



2020-2021 Report to the Community Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network

Note from Liaison & Oversight Committee, Chair

The 2020-2021 year, has been a year to try new initiatives, adapt, and pivot in different or new directions. This is the type of work that is familiar to our PCREN team, as they stay nimble to respond to the changing business environment. “Outside of the box” has been the PCREN’s comfort level, and with that comes exciting projects that support our community’s growth in a more holistic way. For instance, the labour and mobility project is providing employers with access to a pool of skilled staff, while growing our community’s population, and promoting our community as innovative on a national and international stage. It is exciting!

Volunteer Board of Directors

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- Nancy McLean,
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- Stuart Cresswell
- Lindsay Shaw
- Graham MacNeil
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- Deputy Mayor **Simon Lawand**, Town of Stellarton
- Councillor **Nicole LeBlanc**, Town of Trenton



We look forward to the continued success of the PCREN organization. We thank the staff, the volunteer board of directors, and the business community for coming together under the PCREN umbrella to support our community and its growth. The PCREN is a collaborative success story of the municipal units and Pictou County First Nation.

Sincerely,
Wayne Murray, LOC, Chair

Note from Board of Directors, Chair

Fiscal 2020-2021 for the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network (PCREN) was eventful. Our Fiscal year started on April 1st, just as the COVID-19 Pandemic was settling in for our first wave of restrictions. As with all organizations in our community, everything surrounding the duration and severity of the virus and its impacts were unknown. One thing we knew was status quo was not an option for almost anyone. But this turned out to be a productive and rewarding time for the PCREN team. We were able to help support our community's youth in

conjunction with Summer Street Industries and SchoolsPlus to partner on a food security program, the PCREN helped local businesses 'get online', and we finalized our Regional Strategy to help guide our economic growth for years to come. The team has begun making great progress on several key initiatives from our Strategy and we've seen the staff grow and settle into their roles amongst the PCREN and community.

Looking forward to 2021-2022 we have yet more change and growth. I'd like to say thank you and best wishes to Sarah who has taken the PCREN from nothing more than a good idea and led the startup of what has developed into a valuable organization focused on supporting our local enterprises and growing our economy.

Thank you to our stakeholders for your investment in the PCREN and your willingness to explore new initiatives that will advance the economic growth of our community for years to come. We are excited for the year ahead as the PCREN looks to launch from our current PCREN platform to the next level.

Sincerely,
Ryan Fraser, PCREN Board of Directors, Chair

Note from the PCREN, CEO

As my time as CEO winds down, I am feeling particularly grateful to our stakeholders – PLFN, our municipal units and the Province of NS – for having had the vision and trust in each other and in our community to establish the PCREN. With their unwavering support, bolstered by an engaged business community, collaborative local partners and our volunteer Board, the PCREN Team was positioned to work with local businesses during what has been the most unpredictable of economic years. While there is still a long road ahead, we have witnessed an attitude of resilience and recovery in our local businesses community that should make us all proud. Collaboration and innovation are far more than buzz words in our region. Have a peek through these pages, and we think you will see that there is much to be optimistic about! With thanks to all who have made the past 2+ years so fulfilling for me, personally and professionally,

Sarah MacIntosh-Wiseman, CEO, PCREN

Making export trade more accessible

The PCREN has been working with Summer Street Industries and local small businesses to explore and develop a model that will provide inclusive employment and small business growth. The model will give small local businesses packaging support that will assist them in scaling up their orders to export to markets outside of Pictou County.

The model has seen its first success the Big Cove Foods who have recently packaged spice orders through the support of Summer Streets' co-packing abilities. Summer Street and the PCREN are now entering its second phase of the co-packing project which will include introducing more small businesses to this model.

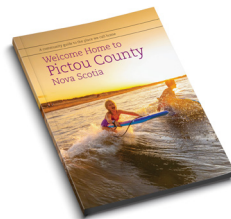
Exploring Pictou County through virtual reality

As a phase one, the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network has been working with NSBI and local businesses to create an immersive, informative, and interactive experience of Pictou County through virtual reality to aid in Nova Scotia's investment attraction efforts. Pictou County will be part of the Nova Scotia wide attraction video, and additionally, will have its own video showcasing a sample of the various "makers" and "industries" that call Pictou County "home."

Welcome to a place that you can call home

Welcome Home Guide - The Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network was pleased to be a partner on development and launch of a comprehensive guide.

This 92-page guide to Pictou County, Nova Scotia – A community guide to the place we call home, was developed by Healthy Pictou County, who received funding for the project through Communities, Culture and Heritage's Healthy Communities Fund, the Pictou County Chamber of Commerce, Destination Eastern and Northumberland Shores (DEANS), and the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network. The group solicited content from Pictou Landing First Nation, the six municipal units and community organizations, individuals and businesses.



Supporting a buy local movement

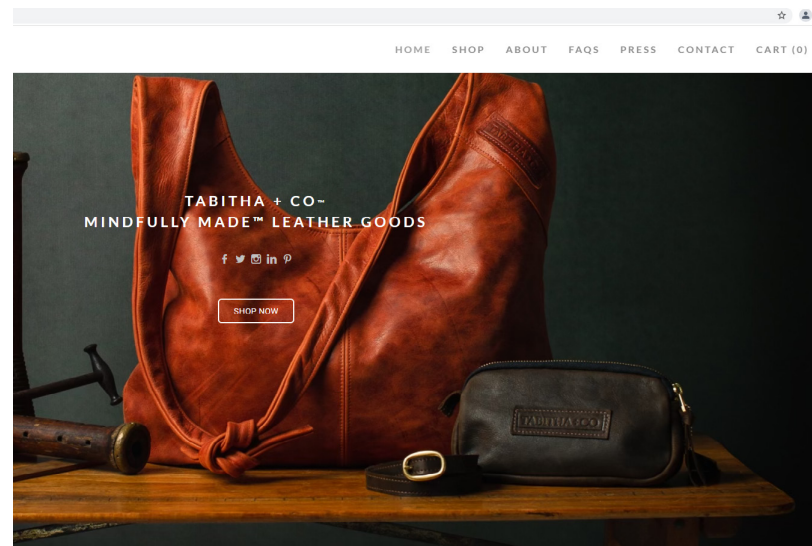
The PCREN partnered with ten local businesses and Summer Street Industries, a local social enterprise, to launch curated boxes of Pictou County goods. Three boxes at different price-points and product offerings were constructed. All 195 boxes were sold out within 12 days, with overwhelming support for more curated local boxes to be available in the future.



The purchase of a curated box directly provided support to several local small businesses. Additionally, each box gave a small contribution to projects lead by Summer Street Industries and the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network (PCREN). These projects support the growth and resiliency of Pictou County's economy and provide inclusive employment opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities.

Supporting small businesses in getting online

The Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network (PCREN) received \$40,000 in funding from the Government of Canada, through the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Regional Relief and Recovery Fund to support local businesses with creating or enhancing their online presence. The PCREN has committed \$20,000 to the ecommerce fund for a total of \$60,000 that was distributed to 20 businesses through an application process and provided support to them in building or enhance their website or ecommerce platform.



Building a strong workforce is important for a vibrant community!

That is why, the Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network is continuously working to understand the challenges, successes and opportunities local employers are facing in securing skilled staff, and how to best support them in recruiting and retaining skilled employees.

We are looking at approaches and solutions that will create opportunities for under-and-unemployed community members, as well as the recruitment of skilled workers internationally, to address labour gaps.

A labour market survey, released in January 2021, was responded to by 51 local employers. Twenty-six of the respondents reported labour market shortages. Out those employers, twenty-one indicated wanting to learn more about the various immigration options available to assist with addressing their labour shortages.

The PCREN, at pictoucounty.com, also provides access to data on demographics, labour force, transportation, education and more.

Navigating immigration supports

Specifically, through federal and provincial funding, a staff member has been assigned to help employers learn more about the provincial immigration programs and how these programs can help address the labour needs of the community.

The Government of Canada, through the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), provided the PCREN with a non-repayable contribution of \$42,500 to support a employer immigration pilot program. An additional \$42,500 was provided by The Province of Nova Scotia, through Nova Scotia Office of Immigration and Population Growth (NSIPG).

The PCREN has interacted with 79 employers on labour market and immigration navigation in 2020-2021.

The PCREN continues to support employers with immigration navigation, and are developing tools to assist Pictou County employers in becoming immigration ready.

Are you an employer with questions about immigration readiness? Becky at the PCREN can help support you!

You can reach out to Becky at becky.cowen@pcren.ca.



Connecting employers with new graduates

While finding employment has been markedly more challenging in 2020 due to the pandemic in some sectors, Connectees continue to express gratitude for this no-cost program, for their Connectors as well as for all the information about the local community they receive which helps them feel more welcome here.

In the second year, the Connector Program has focused heavily on maintaining strong relationships with referral partners. Each of these partners play a pivotable role in the continued success of the program. Continuous communication with these partners has resulted in better serving clients by utilizing networks and services. Forty-five active Connectors are currently enrolled.

Photo: Matthew Berrigan, Northern Connector Program (If you are interested in the Connector Program, please connect with Matthew at mberrigan@northnsconnector.ca)

MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program

The Pictou County Regional Enterprise is leading a local team of 10 community leaders through the MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program –Nova Scotia (MIT REAP-NS). This program provides opportunities for communities around the world to engage with MIT in an evidence based, practical approach to strengthening innovation driven entrepreneurial ecosystems. Locally, this skilled cross-sector group of business and education leaders will be implementing a project that will strengthen the business ecosystem in Pictou County.

Photo: Pictured below are Pictou County MIT team members from PCREN, ACOA, Develop NS, NSCC, StFX, NS Spirit Co., and Velsoft.



Pictou County - Made for Makers

Through the PCREN strategic plan, it was unanimously endorsed from the municipal units and Pictou Landing First Nation to brand Pictou County as a collective region. Over many months, the PCREN worked with a committee of community members and a consultant to develop the brand. This process included input from public surveys collected for the Strategic plan and an evaluation of the community. It resulted in an “economic-focused” brand approach with brand objectives, personality, position, tagline, and logo created.

The brand has several key features:

- It is versatile in nature, being able to be adapted to represent specific sectors and initiatives when opportunities arise.
- It focuses on our collective prospects as an economic area.
- It redefines rural, intended to evoke a “Wow, that’s not what I expected to experience from a rural region” reaction.

The brand speaks to Pictou County’s past in shipbuilding, rail car making and steel production, while providing a platform to share about “who we are now” – a new type of maker. The brand is bright, refreshing, genuine, resourceful, gritty, and thriving. Its essence is “Pictou County – made for makers.”

In the next phase of a brand for Pictou County, the PCREN will be developing ideas, in conjunction with the community, around how it can be used more broadly by local businesses, organizations, campaigns, and activities. Access to the brand guidelines and artwork files are available by request from the PCREN.

Labour Mobility pilot project

The PCREN has been working with several national and international partners, as well as the Federal and Provincial government, to explore new and innovative approaches to solving chronic and increasing labour shortages.

Over the past two-years Pictou County has been a pilot site being the first of its kind to take a community driven labour mobility approach. This approach matches skilled refugees to employment opportunities in our region which employers have been unable to fill.

The PCREN is also sharing its experience of “community driven” economic immigration efforts with economic development colleagues in other provinces. The project received enthusiastic support and interest from local employers who face chronic and increasing labour market shortages, and who are committed to taking a two-pronged approach of: 1) creating opportunities for existing under-and-unemployed community members; and 2) simultaneously recruiting skilled workers internationally to address labour gaps.

The labour mobility project has currently seen five placements filled with a local employer with many others in the process. This model is now moving out of its pilot phase and will be expanding to other communities nationally and globally in partnership with the Shaprio Foundation, Talent Beyond Boundaries, and RefugePoint.

This program has found a unique solution to fill labour market gaps, grow our community, and position Pictou County as innovative on a national and international stage.

Photo: Business owners in our community.





@PictouCountyREN



Pictou County Regional Enterprise Network



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