

EDUCATING OUR FUTURE

Students Nova Scotia Strategic Plan | 2022-25

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. With yearly turnover of Board members, we believe that a strategic plan is essential in enabling meaningful progress towards long-term goals. Each year, the new Board of Directors uses the strategic plan as a measurement tool, a guiding document, and a reminder of work yet to be accomplished.

The strategic planning process, as well as the implementation of a strategic plan itself, sets the stage for StudentsNS' work to occur. It anchors the organization in specific themes, goals, and action items and holds each Board accountable--both to StudentsNS, but most importantly, to students. Strategic planning demonstrates to student constituents and other stakeholders the values and intentions of the organization years in advance and creates compliance for current and future Boards to fulfill this mandate.

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. We are guided by our values of affordability, accessibility, quality, and the role of student voice, and commit to advancing these themes through goals laid out in this rendition of the Strategic Plan.

Scope

StudentsNS is dedicated to representing the collective interests and priorities of post-secondary students in Nova Scotia. This is central to every step of StudentsNS' decision making. The Board is expected to consult their respective student populations, as well as report back to their Councils routinely about the direction of StudentsNS. Advocacy priorities are informed by student feedback, as well as emerging campus concerns. The strategic planning process draws on this feedback to inform a long-term strategy that encompasses all relevant stakeholders.

The strategic planning process included a facilitated three-day Board retreat, presentations from guest speakers on the topics of political climate awareness and higher education trends and weeks of revision at the Board level to accurately capture the direction StudentsNS should be moving toward. Careful analysis of the previous strategic plan, its successes, and its room for improvement played a large role in this process. Similarly, gauging successes in recent annual plans was also helpful in informing potential action items. As we move towards implementation, continual involvement of the StudentsNS membership will be key.

Over the next three years, the Board and Executive Director are excited to continue to work together with the StudentsNS membership to deliver high-quality advocacy reflective of student needs. The 2022-25 Strategic Plan sets the direction for this to occur.

VISION

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

MISSION

It is the mission of Students Nova Scotia 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 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.

VALUES

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

Accessibility

Every 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.

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 they choose.

Quality

Policies, programs, and services in post-secondary education should meet student expectations to help prepare them for lifelong success, including in their citizenship, careers, and personal wellbeing.

Student Voice

Nova Scotia students must be empowered to actively participate in setting the postsecondary system's direction through engagement with representative student bodies, within institutions themselves, and through broader democratic processes.

PLANNING PROCESS

To that end, StudentsNS began working to create the 2022-25 Strategic Plan, based on the above stated values. The Board completed a multi-step, three-day retreat. First, the Board was asked to consider the above values and what they mean to students, as well as how StudentsNS can tangibly deliver our values back to our membership.

Secondly, the Board engaged in a comprehensive review of our past strategic plans, most notably the 2022-25 Strategic Plan, noting areas of success and weakness. Combining both steps, the Board completed a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the organization as it stands. From here, goals for the following three years were devised. Board Members were expected to incorporate their students' feedback into each step of the planning process.

Following the retreat, the Board and Executive Director worked collaboratively to refine the details of the plan. Several rounds of edits occurred before the final language was presented at the StudentsNS Annual General Meeting of Members (AGM), as suggested by the previous strategic plan as best practice. StudentsNS has also been on track with delivering the below items, as is also considered a best practice. These additional planning pieces help keep the Board and Executive Director on track to reach the long-term milestones outlined in each strategic plan:

Annual Plan: This document will lay out the yearly path towards achieving the long-term goals of the organization. This document will be set each year by the Board and will create reasonable expectations alongside achievable action items. Some discussion should be had about the resources, both fiscal and financial, that will be required to achieve these targets each year.

Annual Report: Each year, at the Annual General Meeting, the Executive Director should present an annual report. This report should outline the previous year for the organization and highlight what actions were undertaken and what outcomes occurred in the pursuit of the strategic plan.

Three-Year Review: The Executive Director, with the assistance of the Board and other stakeholders where necessary, should undertake a three-year review of the strategic plan. For planning purposes, this would be best to undertake after the final Annual Plan in the strategic planning cycle has been approved, but early enough in the year to ensure effective planning takes place for the creation of the new plan.

Strategic Plan Overview

StudentsNS began the strategic planning process in 2008 and has since produced four strategic plans (2009- 2012, 2013-2016, 2016-2019 and 2019-22). This strategic plan is the fifth produced by StudentsNS and covers 2022-2025.

Vision by 2025

- Increased postsecondary access, particularly for underrepresented groups
- Increased persistence to graduation and customizable PSE pathways, supporting non-traditional learners
- Equitable student financial assistance and predictable tuition and fee models
- Expanded work-integrated learning opportunities in-study, and a diverse range of career options for recent graduates.
- Accessible, wraparound supports for student health and wellbeing

Strategic Plan Pillars

1. Policy and Research
2. Government and Stakeholder Relations
3. Governance and Organizational Sustainability
4. Engagement and Visibility
5. Equitable Access to Postsecondary
6. Innovative Education and Employment

PILLAR: Policy and Research	
Action	Outcomes
Develop and maintain a home office archive/library of research, data, and past publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relevant, up-to-date research sources are easily accessible to Board and staff, enabling development of better-informed policy and advocacy. ● Greater historical knowledge and contextual awareness key student priorities and past research topics
Establish research partnerships and increase engagement with existing research networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● StudentsNS identifies gaps in current research and diversifies future policy directions. ● StudentsNS research reflects a holistic understanding of student issues within the larger provincial landscape ● StudentsNS' advocacy and research is seen as more credible through collaboration with partners with recognized expertise.
Increase opportunities for Board engagement with media and the public through collaborative publications, campus updates, blogs, and/or op-eds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● StudentsNS membership provides regular commentary on current student issues and policy priorities at both the provincial and regional scale ● Increased student and public awareness of StudentsNS' work and of individual campus projects and priorities
Develop and release regular position papers on key student issues; create accompanying factsheets for each position paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● StudentsNS provides regular, in-depth, well-researched commentary on key student issues. ● Research is simplified and easily accessible for the public/student population.
Create and maintain position policies on all student issues highlighted through past and current advocacy work, informing all creation and through regular student consultation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● StudentsNS maintains relevant, up-to-date policies on all areas of advocacy that reflect the diversity of the student population, their experiences and perspectives.

PILLAR: Government and Stakeholder Relations	
Action	Outcomes
Collaborate and build relationships with community stakeholders, including African Nova Scotian and Indigenous populations. Maintain a database of community-based stakeholders and partners across the province.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased collaboration with community groups on respective projects and priorities. ● Advocacy and research are strengthened through connections with well-respected community groups, reflecting a diverse range of perspectives and experiences.
StudentsNS staff engage regularly with campus-based stakeholders (including student services staff and administration) across all member schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● StudentsNS maintains consistent relationships with stakeholders across member campuses. ● StudentsNS' provincial advocacy is supported through collaboration with on-campus allies and stakeholders.
Build relationships across all political parties, adapting advocacy to reflect current government priorities and maintaining a database of past interactions with government, MLAs, and the civil service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● StudentsNS is seen as a partner in policy development, with recommendations deemed credible and/or implemented by government. ● StudentsNS maintains a non-partisan stance while bringing forth priorities and recommendations ● Access to records of past meetings ensures the Board is informed and prepared to engage with elected and civil service on relevant priorities, projects, and areas of interest.
Increase opportunities for StudentsNS alumni to engage with current Board Members through events, workshops, and formalized networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expanded connections between current/past Board Members ● Strengthened organizational consistency, expanding opportunities for knowledge transfer and mentorship. ● Increased StudentsNS engagement across the range of sectors in which alumni are active.
Engage with all stages of the MOU process (preparation, advocacy, and implementation) and with all relevant stakeholders (including government and universities).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student priorities reflected in the Memorandum of Understanding. ● StudentsNS meets with all MOU stakeholders to present student recommendations and priorities.

PILLAR: Governance and Organizational Sustainability	
Action	Outcomes
Review policies and procedures to identify avenues to better incorporate underrepresented students and on-campus groups (including graduate students) directly into StudentsNS governance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • StudentsNS' policy, research and advocacy work better reflects the diversity of the student population. • Broader student awareness of - and engagement with - StudentsNS projects and priorities.
Review organizational roles, responsibilities, and staffing structures to maximize Home Office capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased role clarity for staff and Board Officers. • Expanded Home Office capacity and increased efficiency of resource allocation.
Build meaningful relationships and identify opportunities for collaboration with Nova Scotia Community College student associations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased college student representation in our advocacy. • A stronger united student voice.
Create and implement robust transition resources and succession processes for Board and Staff roles, including continuous record-keeping.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governing documents are transparent and easily accessible • Increased organizational memory and knowledge transfer.
Increase formalized mechanisms for non-members to observe Students Nova Scotia and be engaged in our mandate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-members gain a better understanding of the benefits of Students Nova Scotia membership. • Broader student awareness and engagement with Students Nova Scotia.

PILLAR: Engagement and Visibility	
Action	Outcomes
Develop multimedia and in-person strategies for students to engage with StudentsNS, including conferences, workshops, assemblies as well as through a range of social media platforms and content styles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enhanced student awareness of Students Nova Scotia ● Increased student feedback in shaping StudentsNS priorities
Develop a consultation framework to guide provincial and campus-specific feedback collection, including consultation mechanisms, yearly timelines and approaches for consultation with different student groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enhanced Student Consultation ● Student feedback reflects the diversity of perspectives, backgrounds and lived experiences of the student population.
Develop and execute Get Out the Vote campaign for summer 2025 election.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased student civic engagement and participation with provincial politics/election cycle
Increase connections between StudentsNS and member schools' councils/Boards, as well as on-campus student clubs, groups and societies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased on-campus avenues to promote StudentsNS' mandate & work ● Increased opportunities for StudentsNS to collaborate with relevant student groups and partners.
StudentsNS Promotional Materials present in key campus events/forums (i.e., O-Week) and in centralized on-campus spaces (SUB).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased on-campus brand recognition and awareness of Students Nova Scotia.
Conduct at least one cross-campus campaign on a key student issue or priority each year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student voice is amplified, increased awareness of student issues and priorities among stakeholders and government. ● StudentsNS research is informed by student feedback and priorities.

PILLAR: Equitable Access to Postsecondary	
Action	Outcomes
Advocate for enhancements to Student Financial Assistance, including increases to weekly maximums and living allowances.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postsecondary education becomes more accessible for Nova Scotia students with greatest financial need. • Student Financial Assistance program reflects the realities of educational and living costs.
Advocate for increases to institutional scholarships and grants that reflect increases in enrolment, with an emphasis on targeted needs-based funding towards those with the greatest unmet need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased institutional accountability for allocations and disbursement of student financial aid. • Financial barriers to postsecondary access and persistence are reduced for students in greatest need, particularly those ineligible for provincial aid.
Advocate for predictable tuition models, sustainable recruitment practices and supports to ensure informed international student decision-making regarding educational costs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions allocate international-specific resources and student services funding proportionate to levels of international enrolment. • All students can anticipate the total cost of their degree at the time of enrolment.
<p>Advocate for regional postsecondary housing networks to regulate quality, provide education and connect students with housing options and supports.</p> <p>Advocate for amendments to Residential Tenancies Legislation to address gaps, strengthen tenant protections and streamline appeals processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced Residential Tenancies Act protections for student tenants, strengthened landlord penalties for violations • Increased student awareness of tenancy rights and avenues for self-advocacy
Begin provincial conversations around postsecondary food insecurity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased government and institutional engagement with issues of food insecurity
Advocate for culturally relevant, wraparound supports and frameworks that foster health and wellbeing with an emphasis on underrepresented student groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased accessibility of campus supports for student wellbeing, including mental, physical and psychosocial health.

PILLAR: Innovative Education and Employment	
Action	Outcomes
Advocate for implementation of a consistent provincial framework for microcredentials, and support for faculty and institutions in developing, compiling, and offering cost-effective microcredential options to students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanded access to upskilling and reskilling pathways. Increased opportunities for students and new grads to gain employable skills & capacities.
Advocate for sustainable funding of provincial OER repository and expansion of OER incentives and uptake on individual campuses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of textbooks is greatly reduced for students; course accessibility is increased. Nova Scotia joins other provinces in taking an innovative approach to postsecondary
Advocate for increased number and range of experiential learning opportunities, including equitable distribution of experiential learning opportunities across all programs and degrees.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased access to work-integrated learning opportunities across all programs of study. Expanded access to work-integrated learning opportunities at campuses with limited opportunities.
Advocate for expansion of employment opportunities for new and recent graduates, including increased incentives for employers to hire new graduates and reduction of barriers to participation in entrepreneurship or self-employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased job opportunities for new and recent grads in their field of study. Reduction of barriers for those facing increased challenges to workforce attachment (international students, students with disabilities).
Advocate for continued implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action as they relate to education, with an emphasis on incorporation of Land Based Learning on campuses province-wide.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased on-campus support for Indigenous students; enhanced postsecondary access and participation for Indigenous youth. Increased student engagement with the Calls to Action and traditional ways of learning.
Advocate for increased educational capacity and consistency through expanded supports for students with accessibility needs (including international students) and identification of best practices to support hybrid learning and UDL within program & planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased flexibility in course delivery and degree structure, greater educational accessibility for mature or non-traditional students. Increased accessibility of educational delivery and pedagogy, Nova Scotia continues to innovate educational quality.
Advocate for expanded access to research experiences and increased funding for research across levels and faculties of study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased opportunities for students to explore research pathways throughout undergraduate and graduate programs and across all disciplines.