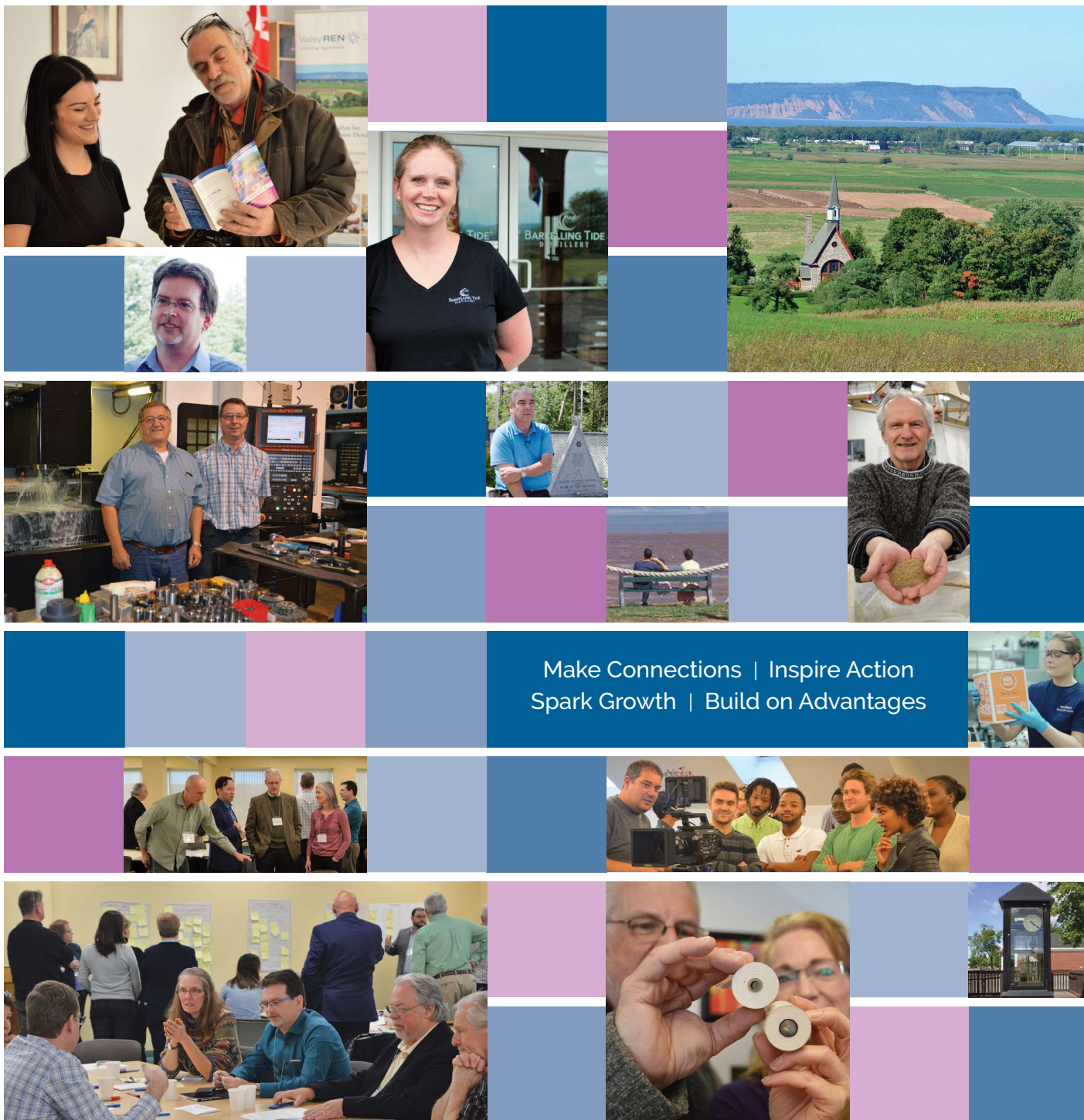


UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES

Valley **REN** 

www.valleyren.ca

ANNUAL REPORT 2017

Our Team



The Valley Regional Enterprise Network is a catalyst for economic development in the Annapolis Valley. Having built the tools and hired a strong, dedicated team, we're now fully operational with a focus to deliver on strategy. The Liaison and Oversight Committee ensures that we are fiscally prudent and accountable. The Board of Directors provides strategic leadership, and CEO Kelly Ells and her team turn the strategy into action.



ANNA ALLEN

Chair, Liaison and Oversight Committee

As the new Chair, I'm very much looking forward to working with the Liaison and Oversight Committee and connecting regularly with the Board of Directors. We're looking forward to a session in July to review the strategic plan and clarify our vision of what we want to achieve. As we work together, we'll be looking for activity to bring strong economic development to the Valley, not only by encouraging new businesses but by supporting our existing businesses and seeing them flourish.



SCOTT ROBERTS

Chair, Board of Directors

The Valley Regional Enterprise Network Board is pleased to present this report to our community stakeholders and thank everyone for the support we've received throughout the year. The work of the Valley REN is to capture information about our strengths as a region and provide this directly to potential new businesses and share it widely with our community partners. Valley business people have shared their information and insight with us as we build our story about how wonderful this place is to live, work, and grow. We think there's tremendous potential to do more of everything.



KELLY RM ELLS

Chief Executive Officer

We are excited about our accomplishments this year and look forward to an even stronger year ahead. By engaging with Valley businesses, individually and through Sector Table Workshops, we have refined our priorities. Through our partnerships, expanded communications, and targeted marketing campaign, we're reaching more businesses and sending a message to the world that the Annapolis Valley is a great place to live, work, and grow. In the coming year, we'll build on our **BusinessNow** program and step up activities for attracting investment to the Annapolis Valley.

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The Valley Regional Enterprise Network (Valley REN) is an inter-municipal corporation with a volunteer Board drawn from the private sector. With a strategic focus on business, we guide regional economic development and foster business growth and investment. Our organization is funded by and accountable to our municipal and First Nation partners and the Province.

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Audited financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2017, show where our funds come from and how we use them.

Our Vision

Communities working together to create a prosperous region

Our Mission

To guide and navigate regional economic development while providing support to businesses; operating as a connector among economic development partners; supporting business growth and retention; and providing regional leadership on economic priorities

Core Values

Community | Integrity | Respect
Excellence | Trust

“Connecting and communicating with the Valley REN has been easy and open. Getting to know the people has been very worthwhile.”

Howard Selig
General Manager
Valley Flaxflour Limited

Our History



The Nova Scotia Regional Enterprise Network model leads regional economic development in the province. RENs view economic development through a business lens as they tackle issues of the Ivany Report agenda to strengthen our economy.

In 2014, as part of its economic strategy, the Province of Nova Scotia adopted a program to form six Regional Enterprise Networks (RENs) to grow the economy outside of Halifax Regional Municipality. The RENs collaborate with the Province, member municipalities and First Nation partners, and the business community to create winning conditions for economic development. Led by a volunteer Board of Directors with extensive business experience, each REN has a mandate to:

1

develop, implement and monitor a regional economic development strategy consistent with provincial and regional economic development priorities

2

cultivate close working relationships with the business community to support the development and attraction of new businesses and to retain and expand existing businesses

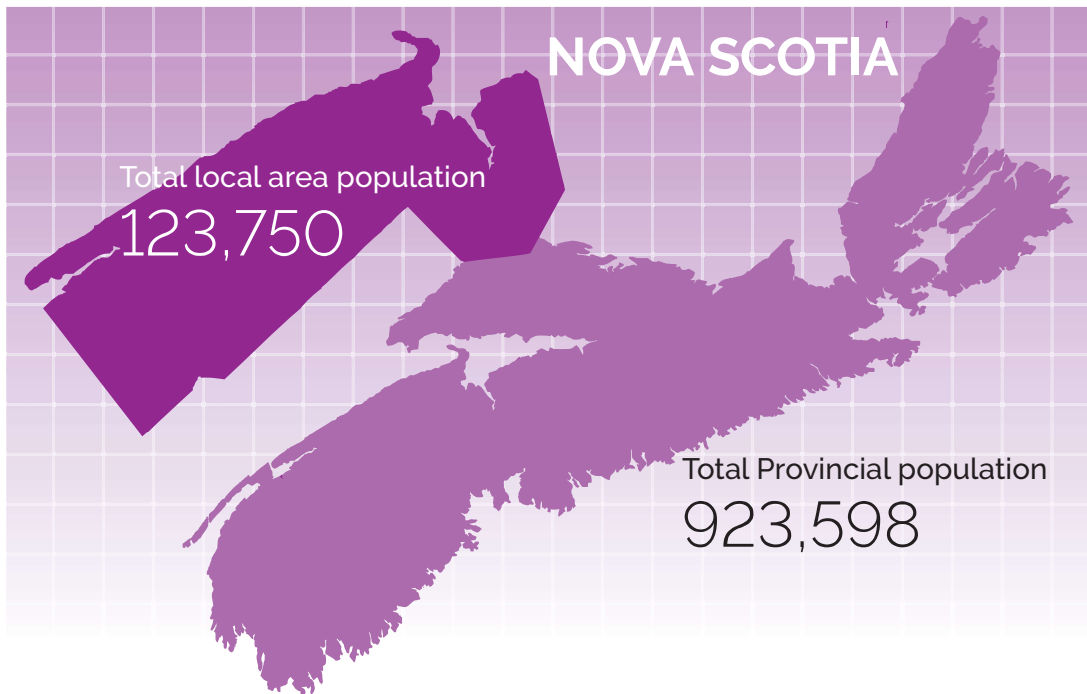
3

inform partners and stakeholders about local business-climate conditions as well as regional challenges and opportunities

As of March 31, 2017, five of six RENs were operational: Cape Breton, Eastern Strait, South Shore, Valley, and Western. The Valley REN was the first to incorporate in March 2014 under the Municipal Government Act. Our current partnership comprises Glooscap First Nation, seven municipalities (County of Kings, the District of West Hants and the Towns of Berwick, Kentville, Middleton, Windsor and Wolfville) and the Province of Nova Scotia.



Annapolis Valley AT A GLANCE



13.4%

The Annapolis Valley covers over 6,500 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 123,750 people or 13.4% of the provincial total.

"It was apparent that their work had paid off, because it was an amazing cross-section of people who represented the true diversity of the local economy."

Valley REN went to great lengths to engage the right people for the Sector Table Workshop. Emily Konrath personally contacted and interviewed about 100 people – I've never encountered that anywhere. Once we got into the session, it was apparent that their work had paid off, because it was an amazing cross-section of people who represented the true diversity of the local economy. And not just people who were tangentially involved in the various sectors. These were the leaders from each of those sectors. The work they had done speaks to what the Valley REN is about. They made my job easy.

Andy Horsnell

Co-founder of Common Good Solutions

"The key thing about the Valley REN is that now we have an organization positioned between government and Valley businesses that is proactively working to rebuild local and rural economies. And we are seeing outcomes with the REN."

One of FarmWorks' clients has eight full-time employees and millions of dollars in sales each year. They told us that if it hadn't been for FarmWorks stepping in at three crucial times, they would not be where they are. We're showing that it is possible to grow these businesses. We are proving that careful, strategic investment in all of the sectors can make a significant difference.

Linda Best

Founding member and a director of FarmWorks Investment Co-operative



2017

Valley **REN**



Regional
Enterprise Network

Highlights of 2016–17



In the first year of our three-year strategy, we created tools necessary to fulfill our mandate. We advanced economic development in our region through communications, marketing, sector development, and *BusinessNow* services.

Website and Communications

The Valley REN website was launched in August 2016. Its primary function is to promote the Valley region as a place to invest, live, and grow your business. Already the numbers of visitors to the site have exceeded our expectations. Among its resources is the Knowledge Suite, which includes regional and provincial reports, business insights, Sector Table reports, links to our Valley communities, and blog and newsletter archives. Rachel Brighton leads communications for the Valley REN.

Sector Teams

We work with businesses in five strategic sectors: tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, information and communications technologies (ICT), and sustainable energy. Our goal in each sector is to identify actions that will unlock opportunities for collaboration and innovation, leading to economic growth. Our December 2016 Sector Table Workshop involved about 70 business leaders from all five sectors. The post-workshop report outlined the key opportunities and challenges facing the sectors, which we are using to plan our work for 2017–18. Emily Konrath leads sector development for the Valley REN.

Promote the Annapolis Valley

Besides promoting the Valley REN region on our website, we worked in partnership with the Valley Business Leaders' Initiative to launch our *Live, Work, Grow* television and digital media campaign. Running from July to December 2016, the digital campaign had more than one million impressions, with more than 3,500 click-throughs and almost 300 form-fills. As well, we launched our *Opportunities Now!* Twitter account to promote opportunities for investment, business growth and employment in the Annapolis Valley. We also teamed up with the Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce to promote the region at the Boston Globe Travel Show.

Business Retention and Expansion

Through our *BusinessNow* program, we're building relationships with businesses in the Annapolis Valley and providing support and referrals to a network of business resources. This program also helps us identify strengths and systemic areas of concern in the region. To expand on the information we are gathering, we have conducted a business climate study, receiving responses from more than 135 local businesses. James Schofield leads the *BusinessNow* program and is the Valley REN's primary point of contact for businesses.

Business Directory

The Business Directory was built as part of our website project. It is on our website with about 100 businesses listed. Now that we've created the tool, we'll be populating the directory through 2017–18.

Investment Readiness

A big part of our Investment Readiness work is collecting and collating information so it is readily available. A soft launch of our Land and Asset Database, branded "Invest in Annapolis Valley," is taking place at this year's AGM. The database's Point Assets are about 50% complete. For the Property Assets, we are still collecting data and preparing it for entry.

"The ability of the REN to bring together business with those resources and in turn help them advance and prosper in the Annapolis Valley is a wonderful partnership that I hope will continue for many years ahead."

Over the past year I have had several opportunities to use the resources of the Valley REN. I have received many referrals from the *BusinessNow* program to employers in need of assistance. I have participated in the regional employer engagement meetings with the Valley REN, which have provided many opportunities for the sharing of information and best practices in the Valley. I have also attended events organized by the Valley REN that were of assistance to business owners in the area and allowed for some great networking and referral opportunities to our own organization. Thank you for the collaborations; it has been my pleasure to have this resource so readily available

Deb Kendall

*Employer Engagement Specialist
Nova Scotia Works – PeopleWorx*

Other Initiatives

Establishing excellent partnerships is part of the Valley REN strategy. As we co-operate with business associations, social enterprises and post-secondary institutions, we leverage their resources, and ours, to achieve common goals. The strength of this approach was displayed at our Partnership Forum for Economic Development in the Valley Region.

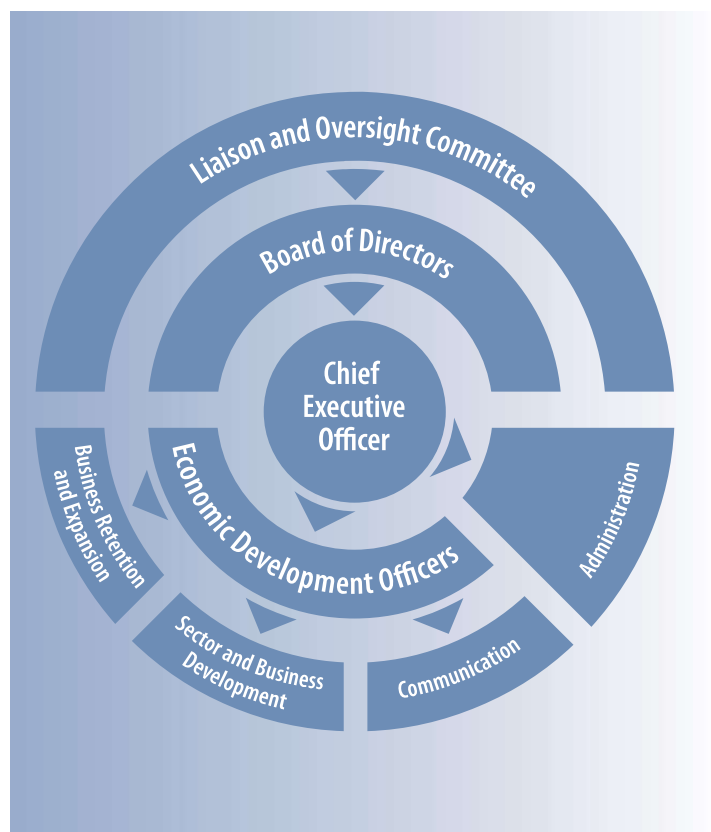
The Valley REN hosted and co-hosted many other targeted events to facilitate connections and collaboration among businesses in our region. Through our activities, we reached more than 300 local businesses, providing expert information to help them grow.

Our partners in these events include Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce; the Nova Scotia division of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters; Devour! The Food Film; Nova Scotia Community College; Acadia University Co-operative Education; i-Valley; the Community Sector Council of Nova Scotia; and Innovacorp.

For 2016–17, the Valley REN's mandate was to carry out the following major projects:

- Launch our website and other elements of the communication strategy
- Set up sector teams in five core economic sectors
- Promote the Annapolis Valley as a place to live, work and invest
- Establish a Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) program
- Create a centralized Valley business directory
- Enhance the region's investment readiness

REN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



**A welcoming
community
that is open
for business**

"We are working to change the conversation from being a 'have not' province and region to being recognized as a welcoming community that is open for business."

Kelly RM Ells

Valley REN Chief Executive Officer

Our Mandate for 2017–18



The Valley REN is working to actively develop and promote business success in the Annapolis Valley. More business activity will lead to an increased tax base, better amenities and services, and more employment opportunities for our youth. It will make our region a more attractive place to live.

Our actions support the OneNS economic goals articulated in the *Report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy* (The 'Ivany' Report) and in the *One Nova Scotia Coalition Collaborative Action Plan*. Our actions are also aligned with OneNS goals for inter-provincial migration, international immigration, retention of international students, new business start-ups, exports, labour force participation and employment, and tourism, fisheries and agriculture.



Economic prosperity in the Annapolis Valley is the guidepost for the Valley REN. For this second year of our three-year Regional Economic Development Strategy, our work plan will focus on four priorities:

- Business Retention
- Business Attraction
- Stronger Partnerships
- Effective Communications

Increasing our strength in these key areas will pay dividends for our region economically, culturally and socially.

Business Retention

Our top priority is to create an exemplary economic environment in the Annapolis Valley, compelling for business growth. Business owners tell us what their needs are when they take part in our **BusinessNow** program, which includes visits and follow-up. We work with businesses individually or in groups to address issues and identify ways to remove barriers. The new Business Directory will also encourage business-to-business opportunities.

Business Attraction

A second priority is to promote our region as an excellent place to do business. Promoting our region effectively means keeping a current inventory of assets and opportunities, making those inventories easily accessible, and making investors aware of our offerings. Our tools for attracting investment include our Land and Asset database, community profile, asset inventory and website. Effective communication is also vital.

Partnerships

A third priority is to work with our partners and stakeholders towards common goals

set out in our strategic plan. We participate in and organize events that build awareness and capacity and open up opportunities to work collaboratively. As we bring businesses and stakeholders together, we identify and advance initiatives that will strengthen industry sectors in our region. In turn, these initiatives can help retain and expand businesses in the Annapolis Valley.

Communications

A fourth priority is to communicate effectively to promote our region and to support our region's businesses. Our communication tools include the Valley REN website and its business resources, our newsletter, social media, targeted digital campaigns, and media releases. We share our message in person through our partnerships and collaborations. Through communication, our goals are to champion business growth, retain our talented youth, attract immigrants and quality businesses to the Annapolis Valley, and change the conversation from being a "have not" province and region to being recognized as a welcoming community that is open for business.

Strategic Vision



Strategic Vision

Communities working together to create a prosperous region

Strategic Goals

Workforce Advantage
Strong Local Businesses and Investment Attraction
Infrastructure

Major Focus Areas

PEOPLE

Entrepreneurship
Student Retainment
Immigration

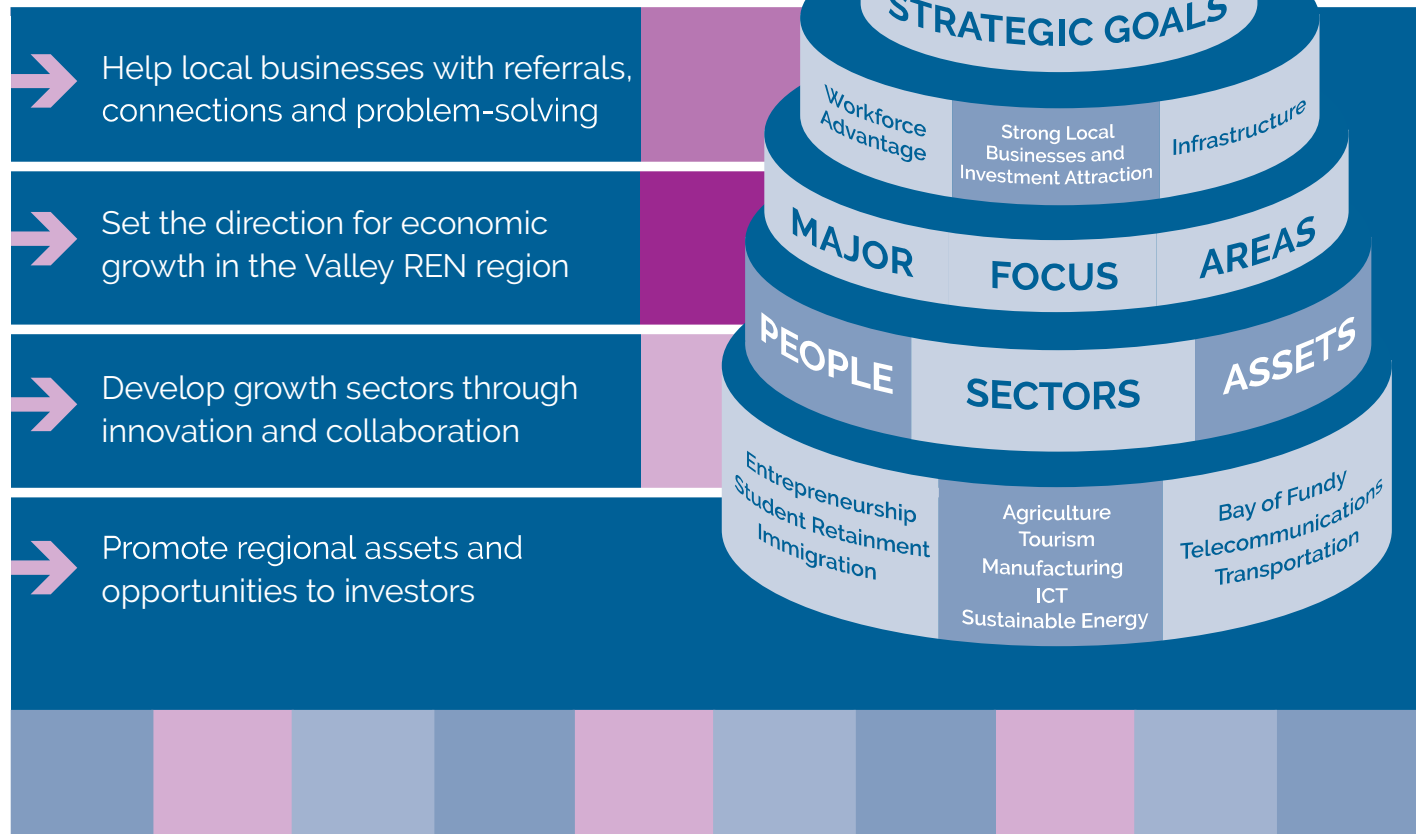
ASSETS

Bay of Fundy
Telecommunications
Transportation

SECTORS

Agriculture
Tourism
Manufacturing

Information and Communications Technologies
Sustainable Energy



Board of Directors



We are grateful for the hard work and dedication of the current Board and of those Board members who have served in the past.

SCOTT ROBERTS

Chair
Executive Director, Communications
and Marketing, Acadia University

MICHELE FASH

Vice-Chair
Director, Business Development,
ACENET

DON ABBEY

President/CEO, Abbey Capital
Management

BARRY GANDER

Co-Founder, i-CANADA

SCOTT HEARN

Vice-President, Real Estate and
Development, Parsons Investments

ALEX JURGENS

President, A-Tack Consulting Ltd.

ROBERT MAHER

Retired Research Scientist, Applied
Geomatics

W. COBY MILNE

Vice-President, Fusion Annapolis Valley

DANIEL MULLEN

Owner/Operator, Aviator Farms Ltd.

DAVID RITCEY

Director, Wealth Management, Scotia
Wealth Management

Governance

Funding model:

50% Province and 50% Municipal/First Nation partners

Liaison and Oversight Committee:

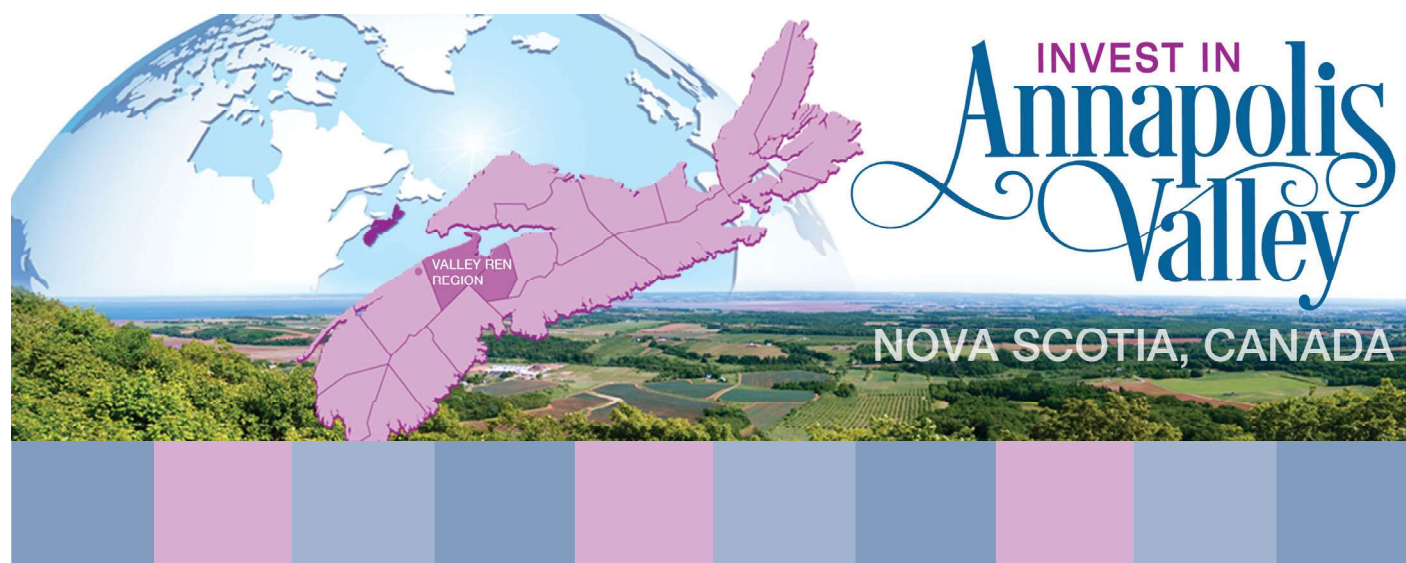
Comprises one member from each partner municipality or
First Nation and two representatives from the Province. The
committee approves the REN's strategy and sets the annual
budget.

Board of Directors:

Comprises 6 to 12 members from the private sector, serving
for terms of one to three years. The Board develops the REN's
strategy and approves the annual business plan. The Board
also hires and manages the CEO.

Chief Executive Officer:

Develops the annual business plan and manages operational
resources.





Regional Enterprise Network

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