

REPORT OF THE AD HOC STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

March 8, 2019

Background

At a 2014 retreat, NVN's Board of Governors reviewed NVN's committee structure and developed comprehensive priorities, assigning them to specific committees. Since that time, NVN has grown and become a more complex organization. After a February 2018 Board retreat focused on operational issues, the Board determined that it was time to develop a strategic plan in order to identify priorities for moving forward.

Strategic planning process

In spring 2018 an Ad Hoc Strategic Planning committee was convened. Membership included representatives from the Board as well as several committees.

After an initial meeting to discuss the committee's charge, Faye Ross, NVN's president, contacted John Riggan, a retired professional consultant living in Mt Airy, about assisting us. When he agreed, the committee provided him with a range of NVN materials. Subsequently, Riggan met with the committee and suggested a structured approach for moving ahead.

Riggan's recommended plan involved convening several small focus groups. Each group would be given three scenarios: (1) *what are the bare bones which are essential for NVN in order to remain a viable organization?* (2) *What would an ideal NVN involve?* (3) *What would be a realistic NVN given resource predictions?* In each group, individuals would be asked to reflect on each question before writing down their answers and then sharing them with the entire group. Comments would be recorded.

Initially the Ad Hoc Strategic Planning group completed the exercise, with Sara Allen serving as moderator and Anne Lee recording comments. The second group was composed of board members not part of the Ad Hoc Strategic Planning group. At this point the process was reviewed and tweaked. For example, groups began with the "bare bones scenario" and ended with the "realistic" one. Also, two changes were inserted into the introduction: Before engaging in the scenarios, each group would review and discuss (1) NVN's mission and vision statements as well as (2) a chart reflecting NVN's organizational structure.

The next step was to broaden participation through several focus groups. In order to populate the focus groups, Sara Allen and Faye Ross went through NVN's membership list and identified a diverse list of 18 representative members: active and relatively inactive, recent and long-time, Chestnut Hill/ Mt Airy, & Germantown, Caucasian and persons of color. Except for one member who was traveling abroad, all eighteen candidates agreed to take part. The list of participants was divided into three groups, each of which met once during the summer. As with the earlier groups, Sara Allen moderated while Anne Lee recorded comments and then organized them by topic.

During the fall and winter the Ad Hoc Strategic Planning group met to review input from the various groups, discuss the results, organize them into topics, and identify priorities. In addition, at the December meeting, Faye Ross shared notes she and Bob Harris had taken at the National Village to Village Gathering in October. The committee was intrigued that national trends closely mirrored what the committee had learned from the groups' input.

In developing the strategic plan, the committee's discussion built on several guiding principles, reflecting NVN's mission and values:

1. NVN's members want to continue growing and learning as we age. We want to engage and grow with a new community and within the neighborhoods where we live; we don't want to just age in place.

2. NVN's members believe that we will age better as part of a supportive community. We want to meet new people, support each other, enjoy social opportunities, make new connections, and be receptive to changing interests and needs. We recognize that when we "give back," we gain a lot in return.
3. NVN is a welcoming community, irrespective of race and ethnicity, age, gender preference and orientation, income level and abilities.
4. NVN recognizes the value in other community organizations that have complementary roles in supporting the needs of older residents. We want to seek out active partnerships with those organizations.
5. NVN believes that all members should expect that NVN's finances are solid and that the organization can be self-sustaining primarily through membership annual dues.

PRIORITIES

As a last step in the process, the Ad Hoc Strategic Planning committee identified priorities and then listed specifics under each, realizing some items reflected larger goals while others were more operational. Knowing that our most active members and finances are already stretched thin, the committee made every effort to relate priorities to projected resources, both financial and human.

1. Clarify our purpose and message:

NVN's foundation rests on building a community that involves active member engagement and mutual support, with members providing benefits to each other. NVN recognizes that active engagement and participation help seniors age well and retain control of their lives. This concept reflects national trends presented at the 2018 national Village to Village conference.

Given this focus, the following recommendations relate to revisiting our mission and vision statements.

- a. Stress that new members are joining a community, not solely buying services. *[Marketing/PR, Membership]*
- b. Reinforce NVN's need for members to actively participate in the day-to-day operations of the organization as well as its activities and services. *[Mkt/PR, Membership]*
- c. Be explicit about the benefits NVN is able to provide to our members. *[Marketing/PR, Membership, Member Services]*

2. Strengthen NVN's membership base

NVN's goal is to strike a balance. We need a membership base large enough to provide strong financial support, varied activities programs to interest a wide audience, and services to meet certain needs of our members. On the other hand, membership also needs to be small enough to retain a sense of community and care.

To achieve this the committee recommends the following:

- a. Increase our membership to a least 200. We are aiming for a higher percentage of our budget to be supported by membership fees, which currently account for about one half of our yearly budget. The Ad Hoc Strategic Planning committee recommends retaining current fees and "scholarship support." *[Membership, Finance]*
- b. Identify NVN's boundaries to be the core geographical area in northwest Philadelphia which includes Mt Airy, Chestnut Hill, upper Germantown, and contiguous neighborhoods. Although membership is not exclusive to those areas, it is important to communicate to potential members outside this core area that benefits we can provide will be limited because of the distance involved. *[Membership]*
- c. Broaden the venues for ongoing activities to accommodate member needs and interests, i.e. weekly coffee at a coffee shop in Chestnut Hill or Germantown. *[Program]*
- d. Investigate possible approaches for increasing the diversity of NVN's membership. *Diversity* includes race and ethnicity, age, gender, and income. *[Membership, Marketing/PR]*

3. Develop a specific plan to strengthen NVN as a member driven organization.

As a member driven organization, NVN depends on its members to share in the responsibilities of guiding and administering the organization. Except for particular duties which the organization may need to pay someone to perform, all other duties must be carried out by the members. It is critical for the survival and growth of NVN that members share in those duties.

- a. Identify NVN members who have not been active and contact them to see if and how we could better engage them. *[Membership, Member Services]*
- b. Identify the interests and expertise of NVN members to better match them with others in the organization and ways they could provide support to the organization. *[Membership, Member Services]*
- c. Identify areas/tasks where member support and involvement is most needed. *[Member Services]*
- d. Assist in the development of a new member survey. *[Membership, Member Services]*
- e. Identify areas where volunteers from the community could assist NVN, and find ways to access these volunteers. *[Member Services]*
- f. Develop a plan for identifying and nurturing new and existing NVN leaders. It is a critical part of any organization that members prepare to share in the leadership of the organization. *[Governance]*
- g. Identify areas that would be most practically assigned to a paid staff person. Develop a job description for that position(s) and adjust as needed to stay within budget and to fit changing needs. (This past year NVN hired a part time staff person to assist with operations. Because our current staff person will be leaving, we have an opportunity to review the existing job description and change it to meet our needs for the future.) *[Executive Committee and other committees]*

4. Continue the work we are doing well with selective additions:

Group feedback indicated that NVN is doing well in a number of areas, and there was a consensus that work in those areas be continued.

- a. **Programs and activities:** we have a good balance of programs and activities which help us learn and socialize together. Because resources are stretched, focus group feedback suggested that one evening program a month might suffice. Programs discussing senior-related issues were especially valued. *[Program]*
- b. **Small groups:** these were seen as important for building community. *[Program, Membership, and Member Services]*
- c. **Regular communication with members:** members appreciated the weekly *Up and Coming*, website calendar, website materials, regular mailings to members without email, hard copy of the monthly calendar, and President's Message. *[Marketing /PR]*
- d. **A workable organizational structure based on bylaws.** The current structure was seen as mostly effective and workable. However, some revisions in current committees may be needed to keep pace with current and future needs. *[Governance]*

Specific recommendations related to these areas:

- e. Consider adding Phone Check-in and One-time Help. *[Member Services]*
- f. Strengthen the bulletin board's capability by
 - 1) Asking NVN members to share contractor and other recommendations. *[Member Services]*
 - 2) Providing basic information on in-home care and care management resources with the disclaimer that NVN has not vetted them. *[Member Services]*
- g. Clarify "boundaries" related to Short-term Support and the Ride service, e.g. *limits on physical contact and administering medications, and possible limits on frequency and distance for rides.* *[Member Services]*
- h. Require that each committee be represented on the board by the chair or co-chair in order to ensure direct communication with the board and be aware of NVN's overall organizational initiatives. *[Governance]*

5. Provide for ongoing evaluation of effectiveness.

Feedback from focus groups provided an opportunity to listen to our members, providing one means of evaluation. The committee recognized the need for an ongoing measure of NVN's effectiveness.

Develop a membership structure to assure that NVN's goals are achieved, and programs, activities and services are made available to meet the needs and interests of our members. This involves a restructuring of the appropriate committees that currently exist to determine the most efficient and effective way to manage these tasks. It may be helpful to review the Board's original intentions on committee structure as we move forward, particularly with regard to Membership and Member Services.

As of now, we recommend separating Membership and Member Services as originally planned.

We recommend returning Membership and Member Services to their earlier status as two separate committees. In the long term, we suggest renaming the Program committee to Activities, with three subcommittees under that umbrella: Small Groups, Program, and Out and About [replacing the more specific "Out and About with the Arts"]. Small group initiatives currently under Member Services might become part of that subcommittee as the role of Member Services evolves.

- a. Review priorities for each standing committee and clarify as needed. *[Governance]*
- b. Develop a structure for the yearly review of the board and each committee based on specific goals defined for the board and the committees. *[Board and all committees]*
- c. Evaluate ongoing activities, programs, and services on a regular basis. *[Program, Member Services]*
- d. Investigate other means for obtaining general feedback from NVN's membership. Consider repeating structured focus group gatherings. *[Governance and all committees]*
- e. **The committee recommends that this plan be reviewed in its totality by Fall 2022.**

6. Strengthen community relationships

At its inception, NVN identified several "community partners," but these relationships have remained very informal, with little coordination.

Knowing that strong community partnerships can extend NVN's outreach and services, the Planning group recommends the following:

- a. Continue sending at least one NVN representative to meetings of the Northwest Coalition for Healthy Aging.
- b. Assign members to connect and improve coordination with specific community partners. *e.g.* Advertise their programs/services along with NVN's and ask them to advertise NVN's in return.
- c. Identify and publicize volunteer opportunities in the community.
- d. Continue working with other villages and promote and coordinate programs and activities where possible.

The Strategic Planning Committee could not identify where to assign implementation of this priority within NVN's committee current structure; therefore, further discussion will be required.

7. Finances

The expectation that finances are solid and the organization can be self-sustaining should be implicit in any strategic plan. As of now, NVN depends on membership fees for most of the 2018-2019 budget, though fees currently support about half of the budget. In this fiscal year, 2018-2019, NVN also received approximately \$12,000 additionally from the second annual membership appeal. Fundraising efforts are ongoing. *[Finance]*

See Priority 2a under **Membership** which recommends strengthening NVN's financial base by increasing membership.

Annual budget information is available on the NVN website. *[Finance]*