

# Strategic Plan

2016–2019



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

# Introduction

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StudentsNS began the strategic planning process in 2008 and has since produced two strategic plans (2009-2012 and 2013-2016). This strategic plan is the third produced by StudentsNS and covers 2016-2019. You will note that this strategic plan does overlap with the previous one, as StudentsNS will move to a process of approving Strategic Plans at their Annual General Meeting in the year of the previous plan's expiration. StudentsNS knows that progress does not occur overnight and that it is through strategic, measured goals that change can be created. As advocates we are often left asking, "What did we achieve?" or "Did anything really change?" This can be a frustrating point of view, but understanding the trajectory laid out through the strategic plan enables generations of student leaders to see the results of their hard work.

A strategic plan allows for planning, execution, and reflection to occur for StudentsNS. With such a high turnover of Board members, StudentsNS believes that a long-term strategic plan is essential to ensure that the goals of StudentsNS are not lost. Each year, the new Board will be able to use this strategic plan as a measurement tool, a guiding document, and a reminder of work yet to be accomplished. It is the hope of StudentsNS that the organization remains committed to the goals laid out in this document, but allows for the fluidity of the changing post-secondary education (PSE) landscape. This may mean modifying, or altering goals, actions, or outcomes as the PSE landscape ebbs and flows. StudentsNS remains committed to advocate for a PSE system that is accessible and affordable, that is of the highest quality, and that values the student voice in the planning and decision making processes.

## Scope

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It is the mission of Students Nova Scotia to represent the collective interests and priorities of post-secondary students in Nova Scotia. To that end, in 2015-2016, StudentsNS ensured that many voices were heard in the process. The Board engaged in open space conversations, facilitated sessions with an external consultant, and then revised the plan further as a Board. This plan's success will be driven by the membership. That is why it was so important to engage membership in this process.

The hope is that subsequent Boards and Executive Directors use this document to ensure that the organization is focused. It is essential that the membership has an active role in the maintenance, progression, and execution of this document. This strategic plan should be used as a gauge for the memberships' concerns and to ensure that the membership and the Executive Director are still progressing towards substantive change.

This process has allowed StudentsNS to think about its current place in the post-secondary advocacy sector and the broader Nova Scotia context. It has allowed StudentsNS to develop a document that will carry this organization through the next three years.

## Vision

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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

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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 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.

# Values

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The foundation upon which Students Nova Scotia 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. Students Nova Scotia's 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 in their citizenship, careers, and personal wellbeing.

✔ **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.

# Planning Process

To that end, StudentsNS undertook a yearlong, in-depth planning process that included engagement of the membership. The Board and the Executive Director worked collaboratively to craft the final language of this strategic plan.

The Board first reviewed the 2012-2016 Strategic Plan and noted areas with which they were happy and areas in which they felt some change should occur. The Board also had two planning retreat days to discuss, brainstorm, and develop the strategic plan for 2016-2019. The Board is thankful to Veronica McNeil for her facilitation of one of these Board sessions and her continued work on the strategic plan to see it to completion.

Best practices were reviewed from across the country and consultation was sought with our Federal colleagues at the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA). It is through these important relationships that the student movement can be united and pragmatic in its approach to student advocacy. StudentsNS values its provincial partners across the country as well as the working relationship it has with CASA.

Moving forward, the strategic plan should be reviewed by the Executive Director and the Board prior to the Annual Planning Conference each year. This will allow for any adjustments to be made in the Annual Plans and ensure that the strategic priorities are being advanced.

**Long-Term Strategic Plan:** Every three years a strategic plan will be produced. This plan will outline achievable goals for the organization that relate to the mission, vision, and values of StudentsNS. None of these will change with the Annual plan, but should be reviewed every three years.

**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 strategic plan.

# 2016-2019 StudentsNS Strategic Plan

## **CORE STRATEGIES**

StudentsNS took time to develop some key strategies to ensure the goals that are laid out in the strategic plan are achieved. StudentsNS recognized that this organization operates within a system of many players. Leveraging individuals both within and outside of StudentsNS will be key to the success of this strategic plan.

To effectively achieve the goals of this strategic plan, StudentsNS believes the organization must tactfully engage in three areas: Member and Alumni Engagement, Policy and Research, and Active, Strong Voice of Students.

### **Membership and Alumni Engagement**

The membership is the organization's backbone. It is essential that regular, meaningful engagement of the membership occur. The organization should continue to think of creative forms of passive and active engagement for its membership to partake in.

StudentsNS also has one of the most accomplished alumni networks. StudentsNS alumni have gone on to be leaders in the private and public sectors. Both former Board members and staff are creating change, not only in the post-secondary sector, but also across many areas. StudentsNS will need to find ways to engage this alumni network where necessary to accomplish the StudentsNS strategic plan.

## Policy and Research

StudentsNS has always argued its positions from a place of strong research. Evidence-based strategies and practices have been the heart of all the advocacy and research that have been produced by this organization. StudentsNS shall continue this strong research in order to create pragmatic policy positions that focus on the greatest needs of students.

Policy will continue to develop to address the needs of the membership. These policies will be based on strong research. The policy should endeavour to be reader friendly and presentable. Graphics should be used where possible to illustrate the needs of the membership.

## Active, Strong Voice of Students

The most important aspect of StudentsNS is the membership; the students on whose behalf we work every day to make the post-secondary sector stronger in Nova Scotia. The voices of these students need to be heard, respected, and valued. To ensure this occurs, StudentsNS must continue to open the doors for students to be contributors through research, government and partnership engagement, and the media. Our role as an organization is to create the spaces in which students can share their stories; their voice is the most important as the primary stakeholder in the post-secondary sector.

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR 2016-2019**

1. Improving access and affordability to post-secondary education in Nova Scotia.
2. Ensuring more post-secondary graduates can stay in Nova Scotia to work.
3. Increasing student participation in civic engagement.
4. Building strategic and multi-sectorial partnerships.
5. Continuing to strengthen StudentsNS membership.

## **KEY OUTCOMES BY 2019**

1. Post-secondary education is more affordable for students in Nova Scotia.
2. Post-secondary education is more accessible for all students.
3. More (%) post-secondary graduates are staying to work in Nova Scotia.
4. More post-secondary students and graduates are politically engaged in public policy issues.

# 2016-2019 Priorities for Students Nova Scotia

## 1. IMPROVE ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN NOVA SCOTIA

Action Items	Outcomes
<p>Develop clear policy position(s) on post-secondary funding to support advocacy on this issue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Propose 60/40% ratio for grant/loans</li> </ul>	<p>60/40 grant to loan ratio for student assistance.</p> <p>Student assistance weekly maximum tied to inflation.</p> <p>University operating grant tied to inflation.</p>
<p>Advocate for reasonable standards for scholarships – graduated expectations from 1<sup>st</sup> year to until completion of program.</p>	<p>Graduated scholarship expectations from 1<sup>st</sup> year to until completion of program at member institutions.</p>
<p>Work with community partners to advocate that under-represented segments of the population have equitable access to post-secondary education.</p> <p>Grants for under-represented segments of population.</p>	<p>Annual changes in registration profile of member institutions.</p>

## 2. MORE POST-SECONDARY GRADUATES ARE STAYING TO WORK IN NOVA SCOTIA

Action Items	Outcomes
<p>Advocate to increase post-graduation employment opportunities with a focus on entry-level jobs for new graduates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships with public &amp; private sectors</li> <li>• Media stories of success</li> <li>• Use research – evidence based positions</li> <li>• Integrated as part of political platform in all elections</li> </ul>	<p>Decrease in youth out-migration by 2019.</p>
<p>Work with public and private sector partners to increase student and graduate opportunities through small business initiatives.</p>	<p>Increase the # of small business start-ups by students, graduates.</p> <p>Increase in small business start-ups.</p>
<p>Develop clear, evidence-based policy position(s) surrounding investments in experiential learning in all fields of study.</p>	<p>Student consultation throughout the development and implementation of provincial and institutional experiential learning programs.</p> <p>Evidence-based experiential learning programs.</p> <p>Adequate funding to students ensure equitable participation in experiential learning.</p> <p>Further develop relationships with third party funding providers to disseminate available grant information and advocate for further funding in new areas of study.</p>

## 3. INCREASING STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Action Items	Outcomes
<p>Campaign for voter mobilization in the next provincial election.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage student voice (student candidates, voting, volunteering, etc.)</li> <li>• Student engagement of MLA candidates</li> <li>• Use StudentsNS research for platform development</li> </ul>	<p>Post-secondary student issues are reflected in all party platforms during elections.</p> <p>Student participation at political events.</p>
<p>Secure regular media coverage of student issues and student engagement during election campaigns.</p>	<p>Increase in media coverage of student issues and of Students NS.</p>
<p>Engage alumni in both the private and public sectors as champions.</p>	<p>Annual increase in engaged alumni.</p>
<p>Get Out The Vote plan.</p>	<p>Increase the # of student voters.</p>

#### 4. BUILD STRATEGIC AND MULTI-SECTORAL PARTNERSHIPS

Action Items	Outcomes
Board and alumni to identify potential partners that can support Students NS mandate & goals.	Database of partners. Increase the # of partner engagements.
Attach partners to specific Students NS initiatives.	More partners support Student NS mandate and activities.

#### 5. CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN STUDENTSNS MEMBERSHIP

Action Items	Outcomes
Engage alumni in both the private and public sectors as champions.  Host an event that highlights the alumni of StudentsNS.	Increase the # of engaged alumni.  Formalize StudentsNS alumni relationship.
Communicate to the membership the achievements of StudentsNS and the contributions of StudentsNS to the student movement in Nova Scotia.  One presentation to every member organization each semester.  Publicly celebrate the successes of StudentsNS and critically review the challenges being faced by the student movement.  Engage Board members to self-promote StudentsNS to the membership.	Increase awareness of StudentsNS contributions within membership.
Increase StudentsNS membership to broaden and strengthen our student voice.  Active communication with interested campuses.  Empower Board members with the tools to recruit and expand membership.	Increase membership of StudentsNS where appropriate.