

Annual Report

UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK'S POND-DESHPANDE CENTRE

May 2025 to April 2026

Photo Credit: UNB Media Services

*Accelerating systems change
for place-based prosperity*



**Change doesn't happen by accident.
It happens when people choose to build a different future.**

At the University of New Brunswick's Pond-Deshpande Centre, our mission is simple though ambitious: **accelerating systems change for place-based prosperity**. We believe communities thrive when they have the tools, networks, leadership, and opportunities to shape their own futures.

This annual report tells the story of how the University of New Brunswick's Pond-Deshpande Centre is helping make that future possible. Over the past year, we have supported entrepreneurs and changemakers, tested new policy ideas, strengthened ecosystems, and created opportunities for people to step into their power and lead change in their communities.

The results captured in these pages are more than a collection of programs, partnerships, and projects. They are evidence **that place-based prosperity is possible when communities invest in their own potential, work across sectors, and tackle challenges with creativity and determination**.

The work is making a difference, and we know the challenges ahead demand even greater ambition. We look forward to taking you through the work we've been doing over the last year!

Photo Credit: UNB Media Services

ECE Lab



Letter from the Acting President and Vice Chancellor

Dear Friends, Partners and Supporters,

At the University of New Brunswick, we believe our responsibility extends beyond our campuses and classrooms. We are deeply committed to advancing the social, economic and cultural well-being of the communities we serve.

UNB's Pond-Deshpande Centre exemplifies that commitment. Through entrepreneurship, social innovation, workforce development, civic innovation and applied research, the Centre brings together students, researchers, businesses, public servants, nonprofit organizations and community leaders to address complex challenges and create new opportunities for growth and prosperity.

Over the past year, the Centre has continued to demonstrate the **power of collaboration**. From strengthening New Brunswick's social economy and supporting entrepreneurs, to advancing health innovation and helping businesses respond to a changing economy, PDC has created spaces for people to connect, learn and take action. Its work reflects a belief that lasting solutions emerge when diverse perspectives come together around a shared purpose.

The Centre also plays an important role within the university itself. Through experiential learning, community-engaged projects and research partnerships, students have opportunities to apply their knowledge in real-world settings while contributing to meaningful work that benefits communities across the province. These experiences prepare graduates to become thoughtful leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs and changemakers.

This impact is rooted in a vision established by entrepreneur-philanthropists Gerry Pond and Gururaj "Desh" Deshpande, whose belief in the power of entrepreneurship, innovation and community leadership continues to shape the Centre's work today.

The recent passing of Gerry Pond marked a profound loss for New Brunswick, the University of New Brunswick and the countless individuals whose lives he touched through his generosity, mentorship and unwavering belief in the potential of people and communities. His leadership and vision helped lay the foundation for an organization dedicated to creating opportunity and advancing prosperity throughout the region.

We are grateful that Desh continues to champion that vision globally through his work in entrepreneurship, innovation and social impact, and recently returned to UNB for his 50th reunion.

Together, Gerry and Desh inspired a model of community-led change that continues to guide the Centre's mission and influence the individuals, organizations and communities creating positive impact through the work highlighted in this report.

On behalf of the University of New Brunswick, I want to thank the many partners, funders, participants, students, alumni, researchers and community leaders who contribute to this work. Your collaboration, creativity and commitment are helping to build stronger communities and a more prosperous future for New Brunswick.

I invite you to explore the stories and impact captured in these pages and to celebrate the many ways people across our province are working together to shape a better future.

Sincerely,

Kathy Wilson, RN, PhD

Acting President and Vice Chancellor | University of New Brunswick



Letter from the Executive Director

Dear PDC ecosystem,

We're living through a period of profound transformation. Communities are navigating economic uncertainty, technological disruption, demographic shifts, climate change and growing pressure on many of the systems we rely on. At the same time, we are seeing remarkable creativity, resilience and determination from people who are stepping forward to build new solutions.

At UNB's PDC, our mission is **accelerating systems change for place-based prosperity**. It is a mission grounded in the belief that lasting solutions emerge when communities are empowered to shape their own futures. Prosperity is not something that happens to a place; it is something built by the people, organizations, institutions and leaders who call that place home.

This year, we saw that principle come to life in many ways. **We strengthened New Brunswick's social economy through Social Enterprise New Brunswick**, helping communities develop new tools, skills and partnerships to address local challenges. **We advanced civic innovation** by convening public servants, researchers and changemakers through the Canadian Open Data & GovMaker Summit. Through Green Horizons, we worked alongside businesses, government and community partners **to explore how sustainability can become a driver of competitiveness and economic resilience**. We invested in workforce development, supported entrepreneurs, challenged ourselves to think differently about health and housing and created opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience solving real-world problems.

Underlying all this work is a belief that the complex challenges facing our communities—from economic transition to workforce shortages, from climate adaptation to health outcomes—cannot be solved by any one organization acting alone. **Progress requires collaboration across sectors, disciplines and perspectives**. It requires experimentation, learning and a willingness to challenge assumptions about how systems operate today and how they could operate tomorrow.

This year also reinforced the importance of people. **We welcomed new team members, expanded our network of associates, deepened our learning culture and continued investing in the next generation of leaders through student placements and experiential learning opportunities.** Our impact is only possible because of the extraordinary individuals who contribute their talent, insight and energy to this work.

We face significant challenges as a society. Yet, I remain convinced that communities have never been more capable of shaping their own future. Across this report, you will find examples of innovators, entrepreneurs, public servants, students, researchers, nonprofit leaders and community members doing exactly that. They are proving that place-based prosperity is a practice.

I am grateful to our funders, partners, participants, alumni, community collaborators and the entire PDC team for their trust and commitment. Together, we are building the relationships, capabilities and systems needed to create a lasting impact.

In closing, **the loss of our cofounder, Gerry Pond, this past July has deeply impacted all of us who were in his ecosystem. We honour him by continuing the work he so deeply cared about: helping our communities, our province, and our region build lasting prosperity. I wrote a tribute to him [here](#).** Gerry, thanks for everything. You will be deeply missed, though your ripples will continue to be felt for generations to come.

Thank you to each of you reading this report, for being part of the PDC ecosystem. I look forward to continuing to build a more prosperous region alongside you.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Paesani, MA, PCC

Executive Director | University of New Brunswick's Pond-Deshpande Centre



A Legacy of Possibility

The **Pond-Deshpande Centre** was founded through the **shared vision of entrepreneur and philanthropist Gerry Pond and technology innovator and philanthropist Gururaj "Desh" Deshpande**. Together, they believed that entrepreneurship, innovation and community leadership could serve as powerful catalysts for creating stronger, more prosperous communities.

Gerry's deep commitment to New Brunswick shaped both the Centre and the countless initiatives he championed throughout his life. He believed passionately in the potential of people and places, and worked tirelessly to create opportunities for entrepreneurs, students, innovators and community leaders to succeed without having to leave the province they called home. **His optimism, generosity and unwavering belief in the potential of New Brunswick helped inspire a generation of changemakers.**

Desh brings a global perspective grounded in the conviction that innovation flourishes when communities are empowered to solve their own challenges. Through his work as a technology entrepreneur, philanthropist and advisor, **he demonstrates how entrepreneurship and social innovation can unlock human potential and create lasting impact.**

The passing of Gerry Pond this summer marked a profound loss for New Brunswick and for the many people whose lives he influenced. **Yet his legacy continues to live on through the organizations he helped build, the leaders he mentored and the vision he championed.** Every entrepreneur supported, every student inspired, every community strengthened and every new idea brought to life through PDC reflects the values he held dear. [Please read our tribute to Gerry here.](#)

The Pond-Deshpande Centre remains guided by the vision that Gerry and Desh shared: **thriving communities are built by people who are empowered to act, innovate, collaborate and lead.** As we look to the future, we honour that legacy by continuing to accelerate systems change for place-based prosperity and by investing in the people and ideas that will help shape a stronger future for New Brunswick and beyond.



Year at a Glance

May 2025 to April 2026

8



PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES DELIVERED

Across social enterprise, civic innovation, workforce development and applied research

3



NEW TEAM MEMBERS ONBOARDED

Growing PDC's capacity to serve New Brunswick's innovation ecosystem

Over 500

PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED

Entrepreneurs, students, community leaders and public servants

10



PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGED

Across sectors and regions of Canada

4



UNB WORK-STUDY INTERNS

4

[VIEW HERE](#)

PROJECT SHOWCASES

1

[VIEW HERE](#)

UNB COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE LAUNCHED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP STUDIES

2



MAJOR CONFERENCES DELIVERED

Impact Highlights

More Than Programs. Building Capacity for Long-Term Change.

Over the past year, the University of New Brunswick's Pond-Deshpande Centre continued to strengthen the people, organizations and systems that contribute to place-based prosperity across New Brunswick and beyond. Through entrepreneurship, social enterprise, workforce development, civic innovation and applied research, PDC connected individuals and institutions that would not otherwise have worked together, creating new pathways for collaboration, learning and action.

Our work helped strengthen New Brunswick's social economy through **Social Enterprise New Brunswick**—check out newly updated site linked here with great resources for social enterprise practitioners.

Across the province, social enterprise is increasingly being recognized as a tool for creating jobs, addressing community challenges and generating lasting social and economic value.

Through **Green Horizons**, we convened businesses, chambers of commerce, policymakers and industry leaders around a shared challenge: how can NB SMEs leverage sustainability for competitiveness in a rapidly changing economy? The initiative demonstrated that sustainability is not simply an environmental imperative, but also a business opportunity that can drive innovation, resilience, market access and long-term prosperity.

PDC also continued to serve as a bridge between research and action. Through **rapid innovation challenges** focused on chronic disease and housing, we brought together entrepreneurs, researchers, practitioners, policymakers

Photo Credit: Madison Tucker

Green Horizon's Decarbonization Dialogue - Bathurst, NB





Immigration & Construction Rapid Innovation Challenge

and people with lived experience to co-design solutions to complex societal challenges. These initiatives demonstrated the power of collaboration across sectors, disciplines and institutions to generate practical responses to issues that no single organization can solve alone.

As a centre embedded within the University of New Brunswick, **we created meaningful opportunities for students to gain real-world experience while contributing to projects that matter.** Through internships, work-integrated learning placements, research collaborations and experiential opportunities, students developed skills, networks and confidence while helping advance solutions in communities across the province.

At the same time, PDC elevated New Brunswick's profile nationally and internationally by convening conferences, contributing to global conversations, publishing practical resources and participating in networks dedicated to entrepreneurship, innovation and systems change. These activities ensure that ideas developed in New Brunswick are shared more broadly while bringing global insights back to the communities we serve.

Together, these efforts are helping build a stronger innovation ecosystem, a more connected social economy and a growing movement of leaders committed to creating thriving communities across New Brunswick and Atlantic Canada.

Team and Talent

PDC grows its team and deepens its learning culture.

This year was one of growth, learning and collaboration for the PDC team. We expanded our capacity by **welcoming three new staff members**, bringing additional expertise to our program delivery, research and community engagement efforts. We grew our network of associates, deepening PDC's ability to connect specialized expertise, diverse perspectives and collaborative capacity to projects across New Brunswick and beyond.

We also invested in the **next generation of changemakers at UNB** by hosting an MBA student through a Business Consulting Project placement and three work-study interns—two in 20-week placements and one in an 8-week placement. These experiential learning opportunities provided students with hands-on experience in social innovation while enabling them to make meaningful contributions to PDC's work and mission.

A commitment to continuous learning shaped our work throughout the year. The team launched an internal LinkedIn Learning series and completed four professional development sessions on project management, storytelling, agentic AI and workplace culture—strengthening our skills, sparking new ideas and helping us stay ahead in a rapidly evolving

We also strengthened PDC's intellectual property portfolio by securing trademarks for both GovMaker and NouLAB, two flagship initiatives that have become recognized platforms for civic and social innovation in New Brunswick and beyond.

Regular connection and strategic reflection remained central to our success. Through biweekly team meetings and quarterly full-day strategy sessions, we created space to collaborate, align priorities, explore new opportunities and strengthen our collective impact across New Brunswick and beyond.

3



NEW STAFF ONBOARDED

4



UNB WORK-STUDY INTERNS

2



UNB CLASSES ENGAGED IN GREEN HORIZONS

4



LINKEDIN LEARNING COURSES COMPLETED AS A STAFF TEAM 11

The Staff Team at UNB's Pond-Deshpande Centre

At **UNB's Pond-Deshpande Centre**, our team works to **catalyze social innovation, foster collaborative cross-sector partnerships, and advance an inclusive, equitable economy for New Brunswick and Atlantic Canada**. Guided by our core values of transparency, equity, boldness, trust, and collaboration, our multi-disciplinary team brings **diverse expertise** to turn **research, policy, and community insights** into lasting impact:

Vanessa Paesani, Executive Director: Leads PDC's strategic vision, drawing on 15+ years of social impact leadership to advance inclusive workforce development, civic innovation, and systemic economic change.

Simon Marmura Brown, Strategic Director - Research & Knowledge Mobilization: Translates research, policy analysis, and community insights into evidence-based action for economic equity and social infrastructure.

Sarah Cormier, Operations & Finance Officer: Ensures PDC's operational excellence and financial health since 2016, managing contracts, budget processes, UNB organizational alignment, and administrative frameworks.

Jasmeet Singh Narula, Project Coordinator: Coordinates stakeholder alignment, logistics, and event delivery across PDC's project portfolio, leveraging a decade of background in development finance and corporate banking.

Madison Tucker, Communications & Events Officer: Drives strategic communications, visual storytelling, and community engagement to elevate regional changemakers and amplify PDC's core initiatives.

Discover the full circle of changemakers and experts driving our mission forward on our [About page](#), where you can view our valued **Associates**.

Photo Credit: UNB Media Services





Civic Innovation: Canadian Open Data & GovMaker Summit 2025

Connecting public servants, civic innovators, researchers and community leaders to shape the future of government.

PDC partnered with the **Canadian Open Data Society** to co-host the 2025 **Canadian Open Data & GovMaker Summit** in November 2025, bringing together participants from across Canada to explore open government, digital transformation, civic technology and public value.

The summit combined the long-standing GovMaker conference with Canada's premier open data event, creating a unique space for cross-sector collaboration, learning and innovation. Through workshops, panel discussions and networking opportunities, participants shared ideas and developed solutions to some of the most pressing challenges facing the public sector today.

PDC also secured a trademark for the GovMaker brand, reinforcing its role as a recognized platform for civic innovation and public sector transformation.

>125

GOVMAKER PARTICIPANTS

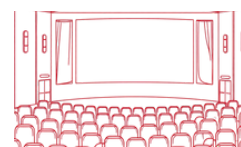
>75

SPEAKERS



>50

SESSIONS DELIVERED



GNB

PRESENTING SPONSORSHIP

Photo Credit: UNB Media Services

Canadian Open Data & GovMaker Summit





Workforce Development

Building the talent, leadership and knowledge needed for a more just and prosperous future.

This year, PDC advanced workforce development through initiatives that expanded access to opportunity and strengthened key sectors. Through **WIN-VC (Women and Non-Binary Impact Network for Venture Capital)**, we supported women across Atlantic Canada in developing the skills, networks and confidence to engage with venture capital as founders through Investor Q&A. A companion podcast series helped shine a light on diverse pathways into entrepreneurship and investment, contributing to a more inclusive innovation economy.

Through the **Future Skills Centre-funded ECE Driving Insights initiative**, PDC collaborated with Indigenous partners, **All In Agency** and sector stakeholders to turn research into action. Building on existing workforce insights, the project produced videos, action packs and practical resources to help employers, educators and communities address workforce challenges in the early childhood education sector. By focusing on knowledge mobilization, ECE Driving Insights helped ensure that evidence informed action where it matters most.

**VISIT OUR WIN-VC
PAGE**

**VISIT OUR ECE
PAGE**

20



WIN-VC PARTICIPANTS

50



**ECE SECTOR MEMBERS
ENGAGED**

8



PODCAST EPISODES

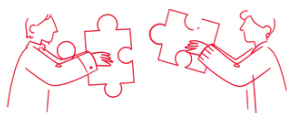
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**PROTOTYPE ACTION PACKS
PRODUCED**

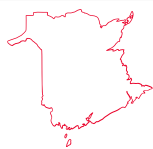
Social Enterprise New Brunswick

3rd



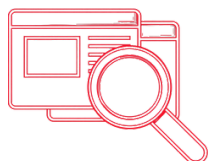
**SOCIAL ENTERPRISE
SYMPOSIUM CONVENED**

24



**CAPACITY-BUILDING SESSIONS
DELIVERED ACROSS ALL 12
REGIONAL SERVICE
COMMISSIONS**

2



**NEW BILINGUAL PRACTITIONER
TOOLKIT PUBLISHED & WEBSITE
UPDATED**

Growing the movement for an economy that creates both prosperity and impact.

Through **Social Enterprise New Brunswick (SENB)**, PDC continued to strengthen the infrastructure, skills and networks needed for a thriving social economy. This year, we developed a new practitioner toolkit, supported social enterprises at multiple stages of growth and partnered with the 12 Regional Service Commissions to deliver training for their staff and community leaders on social enterprise development and community-driven economic solutions.

SENB also convened entrepreneurs, nonprofit leaders, public servants and changemakers who are using innovative business models to address social and environmental challenges while generating economic value. The year culminated in the successful delivery of the **third annual Social Enterprise Excellence Symposium in May**, bringing together practitioners from across the province to share ideas, celebrate achievements and accelerate the growth of New Brunswick's social economy.

By building local capacity, strengthening regional networks and fostering collaboration across sectors, SENB is helping communities turn challenges into opportunities and create lasting impact.

Social Enterprise Symposium



Photo Credit: Jorge Melgar - LIF Media





Southwest Coast Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism Development Plan

Supporting communities to align conservation, stewardship and economic opportunity.

This year, PDC partnered with communities on the Southwest Coast of Newfoundland and Labrador to **explore how conservation and economic development can work together to create long-term social, environmental and economic value.** Working alongside community organizations, municipalities, Indigenous partners and regional stakeholders, the project examined opportunities to advance community well-being while protecting and stewarding the region's unique natural assets.

Rather than pitting conservation and economic development as competing priorities, the process focused on identifying pathways that generate shared value for communities, strengthen local capacity and promote sustainable prosperity. Through engagement, dialogue and collaborative planning, participants explored how community-led approaches to stewardship can support economic resilience, strengthen local ownership and create opportunities for future generations.

The project **reflected PDC's commitment to social innovation and place-based development by bringing diverse partners together to address complex challenges that no single organization can solve alone.** By centering local knowledge, community priorities and cross-sector collaboration, the work helped build relationships, surface new opportunities and contribute to a growing conversation about how communities can create both impact and prosperity through sustainable development.

This engagement also expanded PDC's understanding of how social innovation approaches can support rural, coastal and Indigenous communities as they navigate economic transition, environmental stewardship and community development, generating insights that continue to inform our work across Atlantic Canada.

READ THE REPORT

Green Horizons

Helping New Brunswick businesses turn sustainability into a competitive advantage.

Through **Green Horizons**, PDC's NouLAB convened entrepreneurs, industry leaders, policymakers, chambers of commerce and community partners to explore how New Brunswick small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can **leverage sustainability for competitiveness**. Rather than focusing solely on research or awareness-building, the initiative used a social innovation lab approach to design and test practical interventions that help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) reduce costs, access new markets, strengthen competitiveness and respond to changing customer and regulatory expectations.

Building on extensive research, stakeholder engagement and a province-wide summit, **Green Horizons** advanced eight connected prototypes designed to address key barriers and opportunities facing New Brunswick businesses. These included:

- **Lighthouse Industry Spotlights** – showcasing New Brunswick businesses that are successfully leveraging sustainability to drive growth and competitiveness. These videos were produced through UNB Media Services.
- **Chambers of Commerce as Sustainability Champions** – equipping chambers to support SMEs with practical sustainability and innovation training.
- **Sector-Specific Decarbonization Roadmaps** – helping the constructions sector understand and navigate industry-specific sustainability transitions.
- **Sustainability as a Value-Added Sales and Marketing Opportunity** – enabling companies to better communicate their sustainability efforts and create market advantage.
- **NB Export Edge** – supporting SMEs through mentorship in accessing export opportunities where sustainability performance is increasingly expected.
- **Green Room** – strengthening connections between government departments funding the green transition for SMEs
- **Decarbonization Dialogues** – creating space for discussion and collaboration on the policy and system changes needed to support business transition.
- **Greenwashing support** – supporting NB SMEs in adapting to Canada's Competition Act with greenwashing amendments.

Together, these prototypes represent more than a collection of individual projects. They form an integrated strategy for helping New Brunswick businesses adapt, compete and thrive in a changing economy. By connecting storytelling, training, market development, policy dialogue, supply chains and access to capital, Green Horizons is helping build the conditions for long-term economic resilience while positioning New Brunswick as a leader in sustainable business innovation.

Our final report will be released in Fall 2026.

**VISIT OUR GREEN
HORIZONS PAGE**

8



PROTOTYPES DELIVERED

6



INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHTS

>100

STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED

11



**RESEARCH SUMMARIES
PUBLISHED**

Photo Credit: UNB Media Services

Green Horizon's Decarbonization Dialogue - Fredericton, NB





Rapid Innovation Challenge: Cardiovascular and Diabetes Care

Accelerating new solutions to some of New Brunswick's most pressing health challenges.

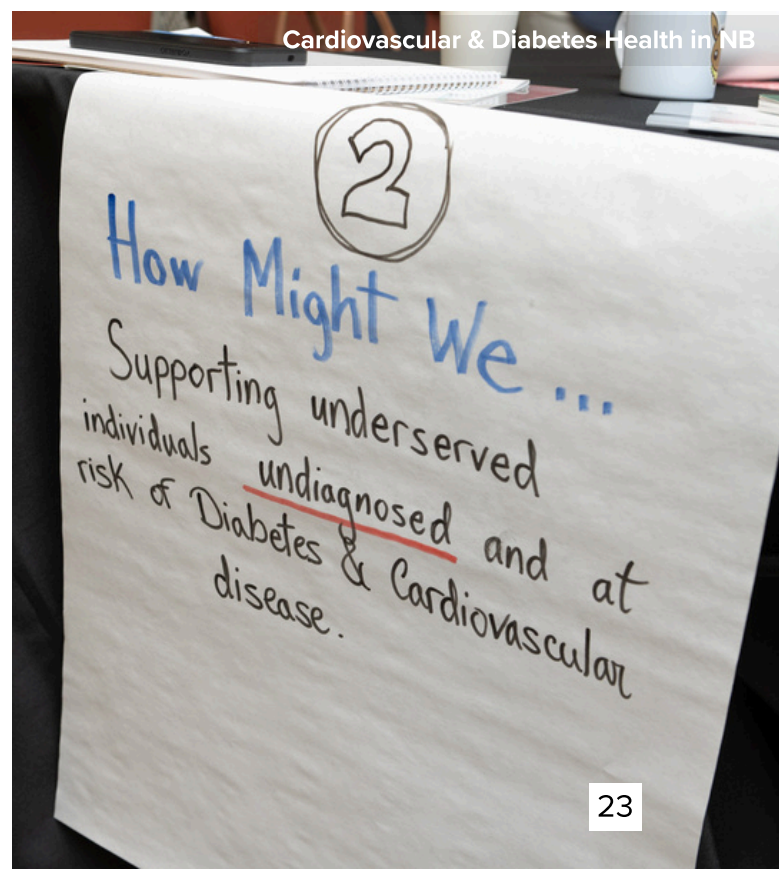
This year, PDC completed the **Cardiovascular and Diabetes Care Rapid Innovation Challenge**, bringing together entrepreneurs, clinicians, researchers, health system leaders, community organizations and people with lived experience to tackle complex challenges in chronic disease prevention, management and care. This was a UNB-based partnership with the McKenna Institute and Data NB.

Using an innovation challenge model, participants worked to identify unmet needs, develop promising solutions and test new approaches that could improve outcomes for individuals living with cardiovascular disease and diabetes. The initiative created opportunities for collaboration across sectors that do not often work together, helping bridge the gap between emerging ideas and real-world implementation.

More than a competition, the Rapid Innovation Challenge served as a platform for health innovation—mobilizing diverse expertise, encouraging experimentation and supporting innovators working to

improve the health and well-being of New Brunswickers. By fostering partnerships between the healthcare system, community organizations, researchers and entrepreneurs, the challenge demonstrated how collaborative problem-solving can generate practical solutions to complex societal challenges.

The initiative reflects PDC's broader commitment to social innovation: **creating space for people with different perspectives and experiences to work together, test new ideas and build pathways toward more effective, equitable and sustainable systems of care.**





Cardiovascular & Diabetes Rapid Innovation Challenge

READ OUR FINAL REPORT

25



CHALLENGE PARTICIPANTS

3



RESEARCH PROTOTYPES

10

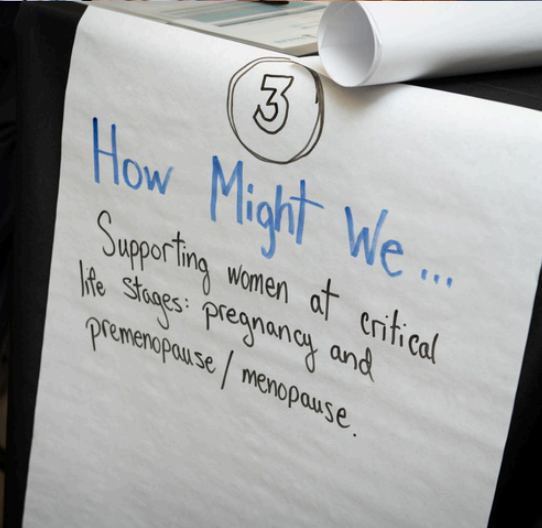


HEALTH SYSTEM PARTNERS
ENGAGED

3



COMMUNITY-BASED
PROTOTYPES



Rapid Innovation Challenge: Health and Housing

Turning innovation into insight for lasting systems change.

This year, PDC published the final report from the **Health and Housing Rapid Innovation Challenge**, documenting the solutions, partnerships and lessons that emerged from a collaborative effort to address the interconnected challenges of housing stability and health in the City of Moncton. The report captures not only what was built through the challenge, but also what is required to sustain innovation across sectors and create lasting impact. This challenge was a partnership with **UNB's Faculty of Nursing** and has catalyzed cross university collaboration; today, **UNB nursing and Université de Moncton social work students are working together, on the front lines, to provide services to un-housed people in Moncton.**

Drawing on the experiences of innovators, community organizations, policymakers and service providers, the report offers practical insights for those working to advance more integrated, people-centred approaches to health and housing. In doing so, it helps ensure that the learning generated through the challenge continues to inform action long after the challenge itself has concluded.

25



CHALLENGE PARTICIPANTS

3



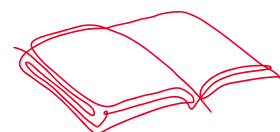
INNOVATIONS DEVELOPED

5



SECTOR PARTNERS ENGAGED

1



FINAL REPORT PUBLISHED

READ OUR FINAL REPORT



UNB Entrepreneurship Week 2025

Inspiring the next generation of founders and changemakers.

As part of **UNB Entrepreneurship Week**, PDC welcomed **Scott Stirrett**, founder of Venture for Canada and author of ***The Uncertainty Advantage***, for a special keynote and community conversation focused on entrepreneurship, leadership and navigating change in an increasingly complex world. Stirrett has helped more than 10,000 young Canadians launch their careers through **Venture for Canada** and has become a leading voice on resilience, adaptability and opportunity in uncertain times.

The event brought together students, alumni, entrepreneurs and ecosystem builders from across New Brunswick, creating opportunities for connection,

learning and inspiration. To extend the impact beyond the event itself, PDC purchased and distributed **50 copies of *The Uncertainty Advantage***, ensuring participants could continue exploring the ideas and practical tools shared during the discussion. The book challenges conventional career advice and offers strategies for turning uncertainty into opportunity—an especially relevant message for emerging entrepreneurs and innovators.

By connecting our community with national entrepreneurship leaders and thought-provoking ideas, PDC continues to strengthen New Brunswick's entrepreneurial ecosystem and foster the mindset, skills and networks needed to build the ventures, organizations and solutions of the future.

>50

**ATTENDEES AT THE
SCOTT STIRRETT EVENT**

50

**UNCERTAINTY ADVANTAGE
BOOKS GIFTED**

The Uncertainty Advantage with Scott Stirrett



Photo Credit: UNB Media Services

Global Learning

DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUES

Bringing global insights home to strengthen place-based innovation.

This year, PDC's Executive Director, Vanessa Paesani, participated in the **Deshpande Foundation's Development Dialogues** in India, joining social innovators, philanthropists, entrepreneurs, researchers and systems leaders from across the Deshpande Foundation's global network. The convening explored rural transformation in Hubballi, India, tackling complex challenges through entrepreneurship, innovation, and locally driven solutions.

The experience provided an opportunity to exchange ideas with practitioners working in diverse cultural and economic contexts while building

stronger relationships across the global Deshpande ecosystem. Discussions focused on topics ranging from community development and systems change to innovation ecosystems and inclusive economic growth, offering valuable perspectives on how place-based approaches can create lasting impact.

As a centre founded on the vision of **Gururaj "Desh" Deshpande and Gerry Pond**, these connections are an important reminder that while solutions must be rooted in local context, the challenges communities face are often shared. The insights, relationships and lessons gained through the Development Dialogues are helping inform PDC's ongoing work to accelerate systems change for place-based prosperity in New Brunswick and beyond.

Deshpande Development Dialogues



CONFERENCES, CONVENINGS & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Sharing New Brunswick's innovations while bringing new ideas home.

Throughout the year, PDC participated in conferences, summits, forums and public dialogues across New Brunswick and beyond, strengthening relationships, sharing lessons emerging from our work and bringing new insights back to the communities we serve.

From entrepreneurship and venture development to social innovation, health, economic development and public policy, these gatherings created opportunities to engage with entrepreneurs, researchers, investors, policymakers, public servants, students and community leaders. Whether participating in Atlantic Venture Forum, NBIF Breakthru, the MedTech Summit, the OECD Conference on Place-Based Economic Development or national social innovation gatherings, PDC remained connected to the conversations shaping the future of communities, economies and institutions.

Closer to home, we contributed to a number of important discussions and university-led initiatives, including State of the Province, State of the University, Kingsbrae Conversations, UNB Research Week, Global Entrepreneurship Week and UNB's Shaping the Debates series. These events created space for learning, dialogue and collaboration around some of the most important issues facing New Brunswick.

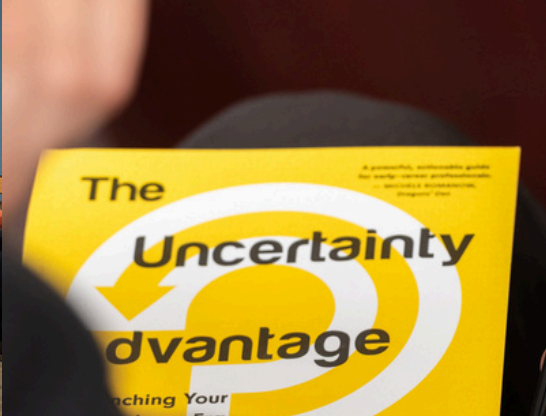
Together, these experiences strengthened PDC's role as a connector between local action and global ideas, ensuring that the lessons emerging from New Brunswick contribute to broader conversations while bringing new perspectives, partnerships and opportunities back to the province.

Events and Convenings Engaged in by Our Team:

- Atlantic Venture Forum
- NBIF Breakthru
- MedTech Summit
- OECD Conference on Place-Based Economic Development
- National Social Innovation Conference
- Deshpande Development Dialogues
- UNB Research Week
- UNB Global Entrepreneurship Week
- State of the Province
- State of the University
- Kingsbrae Conversations Launch
- Shaping the Debate (2 events)



UNB's Shaping the Debate



Looking Ahead

The work captured in this report is ultimately a story about people choosing to shape the future of their communities.

Across New Brunswick and beyond, entrepreneurs are launching new ventures, social enterprises are addressing pressing challenges, public servants are reimagining how government works, researchers are mobilizing knowledge into action and community leaders are creating new possibilities for the places they call home. **PDC's role is to help bring those people together, strengthen their capacity to lead change and create the conditions for innovation to thrive.**

As we look ahead, **we remain committed to accelerating systems change for place-based prosperity through entrepreneurship, social innovation, civic innovation, workforce development and applied research.** We will continue to test new ideas, build unlikely partnerships, invest in emerging leaders and create opportunities for communities to turn challenges into possibilities.

The challenges facing our province and our world are significant. But so too is the talent, creativity and determination of the people working to address them.

The future will not be built by any one organization acting alone. It will be built through collaboration, curiosity, courage and a shared commitment to creating better outcomes for people and places.

We are proud to be part of that work, and we look forward to continuing the journey alongside our partners, supporters, students, researchers, funders, entrepreneurs and communities.

Place-based prosperity is not a destination. It is an ongoing practice of collaboration, experimentation and learning. We are honoured to help advance that work.

University of New Brunswick's Pond-Deshpande Centre

Accelerating systems change for place-based prosperity.

<https://ponddeshpande.ca/>



Annual Report

UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK'S POND-DESHPANDE CENTRE

May 2025 to April 2026

**JOIN OUR MONTHLY
NEWSLETTER**



Location

811 Charlotte Street
Fredericton, NB E3B 5A3

Email

innovate@unb.ca

Website

ponddeshpande.ca

Socials

 [UNB'S Pond-Deshpande Centre](#)

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