

oneNS COALITION

TAKING ACTION NOW:
THE ABCS OF CHANGE
FOR NOVA SCOTIA

Update to
Nova Scotians 2015



INTRODUCTION

A chorus of calls for change has intensified across Nova Scotia over the past year, as our bleak long-term economic and demographic outlook has been more deeply absorbed into the public consciousness. In a province where past opportunities to embrace change has faltered through process or lack of public support, the oneNS Coalition views these calls as a very promising, hopeful sign for Nova Scotia's future.

The gradual shift in the public's inclination towards change has been preceded by an extended period of declining opportunities for many Nova Scotians. It has been difficult to watch the outmigration of our talented young workers and the often painful impact their departures have on their families and communities. But there is an upside to the predicament in which Nova Scotia finds itself today: We have never been better positioned to launch transformational changes aimed at expanding economic growth and stabilizing our negative demographic trends.

The "Urgent Call to Action for Nova Scotians," issued in last year's report of the One Nova Scotia Commission on Rebuilding Our Economy, seems to have struck a nerve, more so than myriad previous reports that also called for extensive economic reform. Earlier reports had one thing in common: By direction or default, they landed primarily at the feet of governments. Efforts were sometimes made to spark change that could be led at the community or sector level, but often as an afterthought. Grassroots initiatives that led to transformative, sustainable change have been the exception, not the rule.

What can we do to realize a different outcome this time around? If broad-based change is to occur in how we work, conduct and invest in our businesses, access public services, welcome newcomers and educate our children, how and where should we begin?

Calls for change are coming from communities, sectors, organizations and individuals across the province, but the volume levels vary widely. It is an unavoidable truth that some people are more ready for change than others. Even among some who voice support for change, there remains a degree of naivete or perhaps denial about what is required to create "transformational change."

Many committed Nova Scotians are already hard at work. They are leading the charge, driving the conversations and establishing networks to create community and sector-led programs and policies to support change that is built from the ground up. Some people have been working for years to promote change; others have begun more recently. We applaud their efforts and their vanguard actions, but this is just the beginning. **Nova Scotia needs many more people to step up.** Our world-high tides need to be matched by a groundswell of broad-based, collective action. We must create an environment in which change is welcomed as an opportunity, rather than rejected in an effort to cling to a status-quo that sacrifices the economic futures of our children.

Shifting the blame to neighbouring communities, past governments, other institutions or previous employers is not working. Collectively, we have been spinning in circles, while this province's greatest resource – the young people who were to become the next generation of engaged, prosperous Nova Scotians – are increasingly finding new places to call "home."

Given the proliferation of ambitious, well-intended reports over recent decades, and their comparatively modest outcomes, Nova Scotians should also be ready to ask tough questions – of our leaders, and of ourselves – about why previous strategies have failed to result in sustainable, long-term change and growth.

The oneNS Coalition was created in June 2014 to develop a 10-year comprehensive development plan to renew the economy, based on the findings of the One Nova Scotia Commission report. To engage Nova Scotians in a meaningful dialogue that will help to build that plan, the discussion has to move beyond recounting the story of how we ended up where we are.

The oneNS Coalition will continue to consult Nova Scotians on ideas for positive changes as we undertake the development of a 10-year plan to rebuild the economy. While work continues on the long-term plan, scheduled for release in December 2015, there are steps that can be taken now to mobilize change.

Thanks to the work of the One Nova Scotia Commission, Nova Scotians have a better understanding of the severity of the structural problems in this province. The next step – recognizing that “change means change,” beginning on our very own doorsteps – has proven in the past to be a steeper climb. The Commission, in setting 19 goals to turn around our economy, emphasized the need for a concerted provincewide effort that moves beyond established local boundaries, political party lines and historical competing interests that can hinder growth opportunities.

We are working to create a long-term action plan that will not end up as one more footnote in Nova Scotia’s lengthy journey in search of better economic outcomes and enhanced well-being for the people in our communities. Nova Scotians will continue to have a say in building the plan, as ongoing engagement across sectors, regions and communities continues. If taking action – individually and collectively – is part of the solution, inclusion in the planning process is critical.

Change is never easy. But if change does not happen, the foundational erosion that is already occurring in Nova Scotia will not only continue, it will likely get worse.

FROM COMMISSION TO COALITION: NEXT STEPS ON THE ROAD TO A NEW NOVA SCOTIA

The One Nova Scotia Commission, under a mandate it received from the provincial government in 2012, released its full report on Feb. 12, 2014. It contains 19 Goals for Transformation to “guide the development of a 10-year action plan for economic transformation and renewal in Nova Scotia.” The goals include population, economic and governance/fiscal targets. The report also defined 12 “Game-Changers,” significant shifts in strategic direction it says are required to create a new attitude and outlook within the province. The game-changers are defined as “different ways of thinking that will be required if the ambitious goals are to be achieved.”

The Commission, chaired by Acadia President Ray Ivany, noted that while the provincial government has a leading role to play in effecting change, success will not be achieved without broad multi-sector commitments and a shift in how Nova Scotians think about their communities.

On June 2, 2014, Premier Stephen McNeil named 15 members to the oneNS Coalition, an all-party, multi-partite group with a mandate to develop the 10-year comprehensive economic development plan. Creation of the Coalition is the government’s response to the first Game-Changer in the commission report, which calls for “A New Politics.” The government role in this endeavour is to lead and manage the provision of public services to Nova Scotians. It has a responsibility to manage well and be accountable. The government has been taking, and will continue to take, action towards the oneNS goals.

The Coalition comprises volunteers who are leaders in their sectors and communities. It is chaired by Premier McNeil and co-chaired by Opposition Leader Jamie Baillie and NDP Leader Maureen MacDonald. The Coalition’s primary role is to develop the 10-year action plan. As the plan is built, the Coalition will engage with Nova Scotians in a number of ways, including by hearing from stakeholders about vanguard programs or change models that could advance the oneNS goals.

But the plan, alone, is not the answer. Nova Scotians must play a role by showing leadership in their sectors, communities, and places of work. The government is likely to take actions that align with the oneNS goals, but it cannot fix all of the problems. Community-based, sector-launched initiatives are more likely to lead to sustainable change, because the models will be built by Nova Scotians. Private-sector leaders, especially those with the capacity to expand their businesses and share their export experience, have a critical role to play.

Of the 19 goals in the Commission report, the final three goals are fully the responsibility of government, relating to fiscal goals and government restructuring, so they have been put aside from the Coalition’s work. The remaining 16 goals, generally dealing with economic, educational and population/workforce issues, have been organized into six areas of focus.

The work and progress under way in these areas – by the private sector, the government and at the community level – are outlined in detail in Appendix 2.

The six areas are:

1. Renewing Education and Our Future
2. Our Universities and NSCC: Co-op, apprenticeship and other opportunities
3. Energizing Entrepreneurship & Innovation
4. Rebuilding Our Trading Economy: Going Global
5. Responsible Development of Our Natural Resource Advantages
6. Adapting to a Changing Demographic: Retaining youth, attracting and retaining immigrants, enhancing workforce participation and aging well

A schedule of meetings with various stakeholders within these areas of focus has been developed. That process began late last summer and will continue into August of this year. Themes of the meetings over the past six months have included Startup Ecosystems and Driving Youth Entrepreneurship, Global Competitiveness and Exports, Youth and International Student Retention, Youth and Social Entrepreneurship, Immigration, Welcoming Communities and Tourism and Workforce Participation.

The Coalition meets monthly, hears from leaders in various sectors and considers exceptional models – some of them already at work in Nova Scotia – in the search for solutions to assist community recovery and bolster provincewide growth. The Coalition has also formed subcommittees of Action Teams that are targeting various sectors and elements of the areas of focus. These teams have been devising proposals for consideration in the 10-year plan. The areas of focus are broad and complex. There is significant work yet to be done.

CHANGE BEGINS HERE: ATTITUDE, BEHAVIOURS, AND CULTURE

This province's challenges have been extensively diagnosed: The poorest economic performance in Canada, an aging population, high dependence on government intervention and limited advancement in innovation and productivity. Yet, Nova Scotia also has tremendous assets, including a wealth of natural resources, a highly educated workforce, a healthy capital region, a strong post-secondary education system and excellent transportation infrastructure assets.

As we move towards action aimed at creating a new economic and social climate, what are our next steps? How can Nova Scotians best respond to the call for "transformational change" in the One Nova Scotia Commission report? Unlocking the full potential of our assets to achieve the one NS goals is our challenge. In order to address the gap between our assets and our most recent outcomes, we must begin by acknowledging the influence of our attitudes, behaviours and culture on these outcomes.

Attitude, behaviours and culture – the ABCs in the Commission report – cannot be defined as single-issue challenges facing Nova Scotia. But these three elements, which have a huge impact on the social and economic fabric of the province, combine to create a pervasive theme. They permeate major issues that require action:

1. Shifting from heavy dependence on government-build programs towards more innovative, self-reliant solutions, and for government to ensure its policies encourage this shift
2. Reform expectations of how business success stories can be created and supported

3. The development of more respect and encouragement for those who undertake entrepreneurial initiatives, and the use of innovation to create unique business models and products
4. Collectively strengthening communities and developing more inclusive attitudes to recognize the potential among all members of our communities
5. Encouraging broader social outlooks that ensure newcomers feel welcomed to our neighbourhoods and our places of work

The Commission report included a series of compelling statements that reinforce the underlying impact of the "ABCs" of Nova Scotia's current social and economic environment:

*"Our challenges ... are embedded in the very structure of the economy after decades of weak private sector growth and perhaps an **over-reliance on government** they are amplified by our **lack of confidence and collective ambition to do better**, and in our **attitudes of mistrust and indifference** with regard to the successes of our entrepreneurs ..."*

The 19 goals “speak to the need for significant changes in attitudes and outlooks across the province.... They are not just directed at government, but need to be seriously considered by all other sectors and the general public.”

*“...the main messages have to do with issues of attitude, shared understanding, and capacities for leadership, collaboration and concerted action among different groups... These are the **critical factors** that will shape the future of our much-loved province.”*

Questioning the attitudes of Nova Scotians leads to sensitive territory.

We have an impressive history of standing together in times of crisis. We are a people with an innate pride of place, with a dramatic capacity to respond in periods of crisis to achieve a goal or overcome a threat. When the chips are down, Nova Scotians stick together. Some of the best-known examples include the aftermath of the Halifax Explosion, the Springhill mining disasters, the Westray Explosion and the hospitality shown to stranded air travelers in the wake of 9/11. Of course, Nova Scotia was home to two of Canada’s most strategic naval bases in both the First World War and Second World War, when battleships and convoys of troop and supply ships set to sea from Halifax Harbour and Sydney Harbour.

There is a new crisis in Nova Scotia that has evolved in a much more gradual, insidious manner. It does not come with an alarm, or the warning blast of a horn. The danger it creates does not threaten our short-term, personal safety, but it has the potential to profoundly undermine this province’s long-term security and the quality of life of our citizens. It’s as though we are the drowsy occupants of a beautiful home built near the edge of a seaside cliff; we have been so mesmerized by the gorgeous view, we’ve failed to notice the creeping threat of erosion that will, as sure as the ocean brings powerful tides to our shoreline, eventually destroy the foundation of our home.

Nova Scotia is a province built by strong, committed individuals, families and communities. Many of us have struggled for years to support new initiatives, adapt to changing economies and adjust to the latest round of political blueprints that promise a better future. What has prevented Nova Scotians from taking up the challenge of change? Part of the problem, the Coalition believes, is that in some cases, existing programs and service structures tend to pit communities, organizations, businesses, investors and individuals against each other.

In that environment, it can be very challenging for sector and community leaders to prevail in supporting the need for change. As a result, carefully considered recommendations from previous reports fall by the wayside.

Nova Scotians become frustrated with our governments, and leaders who have attempted to create change become frustrated by how quickly we revert to past patterns – speaking out against change models that may come too close to our own doorsteps, or fail to protect our “turf.” Voters have a long track record of rewarding parties who provide short-term incentives or promise to maintain – or revert to – the status-quo. But as Nova Scotia’s current demographic and economic realities clearly illustrate, those choices have too often come at the expense of long-term prosperity.

Is it any wonder Nova Scotians may harbour doubts about whether one more economic report, from another group of prominent leaders with good intentions, will amount to significant long-term change?

Meanwhile, we continue to spin our wheels, while attaining the poorest economic growth of any province in Canada since 1990. Our relatively heavy tax rates – at or near the highest levels among Canadian provinces – would be burden enough on top of a struggling economy, even without the addition of the fact that we have the highest percentage of senior citizens of any province.

These three elements combine to create a powerful triple threat that, without significant new directions, will carry our province over that fiscal cliff. If success is to be achieved in rebuilding Nova Scotia’s economy, leaders in all sectors, political parties, institutions and communities will have to step into new territory. How do we know that? Because what we have done in the past has not worked; it has simply left us in a deceptive status-quo environment that is not sustainable.

Over the past 25 years, our per-capita debt tripled to nearly \$16,000, while our net-debt-to-GDP ratio, a measure of our net debt compared to our economic activity, climbed 10 percentage points to hit 38 per cent.

Not only are we worse off economically than we were 25 years ago, but we have fallen even further behind current global trends in international trade, demographic diversity and economic productivity.

A NEW FOUNDATION FOR NOVA SCOTIA

In reviewing the Goals and Game Changers in the oneNS Commission report, the oneNS Coalition has identified three categories of shared priorities among Nova Scotians: attitude, demographics and economic growth. Attempts to improve our demographic and economic prospects must be preceded by a realistic assessment of attitudes – Nova Scotia’s ABCs - and how we can create a more encouraging social and economic growth climate.

Three conditions will be required to create a new foundation that can successfully advance the Commission’s 19 goals over the next decade:

- 1. Broad acceptance among Nova Scotians of the need for change**, and commitments by individuals, communities, business sectors, social enterprise and institutions to participate in an economic and social reform process. Strong, motivated community and sector leaders will play pivotal roles in reinforcing the need to pursue new directions and maintaining support for a united, common agenda.
- 2. Public realization that “the government” cannot fix the economy, it can only set the conditions.** Dependence on government support and solutions has contributed to our economic challenges, by discouraging independence, innovation and entrepreneurial initiative. We need the private sector to lead; we need an entrepreneurial and innovative culture, with a global outlook that leads to stronger export trade. In order for the 10-year comprehensive development plan (CDP) to create sustainable change, Nova Scotians must be involved in building the CDP from the ground up, and then taking action to help support and implement the plan. And government needs to know its role, do it well and to avoid unintended consequences.
- 3. A new structural framework to support the plan’s objectives.** Among the options as the development of the plan moves forward is for the Coalition to request that government put the oneNS goals into legislation. The legislation could include oversight provisions to support and advance the implementation of the 10-year plan.

The overriding objective of a new foundation would be to ensure the 10-year plan does not end up collecting dust on a shelf, as so many previous plans – many of them filled with good ideas and driven by good intentions -- have in the past.

CONCLUSION

The One Nova Scotia Commission report was a call to action directed at all Nova Scotians. Where do you see yourself, your business, your sector and your community fitting into the solution? Will you support and embrace policies and initiatives that will create the changes Nova Scotia needs to thrive and survive, or will you default to protecting our perilous status-quo?

Broad-based action will be required to make transformational change in our province. Everyone has an opportunity to play a role in building Nova Scotia's future. How could the future of your community or sector be helped by your skills, or by a commitment of time or assistance? Could you tutor a struggling child, encourage young parents, motivate a discouraged teenager or mentor a young adult who is attempting to launch a career?

Imagine how strong our communities could become, if we applied our most generous, encouraging and supportive efforts to the struggles and challenges that weaken our neighbourhoods and limit our potential as a province. The goals and game changers outlined in the One Nova Scotia Commission report, which anchor the objectives of the oneNS Coalition, appear to mostly underscore this province's economic and demographic vulnerabilities.

But at their core, many of our struggles and shortcomings can be assisted by approaches and solutions that come from the heart. It's about creating new attitudes, behaviours, and expanding the breadth of our culture: reducing barriers, sharing talents and standing together to build a stronger, more prosperous province. It's about opening doors, giving back, paying it forward and finding strength in numbers.

As efforts to mobilize broad-based actions continue over the coming months, Nova Scotians will be called upon to unite behind a common agenda to build capacities in their communities. The work of the Coalition will continue and the 10-year plan will be developed. Hopefully, voices of Nova Scotians will be heard speaking out in support of our work, and a brighter future that can only be realized if we embrace a collective mandate for change.

This province is filled with wonderful people. Every neighbourhood has them. In many ways, we are surely among the wealthiest of Canadians. Imagine if we could mobilize that abundance into a collective force of engaged citizens who empower our communities, broaden our outlooks and grow our Nova Scotia family.

Imagine the prosperous future we could construct for the next generation of Nova Scotia's children. If we seize the opportunities to create sustainable changes in our province, just imagine how rich in spirit we could become.

APPENDICES:

1. The Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy – 19 goals.
2. Collective Impact – a potential model on which change may be built.
3. Starting at Home – Some of the examples of Nova Scotians taking action now.

APPENDIX 1

THE REPORT OF THE NOVA SCOTIA COMMISSION ON BUILDING OUR NEW ECONOMY – THE 19 GOALS.

Demographics Goals

1. Inter-provincial Migration: a net gain of 1,000 working age persons per year (reversing a trend that sees an average of 800 people leave annually).
2. International Immigration: triple the average number of new international immigrants annually to 7,000.
3. Retention of International Students: retain 10 per cent of foreign students who complete studies in Nova Scotia annually (double current rate).

Economic Growth Goals

4. Business Start-ups: increase the number of new business starts to 4,200 annually (50 per cent more than current).
5. Value of Exports: increase value of international and inter-provincial to \$20 billion (50 per cent more than current).
6. Export Trade: increase the number of Nova Scotia firms participating in export trade by 50% over the current level of 850.
7. Labour Force: raise participation to Canadian rate or higher (bringing more than 25,000 Nova Scotians into permanent attachment to the labour market).
8. First Nations and African Nova Scotians Employment Rates: raise to parity with provincial average.
9. Youth Unemployment: lower rate to national average.

10. Post-Secondary Education and Training: increase population of adults who complete a certificate, diploma, degree, and/or apprenticeship completion from 55 to 65 per cent.
11. Universities R&D: double research funding to \$360M annually.
12. R&D Partnerships: double number of R&D partnerships between industry and post-secondary institutions to 2,000 per year.
13. Venture Capital: increase per capita investment to national average (up at least 60 per cent).
14. Tourism Expansion: revenues from Nova Scotia's leading service sector export will reach \$4 billion (nearly double current).
15. Fisheries and Agriculture Exports: double export value of both on a sustainable basis.
16. Domestic Markets for Agricultural Products: double the value of products produced and consumed in Nova Scotia.

Goals Under Government Purview

17. Leading Long-Term Planning Process: the province, in collaboration with municipalities, will create a plan by the end of 2015 to meet these goals.
18. Administration: provincial review of municipal government and regional service structures.
19. Fiscal Health: decrease Nova Scotia's net debt to GDP ratio will drop by nearly 7 points to 30 per cent or less.

APPENDIX 2

THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT MODEL

Collective Impact is a model that has been used with success to address complex problems that require stakeholders to unite behind a common agenda, and to work together over a sustained period to implement solutions. It is a model that requires that communities and organizations that may have a history of competing interests to put aside their differences to work for the common good of a greater cause.

Key principles of Collective Impact include the concept of sharing credit, rather than seeking to take credit, and applying silver buckshot to complex problems, rather than seeking a silver-bullet solution.

Under a Collective Impact model, neighbouring communities would cheer each other's successes, rather than resenting them. Assets within individual communities would be celebrated and promoted regionally.

Many of the challenges defined in the oneNS Commission report have developed over time and do not have clear pathways to solutions. In understanding that many of these problems are **complex**, do not have traditional solutions and need long term, non-traditional approaches to solving them, we can find those **complicated** parts that can be clearly defined and tackled right away. Within each area of focus, there are two systems running in tandem: The long-term, complex challenges that require *sustained focus* and the *critical wins* nestled within each one that can be acted on now.

An approach we have been studying is "Collective Impact." Collective Impact is almost exactly what it sounds like. It is a framework that brings together a group of stakeholders from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific, complex social problem. The framework provides a structured form of collaboration in which stakeholders make tangible commitments to working towards a solution. It has been used many times with success, in a variety of jurisdictions including Scotland, Calgary's

Welcoming Communities Initiative, and in a dozen cities in the United States as a cradle-to-career continuum under a program known as StriveTogether.

Collective Impact Initiatives must meet five criteria:

1. **Common Agenda:** All participating organizations (government, non-profits, businesses, community, etc.) have a shared vision, a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it.
2. **Shared Measurement System:** Agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported with a short list of key indicators across all participating organizations
3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Engagement of a diverse set of stakeholders, typically across sectors, coordinating a set of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
4. **Continuous Communication:** Frequent communications over a long period of time among key players within and across organizations, to build trust and inform ongoing learning and adaptation of strategy
5. **Backbone Organization:** Ongoing support provided by an independent staff dedicated to the initiative by: Guiding Vision and Strategy; Supporting Aligned Activity; Establishing Shared Measurement Practices; Building Public Will; Advance Policy; and Mobilizing Funding. It is important to recognize that a Collective impact initiative must build on any existing collaborative efforts already underway to address the issue. Collective impact efforts are most effective when they build from what already exists; honouring current efforts and engaging established organizations, rather than creating an entirely new from scratch.

APPENDIX 3

STARTING AT HOME

The business of change, and mobilizing action, will require involvement of business sectors, institutions and government leadership. But the powers of motivated, individual Nova Scotians, and the roles they can play in their home communities, will be crucial to the success of the oneNS plan.

In recognition of the many community and individual leaders who are already mobilizing to create change in their communities, we offer these three examples in salute to the many dedicated Nova Scotians who are “Choosing Now.” They are taking action now to renew our economic outlook from the ground up.

Chebucto Connections – This longstanding Spryfield-based registered charity is one of the most involved and successful broad community support models in Nova Scotia. It has been operating for decades, driven by a series of involved and committed leaders determined to assist families and individuals in need. Its programs include a family needs task force, mental health support, a high school tutoring program and literacy, among others. In partnership with public and private support, it oversees the delivery of programs that are championed by several hundred community volunteers. It has made a five-year commitment to improve school readiness for children in the community – well ahead of the reports published last fall that indicated one in four children in Nova Scotia arrives at school with a vulnerability likely to impede learning. (chebuctoconnections.ca)

Is this a model that could be created in your community? Are there children and families in need in your neighbourhood who could benefit from programs such as these? Who might step forward to lead change in your community?

Pictou 20/20 – A group of five determined women in Pictou County came together last summer to organize a movement that led to the creation of the organization Pictou 20/20. In October, in response to a community and social media campaign, more than 200 people showed up at an event last fall to discuss strategies aimed at building a brighter economic future in the region. The strategy will focus on positive elements and shared strengths among communities in the region, increasing inclusiveness and welcoming newcomers. (To see how this initiative was launched, visit their Facebook Page: Pictou 2020, and check out their YouTube video.)

Is this a model that could work in your community? Could you be a leader to help mobilize motivated citizens to create a Collective Impact initiative in your community?

Now Lunenburg County – In May of last year, five committed citizens joined forces in Lunenburg County in response to the findings of the One NS Commission. With a handful of modest private donations, Now Lunenburg County began organizing citizens interested in taking action to address economic and demographic challenges in its region. With participants ranging from 13 to 80 years of age, the group has grown to include 270, including a core team and project leads who have initiated eight programs aimed at addressing areas of concern. The approach of this organization is to initiate action, even if the design of its initiatives is imperfect, and learn along the way, rather than sitting back and waiting for others to take action. (www.nowlunenburgcounty.com)

Are there citizens in your community who are attempting to create a local, community-based network of volunteers interested in promoting community growth and youth retention efforts? Do you support their efforts? Could they benefit from your involvement?

Greater Halifax Partnership – The GHP Connector program is a referral support program that helps immigrants, international students and talented young workers to build a professional network and connect with job opportunities and potential employers. The Cape Breton Partnership is in the process of designing a similar program in that region.

Is this an initiative that could help to connect young workers in your community to businesses looking for skilled employees? Could you – or a private sector organization in your region - assist in launching a program like this?

Every Nova Scotian - Individuals, too, can play a role in supporting existing efforts that strengthen their communities. If you are interested enough to read this report, perhaps you have a skill that could benefit families or children in your hometown. Could you tutor a young student who needs help with reading, or math? Do you have business skills that could help a fledgling entrepreneur, or a post-secondary student studying commerce? If you have international trade or export experience, could you serve as a mentor to another business in your region seeking to grow its export opportunities?

Are there new families in your community? Are they included in community events, or invited for coffee? If they are new immigrants, has your community made any efforts to make sure they feel welcome?

An international student told members of the oneNS Coalition last fall, “Immigrants aren’t just looking for a job; they are looking for a life.”

The power of an individual, or a small group of people, committed to change should never be underestimated. Craig and Marc Kielburger, the Ontario brothers who are at the core of the Free the Children global relief effort, are testament to that reality. Craig launched the movement against international child poverty when he was 12 years old, after watching a news report of the murder of a 12-year old child activist against child labour in Pakistan. He began with a handful of classmates; today it is a global movement that builds social empowerment among children with a capacity to contribute, while providing relief to many of those who are suffering. The Kielburgers also launched the international We Day events, with Halifax hosting the Atlantic event over the past two years.

Many of the volunteer groups that longtime roots in Nova Scotia’s communities were launched when a handful of people stood up and decided to help. Today, Nova Scotians have been called to action to address a series of more challenging problems, including youth and immigrant retention, career options for marginalized workers, education supports and school-readiness for Primary-aged students.

The most sustainable solutions will require leadership from committed Nova Scotians who are willing to stand up on behalf of the future of our province.