



Executive Summary

October 5, 2020

Reimagining the Future for Nova Scotians

2020 has brought its share of challenges. The combination of COVID-19, the Nova Scotia massacre and the imperative to attend to the crises of racism and colonialism demand we find a path forward together. All Nova Scotians have confronted the limits of our supply chain and procurement policies; the challenges of inadequate technology platforms; the need to re-train and re-tool for work; the fractures in our structures for caring for one another; the limits on our ability to prevent loss and casualties; and the constraints on our ability to engage with each other and the world. As Nova Scotians, we are interconnected and our social and economic infrastructure has some frailties.

In light of these challenges, Dalhousie's Faculty of Management initiated a project that brought together academic experts at Dalhousie and from around the province, pairing them with other thoughtful members of our communities, to ask: what does a reimagined future for Nova Scotia look like? Together, we commit to inspiring new ways of looking at our collective issues and embracing our collective responsibilities.

Nova Scotians are close-knit. We engage in remarkably similar activities and we care about each other's well-being (whether social, political, health, environmental or ecological). Unlike other recovery models, which focus on the way industries engage with economies, and which might be generalizable across jurisdictions, our approach to a reimagined Nova Scotia centres on the human experience and attends to what makes us unique as Nova Scotians. The key to recovery is ensuring that each of us is able to get back to engaging constructively with each other and the world around us in a way that draws lessons from our experiences to make our social and economic infrastructure stronger. When we confront similar challenges in the future, we will be more resilient and creative.

The #reimagine project is built around five aspects of daily life. For each aspect, a research and practice team drew on the talents of members of Nova Scotia's business, government and non-profit sectors. Each team has produced a brief report that: (1) situates the team's recommendations in their Nova Scotia context; (2) identifies the key challenges to that aspect of life and the frictions (e.g. regulations, lack of networks, attitudes) that previously prevented innovation and new ways of thinking; (3) explains transformations that occurred as a result of COVID-19 that should be preserved and enhanced in the post-COVID-19 environment; (4) considers opportunities that were previously dismissed as unrealistic; and (5) offers recommendations for public, not-for-profit and private sector actors and institutions to ensure that insights and possibilities for Nova Scotia in a post-COVID-19 environment are fully realized. In each case, the team was attentive to the roles for technology, innovation, inclusion, community and connection. Our work builds on the Ivany report.

The broad philosophy of this project is to put talented people in a room with access to the best research and data available and see what opportunities are possible for Nova Scotia and Nova Scotians. It is not designed as an academic research project; rather, it is a record of an extended conversation between engaged people from a range of disciplines and backgrounds. We hope our project inspires you. We believe that Nova Scotia should chart its own unique path forward; a path that is not about "returning to normal" but rather "turning to better".

Brief Description of the Reports

Each report offers insights, reflections and recommendations set in context. That richer analysis is designed to spark reflection, dialogue and action.

Support and Protect

The “Protect and Support” report discusses the impacts of, and responses to, the pandemic, mass shooting and police brutality (in light of the recent Black Lives Matter protests) in Nova Scotia, as they relate to supportive and protective services including libraries, child protection, child care, income, housing, justice, public safety and alleviation of poverty. While there have been some positive innovations, overall, responses have been tailored in a way that disregards the needs of already marginalized groups. This illustrates not only that structural discrimination is alive and well, but also that it constitutes a significant barrier to change. The recommendations provided in the report are intended to start the conversation for a reimagined Nova Scotia, where support and protection are consistently provided to those who need it most, so the whole community can thrive.

Care and Connect

The Care and Connect team investigated how the formal and informal mechanisms of caring and connecting have been shaped by Nova Scotia's experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic, the community tragedies of 2020, and the emergence of institutional racism issues into the broad public conversation. The team assimilated the opinions, insights and experiences from an interdisciplinary group of healthcare experts and identified the emergent and prevailing community perceptions and societal challenges faced by Nova Scotians in the first half of 2020 as well as emergent opportunities and possibilities for effectively addressing these challenges. We recommend the province focus its recovery efforts on pragmatic innovations for service provisioning. Due attention must be paid to the needs of vulnerable populations as we work together to mitigate our ongoing challenges and discover better ways to care for and connect and to enhance resilience.

Learn and Work

Learning and work are tightly intertwined. COVID-19 has wrought unprecedented and rapid changes for organizations, industries and institutions, presenting challenges and new opportunities. In Nova Scotia, we need to change and adapt before we can take advantage of these opportunities.

A quick shift to online learning and working has highlighted the digital literacy gap in the province, making it impossible for all to equally share in the advantages of the new digital realm. Linked to this, Nova Scotia needs more people with the digital skills that will enable companies to adopt widespread digital transformation. Restricted access to publicly collected data in the province remains an impediment to realizing the benefits of data-driven decision-making in our new learning and working environments. This report presents context and recommendations to address issues of digital literacy and inclusion; harness data as a public asset for policy, decision-making and education; and significantly grow the digital talent pool.

Create and Commemorate

Given the power of the arts to build connection and community, we see an important role for creative communities in reimagining Nova Scotia/Mi'kma'ki. Artists can help lead the healing from the trauma of the Portapique massacre, and art works can support our efforts to hold on to empathy and humanity in a time of social distancing. Art installations can respect and revitalize sites important to communities harmed by colonialism, creating opportunities for reconciliation and forgiveness. We call on Dalhousie to support the creative, commemorative work of artists in specific ways, including the renovation of an open-air performance venue on campus, a lecture series on art and trauma, and the creation of artist retreats.

Cultivate and Consume

Recent data portrays Nova Scotia as one of the most food-insecure provinces in the country. With an abundance of agricultural and ocean resources, it seems obvious that we can do better. The global pandemic has illuminated the weaknesses of the province's food system and both producers and consumers are left frustrated, weary and concerned for our vulnerable position.

Tackling such a diverse and complex problem requires broad stakeholder engagement. This initiative made a concerted effort to engage with stakeholders in a short time to learn about the food security experience of Nova Scotians during the pandemic. Themes emerged from the study and thought-leaders provided recommendations on how we might better move forward. We recommend that the entire food system come together to develop strategies for innovation, investment and policy reform that will strengthen our ability to both produce the food we need and improve access for those who need it.