There are a lot of great things happening in the Halifax business community, with many businesses taking decisive action to ensure Nova Scotia has a prosperous future. The Ivany Report said that to tackle the challenges we face, we need to use innovative approaches and be willing to take on risks. In short, we need to do things differently than we have in the past.

To achieve that, we need to support:
- Growth
- Entrepreneurship
- Graduates
- Our immigrant population
- The major projects in this region

The companies and individuals profiled in this story are all in some shape or form saying an enthusiastic “Yes!” to the above.

Ask yourself: are you saying yes to the above things? Remember, our future depends on it.

The Startup 100

A new partnership between the Sobey School of Business and the provincial government is helping develop more student entrepreneurs. The Startup 100 began Feb. 23 and has a goal of launching 100 student-driven businesses in 50 communities across the province in 100 days. The participants include university students, community college students, as well as high school students.

So far, the program has exceeded its goals, as about 125 students are participating in the program in 51 communities, says Jared Perry, a project manager with the Sobey School of Business’ Business Development Centre. He says the businesses can be found across the province, in communities such as HRM, Pictou, Amherst, Truro, Sydney and Yarmouth.

Perry says he thinks one of the broader implications of the pilot program is participants seeing entrepreneurship as a career option. “I think they’ll be able to see entrepreneurship is a viable option for them. I think their mindset might change from: ‘Where’s my next job going to be?’ to: ‘What’s my next venture opportunity going to be?’ I think that’s key,” he said.

For now, the businesses will likely be part-time in nature or be ones for the students to focus on in summer. The businesses are at different stages of development and are diverse in nature. Businesses are in a range of areas including web development, website design, apps, photography and there’s even a farm.

Perry says the Business Development Centre is looking for businesspeople across the province to help mentor the program participants.
A challenge immigrants often encounter in Canada is that employers are focused on looking for Canadian experience. For immigrant Mohammad Ali Raza, his employer, Cox & Palmer, hired him in part for the opposite reason. “They were actually valuing my foreign experience,” he says. Prior to settling in Canada in October 2014, Ali Raza had about 10 years of experience practicing law in the energy and gas sector in Asia and Europe.

Oddly enough, Ali Raza was married in Halifax in 2008. His wife and her family are from here. In the ensuing years, the two contemplated whether to settle in Pakistan or Canada, but because of the deteriorating security situation there, Halifax was ultimately chosen.

Ali Raza thought he would work on getting his credentials straightened out and then head to Calgary, the home of Canada’s energy sector. But, Ali Raza saw a lot of opportunity in Nova Scotia’s energy sector.

He then researched local law firms to find out who practiced in energy and gas just to get some advice (and not to land a job), so he contacted Danny Gallivan at Cox & Palmer. A chat soon blossomed into dinner meetings and Ali Raza was brought on board. For now, he is working as a business paralegal, but is expected to be called to the bar in January 2016, at which time he will join the company as an associate. “From our standpoint, it was an easy decision,” says Managing Partner Kevin Latimer.
T4G

Lior Zelering, a recent immigrant from Israel, is thrilled with how life has turned out in Halifax. Not only are people welcoming, but they’re willing to go the extra mile. This was reinforced when he was hired by T4G, a company focused on analytics, managed services, retail planning, digital marketing and custom applications.

After being introduced to somebody from T4G through the Greater Halifax Partnership’s Connector Program last fall, a good meeting was had but there was no opportunity available at the moment. Four months later, T4G contacted him about an opportunity. “I had never seen anything like that before,” says Zelering, expressing amazement someone would think of him four months after the fact. Before coming here with his wife and daughter Zelering believed Halifax was an immigrant-friendly community, and this experience backed up his belief.

Zelering works as a digital strategist with T4G and feels like he fits in with the company’s culture from day one, in part because it wanted to see what he could bring to the table to help the company. “It was more about, ‘Let’s see what you got. Let’s see how you do things. Let’s try and work together,’” he says.

For its part, T4G says it hired Zelering because he was the best candidate for the job, but does concede his foreign experience is a plus because he brings a different perspective to the table. “Life experience in different geographies is never a bad thing,” says Mark Fraser, the company’s Executive Vice President.

Welaptega Marine Limited

Halifax-based Welaptega Marine Limited is known for the fact it often hires young engineers. Business Development Manager James Kesten uses an anecdote from his days at Dalhousie University as an engineering student to describe why. The 2008 grad says in a class he took, the instructor gave the students a coat hanger and told them to come up with a list of all the things the coat hanger could be used for. “If you do this same test with a five year old, they’re going to come up with 500 ideas, 1,000 ideas because they’re not constrained by pre-conceived notions of how this thing should be used or could be used,” he says.

Welaptega designs inspection equipment technology for use underwater. The majority of this technology is used to inspect the mooring ship systems of offshore oil and gas assets and Welaptega’s technology is used worldwide.

The company currently employs 21 people and has grown from 14 to 21 people in the last year alone. Most of the engineering staff are mechanical and electrical engineers.

Kesten says the company’s culture appeals to young people. It’s hierarchical structure, and questioning the way things are done is not just tolerated, but encouraged. “Everybody has the onus that if they have a good idea, go forth and make it so,” he says. This also applies to the ways the company has long conducted its business. If employees think that there’s a better way, they should pursue it.

Irving Shipbuilding Inc.

In mid-February, Irving Shipbuilding Inc. (ISI) announced details of a partnership with Women Unlimited for 20 women to get funding to study in the welding and metal fabrication program at NSCC’s Akerley Campus. Even better, the program includes job opportunities for these women once they finish their studies.

Women Unlimited is a not-for-profit women’s organization that promotes the full participation of women in trades and technology.

The roots of the partnership come from ISI’s Centre of Excellence. It has a mandate of providing Nova Scotians, particularly under-represented ones, with programs and training to help secure work in the marine industry.

The program participants will receive 50 per cent tuition funding over the course of four semesters (two years) from ISI to complete their studies. Successful graduates who meet employment eligibility criteria will then be employed by ISI as positions become available in 2017 and beyond. Prior to starting the NSCC program in September, the women will complete a 14-week pre-academic career readiness program. The readiness program began in March.

Irving Shipbuilding Inc. is proud to promote women in the skilled trades, and to be a part of Irving Shipbuilding’s Centre of Excellence Women Unlimited pilot project,” said National Representative Rick Rose. “We recognize that to increase women’s participation in the trades we need innovative approaches and real commitments that include having industry, union, government, education, and community working together in partnership.”
Dunn & Associates

For the principals of Dunn & Associates, a communications and public affairs company, a five-day course offered through the Halifax Chamber of Commerce’s All Ships Rise program was life changing. “It totally changed our mindset and the way we look at ourselves as individuals and as business owners,” says Michael Dunn.

A key insight was the need to work both “in” and “on” their business. Through some simple actions, it increased its revenue by 25 per cent.

Another key lesson was setting the business up to continuously improve, innovate, grow and share the gains. As part of this, the company looked at key business functions, and the strengths and weaknesses of its people, then aligned their roles with improved processes. For example, rather than giving each partner equal say in all decisions, Michael now leads strategy and administration, while his partner and wife, Holly, leads editorial and client services. These actions have allowed them to better understand their business’ real-time health, making it more efficient, effective and harmonious.

The training also changed their view of entrepreneurs. They aren’t just self-employed people, but rather those who create jobs for others. While the company will continue to work with external associates, it’s now preparing to make its first full-time hire.

Holly says their mindset and process changes have improved everything, and if even a small percentage of Atlantic businesses did the same, it would have a profound effect. “If we all did that, then the whole region would take off,” she says.

Cherubini Metal Works

When Cherubini Metal Works went looking to hire a specialized welder eight years ago, little did the company know this move would inadvertently create a talent pipeline for it.

Finding a specialized welder isn’t easy and through a staffing agency, the company was connected with Jasim Uddin, a Bangladeshi who was working in Singapore at one of the largest shipyards in the world. He began working for Cherubini eight years ago. Four years ago, his wife came over and they have since had two children in Canada.

Three years ago, Cherubini hired two of Uddin’s brothers, Zia and Kabir, also specialized welders who had been working in Singapore. Zia and his wife already had a child when they came over and have had a son since being here. Kabir and his wife have one child and he was born here.

One year ago, Cherubini hired another brother, Al-Amin, also a specialized welder. Al-Amin is not married, but will bring his eventual bride from Bangladesh to settle here.

As of now, that works out to a total of 12 family members. “We certainly didn’t know it was going to turn into a whole family immigrating here,” says Jane Caudle, Cherubini’s human resources manager. As a family company, Cherubini couldn’t be happier. Staff at Cherubini don’t hesitate to provide assistance to the family to help make life easier in Canada, such as on matters regarding documentation or the things that pop up in life. “We have a great working relationship with them,” says Caudle.