

JUST NEIGHBORS STRATEGY – 2017-2020

INTRODUCTION

Just Neighbors was founded as a tax-exempt organization twenty years ago to serve and support the immigrant community in Northern Virginia. Just Neighbors' Board and staff gathered on March 18, 2017 to discuss strategic priorities for the next 3-5 years.¹ This document, which emerged from those conversations, serves as the strategy by which Just Neighbors will fulfill its mission in the next three years. The group identified options to leverage the advantages and address the disadvantages to move from current reality to desired future.

MISSION

The mission of Just Neighbors is:

To provide immigration legal services to low-income immigrants and refugees of all faiths and nationalities, especially those who are most vulnerable. We also seek to foster enriching experiences that enhance community and mutual understanding among our clients, volunteers, and staff.

This mission emphasizes our direct legal services to clients. It also embraces community outreach and education, both for prospective clients and the broader community, and engagement with volunteers. There are no mission-based geographic boundaries. Just Neighbors currently serve northern Virginia.

“Most vulnerable” includes: survivor of domestic violence or violent crime, older people, those with little education who have difficulty understanding the system, homeless, people with disabilities and in many instances, youth. Our understanding about vulnerability is used as criteria to prioritize the target population, given our capacity constraints. It is operationalized through choice and mix of case types.

We provide enriching experiences through volunteer interaction with clients, who are often people of different backgrounds in terms of nationality, faith, and experience. One-on-one interactions help break down assumptions about cultural differences and support greater awareness, understanding, and empathy. We also seek to increase mutual understanding of immigrants and immigration issues in the community through our outreach and communications.

DESIRED FUTURE

¹ Many thanks to Carol Gausz, Blue Heron Associates, for excellent preparation, facilitation and follow-up of the strategic planning retreat.

JUST NEIGHBORS STRATEGY – 2017-2020

At Just Neighbors we seek to contribute to a more immigrant-friendly world, and we aim to continue and deepen our work. We would like Just Neighbors to be able to assist even more people as a result of:

- Being better-known
- Funding at a higher level, with more sustainable sources
- Support by a larger and more engaged base of staff and volunteers
- Operating using stronger infrastructure

CURRENT REALITY

Strengths and Opportunities

- Compelling mission
- Commitment, compassion, and competence of our staff and volunteers
- Culture of collegiality, mutual support, and acceptance among staff and volunteers
- Expertise and deep knowledge of immigration policies and issues
- Efficiency of organization, with excellent and scalable processes for legal work
- Clear expectations for staff, board, volunteers
- Concrete and stellar results – very strong success rate
- Loyal and growing support community including individuals, churches, and organizations
- Good track record with institutional donors
- Flexibility to respond effectively
- Current environment has led to increased interest in volunteering and donating
- The time is right

Challenges

- Insufficient resources to meet demand: financial, technology, systems, etc.
- The current external environment has increased demand for Just Neighbors' services, increased fear among potential clients, and may affect the types of cases presented. This may or may not continue.
- Significant increase in call volumes, requests for education and attorney caseloads.
- Potential staff burnout given intensity of environment (uncertainty about immigration law changes, intensity of political discussion on immigration).
- Flat funding. Budget has been essentially flat over past several years.
- Expressions of interest in volunteering has increased dramatically but our current capacity to get them involved is constrained.
- Immigration legal services story is often difficult to communicate – we help people obtain the benefits that are available to them under U.S. law.

JUST NEIGHBORS STRATEGY – 2017-2020

2017-2020 STRATEGY GOALS AND INITIATIVES.

This table summarizes the strategic initiatives for the period. Each goal area is discussed on the pages that follow.

Help more people	Increase fundraising to allow 50% growth by 2020	Become more visible in the community	Create a satisfied and effective staff for long term retention	Systematically engage volunteers as a community
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase attorney hours to 4LTE to serve more clients. 2. Consider expanding case types. 3. Consider expanding services to be more holistic. 4. Seek the ability to expand geographically. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Expand the potential donor base through systematic outreach efforts. 2. Strengthen board role in fundraising. 3. Create effective, fun and compelling events. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Upgrade education and communication using website, social media, speaking engagements and one-on one conversations. 2. Provide education and outreach to increase awareness of immigration issues. 3. Develop consistent brand look and language. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create work culture that values work-life balance and mutual respect and support. 2. Provide regular salary increments. 3. Develop office and organizational processes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to leverage volunteers as an integral part of JN operations. 2. Develop a loyal and energized volunteer corps that expands involvement beyond the day-to-day. 3. Increase two-way sharing among clients and volunteers.

JUST NEIGHBORS STRATEGY – 2017-2020

A. HELP MORE PEOPLE

The need for immigrant legal support is great and growing. While in 2016 Just Neighbors served 659 clients, 784 have been turned away. Just Neighbors will prioritize expanding services through expansion of attorney hours via hiring and through creation of a network of pro bono attorneys.

Just Neighbors will also consider other ways to expand. One such expansion is to broaden accepted case types, which would enable service to more people. It would also provide a richer experience for staff that could support their professional development.

It is also possible to expanding beyond the current legal services, thus providing clients support for other needs (e.g., counseling, social services). This service expansion can be achieved in a few different ways, not only through hiring, but also – and possibly more feasibly – through partnerships with other providers, referrals to other agencies, or use of interns.

Expanding the service area to beyond Northern Virginia could enable Just Neighbors to assist more people. Staff and volunteers are already being called to other parts of Virginia for education related to immigration and ways to address the issues.

All these possibilities will be assessed and implemented as feasible across the plan period, in concert with funding and infrastructure capacity.

1. Increase attorney hours to 4LTE to serve more clients.
2. Consider expanding case types, e.g., bond motions, COR/asylum.
3. Consider offering more holistic services alongside legal services, e.g., through in-house provision of social workers or through partnerships and referrals.
4. Seek the ability to expand to other parts of Virginia.
 - a. Decide on expansion model, e.g., clinics, volunteer attorney at Methodist churches, remote assistance for DACAs, I-90s, EADs.

B. INCREASE FUNDRAISING TO ALLOW 50% GROWTH BY 2020.

A significant increase in funding is needed to enable Just Neighbors to achieve its goal of helping more people and to respond to the demands for greater community outreach. There is also a backlog of existing staff and operational needs. In addition, it would be highly desirable for more of the funding to provide a sustainable base such that the organization can plan for more than one year. The responsibility for fundraising needs to be shared among a broader base of board, staff, and volunteers.

In this strategy, we set a target of a 50% increase in budget over 2016 levels by 2020. We believe this is feasible given that awareness of the plight of immigrants has increased significantly in the past several months and there is a large constituency anxious to find ways to contribute. Among the approaches to achieving that goal are the following:

JUST NEIGHBORS STRATEGY – 2017-2020

1. Expand the potential donor base through systematic outreach efforts.
 - a. Explore partnerships in faith, law and corporate communities
 - b. Expand outreach to individuals (see also Goal C)
 - c. Secure funding from Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Church.
2. Strengthen board role in fundraising
 - a. Define expectation for board giving and getting.
 - b. Board identifies volunteers who have strengths in fundraising and development to
3. Create effective, fun and compelling events
 - a. Consider developing an annual large scale ticketed event
 - b. Use development speakers' bureau.
 - c. Develop a calendar of all development-related events.

C. BECOME MORE VISIBLE IN THE COMMUNITY

Just Neighbors seeks to become more visible as a credible source of information and education about immigration. This is not only an important aspect of Just Neighbors' mission (particularly the Know Your Rights work in recent months), it is also essential for enlarging the community of Just Neighbors volunteers, clients, staff and funders. However, while Just Neighbors has operated in Northern Virginia for 20 years, its existence, let alone its compelling story and track record, is not well-known. There is great potential to increase visibility, given the enhanced interest in immigration following from new Administration actions.

Just Neighbors has a compelling story, in assisting so many individuals to change their status and hence improve their lives. This story must, however be thoughtfully told, first as there is a public concern around illegal immigration, and second out of respect for the privacy of individual clients. And it must be told both in face-to-face interaction and through written and visual media.

The communications and outreach function at Just Neighbors can expand and improve in many ways. The challenges are to prioritize and to obtain the resources needed to ensure quality.

1. Upgrade education and communications strategy using tactics such as the following:
 - a. Increase social media presence.
 - b. Host events: fundraising, advocacy.
 - c. Develop a speakers' bureau.
 - d. Track online and related analytics.
2. Provide education and outreach to increase awareness of immigration issues.
 - a. Make website an information and advocacy resource.
 - b. Interact with legislators and cultivate traditional media.
 - c. Continue Know Your Rights and related training as needed.
3. Develop consistent brand look and language, through web- and print-based communications and merchandise that creates a connection to Just Neighbors.

JUST NEIGHBORS STRATEGY – 2017-2020

D. CREATE A SATISFIED AND EFFECTIVE STAFF FOR LONG TERM RETENTION.

Staff are a key asset in the success of Just Neighbors. The current staff are committed, compassionate, and competent. As new demands arise, staff members have been flexible in filling in gaps by shifting the nature and size of their role. However, there is realization of the need to prevent staff burnout by providing greater clarity, support, development opportunities, and salary adjustments. Legal staff, in particular, work with clients suffering trauma and other stresses and, at times, staff need others to support them in stress relief.

1. Create work culture that values work-life balance and mutual respect and support.
 - a. Clarify roles, and use tools such as job descriptions and effectiveness measurements
 - b. Provide support to staff to aid in stress relief e.g., coaching, personal care
 - c. Provide staff professional development opportunities
 - d. Increase volunteer connection to staff
2. Provide regular salary increments.
3. Develop office and organizational processes for: volunteers (including training), fundraising, and communications.

E. SYSTEMATICALLY ENGAGE VOLUNTEERS AS A COMMUNITY.

This goal speaks to interest in fully developing the volunteer experience and their contributions to Just Neighbors. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of people who want to get involved or step up their level of involvement, particularly because of the new Administration's stance on immigration. However, there is insufficient staff capacity to engage more volunteers in a timely and meaningful way, as staff are also facing significant increases in client demand.

During this strategic plan period, Just Neighbors will continue its regular volunteer activities and will strengthen it through development of clear office processes (see also Goal F).

In addition, we propose to develop a volunteer corps as a community of people who support each other and serve as a resource for Just Neighbors and the immigration community. This would re-conceptualize Just Neighbors' view of volunteers from individuals who are assigned tasks that need to be accomplished in the current work-stream to a resource to support several initiatives with the board and staff to aid in direct service, fundraising, and increased visibility. In addition, it would help to empower volunteers and would be a source of identification of prospective board members.

1. Continue to leverage volunteers as an integral part of JN operations.
 - a. Develop policies and procedures that define the expectations and boundaries for volunteers.
2. Develop a loyal and energized volunteer corps that expands involvement beyond the day-to-day.

JUST NEIGHBORS STRATEGY – 2017-2020

- a. Hold monthly or quarterly meetings in which to provide briefings, CME and generate ideas and projects
 - b. Involve corps volunteers into board and staff committees and projects as additional resources
 - c. Invite volunteers to provide a list of their interests and capabilities
3. Increase two-way sharing. There is an opportunity for clients to give back and to increase our cultural awareness e.g. celebrations of culture such as cooking, music, etc. This requires more systematic effort to keep in touch with former clients.

F. STRENGTHEN THE OPERATING INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS.

This goal speaks to foundational elements that enable achievement of the rest of the goals. Due to lack of funding, equipment and systems are outdated and insufficient to handle the current operations. They inhibit staff and volunteer efficiency. In addition, while processes related to direct client services are a strength, there is also a need to develop clearer and more efficient processes in other areas that are understood by and accessible to all (especially volunteers).

The current office space is inadequate to meet current and potential future operational requirements and is expected to become unavailable soon. New offices should be accessible to clients, staff, and volunteers.

1. Expand and enhance volunteer processes, including new CRM system that includes volunteer management.
 - a. Front office: streamline, feedback loops, retraining
 - b. Legal process: currently being updated
 - c. Administrative processes: Create process binders: eTapestry, Clinic Prep, etc.
2. Update, replace, and add equipment and systems.
 - a. Phones, computers, tablets
 - b. Databases: eTapestry, T1, reporting
3. Plan and execute office move.

ACTION STEPS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPING THE STRATEGY

1. Consider the feasibility of ideas for each of the goals, perhaps by subgroups that then have a clear deliverable to the Executive Director and Board. Identify the choice of the strategy(ies) with the greatest potential and any other strategies to be implemented after the first-noting timing and critical success factors for moving to the second (and third) tier strategies.
2. Consider the full set of strategy recommendations in terms of resource capacity and needs.
3. Engage board in a discussion on implications of the strategy for governance e.g. role and responsibilities in plan execution, board composition, expectations, committees, etc.
4. Identify responsibilities and timeframes for strategy execution and empower individuals.

JUST NEIGHBORS STRATEGY – 2017-2020

5. Establish a progress reporting system that includes consideration of any changes in the internal and external environment to adjust execution accordingly.

APPENDIX. Strategic Planning Retreat Participants – March 18, 2017

Board:

Elisabeth Rhyne, Board Chair
Jacqueline de los Rios
Mary Ellen Payne
Bryce Chadwick
Joe Keyes
Liz Hofer
Julia Bizer
Chelsy Weber
Cheryl Moore

Staff:

Erin McKenney, Executive Director
Dominique Poirier
Sarah Milad
Stephanie Barnes
Andrea Shuford
Cristina Sproul
Linda Lacy
Genesis Lazo

Facilitator:

Carol Gausz, Blue Heron Associates

Guest:

Rob Rutland-Brown, NJFON

APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MAY 18, 2017