

**WORKING TOGETHER,
THRIVING *HERE.***

Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network Strategic Plan 2020-2023

**PICTOU COUNTY
REGIONAL ENTERPRISE
NETWORK**

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Acadia Entrepreneurship Centre

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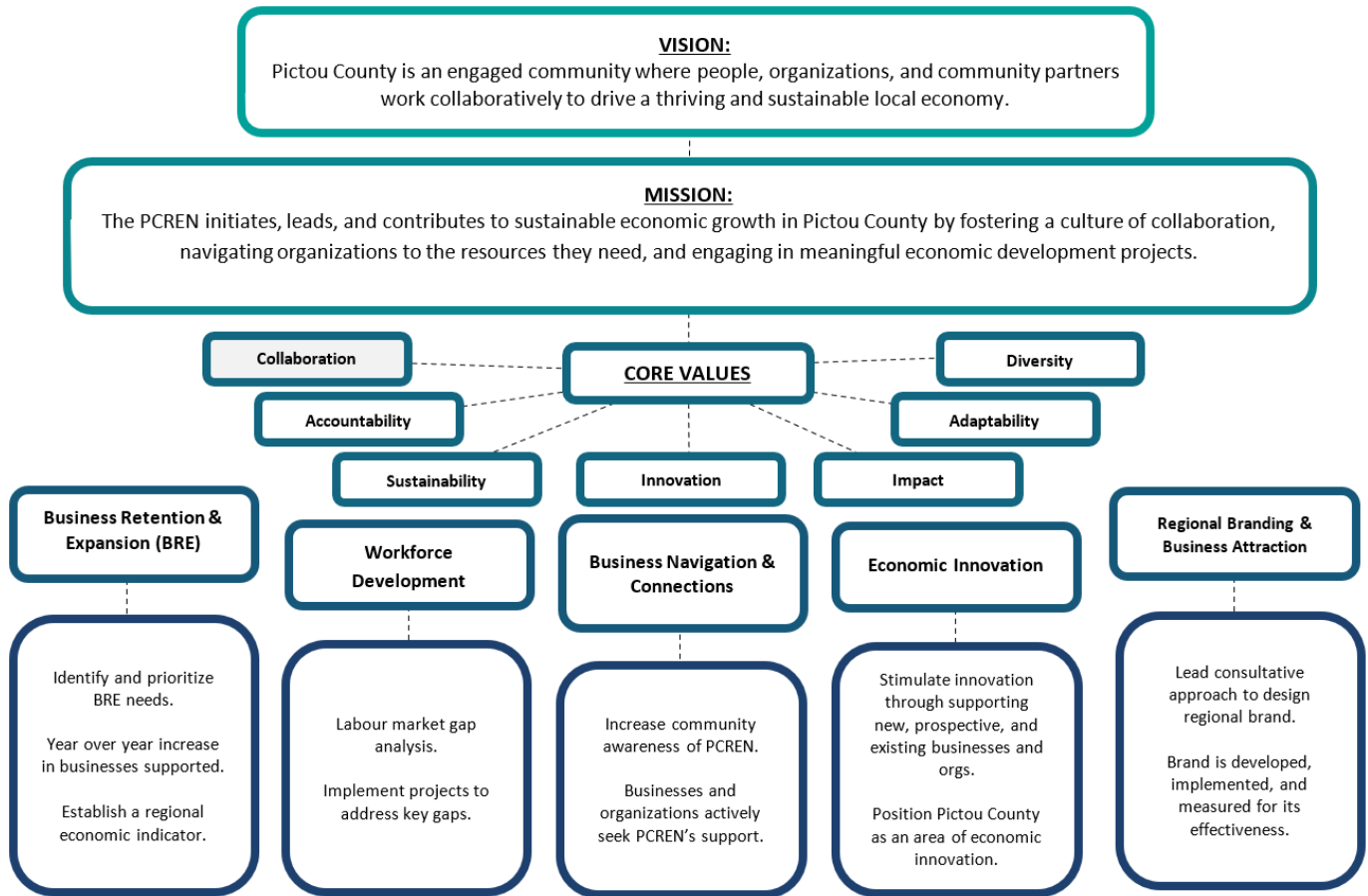
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Abbreviations, Acronyms & Definitions

AEC	Acadia Entrepreneurship Centre
BRE	Business Retention and Expansion
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
FT	Full-time
Innovation	Any idea, method or product that is new to an area.
LOC	Liaison and Oversight Committee
PCREN	Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network
PT	Part-time

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Strategy at a Glance



**Additional detail on strategic goals can be found on [pages 9-12](#).*

Introduction & Intended Outcome

This report is intended to summarize the results of the strategic planning process undertaken by Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network (PCREN). The process spanned from Fall 2019 – Spring 2020. The body of the report highlights the key results, while a great deal of supporting information can be found in an organized cloud folder that will be made available to the PCREN team.

The purpose of this strategic planning process was to help the PCREN's Board of Directors and staff to arrive at an updated and agreed-upon 3-year Regional Strategy. Given that the PCREN is a relatively new entity it was agreed that all aspects of the Regional Strategy – from vision all the way through to goals and outcomes needed to be developed. At the outset, AEC promised that when the process was complete, the PCREN would have consensus around an informed Regional Strategy that could be pursued by the CEO and staff and overseen by the Board of Directors.

A Living Document

With this report, the Acadia Entrepreneurship Centre (AEC) is providing the PCREN with a living strategic planning document. The document will serve to provide focus for the organization's decision-making. It is important to note the PCREN is (a) a new entity that has carved out a strategy during a time of immense uncertainty, and (b) that the organization is currently entering year three of a five-year contribution agreement. Given this, the PCREN has developed both short-term (1-year) and long-term (3-year) strategic goals. The expectation is that this document may require updating or revision during this timeframe, particularly in light of the uncertain economic situation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important that this document be used to inform the following:

- Continued development of an implementation plan led by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) with the support of the board.
- Measurement of progress and success in implementing the Regional Strategy and adjusting as is necessary.

Acknowledging the Four Levels of Partnership

It is critical to acknowledge that while the strategic planning process took place from late 2019 to early 2020, this document is actually two years in the making. The Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network (PCREN) would not exist without the past and ongoing contributions made by the stakeholders represented by the Liaison Oversight Committee (LOC), the volunteers on the PCREN Board of Directors, the CEO and staff, and the community of Pictou County at large. The LOC laid the foundation for the PCREN two years ago by forging essential partnerships and cooperation between the six municipal units, Pictou Landing First Nation and Municipal Affairs and provides ongoing guidance and support. The volunteer Board of Directors developed a three-year strategy and established the right environment to operationalize the concept of the PCREN, along with investing the necessary time and energy to secure the right leadership to help ensure the organization can be successful in its early stages. The CEO and staff must also be acknowledged for their efforts and observations in the organization's inaugural year (2019-20) that positioned them well to contribute to the development and subsequent implementation of the direction established by the board. Finally, the Pictou County community – its organizations, businesses and residents – must be acknowledged for their contribution to the creation of this Regional Strategy and for investing the time to share their ideas and opinions through the survey or other mediums. These ideas and opinions were invaluable to the board as they made strategic decisions over the course of this process.

While it is the primary responsibility of the CEO to identify the specific tactics and actions required to implement the strategic direction proposed by the board and approved by the LOC, the ownership of this document is shared by all four entities (LOC, Board, CEO/staff, and the community of Pictou County).

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Process

The process to create an informed, consensus-based strategy for the PCREN took place during the Covid-19 global pandemic, and as a result, significant adjustments to what was initially proposed by AEC facilitators needed to be made. In light of this, AEC facilitators pivoted their approach and proposed an alternative 5-pronged process for remote and agile consensus-building, while maintaining a strong focus on stakeholder and partner perspectives to help inform decisions.



The ad-hoc planning committee (PCREN Board Executive) must be commended for their dedication and investment of time throughout this process, while still allowing for ample reflection time between meetings, while simultaneously involving non-committee board members by providing them the opportunity to voice their opinions and influence decisions through digital surveys that addressed key topics. Further acknowledgments must be made to the entirety of the PCREN organization for trusting the experimental process and the planning committee to lead it, while being diligent with responding to digital questionnaires and correspondence to share their thoughts.

The result of this process is an informed, consensus-based, high-level, three-year strategic direction for the PCREN that aligns with the Province’s economic development priorities. Further, the three-year strategy was designed to bring the organization to the end of its inaugural 5-year contribution agreement.

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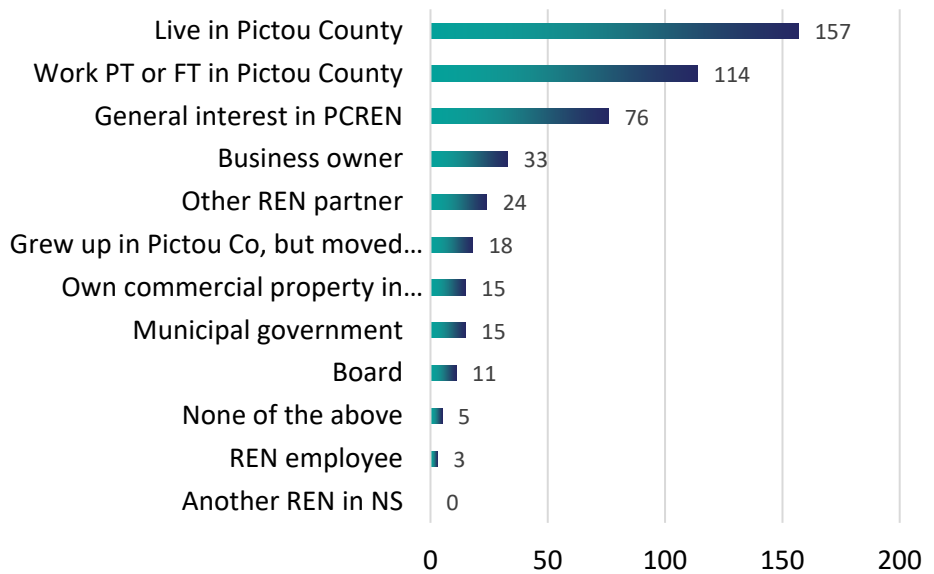
Community Consultation Highlights

In early 2020, AEC developed and distributed a survey through the PCREN’s network of partners and stakeholders across Pictou County. The purpose of this survey was to better understand community and partner perceptions of the PCREN, Pictou County, and opinions regarding economic development priorities and opportunities. It is critical to understand that the strategy on the pages to follow was not developed in a vacuum by five people, but rather, countless cumulative hours of time invested by stakeholders and residents helped inform the decisions of the ad-hoc planning committee. Important to note is that questions in the survey were not made mandatory, so participants had the option to skip any that they felt uncomfortable answering. The following pages share a glimpse of the survey results.

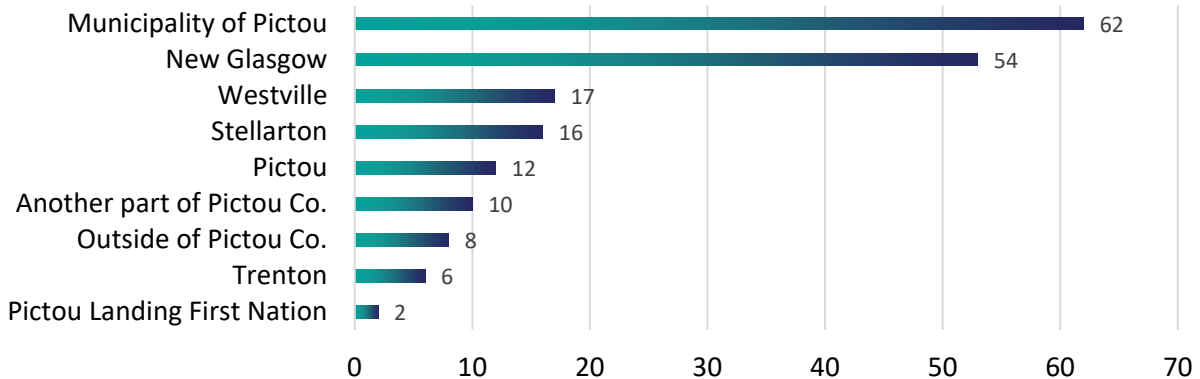
Who Responded?

In total, 187 responses to the survey were collected from a diverse group of stakeholders ranging from municipal representatives to residents of Pictou County with no affiliation with the PCREN. A breakdown of responses by stakeholder type is shown in the chart on the right, while a breakdown of response by geographic region within the county is shown below.

Stakeholder Survey - Responses by Stakeholder Group (n=187) Participants were asked to “select all that apply”.



Stakeholder Survey - Responses by Geographic Region (n=187)



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Top 5 Priorities by Stakeholder Type

Survey respondents were provided a long list of 17 different economic development activities that the PCREN could *potentially* focus its efforts on and were asked to prioritize them. The table below shows the results for three different groups – all respondents (overall), municipal representatives, and local business owners.

	Overall – 183 Responses	Municipal Representatives – 15 Responses	Business Owners – 34 Responses
1.	Business retention and expansion	Business attraction	Business retention and expansion
2.	Business attraction	Supporting businesses seeking to increase exports.	Support innovative Economic Development projects
3.	Support innovative Economic Development projects	Business retention and expansion	Business attraction
4.	Foster collaboration between municipal units	Supporting innovative Economic Development projects	Fostering collaboration among municipal units
5.	Workforce attraction	Fostering collaboration between municipal units	Advocating for and working with others to develop key infrastructure

Quotes from the Survey

“One thing I believe the PCREN can do especially well in the coming years is to bring people with different or novel ideas together and try new solutions to old problems.”

“I would consider the PCREN to be a success if it could reconfigure the “value proposition” of PC from an industrial mentality to a progressive leading-edge lifestyle opportunity.”

“I believe a key priority for the PCREN must be to help us work together to be a viable and vibrant Pictou County. We need to grow our workforce and attract new industries.”

Prioritized Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

Strengths describe what the PCREN truly excels at as an organization, or assets that it has control over that provides the organization with a competitive advantage. Reversely, weaknesses are the competencies that need to be improved or liabilities that are holding the organization back from reaching its potential. Opportunities are the favourable external factors in the PCREN’s environment that can be capitalized on, while threats are factors that have the potential to harm the organization. The best ways for an organization to make use of a SWOT analysis are to leverage and build on its strengths, address and improve its weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and minimize its threats.

Given that the PCREN is relatively new, the survey asked only board and staff members to identify the PCREN’s internal strengths and weaknesses, while all participants were asked to share their perspectives on the opportunities and threats that exist in Pictou County that the PCREN should consider while developing their strategy for the coming years.

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Strengths (Internal – PCREN)

- Very competent, enthusiastic, and passionate team with heart.
- The ability and willingness to get things done/identify & capitalize on opportunities.
- Maintain focus on the larger picture.
- Strong and visionary leadership / CEO - keeping cool, engaging, navigating communications.

Weaknesses (Internal – PCREN)

- The REN is new in this region / too new.
- Lack of awareness / visibility / understanding in the County.
- Lack of a strategic plan / specified goals / tangible results to communicate.
- REN currently has a low profile – few wins under our belt and lack big wins to showcase and enhance profile in the community.

Opportunities (External – Pictou County)

- Community engagement and public consultation / inclusive business engagement / youth engagement / minority groups / general public / stakeholders.
- Achieve a higher profile for REN and its mandate / public awareness / web presence / community visibility.
- REN as a vehicle for fostering collaboration and enhancing communication with stakeholders.

Threats (External – Pictou County)

- Perception of a negative local narrative / fear of change.
- Perceptions of fractured municipal relations and a lack of consolidation and synergies.
- Regional demographics / Aging population / Outmigration / loss of skilled workforce.

Vision, Mission & Core Values

Vision

A great vision statement paints a clear and inspiring picture of what future state of affairs would be transpiring if the PCREN was perfectly successful. It is **not** about what events, services, or products the PCREN offers, but rather about the ultimate outcome(s) the PCREN is seeking as a result of its work. Typically, vision statements are (a) stated in the present tense (b) motivational and (c) concise/memorable.

PCREN’s Vision Statement

Pictou County is an engaged community where people, organizations, and community partners work collaboratively to drive a thriving and sustainable local economy.

The vision statement that has been developed as a result of this process aims to emphasize three key concepts relating to the PCREN’s reason for existence. Firstly, it exists to help Pictou County realize a future where its people are thriving – both socially and economically. Secondly, it acknowledges that a culture of collaboration is essential in order for Pictou County to reach that end, and thirdly, that the ideal future state of the local economy must be sustainable (inclusive of, but not limited to the surrounding natural environment), and further includes demographics, infrastructure, and the ongoing establishment and maintenance of a culture of optimism and working together towards a common goal.

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Mission

A great mission statement tells people what the PCREN does, who the PCREN does it for, and how the PCREN will do it. If done effectively, the mission statement should describe the high-level methodology of how the PCREN will make a unique contribution towards the realization of its vision.

PCREN’s Mission Statement

The PCREN initiates, leads, and contributes to sustainable economic growth in Pictou County by fostering a culture of collaboration, navigating organizations to the resources they need, and engaging in meaningful economic development projects.

The statement shown above articulates the **what** as being, “sustainable economic growth”. It is important to note that the PCREN understands that it will sometimes be the change agent and lead new initiatives, while other times it will act as a contributor to initiatives that are being led by other community partners. **How** the PCREN will accomplish this is by, “fostering a culture of collaboration, navigating organizations to the resources they need, and engaging in meaningful community development projects”. The **who** is identified as the region of Pictou County – which aims to be inclusive of residents, visitors, and its many organizations.

Core Values & Guiding Principles

AEC and the PCREN spent some time during the live facilitated sessions discussing and establishing the organization’s core values, and guiding principles, using the following definitions:

- **Core values** are the foundational beliefs of an organization that can dictate the culture and general approach to the way it conducts its work. For example: *Inclusion*
- A **guiding principle** is a statement that describes how a core value will be uniquely demonstrated within the context of the organization and its work.

Based on survey responses and planning discussions, the board agreed on seven core values. Each core value is accompanied by a guiding principle statement.

Core Values	Guiding Principle Statements
Collaboration	The PCREN will seek to develop strong relationships with stakeholders, encourage other organizations to work together towards a common goal, and make opportunities for input a priority.
Accountability	The PCREN will ensure that stakeholders receive regular communication and insight into the activities and results of our activities.
Sustainability	The PCREN will continuously reflect on and focus its energy towards economic development activities that will lead to a more sustainable future for the region (environmentally, socially, and economically).
Innovation	The PCREN will be creative in its approach, encourage others to think outside the box, and implement innovative solutions to old problems.


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Impact	The PCREN will be strategic in its approach to economic development and focus its efforts by prioritizing initiatives with the potential to create positive and tangible change.
Adaptability	The PCREN will have its finger on the pulse of the environment in which it operates, will be open to feedback and the ideas of others, and will be resilient by making the necessary adjustments when significant change presents itself.
Diversity	The PCREN will proactively seek to engage and consult with the diverse populations within Pictou County to inform our decisions.


Strategic Priorities & Goals


The following section of this report pertains to strategic goals; that is, the set of actions and results the PCREN Board of Directors believes – if pursued – will bring the organization closest to realizing its vision.


It was determined by the board that all of the PCREN’s key strategic goals can be grouped into five distinct, yet interrelated priority areas which are:

- 

Business Retention & Expansion (BRE)
- 

Workforce Development
- 

Business Navigation & Connections
- 

Economic Innovation
- 

Regional Branding & Business Attraction

In the following pages, each strategic priority area will have two subsequent strategic goals, one short-term (1-year), and one long-term (3-year) that have been identified, with each goal having an associated measurable outcome. The goal timelines that have been identified are intended to bring the PCREN to the end of its inaugural 5-year contribution agreement, recognizing that the organization is currently entering year three of that agreement. Recall that this is intended to be a living document, in that it can and should be updated regularly with additional detail as new information presents itself.

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Strategic Priority A – Business Retention & Expansion (BRE)

Short-Term (1-year)	
<p><u>Strategic Goal</u></p> <p>Conduct a business community needs assessment by identifying and contacting businesses in different regions across the County to learn and prioritize their needs associated with BRE, including during and post-pandemic.</p>	<p><u>Outcome</u></p> <p>Projects commenced with a number of businesses in the areas identified by the Province as outcomes (i.e. supporting high growth start-ups; increasing the number of businesses participating in export).</p>
Long-Term (3-year)	
<p><u>Strategic Goal</u></p> <p>Year over year increase in the number of businesses we are supporting to stay and/or expand their businesses in Pictou County. Identify and establish an economic indicator of business activity in Pictou County.</p>	<p><u>Outcome</u></p> <p>The number of businesses participating in export trade has increased; Pictou County is recognized as an area that supports and accelerates business growth.</p>



Strategic Priority B – Workforce Development

Short-Term (1-year)	
<p><u>Strategic Goal</u></p> <p>Identify and prioritize Pictou County’s gaps/areas of need by sector with regards to labour market shortages (both skilled and unskilled), to inform the PCREN’s approach to increasing sustained employment rates and reducing employer labour shortages.</p>	<p><u>Outcome</u></p> <p>Projects are identified that increase the skillset of the local workforce, resulting in improved employment rates; and also address employer challenges with labour market shortages.</p>
Long-Term (3-year)	
<p><u>Strategic Goal</u></p> <p>To address the identified key needs and gaps so that Pictou County is perceived as an area with a diverse, and capable workforce, where employers are able to source the workers they require to meet their operational needs.</p>	<p><u>Outcome</u></p> <p>Employers are able to address labour market shortages and thereby able to sustain and grow their businesses, and the local labour pool is attractive to prospective new businesses.</p>

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Strategic Priority C – Business Navigation & Connections

Short-Term (1-year)

<u>Strategic Goal</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
Increase community awareness of the PCREN so that organizations understand our value as a resource to offer support and contribute to community based economic development projects.	The PCREN is actively engaging with businesses and organizations from each geographic region of Pictou County.

Long-Term (3-year)

<u>Strategic Goal</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
The PCREN is known as being a valuable support resource for local businesses and organizations, and a point of contact for prospective ones considering relocation to Pictou County.	The PCREN provides ongoing support to businesses and organizations throughout the County and supports stakeholders in economic development activities.



Strategic Priority D – Economic Innovation

Short-Term (1-year)

<u>Strategic Goal</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
The PCREN will assist existing, new and prospective businesses and organizations in accessing the resources needed to help them innovate and adapt their business models in light of economic realities.	Pictou County businesses and organizations are supported in their adaptation efforts and are using new ideas, methods or products that allow for continued operations during and post- pandemic.

Long-Term (3-year)

<u>Strategic Goal</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
Pictou County is recognized as an area of economic innovation and the PCREN is a central driver of that effort.	New methods, ideas and products have been introduced to the region, resulting in a more creative, resilient and prosperous local economy.

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Strategic Priority E – Regional Branding & Business Attraction

Short-Term (1-year)

Strategic Goal

Endorsement from the municipal units to brand Pictou County as a collective region has been obtained, and the PCREN undertakes a consultative approach to establishing that brand.

Outcome

Local and external businesses and stakeholders recognize that the PCREN is a representative voice of the region, and that we are working collaboratively to build a thriving local economy.

Long-Term (3-year)

Strategic Goal

The new regional brand has been incorporated into regional marketing efforts, and measurable outcomes are monitored to understand if the brand is positively influencing the local narrative and effective in attracting businesses, organizations and people to the area.

Outcome

Brand awareness featuring our unique value is established, and a positive local narrative has spread resulting in more businesses, organizations, and people relocating to Pictou county.

Evaluation

It is AEC’s recommendation that the PCREN continue to develop a set of specific measurements associated with each goal and to stay diligent in evaluating progress made towards their accomplishment. To that end, the PCREN’s Annual Progress Report to the Liaison and Oversight Committee each year, as required under the Inter-Municipal Agreement, should be aligned with the Strategic Priorities identified within this Regional Strategy.