

JUNE 2018



# Looking Back, Looking Forward

## -Nova Scotia

*Executive Summary*

REAP TEAM NOVA SCOTIA | COHORT 4

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014, the Nova Scotia government formed a commission, the One Nova Scotia Coalition, to assess the future of the region's economy, and to make recommendations to address any projected decline. The Coalition outlined concerns about the economic future of the province and issued calls to action to inspire growth in the region. Recognizing the critical need to act, a group of provincial leaders began to meet regularly to strategize on overcoming regional challenges and advancing innovation and entrepreneurship. The group learned about the MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program (REAP), read about the successes in other regions, and identified this as an opportunity to advance growth. Chaired by [Dalhousie](#) University president, Richard Florizone, Nova Scotia is the first Canadian jurisdiction to be accepted into the MIT REAP. Building on the opportunity to bring together representatives from each of the REAP stakeholder groups, and using the framework provided by MIT faculty, the team has succeeded in identifying and achieving its primary Must Win Battle (MWB)<sup>1</sup> and has accelerated progress on a number of complimentary MWB's in the region. Driven by a collective vision of a more prosperous region, the Team Nova Scotia used the intensive workshops and access to faculty to gain insights and best practices from peer regions facing similar challenges.

### REGIONAL CONTEXT, REAP FRAMEWORK AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The first phase of the program focused on understanding regional challenges and determining regional comparative advantage. Nova Scotia has a strong, accessible post-secondary system, with 10 universities and an exceptional, province-wide community college system. The region takes pride in its established ocean-based economy and has an emerging culture of innovation. These strengths are contrasted with low GDP growth, high unemployment in rural areas, and heavy reliance on public sector support. During this phase, the core Team Nova Scotia gathered data through a number of formal and informal engagements and conducted a survey of regional entrepreneurs to gauge perception of existing gaps.

Two key themes emerged from the feedback. The first is that, like many island and coastal regions, Nova Scotia's access to the ocean is an advantage. Many of region's most successful entrepreneurs have used this resource, together with local research power, to build innovative, international companies. Internally, Nova Scotia has intellectual capacity in its research institutions, but it also has a geographical advantage of proximity to Boston, New York, Montreal and Toronto. It has unique access to one of the most valuable natural resources in the world and is within striking distance of some of the world's leading ocean researchers.

The second theme is that there is a commitment to building an innovation ecosystem in Nova Scotia, but there has been lack of coordination since local needs differ. There are important initiatives underway, but there isn't an organization that tracks what is happening across the province. This gap in coordination has led to some missed opportunities and duplication of effort. There is multi-sector agreement that strategic coordination will advance significant work on advancing innovation driven entrepreneurship in Nova Scotia.

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<sup>1</sup> MWB is a project that a team chooses to focus on that has the potential to accelerate the ecosystem, sharpen the common agenda and create shared measures. MWBs always align with the overall REAP strategy of the team.

## REGIONAL VISION AND STRATEGY

In advance of determining the MWB, the Team Nova Scotia agreed on a vision of a prosperous Nova Scotia driven by inclusive innovation, entrepreneurship and comparative advantage. The following three broad strategies would inform future MWB decisions:

1. Growth of an innovation-driven entrepreneurial ecosystem and funnel for innovators and entrepreneurs.
2. Catalyze the Atlantic Ocean cluster.
3. Invite Nova Scotians to create and be part of the solution.

## CHOOSING MUST WIN BATTLE(S)

Following analysis of the region's comparative advantage, the Team Nova Scotia determined its first MWB would be, within 12 months, to catalyze a fully funded Private-Public Ocean Cluster with a minimum of \$200M in collaborative Research & Development. Several members of the core Team Nova Scotia have been deeply involved in advancing the cluster work, the strategy was informed and inspired by the REAP framework, and the progress of Team South West Norway in Cohort 3 of MIT REAP. Following a mission to Norway, to meet with Team South West Norway, the core Team Nova Scotia was able to identify common challenges, and best practices for advancing a successful cluster.

The success of the primary MWB is unprecedented in the region. The [Supercluster application](#) was one of only five successful initiatives in Canada. In February 2018, this resulted in an investment of more than \$300M in public and private investment in our region.

After determining the first MWB, Team Nova Scotia had the momentum and resources to succeed, and the opportunity was recognized to advance a second MWB. There is significant enthusiasm and activity supporting innovation and entrepreneurship in Nova Scotia, but the core team Nova Scotia, informed by broader input, recognized a gap in coordination. Learning from other REAP regions in Cohort 4, the group agreed that a second MWB would be to establish "Onside" organization to serve as a backbone organization for the many innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives happening across our region. The expanded Team Nova Scotia agreed on the following mission:

- **Convene** individuals and organizations in a network, building connections and fostering partnership within NS to advance the ecosystem (e.g., Cambridge Network).
- **Connect** efforts within the ecosystem, to other regional and national organizations (e.g., MIT REAP Network; Innovation Norway), and to under-represented groups in Nova Scotia, to facilitate partnerships and share best practices.
- **Communicate** to build broader awareness and understanding of the innovation-driven enterprises (IDE's) ecosystem in Nova Scotia, and to celebrate success.

## COMPLIMENTARY INITIATIVES

The Team Nova Scotia is proud of Nova Scotia's historic success of the Ocean Supercluster and is confident that the backbone organization leadership will succeed in strengthening our ecosystem for inclusive, innovation-driven entrepreneurship. To fully understand the impact of MIT REAP on our region, it is important to also recognize significant progress, accomplished with the help of MIT REAP, in related areas, including:

- Successful expansion of Creative Destruction Lab, a seed-stage program for massively scalable, science-based companies, to Dalhousie University. (May 2017)
- Completion of Emera Ideahub, an advanced engineering incubator/accelerator space with the goal to enhance educational experience and equip students with the creative and entrepreneurial skills, at Dalhousie University (Fall 2018).
- Completion of Centre for Ocean Ventures and Entrepreneurship, world class facility for applied innovation in the ocean sector where start-ups, small and medium-sized companies (SME's) and large companies are housed together to develop ocean technologies. (July, 2018)
- Continued support, and expanded space for Volta, a space for start-ups where they get tools they need to succeed, including programming, networking events, and co-working space.
- Development of an entrepreneurship minor at Dalhousie University.