



ANNUAL REPORT

2019/2020

Remembering

WHERE WE CAME FROM

In June 2012, about 75 Nova Scotians gathered to consider how our province could do better. Our organization developed from a grassroots vision for our province to be more vibrant, inclusive and resilient. Our work was conceived for anyone who believed in the promise of Nova Scotia and recognized that more of us wanted to participate in shaping its future.

We believe the rich opportunities and deep challenges before us will be solved by many people and organizations working more effectively together. As a starting point, we recognize that no single sector or individual can work in isolation, so our work often puts us at the intersection of public, private, community and academic interests.

For eight years we have convened gatherings large and small to question and imagine how Nova Scotia can – through the energy and insight of its community members – become a more collaborative, inclusive and adaptive society. Our focus has been on building social cohesion through initiatives like Share Thanksgiving, One Cape Breton-Unama'ki, and many public engagement events from one end of the province to the other.

Our attention now is primarily on coordinating the Nova Scotia Quality of Life Initiative. In collaboration with a broad spectrum of partners, we are focused on improving our understanding of our wellbeing and the actions that will improve it. A province that is resolute in its commitment to raise people's wellbeing will identify a balance of choices amongst economic, social, environmental and cultural issues that reflect their beliefs about what matters most.

Our network has grown to thousands of people from all walks of life, and we welcome you joining us, on this journey.

A note from

THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD AND CHIEF ENGAGEMENT OFFICER

This past year was an extraordinary one for our Province. We have been tested like never before, with the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Portapique mass shooting and so much more. Events beyond our borders - especially Black Lives Matter - have also forced long-overdue conversations about privilege, racism and inequality in our families, communities and workplaces.

As an organization we are reflecting on our place in all of this and how our work can ensure we all can find our way to a better place. The Nova Scotia Quality of Life Initiative seems more important than ever and we remain determined to shine a light on how we can foster a more vibrant, inclusive and resilient Nova Scotia.

There are many elements that reflect the propulsive energy around this Initiative. Our 230-question survey was the first-of-its-kind in the province and close to 13,000 Nova Scotians responded - making it the largest data set of its kind in Canada and showing people's support for this Initiative.

We are grateful that our relationships with community partners is deepening and broadening. More than ever we are seeing the ways Nova Scotians are responding to challenges, and stepping up to lead transformative change with compassion, creativity, and camaraderie. We want to learn from what is already happening and give strength to positive change in all corners of Nova Scotia.

We are particularly grateful for the support and commitment of NSCC and the Province of Nova Scotia in launching the Quality of Life Survey.

We want to thank the many volunteers who are carrying the load in this work, including our talented and committed Board of Directors and Local Leadership Team members. The year has also called upon the best of our staff team. They have responded to every challenge in front of them with insight, tenacity and dedication.

The scope and scale of the opportunity created by the Quality of Life Initiative is huge. We have always said this isn't just a measurement initiative - it's a change initiative. If the idea of positive change inspires you, please reach out about opportunities in your community or for your organization. We look forward to continuing to learn and contribute in whatever ways we can.

Sincere regards,



Dr. Gaynor Watson Creed
Chair of the Board



Danny Graham
Chief Engagement
Officer



OUR MISSION & ASPIRATION

Our mission is to cultivate engagement, contribute to an evolving provincial narrative, and catalyze actions aimed at strengthening social cohesion and improving the quality of life for all Nova Scotians.

Our aspiration is that, as Nova Scotians, we better understand our advantages, opportunities, and the hurdles in front of us. More people are stepping up with greater ability to improve our shared quality of life and economic conditions. We are more collaborative, inclusive, and adaptive to change.

We want Nova Scotians to be more ready, willing, and able to build our best future.

OUR PRINCIPLES

We actively seek to include diverse voices - from all cultural communities, from all parts of the province, and from as many perspectives as possible.

How we do things is as important as what we do.

We move forward in a spirit of responding to opportunities, supporting one another to take risks, and learning as we go.

We create just enough structure to support our activities, while staying lean, nimble, and transparent.

We operate in a collaborative, neutral, and open space that no one individual or organization owns or controls.

OUR 2019/2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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2019 / 2020

A YEAR IN REVIEW



Photo by Carter Hutton



Photo by Carter Hutton



Photo by Carter Hutton





QUALITY OF LIFE INITIATIVE

The Nova Scotia Quality of Life Initiative continued to be our primary focus this year. It was a momentous one for the Initiative as we carried out this next phase. In our continued collaboration with the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW), we launched the Nova Scotia Quality of Life Survey in late April of 2019 – a 230-question survey that asked how people feel they are doing in eight key areas related to their quality of life: community vitality; living standards; healthy populations; democratic engagement; leisure and culture; time use; the environment; and, education.

As part of the launch, we hosted ‘Measuring What Matters’ panel discussions in Halifax (April 30 at Pier 21) and Dartmouth (May 1 at the Akerley campus of NSCC). Panelists included leaders from an array of sectors and backgrounds. Together, over 200 people attended and brought thoughtful questions and considerations related to the Nova Scotia Quality of Life Initiative. The enthusiasm around the Initiative was palpable at the events and the insights from panelists profound – everything from the philosophical importance of the work to the economic benefits was on the table.

We also invited Nova Scotians to celebrate the survey launch by sharing an original photo with us. We sought photos that “shine a light on what makes Nova Scotia a great place to live” and to tell us what ‘quality of life’ means to you. The photo contest received over one hundred submissions from around the province. We heard stories from people about meaningful employment, cost of living, outdoor recreation, and time spent with loved ones, and saw photos of Nova Scotia’s





landscape and coastline featuring the people who live here enjoying them. The top ten photos were featured at the Measuring What Matters events and across our Instagram and Facebook pages.

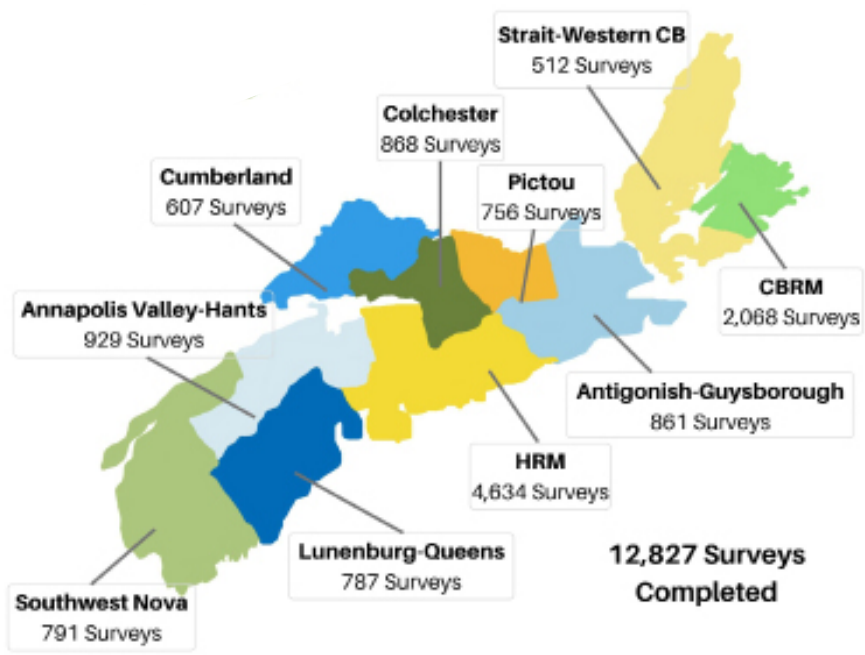
Then, from May to July, 80,000 Nova Scotia households (one in five) received an invitation in their mailboxes to participate in a first-of-its-kind survey measuring quality of life across the province. Each letter included a personalized 5-digit access code to complete the ~30-minute survey online. Paper copies of the survey were available by request. Significant efforts were made to ensure the participation of communities who aren't always heard from in survey results, like youth, African Nova Scotians, newcomers, people with disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness and poverty. We have engaged in discussions with the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw

Chiefs that puts us on a different track about supporting a culturally relevant survey for Mi'kmaw communities.

Nova Scotians were encouraged to "fill it out - don't throw it out!" by nine committed and enthusiastic Local Leadership Teams (LLTs). LLTs were established across the province in partnership with Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) and the leadership of NSCC principals in 2019. Our efforts were successful in large measure because of the support of NSCC and its staff. The LLTs were instrumental in promoting the survey and the resultant high response rate. We are immensely grateful for all they did, including creating and sharing videos online, putting up posters in their communities, writing newspaper articles, and taking to the radio to tell their communities about the importance of responding to the survey.

Special thanks also to SaltWire Network for promoting the survey through advertisements in all their daily and weekly publications throughout the province. Without them the high participation rate in the survey would not have been achieved.

As Nova Scotians checked their mailboxes and filled out the survey, our summer intern Marylise Habiambere, a Loran Scholar, led the “Diving into Quality of Life” blog series on our website. The blogs focused on mental health, physical health, and social health and were accompanied, respectively, by interviews with Pamela Magee (Executive Director of the Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division), Crystal Watson (Executive Director of Recreation Nova Scotia), and Rodney Small (Director of One North End Community Economic Development Society).



The survey closed on July 5 and by then we were already in awe of the number of responses we’d received from Nova Scotians.

12,827 Nova Scotians across 10 different regions participated in the survey making it the largest data set of its kind in Canada. The high response rate (16%) tells us that people are enthusiastic to talk about their lives in Nova Scotia and feel like they can be a part of meaningful efforts that contribute to its future.



Between the end of the survey and the release of the results there was a lot of activity. The CIW collated the responses from the survey and LLTs were re-activated and reconvened. Work with LLTs involved revisiting their role moving forward as well as having initial conversations about the data, engaging stakeholders and communities about the results, and processes for meaning making and priority setting. LLTs were considering who else needs to be involved, informed, and inspired across the regions as we moved closer to releasing the summary results.

In the winter, we were invited to host two events that served as opportunities to dive deeper into the Initiative. In early February, we were delighted to have the opportunity to work with a group of students at NSCC Ivany and take part in some mutual learning. We focused our time together by exploring how to use the Eight Domain Framework as a lens to look at the complexity of social and environmental challenges in the province.

Towards the end of February, an event called the Highland Summit took place. Inspired by conversations we had at LLT tables, on February 21, we joined recreation professionals at the Keppoch Lodge in Antigonish County in a day dedicated to the Quality of Life Initiative. In our time together, we took a deep dive into the Eight Domain Framework, mapped the 'system' of relevant results and discussed how the data could be used for future reporting, evaluation, and funding applications.



“The Quality of Life Initiative creates a shared pathway for Nova Scotians to better understand the province’s strengths and challenges. The survey results are an invitation to build on what we know and to imagine new possibilities for our wellbeing.”

– Danny Graham, Chief Engagement Officer

On March 11, 2020 we released the first set of the Nova Scotia Quality of Life Survey summary results in partnership with the CIW. The summary results present the responses for each of the ten regions in Nova Scotia.

This first instance of sharing the results publicly was well-received and is one of multiple avenues that the information will be shared. The March release also coincided with the launch of a new website for Engage where the summary results can be downloaded. The new website brings together the Nova Scotia

Quality of Life Initiative and Engage Nova Scotia websites.

Within the results there is a treasure trove of information about the perspectives and experiences of Nova Scotians related to their wellbeing and satisfaction with life.

We will be able to share insights about the quality of life of Nova Scotians and we also anticipate further insights shared by groups and organizations across the province who will work with the data.

We are working alongside LLTs as part of efforts to mobilize the results at local levels. Engage Nova Scotia is not the sole holder of the Nova Scotia Quality of Life Initiative – we have worked consistently with an advisory group of community and sector leaders throughout the initiative and continue to actively partner with governments, educators, businesses, community organizations, and inspired individuals who care deeply about the future of this province.

We are also encouraged that the Initiative has received interest beyond Nova Scotia. Engage was invited to speak about the Initiative at a Community Indicators Consortium in Denver, Colorado and at the Putting Well-being Matrix into Policy Action workshop hosted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation

and Development (OECD) in Paris, France.

Moreover, we are grateful to each person who gave their time to complete the Nova Scotia Quality of Life Survey. This set of results helps to substantially deepen our understanding of how Nova Scotians are doing and is the start of additional measurement, analysis and research. The summary results serve as the foundation for innovative approaches to priority setting and planning at a local level and province-wide for years to come.

The Nova Scotia Quality of Life Initiative continues to be a many-people, many-years effort with the potential to gradually ensure fewer people are being left behind and our province is a more attractive place to live work and play.



Photo by Carter Hutton

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND EVENTS

Beyond GDP

We collaborated with the Centre for the Study of Security and Development and the Department of Political Science at Dalhousie University to host the two-day event, “Beyond GDP: International Experience, Canada’s Options” on May 23-24, 2019. The workshop provided a space for researchers, policymakers, government officials, non-government organizations, and community members to exchange knowledge and perspectives about measuring wellbeing in Canada. The event attracted some of the leading policy makers on the topic of wellbeing, globally.

Some of these presenters gathered with Engage and leaders in Nova Scotia at Windhorse Farm following the conference to explore opportunities for Nova Scotia to deepen its understanding of advancing a quality of life agenda.

Recognition and Commemoration Task Force

This year we have limited our public engagement efforts to an advisory role given our current focus on the Quality of Life Initiative. On October 28-29, 2019 the Task Force on the Commemoration of Edward Cornwallis and the Recognition and Commemoration of Indigenous History hosted phase two of its public engagement efforts to seek public input into its work. Engage designed and supported the facilitation of the sessions. They were in Halifax and Dartmouth and were well attended. They fostered lively and informative discussions around history that should be commemorated, and which perspectives and context will be considered and included in the Task Force calls to action.



LOOKING AHEAD

We remain open and focused on the possibilities in this upcoming year to build awareness and capacity to work with the results and set the stage for activity on high priorities in each region and provincewide. Although forums were part of our first plan to help carry out this meaning-making, we have shifted gears and timelines in response to the global public health crisis.

LLTs continue to be drivers of the Nova Scotia Quality of Life Initiative and we are carrying out efforts to support local capacity as well as coordinated efforts across the province. One of the ways we are doing that is starting to establish a provincewide LLT Learning Network with the intention of regions getting to know and learn from one another.

Sharing, mobilizing, and using the results from the Nova Scotia Quality of Life Survey continues in multiple ways. The March release represents the first of several occasions when results will be made available, in different forms, to the public. The next stage will provide analysis about how Nova Scotians

are doing on topics of poverty, discrimination, health, trust, community vitality, and social isolation.

Our plans are ongoing to make the results accessible to everyone who would like to undertake their own analysis and learning in a way most relevant to them. We are working on finalizing data-sharing agreements that would allow organizations, levels of government, academic researchers, economic development agencies, school boards, community groups, and foundations to conduct their own analysis. We are also striving to produce an online tool in the spirit of 'open data' design that would allow anyone to view the information and navigate results more easily.

We also look forward to deepening relationships with long-time partners in the Initiative as well as keeping an ongoing openness to new relationships and partnerships. We wish for all Nova Scotians to see themselves in the Initiative and we will continue working towards making that a reality.



We would love to hear from you.

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