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## Executive Summary

### Centre for Black Student Success

**Leads:** Elizabeth Yeo, VP Students; Megan Fogarty, Director, Human Rights & Equity

**Purpose:** The initiative aims to seed a new Centre for Black Student Success to address systemic barriers faced by African Nova Scotian/Black students, such as anxiety, social isolation, and financial and academic stress.

### Problem Addressed

African Nova Scotian/Black students at StFX experience significant barriers that impact their mental health and academic success. These barriers have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative aims to create Africentric spaces and programming to foster equity, inclusion, and social justice to redress the barriers created by current university structures.

### Initiative Description

#### Current Campus Context:

- 66.5% of diverse students feel left out at StFX.
- Existing supports include the Diversity Engagement Centre (DEC) and initiatives such as Black Student Advising, peer mentoring, and culturally relevant programming.
- There's a need for a dedicated space for African Nova Scotian/Black students to enhance community building and sense of belonging.

#### Centre Vision and Pillars:

- The Centre will be grounded in African Nova Scotian/Black cultural values, including the Nguzo Saba principles, Sankofa Bird imagery, and the Nea Onnim No Sua A, Ohu symbol.
- The community will decide the final name of the Centre.
- Four founding pillars: Belonging, Academic Success, Healing, and Community.

### Timeline and Activities

#### Year 1:

- Engage working group, develop space, launch programming, hire staff, initiate data collection, and open the Centre.

#### Year 2:





- Operationalize vision, engage external communities, continue data collection, and create a 5-year strategic plan.

#### **Post-Year 2:**

- Implement the 5-year plan, apply continuous improvement measures.

#### **Proposed Location**

The Centre will be housed on the main floor of the Mount St. Bernard building, a central location supporting pathways for student learning and engagement with the broader community.

#### **Organizational Structure**

The Centre will be integrated within the profile of the Vice President, Students, ensuring collaboration with other student-centered services. Africentric mentorship and input will guide the Centre's development.

#### **Long-Term Funding Plan**

Beyond initial funding, the Centre will seek support from private philanthropy, governmental contributions, and existing funds like the Jeannine Deveau Educational Equity Endowment. Partnerships with entities like the Windsor Foundation and African Nova Scotian Affairs are anticipated.

#### **Expected Outcomes and Evaluation**

The Centre aims to:

- Build community and reduce isolation among African Nova Scotian/Black students.
- Enhance access to success services and programs.
- Provide peer mentorship for first-year students.
- Promote cultural expression and challenge systemic barriers.

Outcomes will be evaluated using surveys, wellness tools, and student reflections.

The Centre for Black Student Success represents a significant step towards empowering African Nova Scotian/Black students at StFX by fostering a supportive, inclusive, and equitable environment. The initiative aligns with the principles of the Scarborough Charter and aims to create lasting positive impacts on the university community.





## Initiative Request Details

**Institution:** St. Francis Xavier University

**Lead(s):**

Elizabeth Yeo, Executive Lead, Vice President Students  
Megan Fogarty; Project Lead, Director, Human Rights & Equity

**Range of Funding Requested:** 200-250K annually

**Expected Length of Funding Request:** 24 months

**Will the funding be used to improve or scale a current initiative or seed a new one:**

The funding will be used to seed a new initiative.

**Problem the initiative seeks to address:**

The problem this initiative seeks to address are the institutional and systemic barriers at StFX that increase the potential for African Nova Scotian/Black students to experience anxiety, social isolation, financial and academic stress during their academic journey. This initiative will support the development of a centre for African Nova Scotian/Black students providing resources and the creation of Africentric spaces with associated programming to remove structural barriers to equity, inclusion, and social justice.

## Initiative Description within the Current Campus Context

### Proposal Concept

In the 2020 Canadian Campus Wellness Survey, 66.5% of diverse students at St. Francis Xavier University (StFX) reported feeling left out some or most of the time (CCWS Feb 26, 2020, F&M p.8). For a small university that strives to create social engagement inspiring active citizenship, this statistic was alarming and propelled us toward examining ourselves as an institution. Since this time, StFX has been engaged in a process of reflection and learning through the President's Action Committee for Anti-Racism (PACAR). The work of PACAR has shown there is still much institutional work to be done if StFX is to remain true to its values, especially relating to actively supporting success and advancement of our African Nova Scotian/Black students. This proposal to launch a *Centre for Black Student Success* is a significant part of this important work.

### Campus Context

There are over 500 African Nova Scotian/Black students at StFX and improving dedicated institutional supports is a priority, becoming even more prevalent since the onset of COVID-19. Pandemic related stressors have been particularly acute for our African Nova Scotian/Black student populations. These





inequities were felt prior to the pandemic, with African Nova Scotian/Black youth having inequitable access to mental health services province-wide and they carry over to the campus experience.

We know that *spaces* are important to engaging our diverse students with critical campus resources because they provide a welcoming way to onboard students to their use and a safe entry point. Currently, The Diversity Engagement Centre (DEC) and Lounge is the space through which activities and initiatives for African Nova Scotian/Black students are currently undertaken on campus. These include:

- A Black Student Advising Office, that employing one Advisor who works with the mission of ensuring African Nova Scotian/Black students reach their full potential by listening to their needs, promoting self-advocacy, and providing students with supports, resources, and opportunities to thrive throughout their academic career.
- Peer Mentoring as a peer-to-peer method of providing wraparound support to African Nova Scotian/Black students. This past year, the DEC piloted a community-based peer mentor initiative that was received positively by both mentors and students.
- Promoting activities, community building and celebrations that are deliberate and intentional.
- Delivering programming such as game nights, soccer tournaments, pop-up barber shops, Black Artist talks and movie nights.
- Sponsoring social awareness and academic events such as African Nova Scotian Justice Institute community sessions, academic advising sessions, a Dalhousie Black and Indigenous Law Program Information session, and a research information afternoon to inform students of opportunities to be involved in academic research on campus.
- Hosting culturally relevant programming open to the entire campus community such as a Black Artist cabaret, community meals and a Black excellence panel.

The DEC and Lounge have provided a positive starting point. However, we have learned from the [Kiknu](#) Indigenous Student Centre that a culturally relevant space is critical to building community and the sense of belonging foundational to indigenous student success. African Nova Scotian/Black students have asserted through PACAR consultations that they too require a space of belonging for students, staff, faculty, and community of African Descent. Institutional evidence supports this assertion.

In 2021/2022, the office of Black Student Advising welcomed 555 unique visitors. During 2022-2023 that number dropped to 169 due to staffing issues. However, when culturally relevant programming is provided through the office (i.e., the Black Artist Cabaret, community meals, a Black excellence panel) the number balloons to an excess of 760 participants. These numbers provide evidence that there is not only need, but significant community interest at StFX for a space that is dedicated to Black flourishing.

## Centre Long Term Vision

### Centre Vision and Founding Pillars

The development of the Centre's long-term vision and foundational pillars is ongoing and will be finalized through consultations with African Nova Scotian/Black students, faculty, staff, and community members.

Beginning guidance from a working group comprised of African Nova Scotian/Black stakeholders is:





1. The Centre's *long-term vision* be grounded in principles, imagery and values that underpin African Nova Scotian/Black culture.

Specifically,

- The *Seven Nguzo Saba Principles* be applied to as a Centre framework reinforcing cultural values of community building and heritage for persons of African descent (*Nguzo saba: the 7 principles*, Dr. Maulana Karenga, 1967)
- The symbol of the *Sankofa Bird* be associated with the Centre as an image guiding toward wisdom and learning from the past (*The Adinkra Dictionary: A visual primer on the language of Adinkra*, W. Bruce Willis, 1998).



- The *Nea Onnim No Sua A, Ohu* be present as a symbol of knowledge, lifelong learning, and a continued quest for knowledge. Reminding us that "He who does not know can know from learning" (*Cloth as Metaphor*, G.F. Kojo Arthur, 2017).



- That final name of the Centre be decided upon by the community for whom the Centre will serve.
- That the long-term vision to support the Centre's growth, stability and mentorship approach for the Coordinator be informed by African Nova Scotian/Black stakeholders.

2. The Centre be built upon four *founding pillars* to guide its activities and development.

Specifically,

- **Belonging.** Representing African Nova Scotian/Black identity, through culturally relevant and Africentric programming, events, and educational sessions on Africentricity. By being a space of belonging for students, faculty, staff, and community members of African descent that is itself Africentric physically in its look and feel.
- **Academic Success.** Providing academic support through tutoring, mentoring, research opportunities, Africentric learning resources. Be a hub for community-based education, parenting workshops to support students through the public schooling system. Be a source for faculty and staff workshops on supporting African Nova Scotian/Black Students.
- **Healing.** Opening access to culturally relevant mental and physical wellbeing supports. Supporting a purpose to be a place of healing for African Nova Scotian/Black students, staff, faculty, and community members sponsoring specific programming for both African Nova Scotian/Black men and women as well as parenting workshops.
- **Community.** Engaging external partners and communities in promoting and sustaining relationships with African Nova Scotian/Black communities and organizations that work to support anti-Black racism and enhance existing support systems and mentoring networks whose aim it is to bolster the overall well-being of African Nova Scotian/Black students, faculty, staff, and





community members.

### Timeline for Building Toward the Vision

Funding from the McCall MacBain Foundation would provide a 2-year jump-start for this Initiative. The table below provides an overview of anticipated development timeline.

✓ McCall MacBain Support	
Academic Year	Centre Activity
2023-2024 (Funding Yr1)	Engage campus working group, allocate and develop space, develop awareness among African Nova Scotian/Black student body, launch student programming prepare staffing positions, hire, initiate data collection for assessment, <b>launch and grand opening of Centre.</b>
2024-2025 (Funding Yr2)	Operationalize Centre’s vision, engage external community and outreach, continue data collection, create 5-year strategic plan
2025-2026, onward	Roll-out 5-year strategic plan, apply continuous improvement measures based on collected data and other evidence-based assessment strategies.  <i>**Within the second year of operation**</i> Provide a safe space on campus that is adopted by African Nova Scotian/Black students, faculty, staff and community as a place to access supports, services.

### Centre Space and Proposed Physical Location

Currently, African Nova Scotian/Black students share space at the Diversity Engagement Centre (DEC) in a converted meeting room located on the fourth floor of Bloomfield. It is a welcoming and relaxing space where Students of African Descent, International and 2SLGBTQIA+ students can connect with one another. It displays student artwork and serves as a comfortable space to hold community events. Students use the space to study, watch tv, and socialize. It is also the hub for events organized by the Office for Black Student Advising, as well as other Advisors serving our diverse student body. The lounge offers free snacks and study materials that are consistently replenished by advisors. Our students say:

*“The DEC lounge is where I connect with people, it is a cool place where I always go.”*

*“Over the year I enjoyed meeting up with my friends and connecting with new people in the DEC lounge. I can grab a snack just chill, study, or pop into an event.”*

Our current space is well used by many diverse students and while it provides an important first step in serving our African Nova Scotian/Black students a singular space is now required. The proposed space will be a dedicated space supporting African Nova Scotian/Black Students. The vision is that the Centre will be student-focused representing African Nova Scotian/Black culture, excellence, artistry, and identity; physically the space will reflect the students for whom it is intended. On a broader scale the Centre will provide a space for African Nova Scotian/Black faculty, staff, and community members to engage with students, build community, explore academic perspectives, and career opportunities, and to generally gather in a safe space. The proposed location for the new Centre is on the main floor of the Coady building, which houses the

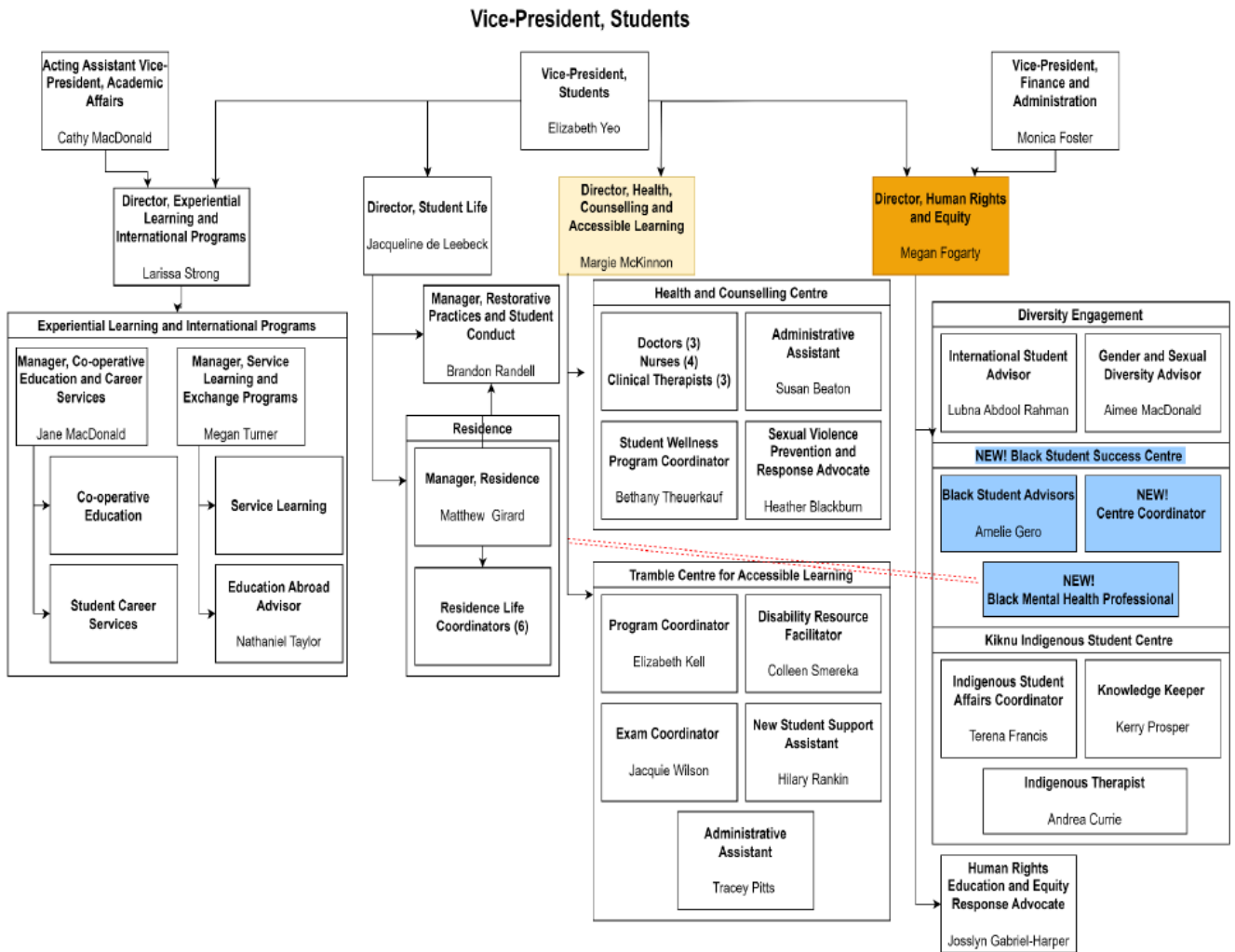




Coady International Institute. Situating the Centre near the Coady institute supports its long-term vision and has the potential to create new, global pathways for student learning.

### Organizational Structure, Situating the Centre

The organizational chart below shows the Centre as being situated within the profile of the Vice President, Students, which creates natural connections and collaboration opportunities with all other student-centred services. StFX will also work to ensure mechanisms are in place for the Centre to receive Africentric input and mentorship throughout its development for long term success and sustainability.



### Centre Long Term Funding Support Plan

We appreciate the McCall MacBain Foundation’s interest in the initiative to re-imagine the Centre for Black Student Success at St. Francis Xavier University. In addition to the university’s long-term







commitment to this venture, we envisage twin mechanisms of external support, beyond the initial two years of proposed funding from the Foundation: private philanthropy and governmental contributions.

In 2015, the Jeannine Deveau Educational Equity Endowment was established at StFX, to “close the gap” between students from Indigenous and African Nova Scotian communities and postsecondary education. This multimillion-dollar commitment has resulted in hundreds of students receiving scholarships and bursaries; helped establish Kiknu (the Indigenous Students’ Centre); and inspired other alumni donations in support of African Canadian and Indigenous students. The Deveau Fund’s matching program doubles the impact of other gifts, and we are confident that the Deveau Fund will be a significant contributor to the Centre for Black Student Success in the years to come.

There are several other private donors that have already funded initiatives for African Canadian students and our consultations with them indicate a willingness to further support the revamped CBSS at StFX. The support from the McCall MacBain Foundation will help assure donors that they’ll be supporting a strong and established initiative. Additionally, we have the ongoing support of entities such as the Windsor Foundation, which supports X-Project (a tutoring and mentorship program for African Nova Scotian and Indigenous school children in the local community), and the congregation of the Sisters of Saint Martha, which provides myriad scholarships, bursaries, and on-campus supports for students from Indigenous and African Nova Scotian backgrounds. Further, our strong partnerships with municipal, provincial, and federal government officials gives us confidence that the Centre for Black Student Success at StFX – and our plans for its ambitious future – will be supported through various grant programs. In particular, potential partnerships with African Nova Scotian Affairs and the Council on African Canada Education indicate opportunities to work with StFX. We are also encouraged by the work of the Michaëlle Jean Foundation, especially the recently released Halifax Declaration for the Eradication of Racial Discrimination, which clearly maps out the need for justice in the education sector.

We are excited by the prospect of working with the McCall MacBain Foundation in the near term, and with our donors, foundations, and government partners going forward. Together, we can drastically improve access to education for African Nova Scotian/Black students and contribute to a society that promotes recognition, justice, and development for Canadians of African descent.

## Centre Community Interface

### Interface with students

The Centre for Black Student Success will be a critical step in closing service and support gaps. It will provide a cultural hub for the approximately 500 African Nova Scotian/Black students at StFX and will be staffed with individuals who are themselves members of the African Nova Scotian/Black community to bring understanding of lived experience. The focus will be on building relationships that meet students at the grass roots to reduce isolation, social anxiety, and feelings of overwhelm. The Centre will link students to a variety of resources that open multiple success pathways and access to wrap around support.

- *An African Nova Scotian/Black mental health professional will work to overcome barriers to mental health services for our African Nova Scotian/Black students and provide dedicated support. This*





professional will be closely connected with the interdisciplinary health services team at the Health and Counselling Centre, and with the Clinical Therapists who work with students individually to provide mental health supports. Through their community-based work with African Nova Scotian/Black students, counsellor will provide “in-the-moment” individual supports, supports by appointment, and relevant group programs within the CBSS. They will be well-placed to recognize students who may require a higher level of support, and they may serve as a navigator for students in facilitating referrals to important supports and services such as Financial Aid, Academic/Learning resources and Sexual Violence Prevention and Response. Thus, helping to mitigate systemic institutional barriers causing inequitable access to these services for African Nova Scotian/Black students. This professional will also present opportunities for the counsellor to facilitate and co-facilitate mental health-related services and programs in collaboration with other Health and Counselling Centre team members. Some of these programs may be offered to broader student groups, thus further building connections between/among students, and breaking down social and institutional barriers. S/he may assist in administering assessments to determine academic need and they present an opportunity for integrating culturally relevant connections for students through programming and direct support for anxiety, coping and stress management.

- *African Nova Scotian/Black Senior Student Peer Mentors* will provide peer leadership, especially to first-year students helping them to adjust to university life, to build strong relationships, reduce social isolation and experience programming opportunities for cultural connection. African Nova Scotian/Black peer mentors will expand on the peer mentoring initiative from this past year. The opportunities for connection and collaboration between our community-based mental health initiatives and the Centre will be invaluable for all students. With expanded funding African Nova Scotian/Black peer mentors will work with all African Nova Scotian/Black students, with a focus on incoming students, delivering workshops and programming related to transitioning to university life. In conjunction with peer mentors from the International, Indigenous and 2SLGBTQIA+ community, African Nova Scotian/Black peer mentors will be responsible for:
  - Providing informal opportunities for gathering and socializing, community building and developing friendships.
  - Facilitating and/or delivering 60-90 minute bi-weekly workshops. Formal workshops will follow an ‘ice breaker/session/free talk’ format and are a combination of skill building and network creation aimed to improve African Nova Scotian/Black student’s wellbeing and sense of belonging on campus. Topics will be determined according to student interest, but could include themes such as:
    - Getting to know campus.
    - mental health (e.g., the inquiring mind, mental health first aid)
    - budgeting/financial success at university
    - What does a midterm look like?
    - Group study sessions during midterms and exams
- *African Nova Scotian/Black Tutors* will provide academic and curricular level support, helping students to navigate academic demands and learn critical academic competencies that contribute to student development of knowledge, skills and abilities.

### Interface with University Stakeholders

The Scarborough Charter is clear in its assertion reflecting Black Flourishing. It states,





“Universities and colleges are central to enabling the just, fulsome realization of human potential and thriving. They play a pivotal role in redressing anti-Black racism by removing structural barriers to equity, inclusion and social justice, with full recognition of our intersectional identities, while advancing the innovative research, critical thinking and engaged dissemination of knowledge that foster substantive equality, human dignity, and sustainability.”

StFX is a signatory to the Scarborough Charter. As such, the Centre will interface with internal and external stakeholders in myriad ways that invite broad learning and engagement.

It will play a role in examining structural barriers and cultural practices that constrain equitable representation of African Nova Scotian/Black academics and staff within institutions from professional preparation through recruitment, to recognition, career progress and success, to leadership development.

It will be a source of leadership for the President’s Action Committee on Anti-Racism (PACAR) in implementing the identified 43 recommendations and accountability framework. While the Centre for Black Student Success will be called upon to act as a resource, it is important to recognize that efforts in support of meaningful change within institutions and the higher education sector should not be the sole responsibility of Black colleagues. It is the responsibility and obligation of all peers and leaders to facilitate supportive environments, promote equitable practices and actively, intellectually, and appropriately foster inclusion for African Nova Scotian/Black students, staff, and faculty (Scarborough Charter, 2021).

The Centre can address gaps in the inclusion and validation of African Nova Scotian and Black perspectives, experiences, and ways of knowing and learning, and can make contributions within pedagogical approaches, research data and classroom cultures. It will be a natural connector between faculty, staff and community members of African descent and our students, with specific attention being paid to our first-year students who we know benefit from early engagement with academics and mentoring opportunities.

Investment from the McCall MacBain Foundation would mean the Centre will become a focal point of activity, championing Black flourishing of African Nova Scotian/Black students in the immediate future. The larger work of the centre will focus on providing leadership internally and externally for anti-Black racism education, deep learning, and decolonizing practices. At the level of the individual student, the Centre will represent a welcoming home that operates as a safe space, supporting students’ personal flourishing and success. The long-term positive impact of how the Centre interfaces with both students and stakeholders, will be a legacy of supporting growth and expansion for individuals and the institution.

### Expected outcomes + how the outcomes will be evaluated

The StFX Centre for Black Student Success will:





- Connect African Nova Scotian/Black students at StFX to one another, building a sense of belonging, reducing isolation, and building community.
- Provide a safe space where African Nova Scotian/Black students can build relationships with university staff and faculty and increasing access to specialized success services, supports and programs.
- Provide a structured peer mentor program for African Nova Scotian/Black first-year students to nurture their academic, personal, and professional growth.
- Create a culture hub on campus that underpins Black flourishing, that challenges institutional and systemic barriers through anti-Black racism dialogue and decolonizing practices, that supports cultural expression, learning, activities, discussion, programming, and experiences that engage all members of the StFX community in deep learning.

These outcomes will be evaluated using a mixed-method approach triangulating qualitative and quantitative data. Specifically, the Canadian Campus Wellness Survey (CCW), the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the StFX annual Student Satisfaction Survey, selected wellness tools (screenings, scales) and student reflections for formative assessment will provide data.

### Evidence base that the initiative builds on / will generate

The development of this proposal has been informed by extensive PACAR consultations highlighting a gap in our ability to reach and support our African Nova Scotian/Black students at the grass roots. We have engaged African Nova Scotian/Black faculty and staff, the Tracadie Black community and our students over 2 years, through various processes. These have included high-level and campus wide Strategic Planning discussions, the Student Experience and Opportunity Plan, the Mental Health and Wellness Strategy and the President’s Advisory Committee on Anti-Racism, three student satisfaction surveys, focus groups, town halls and dedicated meetings with key groups. The evidence gathered from this broad engagement tells us that our African Nova Scotian/Black students want culturally responsive support *and* that they desire change in how resources are accessed. The Centre for Black Student Success responds to this by creating a cultural space that links together multiple outreach pathways designed to connect with and support the unique needs of our African Nova Scotian/Black students.

## Centre Budget

### Proposed Budget

The Budget breakdown demonstrates use of funds, including cash and in-kind contributions from the institution and other funders.

Budget line item	StFX (in-kind)	McCall MacBain Foundation	The Deveau Fund
African Nova Scotian/Black, Mental Health Worker (salary)		\$100,000	
African Nova Scotian/Black Program Coordinator (salary)		\$60,000	
Assessment support		\$25,000	
Student African Nova Scotian/Black Peer Mentors (wages)		\$40,000	





Culturally based programming & supplies		\$15,000	
Honorariums (e.g., community elders, professional mentors)		\$10,000	
Program Evaluation	\$2,500		
Director, Diversity Equity Centre (DEC) (10%)	\$11,000		
Director, Health, Counselling and Accessible Learning (5%)	\$5,500		
Black Student Advisor (10%)	\$6,700		
Special Advisor to President on Anti-Racism (10%)	\$5,000		
Manager, Academic Success Centre (5%)	\$4,000		
Human Rights, Equity Response & Prevention Advocate (10%)	\$7,000		
DEC / DEC Lounge / Other Campus Equity Spaces (overhead)	\$6,000		
Training for staff, mentors, tutors	\$5,000		
2 Academic Tutors (wages)			\$10,000
<b>ANNUAL TOTAL</b>	<b>\$52,700</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>
<b>2 YEAR SUB TOTAL (Annual x 2)</b>	<b>\$105,400</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>
<b>PROJECTED TOTAL, OVER TWO YEARS: \$625,400</b>			

## Concluding Comments

### Redressing Inequality: Empowering Black Students, Staff and Faculty at St. Francis Xavier University

This proposal has been guided by several sources. Specifically, the principles of the Scarborough Charter, and its direction pertaining to Black Flourishing and Accountability, the Halifax Declaration and our own StFX President’s Action Committee on Anti-Racism. StFX views Being Xaverian as an action. It is a commitment to care about the community we are a part of. This means consistently working toward improvement and embracing standards that support excellence.

This proposal presents a powerful opportunity to support the individual success of our African Nova Scotian/Black students more deeply through a Centre founded upon belonging, academic success, healing, and community. While also demonstrating our commitment to “move beyond mere representation and take responsibility for supporting fulsome, transformative inclusion” of persons of African descent across our institution (Scarborough Charter, 2021).





### With Gratitude

The development of this proposal was made possible by the work of many individuals. Deep gratitude for their time, energy, constructive dialogue, and input is extended to:

- Robert Upshaw, Special Advisor to the President, StFX; PACAR Co-Chair, Education Consultant
- Megan Fogarty, Director, Human Rights and Equity
- Margie McKinnon, Director, Health, Counselling and Accessible Learning
- Dr. Wendy Mackey, Faculty, Department of Education, Black Student Society Advisor
- Dr. Jonathan Hood, Faculty, Department of Human Kinetics
- Josslyn Gabriel, Human Rights Education and Resource Advocate
- Amelie Gero, Black Student Advisor
- Gord Gallimore, Community Member
- Tara Reddick, Student
- David Graham, VP Advancement
- Wendy Langley, Director, Development, Advancement
- Dr. Katie Edwards, Faculty, Department of English
- Susan Grant, Executive Assistant, VP Students
- J. Leigh Gillis, Education Consultant and Grant Writing

### Resources

Resources and documents supporting this proposal were:

- [Seven Nguzo Saba Principles](#)
- [Scarborough Charter](#)
- [Halifax Declaration](#)
- [StFX PACAR Action Plan and Accountability Framework](#)

