



NOVA SCOTIA BARRISTERS' SOCIETY

NAME OF POLICY	Mandate of Equity Office		
APPLICABLE SECTIONS OF THE <i>LEGAL PROFESSION ACT</i> AND REGULATIONS	<i>Legal Profession Act - s. 4(2)(d), 9(1)</i>		
Approved by Council May 24, 2013	Effective May 24, 2013	Reviewed	Revised

MANDATE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Equity Office assists in fulfilling the Society's regulatory functions of maintaining public confidence in the regulation of the profession, upholding the public interest in the practice of law and seeking to improve the administration of justice in relation to equity and diversity.¹

Mandate

Under the direction of the Executive Director, the Equity Office promotes the interests of equity-seeking groups² in Nova Scotia by:

- Seeking to improve the administration of justice;
- Addressing issues of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination in the legal profession; and
- Ensuring that the legal profession adequately reflects the public it serves.

In light of the history of the province and the Equity Office³, particular attention will be paid to the needs and experiences of the Mi'kmaq, African Nova Scotians and women in the practice of law.

Responsibilities

The Equity Office will:

- 1) Advise the Society on equity issues and diversity values and principles and how these can be incorporated into Society policies and activities. This work may entail, but not be limited to:

¹ 2012 Working Group Report to Council on the Equity Office

² Equity-seeking groups include women, Aboriginal peoples, racialized peoples, persons with disabilities and persons seeking equality on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

³ The history of the Equity Office and the rationale for its role and mandate are detailed in two reports to Council prepared by the Racial Equity Committee and the Gender Equity Committee in March 2013.

- a) supporting committees, in accordance with their terms of reference;
- b) providing resources to Society staff, Council and Committees;
- c) reporting, by means of annual monitoring reports to Council on its activities; and
- d) developing and promoting equity and diversity policies.

2) Promote membership in the legal profession and the provision of legal services by members of equity-seeking groups with a particular emphasis on women, and the African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq communities. This work may entail, but not be limited to:

- a) supporting the work of the equity committees to develop policies, resources and programs that promote equity and diversity in the legal profession, with a specific focus on recruitment and retention of racialized and Aboriginal lawyers and retention of women lawyers;
- b) partnering with legal workplaces, the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University and the provincial government on the creation of employment equity policies and programming for legal workplaces; and to support initiatives that measure and monitor recruitment and retention of individuals from equity-seeking communities;
- c) providing advice and support to students from equity-seeking communities at the Schulich School of Law, with particular priority given to those participating in the Indigenous Blacks & Mi'kmaq Initiative; and
- d) working to ensure equality of participation and representation of members of equity-seeking groups on Council and Society Committees.

3) Work to improve the administration of justice by promoting enhanced access to legal services and to the justice system for equity-seeking groups. This work may entail, but not be limited to:

- a) facilitating liaison and dialogue among equity-seeking communities, the Society and the legal profession and those responsible for the administration of justice for the purpose of increasing access to justice and access to effective legal services;
- b) supporting through research, convening, collaboration and partnerships those activities that Council approves to advance the Society's strategic priorities in this area;
- c) playing a facilitation and consultative role when the Society engages in community outreach; and
- d) collaborating with equity and access to justice stakeholders such as the Schulich School of Law, Department of Justice, community organizations and others for the purpose of improving equity and access to justice and access to effective legal services.

4) Promote cultural competence⁴ in the practising Bar and institutions responsible for the administration of justice. This work may entail, but not be limited to:

- a) working with members of equity committees, who have expertise in the areas of equity, diversity and cultural competence and can be resources to the profession on such matters, and members of equity-seeking communities to promote an understanding of cultural competence and commitment to equity and diversity among all members of the Society; and
- b) working with the equity committees, members of equity-seeking communities, and Society staff to develop and provide continuing professional development curriculum with a goal to increase all lawyers' understanding of issues related to cultural competence, and all forms of harassment and discrimination across the diversity spectrum.

5) Though not part of its core responsibilities, it is recognized that the Equity Office provides a safe place for discussions of personal experiences with racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination in the legal system in Nova Scotia. The Equity Officer is available to discuss individual concerns and issues and to work with law firms and legal employers, members of the legal profession and the public to find solutions to these issues.

⁴ Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. Cultural competence comprises four components: (a) awareness of one's own cultural worldview, (b) attitude towards cultural differences, (c) Knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and (d) cross-cultural skills. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_competence