



# STRATEGIC PLAN

1 October 2025

# PREFACE

## Background, purpose, resources and timeframe

Background	<p>The objectives<sup>1</sup> of Research Nova Scotia (RNS), described by the <a href="#">RNS Corporation Act</a>, as amended in 2025, are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• support, organize and coordinate and the funding of research to support and advance key provincial research priorities determined by the Minister</li><li>• increase the research capacity of the Province</li><li>• support the research community within the Province</li></ul> <p>On 1 May 2025, the Minister of Advanced Education provided RNS with new <a href="#">priorities</a> based on an economic and productivity growth agenda.</p> <p>Effective immediately, these priorities guide all RNS activities and expenditures, and they apply to all three objectives of the corporation.</p> <p>From 2019 to 2025, RNS invested \$110 million in 700 projects across the province. With this solid foundation, RNS now sharpens its focus to fund projects that demonstrate a plausible path to improving economic outcomes in three sectors selected by the Minister of Advanced Education:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. natural resources, climate change and clean energy</li><li>2. life sciences and health sciences</li><li>3. construction and transportation</li></ol>
Purpose	<p>This strategic plan provides a high-level description of how RNS will realize all three objectives by delivering on the Minister's priorities and the Act. It focuses on <i>what</i> RNS wants to achieve.</p> <p>An operating plan will follow, which will translate the strategy into concrete actions and steps: <i>how</i> the strategy will be carried out. The strategy touches on some operational elements to provide insight into how implementation will occur.</p>
Resources	<p>The Minister contributes to the Research Opportunities Fund (ROF), which can only be used for research funding – i.e. to support the first objective of the corporation. Support to the other two objectives is both through research funding and through the work of RNS staff (which is funded separately).</p> <p>This strategy is based on an annual ROF funding commitment envelope of approximately \$10 million per year. This is comprised of a \$4.6 million annual allocation to RNS from the government of Nova Scotia, with the remainder drawn from funds previously secured but as yet uncommitted.</p>
Timeframe	<p>The strategy timeframe is 2025-2030, or until RNS receives revised provincial priorities from the Minister and/or the funding environment changes.</p>

Definition of  
key terms

**End user:** An individual or group that directly applies or implements research outputs to achieve outcomes. This excludes research colleagues, who apply or implement the outputs for further research.

**Investment vehicle:** A discrete fund with an annual budget allocation from the RNS Board of Directors used to invest in research opportunities intended to earn a positive return (i.e., achieve the outcomes).

**Minister:** The Minister of Advanced Education, who “has general supervision and management of [the RNS] Act” (s.4), including the discretion to determine the research priorities, prescribe reporting requirements, and provide research funds to RNS.

**Outcome:** The change, benefit or improvement that accrues outside the research system as a result of research outputs.

**Research provider:** An organization whose primary role is to design, conduct and supply research, producing research outputs for application by an end user.

# CORE APPROACH

How RNS will deliver on its objectives

Research creates growth	In the aggregate, research is necessary for economic growth. <sup>2</sup> It is <u>pivotal</u> to fostering innovation, improving productivity and creating new industries. It fuels both short-term economic boosts and long-term transformation.
Public R&D support	Research can address immediate problems, facilitate an ethic of service to society, and support an industry culture of problem-solving and continuous improvement. All are essential to the innovation economy. Directing publicly funded research efforts to the needs of the Nova Scotia economy will stimulate private sector R&D, support a vibrant society, and build research infrastructure and talent needed for Nova Scotia.
R&D support programs	<p>Other organizations and programs at the federal and provincial levels deploy public funds for R&amp;D and innovation to create economic growth and improve productivity.<sup>3</sup> These typically have the objectives of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commercializing academic / public research</li><li>• Enabling industry to access publicly funded research capacity (people, ideas, facilities)</li><li>• Supporting / incentivizing private sector R&amp;D</li><li>• Supporting business needs for innovative activities (including R&amp;D-adjacent activities such as training, mentorship or procurement)</li></ul> <p>There are also other publicly funded provincial organizations mandated to undertake or coordinate sector-specific research.</p>
RNS role: research funding	<p>Our investments target <b>sector</b> or <b>field-building</b> research that is needed by end users to realize economic outcomes in the Minister's priority sectors. RNS will work to ensure these investments complement other publicly funded efforts.</p> <p>RNS provides funding to solve problems or pursue opportunities that would be valued by a number of participants, in areas or at stages where private investment incentive is not likely or available. RNS is not an R&amp;D funding or support arm of an individual business or single public service delivery organization.</p> <p>Research funding will be done through two approaches, described below, each with its own funding vehicle. With the strategy in place, RNS will create an operating plan and shape the specific components of these funding vehicles.</p> <p>In summary, RNS will support the Minister's economic framework through outcome-driven research with a sector-building focus, and two approaches for funding that ensures diverse contributions.</p>

RNS role: research capacity and support to research community

As noted above, the ROF is reserved for research funding. Although this directly aligns to the first of the three RNS objectives in the legislation, research directed to priorities will serve the other two priorities as well, increasing research capacity and supporting the research community. In this way, all three objectives of the corporation will be pursued through the supporting, organizing and coordinating the funding of research that advances provincial research priorities.

Support for students, early career researchers, and matching other public funding sources will be realized through a sector focus and an outcome-driven model.

In addition, RNS will deploy staff resources to increase research capacity and support the research community. The operating plan will provide details on the approach.

RNS role: marginalized groups and equity-deserving communities

The 2022 [\*Dismantling Racism and Hate Act\*](#) was passed “to encourage actions and innovation by local governments, businesses, non-government organizations and Nova Scotians for the purpose of making progress in achieving equity and anti-racism”.

RNS will respond to this call to action in the operating plan that will follow this strategy, identifying opportunities to advance the interests of marginalized groups and equity-deserving communities under the research priorities and outcomes expected by the Minister.

# THE ONE PAGE STRATEGIC PLAN

A strategy and implementation summary

Vision	Research delivering economic prosperity for Nova Scotia.
Mission	Building a strong economy through research that enables end user growth, productivity, profitability and competitiveness.
Objectives <sup>4</sup>	To support, organize and coordinate the funding of research, increase research capacity and support the research community.

## Outcomes

- Increase technology development, uptake and use
- Increase knowledge and innovation diffusion into industry
- Increased investment in [tradable sectors](#) and expansion of exports
- Enhance commercialization of research, including retention and deployment of Nova Scotia intellectual property (IP) in the province.
- Increase the number of highly qualified personnel employed in NS
- Increase investment in research and development (R&D) in key sectors
- Increase provincial gross domestic product (GDP)

## Sectors

1. Natural resources, climate change and clean energy; 2. Life sciences and health sciences; 3. Construction and transportation

Investment vehicle	Focused Research Investments (FRI)	Ear to the Ground <sup>5</sup> Research Investments (E2G)
Approach	<p><b>Convened:</b></p> <p>RNS engages partners, end-users and researchers to define outcomes and design a research agenda to achieve them. RNS serves as a <i>catalyst</i> or <i>joiner</i>.</p>	<p><b>Responsive:</b></p> <p>RNS selects investment options from project proposals received within defined funding rounds. End user-informed research outcomes are identified and pitched by applicants, within the parameters of the Minister's priorities.</p>
Typical characteristics	Longer-term investments (3+ years) to realize the outcomes, supporting multiple projects of varying durations, research providers and research funders. Ongoing intake through the year.	Shorter term investments (6 to 36 months) to realize outcomes, supporting an individual project with a narrower set of research objectives, undertaken by an existing research provider, with RNS as either the sole or partial funder. Two funding rounds per year.

# PROGRAM DESIGN AND FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

How the strategy for research funding will be operationalized

**Investment approach** Research must be designed to achieve the outcomes within the priority areas identified by the Minister of Advanced Education.

We will invest in research where:

- the needs of end users (or prospective end users) can be articulated as a clear outcome;
- research is required to unlock value;
- those who are expected to benefit from the research are active and evident participants in shaping the proposed work, and;
- monitoring and management can establish a convincing connection between the investment and measurable changes in economic outcomes over the long term.

**Portfolio approach** Our pathway to building economic prosperity, given the inherent uncertainty of research, is to support an appropriate mix of project durations, size, participant type, outcomes, and risk/reward ratio. With projects from both investment vehicles, we will create a portfolio of supported work that will collectively deliver economic benefit.

**Priority sector outcomes** RNS will engage key ecosystem representatives on an ongoing basis to refine the priority sectors' expected outcomes, which will inform the RNS three-year operating plan. Similar engagement models are the Colleges and Institutes Canada [Program Advisory Committees](#) and the [Sector Research Tables](#) of RDAR (Alberta).

**Definition of 'Research' that RNS will fund**

1. Novel: aimed at new findings
2. Creative: based on original concepts and hypothesis
3. Uncertain: about the final outcome(s), including uncertainty about whether the research objective(s) can be achieved to any degree
4. Systematic: planned and budgeted
5. Transferable and reproduceable: potential for the transfer of the knowledge generated by the research, enabling its use or application in new areas or contexts

This means that research that RNS supports is an act of discovery, the products of which add new understanding of natural or human phenomena, and which could be applied outside the context of its production.

Accountable to Nova Scotia	As an independent non-profit corporation, RNS is accountable for the sound investment of the public funds entrusted by the provincial government. All RNS funding opportunities and their assessment criteria will be public. RNS will publicly report twice per year on the recipients and purpose of every dollar spent.
Applicant / participant eligibility	<p>Any entity can participate in an FRI, and any Nova Scotia entity<sup>6</sup> can apply for E2G. In both cases the entity can be private, public or non-profit.</p> <p>All projects must include the participation of an independent research provider, such as the post secondary sector, non-profit research organization, publicly funded research organization, or private sector research organization.</p>
Funding requirements & flexibilities	<p>For co-funded projects, RNS imposes no <a href="#">stacking limits</a> (i.e. restrictions on the source of project funds from other sources) or restrictions from participating in other research support programs (such as <a href="#">IRAP</a>, <a href="#">CFI</a>, <a href="#">PIVP</a>, <a href="#">Mitacs</a>, etc). Securing funds from other sources is a cost-effective mechanism to achieve results and demonstrates third-party interest.</p> <p>RNS funding can be used for all project-related costs, including personnel, consumables, equipment, infrastructure, etc., that are directly attributable to the delivery of the project(s). Consideration of a match to CFI awards will be available in both funding vehicles.</p>
Intellectual property and availability of results	<p>RNS has no IP interest in any funded research. RNS takes neither an equity position nor lays claim to equity value of commercialized research results.</p> <p>Research projects must include a results distribution plan designed to convey results to end users. This will need to be a thoughtful description of what, when and to whom the outputs will be provided.</p> <p>This plan must describe an IP approach that is consistent with the outcome that RNS has been given in the priorities for “retention and deployment of Nova Scotia IP in the province”.</p> <p>RNS applies a default <a href="#">open science</a> approach, unless the plan convincingly argues that benefits to Nova Scotia are maximized by a more restrictive approach. Results should be as open as possible and as closed as necessary.</p>



# INVESTMENT VEHICLES

Further details on the two approaches for research funding selection



Purpose	<p>Funding for a portfolio-sized unit of ambition, big enough to support numerous projects but small enough to steer decisively, actively organized and coordinated to achieve the desired outcome(s).</p> <p>FRI research efforts benefit from significant financial resources as well as coordination and integration across groups, disciplines or sectors.</p>	<p>Funding for (a) early-stage R&amp;D projects that are high-potential but are too early or high-risk to secure traditional investor financing (private, public or philanthropic); and (b) more advanced stage R&amp;D projects that require the contribution of research providers to develop the invention or innovation for market.</p> <p>Such projects would not generally attract research grants from traditional funding sources that prioritize scientific discovery and/or that don't select for commercial potential.</p>
Background	<p>The FRI model was developed prior to the new priorities and has been updated. Four <a href="#">FRI</a> were selected in <a href="#">January 2025</a>. Research teams worked with their communities, partners and end users to identify needs and problems, and designed a research program to solve.</p> <p>FRI will focus on economic opportunities within priority sectors.</p>	<p>Similar to many research funding programs in other organizations, E2G will evaluate and select proposals submitted by applicants. This enables creativity and provides discretion to the applicants in defining the specific nature of the outcomes that research outputs would create – within the confines of the priority sectors.</p>
Requirements	<p>RNS will participate as a member of a funding consortium: this is an indicator of significant potential value, de-risks the RNS investment, and stretches the</p>	<p>Projects must have a clear line of sight to market or follow-on financing, be it through venture capital rounds, licensing, or</p>

	<p>effectiveness of the RNS investment. This does not mean that research participants must find a match; it means that RNS will engage with other funders to support the work.</p> <p>A new or existing entity will have responsibility to deliver (e.g. an <a href="#">FRO</a>, <a href="#">CIC</a>, academic centre, industry association), with governance and management controls required to achieve the outcome. FRI funding will be issued to this entity that has the capacity to deliver the work program, although funds may be transferred onwards in project delivery.</p>	<p>integration into an industry partner's product line.</p> <p>Proposals may be invited across all three priority sectors, or for a subset of the eight objectives attached to the priority sectors identified by the Minister<sup>7</sup>.</p>
Operation	<p>Inspired by the UK's <a href="#">Advanced Research and Invention Agency's approach</a>, RNS will work with research end users, partners, and research providers where appropriate, to identify <i>opportunity spaces</i>. Opportunity spaces exist where there are sector-level research questions that are inhibiting economic growth, partners with whom to work, private sector interest (or potential interest), and a degree of research capacity that exists or could be built in the near term.</p> <p>RNS will select FRI from those opportunity spaces.</p>	<p>Intake will occur through two funding rounds each year, each with a pre-determined budget.</p> <p>Each project must provide baseline data and agree to report on outcomes during and after the funding period (e.g., follow-up reports post-funding to capture longer-term impacts like company growth or product launch). RNS will collect and aggregate this data to evaluate whether the initiative is meeting its high-level goals of boosting productivity and economic growth.</p>
Proposed budget, subject to RNS Board approval	<p>Annual FRI budget of \$5 to \$7.5 million, selecting 2 to 4 FRI per year, each with a funding value between \$1-5 million over 2 to 5 years. Smaller, seed-level FRI may also be supported.</p>	<p>Annual E2G budget of \$2.5 to \$5 million, selecting 10 to 20 E2G per year, each with a funding value up to \$500k over 1 to 3 years.</p>

Further details will be developed in the operating plan to follow, including relationship to other funding programs.

# SELECTION AND EVALUATION

How RNS will select opportunity spaces and investments, and evaluate performance

## Selection criteria: FRI Opportunity Spaces

RNS will select FRI opportunity spaces that are consequential, under-invested, and ripe for a research contribution

- The issue is a priority for Nova Scotia – urgent, important, salient, recognizably affecting Nova Scotians.
- Research could play a role in resolving the issue – and not repackaging existing information or duplicating other areas of work, or addressing a need better managed by policy or market solutions.
- Nova Scotia has the research expertise, resources and interest in undertaking the research – or if not, there is a strong case for building the capacity or for investing in research outside of Nova Scotia to address it.
- RNS is the right organization to invest in the research – either there is no other organization that is better suited, or RNS can be a valuable supporting partner to the work.

## Selection criteria: FRI and E2G Investments

RNS will select investments based on the Act, Regulations, and Ministerial Priorities

- **Purpose** of the proposed work, including pathway to implementation: expected contribution to the economic growth agenda and to outcomes within priority sectors.
- Evidence of **demand-side interest** and connection: research users are engaged and have informed the proposed work.
- **Value** of the work: cost/benefit assessment against other investment options.
- **Salience** of topic: research outputs are designed for the needs of end users, in a form and timeframe they require to enhance uptake.
- **Scientific quality**: research meets expected quality standards.
- **Capacity to deliver**: the research provider and the research team are capable of effectively managing the project and achieving the proposed outputs.

Standards and requirements such as ethics review, [research security](#), eligible expenses and [OCAP](#) will be detailed in RNS research policies.

## Evaluation of project performance

Individual project performance will be monitored to enable both ongoing engagement and evaluation of results

This framework will be based on the selection criteria: projects will be assessed on the same basis on which they were selected.

Whereas *selection* criteria focus on intent (e.g. purpose of proposed work and expected contribution to the economic growth agenda), *performance* looks at related outputs and outcomes (e.g. research adoption rate; results adopted in practice within a given timeframe).

## Portfolio evaluation

An evaluation of whether the projects collectively achieved the outcomes, and whether RNS as an organization is performing as required

**ROI:** Does RNS organizing, coordinating and supporting of research translate into tangible wealth creation in priority sectors, which exceeds the cost of the public investment? Expected results would include additional revenue earned, cost savings achieved, or contribution to GDP attributable to innovations.

**Productivity:** Does RNS organizing, coordinating and supporting of research lead to tangible improvements in productivity or efficiency in priority sectors due to research adoption? Expected results would include increased output per unit input, cost savings per unit, or time savings achieved.

Coupled with corporate performance metrics, this will also serve as the basis for “evaluation of the Corporation’s activities based on performance measures established by the Board”, required by the RNS [Regulations](#).

# ENDNOTES

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1. The *RNS Corporation Act* uses the term ‘objects’, which is the scope of activities that RNS is empowered to carry out. Activities that do not advance the objects are beyond the legislative authority of RNS. The strategic plan uses the objects as objectives – the purposes that RNS pursues.
  2. There is significant literature around the positive GDP (and other) benefits of a robust research system. Measurement is an unsolved challenge, and not all individual investments create economic results. See for example: “Research pays not in the sense that every penny spent on a particular research leads to a corresponding profit, but that the total amount of money spent on a number of different researches, most of which comes to nothing at all, leads to a really economical development.” ([Bernal, 1939](#))
  3. Governments “often extend monetary aid through grants or loans to assist businesses with their research and development (R&D) efforts” ([Statistics Canada, 2024](#)). At the provincial level, there are provincial departments and organizations (e.g. InvestNS, Health Innovation Hub, Department of Growth and Development) and provincially-funded or co-funded organizations (e.g. Net Zero Atlantic, Perennia, Springboard Atlantic, CLARI, Mitacs). At the federal level, the “innovation universe totals over one hundred and forty programs reporting to twenty-eight departments or crown corporations” ([Senator Colin Deacon, 2024](#)).
  4. The Objectives are taken directly from the [RNS Corporation Act](#), and the Outcomes and Sectors are both taken directly from the Minister’s [priorities](#).
  5. Ear to the ground: ‘carefully gathering information and giving it attentional focus to inform appropriate actions’ (adapted from Cambridge dictionary; Wiktionary; Collins Dictionary; Quora; Longman dictionary).
  6. To be defined in the implementation phase, and may include both legal and functional tests, such as: a body in good standing with the Registry of Joint Stock Companies with registered NS office and agent; a permanent NS establishment; holder of provincial licenses or governed by a Nova Scotia self-regulating body, or; created by Nova Scotia legislation.
  7. When the FRI investment vehicle is used to pursue one of the priority sectors (or a component of a priority sector), E2G proposals within this area *may* be excluded from consideration.