



STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2030

NOVA SCOTIA FEDERATION *of* MUNICIPALITIES



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



It has been a long time since NSFM had a strategic plan. The organization has changed, the municipal landscape has changed, and the challenges our members face bear little resemblance to those of the past. What you are reading is built for where we are now.

Every municipal leader in this province knows the feeling: the work grows, the resources don't, and the expectation is that you'll figure it out. Our communities are counting on us to deliver and the challenges we face are more complex than they were even a few years ago.

That is exactly why NSFM needs a strategic plan. Not a wish list, and not a summary of what we already do. A focused plan that identifies where this organization can make the greatest difference for Nova Scotia's municipalities over the next four years.

The Board's direction was clear from the beginning: focus. Concentrate NSFM's energy where it matters most and where we are uniquely positioned to deliver value that no other organization in this province can. It is ambitious, but it is also realistic, built for an organization of our size, grounded in the needs our members have told us matter.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am proud to present NSFM's Strategic Plan 2026–2030. It sets a direction we can build on, together.

David Mitchell
President
Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Nova Scotia's municipalities are where governance meets daily life. They are where roads are maintained, water is delivered, land use is planned, and communities are built. The 49 municipalities that make up NSF's membership are as diverse as the province itself, and the challenges they face have never been more complex: housing pressures, aging infrastructure, climate adaptation, fiscal constraint, and the ongoing work of delivering essential services to Nova Scotians.

NSFM exists to ensure that municipal voices are heard, municipal leaders are supported, and municipal priorities are represented at every table where decisions affecting local government are made. We have a strong foundation: a clear legislative mandate, an engaged Board of Directors, a dedicated staff, and a portfolio of programs and services that deliver real value to our members every year.

This Strategic Plan sets out the direction for 2026 to 2030. It was built through a deliberate process: a comprehensive scan of peer organizations across Canada and beyond, a visioning exercise with our Board and Senior Management Team, and sustained collaboration among staff. It reflects what we heard, what we learned, and what we believe NSF must focus on in the years ahead.

Of course, this is not a plan that tries to do everything. It is a plan that focuses on the things that matter most and that NSF is uniquely positioned to deliver. I am confident that with the support of our Board, our members, and our staff, we will build on the strong foundation we have and create something of lasting value for Nova Scotia's municipalities.

Juanita Spencer
Chief Executive Officer
Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities

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VISION, MISSION, & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

VISION

Effective local government and strong, sustainable communities.

MISSION

To enable effective local government for Nova Scotia's communities by facilitating strategic advocacy, education, and collaboration.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ◆ **Focused Advocacy:** We commit to focused advocacy, passionately championing the causes and issues that align with our vision and mission.
- ◆ **Financial Stability:** We commit to continuity rooted in the belief that financial stability is essential to achieving our mission and making a lasting impact.
- ◆ **Integrity:** We commit to honesty, transparency, and ethical behaviour in all our interactions and decisions.
- ◆ **Responsiveness:** We commit to being responsive in all our interactions and operations.
- ◆ **Collaboration:** We believe that collaboration is essential for achieving our best outcomes.

STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK

STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY

Strategic Directions

- 1.1: Develop and implement an Advocacy Policy
- 1.2: Strengthen NSFAM's role in policy development at the provincial and federal levels
- 1.3: Make advocacy visible through plain-language materials
- 1.4: Focus advocacy efforts for maximum impact

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: INVEST IN EDUCATION, TRAINING & MENTORSHIP

Strategic Directions

- 2.1: Develop a suite of handbooks, guides, and educational resources
- 2.2: Build a structured education and training program
- 2.3: Develop advocacy and policy materials that also educate

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: EXPAND PROGRAMS & FUND ADMINISTRATION

Strategic Directions

- 3.1: Position NSFAM as the Province's preferred partner for delivering funding programs to municipalities
- 3.2: Integrate NSFAM-administered funding programs into the Funding Portal
- 3.3: Actively pursue revenue diversification
- 3.4: Maintain and continuously improve existing programs and services

STRATEGIC PILLAR 4: KNOW & REACH OUR MEMBERS

Strategic Directions

- 4.1: Invest in understanding the membership
- 4.2: Redesign member communications for clarity and reach
- 4.3: Ensure all 49 municipalities are served
- 4.4: Help members understand the full value of their membership

FOUNDATIONAL PILLAR: STRENGTHEN THE ORGANIZATION

Strategic Directions

- 5.1: Ensure financial sustainability and responsible stewardship
- 5.2: Foster innovation and productivity
- 5.3: Invest in people and organizational culture
- 5.4: Strengthen external partnerships and collaborations

STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: STRENGTHEN ADVOCACY

NSFM's legislative mandate, its policy priorities, and its Advisory Committee structure provide a strong foundation for advocacy. What needs to change is not the substance of advocacy but its discipline and visibility. Too many priorities pursued at once dilute impact. Members who cannot see the work cannot value it.

This pillar commits NSFM to a more focused advocacy approach: fewer priorities pursued with greater depth, a deliberate shift toward proactive collaboration with the Province, and plain-language communication that makes the organization's advocacy work visible and understandable.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1.1: Develop and implement an Advocacy Policy that codifies how NSFM selects, prioritizes, pursues, and communicates its advocacy priorities. This policy will create a single, clear framework that the Board can use to maintain focus and that members can use to understand NSFM's approach.

1.2: Strengthen NSFM's role in policy development at provincial and federal levels. Proactively, this means advancing NSFM's own policy initiatives, informed by member needs and grounded in evidence. This includes positioning NSFM as a collaborative partner that advises on what municipalities need, particularly in the design of policy initiatives, before those initiatives are finalized. Reactively, this means responding to proposed provincial and federal policy with timely, well-researched positions that reflect the interests of Nova Scotia's municipalities.

1.3: Make advocacy visible through plain-language materials. Develop NSFM Fact Sheets and Legislative/Policy/Advocacy Bulletins that follow a consistent format: what is the issue, why it matters to municipalities, and, if relevant, what NSFM is doing about it. Publish these in a dedicated, accessible section of the NSFM website and distribute them directly to members. These materials serve a dual purpose: they communicate advocacy work and they educate members on the issues themselves.

1.4: Focus advocacy efforts for maximum impact. Concentrate organizational energy on the priorities that matter most to the greatest number of municipalities, consistent with the Advocacy Policy and the guidance of the Board and Advisory Committees. Depth of engagement on fewer issues will produce stronger outcomes than surface-level attention to many.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- ✓ NSFM's advocacy approach is documented, understood, and consistently applied. Members can describe what NSFM advocates for and how.
- ✓ The provincial government actively seeks NSFM's input when developing policies and programs that affect municipalities. NSFM advances its own initiatives proactively and responds to proposed policy with substance and credibility.
- ✓ Members across all 49 municipalities receive regular, plain-language updates on issues affecting municipalities and on NSFM's advocacy efforts and their results.
- ✓ NSFM is recognized by members, government partners, and stakeholders as a focused and effective advocacy organization that delivers results for Nova Scotia's municipalities.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: INVEST IN EDUCATION, TRAINING & MENTORSHIP

Nova Scotia's municipalities are governed by elected officials and administered by professional staff who face increasingly complex challenges, from housing and infrastructure to climate adaptation and fiscal constraint. Many of these leaders, particularly newly elected officials, take office without formal training in municipal governance. NSFAM is uniquely positioned to fill this gap. No other organization in the province can provide the breadth of education, training, and resources that municipal leaders require, grounded in the specific realities of Nova Scotia's legislative and regulatory framework.

This pillar commits NSFAM to building a comprehensive education and training offering that becomes the defining reason municipal leaders turn to the organization for support. The destination is a structured and recognized program that positions NSFAM as the province's centre of excellence for municipal leadership development.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

2.1: Develop a suite of handbooks, guides, and educational resources for elected officials, newly elected officials, and municipal staff. The Handbook for Newly Elected Municipal Officials is the first priority. Subsequent resources will be developed in response to identified member needs and may include topic-specific guides on subjects such as governance, finance, land use planning, and emerging issues like artificial intelligence in local government.

2.2: Build a structured education, training, and mentorship program that moves beyond individual conferences and webinars toward a coherent curriculum. This program will be informed by a targeted assessment of member skills, gaps, and training priorities. It will include mentorship opportunities that connect experienced municipal leaders with newer officials, leveraging the knowledge and experience within NSFAM's own membership. Over the plan's horizon, the program will develop defined offerings and a clear progression that helps municipal leaders build capacity throughout their terms of service.

2.3: Develop advocacy and policy materials that also educate. The fact sheets and bulletins described under Pillar 1 are also education products. They build member understanding of policy issues, governance processes, and legislative dynamics. Education and advocacy are mutually reinforcing functions and will be treated as such.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- ✓ NSFAM is the recognized go-to resource for municipal leadership development in Nova Scotia.
- ✓ Every newly elected official in the province has access to an NSFAM-developed handbook and orientation resources within their first months in office.
- ✓ NSFAM offers a coherent suite of educational resources and training programs that respond to demonstrated member needs and build capacity across the full spectrum of municipal governance.
- ✓ Municipal leaders across the province associate NSFAM with professional development, practical knowledge, and governance excellence.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: EXPAND PROGRAMS & FUND ADMINISTRATION

NSFM's portfolio of programs and services, from Group Benefits to the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund, delivers tangible value to member municipalities every year. These programs save municipalities money, reduce administrative burden, and provide access to resources that individual municipalities could not secure on their own. They also represent a significant portion of NSFM's revenue base, which means their strength is inseparable from the organization's financial health.

At the same time, NSFM has identified a lack of revenue diversification as a significant organizational risk. Continued reliance on a concentrated set of revenue sources limits strategic flexibility and leaves the organization vulnerable to disruption. This pillar commits NSFM to protecting and expanding its program base, actively pursuing revenue diversification, and building on its demonstrated strength in fund administration to deepen its partnership with the provincial government.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

3.1: Position NSFM as the Province's preferred partner for delivering funding programs to municipalities. Build on demonstrated success in fund administration and on the Funding Portal's reach and credibility to pursue opportunities to administer additional government-funded programs. Each new program administered strengthens NSFM's service to members, deepens its partnership with the Province, and contributes to revenue diversification.

3.2: Integrate NSFM-administered funding programs into the Funding Portal to create a single hub where municipalities can both discover funding opportunities and apply to programs administered by NSFM. This consolidation increases the Portal's value to members and its attractiveness to the provincial and federal governments as a delivery mechanism.

3.3: Actively pursue revenue diversification. Research and develop new revenue opportunities, including innovative member programs, new fund administration contracts, enhanced approaches to event revenue, and new service offerings that respond to identified member needs. Revenue diversification is the precondition for organizational independence and strategic flexibility.

3.4: Maintain and continuously improve existing programs and services. The current program portfolio is a strength that must be sustained. Programs will be regularly reviewed for relevance, quality, and revenue contribution, and adapted in response to member needs and market conditions.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- ✓ NSFM administers an expanded portfolio of government-funded programs and is recognized by the Province and federal government as a reliable, capable delivery partner for municipal funding.
- ✓ The Funding Portal functions as a single, integrated hub for funding discovery and program application, serving municipalities across Nova Scotia.
- ✓ NSFM's revenue base is diversified, reducing dependence on any single source and enabling the organization to invest in its strategic priorities with confidence.
- ✓ Member municipalities continue to receive tangible, measurable value from NSFM's programs and services, including cost savings, access to funding, and reduced administrative burden.

STRATEGIC PILLAR 4: KNOW & REACH OUR MEMBERS

NSFM serves 49 municipalities that span the full range of Nova Scotia's communities: urban, suburban, and rural; coastal and inland; well-resourced and stretched thin. The organization's effectiveness depends on understanding what these municipalities and their elected officials actually need, reaching them through channels they use, and communicating in ways that are clear, accessible, and relevant.

As NSFM's membership evolves with each electoral cycle, the organization must continually invest in understanding who its members are, what challenges they face, and where they need support. Communications must reach individual elected officials, not only municipal offices. And members who are aware of the programs, services, and advocacy work available to them are better positioned to benefit from their membership and to serve as effective partners in the organization's work.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

4.1: Invest in understanding the membership. Conduct a targeted assessment of elected officials, their demographics, experience, and skills, to build the evidence base that informs education programming, advocacy priorities, and service delivery. This assessment is foundational. When NSFM understands who its members are, it can serve them with precision rather than assumption.

4.2: Redesign member communications for clarity and reach. Restructure the NSFM website to foreground advocacy and education, with topic-specific portals, accessible navigation, and a dedicated space for fact sheets, bulletins, and educational resources. Develop communications approaches that reach individual elected officials, not just municipal offices, including integration of NSFM materials into council meeting packages and direct distribution to members.

4.3: Ensure all 49 municipalities are served. NSFM's advocacy, education, programs, and communications must reach every member municipality, not only those with the most capacity to engage.

4.4: Help members understand the full value of their membership. Members who understand what NSFM does, the results it achieves, and the resources it offers are more engaged, more likely to participate in advocacy, and more likely to see NSFM as essential to their work. Ensuring members are informed about the organization's work and offerings is itself a service to the members.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- ✓ NSFM has a current, evidence-based understanding of its membership and uses that understanding to shape its advocacy, education, and service delivery.
- ✓ The NSFM website is organized around the needs of members, with accessible, well-structured content on advocacy, education, programs, and funding.
- ✓ Communications reach individual elected officials across all 49 municipalities. Members are aware of NSFM's advocacy work, available programs, and educational resources.
- ✓ NSFM is the default resource municipal leaders turn to when they need information, training, or support.

FOUNDATIONAL PILLAR: STRENGTHEN THE ORGANIZATION

The four strategic pillars above describe what NSFAM will do. This foundational pillar describes what NSFAM must build and sustain in order to do it. Ambitious strategic commitments require an organization with the governance, financial stability, staff capacity, and operational discipline to follow through. For an organization of NSFAM's size, strategic partnerships are one of the primary mechanisms for extending that capacity: the right formal arrangements with the right partners can enable NSFAM to deliver beyond what its own resources would allow. This pillar is not a competing priority. It is the foundation on which the other four pillars stand.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

5.1: Ensure financial sustainability through prudent stewardship. Pursue revenue diversification that aligns with NSFAM's mandate while enhancing long-term stability and flexibility. Direct organizational spending toward strategic priorities to ensure financial decisions support sustained organizational stability.

5.2: Foster innovation and productivity. A small team with a broad mandate must find ways to do more with what it has. NSFAM will make intentional efforts to adopt new ideas and tools, improve how work is done, and leverage technology to increase efficiency and service quality.

5.3: Invest in people and organizational culture. Continue building a workplace that attracts and retains qualified staff, supports professional development, and fosters collaboration. Strengthen governance practices, including Board orientation, role clarity, and accountability, to ensure the Board is positioned to provide effective strategic direction.

5.4: Strengthen external partnerships and collaborations. Deepen engagement with the federal government, the Province, FCM, other municipal associations, the Atlantic Mayors Congress, AMANS, post-secondary institutions, and other stakeholders. Where these relationships present opportunities for formal partnerships, NSFAM will pursue them with clear intent, recognizing that not every relationship needs to be a partnership, and not every partnership delivers equal strategic value. This direction commits NSFAM to distinguishing between general engagement and strategic partnerships: formal arrangements with defined scope, shared objectives, and mutual accountability. NSFAM will identify and prioritize the partnerships that most extend its capacity to deliver on the strategic pillars in this plan and invest in fostering those partnerships with purpose and discipline.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- ✓ NSFAM remains financially healthy, strategically focused, and capable of sustaining operations in the future.
- ✓ The organization operates efficiently and effectively, leveraging technology and sound practices to maximize the impact of a focused team.
- ✓ NSFAM is recognized as a well-governed, professionally managed organization that attracts capable staff and develops their skills.
- ✓ External partnerships actively contribute to NSFAM's advocacy, education, program delivery, and member engagement.

SERVING ALL 49 MUNICIPALITIES

Regional responsiveness is not a pillar. It is a lens that applies across every pillar in this plan.

NSFM's membership includes municipalities that differ in size, capacity, and the challenges they face. They operate at different scales and engage with NSFM in different ways.

This plan commits NSFM to ensuring that:

- Advocacy priorities reflect the concerns of municipalities of all sizes and regions.
- Educational materials and training programs are accessible to officials in every municipality, regardless of geographic location and municipal resources.
- Programs and services are designed with the full range of the membership in mind, including municipalities with limited administrative capacity.
- Communications reach elected officials in every region, through multiple channels, in formats that are accessible and relevant.
- Organizational decisions are evaluated for their impact on the full membership.

Regional responsiveness is not a separate initiative. It is a standard by which every strategic direction in this plan will be measured.



A COMMITMENT TO ACTION

This plan will be implemented through NSFM's annual Business and Operations Plan, which translates strategic directions into operational priorities, tasks, and resource allocations for each fiscal year. The CEO will report to the Board on progress, and strategic directions will be reviewed and adjusted as needed to respond to changing conditions and the evolving needs of our members. This is a living document, not a static one.

A strategic plan is only as strong as the commitment behind it. NSFM's Board of Directors, staff, and members have shaped this plan, and their continued engagement will determine its success. Together, we will build on the strong foundation NSFM has established and deliver lasting value for the municipalities and communities we serve.





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