts.

Key recommendations emerged from the interviews and community survey, including the **encouragement of businesses to showcase winter photos** on social media platforms, creation of a **unified comprehensive calendar** to enhance community engagement and awareness of outdoor events, **importance of proper lighting** to create a welcoming atmosphere, **advertising the**

affordability advantage of Saskatoon for hosting events, highlighting the city's/community's kindness and accommodating nature in marketing campaigns, and **the need for improved communication and coordination among city departments and partners.** Collaboration with capable partners like Discover Saskatoon, BIDs, and organizations such as On Purpose Leadership and Meewasin can facilitate the implementation of these initiatives. By implementing these recommendations, Saskatoon can enhance its appeal as a vibrant winter destination and boost its winter economy.



SHIFTING TOWARDS BIKING AND WALKING

Shifting towards biking and walking in winter months helps the local economy, as it enables both cyclists and pedestrians to make stops along their routes and contributes to local businesses and shops.

In order to incentivize these modes of transportation, it is recommended to **pilot E-Bike charging facilities, clear sidewalks, pilot the implementation of heated sidewalks or windbreakers** particularly in high-traffic areas like downtown, **educate the community and create awareness**, including safety guidelines and addressing perception barriers, **and organize group rides and collaborate** with local organizations.



PROMOTION OF THE MEEWASIN TRAIL

The Meewasin Trail in Saskatoon has significant potential for the winter economy, attracting more visitors and supporting local businesses. However, preserving the ecologically significant trail while accommodating human use poses a challenge. Meewasin faces funding and staffing limitations, hindering long-term planning and conservation efforts. To enhance its appeal and create an inviting place, placemaking strategies can be employed.

Stable funding and aligning with the organization's 100-year plan can address these issues. **Placemaking strategies, including community-based and market-driven approaches**, can enhance the trail and improve quality of life for the community. **Drawing inspiration from other winter cities, incorporating storytelling and winter festivals on the trail** can celebrate Saskatoon's history and culture. Additionally, **exploring a pilot winter tourism program** can further enhance visitor engagement. By addressing these challenges and implementing strategic initiatives, Meewasin can contribute to the winter economy and the growth of Saskatoon's tourism industry.

WINTERCITY GRANTS

Last, but not least, it is important to mention the significant role of the Winter City Grant program in providing crucial support to local businesses. While the program has been beneficial for recipients, there are some concerns raised by the awardees that require attention and resolution.

Stakeholders expressed concerns about the strict deadline and have suggested the **introduction of a secondary application date or a more flexible deadline to accommodate late applicants. One-to-one mentorship from BID managers can help businesses generate innovative ideas and strengthen community engagement.** Another concern is the size of the grants, with suggestions **to allocate more funds or reduce the number of recipients to provide larger grant amounts. It is important for the city and government to view investment in the winter economy as an opportunity and consider the needs of the residents, especially underserved populations. Supporting both outdoor and indoor events** is recommended, acknowledging the challenges of planning outdoor activities in winter while promoting community engagement.

The suggestion is to shift the perspective and consider these expenditures as long-term investments rather than mere expenses.



COMMUNITY SURVEY

A community survey was conducted to gather insights on the community's needs and satisfaction with winter activities in Saskatoon. The survey included 50 participants, representing a diverse demographic. The majority of respondents expressed some level of dissatisfaction or neutral feelings towards available outdoor winter activities. Specific issues identified included **the desire for outdoor spaces with thermal comfort, diversified winter experiences, more events and festivals, and better advertising and promotion of winter activities**. The survey also highlighted the need for better awareness and accessibility, affordable options, and family inclusivity when choosing winter activities. Recommendations were made to address these issues, such as **hosting more neighborhood-based activities, providing affordable options, and creating inclusive family-friendly events**. Additionally, it was suggested to revise the structure of available grants to prioritize projects meeting relevant criteria.

Finally, it is recommended to propose a set of measurable financial and non-financial indicators that can be used to evaluate and establish a baseline for each indicator in order to measure the impact of different actions on the winter economy. These indicators include **continuity of businesses, number of days open during winter, average number of customers per day, number of event visitors, job creation, and revenue generation**. Evaluating these indicators on a bi-annual basis can provide insights into the effectiveness of the strategies implemented to address the winter economy issue.

You can read the full report "Researching the Best Practices for Winter Economic Opportunities" at saskatoon.ca/wintercityyx.



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