



# Grassroots catalyst

*Unique in Canada, member-based NovaKnowledge has been dedicated to growing the province's knowledge economy for more than 10 years*

In November business, government, and academic leaders packed the World Trade and Convention Centre in Halifax for the release of NovaKnowledge's ([www.novaknowledge.ns.ca](http://www.novaknowledge.ns.ca)) eighth annual Knowledge Economy Report Card. First published in 1998, the report card has become a respected guideline for stakeholders to track the province's progress and to identify problem areas.

The report card is based on measuring indicators that characterize the innovation cycle, a series of interlinked activities that together fuel economic improvement. For example, this year the focus was on the environmental economy and what opportunities exist for innovative companies to take advantage of them.

NovaKnowledge also organizes events throughout the year, where members focus on innovation and knowledge economy issues such as education and access to capital. An annual luncheon series brings leading speakers to Nova Scotia and is a major fundraiser for the organization. MIKE Debates are annual moderated discussions of knowledge economy issues. Organizations throughout the province also can evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in the innovation process by using the Innovation Scorecard, which was developed as part of the 2000 Report Card.

## UMBRELLA GROUP

So what exactly *is* a knowledge economy? "It is a buzzword," says outgoing executive director Kay Crinean, "but what we mean by it is actually the whole economy and the addition of knowledge and technology to products or processes." In 1987 Crinean moved to Nova Scotia from England, where she had been working in economic development. "I was looking at

problems that large electronics and IT companies were having developing complex computer-based systems that had to respond in real time to real live events," says Crinean. She helped them write manuals on how to make high-technology systems work better. "I'd had experience working collectively on a bigger problem than any one entity could solve."

Crinean met a small group of Nova Scotians who wanted to help lead the province into a new era. "They had the

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vision, they just didn't quite know how to implement it," says Crinean. A bold first attempt at creating an organization to recognize Nova Scotia's economic opportunities didn't work. In 1992 they tried again by inviting a stellar list of business, government, and university representatives to White Point Beach Resort on the South Shore for a planning session. They all agreed on the potential for Nova Scotia's economy, but the real issue came down to how to make it happen. "We ended up concluding that we had to create an organization to try and create this vision," says Crinean, "and get the leaders together to start bringing it about."

The name NovaKnowledge emerged from that first meeting. A subsequent gathering attracted even more interested parties who voiced their ideas about what kind of organization it should be and how it should relate to other organizations.

"Flat and open and networked" were the recommendations.

Although Crinean says NovaKnowledge has acted like an umbrella, bringing other organizations together to work on common challenges, she insists that it had to earn that position. "It wasn't an industry association representing a sector or a professional association." The idea was to be a multi-stakeholder organization, and that's still the goal.

NovaKnowledge provides multiple mediums to not only look at where Nova Scotia is having problems but also to discuss them, plan strategies, and take action to solve them. In last year's Report Card, immigration and venture capital were listed as weaknesses. After the province released its 2004 "Framework for Immigration" discussion paper, 25 stakeholders formed a coalition on immigration and prepared a detailed response.

Today the coalition is ready to help the province implement strategies to improve its immigration track record, while similar plans for attracting venture capital are in the works. "We've set targets for venture capital because we see that as a major obstacle in the growth of the economy," says Crinean. "We've also set targets for immigration because we see that as very important for innovation."

NovaKnowledge was born of an inherent pool of talent, vision, and entrepreneurial spirit that was brought about by frustration, desire, and a changing world. "There is a real sense of passion for the province, and with our strong sense of community, we're interested in working together to improve the knowledge economy," says Crinean. "We care about Nova Scotia, and we want to make it a better place to live and work." — JOE FITZGERALD