

# 2020 Premier's Award for Excellence in the Public Service Recipients

## **Nicole Lamers, Ministry of Agriculture – Emerging Leader**

Nicole is an excellent example of an employee who strives for greatness while staying firmly grounded in the values of the public service. Regardless of the scope of a project, Nicole approaches her work with determination, passion, and a collaborative mindset. Nicole's work on a measurement model for the Ministry of Agriculture's Public Trust Strategy exemplified these qualities. She consulted broadly and created an innovative measurement model, incorporating several separate process and reporting functions. This innovative approach increased efficiency and allowed her colleagues to see their role and impact in the strategy. During the onset of COVID-19, Nicole took steps to build morale and ensure the strong continuation of teamwork amongst her colleagues. She often prepared team building exercises, organized a branch-wide training on resiliency, piloted new online opportunities for professional development and even researched a holiday celebrated by a colleague and invited them to share about the culture with the team. Her work ethic and dedication to the public service is recognized by her peers and she has quickly emerged as a leader in the ministry.

## **Jennifer Brass, Ministry of Advanced Education – Individual**

Jennifer is the Senior Indigenous Advisor at the Ministry of Advanced Education. She is responsible for the introduction of the 4 Seasons of Reconciliation training, which contributes to awareness of truth and reconciliation at the ministry and promotes a renewed relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadians. This ministry was the first to receive this training and Jennifer supplemented it with guest speakers and discussions to elicit further insight and depth of learning. Jennifer is a lead for Saskatchewan's participation on the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), CMECs Indigenous Education Committee and she co-chaired a working group related to Indigenous post-secondary institutions. She also conceptualized, organized and led the first ever Indigenous Post-Secondary Education Symposium in the province which led to connections between institutions and ministries for Indigenous post-secondary education success. One of Jennifer's strengths is connecting with stakeholders building partnerships with each of the post-secondary institutions through face-to-face meetings, with an approach of authenticity, true partnership and common goals. Jennifer engages with elders and Indigenous leaders in a manner that is deeply respectful and grounded in integrity and gratitude. These values have been paramount to the success of her work.

## **Roy Cook, Ministry of Parks Culture and Sport – Individual**

Roy has a clear passion for safety and inclusion in Saskatchewan parks. He provided a surprise safety training session, entitled "A Mile in Their Shoes", to his colleagues at Saskatchewan Landing Provincial Park. His intention was to mentor empathy, awareness, understanding and respect for people with different abilities and to consider a larger perspective on how all visitors experience the park. As part of the exercise, Roy challenged his colleagues to try and navigate the park in wheelchairs, which he borrowed from the Saskatchewan Abilities Council. Roy's efforts awoke his colleagues' empathy for others and created awareness and understanding of how visitors experience Saskatchewan's parks differently. As part of the process, the team identified how older buildings in the park did not meet newer codes, creating extra challenges for some individuals.

### **Colby Elford, Ministry of Agriculture – Individual**

Colby took on the lead role for the Proactive Stewardship Pilot, an innovative project that confirms the benefits of environmental programming and demonstrates positive outcomes that the implementation of Beneficial Management Practices have on water quality. Colby stepped into his role on short notice, and faced tight timelines and daunting deliverables. He formed a technical advisory committee, engaged other branches within the ministry and established relationships with other stakeholders such as producers, councillors of rural municipalities and the Water Security Agency. Colby has an open mind, is considerate of others and ensures that each voice is heard. He has demonstrated a commitment to service excellence through open and honest dialogue and timely and accurate information. Colby is constantly looking for ways to improve as a leader and is always open to feedback.

### **Darrell Kowalski, Ministry of Central Services (now Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement) – Individual**

When the Ministry of Social Services indicated that monthly smudging ceremonies would be held within the L.F. McIntosh Building in Prince Albert, Darrell immediately started looking for options to accommodate this while balancing the needs of multiple building occupants. He approached his supervisor with the innovative idea to install an enhanced exhaust system in a boardroom that was undergoing renovation. Darrell demonstrated leadership and service excellence by putting the client's needs first and found a way to create a ceremonial space by creatively ventilating the room separately from the building's ventilation system. This room has been blessed by local elders and contains ceremonial ribbons and other artifacts that depict its importance. The room is available to all ministries wanting to host a smudging or any other type of ceremony.

### **Business Response Team – Ministry of Trade and Export Development**

Public health orders related to COVID-19 put unprecedented pressure on Saskatchewan's business community. The Business Response Team, in the Ministry of Trade and Export Development, was created to provide information and support to business owners from across Saskatchewan. The program was conceived on March 18, 2020, and was launched five days later on March 23, 2020. The team provides pathfinding and information sharing services related to provincial and federal relief programs via email, telephone and a suite of information available on [saskatchewan.ca](https://saskatchewan.ca). The ministry had no existing call centre processes or front-line service delivery operations; therefore, the new program changed the nature of the work for team members, amidst their own transition to working from home. The team members have become experts in navigating an array of local, provincial and federal relief programs, as well as interpreting and explaining public health orders for thousands of businesses. The team also gathered information about concerns and impacts related to the pandemic for decision makers developing relief programs. In the first 30 days, the team responded to 7,000 inquiries by telephone and email. Despite the significant demand, the average call wait time has never exceeded two minutes.

## **COVID-19 Emergency Financial Relief Team – Ministry of Trade and Export Development and Ministry of Finance**

Public health orders made in March 2020, in response to the COVID-19, restricted economic activity and had a catastrophic impact on small businesses and workers in Saskatchewan. The provincial government responded with utility and taxation deferrals and through the creation of three critical programs: the Saskatchewan Self-Isolation Support Payment, the Saskatchewan Small Business Emergency Payment and the Saskatchewan Temporary Wage Supplement Program. Within a short time, the team from the Ministry of Trade and Export Development and Ministry of Finance, along with the Ministry of Central Services and Ministry of Justice, consulted with and collected data from a number of stakeholders and other ministries. The team analyzed the data and established a strategy that guided collaboration and coordinated efforts to meet very aggressive timelines. As a result, the team developed these new programs, which would normally take months, in a matter of days. The team designed these programs in such a way where no new technical resources were required, setting a new standard for automation of similar processes in the future. Within 12 weeks, over \$34 million in support payments were provided to over 21,000 businesses and workers and applications were processed within five days of receipt. To date, the programs have provided over \$59 million to support businesses and workers impacted by COVID-19.

## **Fiscal Stabilization Modernization Team – Ministry of Finance**

The federal government's fiscal stabilization program was created in 1967. At the direction of the premier and the minister of finance, the Fiscal Stabilization Modernization team led the development and approval of a proposal to modernize and simplify the federal program. The team, including individuals from Intergovernmental Affairs, ultimately negotiated a consensus position which achieved full support from all provinces and territories. The work supported the premier of Saskatchewan as the chair of the Council of the Federation in bringing his colleagues together on a matter of national importance while at the same time addressing a key Saskatchewan interest. The consensus was achieved and the proposal was tabled at the December 2019 Finance Ministers' Meeting in Ottawa. The talented team of officials who developed the proposal and brokered the agreement successfully flexed considerable technical knowledge and relationship-building skills. In the context of COVID-19, and the consequent economic shock, this work will be critical to supporting provinces through recovery.

## **Income Assistance Redesign Project Team – Ministry of Social Services**

The Income Assistance Redesign Project Team successfully delivered the most significant change to income assistance in 50 years. The new vision for income assistance is to support people by meeting their basic needs while partnering with them to become self-sufficient to the best of their ability. Income assistance redesign goals are to provide simpler benefits, improve clients' lives with stronger supports and ensure programs and services are sustainable. The team shifted the emphasis from paperwork to people; from complexity to simplicity; and from compliance to support - all by working with clients in a new way. The Saskatchewan Income Support program was successfully launched in July 2019. Since then, 22,000 people in Saskatchewan have applied to the new program with approximately 50 per cent using the new online application. Through the use of motivational interviewing, income assistance staff have refocused their efforts on planning and support services to help clients set goals, learn to manage their household budget and work toward becoming self-sufficient. Clients across the province are receiving timely benefits and staff are interacting with clients in a new supportive way to help achieve self-sufficiency.

## **Innovation Saskatchewan Team – Innovation Saskatchewan**

The Innovation Saskatchewan team plays a significant role as an innovation catalyst within the province's technology sector and has had a direct impact on the growth that the sector has experienced over the past four years. The team established Saskatchewan's first technology incubator in 2017, introduced Western Canada's most competitive startup technology tax incentive program, and developed programs that support the commercialization of new technology, such as the Made-in-Saskatchewan-Technology program. As a result, in 2019, Saskatchewan's tech sector saw a dramatic increase in venture capital activity. The Canadian Venture Capital Association reported that \$114 million in venture capital investment made in Saskatchewan in 2019 – more than the previous five years combined. The team has also seen impressive results from its internal programs. The Saskatchewan Technology Startup Incentive program has attracted \$10.2M in investments and the Saskatchewan Advantage Innovation Fund has leveraged \$48.7M in private and federal funding. The team's efforts and support for the technology sector has been validated with the release of Saskatchewan's first-ever tech sector impact study. This study confirmed the tech sector is a significant economic driver, contributing 5.6 per cent to Saskatchewan's total GDP and employing over 50,000 people. Supporters of this nomination have described the team as engaged, motivated and exceptional.

## **Play. Learn. Grow. Together! Public Awareness Campaign Team – Ministry of Education**

Over the past two years and counting, the Play. Learn. Grow. Together! public awareness campaign team has collaborated on a campaign to provide ideas to parents and caregivers of young children to support their development and continued learning prior to entering school. The campaign features a new website, an interactive social media presence and a series of informational videos to get parents/caregivers thinking about fun and easy ways they can interact with their young children to assist in their development and education. The website also includes links to French and English programs and services that may be of interest to families. The public awareness campaign team recognized the vast diversity within Saskatchewan and built their campaign with that in mind. The team travelled to different locations across the province to capture varying Saskatchewan family dynamics. We know that Saskatchewan is made up of a mosaic of cultures, and the team members were able to respectfully enter people's lives and homes to then share images and videos with the world. As of June 30, 2020, the videos on YouTube have been viewed 54,358 times, while the videos on the website, Facebook, and other external sources have reached over 35,000 people. It is expected that this campaign will garner some of the government's largest social media following.