



Building a Community of Innovation in Partnership – Pictou County Team Massachusetts Institute of Technology Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program (MIT REAP Program)

MIT REAP PROGRAM

In 2021-2022, five regions across Nova Scotia took part in a tailored version of the renowned Massachusetts Institute of Technology Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program (MIT REAP). This process was led by ONSIDE, a not-for-profit organization who is working collaboratively with stakeholders and partners to galvanize a prosperous Nova Scotia through inclusive Innovation-Driven Entrepreneurship (IDE).

Regional teams of leaders drawn from 5 stakeholder groups (government, risk capital, universities, entrepreneurs, and corporations) worked collectively with MIT leaders and other teams to build an action-based strategy for change.

MIT REAP lead the 'Pictou County Team' through its framework which consisted of understanding the regional challenges, determining the region's comparative advantage, and identifying a "must-win battle" (MWB).

REGIONAL CONTEXT AND ENGAGEMENT

The Pictou Team engaged a series of thought leaders throughout the process. The team collected insights from business leaders and entrepreneurs through a survey with 47 respondents and a focus group with 18 participants. A summary of regional challenges is identified below.

1. **One-Stop-Shop** – Respondents shared a need for a one-stop access to information and services.
2. **Access to Capital** – Respondents indicated heavy reliance on personal sources and less knowledge about start-up/innovation funding.
3. **Perception of Innovation** - Respondents indicated a perception that businesses in the region are creative and innovative, that businesses require knowledge of government programs that are focused on innovation and are readily available, and that post-secondary institutions need to "up their game" in the community (re. R&D, innovation, and flexible workforce).

The Pictou County Team also **identified unique aspects of our region and opportunities**. The region has a **deep history of building and making** rooted in its 'industrial' past of shipbuilders and railcar makers. Pictou County can leverage engagement in the future through innovation by bridging the connection to the past which includes building on the culture we have, and our capacity to build, make, and persevere our creativity.

The region is **home to several large corporate players**. Notable it is the headquarters of Sobeys Inc. a multinational company which has access to world-class product developers, supply chain managers, and



other business building expertise. There is an opportunity to support existing and developing companies to grow their businesses with the guidance of experts in the region.

Pictou County has seen a shift in the region throughout the pandemic, where **new people are moving into the region** with new ideas and fresh faces. These people choose to live in Pictou County and their perspectives would be invaluable in helping to press reset on how we approach business here. Additionally, the area has a lower cost of living which makes the region attractive for relocation.

STRATEGY & MUST WIN BATTLE

Through a \$25,000 grant provided by Onside, the Pictou County Team hired a consultant to support the development of a strategy. This process identified three areas.

- 1) Equip individuals and companies with the capacity to excel.
- 2) Develop a positive network to enable individuals and companies to thrive.
- 3) Stimulate a community of innovation and informed coordination.

Its first **Must-Win Battle will be to launch the Elevate program** which will open existing high-potential companies to all forms of innovation that will create value for companies, customers, and the region. Through an application process to Onside, a \$60,000 grant was received to develop, launch, and run the program.

The Elevate program intends to build a community of innovation, promoting a mindset for exploration and growth, founded in a strong network of businesses and partners collaborating to leverage innovation in all forms.

Founded in our creativity we will innovate from our present competitive advantage around world-class products while building new capabilities in connecting existing mid-size companies to innovate around customer journeys to scale. We will see an increased engagement in exploring opportunities through a measurable shift in entrepreneurial mindset to understand and apply all forms of innovation, fostering collaboration with other companies, and demonstrating the power of working together. What will change is an orientation to action, leveraging ideas, creating a community of innovation with the intent and resources to imagine and implement new ways of providing value.

We will be clear on what innovation is, how to invest in change, connecting people with ideas to the resources to create tangible outcomes. The use of measured progress and data around shifts in mindset will create a narrative that is felt in the community, engaging more entrepreneurs to become involved, and the ongoing mentoring aspect will create a lasting peer network of innovation.

The program will start with a session that will be open to all and will provide the funnel or base for a longer program to follow with 10-15 participants who have an interest and potential in innovation and growth.

In closing, the MIT REAP Pictou County team will continue to champion innovation through the individual organizations and businesses that they represent with a mindset open to growth and a



commitment to seek opportunities to build a community of innovation, and to develop a strong network of companies and partners collaborating to move innovation of all forms forward.

Created August 25, 2022, by The Pictou County Partnership team