

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there are large, golden-brown agricultural fields. A paved road curves through the middle of the image. To the right of the road, there are several farm buildings, including a large red barn and a white house. The background is filled with dense green forests and rolling hills. The text "CREATING A PROSPEROUS HOME FOR ALL." is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image.

**CREATING A
PROSPEROUS HOME
FOR ALL.**

2024/25
ANNUAL REPORT





WELCOME TO THE PICTOU COUNTY PARTNERSHIP'S ANNUAL COMMUNITY REPORT

At the Pictou County Partnership, 2024 was a year defined by bold action, collaborative growth, and a shared commitment to unlocking the full potential of our region. Guided by our vision to be a catalyst for economic and community transformation, we advanced key priorities in business development, immigration and community integration, and support for community impact organizations.

This annual report reflects the progress we've made alongside our partners, stakeholders, and the community - highlighting the innovations, challenges, and successes that shaped our work. Together, we continue to think big, challenge the status quo, and champion the future of Pictou County.



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Pictou County Partnership would like to acknowledge that we are on the land known as Mi'kma'ki (MEEG-MAGEE), the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. The Mi'kmaq are the first people of this land and have been here in present-day Nova Scotia for more than 10,000 years. We acknowledge that none of what we enjoy today, our homes, lands, or prosperity would be possible if the Mi'kmaw people did not welcome and take care of us upon our arrival. Today, Nova Scotia continues to be home to over 24,000 Indigenous Peoples, including well over 13,000 Mi'kmaq. Pictou Landing First Nation is the Mi'kmaq community within the Piktuk region.

We also recognize the African Nova Scotians whose culture, heritage, and history have been and remain a key part of our communities in Pictou County and our province for more than 400 years.

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MESSAGE FROM LOC CHAIR

On behalf of the Liaison and Oversight Committee (LOC), I'm pleased to reflect on a year defined by collaboration, shared purpose and progress.

The LOC plays a key role in aligning our communities around the Partnership's work, ensuring local priorities are reflected in efforts to support business, attract investment, and strengthen our region. Together, we are helping to foster economic growth, community resilience, and opportunities that benefit the entire region.

This past year has shown the power of working together. Thank you to our partners, the Partnership team, and all who contribute to building a stronger,

more inclusive Pictou County. As we thank outgoing CEO Wade Tibbo for his leadership, we also welcome Scott Ferguson and look forward to the road ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nicole LeBlanc".

Nicole LeBlanc
Chair, Liaison Oversight Committee
Pictou County Partnership



MESSAGE FROM BOARD CHAIR

As Chair of the Board of Directors, I'm proud to share this year's Annual Report. It reflects a year of progress, driven by strong partnerships, bold ideas, and a shared commitment to the future of Pictou County.

The Partnership continues to support local entrepreneurs, welcome newcomers, and strengthen community organizations — all with a focus on building a more resilient and inclusive region.

On behalf of the Board, I want to thank outgoing CEO Wade Tibbo for his outstanding leadership and dedication. Wade's vision has helped shape the organization and its impact. We're also pleased to welcome Scott Ferguson as our new CEO, and we look forward to the energy and experience he brings to this next chapter.

The achievements outlined in this report reflect the energy and commitment of our staff, partners, and supporters. To everyone who contributes to this important work — thank you. Your collaboration and belief in this region continue to drive us forward.

The future is bright, and together, we will continue to build a stronger Pictou County for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ryan Fraser".

Ryan Fraser
Chair, Board of Directors
Pictou County Partnership



MESSAGE FROM CEO

I am filled with immense pride and gratitude. Over the past several years, our organization has grown in both ambition and impact. Together, we've deepened our support for local businesses, welcomed newcomers who now call Pictou County home, and attracted attention and investment to the unique opportunities this region offers. We've championed inclusive growth, empowered innovation, and helped position our communities for a prosperous future.

What matters most to me, though, are the partnerships we've built — with businesses, funding partners, non-profits, and residents who all believe in the potential of Pictou County. Our accomplishments are a direct reflection of your trust, collaboration, and drive.

Thank you for the privilege of leading this organization and this tremendously dedicated team. Together, we have accomplished a great deal and positioned the community for greater success in the years to come.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wade Tibbo'.

Wade Tibbo
CEO, Pictou County Partnership (2024-25)



MESSAGE FROM INCOMING CEO

It's an honour to step into the role of CEO at the Pictou County Partnership. I'm excited to build on the strong foundation laid by Wade and the team — a foundation rooted in collaboration, innovation, and a deep belief in the potential of this region.

Pictou County is on the cusp of incredible opportunity. I look forward to working alongside our partners, community leaders, and residents to continue driving meaningful progress and ensuring our work has a lasting, positive impact.

Let's keep thinking big, working together, and unlocking what's next for Pictou County.

Sincerely,

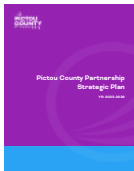
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Ferguson'.

Scott Ferguson
CEO, Pictou County Partnership

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Vision: Pictou County is a community of engaged people, businesses, organizations, institutions, and governments who work collaboratively in a thriving and sustainable local economy where everyone has a good quality of life.

Mission: The Pictou County Partnership initiates, leads, and contributes to a thriving and sustainable local economy by fostering a culture of economic collaboration, navigating organizations to the resources they need, and engaging in meaningful economic development projects.



SCAN QR CODE TO DOWNLOAD THE 2023-26 STRATEGIC PLAN OR [CLICK HERE](#)

Economic Lenses

The Province of Nova Scotia's Department of Economic Development is responsible for creating the climate for broad-based economic growth and prosperity including establishing plans and policies for economic growth and community economic development in the Province.

At the Partnership, when we commit to activities, we assess the connection of the work to these provincial priority areas:

Growing Strategic Sectors: growing our share of high-paying, high-growth, and high-productivity sectors.

Increasing Productivity: enabling increased productivity for all sectors and businesses across the province.

Planting the Seeds: investing in new ideas and entrepreneurship to grow the economy.

Community Focus: ensuring all communities experience growth and prosperity.

Economic Development Realities

In today's fast-changing economic landscape, our role goes well beyond traditional growth measures. The factors highlighted here are reshaping the very core of economic development. While no single organization can address every challenge or pursue every opportunity alone, collaboration within our communities is essential to finding lasting solutions.

By coming together — sharing expertise, resources, and innovative thinking — we can make meaningful progress, whether through small actions or bold initiatives. This collaborative approach not only helps us navigate change but positions us to lead it, fostering economic growth and improving quality of life for everyone in our community.



THRIVING BUSINESSES BUILD THRIVING COMMUNITIES.

We help businesses grow and plan for the future. We facilitate economic growth by assisting businesses in our region with accessing resources, supporting the establishment and expansion of their ventures, and promoting business continuity planning.

We provide customized support to businesses of all sizes throughout their journey.

363

**BUSINESSES CONNECTED WITH
THE PARTNERSHIP**

195

**BUSINESSES PROVIDED WITH
CUSTOMIZED SUPPORT AND NAVIGATION**

11

**ENTREPRENEURS SUPPORTED
WITH BUSINESS SUCCESSION OR
TRANSITION PLANNING**



19

NEWCOMER BUSINESS NAVIGATION PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS SUPPORTED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

- Supported clients as they started and expanded their businesses
- Referred clients to funding sources that led to approved financing
- Provided navigation to programs that enabled business growth
- Guided clients in adopting AI tools

This program is made possible by a contribution from the Province of Nova Scotia's Labour, Skills and Immigration Department.

12

BUSINESS WORKSHOPS

- Marketing/Branding Workshop
- Artificial Intelligence/Social Media Workshop (offered twice)
- Financial Fundamentals Workshop (offered twice)
- Pricing Workshop
- Financial Workshop for 2SLGBTQI+ Entrepreneurs
- Business Planning Workshop
- Newcomer Entrepreneur-to-Entrepreneur Workshop
- Get Ready for Tax Time Workshop
- Side Hustle Tool Kit Webinar (offered twice)

109 Total registrants across all workshops

4

EVENTS HOSTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS AND THE REGIONAL ENTERPRISE NETWORK.

- Accessibility Lunch and Learn
- GST/HST Holiday Tax Break Webinar
- End of Summer Social
- Small Business Week Breakfast



PICTOU COUNTY SIDE HUSTLES

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS BLOSSOMING AND SUPPORTED IN PICTOU COUNTY.

A story from Hearth Botanicals and how this entrepreneurship journey was supported by the Pictou County Partnership.

When her kids began school, Erin Naismith had more time to herself and decided to walk the path of self-care and healing. She began by experimenting with drinking vinegar and teas.

As she learned more about the processes and how to make more complex products like skincare and body care products, her love of using natural ingredients grew.

"I just really love that we can walk outside and there are these medicines right there," said Naismith. The knowledge of herbal medicine is something she has been sharing with her kids and husband as she grows her business and began creating her own products for Hearth Botanicals.

Naismith, encouraged by her husband, looked into the Pictou County Partnership where she applied and was accepted to the Side Hustle program.

Licensed from the program creator, Jeff Mitchell of Lane Two Inc., and tailored for Pictou County, local coaches received training on how to coach for a side hustle from the founder.

The application process for the program begins with a webinar and participants are invited to apply to the program. Having time to commit to the program as well as the story or journey behind the business idea are two key factors for the applications.

"The interviews themselves are simple — about 15 minutes — to determine if they are coachable. Are they open to feedback? Are they eager and excited? We get a feel for whether they'll thrive in the program," said Cindy James, one of the primary coaches.

From there, six or fewer entrepreneurs are chosen for the cohort. Based on Naismith's solo progress, enthusiasm and availability, she was an ideal candidate.

"Erin was selling at the farmers' market, making actual sales. She had a feedback loop. Through coaching sessions, we worked a lot on mindset — imposter syndrome, self-doubt," James shared. James is an entrepreneur herself, owning Crafty Beasts Brewing Company, which makes healthy, dog-friendly beer.

"I really didn't know what to expect," said Naismith who was mentored by James. "She acknowledged how complex it is but made it sound possible."

Naismith was influenced by television, movies and popular culture; the depiction of the overworked and stressed small business owner was what initially came to mind.

"I was so impressed," Naismith said. "It just helped me take myself a bit more seriously."



She shared that she felt the program gave her permission to slow down and really take her time building foundations and the 'why' of her business.

As the Side Hustle program wrapped up, James recognized growth in Naismith and wanted to nurture that. James invited her mentee to apply to the Pictou County Partnership's Elevate program. This program is for established businesses, so Naismith was relatively new compared to other participants.

"I coached her through the Side Hustle program and now she's moved into the Elevate program, which is our first time seeing that happen, which is pretty cool," shared James. Naismith had gone from a stay-at-home mother to a successful budding entrepreneur and was moved up to the big leagues of small business support with Elevate.

"After my second coaching session, I was like whoa!" Naismith said. "It's like magic."

She was blown away that Pictou County has a resource like this available. And offered her highest recommendation to other entrepreneurs.

"There's a lot of value in bringing what you can do, and your skill set to your community," said Naismith.

SIDE HUSTLE COACHING PROGRAM

The Side Hustle Coaching Program is a 10-week journey designed to support aspiring entrepreneurs in turning their ideas into successful ventures.

38

REGISTRANTS FOR SIDE HUSTLE
TOOL KIT WORKSHOPS

23

PARTICIPANTS IN THE 10-WEEK
SIDE HUSTLE COACHING



ELEVATE Program participants celebrate program completion with the Pictou County Partnership Team. Clockwise from bottom left: Nathan Cuifo, Coop Student, Pictou County Partnership, Darrah DeYoung (Baked and Bougie Cheesecakes), Aleksandra Trajkovic (Not the End), Wade Tibbo, CEO, Pictou County Partnership, Carey Allan (Groovy Little Gift Shop), Nikki Braniff (Glamcrow Cosmetics), Tanya Milnes (Eventfull), Cindy James, Elevate Program Business Coach, Pictou County Partnership, Steven Pointon (Beloved Construction)

ELEVATE BUSINESS ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

ELEVATE Business Accelerator Program is an intensive 12-week one-on-one customized support program. This program is designed for business improvement and supports established entrepreneurs to take advantage of growth opportunities and overcome challenges getting their businesses to the next level.

7

EXPERIENCED ENTREPRENEURS
PARTICIPATED IN THE ELEVATE BUSINESS
ACCELERATOR PROGRAM

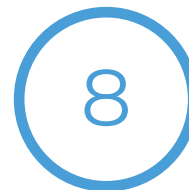
FUNDING FOR THE 2SLGBTQI+ BUSINESS COMMUNITY

In August 2024, the Pictou County Partnership was selected as a recipient of funding from Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce's Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Fund, supported by the Government of Canada.

This funding supports the 2SLGBTQI+ business community, fostering entrepreneurship and aims to reduce barriers faced by 2SLGBTQI+ entrepreneurs. As part of this program, the Pictou County Partnership's current entrepreneurial programming, policies, and practices are being reviewed through a 2SLGBTQI+ lens to ensure inclusivity. This work is essential to building a prosperous future where all voices are heard, valued, and empowered. Together, we're driving positive change in the 2SLGBTQI+ business community!

OUR 2SLGBTQI+ PROGRAMMING INCLUDES:

- Side Hustle - 2SLGBTQI+ Cohort
- ELEVATE - 2SLGBTQI+ Cohort
- 2SLGBTQI+ Business Workshops
- 1-on-1 Support with a 2SLGBTQI+ Business Coach



**2SLGBTQI+ ENTREPRENEURS
ENGAGED SINCE PROGRAM
LAUNCH IN SEPTEMBER 2024**

REACHING BUSINESSES ACROSS THE REGION

PICTOU SATELLITE OFFICE

The Pictou County Partnership provides a satellite location on the second Wednesday of every month to offer business and entrepreneurship services at The Murray Family Public Library in Pictou. This convenient spot will help the Partnership to better serve businesses in the West Pictou region.

SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

Over Small Business Week in October, our Business and Entrepreneurship team connected with 165 businesses from across the region. This outreach provided valuable insights into the current business climate, allowing us to listen to local entrepreneurs' unique needs and challenges. By engaging with businesses of all sizes and sectors, we strengthen our support efforts, build deeper community ties, and help position local businesses for sustainable growth in Pictou County.



Sarah Deschiffert and Dave Armstrong,
founders of Big Cove Foods and Big Cove Snack
Market during Small Business Week



Paul Corbin, owner of
Curious Crows Coffee House,
during Small Business Week

INVESTMENT ATTRACTION

In 2024/25, the Pictou County Partnership took bold steps to put our region on the map for global investment. From launching a targeted Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Strategy to joining international networks and building vital infrastructure tools, we are actively positioning Pictou County as a competitive and compelling destination for investors and paving the way for sustainable, long-term economic growth.

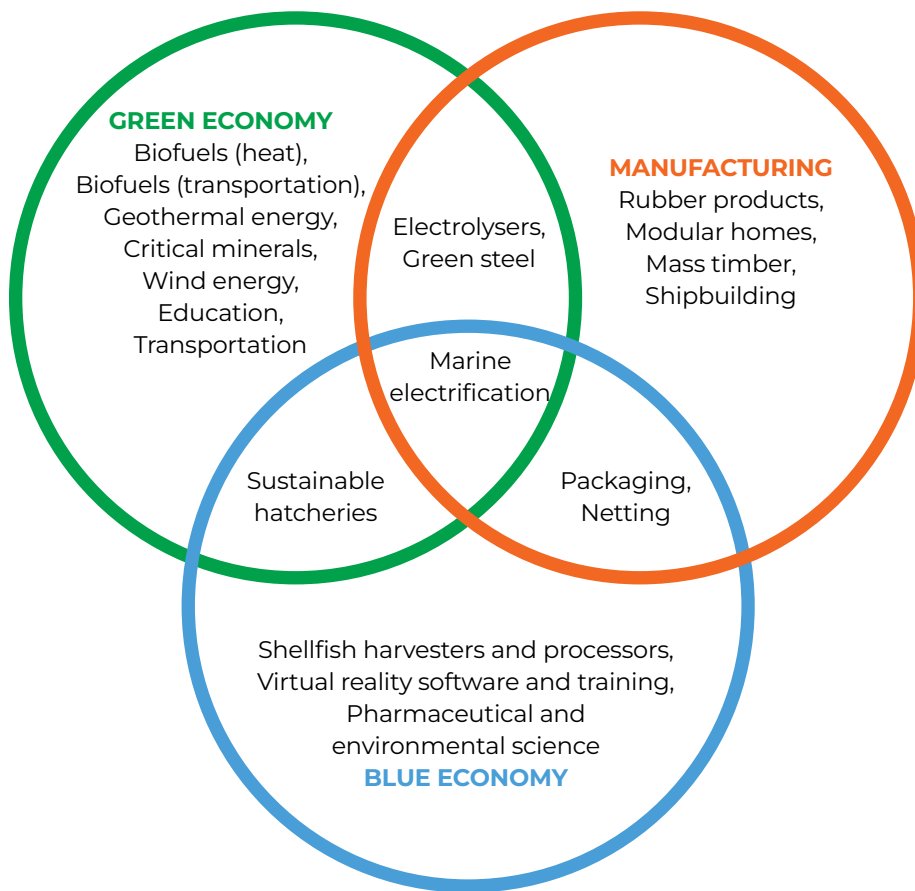
FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Through a Request for Proposals process, ATN Strategies was selected as the consultant to develop the county's strategy for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). The development of the strategy was guided by extensive engagement with stakeholders at all levels, including municipal, provincial, institutional, and business sectors. The final FDI strategy report presents a detailed analysis of Pictou County's industry landscape and socio-economic profile. Three high-potential sectors for investment were identified for the region:

GREEN ECONOMY MANUFACTURING BLUE ECONOMY

The development of the strategy included research on identifying the region's value proposition, a SWOT analysis, jurisdictional scan comparing similar regions to Pictou County from a competitive standpoint, consulting municipal partners, Invest NS, Invest Canada, Chamber of Commerce, business and community leaders. We also hosted engagement session at the Museum of Industry for feedback on draft findings.

With this project complete, the Partnership now has a clear roadmap for how to increase investor awareness. The next phase of work will focus on acting on this strategy, promoting Pictou County's strengths, addressing gaps, and engaging directly with targeted investors in the identified priority sectors.



Examples of investment opportunities in Pictou County's three priority sectors highlighting areas of overlap and potential for innovation across industries.

JOINING THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF MICHELIN CITIES

On behalf of Pictou County, the Pictou County Partnership joined the International Network of Michelin Cities. Established in 2017 by the City of Clermont-Ferrand, France, this network aims to foster joint reflections and collaborative projects among 24 cities worldwide, including Pictou County, Bridgewater, and Kings County. Additionally, the Partnership is part of a group of economic development and entrepreneurship incubators across seven cities worldwide to launch a new project under the International Network of Michelin Cities called The International Corridor of Incubators. This initiative fosters mutual support among participating cities, encouraging investment in each other's regions and aiding businesses in their international expansion.

PICTOU COUNTY ASSET INVENTORY DEVELOPED

The Pictou County Partnership has established and continues to build an asset/site inventory to catalog properties available for investment opportunities. This includes identifying critical infrastructure in proximity to those sites. This will aid the Partnership in guiding investors to ideal spaces for launching or expanding their businesses.



Councillor Nicole LeBlanc, Town of Trenton and LOC Board Chair; Wade Tibbo, CEO, Pictou County Partnership; and Lydia Sayeau, Co-Founder/President & CEO Braevr/ New Brooklyn Media attending the INMC event in Bridgewater.

GREEN FUTURE SUMMIT

On March 31, 2025 the Green Future Summit, hosted by the Pictou County Partnership and proudly supported by Presenting Sponsor McInnes Cooper, successfully convened two-hundred participants from the renewable energy sector, related industries, economic development, and government. Participants discussed the latest advancements and opportunities in renewable energy for Atlantic Canada.



Premier Tim Houston, Pictou County Partnership CEO Wade Tibbo and Peter MacKay from presenting sponsor McInnes Cooper at the Green Future Summit.

The summit featured a keynote address by the Hon. Tim Houston, Premier of Nova Scotia, setting the stage for in-depth discussions on the future of sustainable energy in the region. Four engaging panel discussions explored critical energy-related topics, including one featuring Hon. Ministers Trevor Boudreau (Nova Scotia), and René Legacy (New Brunswick), who provided further insight into policy and investment opportunities.

"The Green Future Summit created a powerful platform for collaboration among government, industry, and communities," said Wade Tibbo, CEO of the Pictou County Partnership. "This sector presents one of the greatest economic opportunities of our generation - not only for new projects and investment, but also for strengthening local supply chains, reskilling our workforce, and attracting global talent. These are the levers that will grow our province's economy and enhance the quality of life for all Nova Scotians."

Attendees explored the economic ripple effects of renewable energy projects, such as new business opportunities and supply chain support. Key discussions at the summit addressed workforce development, including pathways for individuals to return to the region, reskilling, opportunities to attract international talent and the importance of a shift in education and training. Discussions underscored the importance of investing in critical infrastructure, such as housing and educational facilities, to accommodate population growth driven by large-scale energy projects.

The need for regional coordination and the removal of interprovincial barriers was emphasized, throughout the day. The summit also explored the long-term vision for offshore wind energy projects.

Another critical theme was engagement from communities and the inclusion of indigenous community partners. Panelists emphasized that successful projects now require active collaboration from the outset and meaningful participation in the development process.

"We have an opportunity to lead," added Tibbo. "By leaning into our natural advantages and working together across sectors, we can create lasting economic opportunities, and build a stronger, more sustainable, more prosperous region — one where everyone benefits."

The summit concluded with a closing reception, allowing participants to further engage and network, reinforcing connections and partnerships that will drive renewable energy initiatives forward.

CARBONRUN: WORLD-LEADING INNOVATION, BORN IN RURAL PICTOU COUNTY

Something incredible is happening in Pictou County—and the world is taking notice.

CarbonRun, an environmental technology company, chose our region as the home of its very first project. In fact, it's the first site in the world of its kind where carbon is being captured directly from a river. This groundbreaking work is improving water quality, helping fish populations return, and creating new economic opportunities right here in rural Nova Scotia.

The process is simple but powerful: CarbonRun adds crushed natural rock — limestone — into the river. As it dissolves, it helps clean the water and capture carbon. It's a nature-based solution that tackles climate change and restores ecosystems at the same time.

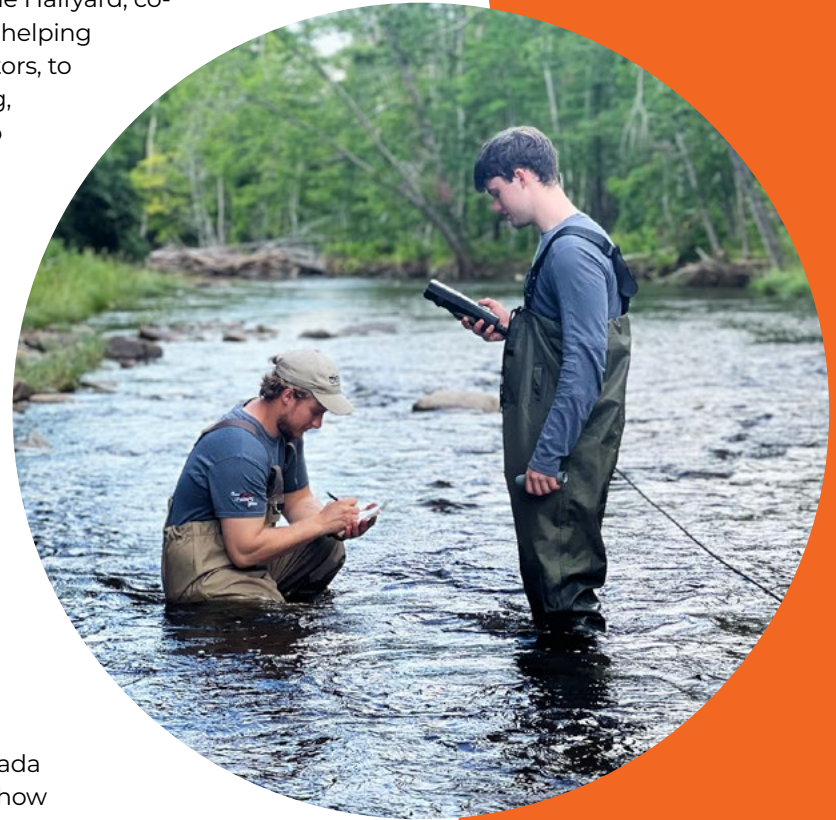
But CarbonRun didn't just bring innovation — they brought a deep commitment to our local economy. They lease land from woodlot owners affected by the downturn in the forestry sector, hire local contractors to build and maintain their sites, and even source gifts for visiting partners from local makers and producers.

From day one, the Pictou County Partnership was there to help them succeed.

"We've had amazing support from the Pictou County Partnership," said Eddie Halfyard, co-founder of CarbonRun. "From helping us find land and local contractors, to supporting our grand opening, they've been a key resource to help us grow in a way that supports the community."

The Partnership also participated in the visit when The New York Times came to Pictou County to report on CarbonRun's work. This not only put a spotlight on Pictou County, it also showcased how rural communities like ours are leading on global issues like climate change and clean technology.

This is more than a business success story. It's a world-first innovation rooted in rural Canada — and a powerful example of how partnerships, people, and place can come together to create lasting impact.



CarbonRun field technicians monitor water quality in the West River, Pictou.

IMMIGRATION IS VITAL TO THE PROSPERITY OF OUR LOCAL ECONOMY.

By helping businesses hire the talent they need to thrive, newcomers bring diverse skills, experiences, and perspectives that strengthen our community, making us more resilient and competitive in the global marketplace. The Pictou County Partnership proudly supports employers in developing strategic and sustainable approaches to connecting with, hiring, and retaining international talent with an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) informed perspective.

91

**IMMIGRATION APPLICATIONS
SUPPORTED FOR LOCAL EMPLOYERS**

58

APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED

33

APPLICATIONS IN PROGRESS



EMPLOYER IMMIGRATION READINESS

The Pictou County Partnership supports employers in hiring international talent through the Atlantic Immigration Program (AIP), the Nova Scotia Nominee Program (NSNP), and the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP).

126

EMPLOYERS LEARN MORE ABOUT PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO THEM TO HIRE INTERNATIONAL TALENT

9

EVENTS HELD TO INCREASE LOCAL EMPLOYERS' KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO HIRE INTERNATIONAL TALENT

2

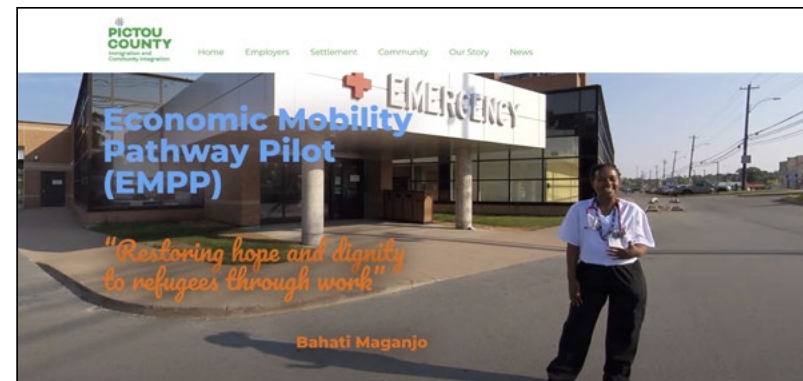
EMPLOYER IMMIGRATION READINESS SUPPORT TOOLS CREATED

FIRST IN CANADA:

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PILOT SHARES ITS LEARNINGS AND INSIGHTS WITH A NEW TOOLKIT

In 2019, the Pictou County Partnership launched Canada's first community-driven model under the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP). This innovative pilot showed that skilled refugees living outside Canada could fill local labour gaps when matched with supportive employers and community settlement services. Now, after five successful years, we are excited to share our learnings with a new toolkit through the Community EMPP Resource Hub website.

This resource is designed to help other communities and employers across Canada replicate the success of our pilot. It offers practical tools, strategies, and insights developed through our work, providing a roadmap for launching similar initiatives. As we enter a new phase of funding with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to continue building the Pictou County International Talent Bridge, we invite you to explore our journey and discover how this approach can support rural workforce growth and strengthen communities.



Visit EMPP site:
communityempresourcehub.com

NOVA SCOTIA NOMINEE PROGRAM

LOCAL EMPLOYER FILLS EMPLOYMENT GAP THROUGH HIRING INTERNATIONAL TALENT.

A story from Balodis Inc. and how they are addressing their employment needs.



Dawn Matheson and
Karan Atwal, Balodis Inc.

Karan Atwal's life goal was to earn a good living and find a nice place to raise a family. And he found it in Pictou County, thanks to the Nova Scotia Nominee Program.

Originally from Punjab, India, Atwal's journey to Pictou County began with a student visa that enable him to complete post-secondary education at Matrix College in Montreal where he graduated with a diploma in software testing. But that was not for Karan who, at that young age, had a bit of wanderlust.

"I just wanted to explore North America," he says adding, "I've been to 45 states in the United States."

So, working in the trucking industry held great appeal for him.

"My uncle operates his own trucking business in Brampton, Ontario. He makes a good living and has a nice home."

This lifestyle was attractive to Atwal. "I was influenced by him. I did not go to work for him, but he influenced me and guided me in the direction of getting a Class 1 license. My goal was to earn a good living and find a nice place to raise a family."

Atwal got his Class 1 license while in Ontario then worked there for several years before coming East. He had been to Nova Scotia with a friend and was impressed by the calm and quiet lifestyle.

"My friend was a supervisor at Tim Hortons so he explained to me the immigration programs and the affordability here as compared to the bigger cities. I want to raise a family in a rural area rather than in a bigger city. So, it feels like home now, here. I've been here for over a year and a half. It's a great place to raise a family."

He and his wife welcomed their first child, a baby boy, last December.

"I love it here."

To find work in Pictou County, Atwal first turned to Career Connections / Nova Scotia Works. "I

“WITHOUT BECKY AND THE PICTOU COUNTY PARTNERSHIP, I DON’T FEEL THAT I WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO COMPLETE THE PROCESS.”

Dawn Matheson

needed a job,” he explains. With the help of that organization and the Pictou County Partnership, he found one as a truck driver at Balodis Inc., in Westville.

Dawn Matheson, office manager at the local company, hired Atwal through the immigration stream.

Balodis offers construction, trucking, and aggregate materials services, employing truck drivers, engineers, machine operators, Red Seal mechanics and labourers. Among its approximately 60 employees, about half a dozen are immigrants; in addition to East India, they hail from the Philippines, Ukraine, and Dubai.

“Karan has been with our company for close to a year,” she says, and she considers him to be a success story. “He fits in well here. He’s quite happy and is a very easy-going guy.”

Atwal hauls a 53-foot trailer filled with rubber material from the Michelin plant in Granton to the plant in Waterville. He makes two trips a day so typically works 12–14-hour days.

“The drive takes two hours and 45 minutes one way, and I do that twice a day,” Atwal says. “If everything works good, it’s 14 hours a day.

And if it doesn’t, add an extra hour!” he laughs.

Matheson decided to hire Atwal through the Nova Scotia Nominee Program because of the current labour market shortage. “Right now, it’s nearly impossible to find qualified workers,” she explains.

Covid took its toll on the trucking industry – as it did most industries. “And right now, a lot of the older truck drivers are starting to retire” which leaves a shortage in the market.

The process of attracting and hiring key talent through the Nova Scotia Nominee Program was attractive, but not always straight forward, Matheson admits. “There was a lot of reading between the lines.”

But Matheson says she was helped greatly by Becky Cowen, Director of Immigration & Community Integration at the Pictou County Partnership. Cowen leads the Partnership’s immigration programs that include employer supports for using the Atlantic Immigration Program and the Nova Scotia Nominee Program to hire skilled international talent.

“Without Becky and the Pictou County Partnership, I don’t feel that I would have been able to complete the process.”

Matheson says she would certainly hire again through the Nova Scotia Nominee Program. “I would do it again for sure. What they’re doing is phenomenal.”

Atwal also remembers those who helped him on his immigration journey.

He praises Career Connections/Nova Scotia Works, Jason MacDonald, Becky Cowen, Victoria Curtis. “The paperwork was all looked after by them. They made it really easy for me.”

Atwal is very happy with his choice and has some words of advice and encouragement for others thinking about coming here. “It’s our responsibility to help in the communities where you got the help. Look how many people have helped me.”

He encourages other newcomers to come to Nova Scotia and stay. “If you see the potential and try to learn new things, there are some people in the community that will help you – either in trade, school or learning any kind of new skill – it only depends how you approach people and what kind of mentality you have. The peace that I have here is hard to find elsewhere. To me, peace is more important than money.”

PICTOU COUNTY SELECTED FOR NEW RURAL COMMUNITY IMMIGRATION PILOT

PICTOU COUNTY PARTNERSHIP TO LEAD COMMUNITY-DRIVEN WORKFORCE AND IMMIGRATION INITIATIVE

In spring of 2025, the Pictou County Partnership announced that it has been selected to participate in Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) new **Rural Community Immigration Pilot**. This program, modeled on the success of the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, represents a vital opportunity to address local workforce challenges while supporting newcomers in building long-term futures in the region.

"This is a significant opportunity for Pictou County," said Wade Tibbo, CEO of the Pictou County Partnership at the time of announcement. "This pilot will allow us to help local employers fill critical roles and provide newcomers with a permanent pathway to stay, thrive, and contribute to the success of our community."

A key focus of the Rural Community Immigration Pilot is empowering employers to address labour needs while supporting newcomer success. Through this initiative, the Partnership will collaborate with businesses to identify workforce gaps, provide training and resources to create inclusive workplaces, and offer ongoing support.

"Pictou County has a lot to offer, and this initiative goes beyond addressing labour shortages," added Tibbo. "It's about creating opportunities, fostering a sense of belonging, and ensuring Pictou County remains a community where people want to live, work, and build their futures."

Quick facts

- Pictou County is the only community in Atlantic Canada selected for the RCIP.
- The Pictou County Partnership is responsible for delivering the RCIP locally, working closely with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to tailor the program to regional needs.
- The Pictou County Partnership will consult with local employers annually to identify 5 priority sectors and 25 in demand job roles for the Pictou County RCIP.
- By the end of 2025, 60 principal applications will be recommended by the Pictou County Partnership for permanent residency.
- Newcomers will be supported by our settlement partners at the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs and will have access to our in-house Community Connections program that supports integration into the community, fostering long-term retention and community development.



GROWING PICTOU COUNTY – ONE STORY AT A TIME

The Pictou County Partnership is celebrating the stories of newcomers and the community members supporting their settlement journeys. Join us to learn more about their contribution to growing Pictou County into a prosperous home for all. Tune in to the weekly radio broadcast on 98.9 XFM - Growing Pictou County, one story at a time - between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. and catch the extended episode on our Spotify channel [Growing Pictou County, one story at a time](#). This welcoming community initiative is funded by the Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment (OHPR).

Based on the success of the podcasts, the series has expanded its focus to include conversations with business owners and community impact organizations.



PICTOU COUNTY CONNECTED

A new Community Connections initiative was developed with the support of OHPR's Community Fund to build community capacity for welcoming newcomers to our region. Pictou County Connected is designed to foster community integration for newcomers in Pictou County by providing a series of curated, self-paced adventures that guide participants through connections with local services, businesses, and attractions. The new website makes it easy to explore with a comprehensive digital map and

promotion of public transportation. The initiative encourages exploration, engagement with local businesses, and the creation of a supportive social network. Participants will receive a Pictou County Connected welcome pack and passport to track their progress and earn rewards for sharing feedback, all while building connections within the community. This collaborative project, supported by local service providers and businesses, aims to help newcomers feel welcomed, supported, and integrated into their new community.

Visit website (coming soon):
pictoucountycommunityconnections.ca/home



**COUNTY WIDE
ADVENTURES**



BUSINESSES PARTICIPATING



STOPS IN TOTAL



From left to right: Alejandro Valdes Alvarez (newcomer client), Ana Alvarez Sanchez (newcomer client), Wanda Davies (volunteer), Sumeet Kumar (volunteer)

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH CONNECTION: A NEWCOMER STORY IN PICTOU COUNTY

Ana Alvarez and her two sons, originally from Cuba, arrived in Stellarton, Nova Scotia bringing with them a deep sense of curiosity and a desire to connect with their new community. While still learning English, Ana was excited to explore Canadian culture, build friendships, and create a strong foundation for her family's life in Pictou County.

Ana was referred to the Pictou County Partnership by the YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs after expressing interest in participating in "Stories Across Generations", a collaborative initiative with Creative Pictou County designed to foster connections between generations and cultures that will result in the creation of artwork.

Sarah Santos, the Partnership's Community Connections Coordinator, describes her role as one that fosters meaningful relationships — pairing newcomers with local volunteers who are eager to share time, experiences, and perspectives. "It's really about creating space for connection and mutual cultural exchange," Sarah explained. Sarah was happy to facilitate Ana's connection the new community art project and recognized the opportunity to further support her and her family's community integration through the Community Connections program.

"When Sarah told me about the program and what they do, I was very interested," said Ana. "I have two boys, and I wanted to learn more about Canada and meet people."

Through Community Connections, Ana was matched with Wanda Davies, a retired English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, and Sumeet Kumar, a newcomer originally from India who had arrived in Pictou County the year before. Both Wanda and Sumeet were eager to participate in the program to build community and expand their own experiences. "We wanted to give back and also learn about different cultures," they shared.

“EVERY MATCH IN COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS IS UNIQUE, CREATED TO MEET THE NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF EACH PARTICIPANT.”

Sarah Santos

The connection was instant. Ana and her sons, Alejandro and Alexey, quickly bonded with Wanda and Sumeet, creating a circle of friendship built on respect, learning, and joy. “I pray to meet good people,” said Ana, smiling at her new friends. “Sarah made a great match.”

Over the recent Easter weekend, the group shared a traditional Nova Scotian dinner together — an opportunity to try new foods like scalloped potatoes, practice English, and create memories. “We had so much fun,” Ana said. “It was a beautiful experience.”

Sarah added, “Every match in Community Connections is unique, created to meet the needs and interests of each participant. The program is designed to be flexible — there is no one-size-fits-all. It allows everyone to be part of this community-building experience. It’s amazing to watch how these connections evolve and grow into lasting friendships.”

For Ana and her family, the program has fostered a strong sense of belonging. “In the future, I want to become a nurse,” she shared. “This program is helping me with my English, and when you learn about the culture where you live, you feel more confident and connected.”

Alejandro, Ana’s son, added, “We feel like we can participate more in our community. My brother is working on getting his license, and I’ve joined a baseball team.” His enthusiasm for the sport has already opened doors for deeper engagement with their new community.

For the volunteers, the experience has been equally fulfilling. “When you have diversity, your life is enriched,” Wanda said, smiling as she looked at Ana and her new friends.

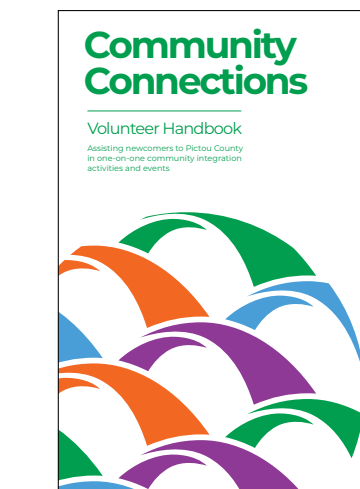
Together, these community members are showing how inclusion, friendship, and shared learning can create a stronger, more vibrant Pictou County.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The Pictou County Partnership is committed to working alongside newcomers, local employers, organizations, and volunteers to ensure a welcoming ‘community hug’ as newcomers settle into our community. By focusing on the needs and interests of newcomers and fostering meaningful connections, we are building a stronger, more inclusive Pictou County where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, and we are helping employers to retain talent here in Pictou County.

51
ELIGIBLE NEWCOMERS
MATCHED WITH
COMMUNITY
VOLUNTEERS AND
ORGANIZATIONS

14
VOLUNTEERS JOINED
THIS PROGRAM



1
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS
HANDBOOK DEVELOPED

WE ARE COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY IMPACT SECTOR IN PICTOU COUNTY AND ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL RESIDENTS.

By supporting local organizations that address social, economic, and environmental challenges, we contribute to the overall well-being and prosperity of Pictou County. Our initiatives focus on building capacity, diversifying revenue streams, and providing vital resources to community impact organizations, ensuring they can focus on and continue their essential work.



SOBEY FOUNDATION COMMUNITY PROSPERITY COMPASS+ PROGRAM

NEW INITIATIVE STRENGTHENS PICTOU COUNTY'S COMMUNITY IMPACT SECTOR.

In August 2024, the Pictou County Partnership launched the Sobeys Foundation Community Prosperity Compass+ program to strengthen Pictou County's community impact sector. This transformative initiative offers resources to help local organizations build capacity, diversify revenue, and access critical funding.

Through Sobeys Foundation Community Prosperity Compass+, organizations receive support with grant writing, access to Grant Connect's funding database, volunteer matching, capacity-building events, and social enterprise development. These tools aim to help Community Impact Organizations which meet vital local needs thrive and contribute to a more prosperous Pictou County.

"We are incredibly grateful for the \$1.2 million investment from The Sobeys Foundation over five years," said Wade Tibbo, CEO of the Pictou County Partnership. "This initiative expands our ability to support community organizations that are key to local vibrancy, livability, and economic growth."

A 2019 Pictou County Chamber of Commerce study, Valuing Pictou County's Non-Profit Sector,

found that sustainable funding, volunteer shortages, and the need for diversified revenue remain persistent challenges for non-profits.

"Operating costs, inflation, and staffing remain difficult," added Tibbo. "But technology and creative partnerships offer new opportunities."

"This is one of the first local projects I've seen that truly connects the business and non-profit sectors," said Margie Grant-Walsh, Executive Director of Big Brothers Big Sisters. "It can help us explore social enterprise and navigate unexpected changes in funding."

According to Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia (IONS), Nova Scotia's Community Impact Sector employs over 20,000 people and contributes \$1.7 billion annually to the province's GDP comparable to the hospitality and utilities sectors.

"The social sector provides local employment and essential community supports," said Grant-Walsh. "If we want to attract people to Pictou County, we must ensure those supports are strong."

Services and Resources

GRANT CONNECT ACCESS

Free access to Canada's most comprehensive grant database at the Partnership office, helping organizations identify relevant funding opportunities.

GRANT WRITING SUPPORT

One-on-one guidance and access to a roster of experienced grant writers to help organizations strengthen their applications and secure funding.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SUPPORT

Advisory services and resources to help new and existing social enterprises develop sustainable business models that generate social impact.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT & MATCHING

Assistance in attracting and connecting volunteers to support local initiatives, events, and governance needs.

WORKSHOPS & LEARNING EVENTS

Regular learning sessions and summits on topics like impact measurement, revenue diversification, and collaborative leadership.

**“I CAME AWAY VERY INSPIRED AND MOTIVATED,
AND IT SEEMS LIKE MANY OTHERS DID AS WELL.”**

Laura Duggan, Sports Hub

FOSTERING SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN PICTOU COUNTY

The Pictou County Partnership hosted a Social Enterprise Summit, gathering community leaders, local entrepreneurs, and social enterprise advocates to explore innovative ways of driving economic and social impact in our region. Supported by funding from The Sobey Foundation and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency of Canada (ACOA), this event was designed to help community impact organizations consider incorporating social enterprise into their operations to diversify revenue. The summit, facilitated by The Purposeful Group, featured panels and workshops on sustainable business models, impact measurement, and strategies for scaling community-driven initiatives. Participants gained practical tools to expand their impact, strengthen financial sustainability, and address local challenges, building a foundation for a more resilient and inclusive community.

“Thank you so much for the excellent summit you and your team put on this week. I learned and came away with so much, we are very grateful for the opportunity and for all the help and guidance the Partnership is providing! I came away very inspired and motivated, and it seems like many others did as well.” said Laura Duggan, from Sports Hub.



Social Enterprise
Summit Panel on
Impact Investing

THE PLYMOUTH DAYCARE CENTRE: A COOPERATIVE MODEL FOR COMMUNITY GROWTH

In 2025, the Plymouth Community Centre - a cherished landmark in Pictou County - began a transformative new chapter that demonstrates the power of collaboration, vision, and rural resilience. Originally built as a school more than a century ago and later reimagined as a community hub, the Centre is now poised to become a cornerstone for early childhood education and family well-being.

Amid growing demand for accessible, high-quality child care, the Pictou County Partnership joined forces with the Plymouth Community and Recreation Association and Councillor Andy Thompson to champion a bold project. Thanks to a \$3.1 million provincial investment, the revitalized Centre will soon offer 58 new child care spaces, including 16 for infants. More than a facility upgrade, this is a meaningful response to one of the region's most pressing challenges - enabling families to access affordable child-care close to home and removing a barrier to workforce participation.

To ensure long-term sustainability and community empowerment, the Centre will operate as a cooperative in partnership with the Nova Scotia Cooperative Council. This innovative, locally governed model gives parents, early childhood educators, and community members a voice in operations and decision-making. It strengthens local accountability, enhances staff retention and engagement, and supports financial resilience by reinvesting surpluses into programming, rather than profit-taking.

The project is already benefiting the local economy. Construction and design involve local suppliers and trades, creating momentum and income for regional small businesses. Once open, the Centre will create over 14 new jobs in early childhood education, administration, and facility operations, while also supporting local service providers for catering, cleaning, and maintenance.

"This initiative expands access to sustainable child care, addressing a key barrier to workforce development," noted Mary Ellen Makhoulf, Community Impact Programming Lead for the Partnership. "Through strong community collaboration and the Partnership's community impact programming, made possible by the Sobey Foundation, it will empower families and serve as a unique cooperative model for the future."

Importantly, the Centre's legacy as a gathering space will be preserved. Renovations will maintain its use for recreation and events, blending child care with community connection. When it reopens in Spring 2026, the Plymouth Daycare Centre will stand as a powerful symbol of what's possible when rural communities lead with innovation and unity.

This project reflects the Pictou County Partnership's mission in action: fostering sustainable, inclusive growth; supporting working families; and helping communities thrive through meaningful investment.



From left to right: Pictou County Partnership Community Impact Programming Lead Mary Ellen Makhoulf, District 11 Councillor Andy Thompson, Plymouth Community Centre Board Chair Janet MacDonald, Premier Tim Houston, Pictou County Partnership CEO Scott Ferguson.

LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE

The governance structure of the Pictou County Partnership is founded on collaboration and expertise, ensuring effective decision-making and strategic direction. At its core, the Liaison and Oversight Committee stands as a representative body, comprised of key stakeholders from our core funders. Charged with the responsibility to approve strategy and appoint the board, this committee plays a pivotal role in shaping the Partnership's trajectory. Complementing this oversight is our board of directors, composed of influential business and community leaders drawn from diverse sectors. Together, these individuals bring a wealth of experience and perspective, guiding the Partnership towards its mission of fostering growth and prosperity within Pictou County.

LIAISON AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Councillor Nicole LeBlanc (Chair) Town of Trenton
Councillor Danielle Fraser Town of Westville
Mayor Darren Stroud Town of Stellarton
Councillor Katie Paul Pictou Landing First Nation
Councillor Nadine LeBlanc Town of Pictou
Mayor Nancy Dicks Town of New Glasgow
Councillor Ronald Baillie Municipality of the County of Pictou
Evan Williams Province of Nova Scotia (Growth and Development)
Ashley Mataya Province of Nova Scotia (Labour, Skills and Immigration)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ryan Fraser (Chair) Melmerby Safety
Jarrold Thorne (Treasurer) Nova Construction
Aaron Millen Turning Point Real Estate
Cindy Brown Nova Scotia Community College and Fishing
Chris Stewart I Matheson & Co.
Darrah DeYoung Baked and Boujee Cheesecakes
Deanna Mohamed Nova Scotia Community College
Ian MacLean Retired Lawyer
Nick MacGregor MacGregors Industrial Group
Ronaldo Gomas Chicks R US Broasted Chicken
Andrew Watters (resigned February, 2025) Group Savoie
Darren Stroud (resigned November, 2024) www MacKay Canada



Wade Tibbo
Chief Executive Officer
(2024-25)

OUR TEAM

We are bold innovators and collaborators, dedicated to creating a more prosperous, inclusive, and resilient Pictou County. As connectors, catalysts, advocates, and storytellers, we work to transform our region's economic landscape and foster a thriving community for all. Together, we dare to think differently, act boldly, and shape a brighter future.

IMMIGRATION & COMMUNITY INTEGRATION



Becky Cowen
Director, Immigration & Community Integration



Victoria Curtis
Immigration Readiness Support Coordinator



Sarah Santos
Community Connections Coordinator

COMMUNITY IMPACT



Mary Ellen Makhoul
Community Impact Programming Lead

BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Colleen Proudfoot
Manager, Business & Entrepreneurship



Cindy James
Business Counsellor & Entrepreneur in Residence



Heather Poulin
Business Outreach & Engagement Officer



Jamie Grant
Business Outreach & Engagement Officer



Maddie Kennedy
Program Coordinator, 2SLGBTQI+ Business Support



Lauren Forbes
Business Coach

OPERATIONS & STRATEGIC INITIATIVES



Heidi Sinclair
Director, Strategic Communications



Lynne Jamieson
Manager, Strategic Initiatives
































David Crowell
Manager, Finance & Administration



Jean-Luc Lewis
Project Intern, Economic Growth

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

We're proud to foster strong, collaborative bonds with a wide range of organizations throughout Pictou County and beyond. These partnerships not only amplify the effectiveness of our initiatives but also ensure that our outreach touches every corner of the community. Through these relationships, we're able to connect our clients with valuable resources, advisors, and fresh opportunities, empowering them to thrive and succeed

-  Atlantic Canada Opportunities Association
-  Build Nova Scotia
-  CBDC NOBL
-  Coastal Nova Scotia
-  Community Health Board
-  Creative Pictou County
-  Destination Eastern and Northumberland Shores (DEANS)
-  East Coast Credit Union
-  Healthy Pictou County
-  IGNITE
-  Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)
-  Invest Nova Scotia
-  Lane Two Inc.
-  Multicultural Association of Pictou County (MAPC)
-  New Glasgow Farmers Market
-  Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists
-  Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC)
-  Nova Scotia Cooperative Council
-  Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage
-  Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Education
-  Nova Scotia Works: Career Connections
-  North Shore Local Immigration Partnership
-  Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library (PARL)
-  Pictou County Chamber of Commerce
-  Pictou County Pride
-  RefugePoint
-  Shapiro Foundation
-  Summer Street Industries
-  YMCA Centre for Immigrant Programs of Pictou County (YREACH)


**BUSINESS AND
ENTREPRENEURSHIP**


**IMMIGRATION
AND COMMUNITY
INTEGRATION**


**COMMUNITY
IMPACT**

CORE FUNDERS

- Nova Scotia Department of Growth and Development
- Pictou Landing First Nation
- Municipality of the County of Pictou
- Town of New Glasgow
- Town of Pictou
- Town of Stellarton
- Town of Trenton
- Town of Westville

PROGRAM FUNDERS

- Nova Scotia Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration
Branch of Immigration and Population Growth
- Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA)
- Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)
- The Shapiro Foundation
- Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development
CanExport Community Investments Sub-Program
- The Sobey Foundation
- Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce's Ecosystem Fund
(Funded by the Government of Canada)
- Nova Scotia Office of Healthcare Professional Recruitment (OHPR)



PICTOU COUNTY
Room to Breathe – Opportunity to Grow



TO VIEW **2024-25 FINANCIAL
STATEMENTS** SCAN QR CODE
OR [CLICK HERE](#)



Connect with us!

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CHRONICLES

OUR BIWEEKLY NEWSLETTER



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 **BUSINESS AND
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AND COMMUNITY
INTEGRATION**

 **COMMUNITY
IMPACT**