

# Report for Craft Nova Scotia

March 2025

nava develop

CRAFT  
NOVA SCOTIA



## 1. Introduction.

Craft is more than techniques; it is the quiet heartbeat of a culture, pulsing through generations, carrying stories shaped by hand and passed with care. In Nova Scotia, craft is not just an economic contributor—it is a way of life, reflecting who we are, where we've been, and what we hope to become.

Across our province, from coastal villages to urban studios, craftspeople are preserving centuries-old traditions while reimagining new ones. They shape wood, metal, glass and clay, into objects that hold meaning, beauty, and function. They carry forward Indigenous knowledge, African Nova Scotian legacy, Acadian heritage, and immigrant dreams — each stitch, each glaze, each carved line a whisper from the past and a gift to the future.

Craft builds community. It binds neighbours, welcomes visitors, and inspires the next generation to see the value in creating with care. Craft is not just what we make — it's how we connect. In a time of mass production and digital detachment, the work of craftspeople invites us back to something deeply human.

The cultural sector significantly bolsters Nova Scotia's economy, contributing nearly \$1 billion to the provincial GDP in 2021 and providing employment to 12,751 individuals. Within this vibrant landscape, Craft Nova Scotia stands as a pillar, representing over 300 individual professional craftspeople and craft enthusiasts, and connecting with more than 1,000 others through various member groups and guilds.

Beyond economic impact, the craft sector fosters a profound sense of community and pride among Nova Scotians. A remarkable 93% of residents express pride when attending craft fairs featuring locally made products. This widespread appreciation underscores the integral role of craft in our cultural identity.

But this world — as rich and essential as it is — cannot sustain itself without care, support, and belief. For without it, we risk losing the very fabric of our cultural identity and the livelihoods of those who make it tangible. Craft Nova Scotia plays a crucial role in nurturing this ecosystem, supporting professional craftspeople who preserve and innovate within our rich craft traditions. The organization's efforts ensure that the stories, skills, and heritage embedded in our crafts continue to thrive, enriching our communities and connecting us to our collective past and future.

This report is not just about repairing an organization. It is about protecting a legacy. It is about reimagining how we support those who shape our world with intention and integrity. Most importantly, it is a call to action — to honour the hands that build beauty from raw material, and to ensure they continue to have a home, a voice, and a future in Nova Scotia.

This report provides an overview of the key challenges, insights, and initial strategic recommendations for Craft Nova Scotia based on conversations with various interested parties. As the organization undergoes a turnaround process, this document serves as a foundation for further exploration and decision-making.

The document seeks to describe the challenges Craft Nova Scotia faces, proposes some solutions to these challenges and has an operational plan attached. We want to ensure the organisation has a strong plan which enables it to do more than survive.

Our challenge in writing this report and suggesting solutions was to think “inside” of the box. Members made it very clear to me in the calls and in the town halls that they wanted to avoid radical solutions which could not be implemented and further betrayed the legacy of the organisation.

It is very clear to me that Craft Nova Scotia is more than an Economic Development organisation and much more than a teaching and standards upholding organisation. Craft Nova Scotia is more important than this. It is very much an organisation about identity, the identity of its members. This demands much respect and sensitivity. I hope I have demonstrated the reverence and respect to the organisation while being honest about the challenges it faces going forward. The organisation can become what the members seek it to be but only if enough of them are willing to step up and support the erosion of the fault lines identified in this report.

Permjot Valia

Nava Develop. March 2025.

I am very grateful to the people who agreed to be interviewed and the participants of the Town Hall. This report and the insights are based on these conversations. Almost everyone was clear that our discussions were public and could be shared with all. If asked, we would be happy to supply the notes from the meetings we held.

## **2. Key Challenges Identified**

### **2.1. Membership Decline & Trust Issues**

- Drop in membership due to perceived lack of value.
- Disconnection between Craft Nova Scotia and its members.
- Ongoing tensions regarding the balance between artistic excellence and diversity/inclusion.

### **2.2. Organizational Disruptions**

- Integration of Craft Nova Scotia and the Centre for Craft has caused internal divisions.
- Staff dissatisfaction and workplace culture issues.
- Major leadership changes (e.g., departures and terminations) have created instability.

### **2.3. Financial Uncertainty**

- Lack of clarity on why funds have been depleted.
- High spending on multiple projects without a sustainable financial structure.
- Loss of corporate funding and longtime supporters.

### **2.4. Transparency & Governance Issues**

- Concerns over leadership appointments and lack of transparency.
- Board resignations following backlash from community members.
- The juried selection process lacks transparency and is seen as arbitrary.
- Need to codify the juried process to make it clearer and more accessible to applicants.

### **2.5. Geographic & Community Representation**

- Organization perceived as too Halifax-centric.
- Need to better serve the wider provincial craft community, including Indigenous and African Nova Scotian craft artists.
- Current definition of “excellence” is seen as exclusive rather than inclusive.

### **2.6. Decline in Revenue-Generating Activities**

- Cancellation of gallery operations and studio programming, which were once seen as revenue generating but have not been financially sustainable for some time. This shift was not clearly communicated to members, many of whom remember a period where these activities did generate income.
- The annual Designer Craft Market, a significant revenue driver, requires reinforcement.



## **3. Proposed Solutions & Recovery Strategies**

### **3.1. Rebuilding Trust & Engagement**

- Host virtual town halls to enhance transparency and communication.
- Establish an advisory group to guide the turnaround.
- Develop a clear and open communication strategy to address concerns and provide a forward-looking vision.

### **3.2. Restructuring for Sustainability**

- Strengthen the membership-based model by offering a strong entrepreneurship and business development hub.
- Improve transparency in leadership decisions, hiring, and financial management.
- Address internal tensions between different organizational groups.

### **3.3. Redefining "Excellence"**

- Move away from an exclusive, gatekeeper-driven model.
- Ensure high standards remain while making room for diverse craft traditions.
- Complete and implement the Atlantic Initiative & Indigenous Group Collaboration work that was previously in progress.
- Codify and make the juried process more transparent to ensure fairness and accessibility for all craft artists.
- The goal is to avoid simply lowering the bar, but rather create a clear, transparent system that incentivizes members to improve their skills.

### **3.4. Expanding Geographic Reach & Inclusivity**

- Strengthen programming for rural and underrepresented craft communities.
- Implement mentorship programs connecting emerging artists with established professionals.
- Increase regional representation in decision-making.
- Make exhibitions more accessible.
- Seek opportunities for the next generation of crafts people.
- Seek opportunities for inclusivity for all communities.

### 3.5. Membership Challenges & Path Forward

#### Key Issues:

- Membership processes (particularly jurying) are perceived as elitist and opaque.
- Lack of engagement and retention among rejected applicants.
- Insufficient representation of equity-deserving groups.

#### Proposed Solutions:

- Transparency in Jurying: Publish clear criteria and decision-making processes.
- Diverse Jury Panels: Ensure that every panel includes at least three members from underrepresented groups.
- Mentorship Program for Rejected Applicants: Provide feedback and guidance instead of outright rejection.
- Tiered Membership Model: Introduce Emerging, Associate, and Professional tiers to allow for career progression.

### 3.6. Strengthening Revenue Streams

- Reinstate and enhance major revenue-generating events such as the Designer Craft Market.
- Secure new funding through government grants and corporate partnerships.
- Leverage the organization's successful residency programs as part of a larger financial sustainability strategy.
- Seek partnerships for exhibitions and markets in high-traffic spaces such as airports, piers, and convention centers.
- Find opportunities to promote emerging craftspeople through showcases and special events.
- Leverage existing external resources, such as entrepreneurship and business training programs, rather than trying to develop everything internally. The idea is to partner with organizations that are already funded to provide this type of training, and have the organization focus on recruitment and coordination rather than content development.

### 3.7. Improving Workplace Culture

- Establish stronger HR protocols.
- Provide conflict resolution pathways and staff support mechanisms.
- Build a healthier work environment that fosters collaboration and inclusion.

### 3.8. Marketing & Public Awareness Campaign

- Invest in a marketing campaign that highlights the benefits of craft to all Nova Scotians.
- Showcase the cultural and economic impact of craftspeople on Nova Scotia's identity, job creation, and local industries.
- Promote craft as an integral part of the province's creative economy and heritage.

### 3.9. Organizational Restructuring & Culture Reset

#### Key Issues:

- Tensions from past mergers (Craft NS vs. Design Centre).
- Board involvement in daily operations, creating confusion over roles.
- Leadership roles need clearer boundaries.
- Poor Communications

#### Proposed Solutions:

- Defined Leadership Responsibilities:
  - **Executive Director:** Partner and community relationships & funding.
  - **Operations Manager:** Daily administration.
  - **Commercial Manager:** Revenue generation & business strategy.
- Board Governance Reset: Clarify the board's role as strategic advisors, not daily managers.
- Creation of advisory group - a small group of individuals with deep expertise and historical knowledge of the organization and the craft community. The goal would be to provide continuity and help preserve the organization's traditions and lineage, while also guiding the evolution and modernization efforts
- Culture of Transparency: Host quarterly town halls with members for updates and feedback.
- A regular e-bulletin with relevant industry news and opportunities, and mechanisms for members to provide feedback and input. The goal is to make the organization more responsive to member needs and concerns.

## 4. Next Steps & Timeline

### 4.1. Immediate Priorities (Next 3 Months)

- Conduct virtual town halls to increase transparency and community engagement.
- Form an advisory group to assist in decision-making and governance.
- Develop a financial strategy to stabilize funding and operational spending.
- Begin addressing internal workplace culture challenges.

### 4.2. Mid-Term Goals (3-12 Months)

- Expand regional engagement and address inclusivity gaps.
- Relaunch key revenue-generating events, starting with the Designer Craft Market.
- Develop new programming focused on business sustainability for professional craft.
- Establish a refined definition of excellence that aligns with both tradition and inclusivity.

## 5. Conclusion

This report represents an initial assessment of the current state of Craft Nova Scotia. As more insights are gathered, these recommendations will be refined to support a structured and effective turnaround. Transparency, inclusivity, and sustainability will be critical pillars in this ongoing transformation.

**Next Steps:** Continue interested parties engagement, refine financial strategies, and initiate the first wave of organizational changes.

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**Operational plan attached**

**Prepared for:** Craft Nova Scotia

**Prepared by:** Permjot Valia, Nava Develop

## Craft Nova Scotia: 2025/2026 Operational Plan

This operational plan prioritizes the following foundational work over the four quarters of 2025/2026 (starting April 2025)

Q1 to build internal clarity, trust, and capacity.

Q2 focuses on low-risk public engagement and testing.

Q3 marks a visible return of Craft NS as a leader in the sector.

Q4 is an evaluation period to ensure we are well-positioned for a strong 2026/2027 strategy.

This framework ensures funders, interested parties and members see progress, structure, and sustainability across all areas of the organization.

### OVERARCHING TIMEFRAME

- **Q1 (April-June 2025):** Foundation-building. Focus on governance, staffing, internal systems, and clarity on implementation structures. A period of rebuilding and reorganization.
- **Q2 (July-September 2025):** Relationship building, soft-launches, and visibility. Low-program intensity, high community engagement. Begin testing ideas and building partnerships.
- **Q3 (October-December 2025):** Full relaunch and activation. Programming, membership rollout, and revenue-generating activities.
- **Q4 (January-March 2026):** Evaluation and scale. Measure, adjust, and plan based on learnings. Solidify gains, initiate long-term planning.

There are six key areas for the operational plan that are broken down into actions per quarter.

1. Governance and Leadership.
2. Centre for Craft Pivot plan.
3. Membership rebuilding and expansion.
4. Revenue and program development.
5. DEI and regional equity work.
6. Communication and engagement.

Ideally, someone from the membership will volunteer to assist with the tracking and progress reporting of each of these six areas that have detailed quarterly actions listed.



## Governance & Leadership

### Objectives & Goals:

- Reset and clarify organizational leadership structures and roles.
- Establish transparent decision-making processes.
- Build trust with the community through consistent communication.

### Priority Activities

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Define and document roles of Executive Director, Operations Manager, and Commercial Manager.	Conduct governance training for board and leadership.	Embed advisory group into strategic feedback loops.	Evaluate leadership performance and community perception.
Establish Board governance guidelines (board as strategic, not operational).	Host second town hall and launch quarterly e-bulletin.		
Form advisory group.	Publish leadership structure and governance philosophy publicly.		
Host first virtual town hall.			

### Metrics

- *Short-term:* Leadership roles documented; advisory group formed.
- *Mid-term:* 3+ town halls with >10% membership attendance.
- *Long-term:* Member survey shows 70% (of those that respond) have confidence in leadership direction.

## Centre for Craft Pivot Plan Implementation

### Objectives & Goals:

- Make the Centre financially viable.
- Align programming with professional support and accessibility.

### Priority Activities

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Determine sustainable operating hours and staffing models.	Pilot new residency model or small-scale workshop with partner(s).	Launch revised fall residency and programming calendar.	Measure usage, satisfaction, and revenue against projections.
Create a Centre usage framework (studio access, programming, residencies).	Offer summer access programming for artists (visits, demos).	Host artist talks or demos during relaunch.	
Identify and secure key partners.			

### Metrics

- *Short-term:* New Centre schedule and usage plan published.
- *Mid-term:* 2+ summer activities piloted.
- *Long-term:* Centre usage exceeds 60% capacity by March 2026.

## Membership Rebuild & Expansion

### Objectives & Goals:

- Increase membership numbers.
- Diversify and support members at all career stages.

### Priority Activities

#### Q1

Redesign membership structure (tiered: Emerging, Associate, Professional).

Codify jurying process and publish clear criteria.

Draft mentorship program for rejected applicants.

#### Q2

Begin outreach for returning and new members.

Recruit mentors and form jury pools.

#### Q3

Launch membership campaign and mentorship program.

Host fall welcome event or exhibition.

#### Q4

Measure membership growth and feedback.

### Metrics

- *Short-term:* New membership model published.
- *Mid-term:* 50 new members.
- *Long-term:* Member retention >80% and balanced representation across tiers.

## Revenue & Program Development

### Objectives & Goals:

- Rebuild financial stability.
- Develop strategic partnerships for program delivery.

### Priority Activities

#### Q1

Create financial stabilization plan (budget forecasting, identify funding gaps).

Map external training programs for business support (partner leverage).

Begin planning 2025 Designer Craft Market and sales opportunities.

#### Q2

Pilot tourism-aligned member sales event.

Build sponsorship strategy.

#### Q3

Execute Designer Craft Market with upgraded operations.

Launch public-facing marketing campaign.

#### Q4

Analyze revenue performance; plan additional streams.

### Metrics

- *Short-term:* Budget plan approved by board.
- *Mid-term:* 2 new partnerships for business training secured.
- *Long-term:* increase in self-generated revenue year over year.

## DEI & Regional Equity Work

### Objectives & Goals:

- Increase access and equity across the province.
- Ensure diverse voices are included in programming and leadership.

### Priority Activities

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Restart Atlantic Initiative & Indigenous Collaboration work.	Begin regional visits to underrepresented areas.	Launch community-led events or exhibitions.	Report on DEI milestones; refine future goals.
Build framework for DEI integration in jurying, hiring, programming.	Pilot inclusive programming with specific communities.	Evaluate jury composition across all programs.	

### Metrics

- *Short-term:* DEI framework developed.
- *Mid-term:* 5 regional visits completed.
- *Long-term:* 50% of all programs include underrepresented groups.



## Communications & Engagement

### Objectives & Goals:

- Strengthen communication with members and the public.
- Reinforce value of craft and presence of the organization.

### Priority Activities

#### Q1

Develop communications strategy (social, bulletin, town halls, branding).

Outsource comms lead.

#### Q2

Launch comms plan and social media strategy.

Begin marketing campaign planning.

#### Q3

Launch marketing campaign to support relaunch events.

#### Q4

Conduct communications audit.

### Metrics

- *Short-term:* Communications strategy finalized.
- *Mid-term:* 3+ bulletins, social engagement increases by 30%.
- *Long-term:* Public awareness survey shows 60% recognition in key demographics.

## Centre for Craft – Pivot Plan 2025/26

### Vision During Pivot

To reimagine the Centre for Craft as a focused and sustainable hub for professional craft practice, supporting makers through residencies, skill-building opportunities, and member-driven initiatives.

### Strategic Goals

- **Sustainability:** Reduce operational and administrative load
- **Member Empowerment:** Provide space and opportunity for members to earn income and share knowledge
- **Professional Excellence:** Offer advanced programming and studio access for professional craftspeople
- **Sector Growth:** Begin building infrastructure to support emerging artists and future partners

### Key Focus Areas

#### 1. Studio Residencies (Pilot)

- Quarterly rotation: one studio per quarter
- 2025/26 pilot studios: Jewelry (Q3) and Pottery (Q4)
- 2 residents per term
- Explore sustainable revenue model (fees, grants, sponsorships)

Each delivers:

- 1 Public Artist Talk
- 1 Technical Workshop for members
- Independent studio time; no class delivery required

Metrics:

- 2 residencies implemented
- 4 residents supported
- 4 public events + 4 workshops
- Revenue stream model developed and tested

**2. Member-Led Classes**

- Members rent studio time to run their own classes outside of residency periods
- Members manage all logistics; Craft NS provides space and promotion
- Studio rental or percentage-based revenue model

## Metrics:

- Minimum X member-led classes (TBD)
- Minimum X participating instructors (TBD)
- Studio use generates cost-recovery revenue
- Member satisfaction tracked

**3. Masterclasses**

- Craft NS-organized advanced workshops for professional development
- Topics and instructors based on member input
- Scheduled between residency periods

## Metrics:

- X masterclasses delivered (TBD)
- Minimum X participants per class (TBD)
- 80%+ participant satisfaction
- Break-even or small surplus achieved

**4. Emerging Artist Residency Program (Planning Only)**

- Development of a 2026 Summer Residency for emerging artists
- Focus on program design, partner engagement, and funding strategy

## Metrics:

- Program structure completed
- 3+ partner conversations initiated
- 1+ funding stream pursued
- Proposal and budget ready for 2026 launch

**Timeline Overview**

Quarter	Focus Area
Q1 (Apr–Jun)	Program planning + outreach
Q2 (Jul–Sep)	Finalize logistics, promotion, recruitment
Q3 (Oct–Dec)	Jewelry Residency + Member Classes + Masterclass #1
Q4 (Jan–Mar)	Pottery Residency + Masterclass #2 + Emerging Artist Program ready for launch

**Next Steps**

- Begin program planning and development in Q1
- Ensure all logistics and communications are ready for Fall/Winter launch

**Note on the Mary E. Black Gallery**

The Mary E. Black Gallery is a vital part of Nova Scotia's craft landscape—a space dedicated to excellence in fine craft, and a place where artists, collectors, and the public come together to engage with the highest levels of creative practice. We recognize the significance of this gallery, not just as a physical space, but as an asset to our sector and a platform for craft artists to be seen, celebrated, and elevated.

Our only plan is to honour that.

As part of this year's focus, we are committed to supporting the gallery's scheduled exhibitions as best as we can, honouring our commitments to participating artists, and ensuring that each show receives the thoughtful presentation and attention it deserves.

Moving forward, we will be investing in stronger marketing strategies, building strategic partnerships, and working to raise the gallery's profile—locally, nationally, and beyond. Planning is underway for a late summer reopening.

The Mary E. Black Gallery will remain a central part of our work—and a key space for showcasing the excellence of our members and the wider fine craft community.