



# Annual Report

2020/2021



## Remembering

# WHERE WE CAME FROM

Nova Scotians from many sectors and regions 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 want to participate in shaping its future.

We believe now more than ever, especially with the challenges the pandemic has presented us, that the rich opportunities and deep challenges before us will be solved by many people and organizations working more effectively together. To this end, our work often puts us at the intersection of public, private, non-profit, and academic sectors.

For many 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 more collaborative, inclusive, and adaptive to change.

We have coordinated engagement initiatives focused on building relationships like, *Share Thanksgiving*, *One Cape Breton-Unama'ki*, and many public engagement events from one end of the province to the other.

Since 2017, our attention has primarily been on coordinating the NS Quality of Life Initiative. In collaboration with a broad spectrum of partners, we are focused on understanding our quality of life and what will improve it. Communities that are resolute in their commitment to raise people's wellbeing will balance choices across economic, social, environmental, and cultural priorities that reflect what they believe 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 another extraordinary one for Nova Scotians. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to preoccupy our awareness and alter our daily activities. It's obvious that we are living through an extraordinary period.

For many, these times are more than disorienting - they are excruciating – financially, emotionally, socially, and culturally. Friends and colleagues have lost their jobs, their life savings, their face-to-face contact with loved ones, and even their trust in the future. Moreover, festering and longstanding under-currents of unaddressed systemic racism, economic inequities, and social injustices have crashed onto our shores in a way that aches deeply - and also incubates hope.

At no time is that hope better reflected, perhaps, than in the month of June, where many of us might revel in the summer solstice, Pride month, Indigenous History month, and several other community and cultural celebrations. At the same time, this year more than ever we are called to reflect on the ways in which equity and inclusion have been denied to so many. The newfound calls to remedy the unfair disadvantage that resides in our neighbourhoods and institutions have also been the hallmark of this time and will be imbedded in the practices of Engage Nova Scotia.

Going forward, everything may seem new, which means anything is possible. It's possible now in Nova Scotia (Mi'kmaki) to face up to our past and live up to our potential.

As an organization, our vision of a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient society has never felt more important – and we are reflecting on our place in all of this. Through the NS Quality of Life Initiative we are shining a light on communities of people who have been left behind, and creating capacity for our partners in the public, private, academic, and community sectors to take positive action and lower the ladder of opportunity to everyone.

We are undertaking a pan-provincial project over the next three years to build awareness of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in a Nova Scotia context. The goal of this, in a Canadian context, is to leave no one behind.

We are grateful that our relationships with community partners continue to deepen. The *From Me To You* project this past winter is one example of our working with new partners to reach thousands of Nova Scotians with letters and notes of personal connection and encouragement in these difficult times.

We continue to learn from leaders in all sectors who are responding to challenges, and taking up the opportunity to innovate – socially, economically, and environmentally.

We are grateful for the support of our partners, at all levels of government, as well as community, private sector, and academic collaborators.

We want to thank the many volunteers who work with us, as well as our remarkable staff and Board of Directors. Together, they are the backbone of our work. Nothing we do would be possible without their skill and dedication.

Finally, to Nova Scotians. This report is for you. Our work is with you. Your character, perseverance, and commitment to the promise of this amazing corner of the world keeps us going.

Sincere regards,



**Dr. Gaynor Watson-Creed**  
Chair of the Board



**Danny Graham**  
Chief Engagement  
Officer





# OUR VISION, MISSION, AND ASPIRATIONS

Our vision is a more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient Nova Scotia.

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 aspirations are 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.

## OUR APPROACH

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 2020/21 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Dr. Gaynor Watson-Creed, Chair**

Assistant Dean, Serving and Engaging Society, Faculty of Medicine, Dalhousie University



**Ron Smith, Vice Chair**

Experienced corporate and non-profit director



**Sara Napier, Treasurer**

President & CEO, United Way Halifax



**Carla Arsenault**

President & CEO, Cape Breton Partnership



**Hari Balasubramanian**

Founding Managing Partner, EcoAdvisors Inc.



**Lynn Hartwell**

VP, Campuses and Communities, NSCC



**Doug Keefe**

President, Doug Keefe Consulting



**Ramona Lumpkin**

Interim President and Vice-Chancellor, MSVU



**Emily Lutz**

Deputy Mayor, Municipality of the County of Kings



**Jim Mustard**

Project Coordinator, Raising the Villages



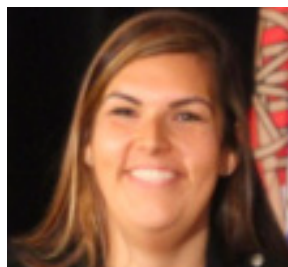
**Adam Rodgers**

Barrister & Solicitor



**Jaime Smith**

Director, Social Innovation, Coady Institute and StFX Extension Department, StFX University



**Zabrina Whitman**

Coordinator, Indigenous Affairs, Acadia University

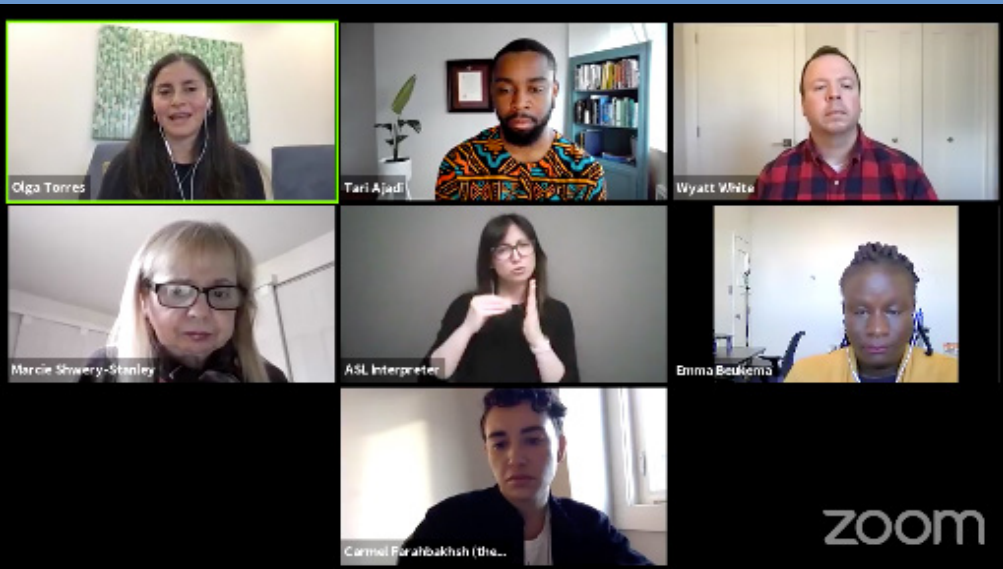


**Dr. Rachel Zellars**

Assistant Professor, Social Justice and Community Studies, SMU

# **2020 / 2021**

**A YEAR IN REVIEW**







## QUALITY OF LIFE INITIATIVE

Our last year of activities is rooted in what we experienced as individuals, a province, and across the world. It informed what our next best step was - each step of the way - in order to continue meeting Nova Scotians where they are.

The challenges we all encountered and events of the last year make it feel like this annual report can't just be describing 12 months. On March 11th, 2020 Engage released the summary results from the NS Quality of Life Survey in partnership with the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW). That same day the World Health Organization named COVID-19 a global pandemic.

In the wake of the pandemic, we adapted our public engagement activities to reflect the changes physical distancing called for, as well as the challenges and opportunities it has presented. For example, in early March, we began to pivot from our plan of hosting in-person forums across the province to other ways of facilitating meaning-making of the NS Quality of Life Survey results.

In many ways, the pandemic has accelerated the relevance of the NS Quality of Life Initiative. It has laid bare the conditions and need for broad social, economic, and personal change. When we asked

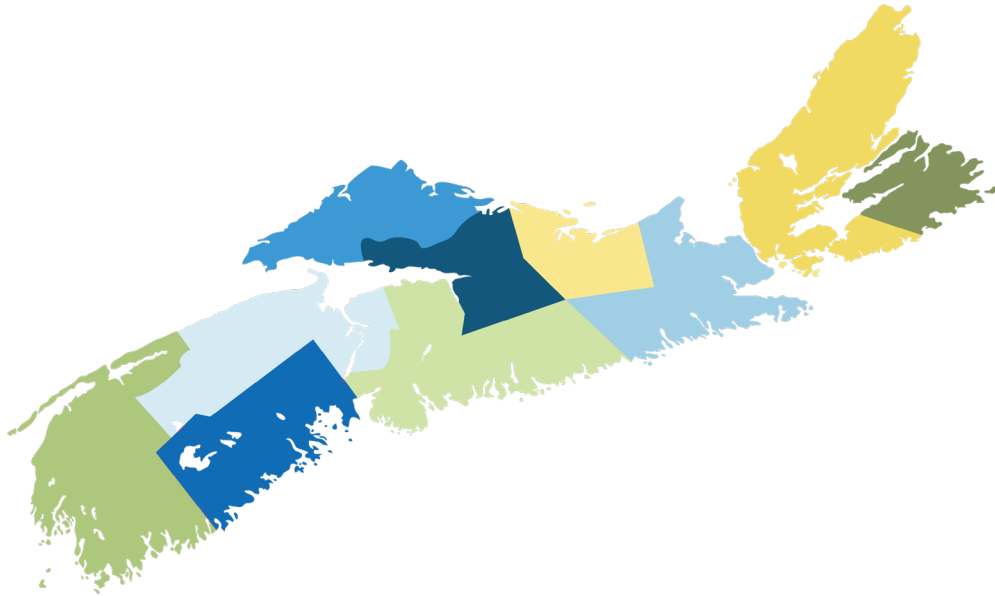




Nova Scotians in August, for the second time since 2015, how they think we should measure success (on a scale of 1-10), 58% said, “By growing the economy” and 82% said, “By improving our quality of life.”

More of us, more often, are considering the question: What matters most? and public discourse has given way to more conversations about ‘building back better,’ ‘resetting,’ and not ‘returning to normal.’ Our Chief Engagement Officer, Danny Graham, and Board Chair, Dr. Gaynor Watson-Creed published an op-ed on July 11th in The Chronicle Herald about just those things: how these unique times behoove us to recognize how life can be better for those more visibly falling between the cracks as well as those who have been simply forced to slow down because of the pandemic. Their commentary captures the backdrop to our organization’s and community’s goings on and where we believe we must go next.

## LOCAL LEADERSHIP TEAMS



Local Leadership Teams (LLTs) are volunteer groups in nine regions of the province who act as local leaders of the NS Quality of Life Initiative in their regions. In 2019, they were essential to spreading the word about the survey and achieving the high response rate of 16%. This past year, LLTs have transitioned from promoting the survey to identifying ways to share the survey results and embody the change initiative aspect of this work.

The pivot away from in-person forums about the survey results saw us host two provincewide LLT Network Gatherings and establish the LLT Network Hub. The first 2-hour online LLT Network Gathering was held on June 16th with 40 participants. It involved

conversations in breakout rooms around two questions: What have you noticed in yourself and/or in your region over the last few months, and what about that do you want to keep, or lose? and, What's most important now as we move forward, as Nova Scotians and as stewards of the NS Quality of Life Initiative? The first LLT Network Gathering also included the launch of the LLT Network Hub. The Hub is a shared online space where LLT members from across the province can gather, exchange ideas, explore tools and resources, and find inspiration in one central place.

We hosted the second LLT Network Gathering on October 20th and 57 people attended. It began with



Danny presenting some of the analysis received from the CIW. Following that, LLT members and Engage staff met in online breakout rooms for conversations about one of three areas: 1) Methodology, Analysis, and Data-Sharing Agreements; 2) Possible Next Pathways for your Region; and 3) Open Questions and Ideas Sharing.

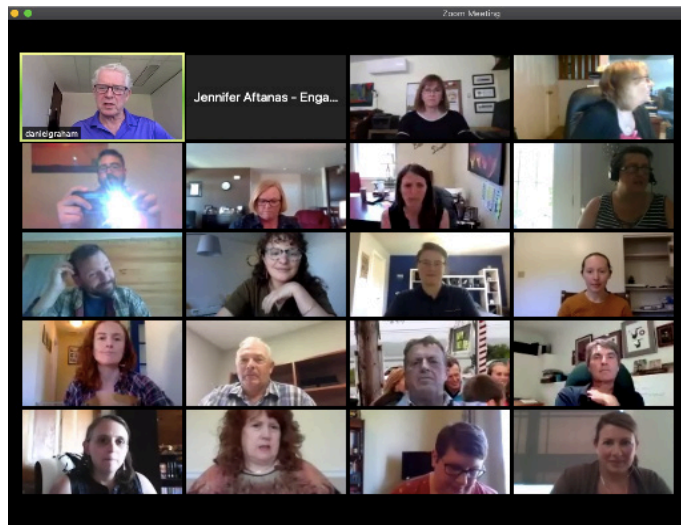
In addition to the provincewide gatherings, we hosted ongoing regional LLT meetings throughout the year. In partnership with LLTs, we also presented to the Municipality of Richmond County in January and to the Cape Breton Regional Municipality in March.

## SHARING SURVEY RESULTS

At the heart of sharing the results is the notion that this is more than a measurement exercise – it's a change initiative. We now need to make those measures matter.

We collaborated with the CIW over the summer and fall to collate and share supplementary analysis of the survey results called *A Closer Look: The Nova Scotia Quality of Life Survey*. This analysis shares high-level information about demographic groups that caught the attention of the CIW, insights about the eight domains of wellbeing, and analysis related to six areas of focus: social isolation, sense of community, feelings of trust, experiences of discrimination, poverty, and health.

In August, we followed up with partners and supporters to ask about how they were using the results, the impact of the pandemic on their use, and what other things could support their use. What we heard was that people were using or planning to use the data - and that these uses varied from sharing the results with friends, colleagues, and on social media to citing the results in presentations and proposals. When asked about how



the pandemic had impacted the use of the survey results, we heard that people's capacity was tight and more focused on immediate needs. When asked how we could better support people to use the results, responses varied from shorter summaries to public discussions. These perspectives helped shape how we support people to use the survey results.

The availability of the results made it critical for our team to build our research and data analysis capacity. With this greater capacity we offer two possibilities for additional analysis of the NS Quality of Life Survey results. One way is for our team to undertake the analysis on a fee-for-service basis. We collaborate with you to build an appropriate analysis plan and then share the results in a way that enables you to draw new insights. The other way is for organizations and groups to access

the raw data themselves through the use of data-sharing agreements. To date, we have undertaken 10 analysis requests, and nine data-sharing agreements have been signed. Options to [request a dataset or request analysis are available on our website.](#)

A significant part of ensuring awareness of the availability and accessibility of the survey results and opportunities for further analysis has been to deliver presentations across the province to a variety of audiences and sectors. In every instance, we raised awareness of the new internal capacity to undertake analysis and to enter into data-sharing agreements, highlight what's possible, and share early findings.

We have delivered over 40 presentations and sessions to 500+ people about the results of the survey and the NS Quality of Life Initiative more broadly, and we are always happy to be a part of the ongoing change initiatives across the province. Throughout the year, audiences have included the NS Non-Profit COVID-19 Coalition Virtual Forum, Mud Creek Rotary, Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, Nova Scotia Works Centres, St. Francis Xavier University, Change Lab Action Research Initiative (CLARI), and the Seniors Advisory Council.

**The book, *Well-Being: Expanding the Definition of Progress*, was published in the fall. It shares “insights from practitioners, researchers, and innovators from around the globe” with one of the case study chapters featuring the NS Quality of Life Initiative, with extensive quotes from Engage’s Chief Engagement Officer. The book is part of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Culture of Health Series published by Oxford University Press.**

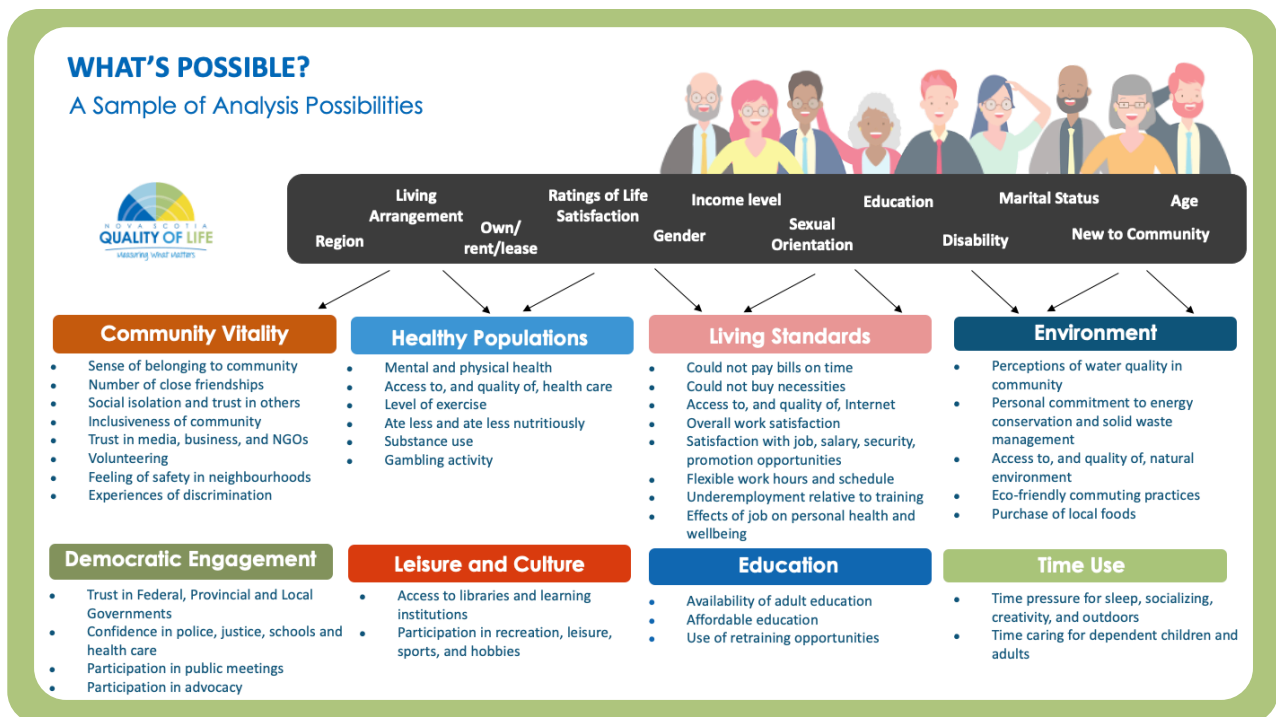
Plus, our CEO, Danny Graham, was a guest on the *Growing Pains with David Campbell* podcast and the first episode of Nova Scotia Business Inc.’s. new podcast, *Point-to-Point*.

Additionally, we hosted a series of 75-minute fall engagement and presentation sessions with many Nova Scotia sectors about the NS Quality of Life Initiative on November 6th, 10th, 12th, 18th, and December 10th. We invited equality-seeking organizations, businesses, governments, non-profits, academic institutions, and professional associations across the province to hear findings from the NS Quality

of Life Survey and steps participants can take to better interact with the results. The agenda was dynamic and led to follow up with organizations and sectors ready to collaborate.

In addition to these events, we also hosted *Snapshots of the NS Quality of Life Initiative*. Community members were invited to bring their coffee and curiosity to one of five 30-minute presentations on Zoom and Facebook Live from February 16-20th. *Snapshots of the NS Quality of Life Initiative* provided an overview of what's happened so far and what's next. It was an opportunity to bring people up to date whether they'd been close to the Initiative in the past or were hearing about it for the first time. A recording of one of the sessions is available [on our YouTube channel](#).

**Domains At-A-Glance - The Eight Domains of Wellbeing is a framework developed by the CIW that offers a wholistic way of thinking about our quality of life. We created a one-page resource about each domain that describes what the domain is and encourages personal reflection about that area of our lives.**



## PARTNERSHIPS AND PROJECTS

The NS Quality of Life Initiative is described as a ‘many people, many years’ undertaking, which is reflected by the number of partners who we work hand-in-hand with, as well as the long-term approach we take. This year saw our growing relationships with partners outside of Nova Scotia to include the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, David Suzuki Foundation, and the Carnegie UK Foundation.

Unique projects we undertook last year are highlighted below.

**Accessibility Directorate Capstone Project:** This project involved working with the Province, Dalhousie students, and disability advocates. Alongside partners, we guided the students in drafting a quality of life index for persons with disabilities using the 2019 Survey results to better understand how people with disabilities in Nova Scotia are doing.

**Atlantic Council for International Cooperation:** We engaged women-serving organizations across the province on the NS Quality of Life Survey results in order to create a resource that would be useful to their work. The project involved four meetings with 12 collaborators from

women-serving organizations who committed to support the project over several months. The end product was an 8-page infographic resource that focused on gender equality and included survey results selected in collaboration with the supporting organizations.

**Data for Good:** Data for Good is a volunteer-run organization that empowers communities through data. We partnered with the local chapter in Atlantic Canada, beginning in April, to offer analysis of the NS Quality of Life Survey results to two non-profit organizations and community groups.

**Child and Youth Well-being Survey:** We facilitated a successful proposal







for the Tri-Counties in Nova Scotia (Digby, Yarmouth, and Shelburne) to be one of four pilot communities for this survey. The Child and Youth Well-being Survey is being undertaken by the Healthy Populations Institute at Dalhousie University in partnership with UNICEF Canada, the CIW, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Tri-County Regional Centre for Education, and Turning the Tide (an Inspiring Communities initiative).

**Every One. Every Day. Kjipuktuk-Halifax:** Every One. Every Day. brings neighbours in Halifax's North End together to design and start projects that benefit them and the community. It is an initiative co-funded by the McConnell Foundation and Employment and Social Development Canada as part of the Government of Canada's Investment Readiness Program, and in partnership with Participatory City Foundation, UK. Engage is one of many partners bringing this initiative to life, including Participatory Canada, the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, Halifax Partnership, Inspiring Communities, Develop NS, United Way Halifax, and the Community Sector Council of Nova Scotia.

**Public Sector:** Federally, we continue to be connected to national discussions about reimagining society to better align with a wellbeing agenda, including two federal departments, the Department of Finance and the Department of Middle Class Prosperity. Provincially, we have been invited to present to individual departments, senior leadership, Deputy Ministers, and Crown Corporation board gatherings. Municipally, we are working with HRM, CBRM, and municipalities in other regions to make the NS Quality of Life Survey results relevant for community members.

## FROM ME TO YOU

*From Me to You* was a provincewide note-writing initiative we carried out this winter.

The idea came together in December in response to how the pandemic has prevented us from being together as much as we'd like, while knowing how good social connections are for our wellbeing. We never know what anyone is facing in their lives at the moment our paths cross and we can't know the impacts that a small gesture can have on any given day. *From Me to You* was an opportunity for each of us to uplift someone else with a simple gesture and do it all together across the province.

Community members were invited to write or draw a note card to someone they knew well, a little, or hadn't met yet - and leave it to be found somewhere like on a doorstep, in a locker, at a coffee shop, or on the bus. All any one person or organization had to do was email or call us to ask that we send them the note cards we'd designed, print them from the website, or use materials they had on hand already.

Over the course of the initiative, participants translated the note cards

into French and Mi'kmaq. We worked closely with one of our partners, Saltwire Network, who shared their support, skills, and resources to create three 30-second videos that illustrated beautiful and moving examples of *From Me to You*. They also featured a full-page about the initiative in 86,000 newspapers across the province in The Chronicle Herald and the Cape Breton Post, included the initiative in their winter newsletter, and hosted us for multiple digital takeovers on their website from January to March.

With the support of partners, including Saltwire Network, Canadian Mental Health Association – Nova Scotia, Halifax Public Libraries, Discover Halifax, Community Foundation of Nova Scotia, SchoolsPlus, Halifax Learning, Lake City Works, Queens Coast, YMCA of Greater Halifax/



Dartmouth, MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning, ISANS, PBJ Design, Atlantic Credit Unions, United Way Halifax, and the Annapolis Valley Community Health Board, we received requests for thousands of note cards across the province. Media, word-of-mouth, emails, newsletters, social media channels (ours and those of our partners), brought the initiative to many people and organizations who created connections in their communities – including in classrooms, households, child care centres, businesses, organizations, and beyond.

We led *From Me to You* with an openness to ongoing partnership ideas. To this end, the idea was taken up by the Town of Kentville who created their own note cards featuring the words, For You, that could be picked up at downtown businesses.

A group in Ontario took the idea up as part of a program called Connectedness Coaching and called it: Connecting Together – Seeding a Smile, where people enrolled in the coaching program could request packages of note cards and seeds that they could then distribute in their communities. Discover Halifax even included writing a *From Me to You* note card in their March Break Week bingo card.

It's hard to put into words what *From Me to You* meant to our team, and what we heard it meant to all who took part in some way. It was a simple offering that would not exist without each person and partner who sent a note card or spread the word about it. People across Nova Scotia picked up their pens, pencils, and crayons with us and we hope you don't put them down.



## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND EVENTS

### **Innovation Fest** - *Advancing Quality of Life: How can public servants foster greater trust and togetherness in our province?*

We hosted a 3-hour workshop as part of the Province of Nova Scotia's annual Innovation Fest. Using global trends and NS Quality of Life Survey results, public service participants focused on the themes of 'Trust' and 'Togetherness' - learning about how they are declining and how we can build a more inclusive, relationship-centered, and resilient province.



### **Accessibility Directorate** - *Meaningful and Accessible Online Public Engagement*

The staff of the Province of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Directorate and Engage Nova Scotia hosted an online 'Lunch and Learn' for members of Nova Scotia's public sector. The session focused on engagement fundamentals and tips for planning and hosting accessible online events and meetings.

### **Crown Board Summit** - *Measuring Beyond GDP*

The Province of Nova Scotia's Department of Business invited Engage to present at the annual Crown Board Summit. Engage staff members presented alongside Deputy Minister of Strategy Management. The theme of the presentation was 'Measuring beyond GDP' and discussed how the NS Quality of Life Initiative relates to the work of Crown Corporations, with some additional focus on the perceptions of new community residents.

## International Development Week - Conversation About Inclusive Economic Growth

The Atlantic Council for International Cooperation (ACIC) encouraged its members to host a 'book club' style event for International Development Week - an annual event held during the first full week of February to engage Canadians on global issues. We hosted a 1-hour open discussion with community members on February 9th about the Sustainable Development Goal, Decent Work and Economic Growth.



Engage Nova Scotia invites you to join a

# Conversation about inclusive economic growth.

Zoom session with Engage NS

For IDW we will be discussing the Podcast:  
*What is a wellbeing economy?* by Katherine Trebeck on TEDx Shorts

Tuesday Feb 9, 2021 12PM- 1PM

CLICK THE LINK IN THE DESCRIPTION TO REGISTER

ACIC CACI

## Government Aftershock

Government Aftershock was a global networked event that explored the future of government beyond crisis. In collaboration with the Government of Nova Scotia's Outpost for Public Sector Innovation, Engage hosted a workshop for public sector employees about the NS Quality of Life Initiative.



# GOVERNMENT AFTERSHOCK

JOIN THE CONVERSATION  
ON THE FUTURE OF GOVERNMENT BEYOND CRISIS

17 - 18 NOVEMBER 2020

European Commission | OECD | OPSI | Observatory of Public Sector Innovation | #GovAfterShock | oe.cd/GovAfterShock

## LOOKING AHEAD

*Igniting Canada's 2030 Agenda in Coordination with the Nova Scotia Quality of Life Initiative* is the name of our 3-year Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) program funded by Employment and Social Development Canada. It will be a priority in the next year and the years that follow.

The SDGs are closely related to quality of life indicators and the goals of our program are to build awareness of the SDGs (particularly in relation to the NS Quality of Life Initiative), explore the relevance of SDGs and quality of life for regions in Nova Scotia, and engage underrepresented communities around the relevance of the SDGs and quality of life indicators.

Sharing, mobilizing, and using the results from the NS Quality of Life Survey is ongoing. We continue to strengthen awareness of the availability and accessibility of results through ongoing outreach and relationship-building. Our team continues to process requests for analysis and data-sharing agreements, and we are always open to forging new partnerships that get survey results into the hands of people working towards improving quality of life in Nova Scotia.

There are partnerships underway to harness the power of digital technology and make the results available through two online tools. One tool is being developed in partnership with the Province, which will make the NS Quality of Life Survey results available to users within the provincial government. The other tool is in collaboration with researchers at Dalhousie University, and will enable people to view and navigate the results in an interactive way.



LLTs continue to be drivers of the NS Quality of Life Initiative. As we move into this next phase of the Initiative, and with the direction and guidance of LLT members, we are working towards online regional gatherings and delivering presentations to more municipal councils. We will also continue to facilitate the provincewide LLT Network with the intention of people across regions getting to know and learning from one another.

The year ahead includes a change of scenery for our team. We are moving into a new space, which fulfills a long-desired aspiration for folks to walk right in off the sidewalk to connect with us. We look forward to the work we'll do and relationships we'll build together – in and outside the office, and in every corner of the province.



**We'd like to hear from you.**  
**Phone us: 902-407-2582**  
**Email us: [info@engagenovascotia.ca](mailto:info@engagenovascotia.ca)**  
**Meet us: 1525 Birmingham Street, Halifax, NS, B3J 0B5**