

COOPER INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES REPORT 2024



With the support of many generous donors Cooper Institute has been active in the community for 40 years.

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Migrant Justice

In 2021, Justin Trudeau mandated the immigration minister to create new immigration streams, double Canada's refugee intake, create a regularization program for undocumented people, and expand access to permanent residency for temporary foreign workers. In 2024, the same Liberal government slashed immigration targets by more than 20 percent, denied access to LMIA's for Temporary Foreign Workers in select areas, and reduced access to Canadian education for international students, all based on a false claim that increased migration is the cause of Canada's healthcare and housing issues.

There has been a disturbing increase in xenophobia in the general public based on misplaced frustrations due to basic services becoming increasingly more difficult to access due to inadequate government planning and investment (as is the case in healthcare), and to neoliberal, market-centered approaches (to housing, for example). Right wing populists have capitalized on Canadians' dissatisfaction by spreading hateful rhetoric. Given these troubling trends, it has become more essential than ever to support our migrant community members, fight for better protections for those with temporary status, and try to win permanent residency status for all.

Our work is always based on experiences of engaging with migrant workers in PEI. Thanks to ongoing funding through ARAISA, Cooper Institute has a dedicated staff person to visit with workers across PEI to hear about what is happening in their communities. Dozens of visits and hundreds of phone calls, text and email exchanges helped to ground the work of Cooper Institute in 2024.

We were lucky to celebrate Mexican Independence Day by sharing a meal with workers in Eastern PEI and then a few days later in Western PEI. We were able to meet with unionized workers at a fish plant and support them in organizing during their negotiations for a new collective agreement.

Several employers closed their doors in 2024, leaving many workers without employment. We helped affected workers apply for government

programs, find new jobs and change their work status. Cooper Institute supported 13 workers who were experiencing abuse to apply for Open Work Permits for Vulnerable Workers.

In 2024, Cooper Institute continued to push for a regularization program for undocumented people in Canada. We have a history of working with undocumented people in our province and recognize the difficult challenges they face daily.



Excellent turnout for the Status for All Event in March!

With volunteers from the PEI Action Team for Migrant Workers' Rights, we hosted a Status for All Event in March with over 50 participants who were able to learn a bit more about what it means to be undocumented in Canada. Participants wrote letters to local MPs and federal ministers and enjoyed some local art and music. Leading up to the event, some members of Cooper Institute and the PEI Action Team met with Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, MP for Cardigan to push for regularization program.

The PEI Temporary Foreign Worker Protection Act was passed in 2022, but due to delays in finalizing the regulations, it has still not come into effect. Cooper Institute circulated a petition which was introduced in the legislature, calling on the provincial government to make it a priority to enact the bill. After sending letters and doing several media interviews, Cooper Institute met with the Minister of Workforce, Advanced Learning and Population Growth. The first set of regulations for the recruiter registration was released and Cooper Institute submitted a list of recommendations to better enforce compliance.

In May, Cooper Institute and the TFW Maritimes Research Partnership released their fourth report, *Permanent Jobs, Temporary People: Temporary Foreign Workers' Struggle for Permanent Residency in PEI*. Eliza MacLauchlan and Ryan MacRae, authors of the report took part in media interviews and podcasts to talk about the report findings and shared them at the North Atlantic Forum in Ireland in June.

Early in the year, Cooper Institute took part in a three-day planning session with the Migrant Rights Network (MRN), a coalition of various migrant justice organizations across Canada. Throughout the year we promoted MRN campaigns and events in the news media and online through social media. In September, in response to federal immigration cuts and rising xenophobia, we hosted a rally in support of migrants in our community.



Meeting with workers, sharing a meal

In 2024 Cooper Institute took part in many public events and discussions focused on migrant workers. These included lectures at UPEI, consultations with Immigration PEI, webinars organized by ARAISA, participation in provincial human labour trafficking and the local RCMP Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committees, and meetings with KAIROS and Amnesty International.

Thanks to funding by the PEI Alliance for Mental Wellbeing, Cooper Institute has initiated a 3-year project aimed at developing a model for a dedicated Migrant Worker Centre in PEI. Over the past 15 years, Cooper Institute has dreamt of creating a centre with and for migrant workers. The first year of the project included engaging workers in PEI to document their needs, and research into how centres function in other jurisdictions. A committee composed of migrant workers and representatives of support organizations will guide the project.

We look forward to learning and working with our colleagues across the province and country as we keep pushing for status for all in 2025!

PEI Working Group for a Livable Income

Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) is the central program of the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income (WGLI), a network of organizations and individuals dedicated to the goal of ensuring a livable income for all. Cooper Institute initiated the establishment of WGLI and continues as a member. In practice, this means that one staff person of Cooper Institute works on WGLI issues.

The year that was. The year began with WGLI's five-part series of op-eds about BIG, published in the PEI Guardian.

In some ways 2024 was a challenging one for all groups in Canada dedicated to establishing basic income as a permanent program. The challenge, as always, is twofold: to convince the population and to engage the policy makers to accept that BIG is essential to Canada's social safety net. Existing social programs are a relief to people surviving on low incomes. But they do not address the reality that a high percentage of people still have too little income to meet their basic needs.

The irony of the challenge of the past year is that neither the policymakers nor the wider community knew how to respond to a great moment of success.

The success is that for the first time in the history of Canada, we have been presented with an evidence-based, economically feasible and politically doable proposal (<https://www.gbireport.ca>) for a Basic Income model. It is a model for a province-wide basic income demonstration. And that province is none other than Prince Edward Island, deemed to be an ideal place for a demonstration of 5 to 7 years. The hope is that at the same time other jurisdictions would, to whatever extent is possible, launch their own demonstrations.

The small population of PEI offers the possibility of implementing a demonstration with a built-in rigorous evaluation system aimed at perfecting the model. The proposal was the result of thousands of hours of volunteer work of highly respected economists, politicians, civil servants and experienced community-based representatives. How could the Federal Government, the Government of PEI and the community of PEI not appreciate the opportunity? Yes, some token efforts were made, but there has been no obvious advance.



The year ahead. This is where we begin the hope-filled work. In 2025 there will be opportunities for PEI residents to take possession of the Proposal for a demonstration in this province. Local communities will come together to speak out with a united voice. There will be opportunities for the PEI Government and federal candidates to answer the question: *Are you ready, willing and able to work toward establishing a 5-to-7-year BIG demonstration program in PEI and to support other jurisdictions to move forward on similar projects?*

Thanks to funded projects initiated by WGLI, Women's Network PEI and Cooper Institute in 2024, there will be many engagement opportunities in the coming year. A one-year project funded by the PEI Interministerial Women's Secretariat looks at the connections between gender-based violence and livable income.

Women's Network is the lead organization on a two-year project funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada. Local community forums are planned to engage the grassroots community in PEI more widely. The culmination of this project will be a national conference in June in Charlottetown. The goal of the project and conference is to develop a pan-Canadian feminist coalition of organizations who support Basic Income Guarantee.

SAVE THE DATE

WHO
Non-profits, advocates, community, and policymakers interested in Basic Income Guarantee

WHEN
June 5th and 6th 2025

WHERE
Holland College, Charlottetown, PEI

WGLI Women's Network Prince Edward Island

Gender Equity — Economic Justice — Thriving Communities

Coalition Canada basic income - revenu de base

In 2024 Coalition Canada basic income - revenu de base continued its foundational commitment to support the establishment of a province-wide 5-to-7-year basic income demonstration in Prince Edward Island. The PEI Proposal, presented to the public in

November 2023 was statistically tested using a microsimulation model (SPSD/M) that is also used by the Canadian government to verify statistics.

PEI Minister of Social Development and Seniors, Honourable Barb Ramsay requested the engagement of her counterpart in Ottawa, Minister Jenna Sudds. The Federal government's response was that they "would be willing to explore the creation of a working group composed of department officials with the intention of exchanging federal-level administrative, survey and tax data and information in support of PEIs work to evaluate a GBI". That working group was established in June 2024. At year end there is little information about the progress of its work.

Coalition Canada continued to engage individuals and sectors in its campaign to lobby MPs, Senators and PEI MLAs. This included supporting Bill C-223, (which was supported by 3 PEI MPs but which did not pass) and an intense letter-writing campaign to Minister Sudds, encouraging progressive action to ensure funding of work on the PEI Proposal.

There is a need to get the PEI proposal into the public eye. Though it is not the final word on basic income, it is far ahead of most others in awareness and applied understanding of basic income guarantee.

Early in the year Coalition Canada formed the *Election Readiness Strategy Committee*. Election work and other current actions can be found at <https://basicincomecoalition.ca/en/overview-of-easy-actions-you-can-take-right-now/>.

Basic Income NOW Atlantic Canada Network

Basic Income NOW Atlantic is a coalition of Atlantic Canadian organizations and individuals working in solidarity to call for the implementation of a basic income.

It had its origins in the Martha Justice Ministry in Antigonish, with the support of Tamarack Institute. The organization has completed three years of advocacy work for the establishment of BIG. The work is carried out on two levels. First there is a Planning Group with ten members representing the four Atlantic provinces plus a member of Tamarack who provides organizational support. The Planning Group meets monthly to develop tools for engaging community and politicians in basic income work and to organize forums for the wider community. Second, there is the wider community of event participants constituting what is now known as the Network. Basic Income-Nova Scotia provides a social media home for Basic Income NOW Atlantic and stores and maintains the expansion of the Network's consensus statement and basic income promotion toolkits.

Available toolkits include: the Consensus Statement as a model for other basic income advocacy groups; a process for engaging the support of municipalities; a movie screening and discussion program; and various aspects of an in-progress election strategy.

Themes for Network forums have included the role of a cross-jurisdictional approach to basic income and strategies for the 2025 Federal election (productive approaches for lobbying MPs and candidates).

PEI Fight for Affordable Housing

The housing situation in Prince Edward Island continues to be dire. According to data from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, PEI's vacancy rate at the end of 2024 was 0.8%. Tenants continue to face many barriers to affordable, secure and suitable housing due to poorly regulated rents, lack of maintenance standards and the loss of rental housing through conversions to condominiums and short-term rentals. In the face of this, Cooper Institute, the PEI Fight for Affordable Housing, and tenants and allies across PEI continue to organize to advocate for housing policy that works for our communities.

A major issue over the past year has been the conversion of large apartment buildings into condominiums. Once this conversion happens, the owner of the building can sell off individual units to a new buyer, who can move in and displace the current tenant within two months. This causes significant stress for tenants and can result in the loss of rental units. And there is no legislation which requires building owners to inform tenants of this change. PEIFAH members worked to inform tenants living in buildings that were converted into condominiums and to support them in advocating for the provincial government to purchase buildings. This work continues into the new year, and we hope will prompt new legislation that will better protect tenants.

After finally introducing a bylaw to regulate short-term rentals in Charlottetown in 2023, the City Council went back on its promise in 2024 and allowed legal non-conforming use to short-term rental owners who held a tourism operator's license prior to the introduction of the new bylaw. This allowed hundreds of units in Charlottetown to continue as short-term rentals. PEIFAH organized a petition with over 200 signatures demanding that city council remove the legal non-conforming use for certain short-term rentals.

In January, members of Cooper Institute and the PEIFAH met with the Minister of Housing and staff to advocate for more public housing. PEI's stock of

public housing is less than half of that in other OECD countries and is only available to families and seniors.

At the municipal level, PEIFAH met with city planners developing Charlottetown's city plan to discuss the state of rental housing and issues that tenants face in our community. Federally, PEIFAH, in collaboration with groups across the country through the Social Housing and Human Rights Coalition, continues to push for a commitment to meaningful investments in public housing.

PEIFAH and Cooper Institute were part of another successful partnership with UNB Pro-Bono Law in 2023-24. We hosted 2 students who researched and produced reports on a) the potential for provincial legislation giving municipalities the power to enforce rental only zoning, and b) factors influencing rent increases in PEI as compared to other provinces. Cooper Institute was also fortunate to have Cory Pater work over the summer preparing for tenant meetings that have been scheduled for early 2025.

RENT TOO HIGH?
HAVE LANDLORD ISSUES?
BUILDING NEEDS REPAIRS?

SUMMERSIDE
ADL. ROOM, ROTARY LIBRARY
6:15 PM TUESDAY
JAN. 21, 2025

MONTAGUE
HAMBLY ROOM, WELLNESS CENTRE
6:15 PM WEDNESDAY
JAN. 29, 2025

CHARLOTTETOWN
AUDITORIUM, PUBLIC LIBRARY
6:15 PM MONDAY
FEB. 3, 2025

**JOIN OUR
TENANT
CONSULTATION
SESSIONS**

**PEI Fight for
AFFORDABLE
HOUSING**

CONTACT US WWW.PEIFAH.CA HOUSINGPEI@GMAIL.COM (902)894-4573

Tenant meetings will take place in 2025

Throughout the year, the PEI FAH was prominent in the media and met with other community groups, including the UPEI Student Union, to discuss the need to end renovictions, establish a rent registry and maintenance standards regulations. Volunteers with the PEIFAH also supported tenants to contact elected representatives in times of need, prepare for rental hearings and support them in getting in contact with other community organizations.

Cooper Institute Celebrates 40 Years

For forty years Cooper Institute has worked alongside and with more than 50 organizations to create the kinds of changes that we believe will lead us to a society based on equality, fairness, peace and respect for the environment. In May, we invited friends and family to celebrate with us. Here are a few pictures of Cooper Institute members with a few of our many friends and allies.



Coalition for the Protection of PEI Lands

The importance of a people's organization to emphasize the need for action to protect PEI lands becomes more obvious as each year passes. The Coalition insists on the need for residents to take seriously that there is a worsening land crisis. The Lands Protection Act exists to ensure that government enforces true lands protection and prevents further loss of Island land to questionable financial investors, developers, and elusive transnational corporations.

The Coalition places the responsibility for the "wild west" land dealings squarely at the feet of the PEI Government. Instead of using its rightful power to stop the land bleed, politicians seem to hide behind legal opinion and the protection of the privacy of violators. Meanwhile everyday people, instead of seeing solid action, are treated to government's lack of transparency.

Early in 2024, representatives of the Coalition met with the Minister of the day. It was a cordial meeting, however there was little progress in convincing government that PEI has a major land catastrophe.

During the year, the Coalition made attempts to research and uncover the role of IRAC in ongoing land transactions and transferrals. IRAC came under community scrutiny for the nature and result of its inquiries, some of which remain hidden from Islanders.

On February 4th (2025), the Minister of Housing, Land and Communities instructed IRAC to investigate whether or not the Great Enlightenment Buddhist Institute Society (GEBIS) and Great Wisdom Buddhist Institute (GWBI) are in violation of the Lands Protection Act. This is seen as one component of an effort to bring transparency and oversight to land ownership in PEI.

It is clear that the current (and future) land situation is a deep concern at the grassroots level. People turned out in convincing numbers for three land forums organized by the Coalition. The first one in February, held in Charlottetown and entitled *The Silencing of the Land* dealt with the need for residents and government to hear and speak out about the PEI land crisis. The other two forums, under the banner of *The People's Land Use Hearings*, were designed to prepare people to engage in the PEI Government's future consultation process for developing a provincial land plan.

The coalition emphasizes the need for land zoning as an essential element of the plan. Two sessions were held in local communities (Tracadie and New Dominion). The proposed land use plan and land zoning is crucial for the future of land in PEI.

Islanders for Proportional Representation

Islanders for Proportional Representation, formed after the 2019 electoral reform referendum, was not active during 2024. However, two community organizations, Citizens' Alliance of PEI and Cooper Institute, deciding to "test the waters", invited the engagement of community organizations interested in a new start for PR in Prince Edward Island. So far, five organizations have indicated interest in taking some first steps. They will meet early in 2025 to discuss revitalizing and inviting others to participate either as organizations, or as individual PR enthusiasts. Many are still animated by the memory of the late Leo Cheverie who often reminded Islanders of the centuries-long painful struggles and successes getting PEI to its current electoral system. He believed that we cannot stop until we establish true Proportional Representation.

PEI Coalition for Public Services

The Coalition (www.publicservicespei.ca) was formed in the spring of 2024. Ten community-based organizations are currently part of the coalition: CUPE PEI, Cooper Institute, PEI Fight for Affordable Housing, PEI Working Group for a Livable Income, Council of Canadians, PEI Federation of Labour, Trade Justice PEI, Energy Democracy Now, the Canadian Health Coalition (PEI) and Transit Matters.

The Coalition and its members are committed to the belief that all people have the right to equality, dignity, respect, and freedom from discrimination and harassment and that public services must be designed to adequately protect and enhance these rights.

The Coalition recognizes the benefits of a robust, reliable, and high-quality public system. It advocates for government-owned and government-operated public services that are accessible to everyone.

The Coalitions first public event was a Summit held in Charlottetown in November. Engagement forums are planned for 3 Island communities in 2025. One will focus on preparing for the 2025 federal election.



At the November forum on public services

Community Connections

Members of the Cooper Institute collective support many organizations in various ways:

Atlantic Council for International Cooperation

PEI Parkinson Association

Breaking the Silence Maritimes-Guatemala Solidarity Network

P.E.I. Supported Decision-Making Coalition

Voluntary Resource Council

BIPOC USHR

National Farmers Union

Coalition for the Protection of PEI Water

Coalition for the Protection of PEI Lands

Coalition Canada basic income - revenu de base

Basic Income NOW Atlantic Canada Network

Latin American Mission Program (LAMP)

Peers Alliance

PEI Action Team for Migrant Workers' Rights

PEI Coalition for Public Services

PEI Fight for Affordable Housing

PEI Seed Alliance

Fundraising

Once again Cooper Institute is amazed by the level of generosity of our friends in the PEI community and beyond. Donations in support of our work continue to represent a significant proportion of our revenue.

Des Duffy and his spouse, Yvonne Gallant, are long-time supporters of Cooper Institute. Des completed his sixth year asking family and friends for donations on our behalf. In 2024 Des raised \$75,250.00. Thank you, Des and Yvonne!

Irene Burge, a founding and current member of Cooper Institute encourages supporters to sign up as sustaining donors in an annual mailout. Thanks to sustaining donors we are able to cover overhead costs. Irene also directs donations to Cooper Foundation, which provides long-term support for Cooper Institute's work. Thank you, Irene! And thank you to everyone who has made a donation to Cooper Institute and Cooper Foundation.

The Cooper Institute Fundraising Committee encourages donors to continue with their generosity. With your help we can continue our current work and expand it when needed. Donations can be made by using the "donate" button on our website www.cooperinstitute.ca. Contributions can also be made in the following ways: pre-authorized monthly donations; an annual contribution; a memorial for a deceased family member or friend; a bequest in your Last Will and Testament. Cooper Institute is a registered charity (Registration #10114 4541 RR0001). Cooper Foundation is also a registered charity (Registration # 89021 2970 RR 0001). For more information on Cooper Foundation, please contact ireneburge7@gmail.com.

Members of the Cooper Institute Collective

Eliza MacLauchlan

Irene Burge

Marie Burge

Joe Byrne

Ann Wheatley

Debbie Theuerkauf

Ryan MacRae

Hadil Haddad

Henry Luyombya

Cory Pater

Carlie Howell

Josie Baker

Reg Phelan

Irene Doyle

Connect with Cooper Institute



Call us at 902-894-4573 or find us on FaceBook. Or visit us in person at 81 Prince St., Charlottetown. You can also find us here: www.cooperinstitute.ca.



Seated: Joe Byrne, Marie Burge, Irene Burge, Irene Doyle.
Standing: Eliza MacLauchlan, Ryan MacRae, Cory Pater, Henry Luyombya, Ann Wheatley, Josie Baker, Hadil Haddad.
Missing from photo: Debbie Theuerkauf, Carlie Howell, Reg Phelan.

Maureen Larkin – Ever Present

Members of Cooper Institute were deeply saddened by the death of Maureen Larkin in December. Maureen was, and will continue to be, known to many people as a true and lasting friend. Wherever Maureen went she left behind (and carried in her heart) a trail of friends. They can be found in places such as Kingston, Ontario, St John's Newfoundland and Labrador, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Brazil, Ghana, Eritrea, Philippines and of course PEI from tip to tip.

While being a model “true friend”, Maureen spent her life dedicated to the advancement and development of her community wherever she lived. She was constant in her commitment to work with, and for, others to create an environment in which basic collective human rights could be achieved. To that end she, with her work companions and associates, provided service and support to many individuals and organizations in PEI and in the wider world.

Maureen was an inspiring community leader who led by promoting and engaging the leadership capacities of others. She did community work based on her belief that the greatest power for change is to have ordinary people taking control of their own lives and circumstances.

Maureen was a member and a leading voice in the Latin American Mission Program (LAMP) of the Diocese of Charlottetown since 1978 and served as a LAMP missionary in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua. Her work in the Dominican Republic was rudely interrupted by the collusion of the Dominican Secret Service and backward elements of the Dominican Catholic Church. Unknown to her she had been under surveillance for over a year because of her work with rural peasants. The civil and church authorities of the day judged that such work was associated with left-wing politics. She was accused, arrested and ruthlessly deported back to Canada in August 1981. Her deportation was viewed with revulsion by the progressive Dominican Church and by many progressive church and community organizations at home. The following are quotes from Maureen at that time:

“I have always considered it strange that the church is so fearful of any action associated with “leftist politics” but rarely condemns anyone for being involved in “right-wing politics.”

“Social change involves risk and sometimes requires taking steps without knowing the final consequences. But it also brings the joy of being part of a movement where people are working together for collective good.”

As a founder (in 1984) and continuing member of Cooper Institute, Maureen was constant in her support of work across PEI with, and for others to create social & ecological justice, peace, fairness, and human rights for all people. She helped design and conduct hundreds of workshops for leadership training and progressive action with Island farmers, fishers, labour and women's groups, and new immigrants.

Maureen had the courage to face obstacles in her own life and in the society, and to turn them into opportunities. Since 2004 Maureen was a champion for people with Parkinsons in PEI. Her life is a personal testimony to the strength of the human spirit. She encouraged others to heal and to lay claim to a rich productive life. Her fearlessness in experimenting in new, diverse, and sometimes unconventional healing paths is giving encouragement to many Parkinson sufferers. She is one of PEI's pioneers in participating in Deep Brain Stimulation surgery as a procedure to reduce the symptoms of Parkinsons. Her spirit is a source of inspiration to the whole community.

Maureen Larkin had an apparent limitless capacity for generosity and shared her many gifts with others in all circumstances. She viewed her life and her work for social justice not as a burden, but as a joy. She lived life to the full and could be found anywhere there was music, singing and dancing. She was a tireless socializer. Her friends and colleagues envied her fun-loving, outgoing liveliness.

