

# Planning, Strategically



## The Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations 2009–2012

### Preface: Educating our Future

Since its inception in 2003, ANSSA has been successful in achieving tangible policy changes for students in Nova Scotia. In its relatively young life, ANSSA has achieved a number of marked successes. As an organization, ANSSA has developed credible relationships with government officials, bureaucrats and other stakeholders, and we have used these positive and solution-focused relationships to achieve results for students in Nova Scotia

Over the last several years, ANSSA has been involved in changes to tuition, student aid, repayment assistance, and the introduction of grants in the province. As a result of our commitment to acting in a pragmatic and focused manner, decision-makers see their partnership with ANSSA has a benefit rather than a burden.

Despite these successes, ANSSA continues to walk with shaky legs. This strategic plan will work to address some of the organizational gaps that ANSSA continues to experience.

This document is inspired by the Strategic Planning Document, “Stronger, Representative, More Effective,” written by the 2005-2006 ANSSA Home Office and Executive Director.

The 2009-2012 Strategic Document was developed over the course of one year and encompasses recommendations and analysis provided by the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 Board Members and Student Assembly Delegates.

This plan is intended to provide a foundation for ANSSA over the next three years. We hope that these recommendations will help future memberships to succeed in developing and strengthening the organization.

Respectfully Submitted,

2008-2009 Board of Directors

## Mission

The Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations (ANSSA) strives to be a non-partisan, representative lobby group on behalf of Nova Scotian post-secondary students. In its activities, ANSSA shall be guided by the principles of fairness, equality, and justice.

In its lobbying efforts, ANSSA will be pragmatic and principled, bringing a visionary approach to the post-secondary sector. Its role is to serve as an advocate, and a steward of the education system. This role is intimately tied to the principles of fairness, equity, and justice. It shall always be member and student driven, and be active and persistent in representing and advocating for the interests of its constituency.

## Vision

ANSSA's vision is to be a leading provincial advocate for post-secondary education issues on behalf of the students of the province of Nova Scotia. It strives to ensure that the province's post-secondary education system is built upon the principles of accessibility, affordability, innovation, mobility, and quality and that these are achieved by the government of the day in a way that is inclusive of all stakeholders and transparent.

## Values

ANSSA is built on a series of values that work to set us apart from other student advocacy organizations.

### → Member Driven

ANSSA derives its organizational direction from the people it serves – students.

### → More with Less

ANSSA strives to deliver services at a minimal cost to its members.

### → Focused on Higher Education

ANSSA focuses exclusively on issues of affordability, accessibility and quality of post secondary education in Nova Scotia.

### → Accountable & Responsive

ANSSA works to stay accountable to our members and responsive to the issues of the day.

### → Driven by Research & Policy

ANSSA bases its policy positions on credible and non-partisan research.

## The Plan

ANSSA will undertake very specific actions to transform itself over the next three year into the voice of students in Nova Scotia. These actions fall into seven categories:

### Member Engagement

### Government relations, partnerships & public outreach

### Research & Policy

### Organizational Structure & Resources

### Public Relations

### Expanding our Scope

# 1. Member engagement.

With only one staff member and a lobby agenda which isn't at the top of most students mind, engaging our membership is among ANSSA's most significant challenges. Currently, ANSSA strives to engage students through its bi-annual student assemblies. Throughout the year, we have acquired feedback on our Assemblies and this has been compiled in a report (see appendix). Below underlines three recommendations to strengthen our student assemblies.

## Member Engagement: **Strengthen our student assemblies.**

### → Enhance delegate comfort level.

Delegates attending student assembly for the first time often feel overwhelmed and intimidated by the information reviewed throughout the weekend. Students are bombarded with material about ANSSA's organizational history, old and upcoming policy, and the current political climate. In an effort to make this information more manageable, ANSSA proposes that Board members provide delegates a briefing or tutorial in the week prior to student assembly. This briefing session will give delegates an opportunity to meet one and other, review material, and acquire a clear understanding of ANSSA's organizational purpose. This measure is intended to increase the comfort level of delegates and consequently enhance the level of discussion and debate throughout the weekend.

### → Better facilitation of discussion topics.

One of the biggest challenges that ANSSA faces with student assemblies is providing delegates the resources that they require to engage in discussion and debate in a meaningful fashion. Going forward, ANSSA must strive to acquire "experts" to introduce policy topics and stimulate debate. This measure is intended to introduce a third party to the discussion who can provide objective material on the policy options being discussed. We also trust that this effort will work to stimulate discussion and encourage participation.

### → ANSSA Ambassadors

Student assemblies aim to provide members with a forum to shape ANSSA's political direction and enhance accountability of the organization. Ideally, student assembly delegates should leave the student assembly and go back to their member schools as "ANSSA ambassadors." ANSSA must work to provide meaningful ways to engage these members in the day-to-day operations of ANSSA, so they can identify and explain ANSSA "value" to their constituents.

## 2. Government relations, partnerships, and public outreach.

ANSSA has historically enjoyed a positive and mutually respectful relationship with its stakeholders. We must work to refine and synthesize our message to ensure that it is clear and manageable. We strive to communicate goals & objectives which are diverse in scope and feasibility. We will also work to engage new stakeholders who, at first sight, might be 'out of the box.' The following are intended efforts to diversifying and refining our messaging.

### Relations, Partnerships & Outreach: **Lobby government leaders to ensure ANSSA policies are reflected in the government-of-the-day's priorities**

#### → **More consistent relationships with officials and bureaucrats**

Board members should have a more visible presence with our elected officials. Home office will commit to notifying Board Members when he/she has meetings scheduled with government leaders. Understanding that distance will prohibit everyone from participating, the option will be available to those who are interested.

#### → **Adjust our advocacy priorities to the lifespan of the sitting government.**

Traditionally, ANSSA has set their advocacy priorities on a yearly rotation. Governments, however, think in four year cycles. In an effort to gain better traction on our priorities, ANSSA must begin to identify short, medium, and long term goals in the annual planning cycle. This will enable the following years Board to continue gaining traction on medium and longer term goals and also increase our relevance and continuity in the eyes of government stakeholders.

#### → **Maintain records of our meetings with MLA, bureaucrats & other stakeholders.**

Through the website, the Executive Director and Board members will commit to updating the Wikipedia tool to log meetings with stakeholders and identify areas of common concern.

### Relations, Partnerships & Outreach: **Engage our 'periphery' stakeholders.**

#### → **Each Board member provides the Executive Director with a list of campus related partners that he/she should meet.**

In an effort to increase ANSSA's visibility and profile, each Board member will be required to provide the Executive Director with a list of on campus stakeholders who would share a common interest in ANSSA's mandate. This list should be generated throughout the transition period and meetings should take place throughout the first semester.

→ Partner with other organizations on issues of common interest.

To build more support and traction on our advocacy goals, ANSSA must form deeper partnership with our community stakeholders. Currently, we enjoy positive working and information sharing relationships with stakeholders. In an effort to future entrench these relationships and build organizational credibility, we should work on partnering with compatible organizations such as NovaKnowledge to host events.

## 4. Research & Policy

ANSSA sets itself apart from other student organizations by conducting meaningful and thorough research on policy topics. Grounding our policies in solid research bolsters our organizational credibility in the eyes of those people whose opinion we work to sway. Since ANSSA's inception, our policies have taken on different forms and tones, but each works to solidify ANSSA's organizational personality. In an effort to further synthesize our message, ANSSA must establish a cohesive message throughout each policy and continually manage the relevance and success of each policy.

### Research & Policy: **Become thought leaders in Post Secondary Education in Nova Scotia.**

→ Ensure that policies are relevant and address issues of the day.

Currently, student assemblies act as the direction-setting body of the organization. Future policies and procedures are determined by at the Plenary Session of Student Assembly. As the final agenda item, future policies are often discussed in passing and with little consideration of the big picture. This results in policies being written for the sake of having policies, and not necessarily because ANSSA requires the research to undertake a particularly initiative or campaign.

ANSSA policies should present solutions to the government on issues of the day. Our policies should be utilized by government members as platform from which to launch parliamentary debate.

To achieve this, assembly delegates will be provided with a 'Future Policy Considerations' document in their delegate packages. Interested delegates will be required to submit policy suggestions in advance. This measure is intended to promote forethought in the plenary policy discussion.

→ Maintain a research archive at home office.

Building a comprehensive library of resources will enable new staff members to easily access materials and information on post secondary topics. This measure will avoid new executive directors from having to start from scratch, finding primarily research sources.

## Research & Policy: **Share our and build our knowledge**

### → Create opportunities to promote and discuss our research in a public forum.

Other successful education thought leaders promote their successes and research by hosting conferences and events. Hosting policy forums, debates, town halls and lectures present opportunities for ANSSA to enhance our credibility and promote our research and policy agenda.

Understanding that ANSSA's resources are limited, we should actively seek to partner with other organizations in achieving this aim.

### → Build a research network of students, professors, and academic groups

Through the new website feature, ANSSA should actively identify post secondary experts, be they students, professors, or policy analysts. We can work in conjunction with these experts to support upcoming research agendas, respond to media inquiry's, and target for events.

### → Build and annually maintain a policy book

Our current policies will be merged into a single document booklet. The policy book will be used as a tool for government officials, Board Members and Assembly delegates. The policy book will be amended each year during the transition conference, to ensure it is updated and relevant before the start of the academic year. This procedure will assist ANSSA in identifying expired and/or irrelevant policies.

## 5. Organizational structure & resources.

Building the organizational capacity of ANSSA is of critical importance in this stage of our development. With only one staff member and an extensive lobby agenda, it's easy to appreciate how organizational matters are easily pushed to the sideline. Our current practices in human resources, financial accountability, and our operational policies must be revisited and amended to ensure ANSSA's future sustainability.

### Organizational Structure & Resources: **Attract & retain high quality Executive Directors.**

#### → Salary consistent with market standards in Nova Scotia

The ANSSA Executive Director is the backbone of the organization. This person is responsible for implementing the vision laid out by the Board of Directors and provides a consistent and familiar face to our stakeholders. In the past ANSSA has been successful in attracting highly ambitious and committed Executive Directors who have worked tirelessly to implement ANSSA's agenda. As the only staff person of ANSSA, the Executive Director carries a heavy workload. Understanding that ANSSA is a small organization which provides extensive services to students at a low cost, the Executive Director must be compensated at a level that reflects both the

workload and the market standards in Nova Scotia. ANSSA must also commit to annually reviewing the salary of the Executive Director and ensure that it remains competitive.

→ **Retain Executive Director's for two years.**

Retention has been a particular challenge for ANSSA. Since its inception, ANSSA has not retained an Executive Director for a period longer than 12 months. This frequent turnover makes it difficult to maintain relationships with our external stakeholders and results in a high level of disruption and discontinuity. This problem has a two fold solution. First, as mentioned in the previous point, salary levels must rise and remain competitive in the market. Secondly, we must redefine expectations for our Executive Director and compensate accordingly. Going forward, Executive Directors will be offered two year contracts. At the end of the first year of service, a bonus incentive of \$2000 will be offered to employees who commit to staying for the additional year.

→ **Adjust salary each year as per CPI.**

This practice will align us with most business models in Nova Scotia. As the cost of living increases as should the annual salary of the Executive Director. (Note: membership fees increase by CPI each year, so this adjustment in salary is sustainable).

→ **Board of Directors develop and communicate clear expectations during summer transition meeting.**

Performance expectations of our Executive Director must be clearly established and evaluated throughout the year. Clarifying expectations and defining a work plan will help to reduce some of the ambiguity that the Executive Director may experience and provide the Board with a good measure of ANSSA's yearly progress.

→ **Performance reviews**

While ANSSA has been fortunate in acquiring motivated and successful Executive Directors, a mechanism of accountability must be further entrenched in ANSSA's annual procedures. Biannual performance reviews should be developed and conducted from the performance expectation plan. A review of the expectation document and subsequent performance review shall be conducted twice per year by the Executive Committee

## Organizational Structure & Resources: **Finances**

→ **Improve internal finance accountability**

Increasing our financial accountability will assist the Executive Director in the budgeting process and assist in month to month planning. The installation of Quickbooks on the home office computer should be utilized by the Executive Director to record all incoming and outgoing expenses.

→ **Monthly reporting by Treasurer to the Board of Directors**

Financial transparency within the organization needs to be enhanced. Going forward, the Executive Director will provide the Treasurer with monthly Quickbooks financial statements and these will be presented to the Board of Directors during the monthly meetings.

→ **Deliver annual financial report to Fall GA.**

The annual financial report shall be included in the Fall General Assembly delegate package.

→ **Hire an auditor to conduct annual reviews.**

Auditing of ANSSA's annual financial records is another step in enhancing our organizational transparency and accountability. We will strive to obtain this services at the lowest cost possible and commit to undertaking the audit at the end of each financial year.

→ **Establish a contingency fund.**

In the past, ANSSA has maintained a contingency fund. These contingency resources have now been depleted. Beginning in the 2009/10 year, ANSSA will budget to contribute \$1,000 per year to the building of a contingency fund.

## Organizational Structure & Resources: **Institutional Memory**

→ **Mandate that outgoing Executive Directors provide a written final report prior to their departure.**

Final reports provide incoming Executive Directors with a useful reference point and historical picture of the organization. Final reports are helpful in piecing together the organization's history and helps future Executive Directors develop and execute their agenda. A financial bonus should be attached the submission and Executive approval of each final report.

→ **Conduct exit interviews with departing Executive Directors**

Outgoing Executives are one of our greatest value opportunities. After spending a significant amount of time with the organization, they can provide an honest and accurate assessment of the organizations threats and opportunities. The exit interview should be conducted by the ANSSA President.

→ **Ensure incoming Executive Director's are provided a paid, two week transition with outgoing Executive Director.**

Each annual budget should reflect two week paid transition period between incoming and outgoing Executive Directors to ensure that all knowledge is transferred an efficient manner.

## Organizational Structure & Resources: **Operating Policies**

→ Establish a pro-forma calendar for meetings; continue rotating the location of meetings between member schools.

As an organization which represents students across the province, ANSSA must continue its practice of rotating meetings from school to school. This practice assists in promoting fairness and cost-sharing.

→ Review and update ANSSA's organizational policies on an annual basis.

ANSSA's organizational foundations are laid out in an internal policy manual and throughout its by-laws. These policies and procedures should be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure their relevancy.

## 5. Public Relations

Building ANSSA's public profile requires positive media attention. Building our media relationships and technological capacity will enable us to communicate more effectively with the general public.

### Public Relations: **Print Media**

→ Stress our "market-share" and size to the media, public, and stakeholders

ANSSA's 'market-share' is one of its greatest resources. Currently, we represent over 75% of students in Nova Scotia and are by far, the largest student representative body in the province. This message must be better reinforced and communicated to our stakeholders. This fact should be a predominate message on all communication tools and emphasized wherever possible.

→ Continue to build relationships with key members of the media.

Meeting with local newspaper editors should become common practice for ANSSA Executive Directors. Face to face communication will provide members of the media with a greater understanding of our organization and the issues. We must also consistently reinforce our market share with the group, so as to ensure that ANSSA becomes the primarily point of contact on education issues.

### Public Relations: **Online Media**

→ Ensure that our website is continually updated and relevant.

Increasingly, an organization's website and digital capacity set the tone and expectation for the organization itself. Recently we have developed a new website with extensive interactive capacities (blogging, Wikipedia etc.). It is imperative that our membership is aware of this website and takes advantage of its capabilities. The Executive Director will be responsible for updating media and content. The Board of Directors shall take an active role in providing new and creative ideas to the Executive Director.

## 7. Expanding our Scope

Expanding our scope speaks to the need to develop relationships with key stakeholders, each of which work to piece together ANSSA organizational strength. These include non-ANSSA schools, volunteers, and alumni.

### Expanding our Scope: **Continue to develop relationships with non-member schools**

→ This measure is a commitment to continue our current practice of communicating and building relationships with non-ANSSA schools, wherever the opportunity presents itself.

### Expanding our Scope: **Build & engage our alumni network**

→ ANSSA Alumni are a great resource for institutional memory and general advice. Simply continue our practice of inviting alumni to events will assist us in continuing to build the ANSSA network.

### Expanding our Scope: **Build & engage a volunteer network**

→ With limited resources, ANSSA must work on tapping into volunteer networks in an effort to 'fill the gaps' in the organization. Oftentimes, ANSSA recruits Executive Director's with strong networking, lobbying, and policy skills. ANSSA needs to tap into networks of people who have strong skills in finance, editing, graphic design, and website development – areas that ANSSA has historically struggled with. Advertising our needs and meaningfully engaging our volunteers will ease the burden of the Executive Director.

