

Moving Forward Together

A background document for Community Meetings on
Gaelic Language and Culture in Nova Scotia

This document, and the process that it outlines, have been developed by a Planning Team that includes representatives from community Gaelic groups, Comhairle na Gàidhlig, Celtic Studies StFX University, Colaisde na Gàidhlig, Iona Highland Village Museum, and Gaelic Affairs.

We thank those who have contributed to the process to date, and we hope that this information helps to provide a good platform to support community discussion and ongoing efforts to grow Gaelic language and culture in Nova Scotia.

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This document provides a background on discussions about Gaelic language and culture that will be taking place in communities across the province.

It has been ten years since a Gaelic Development Steering Group hosted a series of meetings across the province to see what interest and support there is for Gaelic in Nova Scotia. The Gaelic Council, with support from communities, Gaelic institutions, and Gaelic Affairs is continuing that discussion. We hope to see many of the same faces, and many new ones take part, showing how much support there is for Gaelic language and culture in our province.

The purpose of the discussion:

1. Provide a provincial update to local communities on what has been accomplished by Gaelic speakers and supporters since 2002.
2. Provide a chance for people to talk about what they have been doing, and what they want for Gaelic in their own communities.
3. To improve our ability to support Gaelic, by making better connections between local people and provincial organizations like the Gaelic Council and Gaelic Affairs.

Why we hope you will come out and support these meetings:

These meetings will let everyone hear the range of ideas that people have for their communities, provide a place for new people to get involved in the discussions, and for people to come together around shared priorities. All voices should be at the table as we plan for the future. Once communities have had these discussions, The Gaelic Council and Gaelic Affairs will be better able to support what communities want to do, and we will support on-going planning and work.

The format for the discussion:

1. Public meetings in ten communities, that encourage everyone who supports Gaelic, or is involved in Gaelic to come out and talk about what they'd like to see in their communities for Gaelic language and culture.
2. A workshop in June for anyone from across the province to gain some skills that will help them support local community goals for Gaelic.
3. 'Kitchen Table' meetings in the fall in all interested communities to talk about how to move toward their own community goals.

Meeting schedule: Begins with tea / social. Discussion begins a half hour later. Dates are subject to rescheduling, **please confirm** with us, or in local papers

Halifax	April 4	Thurs	5:30 pm	Citadel High, Trollope St.
Antigonish	April 6	Sat	1:00 pm	People's Place, 283 Main St.
Johnstown	April 7	Sun	1:00 pm	Johnstown Parish Hall
Sydney	April 8	Mon	5:30 pm	Grand Lake Rd. Fire Hall by Mall
St Ann's	April 9	Tues	5:30 pm	Colaisde na Gàidhlig
Christmas Island	April 10	Wed	5:30 pm	Christmas Island Fire Hall
New Glasgow	April 13	Sat	1:00 pm	Library, Archimedes St.
Glendale	April 22	Mon	5:30 pm	Glendale Parish Hall
Port Hawkesbury	April 23	Tues	5:30 pm	KOC Hall, 31 Napean St.
Mabou	April 24	Wed	5:30 pm	Dalbrae Academy

Based on what people told the Steering Committee in the 2002 community meetings, a report was produced that listed nine main goals. A general assessment has been made of how Gaelic has developed in the last ten years, as a starting place for discussion. There has been a lot of progress in some ways, and not in others, but the main question now is what to do next for Gaelic, and for the next ten years and beyond.

1. Increase the number of Gaelic speakers.

Increasing the number of speakers of Gaelic is an immediate need to maintain Gaelic as a living language.

- Total numbers may have gone up, but without accurate numbers from 2004, a comparison cannot be made.
- Hundreds of learners have been attracted by immersion programs like Gàidhlig aig Baile, and some are achieving fluency. Perhaps the number of new learners is greater than the number of native speakers who we have lost. Regardless, more learners, children and native speakers are speaking Gaelic.
- There are more opportunities for fluent speakers to help learners.

2. Preserve, maintain, and develop the Gaelic language and culture.

More than preserving historic forms, the language and culture must be maintained. The language must be used to spread knowledge and culture throughout the Gaelic communities.

- There is a wealth of collected material, with a focus lately on providing internet access to some collections. Beaton Collection, Sruth nan Gaidheal, Caint mo Mhàthar, An Drochaid Eadarainn
- Gàidhlig aig Baile, as a learning tool and community development tool, is providing a way to support language and culture transmission.
- New classes and social gatherings in many communities provide centres for sharing Gaelic
- School programming has been developed so that children are introduced to Gaelic culture, and have the opportunity to learn to speak and read Gaelic.

3. Encourage and promote all forms of Gaelic cultural expression.

The Gaelic language is the foundation of its culture and arts, but language on its own is not enough. All forms of culture; dance, music, song, literature, storytelling, and religion all support each other in our communities.

- A variety of independent activities are on-going.
- Efforts are being concentrated on the language.
- There is no provincial framework for arts development, but Colaisde na Gàidhlig and GaB programming tends to draw upon and contribute to aspects of cultural and arts development.
- Stòras a' Bhaile and GaB programming are supporting speaking, storytelling and singing skills

- Féis an Eilein, Féis Mhabu and Highland Village are places that have programming that encourage and promote all forms of Gaelic cultural expression

4. Strengthen Gaelic communities.

Language and culture cannot be separated from the communities in which they exist. Strengthening the communities that share Gaelic values will provide an environment for Gaelic language and culture to thrive. Gaelic must be in the homes, schools, communities, and workplaces as a part of community life.

- Gàidhlig aig Baile has brought together communities in a new way around Gaelic, and focuses on inclusion of local assets, i.e. native speakers and dialect.
- Community classes are populated by students of all ages that were not involved in Gaelic a decade ago.
- Many new initiatives have arisen, but often independent from existing groups, so community efforts are spread among more organizations.
- Province-wide initiatives, as well as connections among the more mobile and computer-linked generation is establishing a provincial Gaelic community.
- Bun 's Bàrr program develops and encourages learning and social linkages between native speakers and learners

5. Develop a place where people can live and work in Gaelic.

Communities will provide more Gaelic-related employment opportunities as Gaelic becomes more recognized for its ability to provide financial benefits. These communities will provide centres for Gaelic families to thrive.

- Comhairle na Gàidhlig, Office of Gaelic Affairs, Highland Village, Colaisde na Gàidhlig and public schools all provide workplaces that encourage and promote the use of Gaelic as a working language in ways that were not realized a decade ago.
- Community based growth will need further support, however, through language instruction. Tutors have employment that requires proficiency in Gaelic, and social circles grow around their community programs.

6. Instill pride and self-confidence within the Gaelic community.

Gaelic identity provides a base for pride and self-confidence, which play an important role in growing Gaelic in Nova Scotia. Gaelic language and all areas of Gaelic culture have to be better understood as part of this identity so that more people get involved in Gaelic.

- Gaelic identity is becoming better understood at a public level.
- There is a new level of pride and self-confidence within the younger generations that did not experience, first-hand, the prejudice of earlier times. As a result, there is a new interest in the language.
- School curriculum places Gaelic in a position that makes Gaelic a subject that is as important as any other one for school children.

- Native Speakers are being more publicly appreciated and honoured for their contributions, and are more involved in spreading Gaelic.
- Gaelic place name signs express Gaelic identity and heritage of local communities

7. Increase public appreciation of Gaelic culture.

Public appreciation encourages pride, and creates interest in the Gaelic culture. This interest translates into increased support for growing Gaelic language and culture, greater participation in Gaelic language and cultural arts, and more resources available to support community work.

- Community and provincial communications have provided greater knowledge and recognition of the role of Gaelic in Nova Scotia. This is sometimes reflected in our media.
- Development of 'Am Bradan' as the Symbol of the Gaels in Nova Scotia
- Gaelic Awareness Month in May promotes Gaelic.
- Gaelic pamphlets, calendars, exhibits all spread information about Gaelic
- Other language and cultural identity groups in the province are gaining a better understanding of how Gaelic has had a similar history to theirs.
- Gaelic place name signs increase awareness of the extent of Gaelic culture in Nova Scotia.

8. Base the development of Gaelic language and culture in local communities, with the support of municipal, provincial, and federal governments.

The growth of Gaelic language and culture must be based in the community and led by the community. This must be supported with finances and recognition by all levels of government. Acceptance of the language and culture as a part of the multicultural face of the country must be institutionalized, and supported with networking and administrative expertise where needed.

- Communities are providing platforms to host language classes and social gatherings and events that bring together their local people and resources.
- The Gaelic Council undertakes communications, gatherings, and projects intended to support community work and promote awareness of Gaelic.
- Municipal support is generally strong, but informal.
- A provincial Office of Gaelic Affairs has been established. The office promotes Gaelic development at international, national and provincial levels. The office also carries out research and provides financial support for Gaelic development in communities through Gàidhlig aig Baile, Bun 's Bàrr, Gàidhlig le Luathas, Bursaraidh na Gàidhlig, Tutor Training and Support, visual and learning aids, and newspaper articles
- Federal support for culture and innovation is provided through grants awarded

9. Achieve secure status for the Gaelic language under law in Nova Scotia.

Obtaining a secure legal status for Gaelic will ensure a level of continued support for Gaelic language, and attach worth and public recognition to the language and culture.

- There have been initiatives to support including Gaelic as one of the 'Foundation Culture', or 'Heritage Status' groups which receive special recognition, but no legal right, in the delivery of provincial Culture and Education services.
- Right in law at the provincial and federal law are only provided for English and French.
- There is an Office of Gaelic Affairs with a designated Minister who sits at the cabinet table.
- Numerous provincial government documents have been translated into Gaelic, Gaelic language training and Gaelic language and culture awareness are included in the corporate training calendar for Public servants, and bilingual boundary signs have been installed in the province's eastern districts.

Much progress has been made. We know much more needs to be done to ensure Gaelic language and culture remain vibrant into the future.

Help create the goals that will get us there, and join in the efforts to grow Gaelic language and culture in Nova Scotia!