



Pictou County Partnership Strategic Plan

YR: 2023-2026

Strategy at a Glance

This **Guiding Strategy** provides a responsive and flexible framework for making decisions and acting, cohesively, for the Pictou County Partnership (“the Partnership”) to contribute to the economic prosperity of Pictou County.

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.

Values: Collaboration, Accountability, Sustainability, Innovation, Impact, Adaptability, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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.

Partnership’s Principles

Creating Healthy Businesses: The Partnership will navigate business owners to supports and resources required to strengthen their impact. Additionally, the Partnership will learn from resilient and successful businesses – sharing stories with the greater community to attract, retain, and grow the local economy.

Embedding a Grassroots Approach: The Partnership will activate an approach which focuses on engaging those who live here and those who want to make the community their home and place of business. Through asking and building relationships, the Partnership will discover the specific barriers faced by businesses and people interested in living here and will support solutions to help address these barriers. The Partnership is committed to working from the grassroots up!

Focus on Key Sector Development: The Partnership will work to increase the region’s capacity for economic growth and competitiveness by developing strategic sectors. Key sectors will attract new businesses and people to the region. These efforts have a real potential to grow Pictou County based on our strengths and assets.

Supporting All Businesses: By business we mean those of any size or stage, whether solo-owned entities, social enterprises, or growing companies with many employees including those led by members of our community in groups that have been systemically bariered and underrepresented in the local economy. Respecting the unique experiences of people and businesses opens the capacity for more inclusive and sustainable growth, the underlying goal of our strategy.

Working in Partnership: The Partnership will use the expertise and knowledge of the entire local economic ecosystem to solve challenges and to achieve a greater impact that will be inclusive and supportive of businesses and the enabling engines of economic growth. Through partnering, we can create a better sense of community by bringing people, businesses, organizations, institutions, and governments together to strengthen the local economy.

Partnership's Pillars

The Partnership will focus on five pillars.

1. Supporting Business Growth and Sustainability
2. Strengthening Sectors for Investment and Attraction
3. Supporting Workforce and Population Growth
4. Partnering and Communicating Economic Success
5. Ensuring a Sustainable Organization

Imagine a community where people and businesses feel empowered to reach their full potential, where they have access to all the resources they need to succeed, and where the community supports and celebrates their growth. This is the kind of community where economic prosperity flourishes and opportunities for all are abundant.

When business owners grow and succeed, they create jobs and drive economic growth. They bring new ideas, new products and services, and innovations forward. They also attract new residents, who bring their own talents, skills, and ideas to the community.

But it's not just about the numbers, it's also about the spirit of the community. People thrive where they feel a sense of belonging, where they feel connected to one another, and where they have a sense of pride in their community.

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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. Today, Nova Scotia continues to be home to over 24,000 Aboriginals, including well over 13,000 Mi'kmaq. Pictou Landing First Nation is the Mi'kmaq community within the Piktuk region and has a population of 530 members.

This strategy was created by the Pictou County Board of Directors and staff with support from consultant Michael DeVenney, Work Insights. Special recognition is given to the Board Strategy Planning Committee consisting of Ryan Fraser (Board Chair), Jaime Smith (Strategy Lead), Ruth Martin, and Jarrod Thorne, as well as the Partnership Staff: Scott Ferguson (CEO), Becky Cowen, David Crowell, Lynne Jamieson, Heidi Sinclair, and Wade Tibbo. The Strategy was approved by the Liaison and Oversight Committee (LOC), which consists of a member of each municipal unit and Pictou Landing First Nation (PLFN). LOC members at the time of strategy development were: Deputy Mayor, Nicole LeBlanc LOC Chair (Trenton); Councillor, Simon Lawand LOC Vice-Chair (Stellarton); Councillor Jonathan Beadle (Pictou Landing First Nation); Warden Robert Parker (Municipality of Pictou County); Mayor Nancy Dicks (New Glasgow), Councillor Dan Currie (Pictou), and Bernie Murphy (Westville).

Partnership Overview

The Partnership is committed to **fostering sustainable economic growth in the region through a collaborative approach**. The Partnership is one of seven regional enterprise networks (RENS) across the province. It is funded by Pictou Landing First Nation, the Municipality of Pictou County, the towns of New Glasgow, Pictou, Stellarton, Trenton, and Westville, as well as the Province of Nova Scotia through the Department of Economic Development.

As part of its mandate and in coordination with the initiatives from the Province of Nova Scotia, Pictou County municipalities, and other engaged entities, the **Partnership is focusing on business growth and sustainability, key sector development, workforce development and population growth, communication and partnerships, and ensuring a sustainable organization**. These strategic focuses will guide the organization's efforts to develop and implement a strategy, as well as a business retention and expansion program and strategic business and investment attraction efforts. The organization also aims to cultivate close business relationships, provide investment readiness, and labour market information, and support the development and attraction of key sectors, new businesses and the expansion of existing businesses.

The Partnership is committed to putting the intent of the strategy in a measurable format. Each year tracking and measurements will take place in the yearly business plan that will accompany this strategy.

Organizational Analysis

A survey in the fall of 2022, completed by representatives from Pictou Landing First Nation, Municipality of Pictou County, and the towns of New Glasgow, Pictou, Stellarton, Trenton, and Westville, as well as key local economic partners provided an analysis of the Pictou County Partnership.

In addition to the survey results, the analysis also considered the challenges facing the Partnership, such as its status as a young organization building its position and capabilities, limited resources to

support implementation, and the need to meet funder objectives. **By working with businesses, other economic development influencers, agencies, local funding partners, the Partnership can help to navigate the resources needed for purposeful and informed decision-making and support the growth and retention of existing businesses as well as the attraction and development of new businesses to the region.**

The Partnership also considered the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats identified by survey respondents.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
The organization's strengths include its focus on understanding local economic challenges; navigating programs; fostering collaboration with businesses, community economic development groups and local, domestic and federal governments and partners.	Its weaknesses include its lack of long-term sustainable funding allowing it to properly plan and resource to more directly impact economic development in the County. Limited resources and capacity, as well as the need to improve its marketing and promotion efforts for the region.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
There are opportunities for the Partnership to establish Pictou County as a regional economic leader by clearly understanding the potential of the region and attracting the needed resources for success.	Threats to the Partnership include external competition for businesses and investment, as well as the potential for economic downturns or other negative impacts on the region's economy.

The Partnership has identified a strong focus on supporting existing businesses and promoting economic growth in the region, with a particular emphasis on navigating the resources needed to make informed decisions and build capacity within the community. By working with partners, business leaders, and municipal and First Nation leaders, the Partnership aims to improve the business climate and quality of life in Pictou County.

Regional Analysis

Pictou County is uniquely situated in the northeastern part of Nova Scotia with access to adjacent hubs and quick access to other locations in the province and national and international destinations via the Halifax International Airport. The region has a first nation community, five towns, and a rural area which hosts a population of 43,657. The region's population has seen a decline over the past number of years. Stats Canada census reports from 2001 to 2021 show a decline of 7%. Recently there have been small pockets of increase in New Glasgow and one area in the Municipality of Pictou County.

Access to other areas:

- **Prince Edward Island** – Northumberland Ferries Ltd. is in Pictou County. The crossing time is 1 hour, and 15 minutes and the boats are seasonal in operation.
- **New Brunswick** – 1 hour and 35 minutes to the New Brunswick border
- **Newfoundland** – 2 hours and 45 minutes to the Newfoundland Ferry
- **Halifax International Airport** – 1 hour and 15 minutes

Pictou County is home to large corporate head offices like Sobeys Inc., Crombie REIT and Advocate Printing and Publishing, as well as large employers like Michelin, MacGregor's Industrial Group, MacKay Meters, and more. Local technology companies, such as Velsoft, New Brooklyn Media, and 360Lab are leading the charge to make Pictou County more digitally focused. Pictou County is also home to many medium and small-sized businesses with provincial, national, and international expertise, exports, and connections.

The regional analysis for the Partnership is centered on the concept of community economic development (CED). CED is an approach to development that focuses on building the capacity of a community to understand and address its own economic and social needs. CED emphasizes participation, transparency, barrier removal, accountability, local power, and enhanced capacity, and aims to improve the quality of

life and business climate in a community. According to Robert Pittman, *"community development produces assets for improving the quality of life and business climate, and economic development mobilizes these assets to realize the benefits of the community"* (Pittman et al., 2009).

As part of the regional analysis, the Partnership conducted a survey in early 2020 to better understand community and partner perceptions of the organization, Pictou County, and opinions regarding economic development priorities and opportunities. The survey received 187 responses from: Municipal and First Nation leaders, business owners, and residents of Pictou County. The survey results showed the top priorities as support to existing businesses, improve infrastructure, improve marketing and promotion efforts for the region, and develop a skilled workforce.

"We are a region with a rich social fabric, increasingly diverse population, and growing sense of self-reliance. However, Pictou County has historically relied on heavy industry as its primary economic driver and over the past decade that sector has seen continual decline.

*When we look forward, we see opportunity to flourish in a more **inclusive, innovative, sustainable, and entrepreneurial** way. We have the foundational building blocks that are needed: an educated population and educational partners; entrepreneurs on the ground seeking to build our regional economy; strong and community-supportive corporate partners; and a government that is eager to support success and growth. As a community, we have an appetite for change, and the necessary pieces of the puzzle, but first we must find a better way to fit them together. We must build systemic change that collectively moves the needle on our local economic and entrepreneurial growth for a stronger and healthier Pictou County, for current and future residents." – Jaime Smith, Pictou County Partnership, Board Member.*

Total Population 43,657	Median Household Income \$56,066	Total Visible Minorities 1,670	Median Age 50.0
Total Labour Force 19,375	Employment Rate 46.9%	Participation Rate 54.2%	Unemployment Rate 13.5%*

*Unemployment Rate: Number of unemployed persons expressed as a percentage of the labour force. The unemployment rate for a particular group (for example, age, sex, marital status) is the number unemployed in that group expressed as a percentage of the labour force for that group.

Developing the Strategy

Overview of the previous strategy

The prior plan placed attention on setting up the Partnership's operations, growing its team, and responding to the unknown of the COVID-19 pandemic. Workforce development was a key initiative of the partnership in its prior strategy based on the need for an immediate response to the business community for support in addressing chronic and increasing labour market needs. In 2022, the Partnership was able to grow its team to provide more one-on-one discovery of business needs and support required. Both initiatives will continue to be essential to the Partnership's work and are embedded in this strategy.

Coming out of COVID-19, there is more clarity of what is needed next, what resources are available, and where the Partnership is best positioned to make a positive impact. This strategy has been designed to provide the Partnership with a path forward through the next 3-years, while being flexible and adaptable to the environment and the unknowns.

The evolution of the strategy for the next three-year period is centered on focus – bringing energy and effort to what is most important to create a measurable and visible impact on the business community to grow, innovate, and promote Pictou County as a dynamic region for entrepreneurship and innovation.

This strategy will inform ongoing decision-making to position Pictou County as a dynamic region for business growth, while building resiliency in order to be flexible and adaptable to the ever-changing environment.

The Process

The Partnership is committed to **fostering sustainable economic growth in the region through a collaborative approach**. In developing the Strategy, the Partnership involved local municipalities, Pictou Landing First Nation leaders, government departments, local economic partners, business leaders, and information from the Tribe Network, Black Business Initiative (BBI), Ulnooweg Development Group, and the Centre for Women in Business.

The Pictou County Partnership hired consultant, Michael DeVenney to support the development of the Partnership's Strategic Plan. In September 2022, a survey was developed and distributed to the Mayors, Warden, Chief, CAOs, Liaison and Oversight Committee members, and partner organizations for input. The purpose of this survey was to gain understanding from the Partnership's funding partners, as well as its local partners in economic development.

The Partnership then distributed a survey through its network of partners to the business community, in which 98 business owners participated. Additionally, Michael DeVenney interviewed 11 community business leaders.

Key aspects of the data are included in Appendix 1.

From the beginning, those engaged stressed the importance of following a defined criteria for success:

- To clarify where efforts can be **best leveraged to integrate and multiply the economic prosperity of the region.**
- To innovate by **focusing resources to accelerate visible progress that makes a meaningful difference for the business community** in the region. A difference that will have interconnected positive impacts on workforce strength, lifestyle experience, and collaborative partnering.
- To **communicate a message that is inclusive and resonates with all who influence the future direction of the region.**

Positioning Statements: The Role of Business

In today's economy, existing businesses play a critical role in driving economic growth.

Existing businesses are the backbone of our economy, and their contributions to society should not be underestimated. These companies, which have stood the test of time, provide not only employment for individuals and families but also a sense of purpose and pride for the communities they serve.

Beyond the financial benefits, existing businesses drive innovation and productivity, constantly pushing the boundaries and creating new products and services that improve our daily lives. They are also the engines of job creation, providing opportunities for people to develop their skills and reach their full potential.

But perhaps most importantly, **existing businesses are the lifeblood of our communities.** They are the places where we connect with our neighbors, build friendships, and create a sense of belonging. They are the places where we come together as a society to achieve common goals and make a positive impact on the world.

It is truly inspiring to see the hard work and dedication that goes into building and maintaining a successful business. These companies, no matter their size, serve as shining examples of what can be achieved through perseverance, determination, and a commitment to excellence. They remind us that anything is possible, and that by working together, we can create a better future for ourselves and for generations to come.

Grassroots Approach

A grassroots approach listens to and builds trust with the business community to better understand the challenges and opportunities available. After barriers are identified, the Partnership can:

1. Convene partners (including community members, all levels of government, business leaders, and economic development partners) to develop creative grassroot solutions,
2. Support businesses in understanding and knowing the resources and programs available to them, and
3. Share with planners what businesses need in terms of programs and support.

Additionally, a **grassroots approach** can also help to promote entrepreneurship and innovation within the region. By providing support and resources to local businesses, community members can develop new products and services that respond to the unique needs of Pictou County and beyond, leading to greater economic opportunities and improved quality of life.

Overall, by taking a grassroots approach to economic development, the Partnership can create an economic environment that is more understanding and appreciative of its local assets and increasingly responsive to the needs and aspirations of the local community.

In this approach, the strategy shifts the focus to one of working directly with business owners to appreciate their needs and support them in what will help them to grow. Further, the focus will build the Partnership's competency of navigating, helping all

businesses with their own individual experiences to access resources most needed to initiate change.

Rather than recreating offerings like existing programs, the Partnership can focus on relationship development with business owners, gaining deeper understanding of what can make a meaningful difference, and accessing the best program resources possible.

Our Strategy

The strategy brings the purpose of the Partnership to life, supporting an engaged environment where people, organizations, and community partners work collaboratively to drive a thriving and sustainable local economy.

An economic development strategy that focuses on a grassroots approach would empower business owners and, in turn, individuals and communities, to take control of their own economic future.

By focusing on supporting entrepreneurs based on what is most important to the business, we have the potential to create momentum and traction, and a truly inclusive and equitable culture. By building a foundation of support and agency from the ground up, we can begin to chip away at systems and work towards a brighter future for all.

Supporting business owners has a tangible, bottom-line impact: commitment to innovate into new products and services and markets, opening new jobs and attracting or retaining people to the region, and effective skill development to attract newcomers to Pictou County.

Strategic Drivers

With the implementation of the strategy, the Partnership aims to make a difference by navigating, facilitating, and collaborating to help businesses find the resources they need to grow, succeed, and be sustainable. The organization will work to attract and retain businesses, support existing businesses, improve branding and communication efforts, and develop a skilled workforce. By focusing on these priorities and leveraging its strengths, such as its strong partnerships, commitment to innovation, the Partnership will strive to create a thriving and sustainable local economy in Pictou County.

The Partnership's business plan will be issued yearly as an action plan to achieving this strategy over a three-year period.

Each pillar will ask a single guiding question that could be used to assess a project or initiative.

A. Supporting Business Growth and Sustainability

"How does this project support growth, sustainability, and/or innovation for business owners?"

The importance of business growth for the viability of a community cannot be overstated. At its core, business growth drives employment opportunities, elevates economic activity, and generates tax revenues that support vital public services.

Furthermore, a **thriving business sector often invites new investment and businesses to the community, enriching the lives of residents and offering a wider range of goods and services.** A robust local economy is a key ingredient for the sustained stability and prosperity of a community, and its attraction of talent and entrepreneurs fuel continued growth and development. In short, **the health of a community is inextricably linked to the health of its business sector.**

The Partnership will:

- Work directly with businesses to assess needs specific to their growth and facilitating access to needed resources to develop solutions to innovate their approach to commit to the next level of success, while **building direct relationships with the business owner is the essential objective.**
- Develop a digital first mindset to support businesses and organizations in the region to stay competitive in an increasingly technology-driven world. By adopting and integrating digital technologies, businesses can improve their efficiency, reach new customers, and access new markets through export and other avenues. **A digital first mindset can also help to drive innovation and enable businesses to stay ahead of trends and changes in their industry.**

A digital focused community is an attractor for the ever-increasing mobile workforce who are looking for lifestyle and strong community connections which are present in Pictou County.

- Support existing businesses to ensure the continuity of the company through proactive planning for succession, that includes growth and **innovation to build value and invigorate the business to transition, stay, and grow in Pictou County.**

In the short term, the Partnership will connect one-on-one with businesses across Pictou County prioritizing on supporting them through navigating resources available to them to ensure their growth and sustainability. The Partnership will take an active role in promoting programming and resources that directly relate to prioritized areas of focus including labour attraction/retention, productivity including developing digital skills and tactics, exporting, as well as in the energy efficiency, climate adaptation and climate resiliency space.

The Partnership will support entrepreneurs wishing to start or bring businesses to Pictou County. With the Province planning to double the population by 2060, we will take an active role in supporting newcomers to establish their business through one-on-one support in navigating the process of starting a business as well as available resources.

Additionally, the Partnership will work closely with businesses in each stage of their continuity planning, including succession, taking an active role in the promotion of buying a business versus starting a business in any conversations we have with aspiring entrepreneurs.

The Partnership will focus on networking and educational opportunities for businesses including business-to-business learning opportunities.

In the long term, the Partnership will have noticeably increased the percentage of the business community that have:

- started or completed their succession plan.
- exported out of province.
- actively generating revenue, promoting themselves, or increasing productivity online and/or through technology.
- accessed government resources and programming.

B. Strengthening Sectors for Investment and Attraction

"How does this project support the business growth of Pictou County?"

Along with providing one-on-one support to local businesses, the Partnership must be a champion for regional growth in investment and attraction. Pictou County has historically relied on heavy industry as its primary economic driver and over the past decade that sector has seen continual decline. Identification, exploration, and infrastructure support for new, existing, or innovative sectors will attract business opportunities and investment to the region.

The Partnership will investigate the key sectors identified by the province in its sector exploration for Pictou County. The Partnership will identify and focus on those most prevalent or that provide the most opportunity for the region. Province identified sectors through Invest NS are: business of diversity, ocean technology, seafood, information communications and technology, agri-food, advanced manufacturing,

naval defence, financial services, digital media, clean technology and life sciences.

The Partnership will:

- Identify and develop key strategic sectors for investment and business attraction.
- Work with all levels of government including local municipal units and First Nation leaders to support the development of sectors in the region.

In the short term, the Partnership will lay the foundational work to start identifying key sectors which the region should be taking an active role in attracting to Pictou County.

In the long term, the Partnership will play a key role in connecting and attracting those sectors to our region. To accomplish these activities the Partnership will be required to continue its strong partnerships with the municipal units and Pictou Landing First Nation, as well as have support from the public on sector growth.

C. Supporting Workforce Development and Population Growth

"How does this project support the attraction and retention of people?

Access to skilled workers is identified as a key determinant for the openness to business growth, innovation, and succession. Supporting education and training programs, and promoting job opportunities enhance the attractiveness of the community. A dynamic community is a beacon for immigration founded in building rewarding lives.

Storytelling can be an effective way to encourage population growth because it can help people to see themselves as part of a thriving community. By sharing stories about the community's history, culture, and people, it can make the community more attractive to potential residents, business owners, and investors.

The Province of Nova Scotia has announced a goal of doubling the population by 2060. This will increase

the population in the province to 2 million, welcoming roughly 25,000 newcomers each year.

The Partnership's efforts will focus on supporting this provincial goal and in retaining newcomers to our region. The Partnership's globally recognized Labour Mobility project that started in 2019 is one example of how the Partnership has been supporting employers, population growth, and retention to our rural region.

The Partnership will:

- Support specific initiatives to attract immigration to the region and help those new to Pictou County find a sense of community and belonging, moving to lifestyle beyond the work.
- Support employers in connecting with organizations who serve underrepresented individuals in our community to explore talent pools.
- Communicate the story of Pictou County and highlighting the benefits and successes of those moving to, living in, and working in the region, showing clearly the opportunity and possibility of the region.

In the short-term, the Pictou County Partnership will continue to raise awareness of the Nova Scotia Immigration Programs amongst partners and employers to foster a business community that is immigration ready. The Partnership is also dedicated to advancing awareness of the role of diversity, equity and inclusion in supporting employers in creating more welcoming workplaces for greater attraction and retention.

In the long-term, the Partnership looks forward to supporting employers with increased engagement with international talent pools as they look to fill labour gaps that cannot be filled locally. Additionally, the region has an opportunity to increase its profile by identifying specific sectors and campaign efforts to attract talent to the region.

D. Partnering and Communicating Economic Success

"How does this project encourage partnership and communicates a positive business environment in Pictou County?"

An engaged and proactive approach to communicating the successes of local businesses, will enhance the region's profile and ability to attract new business, investment, and people. These initiatives will develop pride and purpose distinguishing Pictou County as a community that fosters and supports personal and economic growth.

The Partnership is a convenor for community-wide participation to support needed solutions to issues hindering economic prosperity. This would entail bringing municipalities, first nation leaders, economic partners (traditional and non-traditional), business leaders and interested community members together to come up with innovative solutions.

The Partnership will be assessing and refining its purposeful outreach and engagement. In future, available community demographic data will support the creation of a more inclusive and representational economic development plans. We acknowledge that while the Partnership is committed to advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, demographic based targets are only a starting point, and it is only with ongoing purposeful relationship building with all community social groups and populations can we obtain inclusive and representational feedback. The Partnership is committed to its diversity, equity and inclusion journey.

The Partnership will:

- Communicate business success and promote the region.
- Collaborate with community partners to attract investment to develop the natural resources of the region, building a more vibrant foundation for growth in new areas as well as enhancing the value of existing assets.
- Work in partnership with municipal units, First Nation leaders, other economic development agencies, and learning institutions such as NSCC and StFX to facilitate business growth.

In the short-term, the Pictou County Partnership will enhance its storytelling of business success and resilience, as well as the region to promote a can-do image to Pictou County residents and business leaders.

In the long-term, the Partnership will take that base and branch outside the region to create a Pictou County brand and positioning with campaigns that are targeted to recruit people, businesses, and investment. In time, these activities should move the perception of businesses in the county to recommend more businesses to start, move and invest in the county and to put Pictou County on the map outside the region. To accomplish these activities, the Partnership will require community alignment on messaging and image of the region, as well as an acknowledgment of a positive business environment and support to create that environment.

E. Ensuring a Sustainable Organization

"How does this project communicate the value and positioning of the organization to interested and invested parties and the wider community?"

Communicating the values and purpose of the organization to our partners, invested parties, and the community is important because it helps to build trust and establish a sense of shared purpose. When people align with the values of an organization, they are more likely to support its goals and initiatives, and to engage with the organization in a meaningful way.

Effective communication of values can also help to create a positive organizational culture and foster a sense of belonging. It can be a key factor in attracting and retaining top talent, as many people are drawn to organizations that align with their own values and purpose.

Overall, the impact of communicating our values can be significant, as it can help to build strong and productive relationships, foster a sense of community and collaboration, and contribute to the overall success and sustainability of the organization.

The Partnership will:

- be proactive in working to align the efforts and energy of the Partnership to coordinate with the Province of Nova Scotia and local funders goals.
- ensure the financial sustainability of the organization through partnership and program development.
- continue to seek and retain top talent to support the economic goals of the region.

In the short-term, the Pictou County Partnership will continue to attract top-talent and develop policies that support the growth of the organization to achieve this plan.

In the long-term, the Partnership will continue to seek opportunities to create further sustainability for the organization. The Partnership will require support from the community to economic development and a willingness to explore opportunities.

Collective Vision for the Future of the Region

The strategy connects with the vision and mission of the Partnership to support the future of the region, as outlined by invested and interested parties, and informed by the regional analysis, one of sustainable economic growth and prosperity.

For the Partnership, the strategy works to activate the vision, that 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.

Building direct relationships with businesses is founded in collaboration with the intent of understanding how best to connect entrepreneurs to the resources they specifically need to commit to growth and innovation, with an increase in confidence positively reflected in all aspects of the community.

The strategy was developed from the perspectives of people in Pictou County, identifying what is most important to them to create a positive shift toward a thriving and inclusive future.

The Partnership commits to tracking the Business Promoter Index, to understand the progression of the perception of the business climate by the business community, and to support a collective approach to addressing business concerns and challenges.

Collective approach to measurement

Rural Nova Scotia, as with many areas, is a diverse region that encompasses a range of different landscapes, people, and economic realities.

In order to promote economic success in this community, it is important to consider the unique characteristics of the area, including the economic sectors that drive growth, the workforce demographics, and the community and connectivity factors.

To address the specific needs and challenges of the region, it was important to adopt a data-driven approach to economic development that could be tailored to meet its specific needs. The Partnership will be testing out a method of measurement throughout the strategic plan period, to assess the 'healthiness' of the business environment in Pictou County. Additionally, it will be used to gather feedback, to determine how to better support businesses in the region.

As a baseline in 2022, the Partnership surveyed 92 businesses who responded to 'How likely are you to refer Pictou County to others to move, start or grow a business?'.

Based on results from this survey, the present state of business owners referring a business to Pictou County is:

- 62% of business owners are more likely to refer Pictou County to others to start or grow a business than to discourage.
- 18.5% are active promoters of Pictou County.
- 15% of business owners are more likely to deter someone from starting or growing a business in Pictou County.

By focusing collective community energy, we can shift more business owners to actively encourage others to see the advantage of doing business in the region. Continuing to gain more supporters will take the collaboration of the entire ecosystem, including municipal units, Pictou Landing First Nation, other local economic development agencies, and engaged business leaders.

The Partnership will do its part in supporting businesses in moving towards a more positive result by enacting this strategic plan – supporting businesses of all sizes and encouraging promotion of the region.

It is the Partnership's theory that we can build business confidence by navigating businesses to resources and by promoting business success in the region. These actions will help to move the region towards improving the likelihood of business owners to encourage others to do business in Pictou County.

The Partnership believes that continuing to increase a positive score over time will have the outcome of:

- increase in revenue to the municipal units and Pictou Landing First Nation,
- more sustainable workforce creation, and
- attraction of businesses, investment, and people to the area.

The Partnership will actively survey the business community every six months, with the question '**How likely are you to refer Pictou County to others to move, start, or grow your business**', '**what would move your score by 1 point**' and '**why**'. The information received through this survey will help the Partnership to understand the perception of the business climate by the business community and what actions will help to address business concerns and challenges.



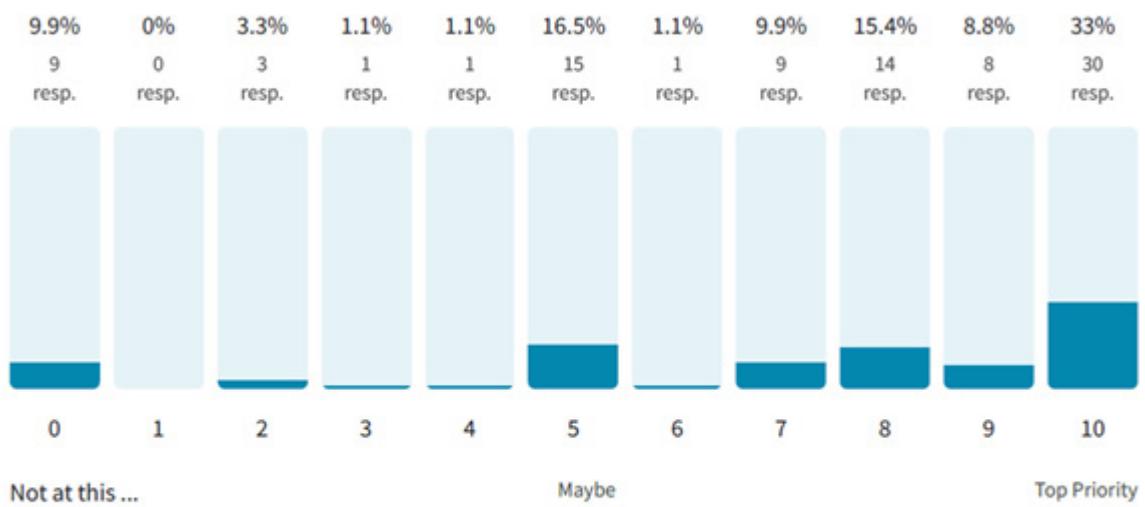
Appendix 1: Strategic Plan Survey Data

The Pictou County Partnership's activities around business growth and sustainability as well as its workforce development initiatives are focused around supporting business growth in the region.

When asked 'Are you seeking to grow your business?' participants responded:

- 68.2% do want to grow
- 16.5% are a 'maybe'
- 15.4% do not want to grow

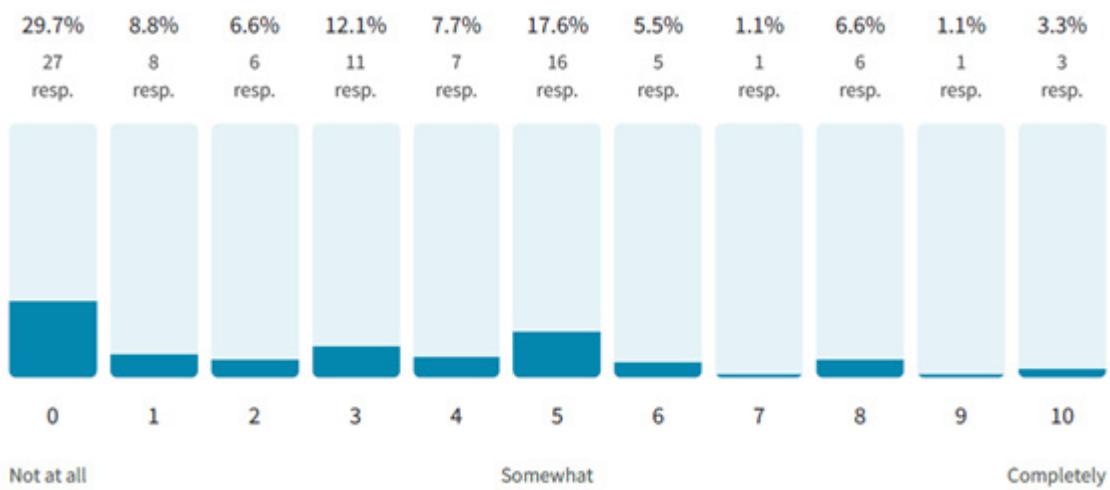
The Partnership's focus will be on supporting the 68.2% to grow. Additionally, through continuous conversations and barrier identification the Partnership hopes to move the others along the spectrum to wanting to grow.



When asked 'Are you able to hire the employees needed to grow your business?'

- 11% are able to find the employees needed to grow their businesses (answered 8-10 on the scale)

The Partnership will continue to focus its efforts on supporting businesses in navigating local, provincial, and federal programs for hiring employees, as well as exploring new talent pools.

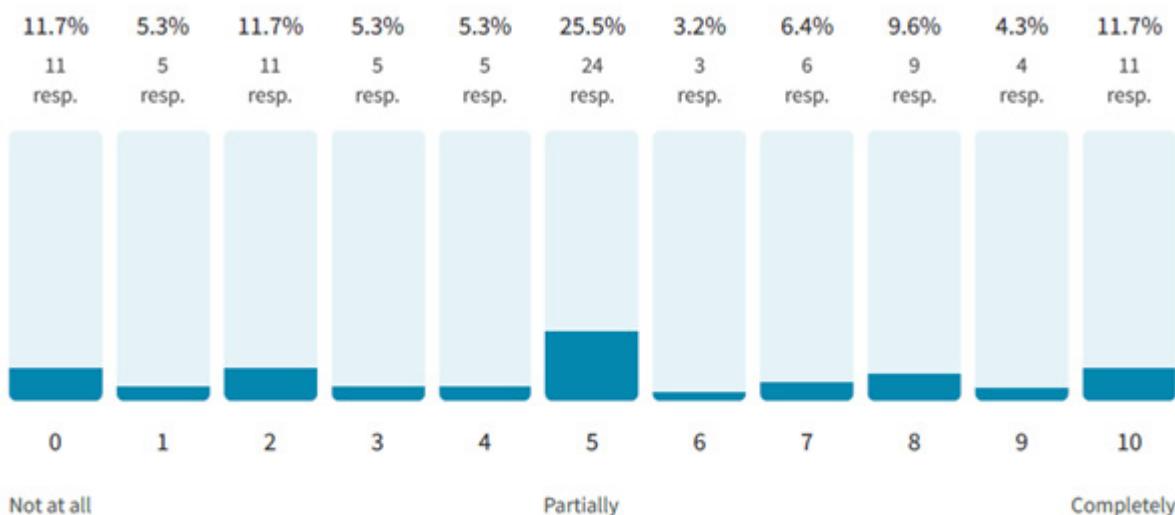


When asked 'Do you have the money needed to grow your business?'

64% responded needing support in finding capital.

- 39% of businesses do not have access to the money needed to grow
- 25% partially
- 35.5% do have the funds needed to grow

The Partnership will focus on support businesses needing capital to grow their business by navigating and referring them to resources, programs and lending organizations. The Partnership will also support this group of business owners in understanding capital opportunities through programs like Elevate and other non-governmental funding and investment opportunities.



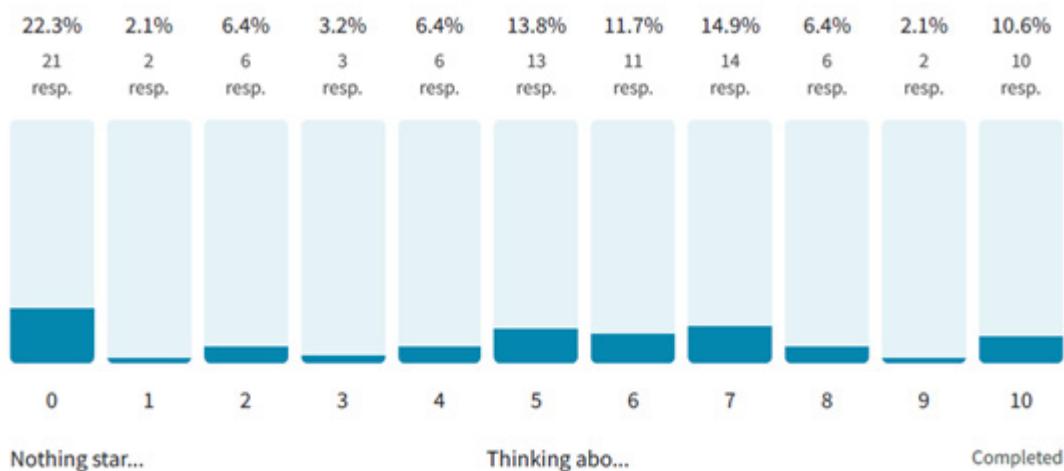
The Partnership has identified that the region's population is aging with that also comes business owners who are looking to retire or continue with other opportunities; therefore, succession will be an area of activity to focus efforts.

When asked 'How far are you in the preparation of succession planning for your business?'

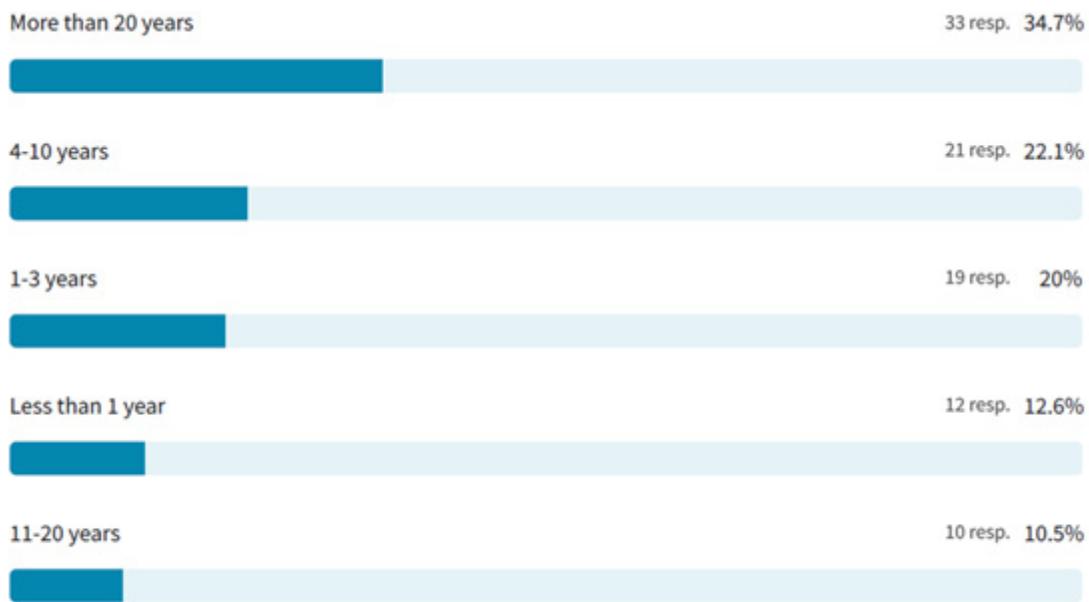
- 10% have fully completed a succession plan.
- 25% have started it.
- 40% haven't started.
- 25% are thinking about it.

It is important to note that a third of the respondents have been in business for more than 20 years. The Partnership recognizes that businesses in the start-up phase may not be in a position to have a succession plan.

The Partnership will work to move more businesses along the spectrum towards having a completed succession plan, and will support connecting buyers with sellers when appropriate.



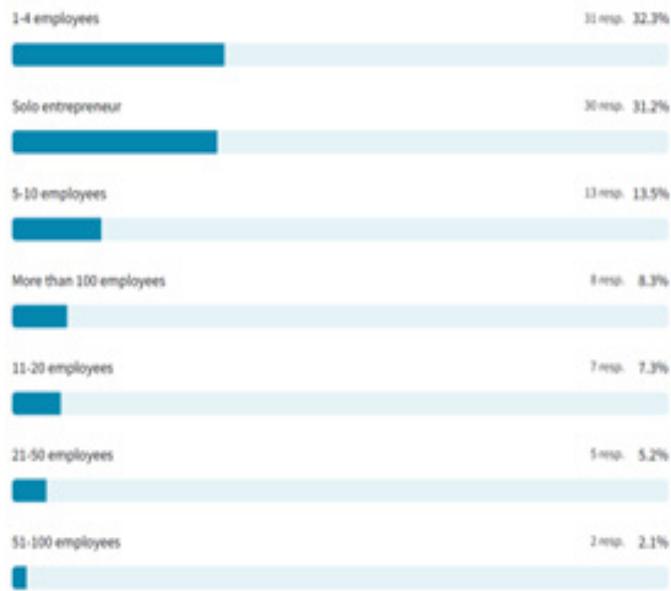
To support businesses in Pictou County, the Partnership is constantly adding to its understanding of the business environment. According to the survey results, when asked '**How long has your business been operating in Pictou County?**' it was equally distributed as 1/3 in more than 20 years, 4 to 20 years and less than 3 years.



Additionally, when asked 'What is the size of your operation?'

- 10.5% more than 50 employees
- 12.5% 11 and 50 employees
- 77% of respondents had less than 10

These results show a need to support solo entrepreneurs and small business owners.



The survey results showed opportunities for enhancing the vibrancy of the business community by focusing efforts on technology development and digital readiness

- business transition through planned succession
- skilled workforce development

Interviews from business and community leaders provided additional information.

“Advancing technology is the core support for all growth and development – need to be digital to change the mindset of entrepreneurs to EXPORT as there are no borders as this is the only way to be future ready.”

“There needs to be a reason to believe in the possibility of the future and the opportunities ahead – messaging around how entrepreneurs can move beyond a market with boundaries is critical.”

Partners

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

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

CONNECT WITH US

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