

Belonging, Inclusivity, and Community Vitality

Key components of Hazard Readiness and Response

Vital Conversations and Project Well-Being



Financial Support Provided By:



Atlantic Canada
Opportunities
Agency

Agence de
promotion économique
du Canada atlantique

Canada



Community Foundation of PEI

and the

Institute of Island Studies UPEI

2023

PROJECT WELL-BEING

Quality of Life on
Prince Edward Island



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
1.0 Project Overview	7
Project Well-Being lens.....	7
Vital Conversations approach and process	8
Limitations of the research	8
Thematic format.....	9
2.0 Understanding Well-Being and Quality of Life on PEI	10
Building upon previous research	10
Why Project Well-Being research is important to Vital Conversations	11
3.0 Findings and Recommendations	12
Research parameters and analysis	12
Belonging — Well-Being and Islandness	12
Inclusivity — Assets and Diversity	16
Community Vitality — Systems and Infrastructure	19
4.0 Going Forward: Possible Knowledge Mobilization and Engagement Options.....	23
5.0 Appendices	25
Appendix A: Vital Conversation Questions Sessions and Survey	25
Appendix B: Press release, session locations, and participation numbers	26

Executive Summary

This report offers ideas for hazard readiness and response efforts for Prince Edward Island (PEI) within the overarching thematic framing of belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality. During the spring and summer of 2023, the Community Foundation of Prince Edward Island and the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) embarked on a series of “Town Hall” sessions (Vital Conversations) with Island residents to collect insights regarding well-being and hazard readiness and response. An on-line survey was used in September to reach additional participants.

The themes that follow— Belonging, Inclusivity, and Community Vitality—and the corresponding ideas summarize the Vital Conversations discussions. People felt strongly that if PEI can utilize its many compelling attributes to ensure that everyone feels like an Islander, is prepared for upcoming hazards, and is supported pre- and post-hazard, our overall well-being and collective resiliency will improve.

While additional research and community engagement efforts are necessary to explore these ideas in detail, there is sufficient qualitative evidence to support moving forward. Individuals, communities, organizations, businesses, and government officials can work together to improve well-being and hazard readiness and response efforts on PEI.



Themes and Ideas:

Belonging — Well-Being and Islandness

Belonging

Position well-being as a critical component of hazard readiness and response efforts

- *Recognize that connection to community is vital*
- *Acknowledge the shared anxieties of everyone*
- *Develop pre- and post-initiatives that support mental health needs*

Promote Islandness to ensure cooperation and belonging

- *Focus on belonging messages that highlight our collective responsibilities to help everyone*
- *Use the term Islander in an inclusive manner and emphasize that during a major climatic event (hurricane, snowstorm), we are all Islanders*
- *Create a clear operating picture of what is happening and how the Island is responding.*

Inclusivity — Assets and Diversity

Inclusivity

Focus on what people can offer and do — asset approach

- *Apply an asset lens to strengthen resiliency*
- *Conduct asset mapping as part of readiness plans*
- *Ensure accessibility when developing community convening locations*

Strengthen diversity and resiliency by recognizing privilege and bias

- *Broaden the term Islander and ensure diversity in Islander profiles*
- *Involve leaders who represent the rich diversity of PEI in the development and communication of hazard readiness and response initiatives*
- *Offer anti-racism and anti-discrimination training as part of hazard readiness plans*



Community Vitality — Systems and Infrastructure

Community Vitality

Develop and coordinate robust emergency readiness systems

- *Establish a central coordination agency that can redeploy resources and people*
- *Set priorities before, during, and after a climate event to ensure effective hazard readiness and response*
- *Verify that communities have supplies, access to supply chains, and alternative power sources*
- *Plan for uncertainty through scalable systems and supports*

Invest in critical infrastructure

- *Create a plan for fuel and essential supplies*
- *Provide alternative energy sources for community centres*
- *Plan for immediate and longer-term storm debris removal and sustainable re-use*
- *Prepare for internet and cell outages (require telecom providers to have portable/mobile cell stations; utilize low-tech options — radio, shortwave)*
- *Rebuild with an eye to inclusion and sustainability*
- *Strengthen and innovate the electrical grid*

Share stories of resiliency and green economy initiatives

- *Collect and share stories of resiliency*
- *Profile green economy initiatives*
- *Demonstrate commitment to sustainability goals*



1.0 Project Overview

During the spring and summer of 2023, the Community Foundation of Prince Edward Island and the Institute of Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) embarked on a series of “Town Hall” sessions (Vital Conversations) with Island residents to collect insights regarding well-being and hazard readiness and response. This report summarizes the activities of the project, offers recommendations, and outlines possibilities for next steps regarding engagement and knowledge mobilization.

We know that people living on Prince Edward Island (PEI) share a legacy of coming together during hard times and building a stronger foundation for a vibrant future. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent Hurricane Fiona, and deal with pressing social and economic challenges, we believe that the same legacy holds the key to our collective recovery and growth.

There are significant questions that emerge after such events. What did we learn about well-being and island life during and following Hurricane Fiona? How did we work well together? What can we do to support resilient communities? How do we prepare for the future, so that we are better equipped for the next emergency? These are questions that we used as Vital Conversation starters to better understand well-being and hazard readiness and response efforts on PEI.

Project Well-Being lens

A key concept explored during the Vital Conversations is the notion of well-being; particularly, its critical connection to hazard readiness and response. Data from a concurrent research initiative — Project Well-Being — helped ground and seed our discussions in this area.

In 2021, the Institute of Island Studies at UPEI embarked on a 4-year research endeavour — Project Well-Being — to better understand and assess the well-being and quality of life of people living on PEI. Specifically, the Institute wanted to understand the components of well-being and explore how they inspire belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality.

Many jurisdictions measure growth and recovery using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for economic purposes, but that measurement/metric does not capture how well we are really doing in our lives. Over the past decade, complementary indicators/domains have emerged in several jurisdictions as well as nationally that help broaden our understanding and assessment of societal well-being.

Project Well-Being uses measures/domains developed by the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) to gather input from Islanders to identify the components of well-being that are important to them, and which inspire belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality.

We position the CIW domains as follows:

Belonging

- Work and Finances
- Leisure and Culture
- Allocation of Personal Time

Inclusivity

- Democratic Engagement
- Education and Learning

Community Vitality

- Community Vitality
- Health
- Natural Environment

We felt that it was important to situate the Vital Conversations initiative within Project Well-Being so that we could use the data already gathered to seed the discussions and frame the analysis. Such framing could help identify which aspects of well-being are important to people on PEI and identify hazard readiness and response ideas that resonate and are amenable to policy and practice interventions. Further, Vital Conversations were also seen as an effective tool to bolster ongoing community engagement regarding Project Well-Being, as they provide an opportunity to connect local organizations and resources and build new relationships that inspire action.

Vital Conversations approach and process

The Vital Conversations approach aimed to collect insights and ideas from the community that could be used to guide future policy directions and decisions relating to well-being and hazard readiness and response.

Vital Conversations were held with Islanders during the period from May to August of 2023. The sessions used the Project Well-Being themes of belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality to frame the discussions. Staff members from the Institute of Island Studies facilitated eight Vital Conversations across PEI and utilized an online survey to reach additional participants. The survey was added to the project to enable the participation of community members and organizations that expressed an interest in attending a session but were unable to do so because of scheduling conflicts.

During the two-to-three-hour sessions, participants were asked a series of questions relating to well-being and climate events; specifically regarding the themes of belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality which, as noted previously, succinctly incorporate the eight domains of well-being as outlined by the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW). A sample of the questions used to guide the discussion is attached as Appendix A.

Recordings of the sessions were made, and notes taken with the consent of the participants. Participants were also given a copy of the questions and encouraged to write responses during the sessions. Many people wrote out and submitted detailed responses during the sessions and some sent their responses a few days later. All information gathered was compiled in a thematic format and used to frame and inform the current report. Quotations from the sessions are used in this report to highlight themes and inform ideas put forward. The project received clearance from the UPEI Research Ethics Board (Ref. #6009112).

Limitations of the research

The Vital Conversation sessions were not designed to evaluate the specific hazard response activities of provincial, municipal, and non-governmental organizations on PEI. That is, we did not set out to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in emergency preparedness and response efforts across the island or map out the development of an action plan to optimize response capabilities and improve public safety. Such analysis is available in other documents commissioned by the Province.

Further, it is important to point out that the sample size and respondent profiles did not provide sufficient data for detailed cross tabulation comparisons such as statistically significant

relationships between two or more variables (e.g., gender, education, or income). However, we note that a detailed statistical analysis of respondents was not the aim of the project. Rather, we wanted to collect qualitative insights and understandings.

While caution should be exercised in generalizing the Vital Conversations data to the entire island population given the short duration of the project, we feel that the sample size is large enough to draw out primary themes relating to well-being and hazard readiness and response on PEI. Participation in the Vital Conversations and subsequent survey provided a sufficient sampling size with 131 people taking part in the sessions and 41 completing the online survey. While this number of participants may seem limited, it did provide rich qualitative data; especially when situated within the broader data collected from Project Well-Being.

Thematic format

Given the rich commentary from the Vital Conversations, the report strives to present the data in a thematic format rather than as a series of statistical measures. There are several reasons why the research team chose this approach.

First, the research project parameters are principally concerned with presenting how people understood and responded to Hurricane Fiona within the context of well-being and quality of life - a detailed statistical analysis of data was not requested. Second, the Vital Conversation data is primarily qualitative allowing the researchers to delve deeper into themes emerging from the sessions within a group setting. This process allowed for both refinement and winnowing of the thematic areas as they emerged during the sessions. Third, and as noted previously, the sample size and respondent profiles did not provide sufficient data for detailed cross tabulation comparisons such as statistically significant relationships between two or more variables. Even if such comparisons were completed, it is unlikely that the resulting findings would reveal statistical relationships that would inform policy and practice. However, the responses to the open-ended questions did provide useful insights and ideas regarding well-being and hazard readiness and response.

While the research cannot include all comments shared, we have summarized the qualitative commentary as themes within the well-being framework of belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality. The research team submits that this thematic representation of the data provides a rich portrayal of how people on PEI experience and understand well-being during a major climate event. Further, the themes reveal specific hazard readiness and response ideas shared by participants that can bolster resiliency and encourage cooperation — two critical components that communities need before, during, and after a major climate event.

2.0 Understanding Well-Being and Quality of Life on PEI

Well-being begins with the belief that our cornerstone value as Islanders is the principle of “shared destiny”:

- that our society is often best shaped through collective action
- that there is a limit to how much can be achieved by individuals acting alone
- that the sum of a good society and what it can achieve is greater than the remarkably diverse parts which constitute it.

Consider the recent hurricane and how it demonstrated a shared destiny and collective response. When the storm Fiona slammed into Prince Edward Island on September 24, 2022, it caused about 90 per cent of the electrical system - or about 82,000 customers - to lose power and left a massive amount of destruction. There were many instances of people coming together and amazing stories of resiliency - the best characteristics of community vitality and being an “Islander” were on display. However, there were also instances where people felt alone (not included as an Islander), uninformed, afraid for their future, and uncertain of whom to turn to for help.

What did we learn from our collective shared response? What did we learn about island resiliency and quality of life? About working together? About inclusivity? About belonging? And how do we prepare for the future, so that we are better equipped for the next emergency? These are questions that help inform hazard readiness and response efforts and reveal the critical connections to well-being.

Building upon previous research

As noted, the Vital Conversations used data collected from Project Well-Being to inform the discussions. This four-year research project aims to understand the components of well-being and explore how they inspire belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality on PEI.

Project Well-Being is still underway and thus far, two province-wide surveys have taken place. In 2021, over 800 Islanders 18 years or older completed an online survey that asked about their personal well-being and offered them the opportunity to share thoughts on how island communities could be better places to live, work, and play. Following the survey, over 60 people took part in six focus groups held virtually. The purpose of these sessions was to explore concepts of well-being, verify survey findings, and delve deeper into specific domains and indicators. Session participants were asked a series of questions grouped by the eight CIW domains of well-being and related to the issues that were identified both in the survey and in the accompanying research as affecting the well-being of island residents.

Initial findings indicated that PEI has many solid well-being attributes and is clearly a good place to live, work, and play. However, the study also demonstrated that we have work to do to ensure that all people on PEI have opportunities for a full and abundant life. At the moment, that reality is not the case.

A second survey occurred in 2022 as part of a complementary study that explored the factors that influence population retention and outmigration on Prince Edward Island. Over 1100 people

completed the survey and more than 60 people took part in focus group sessions. The survey data and focus group sessions revealed that while PEI has been quite successful in relative terms in recruiting international newcomers, the ability to retain a high percentage of this group on PEI has been more challenging. Further, the success of intra-provincial migration with respect to PEI has been mixed. While people from other provinces do move to the Island, there are also many Islanders moving elsewhere in Canada.

Why Project Well-Being research is important to Vital Conversations

The two previous surveys reached almost 2,000 people and the corresponding focus groups connected with an additional 120 Islanders. This significant data set provided a rich backdrop for the Vital Conversations activities and, most importantly, helped inform the discussions. Specifically, both surveys revealed three key thematic challenges for well-being and quality of life on PEI that can inform hazard readiness and response efforts:

- Belonging barriers
- Inclusivity issues
- Community Vitality obstacles

These challenges have persisted despite a series of thoughtful and constructive strategies in various population action plans, well-being initiatives, and inclusivity measures. Further, and as pointed out previously, the data from this research showed that belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality are key components and predictors of island resiliency and cooperation — factors that are critical for effective hazard readiness and response efforts. Thus, using the Project Well-Being data to inform the Vital Conversations was clearly beneficial as it provided a framework to support the discussions.

Given this research context, Vital Conversation participants received a presentation and a summary of the two survey findings related to Project Well-Being. This information helped seed the discussions and enabled participants to situate their understandings and experiences of Hurricane Fiona within a broader research project. Participants commented that having the Project Well-Being background data and research framing allowed them to use the Vital Conversations time more effectively to focus on ideas for policy and practice initiatives to deal with hazard readiness and response efforts on PEI.



3.0 Findings and Recommendations

This section offers several ideas for hazard readiness and response efforts within the overarching thematic framing of belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality. Participants felt strongly that if PEI can utilize its many compelling attributes to ensure that everyone feels like an Islander, is prepared for upcoming hazards, and is supported pre- and post-hazard, our overall well-being and collective resiliency will improve.

Research parameters and analysis

It is important to note that while the ideas presented come from the Vital Conversation discussions, some ideas were discussed at length while others were offered but did not elicit significant commentary. This is a normal occurrence in qualitative research; especially when exploring understandings and experiences. What we have included are ideas that were mentioned in two or more sessions (or in multiple survey responses) even if the discussion was brief. These ideas are positioned as bullet points within a sub-theme under one of the overarching themes of belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality.

Given the foregoing and considering the limited parameters of the Vital Conversations project, we offer the ideas with limited commentary as most are self-explanatory within the context of the thematic framing. However, we do provide general comments on the sub-themes.

While additional research and community engagement efforts are necessary to explore these ideas in greater detail, there is sufficient qualitative evidence to support moving forward on the sub-themes and corresponding ideas. Individuals, communities, organizations, businesses, and government officials can work together to explore these themes to help improve well-being and hazard readiness and response efforts on PEI.

Belonging — Well-Being and Islandness

Belonging
<p><i>Position well-being as a critical component of hazard readiness and response efforts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Recognize that connection to community is vital</i>• <i>Acknowledge the shared anxieties of everyone</i>• <i>Develop pre- and post-initiatives that support mental health needs</i>
<p><i>Promote Islandness to ensure cooperation and belonging</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Focus on belonging messages that highlight our collective responsibilities to help everyone</i>• <i>Use the term Islander in an inclusive manner and emphasize that during a major climatic event (hurricane, snowstorm), we are all Islanders</i>• <i>Create a clear operating picture of what is happening and how the Island is responding</i>

Position well-being as a critical component of hazard readiness and response efforts: A significant number of participants spoke of how Hurricane Fiona caused acute stress, anxiety, and even depression within themselves and people they knew. Several equated the long-term impact as a post-traumatic stress disorder that exhibited itself a year later in 2023 as potential storms lurked offshore.

I thought I was over it [hurricane anxiety] but then we got storm warnings in September, and I felt that same sense of fear — Survey respondent.

Each time I hear of a possible storm, I find myself wondering how bad it will get and I question my ability to make it through. I don't think I was like this pre-Fiona.

While damage to infrastructure and shorelines after a hurricane is concerning, evidence from PEI residents during the Vital Conversations and which is corroborated in research from other island jurisdictions indicates that extreme weather is negatively influencing the well-being of people and their perception of economic stability and social cohesiveness. This emerging research demonstrates that climate change stressors are impacting the mental health and well-being of people living on islands, including interruption of livelihoods, interference with social and community connections, displacement, damage to property and land, and disruption of schooling. The long-term impacts of climate events on well-being and quality of life are only now just emerging and the impact of such stressors is concerning.

It became clear during the Vital Conversations that after a significant storm like Hurricane Fiona, people may feel a sense of loss, sadness, and anger, and become uncertain about island living. Further, such events seem to magnify existing challenges such as housing, inclusivity, community vitality, and overall sense of belonging.

Our family struggled to make ends meet coming out of COVID and then we were hit by Fiona. It has been really hard to find a place to live and keep food on the table but now I feel like things are even worse.... It's like the wind blew down not just the trees but also our family's hopes for remaining on PEI.

I feel like we need to talk more about our collective mental health as Islanders coping with the impacts of climate change. We don't talk enough about how we are coping or even if we are even coping at all, and I worry that some people are getting more and more anxious and unsettled.

It's like there is a rip tide of anxiety waiting to take us all offshore.

Clearly, there are strong connections between well-being and climate events that need to be considered in hazard readiness and response efforts. Living on an island is always challenging but emerging climate realities are having an increasing impact on how people understand and describe their overall well-being. Acknowledging the need for pre- and post-mental health support and then providing services is critical to ensure the ongoing resiliency of island residents.

Promote Islandness to ensure cooperation and belonging: Many of Project Well-Being survey respondents and focus group participants shared comments that revealed sentiments of loving the Island but feeling like an outsider within the Island community. Interestingly, this sentiment emerged in each of the Vital Conversation sessions.

It has always been a challenge here in [name of community] to make new people feel welcome and fit in. It's not that we don't care or that we don't want new people moving here, it's just that we don't take the time or have the time and we don't have formal structures to welcome people. So, when the hurricane hit, I know there were people who felt even more unwelcome here in [name of community] because they had no connections and no family. That's not right and it's not the Island way.

Honestly, I love PEI and want to stay here forever. But if these hurricanes keep coming and I have no one to help me and no sense of connection to anyone, I don't think I can stay.

After the hurricane had subsided, several people expressed frustration with trying to meet others, being included in community conversations, trying to fit in, feeling unaccepted, and noting that the term “Islander” seemed reserved for those with a PEI birthplace and generational ties to the island. Specifically, the term “Islander” is seen as othering as it may carry exclusionary meaning to denote people who were born on PEI and have a particular heritage. More pointedly, and as stated in previous Project Well-Being focus groups and echoed in the Vital Conversation sessions, there appears to be a visual perception of who is a true Islander; namely, “a person who is white” and someone who can answer the question “Who’s your father?” by naming four generations of PEI residents.

One might ask why people seek validation as Islanders after a hurricane and why such place-based identification is important in hazard readiness and response efforts. Based upon the Vital Conversation data, it seems that people’s exclusionary feelings became magnified during and after Hurricane Fiona and may have impacted their overall resiliency and even their desire to remain on PEI. As one participant stated:

Why stay on this windy place when you don't feel included in the community after a major storm? It's no fun being alone and feeling lonely when you don't have power.

While many survey respondents and session participants spoke highly of “Islanders” and of initiatives to help people after Hurricane Fiona, they also felt these activities needed broader diversity representation to reach everyone. Further, they want to see a more diverse make-up of Islanders represented in hazard readiness and response positions at the municipal and provincial levels of government and business.

Upon hearing these comments and using Project Well-Being as a backdrop, we took time during the Vital Conversations to discuss a well-being domain that emerged in our previous research. We noted that in conducting our Project Well-Being study, there was evidence of an additional well-being domain beyond the eight as defined by the Canadian Index of Wellbeing. We refer to this distinct domain as Islandness.

The domain is uniquely an island-related phenomenon and is expressed in terms that are important to consider during hurricane readiness and response:

- A sense of belonging
- Inclusivity, cohesion, culture, and way of life
- Historical and contemporary identities
- Sustainability and resilience
- Environment and climate change
- Community vitality

Islandness nourishes island communities despite economic hardship and environmental challenges. In many ways, it is the tangible and metaphysical resiliency-lifeblood of PEI. Newcomers and visitors are acutely aware of Islandness and desire to be included in its collective embrace rather than feel like outsiders.

Vital Conversation participants commented that the Islandness domain appears to be a more encompassing concept than the term Islander, as the latter may carry exclusionary characteristics — even if unintentional. Most importantly, they suggested that Islandness is perhaps linked directly to concepts of resiliency and was a significant factor in how people responded to and understood Hurricane Fiona. Several commented that even if you were new to PEI during the hurricane, “you wanted Islandness”.

I felt safer during and after Fiona because I have family nearby and many friends in this community, but I know other people who just moved here who were really worried.... They didn't have the same connections that I have, and I feel badly that no one in our community including me took the time to touch base with them after Fiona. And then when we did follow up weeks later, I think we were all surprised at how worried they were about their future.... We should have reached out sooner.

As I hear about Islandness, I realize I didn't think about how I view myself as an Islander and I suppose I didn't see them [newcomers] in the same way — you know as people like me who have a long family history here rather than just a new resident.... I can do better at welcoming people for sure. We all can do better.

Many participants suggested that everyone should use the term Islander in a more inclusive manner and emphasize that during a major climatic event (hurricane, snowstorm), “we are all Islanders whether we are long-term residents, newcomers, or visitors”. As one participant wryly noted:

The wind doesn't care if you have lived here all your life or just crossed the bridge yesterday. We all have to lean into it [the wind] and support each other.

Inclusivity — Assets and Diversity

Inclusivity
<p><i>Focus on what people can offer and do — asset approach</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Apply an asset lens to strengthen resiliency</i>• <i>Conduct asset mapping as part of readiness plans</i>• <i>Ensure accessibility when developing community convening locations</i>
<p><i>Strengthen diversity and resiliency by recognizing privilege and bias</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Broaden the term Islander and ensure diversity in Islander profiles</i>• <i>Involve leaders who represent the rich diversity of PEI in the development and communication of hazard readiness and response initiatives</i>• <i>Offer anti-racism and anti-discrimination training as part of hazard readiness plans</i>

Focus on what people can offer and do — asset approach: After Hurricane Fiona, communities focused on what they lost and could no longer do. This lens is understandable and necessary given the widespread devastation and the shock of residents. People needed to take stock and reflect on their loss.

However, as several session participants suggested, when such thinking lingers it can over time create a deficit-based perspective about living on PEI. People become fearful, anxious, and feel a lack of agency. These sentiments can foster a corrosive narrative concerning Island life — one that is rooted in deficit-based thinking that can simmer into mistrustful attitudes. People may feel that governments do not care about them and may become less interested in being engaged in their communities. They may become bitter at the seemingly slow pace of response efforts even though much is taking place, and they may pull back from taking part in actions that could improve the well-being and quality of life in their own community because they do not feel a sense of agency or control.

Some folks here in [name of community] seem to feel they have no voice in community affairs. I think this [perspective] comes from them feeling like they have nothing to offer — no money, no resources, no powerful contacts.... They also think the community has nothing. These thoughts seemed to be more evident after Fiona and I think we need a change in perspective.... Maybe we can start by talking about the strengths of this community and perhaps that will show everyone that we have lots of life here and skills and ideas for getting us through the next storm.... A more positive outlook might get people more involved.

An asset-based readiness and response strategy will focus on what communities have and what people can do after a major storm. Such a strategy places emphasis on assets rather than deficits, on cultural richness rather than community norms, and on new ideas and skills rather than standard practices. The use of asset-based language in PEI readiness and response initiatives and in public messages can change deficit thinking by demonstrating how everyone — immigrants, newcomers, temporary residents, and visitors — can work to develop proactive, innovative responses to community challenges after a climate event.

By focusing on what people can do and what community assets exist, people are more likely to engage in readiness and response efforts rather than waiting on government actions. Taking time to map out community assets — people, culture, infrastructure, nature, experiences — and discussing how to coordinate these strengths, can be a key part of readiness efforts.

Strengthen diversity and resiliency by recognizing privilege and bias: This theme came up in most of the Vital Conversations and was expressed as seeing PEI “having no diversity in leadership”, “limited representation” and “few diversity champions, especially during and after Fiona”. Participants of all cultural backgrounds noted that there seems to be limited diversity representation on PEI in political, municipal, and business leadership. This lack of representation was especially evident in post-Fiona communication and response efforts as participants noted that no one of colour or of a diverse background was seen in leadership.

I don't recall seeing any diversity in the leadership representation of my community or within government after Fiona. I know some people might say that [diversity representation] is not important — we just need to focus on getting stuff done. But it is important as it shows that I am part of this island, and my perspective is acknowledged.

Several people spoke of how they felt their cultural and racial background limited their ability to engage with others in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Fiona. This sentiment echoed comments noted earlier regarding the term Islander and its unintended exclusionary meanings. It is worth noting that several survey respondents and session participants spoke positively about PEI as it pertains to 2SLGBTQAI+ spaces and hazard readiness and response; although, several suggested specific research in this area is needed.

A first step in strengthening diversity on PEI is learning to recognize and understand long-standing Islander privilege; particularly racial privilege which impacts how people may feel about belonging. Acknowledging that racial privilege in the form of white Islander heritage is evident across social, political, economic, and cultural environments and then noting how this privilege can provide advantages after a climate event (e.g., having generational ties that provide support) is a first step. Of course, race is only one component of privilege as religion, gender, sexuality, ability-status, socio-economic status, language, and citizenship status are all elements of Islander privilege and each can be magnified following a climate event.

Using these privileges to collectively empower others and include everyone as “Islanders” requires first being aware of such privileges and acknowledging their implications. This awareness can be heightened through hazard readiness initiatives that include anti-racism and anti-discrimination training and awareness campaigns with children, youth, and adults. During such training, people can confront their biases, stereotypes, and prejudices.

They ask questions such as:

- What messages did I receive growing up on PEI about people who are different from me? How might these messages impact my perspectives on belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality after a major storm?
- What is the racial and/or ethnic make-up of my neighborhood, school, or religious community?
- How might that community make-up be biased toward immigrants and newcomers?
- What can I do to change this context?
- How should community response efforts be developed to ensure everyone is included and represented?

Bias and privilege can also be addressed by understanding and supporting the lived experiences of immigrants and newcomers. This understanding often requires listening to and engaging in tough conversations about injustice and inequality, learning about intersectionality and then taking action to address racism and discrimination in local communities. Further, the province should work with municipalities to conduct reviews of hazard readiness and response by-laws and policies to make sure that these do not contain elements with discriminatory impacts.

PEI is changing and we have a more diverse population — maybe not Island-wide but certainly in my community.... I'd like to see us talk openly about racism and discrimination and provide workshops and training to ensure our communities are supportive of everyone — especially after a hurricane.

Some may ask why diversity is important in hazard readiness and response efforts. In communities that have a high degree of inclusive democratic engagement, there are opportunities for everyone to participate in decision-making and there is an overriding concern for democratic values that foster inclusiveness, transparency, and trust. People feel they are represented, and their voice is important. They express confidence in hazard response efforts and feel that their political leaders listen to their concerns and are open to meeting with them. They reach out to their neighbours, they develop practices that encourage belonging, and they work with others to build communities that can withstand climate change.

The result of such engagement is a more inclusive Island community and increased resiliency.



Community Vitality
<p>Develop and coordinate robust emergency readiness systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Establish a central coordination agency that can redeploy resources and people</i>• <i>Set priorities before, during, and after a climate event to ensure effective hazard readiness and response</i>• <i>Verify that communities have supplies, access to supply chains, and alternative power sources</i>• <i>Plan for uncertainty through scalable systems and supports</i>
<p>Invest in critical infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Create a plan for fuel and essential supplies</i>• <i>Provide alternative energy sources for community centres</i>• <i>Plan for immediate and longer-term storm debris removal and sustainable re-use</i>• <i>Prepare for internet and cell outages (require telecom providers to have portable/mobile cell stations; utilize low-tech options — radio, shortwave)</i>• <i>Rebuild with an eye to inclusion and sustainability</i>• <i>Strengthen and innovate the electrical grid</i>
<p>Share stories of resiliency and green economy initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Collect and share stories of resiliency</i>• <i>Profile green economy initiatives</i>• <i>Demonstrate commitment to sustainability goals</i>

Develop and coordinate robust emergency readiness systems: One of the key lessons from Hurricane Fiona which was voiced by most of the Vital Conversation participants was the need for the coordination of response efforts.

You need coordination so that people can work effectively, and so that you can put resources where you need them the most.... So put someone in charge!... We felt that in our community, no one was in charge of the overall response and maybe that's because we were caught off-guard or maybe because our hurricane response plans need to be updated. I suppose we just were not ready.

My biggest takeaway is that it was difficult to know who was looking after things. When you respond to a crisis like what we faced after Fiona, you need a group of people both at the provincial and community level who can provide guidance and make decisions. I think we had that at the provincial level, but I'm not sure it trickled down to our community.

These sentiments speak to what is also touted as a best practice in the literature; namely, the need for both centralized and localized coordination of response efforts. The literature reveals that provincial bodies are in the best position to develop such coordinated partnerships because they

have the power to ensure equality of access; function as impartial monitors and evaluators; create a climate for cross-agency partnerships; and provide the broad perspective required during a climate emergency. However, such organizations cannot do all tasks on their own and need local coordination and leadership. In jurisdictions with effective hazard response strategies, power-sharing, and decision-making with all local organizations and parties are primary characteristics of provincial-local leadership teams. Such broad coordinated decision-making results in resources that are used effectively and allows for staff and volunteers to be placed where they are needed the most.

In all provinces and countries with effective coordination of hazard response strategies, there also exists a full complement of well-trained staff specifically devoted to the distribution of resources and the coordination of people when required. The literature demonstrates quite clearly that no jurisdiction can develop, deliver, and support hazard responses without adequate staffing. This statement does not mean that volunteers are not required but, rather, it appears that provincially based, paid staff members will have greater success than an uncoordinated group of volunteers. Further, from a readiness perspective it is important to identify ways to scale up staffing as needed based on the magnitude of the hazard event.

PEI is fortunate to have a number of locally based government and non-governmental agencies which have staff members who can and did support the hazard response efforts after Hurricane Fiona. What appears to have been missing, at least from the perspective of the Vital Conversation participants, was a clear coordination of staff and resources, especially in mobilizing and moving staff and resources to where they were needed the most. It is important to note that this sentiment could be reflective of local community challenges (e.g., some communities seemed to be impacted more than others) and is not intended to diminish the tireless efforts of provincial and municipal staff during and after Hurricane Fiona. We heard from many members of rural communities who lauded the efforts of local municipal staff, council members, volunteers, and provincial agencies.

Finally, there were many comments during the Vital Conversation sessions about the devastation of the natural environment; particularly the shocking erosion of the coastline and the Island-wide destruction of thousands of trees.

Our property looked like a giant had waved a hand over the trees and leveled them to the ground.... My only suggestion is that we need a way to use the lumber from the trees rather than just dumping and burning them in a pile.

The loss of the dunes was really a shock. It was as if someone took a knife and sliced off 30 metres and threw it inland or into the sea.

It is a challenge for individuals and communities to know what to do in the face of unprecedented coastal erosion and habitat loss. For instance, many session participants pointed out that the clean-up and disposal of trees was an overwhelming issue and required a more sustainable method of disposal than the post-Fiona practice of burning or burying piles of brush and timber. Future readiness plans should consider how to re-use downed trees.

Invest in critical infrastructure: The East Coast of Canada and PEI in particular often face harsh weather conditions. Island residents are quite familiar with big winds and heavy rains. However, Hurricane Fiona was different as it had a wind intensity of a high-end Category 2 storm and a surface pressure of 932.48 millibars — the latter being the lowest-pressured hurricane ever to make landfall in Canada. This record-setting low pressure led to a rapid intensification of winds and a sizable expansion of the storm causing more damage than anticipated. As several participants noted, Hurricane Fiona made everyone realize that the storms are getting worse and their impact on PEI more severe.

I fish for a living and I've seen a lot of bad weather but this storm [Fiona] was a beast...wicked powerful with storm surge and wind that no one has ever experienced. We lost our wharf and most of the buildings...a helluva mess to clean up.... We definitely need to build stuff differently.

Hurricane Fiona did significant damage to the critical infrastructure of PEI; the electrical grid, fuel supply chains, wharfs, and telecoms were damaged and rendered inoperable. This widespread damage revealed the fragility of an island infrastructure unable to handle the new realities of climate-change-driven extreme weather events. Suddenly, communities, businesses, agencies, government, and individuals rushed to explore how to forge resilience into the built environment — a topic that came up in every Vital Conversation and included similar questions from participants:

- *What do we need for new building codes?*
- *How do we manage/limit coastal construction?*
- *How do we build resilience and backup into our electrical grid and telecoms?*
- *What incentives can government and insurers offer to ensure that resilience measures are incorporated into the restoration of properties damaged by Fiona?*

One of the first actions that many participants mentioned was that we need to limit our exposure to new risk by using designs and systems for new critical infrastructure with Hurricane Fiona in mind.

We have to stop building our grid and designing our communities for the weather we used to get. Those days are gone. This new weather means we need systems designed to handle several Fionas every year; especially if we want our systems to be in place for years to come.

These comments echo the research literature which argues that communities, financial lenders, businesses, and government must develop and implement mandatory climate vulnerability assessments for both new infrastructure and for the repair and revitalization of existing infrastructure. Such assessments should also consider accessibility and affordability issues which may require incentives from government for such resiliency aspects to be incorporated into new and existing infrastructure.

Many of these evaluation tools and resilient strategies already exist and there are ample real-world examples from other island jurisdictions that can be used to help PEI as it moves forward with critical infrastructure re-design. Further, there are best practices which can be used by individuals

as they rebuild and repair homes and design living spaces to withstand future storms. As one participant commented:

Look, we know how to do this stuff and there are many, many examples of how to build back better. We just have to provide the support, the incentives, and in some cases put in place restrictions to ensure that we develop stronger and more resilient infrastructure on PEI. And really, what choice do we have? We live on an island — we can't ignore climate change and bad weather.

Share stories of resiliency and green economy: There were also suggestions about sharing stories as a way to foster community vitality and resiliency. Vital Conversation participants noted that PEI is well positioned to share stories which highlight an alternative vision for growth and development. The province can profile organizations and individual initiatives that are dealing with climate change while generating economic development and improvements in people's lives in a manner that is consistent with environmental and social well-being. A significant component of a green economy strategy is to promote the development and adoption of sustainable technologies and this promotion has the added benefit of attracting investment and people to PEI.

We like telling stories here on PEI. We can talk for hours. So, what better way to inspire us all to do better than hear from people who are doing cool stuff...in the building sector, environment, coast protection. Those stories help us understand new ideas and...they bring us together.

As several participants pointed out, people are looking to live in a place that strives to establish real links between the ecological system and the economic system. PEI has many initiatives that can reinforce perceptions of a province that is working to transition to a green economy (e.g., EV incentives, wind and solar power, heat pump rebates). Such fundamental transformations towards more sustainable modes of energy production, consumption, and transportation are very attractive to people and provide tangible incentives for remaining on the Island despite the uncertainty of major weather events like a hurricane. Individual stories of immigrants, newcomers, and long-term residents living a greener lifestyle and using new design standards should be profiled widely and included as part of provincial communication efforts to support resiliency.

Building upon this strategy of sharing green economy stories, session participants suggested that PEI should profile itself as a leader in climate change and sustainability initiatives by showcasing research and innovation opportunities that accelerate green businesses and help protect the natural environment. Communication initiatives can also highlight provincial incentives that help businesses and individuals develop and evaluate innovative technologies in sustainability and habitat protection. Further, the educational opportunities available at both UPEI and Holland College can be featured to demonstrate the learning and training opportunities available. Participants felt that PEI's green business ecosystem, infrastructure innovations, coastal erosion strategies, and commitment to sustainability goals are powerful qualities for fostering resiliency and for attracting and retaining people who want to build a more resilient province.

4.0 Going Forward: Possible Knowledge Mobilization and Engagement Options

Considerations

The data gathered from the Vital Conversation sessions demonstrated that within the context of PEI's emerging climate realities, change in the form of personal, social, and economic transition and island living is becoming a continuous and permanent feature of life. The uncertainties of living on the Island as weather events and hazards become more pronounced are drivers that have a wide and lasting effect on everyone who resides or visits PEI. Belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality are all impacted.

Many of the ideas mentioned in this report will help cultivate and support resilient communities on PEI and improve overall well-being. Hazard readiness and response strategies that help people improve their sense of belonging, connection to others, and overall feeling of being an Islander will make Island communities more resilient. People will want to stay in a place if they feel better about themselves, if they feel their livelihood is not at risk, and if they feel everyone is working together toward a common set of social capital goals.

Social capital is a set of shared values or resources that allows individuals to work together in a group to effectively achieve a common purpose. Obviously, it is an essential component of hazard readiness and response efforts as people need to work together to be ready for a major storm and to deal with the aftermath. Of key interest in the qualitative literature is how social capital can be altered through deliberate interventions and if these interventions carry direct benefit.

Hazard readiness and response initiatives are deliberate interventions (albeit with the consent and involvement of the local community, partners, and individuals). Further, hazard readiness and response efforts respect the networks, norms of reciprocity and trust, and the traditions that exist in a community. However, these activities can also play a role in challenging these norms and encouraging change and action. This report has suggested several norms that require change (e.g., perspectives on the word "Islander", more diverse leadership, focus on assets) to ensure broader community engagement in readiness and response activities. The key is building trust and public cooperation among diverse members of local communities and making everyone feel like they belong and have something to offer.

While social capital change can be daunting, we suggest that it can be met with confidence based upon the data from the Vital Conversations. PEI has a rich mix of long-term residents, new immigrants, newcomers, and temporary residents who bring perspectives, ideas, and skills to nurture and develop the required human, social, cultural, and racial capital that is necessary to ensure that everyone feels connected and included when they are dealing with unpredictable and more volatile weather systems. Effective hazard readiness and response strategies that seek to keep people on the Island will require the development of well-being initiatives that enrich social capital by focusing on diversity and inclusion. The result will be an increased sense of belonging, strengthened resiliency, and improved community vitality.

It is important for everyone on PEI to identify readiness and response ideas and initiatives that are important to them and then determine what they need to do to foster welcoming, inclusive, and vibrant Island communities. The key is to identify strategies that resonate and are amenable to policy and practice interventions — by individuals, organizations, communities, and government.

Knowledge mobilization and engagement options

We note that a common question raised during the Vital Conversations focused on how the data could be shared with and used by Islanders. Participation in the sessions helped residents become more aware of concepts of well-being and, as a result, many expressed interest in being involved in further discussions about belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality and also being part of Project Well-Being.

As noted, many of the ideas raised are amenable to follow-up by communities, individuals, agencies, businesses, and government. This report may serve as a useful starting point for these discussions and help in future conversations focused on priorities for communities, organizations, and government.

However, we feel the Vital Conversations findings would benefit from further analysis and discussion and suggest several possibilities for knowledge mobilization and community engagement that could help augment the themes and corresponding ideas shared in this report:

- Engage the Island community in a broader Vital Signs¹ research project that builds upon the findings from the Vital Conversations
- Research exemplary practices for hazard readiness and response from other island jurisdictions as preparation for a broader Vital Signs project
- Host a Well-Being and Hazard Readiness symposium to share exemplary practices, ideas, and new innovations
- Integrate additional Vital Conversations within the Well-Being project.

We are encouraged by the work completed thus far, the thoughtful responses shared by participants, and the engagement in our sessions. Clearly, there is a growing interest in well-being and quality of life on PEI and a desire to explore how these essential components connect to and support hazard readiness and response policies and plans.

We all need to row in the same direction if we are going to make progress on this windy Island so let's make sure that everyone has a seat in the boat [that] we call PEI — Survey respondent.

¹ Vital Signs is a community-driven data program led by Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) and organized by local Community Foundations in Canada and around the world. Local data gathered through the program is used to support evidence-based, locally relevant solutions to improve the quality of life at the community level. The CFC produces a National Vital Signs Report that explores a series of interrelated topics – belonging, engagement, and well-being – vital to building communities where everyone belongs.

5.0 Appendices

Appendix A: Vital Conversation Questions² Sessions and Survey

Belonging — Personal experience and understanding

- What does belonging mean to you?
- To what extent does your experience living on PEI match your sense of belonging?
- How did your experience of belonging here on PEI help and/or hinder you during and after Hurricane Fiona?

Inclusivity — Structures and systems

- What does inclusivity mean to you?
- In your experience, what structures/systems reflect inclusivity on PEI?
- Where do you see opportunities for growing inclusivity in these structures and systems?

Vitality — Community, family, and workplace

- Thinking of family, community, and workplace, what are some of your successes living here on PEI? What is working well?
- What is not working?
- What are some ideas you have for better supporting vitality on PEI?

Individual reflection

- What can you do personally to foster belonging, inclusivity, and community vitality on PEI?

² Participants were given a copy of the questions and encouraged to write responses during the sessions. Many people wrote out and submitted detailed responses during the sessions and some sent their responses a few days after the session.

Appendix B: Press release, session locations, and participation numbers

The Community Foundation of PEI and the Institute of Island Studies at UPEI are hosting a series of Vital Conversations with Prince Edward Island residents to collect insights regarding well-being and quality of life.

We know that people living on Prince Edward Island (PEI) share a legacy of coming together during hard times to build a stronger foundation for a vibrant future. As we emerge from the past several years of the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent post-tropical storm Fiona, and confront current pressing social and economic challenges, we believe that the same legacy holds the key to our collective recovery and growth.

Vital Conversations will help focus on what people living on PEI feel is important for their well-being and quality of life, especially as they emerge from the uncertainties of a pandemic and the aftermath of a post-tropical storm. What did we learn about well-being and island life during and following the pandemic and Fiona? How did we work well together? How do we prepare for the future, so we are better equipped for the next emergency? Vital Conversations are an effective tool to bolster community engagement and well-being, as they provide an opportunity to connect local organizations and resources and build new relationships that inspire action.

We think it is important for everyone on PEI to engage in Vital Conversations to identify which aspects of well-being are important to them and then determine what they can do to improve the measures within that area. The key is to identify measures of well-being that resonate and are amenable to policy and practice interventions — by individuals, organizations, communities, and government — that foster civic engagement, community vitality, and an overall sense of belonging. During these town hall conversations, the Institute of Island Studies will share findings from its current [Project Well-Being](#) research which provides insight and data from the community regarding quality of life on PEI. Initial findings indicate that PEI has many solid well-being attributes and is clearly a good place to live, work, and play. However, the study also demonstrates that we have work to do to ensure that all people on PEI feel included in their communities and have opportunities for a full and abundant life.

- Charlottetown – Wednesday, May 24 / *le mercredi 24 mai* – Holman Grand Hotel (Beaches Room) – 6:30pm/18h30
- Stratford – Thursday, May 25 – Lone Oak Fox Meadow – 6:30pm – **COMBINED WITH CHARLOTTETOWN**
- Souris – Tuesday, May 30 / *le mardi 30 mai* – Fiddling Fisherman Lookout – 6:30pm/18h30 – **COMBINED WITH MONTAGUE**
- Montague – Wednesday, May 31 / *le mercredi 31 mai* – Kingswood Centre (56 Crescent Lane, Montague PE) – 6:30pm
- Summerside – Tuesday, June 6 / *mardi 6 juin* – Credit Union Place – 6:30pm/18h30
- Abram-Village (séance en français) – mercredi 7 juin – Village musical acadien – 18h30 – **POSTPONED/REPORTÉ**
- Mill River – Mill River Resort – Date & Time TBA / Date & heure à déterminer – **POSTPONED/REPORTÉ**

Participants in initial round: 60

To participate in one of the sessions, please register in advance. / Nous tiendrons des conversations vitales en présentiel dans l'ensemble de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard lors des séances suivantes (les emplacements peuvent être modifiés)

Additional sessions held

- March 13th – Master of Arts in Island Studies students (ZOOM) 15 participants
- May 4th – Essential Employability Health Skills (Holland College) 22 participants
- May 10th – Rural Communities Council (Emerald Community Centre) 17 participants
- May 15th – Social Deputies presentation (Charlottetown) 8 participants
- August 12th – North Shore 19 participants
- Participants in additional sessions: **81**

Participation numbers – sessions and survey:

Total number of session participants (May-August): **131**

Survey participants (September-October): **41**

Total Vital Conversation participants sessions and survey: 172*

***Note:** Data also drawn from Project Well-Being surveys and focus groups – **2,000+ participants**