

2012-2013 Annual Plan



September 10, 2012

STUDENTSNS.CA

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2012-2013 Annual Plan

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2012-2013 Annual Plan

Overview

The Board of Directors preliminarily approved this Annual Plan following discussions at the Students Nova Scotia (hereafter StudentsNS) Annual Planning Retreat July 24-26, 2012, and then it was approved in full on September 10, 2012. It will remain in effect until the next Annual Planning Retreat in June-July 2013.

This Annual Plan serves primarily to formalize the Board of Directors' expectations for 2012-13 StudentsNS activities and provides, therefore, the essential terms of reference for the Executive Director's decision-making over the course of the year. Upon expiry, the Annual Plan will also form the basis for students and the Board to evaluate the effectiveness of StudentsNS and the Executive Director. The document will therefore be made available to students and the public at the earliest possible date to ensure that StudentsNS is accountable and transparent in its operations.

The most essential component of the Annual Plan is the list of priorities. The Board of Directors has identified five key priorities for 2012-13 that may be summarized as:

- Re-branding and website renewal: StudentsNS will be rebranding and changing the name of the organization from the Alliance of Nova Scotia Student Associations (ANSSA), making all communications reflect this new identity.
- Advocacy: StudentsNS will remain focused and at the table with government, university administrators and other stakeholders in Nova Scotia's post-secondary education system, defending and promoting student interests.
- Research and Policy Development: StudentsNS will prioritize building the foundation of research and policy needed to deliver results for students.
- Engagement: StudentsNS will establish a stronger presence on campuses, online, and in the media, including through timely and effective campaigns.

- **Strategic Planning:** StudentsNS will complete a Strategic Plan to provide a broader framework for the organization's annual planning in the next three years.

This Annual Plan is consistent with Students Nova Scotia's Mission and Values. Students Nova Scotia's Mission is to represent the collective interests and priorities of post-secondary students in Nova Scotia. Students Nova Scotia has four key values, which guide the organization's decision-making:

Accessibility: Every qualified Nova Scotia student 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: The Nova Scotia post-secondary system should strive at all times to provide the highest possible quality of education to its students, fostering student success.

Student Voice: Nova Scotia students must be empowered to actively participate in setting their post-secondary system's direction via engagement through their representative student bodies, within the post-secondary institutions themselves, and through the broader democratic process.

Prior to discussing the 2012-13 priorities in greater detail, this report provides an overview of the environmental and organizational context wherein these priorities must be situated.

Environmental Context

2012-13 promises to be a very important year politically. It is the last year of the current NDP majority provincial government's mandate and an election will likely take place in spring, summer or early fall 2013. Recent polling shows that the parties are close in popularity making it difficult to predict a particular result.

The university system is currently experiencing some significant changes. Domestic undergraduate tuition is scheduled to continue and increase at 3% per year, while international, professional and graduate tuition will remain unregulated and consequently continue to rise at an even greater pace. At the same time, government grants to universities will fall by 3% this year and are expected to fall another 3% next year, completing a 10% reduction over three years, before returning to growth. On the positive side, there is significant momentum for improving the student assistance system in the province, with approximately \$18 million in new investments over the past two years.

Negotiations between government, the universities and – as an unfortunately marginalised partner – students, are on going even after the Province-Universities Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2011. Negotiations for the MOU failed to resolve many significant challenges, requiring that talks continue through the ‘Partnership’ to find agreement on various issues, such as long-term tuition regulation, quality indicators, the funding formula, international students, accountability standards, etc.

The global economy remains sluggish following the 2009 recession, which continues to affect university, government and student finances, as well as student demand for education. Government income has been constrained by reduced economic growth, while by the same token university pension funds have been slow to crawl back to pre-recession levels, such that many expensive older staff and faculty continue to postpone retirement at great cost to their institutions and governments. Among students, many are choosing to study now in the hopes of retraining or delaying entry into the job market. Limited demand for their labour, including through substantial layoffs in recent months and a diminishing opportunities in part-time and seasonal economies throughout the province, reduce in-study earning opportunities. Taken as a whole, these forces are making education more expensive.

Finally, Nova Scotia’s demographics are conspiring to aggravate these aforementioned forces. The combination of rural out-migration and low birth-rates are aging and shrinking the population such that local young people are no longer a stable source of enrolment for post-secondary institutions in the immediate and long-term.

Students and the post-secondary system in Nova Scotia face significant challenges. It is therefore all the more imperative that StudentsNS provide students with a strong voice in Nova Scotia, ensuring their interests are protected and promoted.

Organizational Context

Fortunately, StudentsNS has become better equipped this year. In 2011-2012 five StudentsNS members approved an increase in their member fees, giving StudentsNS an additional \$80,000 to fund its activities in 2012-13. The greater resources will dramatically increase the organization's capacities and effectiveness, allowing StudentsNS to hire two new staff members; a Director of Engagement and Communications, and Director of Research. StudentsNS' new strength is reflected in the ambition and scope of this Annual Plan.

Importantly, there has also been a turnover in the Executive Director position. Jonathan Williams was hired in April 2012, and Mark Coffin moved on after three years of hard work for Nova Scotia students.

The new staff and capacities together sparked a review and modification of the organization's internal governance; partially as a normal process of organizational renewal, and partially to better house the new organizational structure. An external advisor has been brought in to assist with this process. The Board of Directors and Members have approved significant changes to StudentsNS' Vision/Values/Mission/Principles, By-laws, Governing Policies, Board-Staff Relations Policies, and Operations Policies. The following changes are of particular note:

- Student Voice has been added as an organizational value, meaning StudentsNS will promote student participation in decision-making within their own associations, universities and the province as an end in and of itself.
- The Board of Directors has committed to making meeting minutes, budgets and audits publicly available.
- The Board of Directors will approve policy for external lobbying only two times a year, with proposed policy released one month in advance so that board members can host consultations with students before making decisions.

The review of internal governance is relevant to this whole document and ties in with each of the key priorities for the year. StudentsNS will be doing many things differently starting in 2012-13, all with the purpose of generating greater results for its members.

Despite these significant changes, StudentsNS has nevertheless entered 2012-13 on solid footing. The organization is already recognized as a serious player in the Nova Scotia post-secondary system, willing to negotiate and do the hard work necessary to understand our challenges and find realistic solutions. The organization's successful pursuit of fee increases also demonstrates members' confidence in StudentsNS and its potential to do still better.

Students, government, universities and the media have high expectations of StudentsNS. The changes and projects pursued in 2012-13 should ensure StudentsNS is able to meet and even surpass these expectations in the short, medium and long term.

Priorities for 2012-13

1. Rebranding and Website Renewal

StudentsNS will undertake a significant rebranding in 2012-13. Working with Kula Partners (a Halifax based design and marketing firm), the organization will be developing new strategies to enhance its brand by modifying the names, images, and digital presence associated with the organizations identity.

The new name will be far easier for students, community-members and media to remember. The new word-mark, colours and report designs will create a new standardized, recognizable, professional look. This element of the rebrand will be complete by early September.

The new website will be ready in October and carry forward the vision outlined by the new identity features mentioned above. Beyond simply being a more professional storefront for the organization though, studentsns.ca aims to become the hub for information on Post-Secondary Education (PSE) issues in Nova Scotia—connecting students, community-members, and other stakeholders with clear and accurate information about how the PSE system works, framed by our vision for change. We recognize that the web of policy and government legislation governing PSE in Nova Scotia is difficult to access and interpret, but this presents an opportunity for StudentsNS to become an essential provider of PSE knowledge for our constituents and communities.

Clarifying and updating internal governance policies is an additional and complementary component of rebranding this organization. StudentsNS aims to become a leader in transparency, so as to “practice what we preach” to other organizations and governments. With the organization’s new digital infrastructure in place, constituents and the public will be able to access budgets, annual reports, plans and Board of Directors meeting minutes online.

StudentsNS recognizes that while its mandate remains anchored to a focus on the post-secondary education system in Nova Scotia, it also has much to contribute to the larger national and even international conversation on PSE reforms. The new branding at Students will better shed light on our policy and research, creative and effective engagement and communications, organizational transparency, and results for our members, allowing StudentsNS to become a leader in student engagement and evidence-driven post-secondary reform.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES:

1. The name change to Students Nova Scotia (StudentsNS) is completed and entrenched by the end of the year.
2. StudentsNS has a new Wordmark/logo, in addition to corresponding colour schemes for standardizing reports, presentations, etc.
3. StudentsNS has a new website that is functional, dynamic and attractive.
4. StudentsNS’ internal governance policies, budgets, annual plans, annual reports, audits and meeting minutes are available on the organisation’s website.
5. StudentsNS’ Internal Governance policies are fully functional by the end of the year such that they will require only minor reviews in the next three years.
6. StudentsNS respects its internal governance policies at all times, including notably the organization’s Principles.

2. Advocacy

StudentsNS is fundamentally an advocacy organization built to find constructive, evidence-based solutions for issues facing students, and to bring these solutions to the attention of key decision-makers in civil society and government. StudentsNS will continue to advance constructive reforms and alternatives for Nova Scotia post-

secondary education. In particular, through the 2012/13 planning cycle, we see the following advocacy opportunities:

- StudentsNS will continue to engage with the Provincial Partnership Board and other on-going Province-universities negotiations, including working group discussions on tuition, international students and the funding formula. We aim to have this include formal meetings with the Partnership Board, full membership on working groups, and submissions where appropriate. Students must have a voice at these tables.
- StudentsNS will seek to contribute our policy and advocacy priorities to all major parties' election platforms for the expected 2013 election cycle. Further, we aim to ensure that students and post-secondary education are prominent within the political community and the province at-large, both in the lead-up to and during the 2013 election.
- Recognizing that many decisions affecting students are not made by any level of government, but instead through the autonomous institutions, StudentsNS, through its membership and directly upon invitation, will engage with campus decision-makers, whether faculty, administration or governing boards, to find and promote constructive solutions for both that campus and the broader system.
- StudentsNS, as it aims to be viewed as a leader in Nova Scotia post-secondary, will continue to build respectful relationships with decision-makers at all levels of government, in all political parties and within the wider community. StudentsNS will pursue regular meetings with government officials and other political actors, to stay top of mind and 'in the loop' on developments to the greatest extent possible.

Advocacy will continue to be the primary means by which StudentsNS delivers results to students.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES:

7. StudentsNS participates in meetings of the Province-University Partnership bodies in an informed and strategic manner.
8. StudentsNS has prepared a platform for the upcoming provincial election and present this platform to all three major political parties early enough to contribute to their platform development processes.

9. StudentsNS has made student issues a visible priority in the provincial election.
10. StudentsNS is responsive to members' requests to assist with their relationships with their own institutions.
11. StudentsNS has regular meetings with decision-makers and maintains respectful relationships.

3. Research and Policy Development

StudentsNS, aided by our increased resources, will establish a new research and policy process to build-up a reserve of agreed-upon policies that equip the organisation to effectively participate in discussions concerning post-secondary policy in this province.

While recognizing there will be the first time attempting such an approach, the members shall engage in a series of consultations with their students on two occasions, to vet policy proposals to ensure they address the needs of students. It is important to note that this will be the first effort at such a research-backed approach, but the new governance reforms have built into them a series of checks and balances that ensure these policies are vetted by members at various stages of the research-to-policy development.

Governance reforms are institutionalizing greater student-body input into policy-development, to vet policy proposals and ensure they address the contemporary needs and priorities of students. All member unions and association are now asked to host campus consultations prior to each of two annual Board of Directors policy-meetings. Policy proposals will be released one month prior to these policy-meetings to allow for these consultations and, when invited, StudentsNS staff will help to facilitate consultations or present research. After these consultations the Board Members and home office staff will revise the policies to reflect student input as represented by the Board. Best practices for consultations will be discussed after the first year is completed.

Below are listed the policy development priorities for 2012-13—as identified by the Board of Directors—in order of importance and with their target month for approval noted:

1. System's View (Funding Formula, accountability, etc.) – November 2012
2. Ancillary Fees – November 2012
3. Tuition – March 2013
4. Student Health – March 2013
5. Employment – March 2013
6. International Students – March 2013
7. Quality – October 2013
8. Housing – October 2013
9. Financial Assistance to Students – October 2013
10. Non-Financial Determinants of Accessibility – October 2013

Our research priorities are a testament to StudentsNS's expanding focus, towards some issues that affect students but are outside the immediate post-secondary environment. Work on health, employment and housing will allow the organization to better represent student concerns and press for change on fronts that had been inadequately covered before and find new community partners.

Building this organization's research resources is essential to our advocacy efforts. We must know our issues and have certainty in our recommendations if we are to generate meaningful change for students. The priorities identified for 2012-13 will improve our understanding of what changes would help students, and simultaneously reinforce our ability to make those changes happen.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES:

12. All members have conducted consultations on their campuses prior to the two Board Policy Retreats and reported to the Board on these consultations.
13. Based on the year's experiences, Students NS has completed a best practices guide on conducting policy consultations.
14. Students NS has completed a Position Paper on A System's View by November 2012.
15. Students NS has completed a Position Paper on Ancillary Fees by November 2012.
16. Students NS has completed a Position Paper on Tuition by March 2013.
17. Students NS has completed a Position Paper on Student Health by March 2013.

18. Students NS has completed a Position Paper on Employment by March 2013.
19. Students NS has completed a Position Paper on International Students by March 2012.
20. Students NS has begun work to complete a Position Paper on Quality for October 2013.
21. Students NS has begun work to complete a Position Paper on Housing for October 2013.
22. Students NS has begun work to complete a Position Paper on Financial Assistance to Students for October 2013.
23. Students NS has begun work to complete a Position Paper on Non-Financial Determinants of Accessibility for October 2013.

4. Engagement

Engagement is essential for StudentsNS. Without broad and consistent engagement with the community and its constituents, this organization would not have the legitimacy or momentum needed to influence decision-makers and the public at large. The internal changes at StudentsNS, including the rebrand, should significantly facilitate better engagement, yet additional initiatives and measures are also in order.

The direct campus consultations discussed above, are one such initiative. As a first in the organization's history, these events will create a space where students outside of an association's internal bodies can give feedback, helping make StudentsNS policies more representative and raise awareness of the organization. This new decision-making process represents a major step forward for engagement at StudentsNS.

With the addition of a full time Director of Engagement and Communications to the home office staff, StudentsNS will also expand engagement through a more consistent and focused approach to social, online and traditional media. This will include a faster and more consolidated approach to press releases, an organized communications plan for promoting StudentsNS priorities, and closer relationships with individual members of the media. Having a staff member dedicated to our digital and media

presence will heighten awareness and exposure of the organization and our work, giving students, decision-makers, and the broader public multiple points of entry to get engaged. In this vein, our new website will also include a page on how to get involved in StudentsNS, to help us build a database of enthusiastic volunteers.

StudentsNS has always maintained that innovative campaigns are key to achieving our goals and plan to continue this strategy through the coming year. We will pursue the following campaigns in 2012-13:

- **Students Speak Out:** capturing and communicating students' stories about why Post-Secondary is important for them, and what reforms are needed to promote accessibility, affordability and quality in the system. These videos are powerful online and in meetings with decision makers.
- **Provincial Election Campaign:** As a provincial election is anticipated for 2013, StudentsNS aims to leverage our 35,000 students, the majority of whom are voters, to significantly influence the election in favour of students' interests. Our activities will include pushing for the election to occur during the school year, educating students and community-members about the parties' PSE platforms, and calling on students and community-members to vote for the post-secondary system that we envision.
- Recognizing that though post-secondary is formally a Provincial responsibility, municipal governments control many factors affecting accessibility, affordability and quality, StudentsNS will assist members with engagement around various municipal elections.
- Because Mental Health is an emerging and increasingly important issue for members and our students, StudentsNS will seek to build an advocacy and awareness campaign around the issue, subject to the organisation's research to be approved in March 2013.

The combination of student consultations, greater online and media messaging, a consistent public presence, and effective campaigns will make 2012-13 a watershed year for student engagement at StudentsNS.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES:

24. StudentsNS has developed a Communications Strategy, including points on interactions with the media and building internal structures that foster effective and engaging communications.
25. New content of elevated quality is being regularly generated on the website (at least one new item per week).
26. StudentsNS has continued to publish recordings of students' experiences through the Students Speak Out campaign.
27. StudentsNS has created a strategy for effective engagement in the up-coming provincial election.
28. Upon request, StudentsNS assisted its members with engagement around municipal elections in October 2012.
29. StudentsNS has built a campaign around student health, and particularly mental health, subject to the recommendations of the Position Paper on Student Health to be completed in March 2013.

5. Strategic Planning

Strategic plans provide very 'big picture' guidance to the organization on the direction and form of its development over a longer period of time; i.e. three to five years. In particular, they provide a consistent and longer-term basis for annual planning.

The new Governing Policies of StudentsNS require that a strategic plan be completed in March-April of every third year, and remain valid for three years from its date of approval. StudentsNS does not currently have a strategic plan in place, as the most recent plan expired in 2011-12. StudentsNS will, therefore, complete a Strategic Plan in March-April, 2013.

RESULTS AND OUTCOMES:

30. StudentsNS has completed a Strategic Plan in March-April 2013, to help guide the organization's development from 2013-14 to 2015-16.

Conclusion

This plan outlines an ambitious organizational programme for 2012-13. As the organization expands and adapts to better house its greater capacity, this will be an integral building year. At the same time, this is an important year for advocacy and engagement, with the post-secondary education situation, the economy and an upcoming election creating a backdrop of change that StudentsNS must be engaged with. The plan outlined above is aimed at generating results for students this year, while also building the kind of lasting and sustainable organizational framework that will foster greater results further in the future.

Budget:

The original budget was approved by the Board of Directors on May 16, and was amended by the Board, extraordinarily, on July 26.

INCOME	MAY BUDGET	JULY REVISION
Total	\$176,084.40	\$169,111.95
4101 DSU	\$95,082.84	\$88,672.33
4102 ASU	\$19,994.05	\$19,632.68
4103 STFXUSU	\$26,269.26	\$25,822.08
4104 SMUSA/ASTSU	\$18,200.00	\$17,688.30
4105 CBUSU	\$16,538.25	\$17,296.58
4106 Other revenue		

EXPENSES	MAY BUDGET	JULY REVISION
Total	\$175,603.89	\$169,100.22
6000 Accounting	\$4,000.00	\$4,000.00
6005 Strategic Initiatives*	\$8,000.00	\$14,375.00
6050 Recurring Fees (Bank/Insurance)	\$3,600.00	\$3,600.00
6700 Office supplies and equipment	\$6,200.00	\$3,820.00
6800 Rent	\$7,740.00	\$5,420.00
6850 Human resources	\$125,821.19	\$120,615.22
6880 Student Assembly**		
6905 Travel & meetings	\$7,992.70	\$7,000.00
6955 Utilities and Conf. Calls	\$2,250.00	\$2,670.00
Contingency fund***	\$1,000.00	\$500.00
Communications and campaigns	\$9,000.00	\$7,100.00

* Strategic initiatives spending in 2012-13 is covering the organization's rebranding and new website, completed with Kula Partners.

** Student assembly records money StudentsNS spends to host board meetings. Members are expected to reimburse StudentsNS for these costs, which is why the line is left empty.

*** The Contingency Fund is money kept from year-to-year in case of emergency.

Summary of Results and Outcomes

Below is a concise list of the key outcomes and results cited in this annual plan, to facilitate evaluation at the end of the year.

REBRANDING AND WEBSITE RENEWAL

1. The name change to Students Nova Scotia (StudentsNS) is completed and entrenched by the end of the year.
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3. StudentsNS has a new website that is functional, dynamic and attractive.
4. StudentsNS' internal governance policies, budgets, annual plans, annual reports, audits and meeting minutes are available on the organisation's website.
5. StudentsNS' Internal Governance policies are fully functional by the end of the year such that they will require only minor reviews in the next three years.
6. StudentsNS respects its internal governance policies at all times, including notably the organization's Principles.

ADVOCACY

7. StudentsNS participates in meetings of the Province-University Partnership bodies in an informed and strategic manner.
8. StudentsNS has prepared a platform for the upcoming provincial election and present this platform to all three major political parties early enough to contribute to their platform development processes.
9. StudentsNS has made student issues a visible priority in the provincial election.
10. StudentsNS is responsive to members' requests to assist with their relationships with their own institutions.
11. StudentsNS has regular meetings with decision-makers and maintains respectful relationships.

RESEARCH AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

12. All members have conducted consultations on their campuses prior to the two Board Policy Retreats and reported to the Board on these consultations.
13. Based on the year's experiences, Students NS has completed a best practices

guide on conducting policy consultations.

14. Students NS has completed a Position Paper on A System's View by November 2012.
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23. Students NS has begun work to finish a Position Paper on Non-Financial Determinants of Accessibility for October 2013.

ENGAGEMENT

24. StudentsNS has developed a Communications Strategy, including points on interactions with the media and building internal structures that foster effective and engaging communications.
25. New content of elevated quality is being regularly generated on the website (at least one new item per week).
26. StudentsNS has continued to publish recordings of students' experiences through the Students Speak Out campaign.
27. StudentsNS has created a strategy for effective engagement in the up-coming provincial election.
28. Upon request, StudentsNS assisted its members with engagement around municipal elections in October 2012.
29. StudentsNS has built a campaign around student health, and particularly mental health, subject to the recommendations of the Position Paper on Student Health to be completed in March 2013

STRATEGIC PLANNING

30. StudentsNS has completed a Strategic Plan in March-April 2013, to help guide the organization's development from 2013-14 to 2015-16.