



2021-2022

Community Report

Message from Board Chair, Ryan Fraser

The last few years have been a time of continuous change and adaptation. Entrepreneurs and business leaders had to adapt because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the changing business environment.

The PCREN also saw change and adaptation as it responded to the needs of entrepreneurs and the business community. In August, the Board of Directors thanked our first-ever CEO of the PCREN, Sarah MacIntosh Wiseman, for her leadership, passion for immigration, and guidance throughout the early years. The PCREN transitioned to a core team of two for several months while the board searched for a new successor, in which we welcomed Scott Ferguson to the team in mid-November.

Over the year, we received global attention for our innovative partnership that matches skilled refugees to employment opportunities, and we built strong connections with local business leaders and entrepreneurs. The team supported local business leaders with awareness about COVID-19 regulations, programs, and access to personal protective equipment.

In early 2022, the PCREN received a renewed commitment from its stakeholders to continue building the local economy by providing support, resources, and navigation to entrepreneurs and business leaders.

We will soon delve into a new strategic planning process that will seek input from the business community and will focus on partnership, innovation, and business growth and development.

Thank you to Pictou Landing First Nation, the Municipality of Pictou County, the towns of New Glasgow, Pictou, Stellarton, Trenton, and Westville, the Province of Nova Scotia, the volunteer board of directors, and the PCREN staff for your commitment to the PCREN's mission and vision of a sustainable and thriving Pictou County.

PCREN Board of Directors

- Ryan Fraser, Chair
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- Ruth Martin, Treasurer
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- Lindsay Shaw
- Kayla Sutherland
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- Jamie Smith - newly appointed
- Dr. Neal Reddy - newly appointed

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- Jennifer Swinemar-Murray
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- Deputy Mayor Nicole LeBlanc, Trenton
- Councillor Simon Lawand, Stellarton
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- Ross MacDonald, Province of Nova Scotia

Former LOC members 21-22

- Deputy Warden Wayne Murray, LOC Chair, Municipality of Pictou County
- Mayor Lennie White, past LOC Chair, Westville

Message from CEO, Scott Ferguson

In the fall of 2021, I was fortunate to accept the role of CEO at the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network (PCREN), when regional economic development is emerging as an opportunity for Nova Scotia. I was first attracted to the Pictou County region because of its lifestyle and beauty. After taking the position, I learned more about the rich history and the determination to grow the local economy.

The first few months in the role at the PCREN focused on learning about the local economy and connecting as widely as possible with municipal, businesses, and community leaders. I was interested in understanding where support and resources are needed and how the PCREN can be a practical investment for progress.

My observations show that working together and aligning our visions and resources will create a thriving region. Innovation can be the driving force behind this work. Through innovation and partnerships advancements in the digital economy can take place.

Our work moving into future years will build on the early success of the PCREN. I am impressed with

the RENs efforts to support employers in filling chronic and increasing labour market gaps in our community through immigration. The PCREN's most notable project is piloting the first-of-its-kind community-focused labour mobility program that matches skilled refugees to employment opportunities.

The PCREN has built strong relationships with business leaders that we hope to expand and deepen to capture a better understanding of the business community in Pictou County.

In the years ahead, the PCREN will continue to seek input and information from business leaders to understand the opportunities, challenges, and gaps.

The PCREN will focus on connecting, collaborating, and communicating.

Connect with businesses to understand challenges, pain points, gaps, and opportunities.

Collaborate with businesses, provincial, municipal, and federal governments, and other business support organizations to navigate business leaders to programs, funding, resources, and solutions.

Communicate the incredible story of the Pictou County region.

Introducing Scott Ferguson, CEO

In November of 2021, the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network (PCREN) named Scott Ferguson its new Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Ferguson brings more than 30 years of experience in economic development. Most notably, he was CEO of the World Trade Centres Association (New York), a global association dedicated to the effective operation of World Trade Centers (WTCs) as instruments for real estate investment and international trade. Ferguson also held the role of President and CEO of Trade Centre Limited, an organization that operated the World Trade Center Halifax, Scotia Bank Centre, and the Halifax Convention Centre.



Growing our Community Through Business Growth & Innovation

In 2021-2022, the PCREN worked to increase its capacity to better support business leaders seeking to grow and expand their business.

Businesses are encouraged to discuss opportunities and challenges with the PCREN's business development team.

Business Retention and Expansion Program

In March, the PCREN expanded its team to include a dedicated Manager of Business Development and Innovation and an Officer of Finance and Business Outreach. Four PCREN team members were certified as Business Retention and Expansion Coordinators through BREI (Business Retention and Expansion International). This program prepares participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement a Business Retention and Expansion Visitation program, as defined by this internationally recognized program.

The business development team has been busy connecting with local businesses to understand the challenges, opportunities, partnerships, and gaps in our local ecosystem. This information will help the PCREN navigate business leaders to available programs and supports. This is a key function of the PCREN as described in the Intermunicipal Agreement.

One-on-one navigation to business programs, resources, and funds is available at the PCREN.



Photo: MacGregor's Industrial Group

MIT REAP Program

The Pictou County Regional Enterprise led a local cross-sector team of 10 business, education, and government leaders through the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program –Nova Scotia (MIT REAP-NS).

This program provides opportunities for communities to engage with MIT in an evidence-based, practical approach to strengthening innovation-driven entrepreneurial ecosystems. The team consisted of: Scott Ferguson and Heidi Sinclair (PCREN), Jamie Smith and David Bruce (StFX), team champion Maxine Mann (NSCC), Ryan Sharpe (Sobeys Inc.), Jim Fitt (Velsoft), Jen MacKinnon (formerly IGNITE), and Mark van de Wiel (ACOA). The official program finished in January 2022 with a virtual graduation.

The Pictou County team released a survey to the region which 47 local entrepreneurs responded. Additionally, the team held two focus groups with 18 participants in total. The information collected from these two engagements become the base of the strategy developed from December to March.

In the fall of 2021, the Pictou County Team received \$25,000 from Onside to create a regional "innovation" strategy (mentioned above). Through an application process this spring (2022), the MIT REAP Pictou County team received an additional \$60,000 from Onside to support this strategy and its collective work on innovation. The funds will build a mechanism for entrepreneurs to understand innovation, apply innovative ideas and concepts to their businesses, and navigate the resources needed to implement innovative initiatives.

Virtual Advisor Program

In partnership with the Regional Enterprise Networks across the Province, ACOA, and Boomers Plus, the PCREN supported eight businesses to access the Virtual Advisor Program. The Virtual Advisor program connected local entrepreneurs with a database of mentors from across the country to provide support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 Navigation and PPE Support

In the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the PCREN continued to provide awareness of and navigation for COVID-19 relief/support programs.

One specific program in which RENS across the province participated was the Workplace Screening program, available from spring to December 2021. This program provided workplaces with COVID-19 rapid screens and personal protective equipment. The PCREN supported more than 20 businesses to participate in this program.

The Workplace Screening program was a valuable tool for early detection of the virus in workplaces. The workplace screening program helped employers with the resources and information to reduce the spread of the virus amongst their employees.

Business Upscale and Growth

In 2022, the PCREN completed its capacity-building financial support to Summer Street Industries for a joint initiative in developing co-packing services for small businesses.

Packing support for small businesses allows the business to sell more products and capture wholesale contracts without the additional stress and cost associated with increasing their facilities and staff.

Summer Street Industries have a co-packing service used by several local businesses, including Big Cove Foods. This service is available to other local food-related businesses.

Excerpt of an article published by SaltWire in February of 2022.

Liz LaPier, manager of community development with Summer Street, explains that this new initiative is a direct result of a collaboration between Summer Street and the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network (PCREN) to find ways to develop businesses or enterprises that are mutually beneficial for the community and Summer Street.

"The idea is to find a way that we can provide employment by helping fill gaps for local businesses," says LaPier.

The PCREN says it was pleased to support this initiative that grows small businesses in the community.

"We know that a hurdle for small business growth is the capacity and resources to fill increased orders," said PCREN CEO Scott Ferguson. "Our partnership with Summer Street has been developing a model that will provide packing support to assist small businesses in scaling up their orders to export to markets outside of Pictou County while also providing inclusive employment."

Connect with our team about business navigation, support, and innovation.

David Hachey, Manager of Business Development and Innovation

David Hachey (he/him) has recently joined the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network as the Manager of Business Development and Innovation. With a broad range of experiences in finance, energy, agriculture, retail, forestry, and IT, David is as excited about the future of traditional industries as he is about web3/crypto. He holds a bachelor's degree in economics from Harvard. He has spent significant time in Asia and lived in Halifax, New York City, and India before moving to a hobby farm in Meadowville in 2010. His wife Christine is a small business owner (photographer) and together they have three young children.

David Crowell, Finance and Business Outreach Officer

David Crowell spent 12+ years working for Sobeys in numerous departments and positions, including Budget Coordinator for Retail Operations. It was through his work at Sobeys and on Hyperion's software steering committee that he was offered a position with Syncor International (a radio-pharmaceutical company) in Woodland Hills, CA. After 3+ years of experience in California, David decided it was time to come home to Canada. He found work in the west, mostly within the Co-operative Retail System as Controller and General Manager of various Co-op locations. Family issues brought him back to Nova Scotia and working again for Sobeys as a Retail Accountant. When he retired a couple of years later, he decided to dabble in the real estate market. When he noticed that the PCREN was looking for a Finance and Business Outreach, he jumped at the opportunity to help others trying to establish a new job in a new home (Province/Country).



Photo: MacGregor's Industrial Group

Growing Community Through Workforce Development

The PCREN supported by the Province of Nova Scotia, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), and Immigration Refugee Citizenship Canada (IRCC), recognizes the importance of immigration in growing our population and supporting employers in filling chronic and increasing labour market gaps in almost every sector.

The PCREN supports employers in hiring employees from outside of Canada.

Hiring Employees from Outside of Canada

In spring 2021, the PCREN released a Workforce Development Survey, in which 63% of employers reported labour shortages, 77% of those would consider immigration, but 65% were still at the first exploration stage, with only 18% of employers describing themselves at an international recruitment stage. Our goal is to provide navigation support through the available immigration streams, help employers gain confidence, and help employers be more proactive in immigration as a tool for workforce development.

Employers are struggling to fill employment opportunities locally; therefore, more and more employers are seeking to recruit employees from outside of Canada. The programs supported by the PCREN require that employers prove that they have tried to hire locally and have been unsuccessful.

The PCREN has engaged more than 50 businesses with their interest in hiring employees from outside of Canada. The PCREN has developed a 32-page employers guide to hiring from outside of Canada, and an infographic to help explain the employers' immigration application process.

Additionally, the PCREN developed a social media campaign to help promote the benefits of hiring internationally.

Matching Employers with Skilled Refugees in a Program Called Labour Mobility

Over the past several years, the PCREN has worked with the Federal and Provincial governments, YMCA Centre for Immigrant programs, a local employer, and international partners to create an innovative approach to solving chronic and increasing labour shortages.

Pictou County was the first-of-its-kind to be a pilot site for a community-driven labour mobility approach that matches skilled refugees to employment opportunities in our region that employers have been unable to fill.

This program has supported an employer by welcoming eight new employees and their families to the region. We are expecting six more employees to join soon. This program is available to other local employers.



Below is a story that was taken from the UNHCR website about a member of our community that we welcomed in June 2021.

Bahati Hategekimana is originally from Rwanda and was formerly based in Kenya as a refugee. Despite her hardships growing up, she knew she had always wanted to give back to her community and went on to obtain a nursing degree to help people around her.

Like many refugees looking to rebuild their lives in dignity and peace – through a new federal economic immigration pilot called Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) with support from UNHCR, Refuge Point, Shapiro Foundation, the PCREN and the Pictou County community – Bahati's skills and education connected her with a long-term care facility in Nova Scotia.

Now in Canada, she says "I think this is a very dignifying way for me to get work and not feel like I'm being done a favor. I feel motivated to go to work knowing that I am making a difference and that my contribution is valued."

How to Help & How to Hire: Responding to the Crisis in Ukraine

Becky Cowen, Manager of Workforce Development and Immigration, was a guest speaker in a panel discussion with MP Central Nova Sean Fraser about the current crisis in Ukraine.

MP Sean Fraser shared how the Government of Canada is taking action to support Ukrainians in coming to Canada. Becky Cowen shared information about the Atlantic Immigration Program (AIP), the Provincial Nomination Program (PNP), the settlement supports available locally, and the PCREN's services that help employers who seek to hire individuals from outside of Canada.

The event introduced how the Pictou County community can provide jobs and comfort to those who may arrive in our community in the coming months.

[Connect with our team about workforce development and immigration.](#)

Becky Cowen, Manager of Workforce Development and Immigration

Becky joined the PCREN team in November 2019. With a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Anthropology, and diverse background including three years as a Fundraising Manager Assistant for a national conservation non-profit, and a further three years as a Buyer and 5S Lean project lead, initiating inventory control improvements, she brings her passion for organizing into her project coordinator role. Becky has been enjoying being a part of this exciting start-up phase of the REN and looks forward to supporting the Pictou County Business Community with immigration support. Originally from Moncton, New Brunswick, Becky has been on the move living in the U.K and throughout Atlantic Canada. Having now settled in Pictou County with her family, she now considers this home and wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

Resources to Support Settlement

The PCREN recognizes that attracting employees is one part of hiring individuals; therefore, funded by IRCC, the PCREN provides resources to employers in retaining new employees. The PCREN has created a 44-page printed guide to help individuals who are new to the community navigate community organizations and available supports. Employers can request a guide and a welcome bag to be shared with employees who have recently relocated from outside Canada.

The PCREN also released a series of videos showcasing key community spaces to help individuals new to our community settle in the region.

Connecting with Students

The Northern Connector program (hosted at the PCREN) matches recent graduates (Connectees) with established businesses and community leaders (Connectors). This mutually beneficial relationship gives students or recent graduates the connections to expand their professional network and gives business leaders access to talent.

The Northern Connector program is a shared initiative with the Truro and Colchester Partnership for Economic Prosperity and the Cumberland Connector.

Throughout the 2021-2022 year, the Northern Connector program participated in the planning and delivery of several student career-focused events.

In March, twenty-eight businesses participated in a job fair hosted at the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) and organized alongside partners, including the NSCC student council.

The BEST conference, Building Employment Skills for Successful Transitions, was a collaborative initiative hosted by several post-secondary institutions across Nova Scotia, EduNova, Halifax Partnership, and the Government of Nova Scotia for international students. The virtual networking event brought together the Atlantic Canada Study and Stay™ - Nova Scotia program students, mentors, guests, and EduNova members. The conference connected students with the Northern Connector Manager through one-on-one private chat/video calls. There were 109 attendees.

The Connector program co-hosted the first virtual “Get the Skills, Land the Job” workshop series in partnership with the Valley Regional Enterprise Network and Cape Breton Partnership with HR Pro’s Inc. owner Tanya Sieliakus. In this four-part series, upcoming graduate students engaged with Tanya Sieliakus, HR Specialist, about how to promote their skills and land a job.

The Connector program coordinated the Power of Choice Summit, in partnership, with NSCC, Ignite Labs, and Nova Scotia Works that included a series of presenters and relevant topics for soon-to-be graduates.

Connect with our team about student and new graduate employment.

Matthew Berrigan, Regional Manager, Northern Connector Program

Matthew Berrigan, regional manager of our Northern Connector Program, in partnership with the Truro Colchester Partnership for Economic Prosperity, Cumberland Business Connector, in collaboration with National Connector Program is a graduate of Acadia University ('17) and has been with the program for nearly 5 years.

As regional program manager, Matthew works closely with established business and community leaders to help employment-ready workers build professional networks across the region with a specific focus on recent graduates, including international graduates, students who are approaching graduation and entering the labor force and newcomers to connect them with employers in their field of work. This connection will expose participants to experienced professionals in their fields and inform as to the job market and local opportunities, while exposing employers to a new source of talent to enhance their recruiting pools.

Matthew’s role is designed to be collaborative. Matthew regularly works with Universities, Colleges, Chambers of Commerce, non-profit organizations including but not limited to; Community groups, Ignite Labs, YMCA, CBDC, and many more to provide networking opportunities for Northern Nova Scotia.



Growing Community Through Promoting Our Businesses

Shop Here Program

In partnership with the Pictou County Chamber of Commerce and a \$40,000 fund received from the Atlantic Chamber of Commerce, the PCREN developed 'shop and eat here' sections at the pictoucounty.com website. This directory of businesses is intended to help promote the many shops and restaurants available in Pictou County, allowing visitors and locals to discover the unique products, dining atmospheres, and shops available in the region. Businesses can request to be featured by applying at pictoucounty.com.

PictouCounty.com

The pictoucounty.com site was released to share information about living, working, shopping, eating, and doing business in the region. This is a "living" site in which information will continuously be added and updated.

Small Business Week 2021

In partnership with IGNITE, the Pictou County Chamber of Commerce, Nova Scotia Works, and the town of New Glasgow an networking social was hosted at The Commune in New Glasgow with corresponding Small Business Week social media campaigns "Support local" and "Get to know your business community."

Connect with our team to share stories of business innovation and success.

Heidi Sinclair, Director of Strategy and Communications

Heidi has spent more than ten years in Communications, Community Outreach, Project Management, and Event Planning for not-for-profit and educational-based organizations. Heidi has a Bachelor of Business Administration from St. Francis Xavier University and a post-graduate certificate in Public Relations from Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning. Heidi has applied her education to positions at the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network, YMCA of Pictou County, the National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH), and the Coady International Institute. Over the years, Heidi has taken multiple education programs, including completing several leadership programs through YMCA Canada and a certificate in Digital Marketing from York University. Heidi served as acting Executive Director for the YMCA of Pictou County and the PCREN while organizations searched for new successors.



Photo: Frazer Hunter owner of Knoydart Farm.



**Photo: Trisha MacDonald
Owner/Operator
The Raw Edge Pet Health**

Partners

The Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network would like to recognize its partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia, Pictou Landing First Nation, the Municipality of Pictou County, and the towns of New Glasgow, Pictou, Stellarton, Trenton, and Westville.

Additionally, the PCREN would like to recognize its partnership with IRCC, ACOA, Pictou County Chamber of Commerce, IGNITE, Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC), Nova Scotia Works, DEANS, YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs, StFX, Mentoring Plus, the REN network and other business and community support organizations in the region and across the province.



CONNECT WITH US

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