

REPORT FROM WORKING GROUP ON ‘THE WAY FORWARD: NEXT STEPS IN ACKNOWLEDGING THE SOCIETY’S ROLE IN PAST NARRATIVES’

1. BACKGROUND

Extracts from Minutes of Special Council Meeting, 9 Aug. 2021:

The meeting was called to consider next steps in response to a motion adopted in the 14 June 2021 council meeting: “...that the Society examine with learning and reflection our role in shaping the interpretation of Nova Scotia’s settler historical narrative.” Agenda was limited to a number of potential actions:

- How to acknowledge the Society’s role in past narratives
- Additional suggestions for moving the Society forward positively
- Possibility of a small Working Group to explore and recommend a strategy/action plan.
- When feasible, host an in-person discussion open to all RNSHS members.

Extracts from Minutes of the Next Regular Council Meeting, 13 Sept 2021:

A motion was successfully moved by Lois Yorke and Sara Hollett:

- That the Society strike a small working group to identify next steps, outcomes and strategy to implement *The Way Forward*.

It was also agreed that:

- the Working Group be composed of 2 members from the Society at large, who would be identified through expressions of interest sought by the end of Sept; plus 4 members of Council
- the Working Group to report back to Council by March 2022, and include in their report draft foundational statements, an action plan, and a model for consultation.

The final Working Group included the following Council members: Sara Beanlands, Sara Hollett, John MacLeod, Nicole Neatby, Stefanie Slaunwhite, Lois Yorke (coordinator); and from the Society’s members-at-large: Chris McCreery, Brian Tennyson. The group met via Zoom on 25 Nov and 9 Dec 2021; and on 13 Jan and 17 Feb 2022. A Draft Report was delivered to Council for its March meeting, but full discussion was deferred due to continuing Public Health gathering restrictions.

On 29 Nov 2022, a Special Council Meeting was held to review the Draft Report, addressing the changing landscape since March 2022, plus comments received to date from interested General Members. The revised document presented here ('Draft #2') incorporates: 1) a synopsis of discussions and comments; 2) 15 Recommendations for Council's consideration; and 3) suggested next steps. Certain original directives to the Working Group (e.g. providing draft foundational statements) proved impracticable to deliver within the allotted reporting timeframe of March 2022.

Recommendation #1: Council receive, review and vote on the Draft Report and Recommendations, but defer any further action until a meeting open to all RNSHS Members, in-person and online, has been held in order to enable full discussion, followed by a Members' vote on the proposed Recommendations. [voted and approved by Council, 9 Feb. 2023]

2. REVIEW OF FOUNDATION DOCUMENTS OR SIMILAR STATEMENTS

Existing:

- **Objectives**, from Article 2 (i) of the By-laws: "The objectives of the society shall be to encourage the collection and preservation of all documents, papers and other objects of interest which may serve to throw light upon and illustrate the history of this country; to read, at the meetings of the Society, papers on historical subjects relevant to Nova Scotia; to publish, as far as the funds of the Society will allow, all such documents and papers as it may be deemed desirable to publish; and to promote an understanding of Nova Scotia's history and cultural development."
- **Statute**, "An Act to Incorporate the Nova Scotia Historical Society," 1879, c.87 [further search required for subsequent revisions]
- **Tag Line/Brand** from RNSHS stationery: 'preserving and promoting the history of Nova Scotia'
- **Motto** from Arms of the Society (first used 1986): 'Futura in Historia Vivet'
- **On back of program pamphlet (1997)**: '...to hear and discuss individual papers about personalities, places, and events integral to the history of Nova Scotia'
- **Statement Acknowledging Ancestral Territory** (first used in *Journal*, 2017): "...acknowledges that where we work and live is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq."

Comments:

- other foundation documents or similar statements could not be located

- developing mandate, mission and/or vision statements at this time was not seen as a priority
- retaining and refreshing existing **Objectives** was seen as central and a priority
- foundation documents or similar statements should be reviewed, and if retained their wording should be refreshed as appropriate, including the **by-laws**
- some organizations now use a broad ‘touchstone statement’ to guide their activities – not exactly a mandate but something flexible and open to review every few years; Councillors considered the Society’s existing tag line, slightly amended [e.g. ‘Preserving and promoting the history of Nova Scotia and its peoples’] could stand as this ‘touchstone statement’ and as a lead-in to **Objectives**

Recommendation #2: Review and refresh **Objectives** and **By-laws**.

Recommendation #3: Review other foundation documents or similar statements, including a ‘touchstone statement’ and refresh as appropriate.

3. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Comments:

- seen as a critical theme (“we are many peoples...”) in the ongoing life of the Society, as well as the principal direction under which many/most Recommendations can be grouped

Recommendation #4: Develop **Diversity and Inclusion** commitment statement as part of or immediately following **Objectives** statement in the **by-laws**.

4. STATEMENT ACKNOWLEDGING ANCESTRAL TERRITORY

Comments:

- seen as important within commitment to **Diversity and Inclusion**
- has been used in various instances since 2017
- should be used more widely and consistently within Society activities

Recommendation #5: Review and refresh wording for current statement and its use, after consultation with recognized Mi’kmaw representatives

5. JOURNAL/COLLECTIONS

Comments:

- item was deferred after discussion, since *Journal*’s Editorial Board is currently reviewing its make-up and preparing recommendations on future directions, to be determined within the next two calendar years
- two related directions were identified: 1) demonstrate the Society’s immediate commitment to looking back at itself; and 2) identify and build upon existing *Journal* databases, in order to identify authors, titles, subjects, marker dates, etc. for articles by or

about, e.g., African Nova Scotians, Mi'kmaq, Acadians, women, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and other historically marginalized communities.

Recommendation #6: Schedule a lecture within the next two calendar years, looking at early content featured in the *Collections* from an historiographical perspective

Recommendation #7: Explore and seek funding for a legacy project/research tool, to encourage improved access to and analysis of *Collections/Journal* content since 1878.

6. MEETING VENUES

Comments:

- key opportunity to build **Diversity and Inclusion**, encourage wider participation, new members, community connections, etc.
- use donations line in Society's budget to cover fees for use of venues; and for meetings outside HRM, to cover mileage expenses for guest lecturer and representatives from Executive to attend
- suggested venues/partnerships within HRM (time to visit some again) include ISANS, Pier 21, Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre, Central Library Friendship Circle, Black Cultural Centre, Africville Museum, NS Women's History Society, Cambridge Military Library, etc.
- have a volunteer Councillor coordinate external meeting venues and accompanying lecture
- explore bringing back business component of monthly lectures, once pandemic restrictions have eased and in-person meetings become consistent and regularized

Recommendation #8: Continue hybrid delivery model for monthly lecture meetings (onsite, online, YouTube)

Recommendation #9: Move monthly lecture meeting out into broader HRM community at least once a year, on a two-year trial basis

Recommendation #10: Move one monthly lecture meeting per year outside HRM, such meeting to be held with a local museum, like-minded organization or place of historical/cultural interest, with thought given to pairing the lecture subject and location

7. LECTURES

Comments:

- link lecture topics to meeting venues as much as possible
- seen as key to building **Diversity and Inclusion**
- new topics/themes or expanded content suggested, such as: immigration, new Canadians, African Nova Scotians, Mi'kmaq, Acadians, gender diversity, women, people with disabilities, and other historically marginalized communities.

- ‘Conversazione’ (‘Conversation’) concept suggested: invite a couple of local businesspeople, older RNSHS members, community leaders or figures, to talk informally of their experiences and stimulate conversation – has been successfully tried elsewhere

Recommendation #11: Council and all VPs to continue encouraging and working with younger presenters and emerging scholars.

Recommendation #12: VP Programme to develop a checklist of under-represented content areas, and continue identifying new/expanded topics and themes.

8. MEMBERSHIP

Comments:

- much more discussion needed – membership structure and fees, value for members, community engagement, etc.
- key area for addressing and building **Diversity and Inclusion**, e.g. need to identify other groups/communities to reach out to, work with, encourage to join – what can we offer? how do we reach them?
- need to better promote free meetings and lectures
- need to identify and promote value of membership
- need to make membership more attractive, less formal, and offering obvious benefits
- fee structure should be adjusted to encourage students, unwaged, new Canadians, etc.
- to survive and grow, we have to offer something of interest, value and relevance – in membership, meetings, lectures, and the *Journal*

Recommendation #13: Review monthly meeting structure, including process for introducing new members, and make appropriate changes

Recommendation #14: Review current fee structure and make appropriate changes

Recommendation #15: Review framework and best-practices for RNSHS Fellows

9. NEXT STEPS: SPECIAL MEETING/CONSULTATION WITH GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

- formal consultation with RNSHS members and interested public
- meeting to be held in-person and virtually
- appropriate advance notice and full information (Report, copy of Statute and By Laws), provided online via RNSHS website, listserv and social media tools
- email response (in advance) invited from those unable to attend either in person or via Zoom
- facilitated discussion for all participants (in-person and Zoom), then members-only vote on Recommendations

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