



Discussion and Planning Document

**Aspects of Strategic Planning for
Skate Canada Nova Scotia**

**Prepared for Skate Canada Nova Scotia
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January 2012

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Introduction

The Skate Canada Nova Scotia Section (the NS Section) is an administrative entity of Skate Canada that has operated in Nova Scotia for many years. Its function is coordination and promotion of figure skating activities in the province.

The business of operating an entity to coordinate and administer sport involves consideration of many aspects. These include amongst others: needs of multiple stakeholders, funding, human resources, volunteers, communication, technical aspects, processes of interaction and governance, event organization, training etc. Ultimately these contribute to numerous products and outcomes that stakeholder's value. Whilst outputs and outcomes provide a way of assessing the relative success of the organization, it is the way in which the resources and activities are managed that leads to the success of any organization. Strategic planning therefore has to take into account the quantity and quality of the inputs and resources, as well as the efficiency of activities and processes that produce the outcomes.

All organizations should carry out regular strategic planning in order to ensure for sustainability and maintenance of performance in the achievement of objectives. As the NS Section does not have any published strategic plan to which it refers, it was felt that it was timely to undertake a strategic overview process to review the many activities that fall within the NS Section's mandate.

This short report provides a summary of opinions, thoughts and ideas that were generated during two specially convened meetings of the NS Section's Board convened during November 2011 and January 2012. Whilst not qualifying as an official "strategic plan" it does identify numerous issues that the NS Section and its committees, as well as its parent body (Skate Canada), need to consider and address as part of achieving success for ongoing and future operations.

Brief Profile of the Nova Scotia Section

Skate Canada, for the purpose of achieving its objectives, has created administrative coordinating bodies (known as "Sections") that serve to implement operational activities throughout Canada. The NS Section serves the province of Nova Scotia.

Functions and Performance Areas

The functions and performance areas that are laid out for the NS Section are identified as:

- Facilitating and promoting Skate Canada programs
 - Recreational including Canskate, Star skate, Canpowerskate and Adult
 - Competitive
- Communication
- Information management

- Education and training
 - Officials
 - Coaches
 - Volunteers
- Liaison with clubs
- Developing partners (e.g. Municipalities, business, localized sport governing bodies, province)
- Conflict resolution
- Section competitions
- Effective governance

Stakeholders

The main stakeholders who participate in, and/or benefit from, activities of the NS Section include: 36 association clubs, parents, club officials, other officials, and about 90 registered coaches. It is estimated that there are approximately 4 200 skaters who are registered with Skate Canada, and who participate in the NS Section's programs.

Governance

The NS Section has a fairly inclusive governance structure, and positions on its Board include: Chair, Vice-chair, Past-Chair, Treasurer, Governance & Recording, Skater development, Competitions & music, Marketing, Data Specialists, Judges/Evaluators, Athletes' Representative, Coaching Representative, and Regional Representatives.

The day to day management is effected through an executive committee consisting of the Chair, Treasurer, Past Chair, Vice Chair, Regional representative, and two Directors. Activities of this committee are supported by the Executive Director.

In addition to this there are several standing committees, each with its own chair, that deal with operational aspects. These are:

- Awards
- Coaching
- Competitions
- Data Specialists
- Governance
- Judge/evaluators
- Marketing
- Membership
- Publicity
- Skater development

Resources

There are numerous resources that the Section has at its disposal. These include:

- Human resources - in terms of volunteers that assist and participate in almost every activity and performance;
- An executive director who is salaried from the Section's annual budget, and who operates according to a specified job description;
- Coaches at all levels who contribute time to many activities;
- Finances made available from skater registration fees, and government and other sponsorship. It is estimated that Skate Canada and the Government of Nova Scotia currently contribute \$132k and \$37k respectively per annum to the NS Section. In addition, income is also derived through the convening of event;
- Office space and facilities at Sport Nova Scotia in Spring Garden Road, Halifax; and
- Equipment that is used for organised events (e.g. computers and software)

The NS Section Strategic Planning Process

The strategic planning process to date has involved two interactive facilitated meetings at which Board representatives have had input. Although there was not 100% attendance at either of the meetings, participation may be considered adequate to represent opinion on the key strategic and operational issues that need to be considered by the Section.

First Session

The first meeting carried out a quick overview of the NS Section and its characteristics (outlined in the overview above). It then involved the identification of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) that apply to the NS Section. During this session, Board participants were asked to identify aspects of the NS Section's operations within four categories:

1. Strengths – characteristics of the Section that are considered to be strengths in terms of the way it operates and functions as an entity.
2. Weaknesses – characteristics of the Section that are considered to be a weakness
3. Opportunities –opportunities that are external to the Section which could provide resources and support
4. Threats – external threats that the Section should take note of as they might have an adverse effect on operations or success.

Because of time constraints it was decided to focus firstly on the “weaknesses” aspect of the Section as this was considered to be the most profitable in identifying the areas and issues that require strategic attention. After this was completed, time was also given to discussing opportunities and threats. Board members were asked to identify any issue(s) that they felt were important without giving explanation. This approach was taken as it allowed all participants to contribute ideas without getting bogged down in debate.

During the identification of weaknesses, an attempt was made to categorize them according to their relationship to the Section's performance areas.

The characteristics and issues that were identified in Session 1 for weaknesses, opportunities and threats are listed in Annex 1.

For the weaknesses, a table has been constructed of issues with associated notes and comments that were made by members. Opportunities and threats are presented as bullet point issues.

Second Session

At the second session members were asked to review the findings of the first session and to identify what they thought were priority areas and identify some possible actions that might address the issue. This session was not as productive as the first for a variety of reasons:

- Members did not have all the issues given to them prior to the meeting so were a bit unfamiliar with the findings of the first session.
- Strategic planning gets more difficult as you proceed. The initial SWOT analysis is usually the fun/easy part.

Nevertheless both sessions generated sufficient material and ideas for the Board and its committees to develop a plan (plans) with associated actions and products that, if implemented, will serve to elevate performance and effectiveness of the Section.

The aspects that Board members felt should be given highest priority in terms of attention and possible allocation of resources were (not in any order of priority):

1. Lack of control over Club programs
2. Poor marketing
3. Access to membership details
4. General Communication
5. Volunteers
6. Effective governance
7. Sponsorship
8. No competitions manual
9. Ineffective leadership
10. Increasing the number of skaters in the province (This aspect should be seen as an objective that can be achieved only through cumulatively implementing activities in the previous 9 areas).

Notes on some possible interventions and actions associated with these priorities are presented in the table which lists the weaknesses.

The Road Ahead

The Board has gone through a process that has identified many issues and factors that need to be considered for attention and action. It might be unproductive to convene further sessions of the complete Board in order to develop a comprehensive plan of action for all of these areas. The constitution of the Section mentions that there are standing committees in place to facilitate governance of the Section. These include:

Data Specialists	Nominating
Athlete Representative	Personnel
Awards	Public Relations
Competitions	Regional Coordinating
Coaching	Skater Development
Dispute Resolution	CanSkate/CanPower
Evaluators/Judges	STARSkate
Harassment	Competitive
Marketing	Synchronized
Membership	Adult
Music	

Responsibilities of each Standing Committee are defined in the Policies and Procedures Manual (not seen by this author). It is suggested that the next step of planning be devolved to the designated chairpersons of each of the various committees of the Section.

Each chairperson and committee should examine the identified SWOT issues and develop a plan that identifies interventions and actions that are relevant to the success of the respective portfolio. Each committee's plan should include:

- A proposed list of Interventions and actions that address the weaknesses that can be associated directly with that portfolio. At the same time the intervention/action should take note of any opportunities and threats that might enhance or jeopardise the situation.
- Each intervention should relate to producing a product or deliverable, or improving a process that relates to a service under that portfolio.
- A time schedule for the completion of the intervention
- The resources required to carry out the action
- The expected outcomes.

A generic table that could be used for each committee to use (with some examples) is attached in Annex 2. These should be developed as concisely as possible e.g. no more than 1-2 pages at most.

The proposed portfolio plans, should all be completed independently before the next Board meeting and presented to the Board for examination and review. At this stage it will be a question of the Board looking for any overlaps or omissions, and adjusting the respective portfolio plans where relevant. A decision should be made by the board on a package of

interventions that are feasible within the time horizon of the Board or respective committee (2 years). The priority and implementation status allocated to proposed interventions should be based on available resources (funding, personnel, volunteers, sponsorship etc.). The agreed suite of interventions should then form the strategic plan that the Board can show to membership. Success of the Board and the respective committees can then be reported on by completion or fulfilment of the interventions and actions.

In most organizations it is usually the task of the executive director to oversee the administrative integration of the strategic plan under instruction from the Board. Once accepted by the Board each portfolio committee (chairperson) should be responsible for implementation of and reporting on their respective portfolio plans.

Annex 1: Issues Identified by the SWOT Analysis

1. Weaknesses of the Section associated with Performance Areas

Performance Area	Weakness Aspect/Issue Identified in Session 1	Comments and Possible Actions as Identified in Session 2
Facilitating and promoting Skate Canada programs	Lack of control over club programs	This is not a Sectional weakness <i>per se</i> . Should the Section really have control over club programs? Does section have full information of the capabilities/profiles of each of the clubs?
	Low competitive numbers	This is more of a threat than an internal weakness of the Section.
	Poor marketing	
	Inadequate opportunities for skaters	
	Poor balance to stakeholder needs	
Information management	Lack of information	
	e-mail etiquette	
	Poor access to membership details	Membership committee to look at ways to get membership details
Communication	Low attendance at AGM	Need a communication portfolio/committee
	Lack of 'effective " communication	
	Inconsistent message transfer	
	Lack of targeted communication	Need communication with strategy/plan
	Poor knowledge sharing	
	Poor dissemination of information	Need appropriate communication materials: brochures; newsletters; fact sheets
	Poor response to e-mails	
Poor liaison with clubs	Lack of commitment of clubs to region. There is an "us and them" syndrome. Need targeted program of liaison with regional representation	
Education and training	Poor use of skating terms	
	Poor volunteer training in general as indicated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turnover of volunteers • poor retention of skaters as volunteers • Recruitment of volunteers • Education of volunteers • Weakly committed volunteers • Little education of parents 	Need a volunteer education/ training/ promotion group to develop appropriate program of activities/materials.

Performance Area	Weakness Aspect/Issue Identified in Session 1	Comments and Possible Actions as Identified in Session 2
	Limited opportunities in NS	
	Shortage of skilled coaches and coaches training in province.	Need to find out what coaches want regards education.
	Limited incentives for officials	
	Shortage of officials, data specialist, judges particularly in rural areas	Data specialists: need a clinic structure and material plus program - 2011/2012 Consideration of honorarium for judges Need to target older skaters
Effective governance	Too large and no direction	Strategic plan in place
	Inability to follow through on goals	Review/revisit structure
	Ineffective board and leadership	Constitution to be finalized
	No new blood	
	Poor accountability	
	Poor support from skate Canada	
	Resistance to change	
	Lack of direction	
	Inability to generate own funds	
Developing partners	Little sponsorship	Sponsorship program needs to be developed. Marketing communications to incorporate.
	Not enough partners	
	No fundraising	
Conflict resolution	-	-
Section competitions	No competitions manual	Develop a manual
	Lack of event registration system	Needs to be done on-line Skate Canada to be consulted to get right software

2. Opportunities that might enhance the operations of the Section

- Extending relationship with the clubs
 - Tapping into the potential of the clubs
 - Personal club visits
 - Regional visits
- Develop partners
 - Sponsorship program
 - Liaison with other ice sports
 - The oval
 - Universities
 - Municipalities
- Effective governance through use of technology
- Section competitions - combine competitions
- Educating and training
 - Canskate the right way
 - Intersectional skating
 - Liaison and joint projects
 - Training for club executives
 - Instruction manuals
- Information management
 - Information sheets
 - Make use of officials/coaches as source of knowledge
- Communication
 - The new Skate Canada marketing (liaison with Skate Canada)
 - Marketing to municipalities
 - Promotion
 - media ice show
 - higher profile at ice events
 - hosting events
 - live stream
 - politicians and decision-makers
 - marketing to minor hockey
 - Facilitating and promoting Skate Canada programs
 - Develop Off ice and X training opportunities
 - Other sports science resources
 - Use the old network
 - Make us of role models
 - Promote ice-skating schools

3. Threats that the Section needs to take note of

- Factors that influence time and commitment of stakeholders
 - Parents
 - Kids
 - Coaches volunteers
- Skate Canada, the parent organization
- Ageing out of volunteers
- Availability of funding
- Other sports and funding/resources/membership
- Cheap skating hockey NS
- Limited ice and facilities
- Cost of skating
- Loss of knowledgeable people
- Population decline in NS
- General apathy
- Geographic separation
- Male sexual perceptions (put in here by an unknown person)
- Bad perceptions on cost of ice skating
- Technology
- Cost of training coaches/officials
- Egos
- Self-preservation attitudes of individuals, coaches and clubs

Annex 2: Generic Table to be Used in the Development of Plans for Each Committee with Simple Examples.

Each Committee Chairperson should present the committee's proposed suite of interventions to the next meeting of the Board for discussion and agreement. The table should be a simple summary of no more than 2 pages on what the committee believes is feasible within their term.

Goal	1. To ... 2. To 3. To ...			
Strategy	1. By.... 2. By....			
Intervention	Rationale/Explanation of approach	Products/Deliverables	Timeline/Due Date	Resources Required
e.g. Development of a Competitions manual		e.g. A manual	December 2012	\$2000 from Section budget
e.g. Development of an electronic entry system		e.g. An electronic entry registration system	January 31 st 2020	Purchase of software \$400