

Ripple Effects: How Strong Colleges Build Strong Communities

A City of Kingston Perspective on Colleges as Anchors of Local Prosperity

**Colleges are
community anchors.**



The background of the image is a photograph of an empty theater. The seats are red and arranged in rows, sloping downwards towards the stage. The walls are made of wood and brick. The lighting is dim, with some blue light visible on the right side. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

**Impact of cuts aren't just
economic, they're
cultural and social.**

**Policy decisions made at
Queen's Park are felt on
Main Street Ontario.**

**Strong communities
are built on strong
College – Municipal
partnerships.**

**Resilient communities
need resilient colleges.**



Thank you.

Contact:

Craig Desjardins, MBA

**Director, Strategy, Innovation &
Partnerships**

City of Kingston

cmdesjardins@cityofkingston.ca

November 2025

HEQCO - REIMAGINED: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF ONTARIO PSE

SARNIA-LAMBTON ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

SARNIA-LAMBTON ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

VISION

Sarnia-Lambton will be one of Canada's premier locations to live, work, and invest – where economic prosperity is driven by innovation, growth and diversification.

MISSION

To advance economic growth and opportunity in Sarnia-Lambton through leadership, partnership, collaboration, and strategic direction.

CUSTOMIZED SERVICES TO INDUSTRY

- Relocation & site selection services
- Start-up & commercialization support
- Market research, data, and statistics
- Incentive & grant information
- Permitting assistance
- Support navigating municipal, provincial, and federal government agencies
- Facilitate connections to businesses and support services pertinent to development
- Retention and expansion services for existing businesses
- Connect to local workforce and attract talent



SLEP - STRATEGIC SNAPSHOT CORE ELEMENTS



1. ORGANIZATION

- Focus on organizational role, structure, & relationships to generate a seamless investor & stakeholder experience.
- Promote & foster an environment of diversity, equity, & inclusivity.



2. BRAND & MARKETING

- Develop a powerful brand & story to attract attention, investment, talent & population.
- Leverage market position to influence & advocate on key issues.



3. WORKFORCE

- Develop a coordinated workforce program to attract & retain talent.
- Support immigration and new resident attraction efforts to assist with local industry need



4. CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT

- Fully leverage our key industry strengths across established industry clusters.
- Foster diversity through the development of emerging sectors and value-added opportunities.



5. BUSINESS RETENTION, EXPANSION, & RURAL COMMUNITIES

- Accelerate growth opportunities for existing businesses and promote rural entrepreneurship.
- Establish support of rural municipalities and connection with municipal stakeholders.



6. INNOVATION & MARKET READINESS

- Grow innovation culture, support the growth of technology & leverage key partnerships.
- Ensure "product" (lands, infrastructure, hydrogen hub, transportation) is market-ready



7. ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Assist entrepreneurs in navigating their business journey from start-up to scale-up to succession.
- Raise the profile and promote small business as an important contributor to and builder of our community

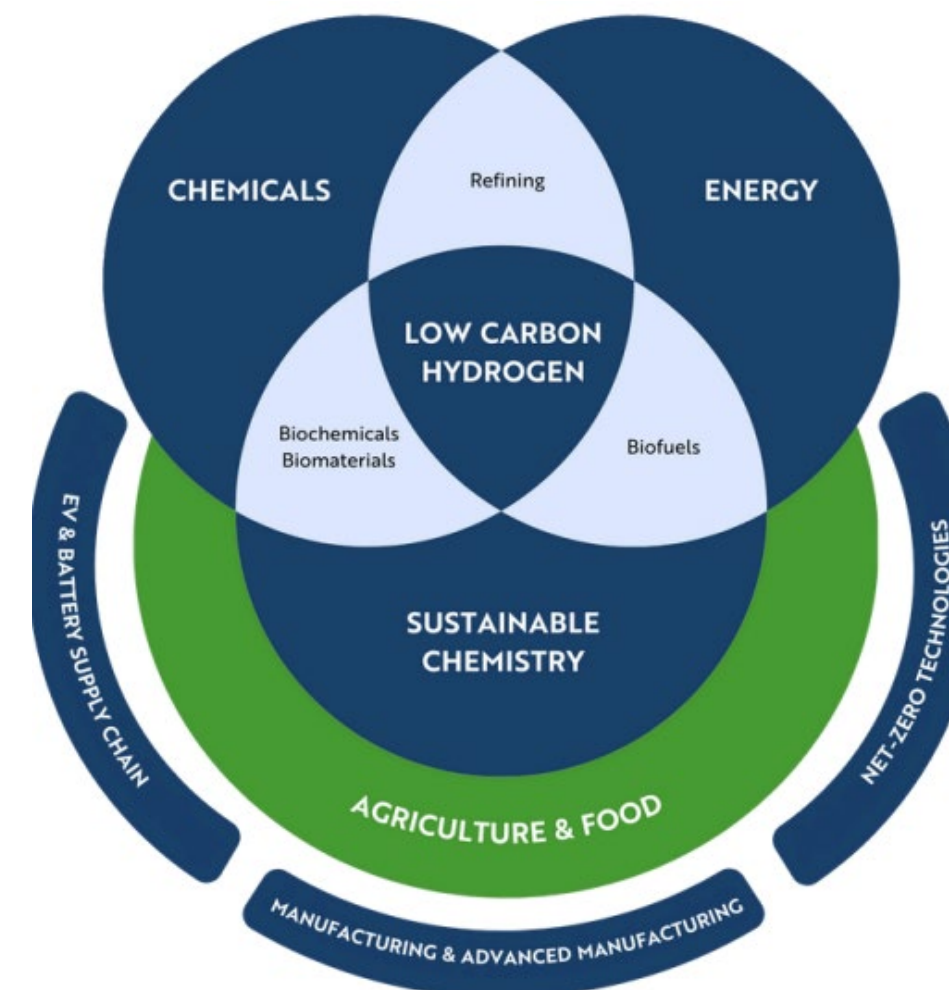
ABOUT SARNIA-LAMBTON



Located on the Canada/USA border in the heart of the Great Lakes Basin.

The largest and most well-known municipality is the City of Sarnia.

- County population 132,900
- City of Sarnia population 75,000
- Total Labour Force – 67,500
- Total Labour Force within 100km – 550,000

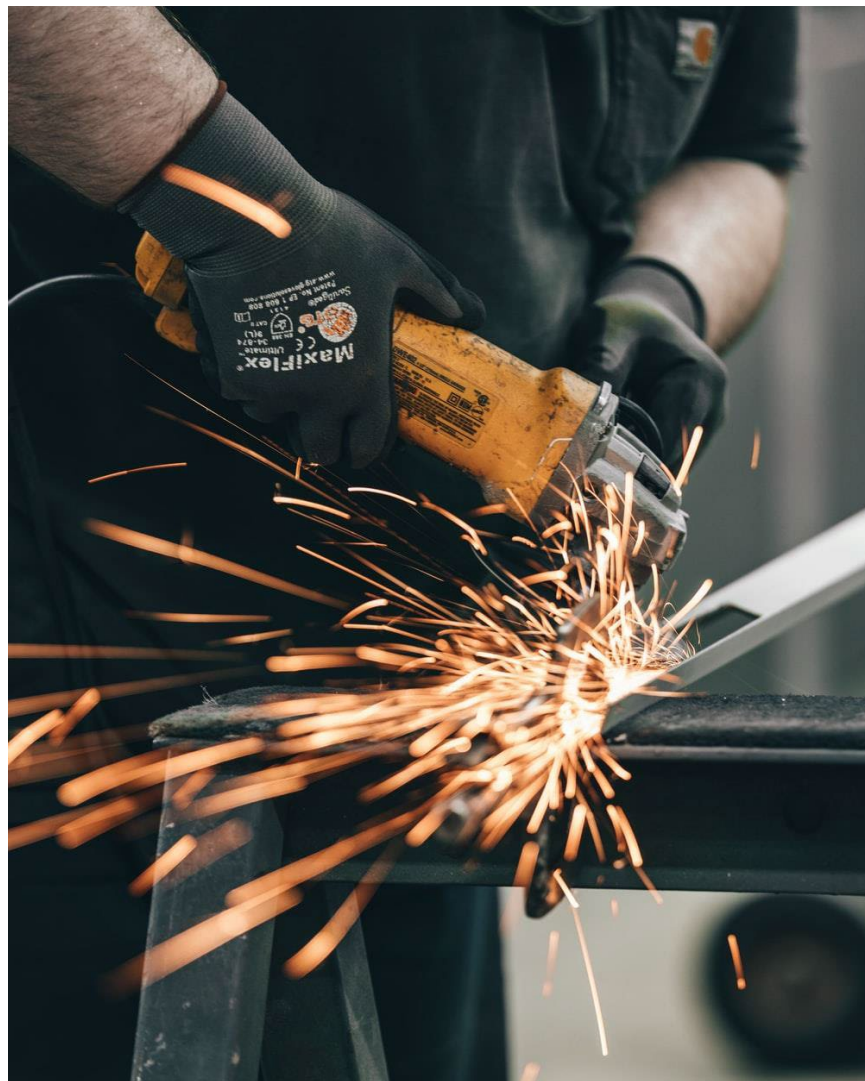


LAMBTON COLLEGE



- Main Campus and Fire School located in City of Sarnia
- Has served Sarnia-Lambton and its learners for nearly 60 years
- 70+ credentials
 - Faculty of Applied Science, Engineering Technology & Trades
 - Faculty of Health Sciences, Community Services & Business
 - Faculty of Nursing
- 3,400 students in Fall 2025 – down from 5,000 in Fall 2024
- A top five research College in Canada for an unmatched nine consecutive years

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT GAPS



- “Rural” community in which Lambton College is the sole post-secondary institution.
- Program closures would reduce local training pipelines, impacting accessibility of post-secondary education.
- Potential for skills shortages in high-demand sectors.
- Reduced capacity to meet employer needs.
- Long-term impacts on regional labour supply.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT GAPS

- Fewer local options would mean students have to travel outside Sarnia-Lambton for comparable programs, creating financial and logistical barriers and making post-secondary education less attainable for low- and middle-income learners.
- Students balancing work, family, or caregiving responsibilities lose access to local, flexible education options.
- Equity impacts: vulnerable groups (first-generation students, newcomers, Indigenous learners) are disproportionately affected when local, affordable access to education is compromised.
- Nursing, community services, skilled trades, and technology programs require expensive labs, equipment, and often small class sizes. With funding shortfalls, these programs could potentially become harder to sustain for colleges.
- Colleges could be forced to prioritize high-enrolment, lower-cost programs to remain financially viable, leading to fewer specialized offerings connected to their communities' labour market needs.

ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS



Photo by [Michelle Spollen](#) on [Unsplash](#)

- Fewer students = less local spending
 - Loss of approx. \$12.4M direct community spending in 2025-2026 amongst just first year international students.
 - 541 fewer first year international students in Fall 2025 compared to Fall 2024 x living expense \$22,895/student [figure does not include tuition]
- College operations and students support local businesses
- Impacts on local real estate
- Reduced economic activity and job creation
- Programs represent local job losses in both educators and administrative staffing
- Weakens the foundation for business attraction

ATTRACTION & RETENTION OF YOUTH & NEWCOMERS

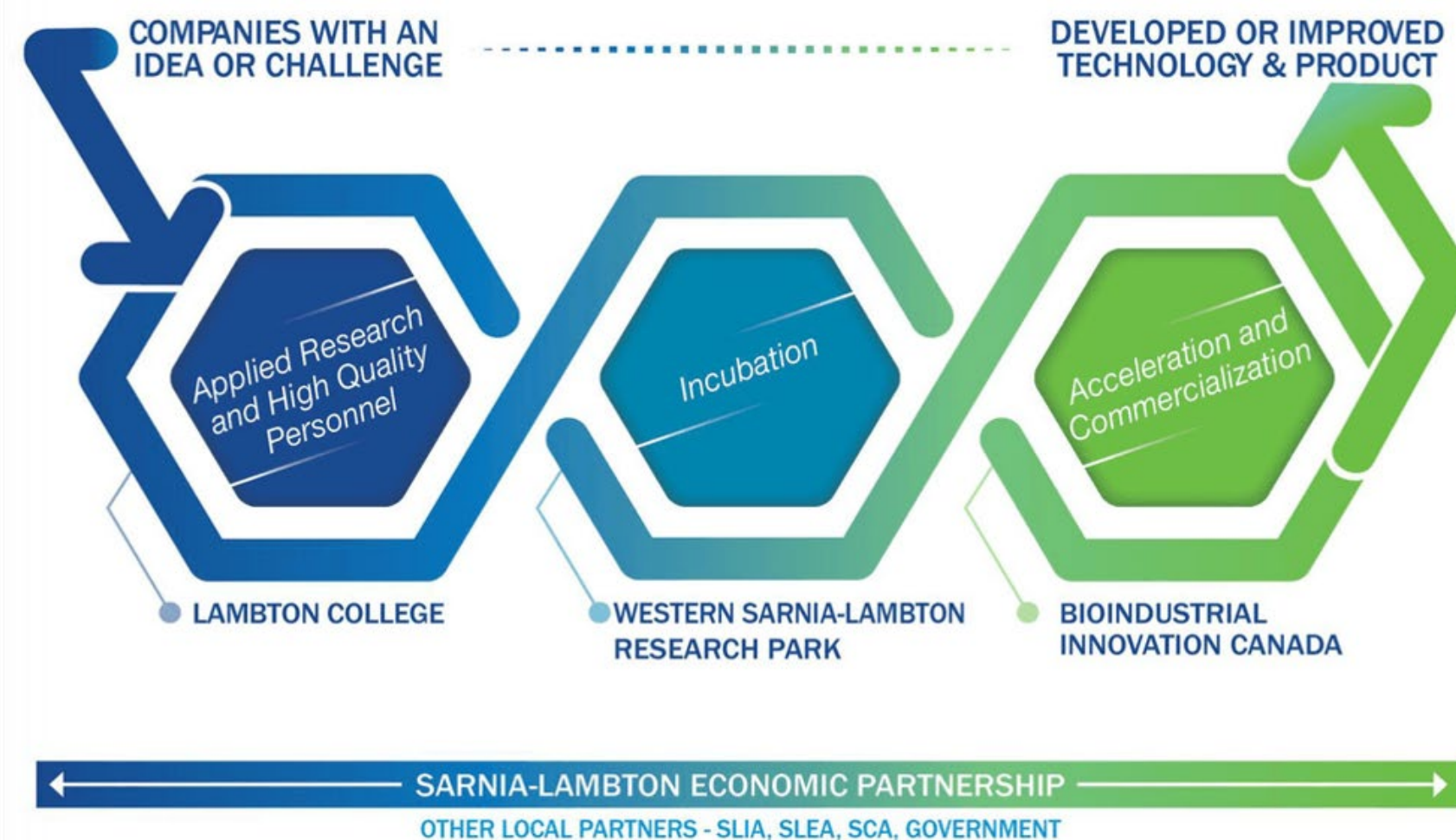


- A sufficient working-age population is necessary to sustain critical services amid a growing number of retirees
- Closures undermine community strategies to attract newcomers and retain local youth through college programs
- College programs retain local youth
- Attract international students and newcomers
- Graduates often stay and work locally
- As an example, this is why Lambton College developed a standalone BSCN degree program – in their joint program with the University of Windsor, Sarnia-Lambton was losing nursing graduates to Windsor because that is where they finished the final two years of their program and received their clinical placements



INNOVATION & BUSINESS GROWTH

- College programs are integrated into innovation and research and development. Losing programs reduces research, training, and R&D capacity, weakening employer competitiveness and regional growth.
- Lambton College is a key component in the diversification of Sarnia-Lambton's economy and the reduction of our dependence on the historical petrochemical sector – change driven by innovation
- This work has included playing an instrumental role in the development of three industry clusters:
 - Sarnia-Lambton Hybrid Chemistry Cluster
 - Sustainable Energy Cluster
 - IT Cluster
- One of the only colleges in Canada with three Technology Access Centres (TACs), which enable local businesses to optimize new solutions or commercialize new products to compete and lead in their industries, all while remaining in Sarnia-Lambton, creating jobs here and contributing to economic growth and diversification.
 - Lambton College's TACs have 1,699 partners including 1,549 SMEs



INNOVATION & BUSINESS GROWTH



- College programs fuel research and innovation
- Partnerships with local employers drive research and development
- Cuts could reduce applied research and technology adoption
- Which could, in turn, weaken employer competitiveness and regional growth

DISRUPTION TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



- SLEP and the College align with community priorities
- Program cuts disrupt workforce and innovation strategies
- Forces shifts in economic development plans.
- Slows regional progress toward resilience and growth



THANK YOU!

Matthew Slotwinski
CEO
matthew@sarnialambton.on.ca
519-332-1820
www.sarnialambton.on.ca