

Living the Work: A Collaboration Between Music Nova Scotia and ANSMA

Executive Summary

The Black Music Matters report was created to strengthen the participation and representation of African Nova Scotian and Black artists in Nova Scotia's music industry. When it was first developed, there was a limited connection between the African Nova Scotian Music Association (ANSMA) and Music Nova Scotia (MNS). The report helped identify what needed to change and where both organizations could grow. It provided a foundation for new ways of working, guided by mentorship, representation, education, collaboration, and accountability.

This joint progress report, developed after the 2025 Nova Scotia Music Week session facilitated by Quiora Consult, builds on that foundation. It reflects on how both organizations have evolved, how collaboration has deepened, and how the focus has shifted from reporting to living the work. The 2025 session encouraged open reflection, acknowledgment of progress, and collective discussion about how to keep this work alive.

Highlights include:

- Strengthened collaboration and regular meetings between the executive and board leadership of MNS and ANSMA.
- Greater representation of Black artists and facilitators in programs and leadership.
- Improved partnership models balancing community leadership with industry infrastructure.
- Continued need for stronger use of the Advisory, expanded training opportunities, and better coordination with funders.

This report honors the work of the original Black Music Matters report and captures the next stage of growth toward embedding equity and collaboration across Nova Scotia's music ecosystem.

1. Background and Evolution

The original report was designed to identify systemic barriers facing Black artists and professionals and to offer practical steps for improvement. It called for mentorship programs, fair representation at events, advisory structures, and consistent

collaboration between MNS and ANSMA. It was meant as a starting point, not an endpoint. Over time, both organizations began applying these lessons to their internal systems, learning through action.

The 2025 Nova Scotia Music Week session, titled “Living the Work,” focused on how to make this transition real. It was about moving from measuring outputs to embedding new habits and cultural practices. The session explored how both organizations could continue growing and working together in a way that makes inclusion part of everyday life.

2. What Has Been Achieved

Progress from the Report

Both organizations have achieved meaningful progress in several areas:

- **Education and Training:** Black facilitators have led learning sessions across the province, creating a sustainable network of trainers who continue to deliver programs.
- **Mentorship and Consultation:** Mentorship is now community-led and supported by MNS, creating a stronger sense of ownership within the Black music community.
- **Performance and Representation:** Black artists are more visible across MNS events and festivals. Representation is now a consideration at every stage of programming.
- **Collaboration:** Regular meetings between MNS and ANSMA’s executive directors and board chairs ensure ongoing communication and alignment.
- **Community Events:** Initiatives like Black Vibes have grown under ANSMA’s leadership, with MNS supporting through promotion, logistics, and delegate engagement.

3. Organizational Growth and Strategic Alignment

Music Nova Scotia

Music Nova Scotia’s 2024–2027 strategic plan builds the principles of the Black Music Matters report into its structure. Inclusion, access, and collaboration now guide programming, staffing, and partnerships. Equity is part of how decisions are made, not an add-on. The Basic Training program continues to grow, led by more Black facilitators and reaching diverse communities. The partnership with ANSMA has

matured, and regular meetings between executive and board leaders support shared goals.

ANSMA

Since 2022, ANSMA has moved from a volunteer-driven group to a professional organization with staff, systems, and stability. Under Executive Director Julien Matwawana, ANSMA now operates from its own office, runs consistent programming, and manages finances and administration effectively. A Memorandum of Understanding with MNS formalized how both organizations work together. ANSMA continues to lead programs such as Black Vibes and the ANSMA Awards, ensuring the work remains rooted in community.

4. Areas Still Growing

While much has been accomplished, some areas need continued focus:

- Advisory Role: The Advisory could become a stronger bridge between the community, funders, and both organizations. Participants highlighted the need to use the Advisory more effectively, especially when responding quickly to opportunities like grant applications.
- Funding Relationships: Participants suggested that MNS and ANSMA explore joint presentations to funders, positioning both as collaborators in advancing Black music in Nova Scotia.
- Training and Mentorship Expansion: There is a strong desire for more business and leadership development opportunities for emerging Black-owned companies.
- Communication and Visibility: Both organizations are committed to finding better ways to share progress with the community through newsletters, events, or regular updates.

5. What We Heard

The session reflected the community's gratitude for progress and its desire to keep momentum. Artists and community members spoke of the importance of visibility, accountability, and continued collaboration.

Key Themes

- Collaboration: Attendees celebrated how far MNS and ANSMA have come and encouraged continued transparency and shared leadership.

- Representation: Progress is visible, but ongoing effort is needed to maintain diversity in all programs.
- Advisory and Accountability: The Advisory can play a more active role in guiding and communicating the work.
- Industry Growth: There is enthusiasm for expanding business mentorship and training to support the growth of Black-owned music enterprises.

Delvina, one of ANSMA's founding members, reflected on the organization's roots and how its original purpose continues to shape the present. Her words grounded the session in legacy and progress.

6. Systemic Shifts

The most significant progress has come from cultural and structural shifts in how both organizations operate.

- Language: Equity and inclusion are now part of daily conversations and decisions.
- Practice: Collaboration is expressed through consistent action, not just intention.
- Sector Influence: Other organizations are looking to this partnership as a model for shared leadership and equity-driven collaboration.

7. What Happens Next

This document serves as the joint progress report capturing shared growth and ongoing priorities.

Next steps include:

- Continue finding opportunities within both organizations to strengthen the black Music Industry experience.
- Continued regular meetings between executive and board leadership.
- Considering where there are opportunities for Joint approaches to funders to increase opportunities and resources for shared initiatives.
- Creation of a shared community update moment to communicate progress and next steps.
- Strengthening the Advisory's role in connecting community voices to leadership and funders.

8. Shared Learning and Reflection

Real change happens through relationships, reflection, and persistence. Both organizations have grown in capacity, internal systems, communication, and collaboration. The partnership between Music Nova Scotia and ANSMA demonstrates how lasting transformation takes root when people commit to learning and leading together.

This progress is not simply about programs or policies and is ongoing. It reflects a broader shift in how both organizations think about their role in supporting Black artists and communities. The lessons from the Black Music Matters work are now integrated into daily practices, influencing how decisions are made, how partnerships are built, and how leadership is shared.

The growth of both organizations has created a stronger, more connected ecosystem where equity is part of every conversation. The collaboration between MNS and ANSMA shows that sector change begins with organizational change. It starts with building structures and cultures that make inclusion natural and sustainable.

Looking ahead, both organizations are committed to continuing this journey. The next phase will focus on deepening partnerships, amplifying voices from across the community, and ensuring that Black artists are not only represented but fully supported through access, opportunity, and recognition. There is a shared understanding that true change is an ongoing way of being.

This report is a reflection of that shared progress and an invitation to keep building together. The work continues, strengthened by trust, guided by community, and sustained through the shared belief that music in Nova Scotia should reflect and serve everyone who creates it.