

# **RNS THREE-YEAR OPERATING AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN: 2026/27 – 2028/29**

## **Contents**

A: Purpose of the 3-year operating plan .....	2
B: Strategic Framework.....	2
Type of Research .....	3
Sector-building research.....	4
Funding pathways .....	5
C: RNS Focus areas.....	5
E2G Funding rounds.....	5
FRI engagement tables and opportunity spaces.....	6
FRI funding .....	6
Increasing research capacity and supporting the research community .....	7
Marginalized interests and equity-deserving communities .....	7
D: Budget 2026/27 .....	8
Operating Funds.....	8
Research Opportunity Fund .....	8
E: Fiscal Outlook .....	8

## A: Purpose of the 3-year operating plan

The *Research Nova Scotia Corporation Funding Regulations*, section 4.6 (b), requires RNS to submit “an updated 3-year operating plan” as part of its semi-annual report to the Minister of Advanced Education due at the end of November of each year.

In May 2025, the Minister of Advanced Education provided RNS with new priorities based on an economic and productivity growth agenda, and a strategic plan was adopted in October 2025 to describe how RNS will deliver on these priorities.

This three year operating plan details how the strategy will be delivered: the key RNS operations that provide focus to the priority areas and intended outcomes.

This plan updates the operating plan submitted in November 2024, and covers the fiscal years **2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29**. The first year of activities and operations are defined in greater detail, and the second and third years provide a higher-level overview.

This rolling three-year plan will allow the government, partners and stakeholders to prepare for coming opportunities and identify potential trends and risks that RNS should consider.

Research typically operates with a long-term perspective, from planning to execution to availability of results to impact. Continuously looking ahead over three years ensures that we maintain our focus on the delivery of results to Nova Scotia, while providing the longer-term focus the research community needs.

This plan was approved by the Board of Directors on 26 November 2025 and submitted to the Minister of Advanced Education on 30 November 2025.

## B: Strategic Framework

The three legislative objectives of the RNS Corporation are to: organize, coordinate and support the funding of research; increase research capacity, and; support the research community.

In the priorities established by the Minister of Advanced Education, RNS must support activities that advance seven key outcomes:

### Provincial productivity

1. Increase technology development, uptake and use
2. Increase knowledge and innovation diffusion into industry
3. Increased investment in [tradable sectors](#) and expansion of exports

### Provincial economic growth

4. Enhance commercialization of research, including retention and deployment of Nova Scotia intellectual property (IP) in the province.
5. Increase the number of highly qualified personnel (HQP) employed in NS
6. Increase investment in research and development in key sectors
7. Increase to provincial GDP

Research must be supported in three priority sectors:

- Natural resources, climate change and clean energy
- Life sciences and health sciences
- Construction and transportation

There are three key elements to RNS' delivery of these expectations: the type of research RNS funds; a focus on sector building, and; pathways for research funding.

## **Type of Research**

We fund projects, equipment, infrastructure, and people through grants made to universities, the community college, health authorities, for-profit and non-profit organizations.

For RNS, 'Research' is the systematic pursuit of new knowledge, understanding or technology through the application of scientific methods. Its objective is to discover "knowledge that is repeatable and reusable, outside the context of its production, [and that] can be relied on in a broad variety of other endeavours".<sup>1</sup>

All research seeking RNS support must possess five characteristics based on the [OECD Frascati Manual \(2015\)](#):

1. **Novel.** The work must be aimed at new findings, producing new knowledge or insights. It must address unanswered questions, gaps, or unexplored applications. This excludes work such as that limited to jurisdictional scans, literature reviews, or the collation of existing material.
2. **Creative.** The work must use original concepts, innovative methods or new interpretations. This excludes work such as that limited to the application of accepted methodologies or existing technology, routine data processing, and quality control.
3. **Uncertain.** The results or feasibility cannot be fully known in advance. This excludes work where an ability to answer the questions is assured; for example, engineering

---

<sup>1</sup> Cartwright, N. et.al. 2023. The Tangle of Science: Reliability Beyond Method, Rigour, and Objectivity. Oxford University Press.

assessments, technology testing, feasibility studies, or compliance testing (unless there is methodological development).

4. **Systematic.** The work follows a planned and organized approach, with objectives, methods, procedures, data collection and analysis. This excludes trial-and-error, straightforward learning by doing, or projects with objectives limited to engaging with beneficiaries to understand needs.
5. **Transferable.** The work must generate results that can be transferred to other situations or circumstances, to be adapted and built upon, so the work becomes part of a broader understanding rather than a one-off achievement. This excludes one-time solution-finding tailored to a specific circumstance or client, and work without generalizable findings.

## Sector-building research

RNS supports sector-level research rather than that which supports a single beneficiary. When combined with the five characteristics described above, it distinguishes research by its **purpose**: to solve a sector's problem or create an opportunity, producing discoveries that can go on to solve other problems in other contexts.

As described in the following table, Type II research that RNS supports is distinct from other forms of beneficial research, such as work whose driving purpose is discovery for the advancement of knowledge or understanding (Type I), and research that applies scientific methods to supply knowledge to solve, develop, or evaluate a specific problem or opportunity (Type III).

In practice, the relationship between the three types of research is dynamic, with the outputs of work of one type supporting, informing and building on work that occurs of another type. Effective support for Type II depends on vibrant activity of the other two types.

Type I research is supported through other mechanisms, such as the operating grants for universities, federal tri-agency funding or other discovery research funders; Type III research is supported under a procurement model in which the end user engages a scientific supplier.

	Type I	Type II	Type III
Purpose	Discovery to advance the frontiers of knowledge; the search for truth	Solve a sector's problem or pursue a sector's opportunity through discovery	Application of scientific methods to supply knowledge to solve/ develop/ evaluate a specific problem or opportunity
Who defines research activities?	Supply side (researcher)	Purpose from end user (demand side); methods and approach from supply side	Demand side
What/who sets the agenda	Investigator	Sector needs	Market requirement(s)

What is valued	Novelty, originality, foundation on which other research can occur	Producing outcomes valued by end user	Fit for intended purpose
Evidence of value	Publication, peer acceptance	Applicable knowledge	Problem or opportunity is solved or advanced

## Funding pathways

RNS has two mechanisms to fund research:

- **Focused Research Investments (FRI):** RNS engages partners, end-users and researchers to define outcomes and design a research agenda to achieve them. Suitable for larger, co-ordinated, multi-project efforts on issues of provincial importance, with active funding engagement by partners at the organization level. RNS *catalyzes*.
- **Ear to the Ground (E2G):** RNS selects investment options from project proposals received within defined funding rounds. End user-informed research outcomes are identified and pitched by applicants. Suitable for smaller, individual projects where specific pain points are identified. RNS *selects*.

## C: RNS Focus areas

This section describes five focus areas for RNS over the three year operating plan time horizon.

### E2G Funding rounds

In 2026/27, RNS will launch two E2G funding rounds, in spring and autumn. Subject to a RNS Board of Directors budget decision in March 2026, RNS expects the budget for each round will be \$2.0 million (i.e. total fiscal year budget of \$4.0 million), with a per-project maximum budget of \$0.5 million over a maximum of three years. RNS expects to select between five and ten projects per round.

Although matched or leveraged support from other funders is not a requirement for an E2G application, it nevertheless can be a strong indication of broader interest in the proposed work, and can be a more cost effective way to support research.

On 21 November 2025, RNS launched the pilot E2G funding round. The lessons learned from this effort will be applied to all future rounds.

## FRI engagement tables and opportunity spaces

RNS will convene engagement tables (or participate in, where these already exist) in 2026/27 with research end users, partners and research providers to identify *opportunity spaces*, which exhibit the following characteristics:

- 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, duplicating other areas of work such as program evaluation, 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); and
- RNS is the right organization to invest in the research (there is no existing organization that is better suited; or, if there is, RNS can be a valuable supporting partner to their work).

These research opportunity spaces are areas where research can make an important impact on the economy. RNS will identify a limited set of opportunity spaces for which FRI will be developed.

## FRI funding

The ambition for the next three years is to launch FRI within the opportunity spaces described above. Subject to the RNS Board of Directors budget decision in March 2026, RNS expects a 2026/27 FRI budget of \$6.0 million, and RNS expects to select two to four FRI, each with a funding value of between \$1 and 5 million over a maximum of five years.

In some cases, seed-level FRI may be funded, where teams are supported to develop their research ideas and partnerships with a view to building it into a strong coordinated research program funded as a future FRI.

With RNS catalyzing or joining with other partners, other funders will be contributing to the selected FRI. This is an indicator of significant potential value, de-risks the RNS investment, and extends the value of the RNS contribution.

## Increasing research capacity and supporting the research community

The 2023 report “Effective research capacity strengthening”<sup>2</sup> identifies three levels of research capacity: the individual level (students, post docs and other people-based supports); the institutional level (physical facilities and resources, research systems, etc.), and; societal level (“how knowledge is produced, translated and disseminated within and beyond the academy through research uptake, collaborations and networks”).

RNS will increase research capacity using two mechanisms

1. For the individual and institutional capacity building, increased capacity will be realized as a secondary or indirect benefit to the pursuit of the research outputs supported by the ROF. RNS will select research for funding based on the need for the outputs. The development of additional capacity will be considered an accompanying and positive effect. The 2023 report defines this as an ‘embedded model’ for capacity development.
2. Societal

level research capacity and supporting the research community will be directly advanced through operational activities. These include:

- Convening and participating in engagement tables and pursuing FRI from them
- Working with the research community to help shape stronger E2G proposals
- Providing advice to a variety of research end users (e.g., government departments, industry) on Nova Scotia researchers or equipment in a particular field, or facilitating the discussion between research end users and research providers
- Forging partnerships with other funding partners to augment research investment in Nova Scotia
- Sponsoring key research events in the community

In addition to staff time devoted to these activities, subject to the RNS Board of Directors budget decision in March 2026, RNS expects to allocate \$100k of operating funds for activities that support the research community.

## Marginalized interests and equity-deserving communities

RNS will advance the research interests of groups that have been excluded from traditional research processes. This will be done by:

- A new RNS staff hire to be focused on addressing these interests
- Increasing partnerships with other organizations that support researchers from equity-deserving communities

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://tdr.who.int/publications/m/item/effective-research-capacity-strengthening>

## **D: Budget 2026/27**

### **Operating Funds**

RNS has an agreement with the Minister of Advanced Education that has secured \$1.796 million in operating funds for each of 2026/27 and 2027/28, subject to meeting performance requirements.

### **Research Opportunity Fund**

RNS has an agreement with the Minister of Advanced Education that has secured \$4.6 million in ROF funds for each of 2026/27 and 2027/28, subject to meeting performance requirements. This will be supplemented with \$5.4 million from existing ROF funds currently held by RNS for a total anticipated budget of \$10 million (subject to RNS Board of Directors review and approval).

## **E: Fiscal Outlook**

### **Operating Costs**

RNS receives an annual allocation of \$1.796 million to cover operating costs (including salary and all administrative overhead).

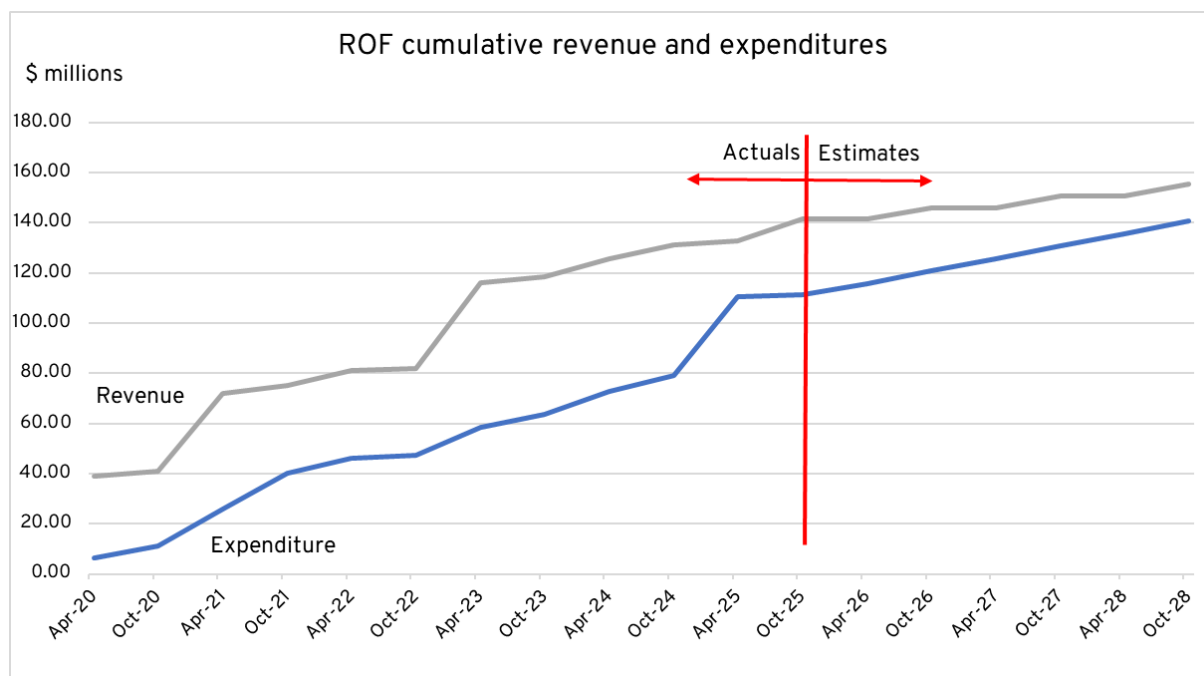
Any deficits are managed through transfers from the Operating Reserve on approval from the Board, and are reported in the financial statements within the unrestricted net assets. The current value of the Reserve is approximately \$2.4 million.



(\$000s)	Fiscal 2025/26				Fiscal 2024/25
	Year to date		Year end		Year end
	Actual	Budget	Forecast	Actual as %	Actual
<b>Salaries and Benefits</b>	\$563.1	\$638.8	\$1,029.8	55	\$1,322.7
<b>Fixed Expenses</b>	\$102.8	\$113.0	\$214.9	48	\$220.7
<b>Variable Expenses</b>	\$63.0	\$147.8	\$257.5	23	\$298.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$728.0</b>	<b>\$899.6</b>	<b>\$1,502.4</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>\$1,841.9</b>

### Research Opportunities Fund (ROF)

As of 30 September 2025, the available balance of the ROF is **\$30.2 million**. 'Available' means that it has not been committed to a recipient through a funding agreement, and therefore can be used to support research projects in the future.



#### Notes to ROF figure:

1. Revenues and expenditures are presented in half-year increments, to match the time period for the semi-annual reports.
2. All revenue sources are included: Contributions to the ROF from AE (full discretion on expenditures within definition of ROF, from both annual allocations and the contributions of \$25 million in March 2022 and \$25 million in February 2023); funding originating from DHW (before 2024/25); trust residuals received (RNS Trust, EMR

Trust, NSRIT, and Patient Enrollment Trust); third-party funds received that are matched to specific project expenditures (e.g. ACOA; COVID-19 Response Council; Forestry Innovation Transition Trust agreement #1; Office of Mental Health and Addictions); third-party funds received and expended on projects consistent with funds' designation (e.g. Forestry Innovation Transition Trust agreement #2; HRM; Port of Halifax); interest and returns realized on ROF investments; funds returned when project eligible expenses are lower than the granted value.

3. All expenditures associated with the diverse revenue sources listed in Note 2 are included. Where funding expenditure commitments are designated for future years (e.g. FITT agreement #2), expenditures are recorded in the time period associated with the signed grant agreement.
4. This fiscal outlook represents a Base Case scenario, where revenue is based on the current annual commitment of \$4.6 million from AE and expenditures are based on \$5 million per six month period based on the RNS strategic plan.

In the base case, the cumulative anticipated expenditures exceed the forecast revenues in 2029.

Given that research funding applications and planning typically have a 12 to 18 month development period, a revenue strategy or a sharply reduced expenditure approach would need to be developed well in advance of this point of intersection of revenue and expenditure.

Significant increases in expenditure – such as a large investment in research in response to a risk (e.g. pandemic) or opportunity (e.g. economic diversification) – are outside the base case planning assumptions.