WHERE WE CAME FROM

In June 2012, approximately 75 Nova Scotians gathered to address how our province could do better. The organization that followed sprang from a grassroots desire for us to be more innovative, collaborative and open to change. By 2014, we had grown enough to bring on a permanent board of directors and professional staff to bring to life our vision.

Since then, we have gathered in groups large and small to question and imagine how Nova Scotia can – through the energy and insight of its citizens – become a more vibrant, resilient and inclusive society. Our province-wide network has grown to thousands of people from all walks of life, bound by a common affection and concern for our province.

A NOTE FROM
THE CHIEF ENGAGEMENT OFFICER

Dear Friends,

The last year has been a busy time at Engage.

- We launched a new website - complete with more frequent blogs and added several podcasts.
- We held five well attended municipal engagement clinics in different areas of the province.
- We partnered with the Community Sector Council on two workshops.
- We worked with Sobey’s and held four community dinners in addition to the in-home meals for Share Thanksgiving.
- We worked with Mi’kmaq and Municipal leaders in Cape Breton to design and facilitate the One Cape Breton/Unama’ki Summit which brought together leaders from all of the councils on the island.
- We held workshops and meetings about the Quality of Life initiative to bring people and groups into an understanding of how they can partner with us and each other to make this initiative successful.
- And finally, we worked with the Town of Antigonish to bring the community together to tap into public priorities to build their strategic plan.

Through all of these activities with our partners, we were laying the foundations for stronger relationships amongst Nova Scotians by building the capacity for greater social cohesion and trust.

Sometimes that trust developed between individuals through shared Thanksgiving dinners. At other times it involved helping Municipal Leaders find better ways to communicate and collaborate with their residents. At other times, it involved providing the opportunity for leaders to come together to build greater, stronger relationships in their region of the province.

As we move forward with the Quality of Life Initiative, building a coalition of partners and preparing for a comprehensive Quality of Life survey, that trust and those relationships will be more critical than ever before.

Over the next year, we will continue to do the types of work we have been doing, with greater emphasis on establishing Quality of Life as a shared lens for collaboration and improving the wellbeing of Nova Scotians.

The faith Nova Scotians continue to place in us is greatly appreciated. We know we can’t do anything without the support of engaged citizens, organizations, businesses, and government. We look forward to working with them, and you, to build an even better Nova Scotia.

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 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.

A WORD FROM
THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD

In 2012, Ruth Goldbloom invited me to attend a meeting with seventy-five diverse Nova Scotians to tackle the question of “how could we all do more to live up to our potential”. This was the founding meeting of a group that would become Engage Nova Scotia. I didn’t know the people who had called the meeting but I had a strong belief that we had (and still have) much to celebrate and much to improve upon.

I also didn’t know how much that meeting would impact my own life. In 2014, Engage Nova Scotia formed its first board and I was elected Chair. The last four years have been exciting, fulfilling, and, if I might, engaging.

As board chair, I am proud of the work done by Engage Nova Scotia and the promising impact it is having on the future of our province. At a time when all segments of society – not just government – are being called upon to step up and tackle our significant challenges and opportunities, we are pleased to see so many municipalities, organizations and individuals answering the call.

Over the past year, our activities were focused on laying foundations for stronger relationships by building the capacity for greater social cohesion and trust. From building capacity for community engagement with municipalities, to bringing leaders together to build better relationships, to bringing Nova Scotians to share a meal and build community connections, everything was designed to build trust and improve our social cohesion in order to take steps towards improving our collective quality of life.

As my second term as Chair comes to a close, I am looking forward to what happens next for Engage. I am confident that as a board, a staff and a network of thousands of committed Nova Scotians, Engage Nova Scotia will remain focused on building a more vibrant and resilient province – one where more of us feel ready, willing and able to create the future we all want.

I ask you, what are you ready to do?

Ramona Lumpkin, CM
Chair of the Board
OUR 2017 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2017 A YEAR IN REVIEW
MI’KMAQ AND MUNICIPAL COOPERATION

Five years ago, municipalities in Cape Breton started gathering once a year to hear about initiatives relevant to the Island as a whole. This year, it was Port Hawkesbury’s turn to host, and Mayor Brenda Chisholm-Beaton wanted to encourage more in-depth idea generation. To do this her town partnered with Engage to design the event. It became clear early that discussions would be incomplete without participation from the Island’s five Mi’kmaq First Nations.

On November 23 and 24, along with Mayor Chisholm-Beaton and Chief Rod Googoo, Engage co-hosted One Cape Breton: A Future Forward Leaders Summit for over 40 municipal and Mi’kmaq leaders. It was the first of its type, and the spirit of friendship, collaboration and shared purpose was inspiring to all who attended.

Priorities identified over the two days were ensuring high speed internet and cell service for all; tackling out migration and seasonal work; building a skilled workforce; developing an aquaculture industry; and addressing mental health and homelessness issues.

A commitment exercise at the end of the two days resulted in a strong core of leaders and supporters stepping up to make sure momentum wasn’t lost.

At the end of the event, we asked participants how they felt about the potential of events like this to bring together a more united Island. Collectively they said they were quite hopeful (averaging 4.48/5). Many steps have been identified to achieve this, and Engage continues to be active as a partner in building stronger relationships between municipal and Mi’kmaq leaders.

When asked to complete an evaluation form for the event, virtually every participant gave it a 5/5.

MUNICIPAL ENGAGEMENT

The vitality of Nova Scotia communities depends heavily on the trust and engagement between citizens and their municipal officials.

After the 2016 municipal elections, Nova Scotia saw a nearly 50% turnover of elected officials. Hundreds of councillors were new to their roles. New relationships and partnerships with community organizations, business leaders and other public leaders needed to be established or strengthened.

In 2017, we supported the growth of these partnerships by hosting a series of hands-on public engagement clinics for mayors, councillors and staff throughout the province.

On May 10 Engage invited municipal councillors and staff to Lochaber Community Centre in Antigonish County. The idea was simple—to learn from each other about what works and what doesn’t. We “work-shopped” fresh ideas for kick-starting public engagement, creating sustainable engagement strategies, and building greater trust and community cohesion. This first clinic “sold out” within a few days of registration opening, with more than 50 municipal officials and staff in attendance.

Requests rolled in to deliver similar clinics in different regions of the province, using an approach that was attuned to the relevant challenges of local municipalities.

The vitality of Nova Scotia communities depends heavily on the trust and engagement between citizens and their municipal officials.
On September 20, dozens of councillors and staff from Kentville, Kings County, West Hants, Windsor, Berwick and Kingston gathered for a five-hour engagement clinic. Themes that emerged from that clinic were:

- Improving Council Transparency
- Building a culture of engagement
- Greater cooperation amongst local municipalities
- Engaging youth

We then hosted a municipal engagement clinic on October 11 in Mahone Bay. We then hosted staff and councillors from the County of Lunenburg, Town of Lunenburg, Bridgewater, Chester, and Mahone Bay. After brainstorming with other municipalities, each one caucused about their unique public engagement challenges and developed early plans for resolving them.

Engage visited Meteghan on October 17 to facilitate teams from the District of Digby, Clare, and the Town of Digby for an Engagement Clinic. Elected officials and staff asked and answered: Where are we right now? What can we do more of, or differently? Who can help us/who can we help?

Our last engagement clinic of 2017 was held November 20 in Shelburne. Joined by staff and councillors from Argyle, Barrington, the County of Shelburne, Queens County, and Lockeport, we spent the day in a fun and challenging Engagement Case Study.

Post event feedback showed 98% of participants were more likely to undertake or change their approach to public engagement specifically because of this clinic.

Each event was evaluated and received high praise from participants for how it will make a difference for their future work. Post-clinic follow-up was offered to all participants and municipalities.
In 2016, Engage and the Town of Amherst co-hosted a deep public engagement exercise to determine the priorities of participants and stimulate citizen-led action on those priorities.

In 2017, the Town of Antigonish asked us to do something similar. Under the leadership of Mayor Laurie Boucher and Council, we engaged over 100 Antigonishers in an evening of conversation and priority setting.

This two-part exercise, starting in January 2018 and continuing into April, polled participants on their highest priorities and surfaced the best ideas about tackling them.

Quantitative and qualitative feedback from participants was strong and included:

“I’m not sure what I expected, but the evening was a pleasant surprise. I went to the meeting mainly out of curiosity (rather than interest or feeling civic duty) and found myself drawn into the thinking and discussion processes on the topics.”

For Nova Scotia to succeed, it will be important for us to continue to expand our reputation for being friendly and welcoming toward newcomers. Every relationship is built one person at a time and one family at a time. That’s the secret to Share Thanksgiving.

This is the fourth year of our coordinating this important and simple initiative. We ask Nova Scotians to open their doors to newcomers and share a meal. Of course this often becomes much more than a shared meal.

In 2017, efforts started long before the turkey was served. On September 6, Engage Nova Scotia and Sobeys welcomed former hosts, guests, and community partners to Pier 21 to launch Share Thanksgiving 2017. We were joined by Sobey’s officials, dignitaries and the family of Sherifat Onabanjo – originally from Nigeria – to hear about the lasting friendship that has developed and continued with her family’s hosts. The rest of the evening was filled with lively discussion and tours of Pier 21 – Canada’s symbol of welcoming.
Beginning September 25, Sobeys staff in Antigonish, Halifax, Sydney and New Minas hosted new Nova Scotia families for community dinners. Friendships were formed as staff sat together with new members of their communities to learn about each other over a traditional turkey dinner. Invitations for the connections to continue were among the most inspiring impacts of this work.

October 6 marked the fourth annual Share Thanksgiving program. This year we matched families and students representing 35 countries and 39 languages.

The greatest gifts of Share Thanksgiving are the connections that last long after the leftovers have been eaten. Our follow up survey with hosts and guests in January showed 60.71% of respondents have stayed in touch either by email, phone calls, social media or visiting. We’ve been delighted to hear stories of other shared meals, game nights, and holiday visits.

**QUALITY OF LIFE INITIATIVE**

If we treasure it we should measure it - and that’s particularly true when it comes to quality of life. Nova Scotia’s quality of life can and should be a point of pride. The Nova Scotia Quality of Life Initiative will provide a common language and a comprehensive framework to help us understand past trends and current circumstances in eight domains that reflect what we value. Our work is based on the framework of the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and ties into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It builds on the pioneering work of GPI Atlantic in Nova Scotia.

On September 14 and 15, we hosted two groups of thoughtful Nova Scotians at Saint Mary’s University and Membertou First Nation to interpret some early results. From business, academia, government and the social sector, they helped us imagine how a more complete view of success might change the way we make choices, work together and enhance the Nova Scotia story.

On February 21 Engage invited a diverse group of senior leaders from business, government, academia and the social sector to a full-day Leadership Gathering at Ocean Stone to delve deeply into our planned Quality of Life Initiative. Feedback provided at this event, along with commitments made to support the initiative continue to shape the planning and pace of our largest project to date.

In June 2018 we will release the Nova Scotia Quality of Life Index report, highlighting 20 years of province-wide data in the eight key areas of quality of life and focus on starting a rich conversation about what quality of life means to us.

This marks the beginning of new discussions, opportunities and even debates about what we should measure and how we improve our overall wellbeing.

In 2019 we will survey Nova Scotians to get up-to-date answers on their quality of life.
AND MORE

We are grateful for the many partners we worked with in 2017 – notably **Pictou 2020**, with whom we collaborated in March to put on their Voices: Stories of Change event.

**Toke Moeller and Tim Merry** worked with us on a webinar to reveal how the Art of Hosting approach to collaboration is growing and can make a huge impact in Nova Scotia.

And of course our colleagues at the **Community Sector Council of Nova Scotia** have been partners in various events – particularly in building storytelling skills and peer learning opportunities in 2017.

There is no cookie-cutter solution for the complex challenges many communities, sectors and cultures are tackling. We will continue to uncover patterns of success, as well as gaps that need to be addressed.

We are grateful to our countless supporters and partners, who have committed lots of time and financial resources toward making 2017 a success.

**It is an honour to be doing this work with and for Nova Scotians.**