NSCSW – Strategic Plan Evaluation and Regeneration

Request for Proposals

Who We Are

The Nova Scotia College of Social Workers exists to serve and protect Nova Scotians by effectively regulating the profession of social work. The NSCSW establishes, maintains, and regulates standards of professional practice. Our role is to ensure that Nova Scotians receive the services of skilled and competent social workers who are knowledgeable, ethical, qualified, and accountable to the people who receive social work services. The NSCSW believes the people of Nova Scotia are entitled to receive the highest caliber of care from their social workers. To ensure this we provide membership services to support Registered Social Workers in maintaining the highest standards of professional competency, enabling participation in a broader provincial social work community.

We engage with members, government, employers, community groups, and citizens to build a stronger social work community, and to advance the social work profession in Nova Scotia. We believe social workers provide an essential service to support Nova Scotians lead healthier, happier lives. The NSCSW engages with Nova Scotia's social work community in advocating for Improvement to social policies, programs, and social justice.

We provide responsive, accountable leadership to ensure the highest standards of social work for Nova Scotians. We work in solidarity with Nova Scotians to advocate for policies that improve social conditions, challenge injustice and value diversity.

Our Values

Our work is grounded in integrity and professionalism which calls on us to be:

Respectful

The College is respectful of the inherent dignity of every individual and strives for cultural humility and social change.

Accessible

The NSCSW provides communication and services that are accessible province-wide for members, stakeholders, and the public.

Ethical

The NSCSW follows the established national code of ethics that adheres to the values of the social work profession.

Progressive

The NSCSW is proactive in reflecting the values of social work, and supports innovation through education, research, and transformative community engagement, for the sake of social justice.

Project Guidelines

This Request for Proposals represents the requirements for an open and competitive process. Proposals will be accepted until August 19, 2022. Any proposals received after this date and time will be returned to the sender. All proposals must be signed by an official agent or representative or organization submitting the proposal.

If the organization submitting a proposal must outsource or contract any work to meet the requirements contained herein, this must be clearly stated in the proposal. Additionally, all costs included in proposals must be all-inclusive to include any outsourced or contracted work. Any proposals which call for outsourcing or contracting work must include a name and description of the organizations being contracted.

All costs must be itemized to include an explanation of all fees and costs.

Contract terms and conditions will be negotiated upon selection of the winning bidder for this RFP. All contractual terms and conditions will be subject to review by NSCSW's leadership team.

All proposals should be sent to Alec Stratford at Alec.Stratford@NSCSW.org.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to complete a comprehensive evaluation of the NSCSW's 5 years strategic plan and use this insight as benchmark to generate a renewed strategic vision.

In 2016, amendments were made to the 1993 Social Workers Act which transformed the Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers into a College and sparked a renewed vision and growth for the NSCSW. The amended Social Workers Act resulted in major changes to the College's mandate as both a regulatory and association body, our programming, and brand. The College also embarked on a provincial campaign to renew its professional commitments, values, ethics, and professional practices.

In 2017 the College focused on ensuring the highest standards of professional and ethical social work practice for the people of Nova Scotia, enhancing communication and engagement with members and the public including: building a bi-weekly member newsletter; transforming Connection magazine; offering professional development opportunities throughout Nova Scotia; and rebuilding core committees armed with a clear focus and expectations. That year also saw a provincial consultation regarding social work ethics, a revised Candidacy Mentorship Program, and significant achievements made toward becoming a recognized leader in advocacy, and social justice working to protect Nova Scotians.

A transformational agenda led to the College conducting a provincial consultation with its membership in effort to develop a Strategic Plan. In the summer of 2017, we surveyed our social work members to gain insight into changes in the social work community, trends in the social work field and in their social work practice and their experience with the College. College Council then used this valuable feedback to shape the five-year goals and outcomes. An ambitious 5-year Strategic Plan was created, with the overall objective to fulfill the College's mandate and create a vibrant, visible, and vocal social work community. The membership voted to adopt this plan in 2018.

The five-year strategic plan is the foundation that will help guide the profession of social work in Nova Scotia and strengthen the College's voice for social workers and social justice.

Our Five-Year Goals

We regulate the profession by ensuring the highest standards of professional and ethical social work practice for the people of Nova Scotia.

Outcomes:

- Nova Scotians see the candidacy program as a strong and relevant approach to regulation.

- The NSCSW has removed barriers to labour mobility between provinces.

- Members bring the spirit of the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics to life.

We are a recognized leader in advocacy and social justice working to protect Nova Scotians.

Outcomes:

- Nova Scotians see the NSCSW as a credible source for critical analysis and innovative solutions to social justice issues.

- Government actively engages the NSCSW to inform policies and legislation that impact social justice and social planning.

- Work towards the goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Nova Scotians value social work knowledge, experience, and training.

Outcomes:

- Social workers are influencers in positions of leadership.

- Nova Scotians are aware of the diversity of social work practice.

- Employers recruit Registered Social Workers for their essential social work lens grounded in human rights, equity and social justice.

- Social workers are engaged in meaningful and rewarding work, that makes a difference to the social conditions in Nova Scotia.

We are a centre for social work resources, professional development, ethical consultations, research and acts as the collective voice for social work.

Outcomes:

- Members are supported by the College throughout their career.

- Members are a part of the NSCSW's progressive support.

- Members contribute to social work's collective voice.

- NSCSW works to enhance social worker well-being.

- NSCSW works to build conditions for social work success.
- Social workers from marginalized communities and both urban and rural settings are engaged with the NSCSW and their voice is represented within the organization.

We are responsible, accountable and transparent.

Outcomes:

- Nova Scotians value and trust the NSCSW.
- Demonstrated accountability as a regulatory body.
- Clear autonomy of regulatory function and membership services.

Our Progress

In 2021 a mid-term evaluation the strategic goals of the College was conducted. The NSCSW asked its members for feedback on how we were performing regarding the goals laid out in our strategic plan. We gathered feedback through a survey, as well as Zoom consultations in each of the regions in Nova Scotia.

Respondents explained they felt the NSCSW had strengthened its regulatory policy and that recent high profile discipline decisions demonstrated how this is working. It was expressed that folks felt that there was good advocacy being done with the Executive Director/Registrar being a continued presence in the media creating a public discourse. Respondents indicated that more work needs to be done to promote the profession in a positive light.

Overall, 68 per cent of respondents felt that we were making significant progress on our strategic agenda. The regulatory efforts respondents were most satisfied with were our new database, improved registration and renewal processes, and application and renewal policy updates. For our advocacy work, respondents were also largely satisfied with the creation of our Social Policy Framework, and our ongoing child welfare advocacy. Most respondents were also pleased with Connection magazine's role in promotion of the profession, and professional development opportunities the College offers as support for the profession.

The lowest satisfaction scores were for our progress regarding clinical regulation; 42.9 per cent of respondents were neutral, and 14.4 per cent indicated some degree of dissatisfaction. The Clinical Committee is now active, so we are hopeful that member confidence will grow as the work of this committee develops.

Respondents were for the most part satisfied with the direction that the NSCSW is taking, and supported a strong advocacy voice and media attention, as well as work done to strengthen regulation. Respondents also reflected that the NSCSW needs to be more present in social workers' lives, recognizing that we are "all in this together," and that we need to foster a more positive image of the profession. Respondents also stated that they would like to see more affordable and accessible professional development opportunities in their communities that focus on skills and direct practice.

As we enter our final year of our strategic plan a comprehensive evaluation must occur to determine the outcomes of our efforts,

Project Scope

The successful bidder will be propose a plan for both phase 1 & phase 2 or bidders can propose a plan for **eithe**r phase 1 or phase 2:

Phase 1: Strategy Evaluation

The objective for Phase 1 is to facilitate a comprehensive assessment of the current performance and progress towards the execution and achievements of the 2018-2023 Strategic Plan. This phase will also evaluate how the organization delivered against the five core outcome statements (See above)

Key Areas of Focus:

1. **Candidacy Mentorship Program** – The social worker Candidacy Mentorship Program (CMP) is designed to provide graduates of accredited schools of social work with a strategic, supportive, and educational professional development experience rooted in principles of adult learning. By linking new graduates and those re-entering practice (candidates) with experienced practitioners (mentors) the CMP provides new registrants with educational and supportive mentorship to integrate knowledge, apply skill, and action ethics in their first years of practice.

   Candidates gain valuable support throughout their 2500 hours of practice experience through regular, structured, and documented meetings with their mentor. They are supported as they develop a professional identity, grapple with ethical issues, explore professional concerns related to their practice experience, integrate theory and practice, develop self-awareness, and refine a unique practice framework.

   The CMP is part of the NSCSW's mandate to protect the public. The program is designed to ensure that newly registered social workers have the skills, competence, and good character to practice social work in Nova Scotia.

   The evaluation should focus on:

   a) The specific effects of the CMP towards social workers' ability to uphold ethical practices.

   b) The specific effects of the CMP towards developing a professional social work identity.

   c) The specific effects of the CMP on social workers' resilience against stress and burnout through vicarious trauma.

2. **Integrated Governance Model** – The NSCSW holds a combined mandate as both a regulatory body and professional association. In professional regulation there is a trend towards the dissolution of this mandate to ensure that regulatory bodies hold a stand-alone public interest focus. Dominant neo-liberal values hold that professional interests are in conflict or at odds with the public interest, assuming philosophically that professional interests are always driven by self-interest rather than altruism. This

approach has continued to pit health and social service care professionals against the clients they serve and aims to responsiblize individuals for professional misconduct without an analysis of the political, economic, and social system in which health and social services are delivered. This has led to many of the reforms across Canada toward the de-integrated association and regulation models for professions (see Appendix "A" for more detail).

The NSCSW has operated through a governance structure that aims to hold members accountable to the values and standards of the professions while also operating as a civil society organization using scholarly research, public education, and advocacy, to promote discussion and pose substantive questions that are central to the delivery of core social work services. Our goal has been to provide new ways to understand social issues through a social work lens and offer political positions that are in solidarity with the public interest of the most marginalized towards better and more meaningful services.

The evaluation should focus on:

a) The specific impacts to the public interest of a governance approach that integrates professional interests and public interest towards greater public safety and trust.

b) Perspectives from public stakeholders regarding NSCSW's role in advocating for the development, enhancement and promotion of policies to improve social conditions and promote social justice as it relates to protection of the public interest.

a) Perspectives from members on the effects of integrating professional and public interests.

Phase 2: Strategy Design and Development

The objective of Phase 2 is to build upon the current strategy and its strengths with the goal of defining a road map that will allow the NSCSW to reaffirm its core mandate to protect the public while striving towards our profession's obligations to social justice, anti-racism and decolonization of the profession.

Request for Proposal and Project Timeline

The initial proposal is due no later than August 19, 2022

Evaluation of proposals will be conducted from August 22-26, 2022. If additional information or discussions are needed with any bidders during this window, the bidder(s) will be notified.

The selection decision for this project will be made by September 1, 2022.

Upon notification, the contract negotiation will be completed by September 8, 2022.

Notifications to bidders who were not selected will be completed by September 15, 2022.

Budget

All proposals must include proposed costs to complete the development and delivery requirements for the above scope. The budget for this project will between $30,000 and $50,000.

Bidder Qualifications

The Bidder must list their:

- qualifications,

- project experience,

- reference(s), and

- provide example(s) of similar projects.

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

The NSCSW leadership team will evaluate all proposals based on the following criteria:

- qualifications and project experience

- examples of relevant work experience

- competitive pricing

Appendix #A

MEMORANDUM

RE: Trends in Self-Regulation

Introduction

Renewal and growth are imperative to ensuring the public interest is protected. It is important that critical reflection and evaluation of crucial systems and organizations happen regularly and through rigorous collaborative and democratic process; these are the tools of good governance. However, when such evaluations occur, the scope of the assessment must consider the broader political context that these systems exist and function within.

With the current calls to dismantle whiteness and privilege within our health and social care systems, and the systemic violence of anti-Black, anti-Asian, and anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia we have witnessed during the pandemic, we as regulators and social workers are continuously called on to ensure that we consider the complete political context of proposed changes to ensure a full examination of unintended consequences.

Trust in Regulators

There is no doubt that health regulators have become increasingly important in facilitating trust between the public and the services they receive. Regulators are experiencing more

applications as human resources are strained by the current working conditions, adding to the complexity of evaluating applicants with credentials from outside of Canada. In addition, regulators are seeing more complaints as the public is often not receiving the care they expect, and as health care workers are stretched beyond their capacities by experiencing burnout and vicarious trauma. Health care regulators have continued to fill a void by building trust between the public, professionals, and the systems they work for, in the face of poor public policy founded in austerity and managerialism.

Trust is at an all-time low, with Engage Nova Scotia reporting that only 27.1% of Nova Scotians trust the provincial government. This growing lack of trust is rooted in rising inequality; in 1988 the income shares of the wealthiest ten per cent in Nova Scotia was 11.1 times the income shares of the bottom ten percent. Three decades later, top incomes in Nova Scotia grew to 16.3 times the income share of the bottom. Evidence has clearly demonstrated that rising inequality and the continued class divide between the rich and the poor have allowed the voices of the most vulnerable, particularly those of racialized communities and children and youth, to go unnoticed. Various governments have perpetually enacted austerity policies (expanding corporate influence in the process) to cut the cost of care, institutionalize new management systems, and centralize government services; these actions create highly top-down bureaucratic systems. This has led to increasing managerialism which devalues and deskills professional competence and creates a management framework that is focused on liability and efficiency rather than promoting human connection.

These trends have continued to erode public trust because they have led to health care systems where the individual, rather than the state, is responsible for social risks such as illness, (dis)Ability, unemployment, and poverty, with a focus on the individual's ability to be self-managed and regulated and ultimately *responsibilized* for their own "problems." This leads to individualized, decontextualized, and pathologizing approaches which fail to address the social and political contexts in which people live; the state's responsibilization of individuals and families to solve their own problems has eroded public trust.

Regulatory Reform

This environment has led to questions regarding the effectiveness of self-regulating professions. Most recent reports and studies have questioned the effectiveness of regulatory bodies and have concluded that many of the premises of current regulatory approaches need to be examined. Many of these reports and studies have pointed to the need for regulators to clearly define their goals towards protecting the public interest, have more involvement from the public, focus on real and perceived risks and to be proactive in addressing these risks. This has led to calls for regulatory reform in Canada. However, there are several troubling underlying assumptions and theories that are currently driving sweeping reforms and modernization, particularly the use public choice theory and neoliberalism.

Previous research and theorizing on professional self-regulation has emphasized a regulatory bargain between the state and the public, whereby the state grants professions privileges as long as they act in the public interest. Some scholars contend that self-regulating professions' inability to serve the public interest has provoked regulatory change. However, other research has provided clear evidence that regulatory change is linked to changing conceptualizations of the public interest. When professions' interests and the public interest were viewed as compatible, granting professions self-regulation and considerable autonomy made sense. In the

1960s and 1970s when state (and social) discourses tied the public interest with human rights there was greater alignment. In Ontario and now Nova Scotia, with its increasingly business-focused definition of the public interest, alternative regulatory forms are being explored. An emphasis on open markets and competition does not appear to be compatible with professional self-regulation. Thus, it is not so much professions' inability to serve the public interest, but the changing definition of the public interest away from service quality and towards open competition and cost reduction, that contributes to the decline of self-regulating professions.

Regulators hold some common mandates regarding protection of the public interest, maintaining confidence in self-regulation, and maintaining integrity in the various professions. The determination of what is in public interest is rather nebulous and rarely defined; core questions consistently asked include "who determines what's in the public interest" and "who's left out of this determination". Generally, regulators hold that public interest is akin to public safety. As mentioned, one of the grounding values that we're seeing in regulatory modernization efforts is a value statement that professional interest and public interests are fundamentally opposed positions. Underlying this value are the assumptions of public choice theorists who assume that all actors are self-interested and motivated by microeconomic principles; thus, professional interest then becomes akin market interest. Public choice theorists generally negate that motivation for professional interests as potentially rooted in altruism and aspirations for the public good.

At a deeper level this raises the question of what drives human nature and behaviour. While public choice theorists assume that all actors are motivated by self-interest, there is a wealth of neurobiology, social science, and political science that has established that our primary drives are rooted in empathy and belonging, and public choice theorists negate the evidence that self-interest is a socialized response to our current environment. However, the dominant discourse has led to public policy regarding the regulation of professions that treats each professional and their professional interests as an autonomous actor motivated by their own self-interest, uninfluenced by the context of their work environment, the dominant values, and social and political context.

There is also a push in regulatory reform for Ministers (who sponsor professional regulation legislation) to have greater oversight of professional regulation. It should be noted that any Minister within a government already has oversight powers for any legislation that is within provincial authority. A Minister can intervene or put forward amendments, or new legislation, or change regulations at any time without the need for a specific law stating they can do so. However, any Minister who needs to act would have to go through a democratic process to do so (but that is what is required of good governance to protect the public interest).

Structural Lens

From a structural lens public choice theory in public policy serves several purposes. It pits workers against the clients they are serving, distracts from the broader issues in the delivery of health and social services (where many risks lie), and maintains a power base in a few decision makers who seem determined to formulate conceptions of the public interest in values of the marketplace and white supremacy. This lens informs public policy and seeks to distract from the broader political issues that impact client safety, the delivery of ethical social work practice within an organizational context, the impact of the diminishment of services (particularly those

for racialized and vulnerable communities) and the risks that austerity and managerialism creates for clients.

The current discourse and trends in self-regulation aims to responsibilize the individual, holding them accountable for broader issues related to high caseloads, moral distress and burnout, lack of mentorship, supervision and training, scarcity in resources to meet clients needs and the erosion of professional autonomy and judgment, while simultaneously using regulation as a tool of social control towards conformity to neo-liberal values.

The Supreme Court of Canada has concluded that it is difficult to overstate the importance in our society of the proper regulation of our learned professions. The primary purpose of the establishment of self-governing professions is the protection of the public. This is achieved by ensuring that only the qualified and the competent are permitted to practice and that members of the profession conform to appropriate standards of professional conduct. There is always a level of individual accountability that regulators must hold registrants to, however from a structural lens this must be placed in the current political context given the erosion of public health and social services, the class divide and eroded trust.

Our democracy is struggling. We've witnessed the rising influence of corporations and business organizations in politics, alongside the declining power and the weakening of equality seeking civil society organizations. Citizens are increasingly disillusioned with their governments. The form our political system takes makes a difference in the application of government policies and process. Policy decisions might make sound fiscal sense and help the government achieve its economic policy goals but may also have disastrous effects on social well-being in the longer-term. Individual departments must not make policy without considering whether they are maintaining or deepening systemic oppression. To ensure meaningful, inclusive, and effective heath policy, communities need the capacity to engage and to shape public policy.

At this point in our history, it is fundamental that we all work to strengthen democratic process, not weaken it. The current political climate continues to see a growing trend towards retrenchment of democratic process, where the decision-making powers that impact the public interest are left to a few people, and too often it is left to people who have political agendas that are not in the public interest; particularly the interests of the vulnerable and marginalized. Modernization of regulation has been wrought with political interference to serve a political agenda in Alberta. From the patronage appointments of public members to forceful intervention in standards of professions, this appears to be done to manage the manufactured crisis in health care created by the United Conservative Party, to push an agenda of privatization and austerity. This in turn leads to a greater lack of trust. Historically when power is entrenched into the hands of few; marginalized and vulnerable populations bear the brunt.

Conclusion: An Integrated Mandate

The assumptions and theories currently underlying self-regulation are not adequate to protect the public, particularly from discrimination, white supremacy and racism. A focus on protecting the public interest must address broader political trends that affect public safety; this requires the building of a broader social movement, and connecting change through systems, institutions and people.

How can a regulatory body hold organizations or systems accountable if regulators don't hold that mandate? Integrating professional associations with regulatory bodies puts professional

regulation in the role of being a civil society actor. Civil society holds an important role in holding both the private and public sector accountable by raising political and public discourse on issues that matter to the professions; the public's interest is the profession's interest. Thus these advocacy tools are incredibly important in tackling structural and organizational constraints in our organizations and within social work practice, and are also part of how we build confidence in the profession, maintain integrity in the provision of social work, and ensure we are being proactive in addressing risk.

Dated June 22, 2022