



Students Nova Scotia
2021 - 2022 Annual Plan

AFFORDABILITY • ACCESSIBILITY • QUALITY • STUDENT VOICE



Students Nova Scotia (StudentsNS) is a not for profit and nonpartisan advocacy group that represents Nova Scotia post-secondary students. Our members study at Acadia, Saint Mary's, and St. Francis Xavier Universities, as well as Campuses of the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC).

Mission

It is the mission of StudentsNS to represent the collective interests and priorities of post-secondary students in Nova Scotia. In pursuit of this mission, StudentsNS will:

- Conduct research to identify issues affecting the accessibility, affordability, accountability and quality of post secondary education in Nova Scotia;
- Develop credible and constructive policy to address these challenges
- Communicate research and policy to both educate and affect the opinions of stakeholders, Nova Scotians and government;
- Lobby the government to affect their post-secondary education policy;
- Organize campaigns to effectively articulate the needs and interests of our members; and
- Build partnerships to accomplish our vision.

Vision

StudentsNS envisions a Nova Scotia post-secondary education system that is *accessible, affordable*, of the highest *quality*, and that includes *student voices* in decision-making.

Values

The foundation upon which StudentsNS is built is the belief that post-secondary education can play a fundamental role in allowing both the individual and society to realize their full potential. StudentsNS' values are pillars built on this foundation, and the organization shapes its decision-making around these values.

- **Accessibility:** Every qualified Nova Scotia resident who wishes to pursue post-secondary education should be able to do so, irrespective of their financial situation, socioeconomic or ethnic background, physical, psychological or mental disability, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, or any other factor exogenous to qualification.
- **Affordability:** The cost of post-secondary education in Nova Scotia should not cause undue hardship upon any student, restrict their ability to pursue the career path they choose, or make them financially unable to live in the community that they choose.
- **Quality:** Policies, programs and services in post-secondary education should meet student expectations to help prepare them for lifelong success, including their citizenship, careers and personal wellbeing.
- **Student Voice:** Nova Scotia students must be empowered to actively participate in setting their post-secondary systems' direction via engagement through their representative student bodies, within the post-secondary institutions themselves, and through the broader democratic process.

Introduction

Successful student advocacy requires long-term planning and execution. StudentsNS finds its strengths through consistency in approach, while being flexible and listening to the needs of students. As an organization, yearly turnover brings both challenges and successes. While individuals may not be able to move mountains, the collective voices of student leaders, year after year, create meaningful change. Despite typically serving for only a year, each Board Member is able to bring creativity and innovation to their roles, as informed by their student body.

Our 3-year Strategic Plan sets the long-term direction for the organization. This direction is mirrored within our Annual Plans, created each year during the Board Annual Planning Retreat. Annual Planning is key to StudentsNS' organizational success for a number of reasons. Most significantly, it ensures Board Members are held accountable to each other and to the students they serve. By identifying our yearly goals and providing updates on progress, we demonstrate transparency and accountability and highlight our commitment to a long-term organizational vision.

StudentsNS remains a committed advocate for student interests in the Post-Secondary education (PSE) sector. Our continuous goal is to represent these interests in a professional, well-researched and fiscally responsible manner. StudentsNS is guided by our values of affordability, accessibility, quality, and the role of student voice, and commits to advancing these themes through the goals laid out in the 2021-22 Annual Plan.

Planning Process

The 2021-22 Annual Planning Retreat took place August 22-24, 2021. The Board first reviewed the existing Strategic Plan, as well as the 2020-21 Annual Plan, to identify potential strengths or carryover items. A SWOT analysis was conducted to reflect on organizational sustainability and direction. Board Members then identified high level goals and subsequent action items they hoped to accomplish within the upcoming year. The Board made the decision to incorporate at least one action item relating to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion within each goal rather than create a pillar dedicated solely to EDI, ensuring that our efforts to become increasingly inclusive of a variety of perspectives are reflected in all aspects of our organizational work.

StudentsNS' 2021-22 Annual Plan was approved by the Board of Directors at the Annual General Meeting on August 24, 2021.

StudentsNS' 2021-22 Annual Plan presents goals across 6 domains:

1. Consultation and Student Engagement
2. Organizational Sustainability
3. Student Affordability
4. Student Wellbeing
5. Postsecondary Participation and Retention
6. Research and Policy Development

→ **Goals** are the overarching objectives that work to achieve StudentsNS' Plan.

→ **Action Items** are direct actions taken by StudentsNS in pursuit of **Goals**.

→ **Outcomes** are the immediate results of the **Action Items**.

→ **Measures** provide an evaluation & demonstrate how **Outcomes** advance **Goals**.

COMMUNICATIONS & STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

This goal seeks to promote increased awareness of and engagement with StudentsNS' brand on the part of students, stakeholders and other groups. Additionally, it ensures that StudentsNS consults with a wide range of perspectives to effectively inform our advocacy.

Action Items	Outcome	Measure
Create formalized mechanisms to guide consultation with stakeholders and student groups, with an emphasis on students underrepresented within SNS' governance.	Increased student consultation and representation from a diverse range of student perspectives within StudentsNS decision-making	Board approves a StudentsNS consultation framework
Create a social media strategy or social media plan.	Increased engagement with StudentsNS via social media, and increased student awareness of StudentsNS' work	Implementation of a formal social media plan to guide brand management and engagement
Creation of an alumni and stakeholder network	Increased opportunities for students and Board Members to engage directly with former Board Members and other key PSE stakeholders	Creation of a formal alumni and stakeholder database, and leveraging of these connections across campuses
Increase StudentsNS' presence across member campuses	Increased student awareness of StudentsNS	StudentsNS presence at on-campus events StudentsNS merchandise and promotional materials circulated to students StudentsNS presentation to councils
Conduct an awareness campaign on a student advocacy priority	Increased awareness of StudentsNS' advocacy work, and increased institutional and government awareness of student priorities	Awareness campaign conducted over social media and on member school campuses.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

This goal seeks to ensure that StudentsNS continues to function effectively & sustainably in the long-term, with an emphasis on strong internal governance and year-over-year consistency.

Action Items	Outcome	Measure
Creation of transition resources for incoming Board Members and officers	Carryover of knowledge, and increased Board awareness of their responsibilities	Transition documents are approved and circulated to the incoming Board.
Conduct a StudentsNS Staffing Review	Role clarity for Board Members and Officers	Staffing report presented to the Board of Directors.
Review voting and fee structures	Ensure that voting structures within the Board are representative, and fee structures are equitable and promote organizational sustainability.	Fee and voting structure report presented to the Board of Directors.
Review Board structure, with an emphasis on expanding the range of student perspectives and voices.	Increased involvement of underrepresented groups within StudentsNS' governance model and structure, including Indigenous and African Nova Scotian students.	Recommendations presented to the Board of Directors on how best to ensure the Board is representative of a diverse range of student voices and perspectives.
Continue to develop upon partnerships with schools outside of StudentsNS' membership	Increased engagement with student groups outside of StudentsNS membership More effective representation of students across the province	Finalized Partnership Agreement with Nova Scotia Community College Recommendation to the Board on the development of a formalized observer status.

STUDENT AFFORDABILITY

This goal seeks to increase affordability for students across numerous domains, including the cost of education & cost of living, with an emphasis on needs-based supports.

Action Items	Outcome	Measure
Advocate for increased financial support for housing through the Student Financial Assistance Program	Affordability barriers to accessing housing are reduced for Nova Scotia students with highest need.	Provincial implementation of a student-specific housing bursary.
Advocate for the development of a Provincial Student Housing Strategy	Oversight mechanisms in place to ensure fairness and support for student tenants.	Government and stakeholders consider the implementation of a provincial Student Housing Strategy.
Advocate for increased financial assistance funding to address student unmet need	Financial barriers to postsecondary access are reduced for the students with highest financial need.	Government increases Student Financial Assistance program maximums.
Advocate for targeted, upfront needs-based supports for rural students, first-generation students and other groups underrepresented at PSE.	Decreased educational access gaps for rural, first-generation, Indigenous and African Nova Scotian learners.	Government implements targeted needs-based grants for particular student demographics within existing financial assistance programs.
Advocate for the province to encourage an institutional shift from merit-based to needs-based funding, with an emphasis on equitable international student supports	Decreased institutional emphasis on merit-based funding and increased supports for students with greatest financial need	Government works with institutions to develop a bursaries and loans framework that emphasizes needs-based funding, including international-student-specific recommendations.
Advocate for sustainable government funding for a provincial Open Educational Resources repository.	Increased institutional uptake of Open Educational Resources Increased affordability of educational materials for students.	Government supports the funding and implementation of a provincial OER repository.

STUDENT WELLBEING

This goal seeks to promote policies and programs that affirm and support students' mental, physical and emotional wellbeing.

Action Items	Outcome	Measure
Ensure testing and vaccination options remain accessible for students throughout the academic year	Students have access to COVID-19 support on campus, and are aware of the options available to them.	Testing and vaccination clinics available to students in both the fall and winter terms.
Advocate for reduced barriers in International Student access to MSI	International students have increased access to crucial health services	<p>Government reduces the opt-in eligibility window for international student MSI</p> <p>Government eliminates the 31-day exception for international students travelling outside of the province</p>
Advocate for institutional implementation of the Post-Secondary Mental Health Standard	Quality and scope of mental health care supports across the province are high and consistent	Institutions implement the Post-Secondary Mental Health Standard and utilize its evaluatory functions to assess the quality of existing supports.
Advocate for increased access to on-campus health resources & increased capacity of student health centres.	Students can access high quality health care within their campus community.	Provinces and institutions review the efficacy of on-campus health supports and address gaps in staffing or scope.
Advocate for the creation of a province-wide international student framework that would identify best practices for international student supports and programs across campuses.	Quality and scope of international student supports are consistent and high across the province	Province considers the creation of an International Student Strategy or Framework.

POSTSECONDARY PARTICIPATION AND RETENTION

This goal seeks to highlight advocacy goals that address challenges in student retention throughout and following ones degree, including employment and housing.

It additionally highlights barriers to educational access & opportunities to expand transition supports.

Action Items	Outcome	Measure
Advocate for increased funding for provincial student employment programs, including COOP, Graduate to Opportunity and Innovate to Opportunity	Increased accessibility of provincial work-integrated learning opportunities for students and graduates.	Increased provincial investment in COOP, Graduate to Opportunity and Innovate to Opportunity programs.
Advocate for the expansion of existing Work-Integrated Learning programs across degrees and campuses	Increased accessibility of work-integrated learning opportunities across all of degrees and programs	COOP or Work-Integrated Learning options available for all students, regardless of program of study. Encourage institutional implementation of Land-Based Learning within pedagogy and Work-Integrated Learning initiatives
Advocate to reduce the barriers to recent graduates to purchase a home within Nova Scotia	Increased affordability of housing in Nova Scotia, and increased support for new graduates to remain in the province.	Implementation of incentives for new graduates to purchase homes within Nova Scotia.
Support the expansion of micro credentialing opportunities, and the development of a provincial micro credentialing framework	Increased opportunities for development of transferable skills throughout one's degree, regardless of program of study	Implementation of provincial micro credentialing framework and uptake across institutions.
Work with the Department of Education or community partners to identify transition supports for students seeking to pursue post secondary education.	Increased access to postsecondary education among Nova Scotia students, particularly those who are currently underrepresented at PSE.	Implementation of transition supports and postsecondary preparedness initiatives throughout the secondary education system.

RESEARCH AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

This goal seeks to ensure that Students Nova Scotia continues to produce high quality policy documents, and that our advocacy work is informed by up-to-date and relevant research.

Action Items	Outcome	Measure
Update and revise StudentsNS' expiring policies,	Students NS' advocacy is based upon up-to-date and relevant policy and data.	Board approves revised policies.
Creation of at least 3 new StudentsNS Policy Positions	New advocacy priorities and stances continue to be informed by research and policy.	Board approves new policy positions.
Release a research paper highlighting a key student issue	StudentsNS continues to produce high-quality, relevant research on key postsecondary issues	StudentsNS publishes a high quality research submission that is circulated and shared with stakeholders.
Seek to create executive summaries or briefs for new and existing policies and research papers.	StudentsNS research is easily accessible for the general public.	Release of shortened summaries of research papers and policy positions.
Create pre-budget submissions and advocacy documents of a high quality	StudentsNS continues to produce high-quality, relevant research on key postsecondary issues	Circulation of high quality pre-budget submissions and advocacy documents to government and stakeholders.



StudentsNS 2021-2022 Board of Directors