

Brief History

Founded in 2017 on the basis of bringing lifelong learning to Whistler through accredited educational and thought-provoking programming, the Whistler Institute (the Institute) has facilitated ten speaker events, 26 educational programs, 27 concierge services for post-secondary institutions, and nurtured the fulfillment of special projects to further unique educational offerings within the Sea to Sky Corridor. In 2021, the Institute's strategic plan framework identified four focus areas for 2021-2023: a speaker series, learning programs, financial sustainability, and organizational excellence. In total, 3,022 individuals have engaged with the Institute since its inception.

***Mission:** Influencing change and inspiring minds through education and through leadership to meet the needs of the Whistler Resort and community

***Values:** Inspiring, Impactful, Inclusive

***Focus Areas:** Whistler Institute Speaker Series, Whistler Institute Learning Programs, Financial Sustainability, and Organizational Excellence

**(denotes from Strategic Plan Framework)*

Current Situation Analysis

In 2024, the Institute entered its growth phase, and Whistler's new educational landscape has made the Institute's original unique value proposition opaque: there are more providers facilitating in person, online and hybrid higher-education programs and speaker events; the Institute's business skills training and Indigenous and intercultural awareness courses overlap with community partner programs; demand for 100% in-person learning has decreased; and the cost of living, pursuing higher-education, and doing business has increased. The Institute's current strategic plan framework is sufficient in guiding the Institute's annual business plan; the need the organization is fulfilling in the community, however, must be clarified, and diversifying the Institute's revenue streams will be essential to the organization's longevity.

The Global Perspectives Speaker Series demands the most staff hours while presenting the most viable opportunity to boost brand awareness and increase cash flow. The Speaker Series has secured sponsors, donations, ticket sales revenue and overall brand

awareness for the Institute. Equally demanding on staff hours are educational programs and concierge services, however these have generated minimal revenue and show the least potential to grow brand awareness and cash flow. The Institute continues to significantly rely on donations, ironically the least reliable form of funding for an organization's longevity, so it is of utmost importance that funding streams are diversified as soon as possible.

The Institute's new executive director is well versed in Whistler's economy, with established connections and networks, and general marketing and events operations; these will be integral to building brand awareness. Coupled with a part time marketing and community development coordinator however, these two part time positions have overlapping skills and gaps that leave the organization vulnerable to financial mismanagement, poor data collection and reporting. Looking ahead, the Institute must focus the coming year on building brand, growing product and service offerings, and achieving financial health and organizational effectiveness.

Industry Analysis

The Institute operates within Whistler's non-profit and higher education sectors. More than 146 non-profit organizations in Whistler deliver a myriad of higher education, continuing education, some vocation, and general interest programs. Areas of offerings include but are not limited to arts and culture (fine arts, literary, film, photography, music, language, history); technology (computer literacy, digital literacy); business (communications, administration, people management, customer service, event planning, bookkeeping); and the environment (waste reduction, conservation, climate action, gardening). Each respective organization complements their educational offerings with aligned speaker series. Speaking with our non-profit partners who facilitate the above programming, there is demand for in-person engagements that build community, deliver authentic experiences, and inspire participants. In 2017, when the Institute was established, we were the lead organization in bringing accredited courses and speaker series to Whistler. Today, the landscape has changed, and our differentiating value proposition needs to be better defined.

Our partners at Capilano University, British Columbia Institute of Technology, and Vancouver Community College have articulated a need of post-secondary institutions to respond to consumer demands of hybrid learning offerings that work towards micro credentials, diplomas, and degrees. While students are seeking some in-person training, the higher cost of post-secondary education coupled with the increased cost of living has made blended delivery more appealing and accessible.

2023 trends in Canada's higher education sector:

- While some students want to learn in person and some want to learn fully online, the majority of students are demanding hybrid learning models
- If it weren't for international student intake, the enrollment of students in Canadian post-secondary institutions would be down.
- Students aren't coming into post-secondary with the skills they need in terms of resiliency, digital literacy, and academic rigour.
- There's a growing demand for micro-credentials
- There's a decrease in demand for full degrees and diplomas
- The future of higher education is placing an increasing emphasis on skills-based learning.

Consumer Analysis

The Institute's primary audience for all programs are residents of Whistler. Statistics Canada reports that in 2021 Whistler's population was 13,982, 50% of which were aged 20 – 44 years, 25% were 55 years+, and 14% were 45 – 54 years. 40% of residents are foreign born, and more than 40% of residents identify as visible minorities. The average household income is \$146,651, while 50% of Whistler household income is below \$100,000 (half of those earn below \$60,000).

For education offerings, our primary audience has been 18 – 30-year-old residents (32% of Whistler's population). There has been a focus on marketing to business owners and operators to upskill their supervisors and managers, mostly within Whistler's tourism and hospitality sector (41% of Whistler's workforce). Our secondary audience has been working professionals (24% of Whistler's workforce) and under-employed individuals looking to grow their skillsets through accredited courses.

For speaker events, our primary audience continues to be Whistler's senior residents (25% of community population). Our secondary audience are in-resort working professionals with some form of higher education.

Whistler's Community Life Survey results in 2022 indicated that only 28% of permanent residents were satisfied with current access to 'learning opportunities' within Whistler and the Sea to Sky. This level of satisfaction is a statistical decrease from 2021 and does not yet meet the community performance aspirations.

We know that Whistler is an engaged community and there is a demand for in-person events. Beyond that, information on our consumers is very limited, and increasing our understanding of their wants and needs will be critical for the organization's success. Due to Whistler's small population with an abundance of community programming already on offer, the Institute should consider multigenerational programming, intersectional offerings, and maintaining accessible pricing for future programs.

Competitor Analysis

For education offerings, Whistler-based consumers have a breadth of options to choose from: Whistler Adventure School, Whistler First Aid, Whistler Public Library, Tamwood, Whistler Chamber of Commerce, online courses from post-secondary institutions outside the Corridor, and (as of September 2024) Capilano University's Squamish Campus. The Whistler Chamber of Commerce serves the business community and often sells out their courses. The Whistler Adventure School brings in international students who also complement the local workforce, filling their courses and boosting Whistler's temporary workforce. The Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre delivers cultural workshops and community events in an immersive environment.

For speaker events, attendees consider us against other in-resort offerings such as annual festivals and film premieres; Whistler Museum speaker events; Whistler Public Library speaker events; Arts Whistler Live! performances; comedy shows; etc. Our Global Perspectives Speaker Series does not have much overlap in terms of content delivered, but we do have to be mindful of what other ticketed events are happening in resort when we program.

The Institute's unique selling proposition is its relationships with multiple postsecondary institutions. Through 2017, while our relationships continue to be strong, with the changing educational scene we need to better situate ourselves in the marketplace and establish where we fit. Looking forward, how we leverage these relations for future educational programs and speaker events will be essential to the Institute's success.

SWOT Analysis

The Institute's leadership is highly engaged and can leverage its community connections, and the halo effect of the Whistler brand to create robust educational programs that sustain community and government support. However, the Institute faces challenges with revenue diversification, brand recognition, and clear organizational priorities, amidst a competitive landscape with low barriers to entry and potential overlaps with other organizations.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Leadership with community connections and expertise	Lack of revenue diversification, and financial sustainability
High level of commitment and engagement amongst board and staff	Low brand recognition and awareness
Location and Halo of Whistler Brand	Unclear WI brand value proposition and organizational priorities
Strong community and government support, including financial	Unclear target audiences and focus areas - B2C, B2B, B2B2C, All?
Products: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaker Series as flagship product is growing momentum • Strength in engaging stakeholders to build and deliver inaugural partnered educational programs 	Donor relationship management
Resources dedicated around operational process including annual review and planning with ongoing controls in place	Staff Resources (P/T Executive Director)
Organization is designated as society and registered charity	
Robust donor database	
Opportunities	Threats
Appetite for learning and interest around meaningful, bold content	Lots of competition with low barriers to entry
Tourism Whistler focus on weather-independent activities	Crossover/duplication with Chamber and other existing organizations - it's confusing

Increased outreach efforts from interested partners	Lower discretionary income, and access to obtain free content
RMOW expression of interest around current and new opportunities	
Increased demand for shorter, bite sized content	

FY 2025 Outlook

We have three major goals ahead of us this coming year:

Goal 1: Build Strong Brand Awareness

Objective 1.1: Focus on advocacy and stakeholder engagement

Objective 1.2: Develop a comprehensive annual marketing plan that drives fundraising and brand awareness

Objective 1.3: Invest in year-round marketing and advertising within local print media, community events and partnerships

Goal 2: Growth Through Product & Service Offerings

Objective 2.1: Research bold topics that stimulate community discussion and participation

Objective 2.2: Grow to drive revenue, partnerships, and community presence

Objective 2.3: Regularly audit the series to drive continual improvement

For the sake of clarity: staff will not allocate resources towards the learning programs for the coming year.

Goal 3: Improve Financial Sustainability & Organizational Effectiveness

Objective 3.1: Adopt an annual business review and planning process

Objective 3.2: Establish sustainable revenue diversification (e.g., grants, government funding, tickets and registration, sponsorship, donations)

Objective 3.3: Achieve operational effectiveness and efficiencies through a comprehensive resource review

Objective 3.4: Achieve board diversity to adequately represent our community fabric