



## **NSFM Advocacy Prioritization Policy**

### **Background**

1. The Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) is the legislated voice of Nova Scotia's 49 municipalities. Our vision is one of effective local governments and strong, sustainable communities. Our mission is to work toward this vision by providing strategic advocacy, education and collaboration services for our members. NSFM's advocacy efforts need to be prioritized to best serve our members and achieve our mission.

It is the policy of the NSFM Board of Directors to avoid engaging in advocacy efforts on any matter which is not of general concern to our member units. This is to be distinguished from matters that are of interest only to one or some very small number of units, with the exception being those cases where the interests of most municipalities are likely to become involved.

As a general rule, the NSFM Board of Directors does not wish to have the Federation take a position on any issue which is controversial among Members. However, in specific cases, the Board recognizes that the general municipal interest will require such action from time to time. In such cases, the Board reserves the right to act for the general municipal interest after appropriate notice and consultation with all interested municipal units.

This document provides a clear process for identifying and prioritizing the advocacy efforts of NSFM. This is meant to help NSFM:

- a. Ensure that advocacy efforts are consistent with our mission and vision;
- b. Focus the time and resources of the NSFM Board, employees, and Members on the most important advocacy activities that best serve our collective needs;
- c. Establish a reliable and transparent process for identifying public policy issues of relevance to NSFM, and to prioritize NSFM's level of engagement with these issues;
- d. Build NSFM's credibility with the public, other levels of government, stakeholders, and decision makers.

## Definitions

2. In this policy:

“Advocacy” refers to the work performed by NSFM in order to influence public opinion and the decisions of other levels of government regarding a particular cause or policy.

“Area of Municipal Interest” are general themes of advocacy that are determined by the Board to organize the work of the Advisory Committees on Areas of Municipal Interest.

“Board” means the NSFM Board of Directors.

“Board Member” means a member of the NSFM Board of Directors.

“CEO” means the Chief Executive Officer of NSFM.

“Committee” means a committee of the NSFM Board, whether standing, ad-hoc, or otherwise, or a committee created by the Board and populated by NSFM Members.

“Employees” refers to NSFM employees.

“Library of Municipal Interest” means a database of all resolutions and statements of concern since 2019, all member requests delegated to Advisory Committees on Areas of Municipal Interest or an ad hoc committee and the resulting response.

“Member” refers to a municipal unit that is in good standings with NSFM as set out in the by-laws.

“NSFM” means the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities.

“Political Capital” refers to resources and power built through relationships, trust, goodwill, and credibility between politicians other stakeholders.

“Statement of Municipal Interest” means a statement produced by an Advisory Committee that outlines goals and objectives within their respective Area of Municipal Interest from the municipal perspective.

## Purpose

3. The method of identifying and prioritizing issues described in this policy is intended to be used to:

a. Guide the use of NSFM’s resources in the most effective and efficient way possible, including:

i. Budget

ii. Board, Committee, Staff, and Member time

- b. Officially elevate membership priorities as part of the Board’s strategic planning process;
  - c. Guide in the development of ‘right-sized’ committee work plans, and guide the determination of which external committees and working groups NSFAM staff and members will participate in;
  - d. Guide in the screening of requests and issues submitted by Members to the Advisory Committees on Areas of Municipal Interest to assist committee members and staff in determining the appropriate response;
  - e. Guide in the screening and prioritization of issues that emerge outside these planning processes.
4. NSFAM staff will analyze new or developing issues using the (a) screening and (b) prioritization matrices identified below to determine whether and how NSFAM can address an issue:
- a. If there is a clear answer, NSFAM staff will confirm the proposed approach with the CEO and NSFAM President.
  - b. If there is no clear answer, NSFAM staff will seek input and/or further direction through the NSFAM Board.

### **Advisory Committees on Areas of Municipal Interest**

5. To facilitate member-driven advocacy priorities, the Board will strike Advisory Committees on Areas of Municipal Interest.
- a. The Areas of Municipal Interest shall be determined by the Board and reviewed by the membership at least every five (5) years.
  - b. Advisory Committees shall meet within six (6) months of being struck to produce a foundational Statement of Municipal Interest.
  - c. All Statements of Municipal Interest shall be approved by the Board.
  - d. Members Units may request, by a motion of council, that NSFAM recognize a specific issue or phenomenon as an advocacy priority.

- e. Upon receiving a request from a Member Unit, the Board or staff shall delegate this request to the appropriate Advisory Committee.
  - f. If a member request does not fit under any of the existing Areas of Municipal Interest, the Board may strike an ad hoc advisory committee.
  - g. Advisory Committees shall meet at a minimum of four times per calendar year.
  - h. At each meeting, Advisory Committees shall review all requests received that have not yet been responded to and apply the screening and prioritization process outlined in Section 8 and Section 9.
  - i. Advisory Committee members may divide and delegate any research or other tasks deemed necessary to complete the application of the screening and prioritization process.
  - j. Following the screening and prioritization process, Advisory Committees shall inform the Board of Directors of their recommended response.
  - k. Advisory Committee responses shall be provided in one (1) of three (3) forms:
    - i. The issue should become or be integrated with an advocacy priority of NSFM
    - ii. The issue should continue to be monitored by the Board but is not being recommended as an advocacy priority at this time
    - iii. The issue is not a viable advocacy priority and not a priority of NSFM
  - l. Ad hoc Advisory Committees shall follow the same process as standing Advisory Committees.
  - m. All membership requests, Advisory Committee responses, and any supporting research will be added to the NSFM Library of Municipal Interest.
  - n. Each Advisory Committee may approve its own Terms of Reference but remains subject to this policy and all NSFM by-laws.
6. Composition of the Advisory Committees of Municipal Interest will adhere to the Committee Appointment and Reporting Policy. For clarity, the composition of each Advisory Committee will be determined by the following:

- a. The Board will issue a call for expressions of interest from Elected Municipal Officials and municipal staff who would like to participate in each committee.
- b. The Board will appoint these positions after reviewing all expressions of interest submitted.

## **Screening**

7. NSFAM endeavours to focus advocacy efforts on matters that would make a difference to most Nova Scotian municipalities.

Issue screening is required to identify those issues that align with NSFAM's core mandate, and to identify those clearly outside of scope.

NSFAM will not engage in issues which:

- a. Are outside municipal interests;
- b. Are deeply divisive or ideological in nature;
- c. Are partisan in nature, i.e. could lead to NSFAM being perceived as being supportive of a specific political party or candidate;
- d. Involve conflicts between individual municipalities;
- e. Involve the internal issues of a municipality;
- f. Promote the interests of individual businesses.

## **Prioritization Framework**

8. NSFAM will use the following questions to determine the course of action for an issue and how the issue will be prioritized:
  - a. Is the issue within municipal jurisdiction?
  - b. What is the impact on members? How many members are impacted?

- c. Will engagement in this issue build or deplete political capital?
- d. Does the issue involve any need for:
  - i. Information sharing
  - ii. Funding
  - iii. Policy change
  - iv. Legislative/regulatory change
  - v. All the above
- e. Is there an opportunity for NSFAM to add value to this issue?
- f. What are the timelines involved?
- g. What are the chances of success?
- h. Does NSFAM have the capacity to respond effectively?
- i. What is the level of effort required to address the issue and how will advocacy on this matter improve or impede NSFAM's pursuit of other priorities?

### **Level of Engagement**

- 9. Based on the answers to the questions above, NSFAM will determine the level of engagement required.
  - a. No engagement: Monitor the issue for any significant changes which may impact members.
  - b. Low: Inform members about the issue and any opportunities for them to engage directly.
  - c. Medium: Contribute to the issue through developing a position and basic advocacy.
  - d. High: Lead solutions-based advocacy development and deployment of an advocacy strategy.

### **Evaluation**

- 10. To determine the effectiveness of the Advocacy Prioritization Policy and process, NSFAM staff will conduct the following assessments:

- a. Key Performance Indicator
  - i. In our Annual Report, NSFAM will identify whether and how we achieved the intended outcomes in the designated Areas of Municipal Interest.
  
- b. Satisfaction of Board
  - i. Board members will be surveyed and asked to explain if they feel they spent their time on the right issues.
  
- c. Satisfaction of Committees
  - i. Committee members will be surveyed and asked to explain if they feel they spent their time on the right issues.
  
- d. Satisfaction of Members
  - i. Through an annual advocacy survey, Members will indicate whether NSFAM's top resolutions reflect their priorities.
  
- e. Satisfaction of Employees
  - i. Through annual performance reviews, staff will indicate whether they have adequate time and resources to address high priority issues.
  - ii. Staff will indicate whether they understand the value of their work and/or the rationale behind their work.

## Appendix A: Prioritization Framework

Questions	Sample Consideration(s)
Is the issue within municipal jurisdiction?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the issue exclusive to municipalities or does it also involve federal or provincial government?</li> </ul>
Does the issue align with NSFM's strategic priorities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will action on the issue contribute towards realizing the goals of our top priorities, or will it lead to scope creep without adding value?</li> </ul>
What is the impact on members, and how many members are impacted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is this a significant issue to a single member, or many members?</li> <li>If the issue impacts only a few members today, does it have the potential to impact more members in the future?</li> </ul>
Will engagement in this issue build or deplete political capital?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the issue align with the priorities of the government of the day?</li> <li>Or will we have to push to get it onto the agenda or actively counter their agenda?</li> </ul>
Does the issue involve the need for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information sharing?</li> <li>Funding?</li> <li>Policy change?</li> <li>Legislative/regulatory change?</li> <li>All the above?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The answer to this question will influence the time, resources, and chances of success.</li> <li>In general, changes to legislation require more time and effort than changes to regulations.</li> <li>Requests for funding must consider that federal and provincial governments face funding constraints.</li> </ul>
Is there an opportunity for NSFM to add value to this issue?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does NSFM have the expertise on staff, on the Board/committees, and/or among members to add value?</li> <li>NSFM is often best positioned to provide input on higher-level principles, and only has the capacity to engage at a detailed technical level on a limited number of issues.</li> <li>Are there other organizations that have greater expertise and credibility on the issue?</li> <li>Is it better for municipalities to respond directly, or is a collective response needed?</li> </ul>
What timelines are involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there time to seek input from members/committees and seek approval from the board?</li> <li>Is there time to determine a collective response, or should NSFM just let members know about an issue and let them respond individually?</li> </ul>
What are the chances of success?	<p>Given the answers to the above questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How likely is it that NSFM's advocacy on an issue result in tangible benefits for members?</li> <li>Has the relevant decision maker (i.e. provincial or federal government) indicated they are open to making changes? Has a consultation process been initiated?</li> </ul>
Does NSFM have the capacity to respond effectively?	<p>Given the answers to the above questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does NSFM have the time and resources to conduct appropriate analysis, engage members, build partnerships, create meaningful solutions and report back to members on this issue?</li> </ul>

**Conclusion**

**Based on the analysis above, what should NSFAM's level of engagement be on this issue (as outlined in the levels of engagement framework)?**

**What action(s) should be taken?**

**How will the action be reported?**

## Appendix B: Levels of Engagement Framework

Level of Engagement	Potential Actions
No engagement: Monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through monitoring municipal outreach and engagement with members, NSFM monitors issues for potential impact.</li> </ul> <p><b>Example: Immigration</b></p>
Low: Inform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Article in NSFM’s newsletter on issues that may be of interest to some municipalities</li> <li>• Informal email or phone call at the staff level on issues that can be quickly resolved</li> <li>• Monitoring for potential future impacts</li> </ul> <p><b>Example: Accessibility</b></p>
Medium: Contribute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submitting a briefing note, recommendation, or a request for decision to the board. As a result, further action may be taken including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Letters</li> <li>o Meetings</li> <li>o Presentations to Committees</li> <li>o Webinars</li> <li>o Workshops</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Example: One-Third Tax Exemption</b></p>
High: Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement full advocacy strategy</li> </ul> <p><b>Example: CAP</b></p>

### Date of Approval

This policy was approved on the following date: September 19, 2019.

Date amended: March 31, 2023