

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION RESOURCES

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STRATEGIC PLAN

2018-2020

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Introduction by the President

The National Council of Higher Education Resources (NCHER) Strategic Plan for 2018-2020, which follows, aims to better position the organization and its membership for success over the next three years. The plan is the result of the hard work and dedication of the Strategic Planning Working Group, co-chaired by Bruce Wagner from the Finance Authority of Maine and Jimmy Parker from Panhandle-Plains Higher Education Authority. Over a six-month period, the group – representing all sectors of the NCHER membership - held numerous conference calls, meetings, and discussions to review the existing plan, solicit and digest feedback received from the members, and formulate those changes that would improve the organization’s advocacy, communications, research, and operational activities in light of the changing policy and political environments.

In 2014, NCHER undertook a comprehensive planning process in order to revise the organization’s Strategic Plan for 2015-2017. Through this process, NCHER established a new mission, goals, and strategic objectives to ensure that its activities were aligned for success in the future. The Strategic Plan’s goals and objectives were centered on two main areas: (1) a gradual and orderly wind-down of Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) operations to protect the membership’s expertise and infrastructure in assisting students and families; and (2) new federal and private business opportunities to advance the membership’s services. Over the three-year time period, there has been a slower-than-expected loss of FFELP holders, servicers, and guarantors, though major regulatory and contract decisions by the U.S. Department of Education, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and states have negatively impacted the ability for the members to engage in new ventures. Cumulatively, these activities continue to have a major impact on NCHER’s membership and financials. In conjunction with the development of the Strategic Plan for 2015-2017, NCHER also developed a Legislative Plan detailing its advocacy priorities for the 114th and 115 Congresses, formulated a Communications Plan, set new research priorities, reviewed and implemented a revision of its committee and caucus structure to increase membership participation in its activities, and approved a Membership Plan to assist the organization in defining its membership and increasing membership recruitment and retention. These actions assisted the NCHER Strategic Planning Working Group as it began the current review process.

Consistent with the planning process in Appendix A, the group began its work by reviewing the breakdown of the current NCHER membership, the anticipated breakdown of the NCHER membership over the next three to five years, and the organization’s value proposition. It also prepared and administered a survey designed to determine whether the membership agreed with the current mission, whether the members understood the current mission, and whether the members had identified any pressing changes to the mission. The survey also asked the membership to rank the six strategic goals put in place in 2014 to promote its advocacy, communications, research, and operational strategies, and whether there were any goals that should be removed and/or any goals that should be added to the plan. Once the working group completed reviewing the results of the membership survey, it conducted a SWOT (strengths,

weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis and developed and refined a list of strategic goals that would be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Results-Based, and Time-Bound).

Over the course of a two-day in-person meeting in Washington, DC in October 2017, the working group developed four main goals that the organization would aim to accomplish over the next three years, conducted an exercise to prioritize those items that may prevent the organization from reaching those goals, and developed a list of roughly 70 solution-based items that could mitigate those challenges. Facilitated by the working group's co-chair, the President and NCHER staff then developed a Strategic Deployment Plan that involved taking each of the goal solutions and assigning a staff leader, a start time, finish time, key activities, key activity metrics, key results, and key result metrics. The plan will ensure that the organization is committed to its mission and goals, and clear and actionable activities that could be reported on and reviewed by the Board of Directors periodically. Finally, the working group took a final look at the organization's mission to make sure that it is still relevant and aligned to the organization's strategic goals and deployment plans. After discussion, the working group approved a number of technical, but important, changes to the mission to specifically state what NCHER does for its members, especially around advocacy and communications.

Many of the items discussed during the initial calls of the working group and during the October 2017 meeting have undergone significant revisions through subsequent and robust conference call and email discussions of the working group. All of the items were also discussed with the Board of Directors during its regularly-scheduled monthly calls and during the in-person meeting of the Board on November 6, 2017 at the Knowledge Symposium in New Orleans, Louisiana. In addition, many of the items were discussed with the membership during numerous monthly calls and during a general session at the Knowledge Symposium. Since that time, additional revisions have been made to the various elements based on feedback received by the working group, and prior to inclusion in this Strategic Plan.

I would like to thank all of the members of the Strategic Planning Working Group, the NCHER Board of Directors, the NCHER staff, and the membership for their roles, hard work, and dedication in the development of the Strategic Plan for 2018-2020. I believe that the revised mission, new goals, and the strategies developed to accomplish our goals will guide and better position the association and its membership for success over the next three years.

Sincerely,



James P. Bergeron
President

Charge of the NCHER Strategic Planning Working Group

The Strategic Planning Working Group is charged with preparing a new Strategic Plan for 2018-2020, in order to better position NCHER and its membership for success over the next three years. To meet this charge, the Working Group is directed to:

- Conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis and use such analysis to identify core and secondary roles and responsibilities for NCHER and its membership to play in the current and future higher education financing marketplace.
- Review and update, as applicable, the organization's mission, goals, and strategic objectives after examining the results of the SWOT analysis, the current state of the higher education financing landscape, and the information included in the NCHER Membership Plan.
- Solicit input from the Board and membership on possible refinements to the organization's mission, goals, and strategic objectives.
- Develop a Management Action Plan to establish firm and achievable timelines to accomplish the new short-term (one-year) and long-term (three-year) goals for the organization.
- Propose how the contents of the Strategic Plan can be tied to the organization's budget and performance metrics for the NCHER staff.
- Regularly report to the Board and periodically report to the NCHER membership, through monthly membership calls, on the development of the Strategic Plan.
- Provide recommendations, if any, for further work that may be pursued by the organization during the next strategic planning process, due in 2020.

Membership

The Working Group should include representatives of all sectors of the organization's voting membership. Such representatives should represent the current and potential NCHER membership, including former FFELP holders, servicers, guarantors, and private collection agencies; federal student loan contractors and subcontractors; state agencies and state-affiliated organizations for postsecondary education; private loan providers, services, and collectors; third-party servicers working with institutions of higher education and students; college- and career-ready organizations and foundations; institutions of higher education; investment banks; law and consulting firms, and market measurement companies.

Executive Summary

The Strategic Plan of the National Council of Higher Education Resources (NCHER) outlines how the organization will improve its advocacy, communications, research, and operations to better position its member organizations for success over the next three years. In multiple surveys conducted by the membership over the last two years, NCHER members value the important work of the organization in shaping policies governing federal and private student loan programs. The members also continue to be interested in leveraging the expertise of its state and nonprofit members so they are able to carry out their public service missions on behalf of students and families while searching for new opportunities to promote a high-quality postsecondary education for all students.

NCHER's revised mission is to provide superior advocacy, communications, research, and operational support to its members so they may effectively help students and families develop, pay for, and attain their educational goals, pursue meaningful and rewarding work, and become contributing members of society. While similar to the existing mission in that it continues to reinforce the membership's public service activities are broad in scope and centered on helping students and families, the revised statement clearly specifies that the organization's mission is to provide advocacy, communications, research, and operational support to its membership. A number of NCHER members, through the survey conducted earlier this year, and Board members identified this deficiency and support these minor – though important - changes to the mission. The mission statement is meant to be read and interpreted by the NCHER membership as well as outside audiences in the broadest sense possible as the proposed changes are not intended to narrow the organization's focus only on those specified functions. It is simply a reflection that NCHER is a membership-driven organization. As it has done for more than 50 years, NCHER will continue to contribute to the national dialogue around postsecondary education and carry out other important activities and functions on behalf of students and families.

NCHER's value proposition is that it provides leading national and state advocacy, information sharing, research, and professional development services to its membership to help students succeed through postsecondary education and beyond. Because of the competition for members with other higher education finance trade associations, it is imperative that NCHER maintain – and improve - its value proposition. Like NCHER, these organizations are expanding their voting and affiliate memberships, playing a larger role at the state level, and redirecting resources into college access and success and private education loan initiatives. NCHER must do the same or risk losing members who have the ability to choose between multiple associations for the one that best meets its unique needs. At the same time, NCHER must ultimately focus on doing what is best for its members. As such, the Board, the President, and the NCHER staff will need to find the balance that promotes healthy competition.

Similar to past strategy efforts, NCHER continues to focus on two primary objectives in order to promote its value proposition. First, it must continue to secure an orderly wind-down of Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) operations so that its members can continue to carry

out their public missions. Second, it must continue to develop, educate, facilitate, and provide a forum where the membership can explore new business opportunities that continue the demand for their services for the future.

The strategic goals for 2018-2020 address these important elements while continuing to adjust to the policy and political landscape at the federal and state levels. This Strategic Plan includes four overall – and specific, measurable, actionable, results-based, and time-bound – goals that the organization must accomplish over the next three years to maintain and grow the membership.

NCHER's number one goal is to ensure that the organization is a trusted, active, and credible resource and advocate for its members, federal and state policymakers, and other higher education stakeholders so it can effectively influence the legislative and regulatory processes. The goal is roughly the same as Goal #1 included in the prior Strategic Plan, though the goal reflects the organization's recent work at the state level which is having a significant impact on the membership's student loan servicing operations. The goal also specifies that the organization intends to be a resource and advocate so that it can influence the legislative and regulatory processes, ensuring that there is proper linkages to the NCHER Advocacy Plan. Similar to the past, it is imperative that the membership is looked upon as a resource to Congress, federal agencies, states, institutions of higher education, and students and families. College affordability and student loan debt continue to be high-profile issues on the minds of the public and the organization's broad membership should leverage its long-standing role to help students and their families realize postsecondary education access and success. To this end, the membership must develop and promote a federal advocacy agenda geared toward educating members of the U.S. House and Senate on the important role that NCHER and its members play in higher education, and put forth policies that will assist students and families while identifying new federal policy and political opportunities for agencies looking to reinvent themselves in anticipation of the amortization of the FFELP portfolio (through third party service providers of financial literacy and debt management, federal student loan servicing and collections contractors, etc.

There are seven items that have been identified that could prevent NCHER from accomplishing this important goal, including staff constraints that reduce productivity, revenue shortfalls that fail to grow the membership, a lack of Congressional champions to better enact legislative priorities, a highly-toxic political environment that prevents the organization's ability to get legislative priorities passed, the lack of members active at the federal level to augment the ability and capacity to influence legislation, the lack of readily-available research data to validate its positions; and the need to leverage background shared services with other trade associations. The Strategic Plan outlines 24 ways to mitigate these challenges such adding a part-time staffer/intern to assist with general advocacy responsibilities; asking the NCHER membership to play a larger role in advocacy from policy development to drafting legislative language; reviewing and implementing a new membership dues structure to capture the full-value of NCHER's proposition; requesting special or project-based assessments; recruiting new members to the organization consistent with its target sectors; building relationships with both

sides of the aisle in an effort to build Democratic champions; and creating a data clearinghouse of program information that could be generated semi-annually for development into a report that is disseminated to the membership and federal policymakers. Each of these areas are included in the Strategic Deployment Plan that will be reviewed by the NCHER Board of Directors, the President, and the NCHER staff periodically.

NCHER's number two goal is to deploy a communications strategy that promotes the successful work of the NCHER members' services on behalf of students and families, consistent with the advocacy agenda. The goal significantly alters the previous Goal #2 to focus on internal and external communications; the current goal is focused exclusively on developing a rebranding strategy, which is not really within the purview of the NCHER staff. There are roughly six items that could prevent NCHER from reaching this important goal such as staff capacity barriers that prevent creating more proactive communications, the lack of processes that could drive more timely stories, competing agendas among members, the inability of a trade association to influence the media narrative and rebut the number of negative stories, the difficulty in effectively messaging on student loans, and potential bad actors in the industry.

The Strategic Plan outlines 15 ways to mitigate these challenges by creating a Communications Committee made up of seasoned communications directors/public relations experts to guide the organization's communications efforts, including setting priorities, garnering data from members, and resolving disagreements among different sectors; streamlining the NCHER Daily Briefing so that NCHER staff has time to conduct outreach to relevant national and trade reporters; developing a calendar of events so that the organization can better anticipate issues and compile data in advance; encouraging NCHER members to share positive news stories so that they can be pushed out on social media and through a regular communication stream; and working effectively with communications directors of outside organizations that can support the organization's message. It is the hope that, by developing better relations with education reporters and proactively highlighting the positive work of the members, NCHER will be able to effectively pivot to industry positive news when bad press occurs and be able to shorten the news cycle. Once again, each of these areas are included in the Strategic Deployment Plan that will be reviewed by the NCHER Board of Directors, the President, and the NCHER staff periodically.

NCHER's number three goal is to provide more effective and efficient high-quality support and professional development to members, including sharing of best practices in support of the NCHER members' services that assist students, families, and borrowers in accessing and completing postsecondary education. The goal is similar to – and combines - the previous Goal #3, Goal #5, and Goal #6 since all are relevant to the operational matters for the organization. The goal focuses on ensuring that its program services are more effective and efficient than currently provided to the membership.

There are three items that could prevent NCHER from reaching this goal, including a lack of membership engagement that could add resources and save time, the lack of subject matter experts among the membership, and the fact that a number of members are not willing to

share their expertise with others interested in new opportunities. The Strategic Plan outlines several ways to mitigate these challenges by reducing calls to every other month or quarterly in order to maximize staff time; reevaluating when meetings are held to maximize member participation; creating a “New Leader Initiative” to recruit and develop new subject matter experts in the industry; videotaping key conference sessions and making them available online to improve compliance and enforcement work; holding a Leadership Conference to discuss lessons learned on new product/strategic issues; building reference materials on new initiatives for those members that are willing to share; and engaging the Board of Directors for NCHER members for participation at upcoming events. Each of these areas are included in the Strategic Deployment Plan that will be reviewed by the NCHER Board of Directors, the President, and the NCHER staff periodically.

NCHER’s number four goal is to engage and collaborate with its higher education partners on matters of mutual interests while continuing to promote and create membership services that are unique to NCHER. The goal is similar to the previous Goal #4, though it moves away from the organization taking a leadership role on engagement and collaboration, while continuing to focus on those activities that are unique to NCHER such as CommonLine and the Going2College website. There are three areas that could prevent NCHER from achieving this goal, including partners not willing to collaborate, a hierarchy of interests among members, and competing interests among members.

The Strategic Plan outlines several ways to mitigate these challenges such as holding quarterly or bi-yearly calls with key associations to share intelligence and information on federal and state developments; engaging common members to encourage collaboration as a basis to bring the various higher education associations together; keeping the lines of communication open with large ex-members that are part of other trade associations; and providing a forum for other organizations to discuss issues of importance to their membership, including inviting them to relevant conferences. Through this effort, it is expected that the NCHER staff will let other organizations take the lead on respective issues, especially if they have expertise and better relationships with Congress and the Administration; use key issues to draw associations together; not take collaboration for granted; not force issues where there is a disagreement; recognize that all of the various higher education finance trade associations will not always agree with each other; and present the organization’s case and priorities diplomatically to other organizations. These items may seem benign or common-sense, but they bear repeating and highlighted in the Strategic Plan since NCHER has always conducted itself in a professional manner with the best interest of the higher education finance industry as a whole in mind. Once again, each of these areas are included in the Strategic Deployment Plan that will be reviewed by the NCHER Board of Directors, the President, and the NCHER staff periodically.

In general, a strategic planning process keeps an organization on track over time, and allows it to respond to change while remaining faithful to its mission and membership. Many times, the process itself may have as much value to the organization as the final plan since so much can be learned from surveying both the position of the organization and the state of the policy and

political environment in which the organization operates. For the National Council of Higher Education Resources, this is particularly true.

Through the recently-completed process, NCHER had the opportunity to step back and scrutinize, evaluate, consider, and question its activities to make sure that each is crucial to the proper function of the association and valued by its membership. As an organization that represents the interest of over 100 members across the United States and relies heavily on the volunteerism of its members, this time of reflection has proven to be invaluable to NCHER as it charts its mission, goals, strategies, and membership going forward.

Mission Statement

The mission of NCHER is to provide superior advocacy, communications, research, and operational support to its members so they may effectively help students and families develop, pay for, and attain their educational goals, pursue meaningful and rewarding work, and become contributing members of society.

Strategic Goals for 2018-2020

In order to succeed in its mission, NCHER must accomplish the following four goals over the next three years, 2018-2020. Collectively, these goals will promote the value proposition of the organization's advocacy, communications, research, and operational services in order to recruit new members and retain the existing membership.

Goal #1

Ensure that NCHER is a trusted, active, and credible resource and advocate for its members, federal and state policymakers, and other higher education stakeholders so it can effectively influence the legislative and regulatory processes

Goal #2

Deploy a communications strategy that promotes the successful work of the NCHER members' services on behalf of students and families, consistent with the advocacy agenda

Goal #3

Provide more effective and efficient high-quality support and professional development to members, including sharing of best practices in support of the NCHER members' services that assist students, families, and borrowers in accessing and completing postsecondary education

Goal #4

Engage and collaborate with our higher education partners on matters of mutual interests while continuing to promote and create membership services that are unique to NCHER

Strategic Goal Solutions for 2018-2020

Goal #1 Solutions: What prevents NCHER from being a trusted and trusted, active, and credible resource and advocate for its members, federal and state policymakers, and other higher education stakeholders so it can effectively influence the legislative and regulatory processes?

- Overcome staff resource constraints by adding capacity through productivity and head-count gains:
 - Add full-time or part-time staff/intern that formulate position papers and letters, and assist with general advocacy responsibilities
 - Ask more of the Penn Hill Group on policy development, drafting legislative language or writing letters, etc.
 - Ask NCHER members to play a larger role in advocacy, policy development, drafting legislative language, lobbying, etc. (Membership Plan)
 - Build closer state and local connections between NCHER members and House and Senate members, and facilitate sustained relationships
 - Identify and find champions for certain issues and certain sectors of the industry; list relationships and match with respective issues
 - Redirect staff resources from operations and professional development to advocacy

- Address the revenue shortfall by growing the membership and raising financial contributions:
 - Review membership dues structure to capture the full value of NCHER's value proposition
 - Implement new membership dues structure based on future growth and opportunities
 - Request special or project-based assessments or voluntary contributions, similar to past practice
 - Request that the Board make a financial commitment to the organization (sponsorship, new membership recruitment, etc.)
 - Recruit more members to join NCHER, consistent with our target sectors (Membership Plan)
 - Increase conference registration fees and committee meeting registration fees
 - Explore a la carte services

- Address lack of Congressional champions to better enact legislative priorities:
 - Meet with House and Senate members regularly through NCHER-led meetings (Membership Plan)
 - Teach members how to build "champion" relationships, including through the creation of a Government Relations list-serve and holding relevant sessions at the Legislative Conference (Membership Plan)

- Mitigate impact of high-toxic political environment to protect the ability to get legislative priorities passed:
 - Build relationships with both sides of the aisle by supporting Democratic initiatives and engaging state officials such as the Attorneys General
 - Build Democratic champions, similar to above-stated solutions
- Address members not active at the federal level to augment our ability and capacity to influence legislation:
 - Have each NCHER member identify government relations resource to coordinate campaigns, including through the creation of a Government Relations list-serve (Membership Plan)
 - Assess key inactive states to find a way for them to engage, mainly through affiliate members
- Address lack of hard research data to validate NCHER's positions:
 - Create a data clearinghouse of program information by generating an easy-to-populate spreadsheet that could be generated semi-annually for development into a report that is disseminated to the membership and federal policymakers. The report would provide data on how "it" helps their constituents and "why should they care" such as the number of member employees, revenue generated and pumped into the local economy
 - Collect borrower-friendly stories from student loan servicers and collectors
 - Update research priorities, aligned to the organization's advocacy work
 - Create a more robust section of the NCHER website (external) and reorganize the NCHER E-Library so that members can easily find research items (internal)
- Leverage backroom-shared services with other associations by evaluating collocating with the Education Finance Council or others

Goal #2 Solutions: What prevents NCHER from deploying a communications strategy that promotes the successful work of the NCHER members' services on behalf of students and families, consistent with the advocacy agenda?

- Address staff capacity barriers to create more proactive communications:
 - Create a 7-9 member Communications Committee made up seasoned communications directors/public relations experts to guide the organization's communications efforts, including setting priorities, garnering data from members, and resolving disagreements among different sectors
 - Create a contact list of the designated press person for every NCHER member
 - Find ways to free Pam to work with reporters to create the capacity to conduct quarterly outreach to relevant national and trade reporters
 - Explore streamlining the Daily Briefing by publishing four times a week, reducing the length of the articles, etc.
 - Consider adding an intern to help Pam (Membership Plan)

- Create processes that drive more timely stories:
 - Develop a calendar of events so that the organization can better anticipate issues and compile data in advance (Free Application for Federal Student Aid completion deadlines, start of school year, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau reports, etc.)
 - Encourage NCHER members to share positive news stories / issue pieces with Pam so that they can be pushed out on social media, meetings with reporters, etc.
 - Work effectively with the communications directors of outside organizations that can support our message (American Enterprise Institute, American Action Forum, ACA, National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, etc.)
- Address competing agendas among members by focusing on those activities that benefit the student as the unifying element
- Mitigate impact of lack of ability of a trade association to influence media and the narrative to mitigate the number of negative stories:
 - Pivot to issuing industry positive news when bad press occurs
 - Establish better relations with education reporters and focus on selected issues if needed
 - Shorten ‘bad’ news cycle by not always having a response, but this should not be the default option if necessary
- Improve student loan messaging
- Mitigate the level of bad actors in the industry:
 - Maintain policy of not accepting debt relief/document prep companies as members
 - Evaluate informational tools to students and families that promote the public service mission role of our members
 - Work with federal and state officials to reject document prep companies’ behavior

Goal #3 Solutions: What prevents NCHER from providing more effective and efficient high-quality support and professional development to members, including sharing of best practices in support of the NCHER members’ services that assist students, families, and borrowers in accessing and completing postsecondary education?

- Optimize membership engagement to add resources and save time:
 - Have the membership step forward to lead caucuses and committees similar to our push with the NCHER Guaranty Agency Chief Financial Officer Committee
 - Reduce calls to every other month/quarterly; shorten calls to 45 minutes; and separate caucus and membership call topics to maximize staff time
- Increase the number of subject matter experts among the membership:
 - Create “New Leader Initiative” / mentoring program to recruit and develop new subject matter experts in the industry, including ‘neg-reg’ and other key committees

- Implement “Lunch and Learn” webinars
- Implement personal leadership projects
- Videotape key conference sessions and make them available online to paid conference attendees and, for a small fee, the general NCHER membership
- Review committee structure to determine whether any committees could be merged with existing committees to get critical mass and efficiency
- Provide conference discounts to first-time attendees and multiple attendees to encourage NCHER members to send multiple participants
- Reevaluate when meetings are held to maximize participation
- Address the issue of members not willing to share:
 - Hold Leadership Conference/Chief Executive Officer Roundtable to discuss lessons learned on new product/strategic issues, tacked onto the Spring Convention in June
 - Build a reference document on new initiatives that members are willing to share (i.e. default prevention programs), similar to the Private Loan Booklet
 - Seed “others” who are sharing in a meeting to encourage others to contribute
 - Engage the Board of Directors of NCHER members for participation at upcoming events

Goal #4 Solutions: What prevents NCHER from engaging and collaborating with our higher education partners on matters of mutual interests while continuing to promote and create membership services that are unique to NCHER?

- Address partners not willing to collaborate:
 - Hold quarterly or bi-yearly Chief Executive Officer-level calls with key associations (NCHER, Education Finance Council, Student Loan Servicing Alliance, and Consumer Bankers Association already meet monthly – consider adding other associations like National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrations, National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs, Coalition of State Student Education Loan Programs, National College Access Network, Lumina Foundation, etc.)
 - Engage common members to encourage collaboration as basis to bring the associations together
- Address competing interests by providing a forum for other organizations to discuss issues of importance to their membership, especially institution-based organizations – invite to relevant conferences
- Address competing hierarchy of needs by keeping lines of communication open with large ex-members that are part of other trade associations

Organization Profile and History

The National Council of Higher Education Resources (NCHER) represents state, nonprofit, and private organizations, including lenders, loan holders, servicers, guaranty agencies, collection agencies, postsecondary schools, and other organizations, involved in the administration of federal, state, and private education loan and grant programs. NCHER represents its members on public policy and regulatory issues before the legislative and executive branches of the federal government. The organization is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, and registered in the state of Delaware.

The association started in 1967 as the National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs, Inc. or NCHERP representing the key players responsible for administration of the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP). As a result of legislation passed by Congress in 2010, students and families ceased to receive new FFELP loans beginning on July 1, 2010. All NCHER members continue to provide student and borrower services during what is a lengthy wind-down period of the program. Many members have secured new opportunities as federal student loan servicers and private collection agencies, as federal contractors and subcontractors, to service and collect on Federal Direct Student Loans, while others have continued their public service mission by creating and administering lower cost private education loan programs to promote access to postsecondary education. Other members are exploring new opportunities such as providing comprehensive financial literacy, debt management, and default prevention services to students, families, and borrowers as third-party servicers for institutions of higher education.

NCHER is governed by its Bylaws, which dictate its governance structure. Management of the activities and affairs of the organization is vested in a 16-member Board of Directors. The Board is composed of the Chair, Chair-Elect, Immediate Past-Chair, Treasurer, and twelve At-Large Directors elected from the voting membership. All voting members are state and nonprofit entities. The President serves as the Secretary, and is a non-voting member of the Board. The Board includes two liaison representatives who advise and counsel the Board on issues impacting the organization's affiliate members. The Executive Committee, composed of the elected officers, is charged with the responsibility for day-to-day management of NCHER.

Membership in NCHER is on an institutional, organizational, or agency basis rather than on an individual or personal basis, and is contingent upon application, Board of Directors approval, and payment of dues. There are currently three classes of membership:

Voting Membership

Voting Membership is open to all nonprofit organizations providing higher education services to help families and students develop, pay for, and attain their educational goals so they can pursue meaningful and rewarding work and become contributing members of society. This includes:

- Providing information or services to students, parents, families, borrowers, and/or postsecondary institutions designed to improve college readiness upon graduation from high school; improve college access and enrollment; assist students and parents in understanding and accessing financial aid; improve financial education, debt management, and budgetary skills; assist students in making and planning for career choices; assist students in evaluating, selecting, and applying to postsecondary institutions; prevent or avert student loan delinquency and default; or enhance college completion, including through philanthropic efforts;
- Originating private education loans, providing financing and refinancing for federal and private education loans, and purchasing federal and private education loans;
- Administering postsecondary scholarships, grants, college savings plans, and college access and success programs;
- Providing loan guaranty services on behalf of the federal government; or
- Servicing federal and private education loans.

School Membership (Non-voting)

School (non-voting) membership is open to all nonprofit and for-profit postsecondary education institutions accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and who are interested in helping families and students develop, pay for, and attain their educational goals so they can pursue meaningful and rewarding work and become contributing members of society.

Affiliate membership (Non-voting)

Affiliate (non-voting) membership is open to all nonprofit and for-profit organizations, not otherwise eligible for Voting Membership or School Membership, who: (i) are interested in helping families and students develop, pay for, and attain their educational goals so they can pursue meaningful and rewarding work and become contributing members of society, (ii) provide services to members that further their mission to help families and students develop, pay for, and attain their educational goals so they can pursue meaningful and rewarding work and become contributing members of society, or (iii) provide financial education, career planning and career development, college access and success, debt management, delinquency aversion, default prevention, information technology linkages, financial aid administration, or collection services to students, parents, families, borrowers and/or postsecondary education.

Organizations eligible to be considered for Affiliate Membership include:

- Private loan providers, servicers, investment banks, and collectors;

- Federal contractors, including primes and subcontractors involved in the servicing and collection of student loans;
- Law firms, consulting firms, and market measurement companies; and
- Other organizations approved by the Board of Directors.

Appendix A

Planning Process

The Strategic Plan drives all aspects of an organization; it articulates basic concepts of vision, mission, goals, objectives, and future activities. While there are different key elements of a strategic plan, the basic tenets of strategic planning determines where an organization is going over the next several years, how it's going to get there, and how it'll know if it got there or not.

The plan includes a deliberate set of steps that:

- Assesses the organization and membership needs and resources;
- Defines a target membership/audience and a set of goals and objectives;
- Plans and designs coordinated strategies with evidence of success;
- Logically connects these strategies to needs, assets, and desired outcomes; and
- Measures and evaluates the process and outcomes.

After considering the above, the Strategic Plan for the National Council of Higher Education Resources (NCHER) will be developed through the proposed strategic planning process:

Process Flow



Timeline

PROCESS STEP	PROCESS	STATUS	DUE DATE
VISION/MISSION	REVIEW EXISTING	COMPLETED BUT REVIEW AT NOV. MEETING	FIRST CONF CALL
MEMBERSHIP ANALYSIS	REVIEW EXISTING	COMPLETED	FIRST CONF CALL
SWOT	REVIEW PREVIOUS, ADD NEW ITEMS	COMPLETED	FIRST CONF CALL
MEMBERSHIP SURVEY	SURVEY MONKEY	COMPLETED	SEPTEMBER 29
STRATEGIC GOALS	SET BY JAMES BERGERON	PENDING	OCTOBER 2-3
SWOT	REVIEW PREVIOUS, ADD NEW ITEMS	PENDING	OCTOBER 2-3
GAP ANALYSIS	DC MEETING	PENDING	OCTOBER 2-3
STRATEGIC PLANNING	DC MEETING	PENDING	OCTOBER 2-3
STRATEGIC DEPLOYMENT	KS MEETING	PENDING	NOVEMBER 6-8

Appendix B

Breakdown of the Current NCHER Membership

Dual Agency – Guaranty Agency and Nonprofit Holder/Lender/Service (10, No Change)

- Finance Authority Of Maine
- Illinois Student Assistance Commission
- Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority
- Michigan Guaranty Agency, Department of Treasury
- New Hampshire Higher Education Assistance Foundation
- New Jersey Higher Education Student Assistance Authority
- New Mexico Educational Assistance Foundation
- Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency
- Utah Higher Education Assistance Authority
- Vermont Student Assistance Corporation

Former Guaranty Agency (4, increase of 1 member)

- Iowa Student Aid Commission
- Student Loan Guarantee Foundation of Arkansas
- Strada Education Network/Formally USA Funds
- Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation

For-Profit Lender/Service (10, net increase of 3 members)

- Climb Credit
- Conduent Education/Xerox
- cuLearn with Thrivent
- Discover Financial Services
- Edfinancial
- Goal Structured Solutions
- MPOWER Financing
- SoFi Lending Corp
- SunTrust Bank, Inc.
- Wells Fargo Education Financial Services

Guaranty Agency (12, loss of 3 members)

- American Student Assistance
- College Assist
- Educational Credit Management Corporation
- Florida Department Of Education, Office of Student Financial Assistance
- Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance
- Missouri Department of Higher Education
- National Student Loan Program

- New York State Higher Education Services Corporation
- North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority
- Oklahoma College Assistance Program
- Rhode Island Division of Higher Education Assistance
- Texas Guaranteed (TG)

Law Firm/Consulting Firm (10, loss of 2 members and increase of 2 members)

- Ballard Spahr
- Collection Quotient Consulting
- Evidens Group
- Hinshaw and Culbertson
- Hogan Lovells
- Hunton & Williams
- McGlinchey Stafford
- PG Presents
- Powers, Pyles, Sutter, and Verville
- Tsibouris and Associates

Miscellaneous (9, net increase of 1 member)

- Bank of America Merrill Lynch
- ELM Resources
- iGrad – Financial Literacy
- MeasureOne
- Money Management International
- National Student Clearinghouse
- ReliaMax Surety Company
- Student Loan Capital Strategies
- Veri-Tax

Nonprofit Holder/Lender/Service (16, increase of 4 members)

- Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education
- AccessLex Institute/Access Group
- ALL Student Loan
- Bank of North Dakota
- Brazos Group of Companies
- College Foundation Inc.
- Edsouth
- Georgia Student Finance Commission
- Greater Texas Foundation
- INvestED/Indiana Secondary Market for Education Loans
- Iowa Student Loan
- Massachusetts Educational Finance Authority

- Michigan State University Federal Credit Union
- Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority
- Panhandle-Plains Higher Education Authority
- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Private Collection Agency-Related Field (19, net loss of 5 members)

- Account Control Technology
- Alltran
- CBE Companies
- Ceannate Corp
- Coast Professional
- Conserve
- Delta Management Associates
- ECMC Holdings/Premier Credit of North America
- EOSCCA / Collecto
- FH Cann & Associates
- GC Services
- iQor / Allied Interstate
- Maximus Federal Services
- Performant Financial Corporation
- Pinnacle Recovery Inc.
- Regional Adjustment Bureau
- Uniquity Financial
- Weltman, Weinberg, and Reis
- Windham Professionals, Inc.

School-Related Field (6, No Change)

- Apollo Education Group
- Association of American Medical Colleges
- Adtalem Global Education/DeVry Education Group
- The Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising
- University of Illinois System
- Western Governors University

Standards Member (8, net loss of 1 member)

- CampusDoor Holdings
- Cognition Financial Corporation/First Marblehead Corporation
- College Avenue Student Loans
- CommonBond
- Credit Union Student Choice
- LendKey
- Sallie Mae Bank

- Student Loan Finance Corporation

Declined Membership

For-Profit Lender/Servicer (1)

- Earnest

Guaranty Agency (2)

- Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program
- Northwest Education Loan Association

Law Firm/Consulting Firm (2)

- Foley and Lardner
- Vethos

Miscellaneous (1)

- EverFi

Private Collection Agency-Related Field (6)

- Collection Technology Inc.
- Financial Asset Management Systems
- Global Receivables Solutions, Inc.
- National Enterprise Systems, Inc.
- Progressive Financial Services, Inc.
- Transworld Systems, Inc.

Breakdown of Future NCHER Membership

College- and Career-Ready Organizations and Foundations

- College Access and Success Providers
- Higher Education Foundations/Philanthropic Organizations

Federal Student Loan Contractors and Subcontractors

- Direct Loan Servicers
- Private Collection Agencies

Former FFELP Holders, Servicers, Guarantors, and Private Collection Agencies

- Guarantors
- Not-for-Profit Lenders and Servicers
- Private Collection Agencies with Guarantor Contracts
- FFELP Players Involved in Other Identified Areas

Institutions of Higher Education

- Proprietary schools
- Nonprofit schools

Investment Banks

Law Firms/Consulting Firms

Market Measurement Companies

Private Loan Providers, Servicers, Collectors, and Other Players

- NFP or For-Profit Lenders and Servicers
- Private Collection Agencies Interested in This Space

State Agencies and State-Affiliated Organizations for Postsecondary Education

- 529 Plan Administrators
- GEARUP and TRIO Grantees

Third-Party Servicers to Institutions of Higher Education and Students

- TPS Providers with Default Prevention Programs

Appendix C

Draft Questions for the Survey to the Membership

- 1) Do you agree with the current mission of the National Council of Higher Education Resources (NCHER)? If not, please explain.

“The mission of NCHER is to enhance member organizations’ abilities to help families and students develop, pay for, and attain their educational goals so they can pursue meaningful and rewarding work and become contributing members of society.”

- 2) NCHER currently has six strategic goals to promote its advocacy, communications, research, and operational strategies. Please rank/rate the current goals in order of importance to your organization (with 1 being the least importance and 5 being the most importance).

Program and Advocacy Goals

Goal #1

Ensure that NCHER is a trusted, active, and credible resource for its members, policymakers (including Congress and the Administration), and other higher education stakeholders.

Goal #2

Successfully reposition and rebrand the membership's services and programs, and focus more on student-, family-, and borrower-centered activities.

Goal #3

Preserve existing member assets and support the development of non-federal student aid programs and services that assist students, families, and borrowers.

Goal #4

Take a leadership role in promoting collaboration with external organizations on matters of mutual interests.

Membership Goals

Goal #5

Provide high-quality support, professional development, and technical assistance to members, as appropriate, through conferences as well as the committee and caucus structure.

Goal #6

Identify and promote best practices in support of members' missions to assist students, families, and borrowers develop, pay for, and attain their educational goals so they can pursue meaningful and rewarding work and become contributing members of society, and facilitate increased collaboration among members.

- 3) Are there any strategic goals that are included on the above list that should be removed? If so, please explain. Also, please remember to re-rank the goals in question (2) if needed.
- 4) Are there any goals not included in the above list that your organization believes should be added? If so, please explain. If there are two or more additional goals, please rank the goals in order of importance to your organization. Also, please remember to re-rank the goals in question (2) if needed.

Appendix D

Notes from the October 2-3, 2017 Meeting

Restatement of NCHER's value proposition

- To member organizations that help students succeed through postsecondary education and beyond.
- NCHER is the leading national advocacy, information sharing, and professional development organization/entity.
- That can provide a collaborative platform for facilitating their members' missions.
- Because we are the most efficient and effective one-stop-shop leveraging member efforts.

SWOT analysis

- Strengths of the organization - internal
 - Strong legislative and regulatory knowledge and connections
 - Diversified membership
 - Strong DC staff
 - Culture of collaboration, sharing, etc. – external
 - Caucus structure and willingness of membership to participate in the organization and sharing of staff resources - internal
- Weaknesses of the organization - internal
 - Decline in revenues and vulnerable to loss of membership which impacts the revenue of the organization, including staff
 - Currently no legislative footings/champions
 - Time spent on FFELP/Guarantor issues/are staff focused on right things
 - Collaboration and sharing with other organizations risks delaying or diluting its effectiveness
 - Postsecondary schools remain distant to direct contact
 - Not all states are represented in the membership – makes weaker national appeal/legislation
- Opportunities for the organization - external
 - Develop better relationships with the new Administration at the Department of Education
 - Shore up the budget with an analysis of current fee structure

- Widespread agreement that federal regulation/complications require more resources and demand for our services
- Legislative Opportunities – Development of programs to assist schools in mitigating the impact of regulations, potential “skin-in-the-game”, counseling, etc.
- Serve as an expert/advocate for the borrower
- Threats to the organization - external
 - New laws/regulations/solicitations that negatively impact member revenues
 - Decreasing revenue streams for membership organizations
 - Negative/inaccurate media coverage of member services
 - Lack of cooperation within the Republican Party and the relationship with the Republican President, resulting in lack of reauthorization of the Higher Education Act
 - EFC/SLSA/NCAN (competing trade associations)

Strategic Goals for 2018-2010

- Ensure that NCHER is a trusted, active, and credible resource and advocate for its members, federal and state policymakers, and other higher education stakeholders so it can effectively influence the legislative and regulatory processes
- Deploy a communications strategy that promotes the successful work of the NCHER members’ services on behalf of students and families, consistent with the advocacy agenda
- Provide high-quality support and professional development to members, including sharing of best practices in support of members’ services that assist students, families, and borrowers in accessing and completing postsecondary education
- Engage and collaborate with our higher education partners on matters of mutual interests while continuing to promote and create membership services that are unique to NCHER

Gap Analysis

Goal #1: What prevents NCHER from being a trusted and credible resource...

- Staff is small, declining revenue - sufficient and dedicated resources to carry out the goal? – 24 votes
- NCHER has revenue shortfalls – 13 votes
- Lack of Congressional champions – 13 votes
- Highly-toxic political environment – 12 votes
- Many members are not active at the federal level (retirements, lobbying prohibition, etc.) – 11 votes

- Lack of hard research data – 8 votes
- Staff turnover – 0 votes
- Not enough member-specific data provided to NCHER – 0 votes

Goal #1 Solutions

- Overcome staff constraints:
 - Add staff that does research and writes position papers
 - Redirect staff resources from operations to advocacy
 - Ask more of the Penn Hill Group
 - Add interns or volunteers
 - Ask members to do more – involve members more in advocacy role
 - Narrow priorities – don't do as much
 - Take resources from professional development since members value it less
- Address revenue shortfall:
 - Review membership dues structure
 - Recruit more members to NCHER
 - Tap into reserves
 - Special or project-based assessments
 - New business opportunities
 - Merge with another trade association
 - Enter into a strategic alliance with a lobby/law firm
 - Leverage backroom-shared services with other associations
 - Increase conference fees
 - Explore a la carte services – Daily Newsletter, specific services
 - Stop non-value services and redeploy to advocacy
- Address lack of Congressional champion:
 - Hold fundraisers for potential champions
 - Build state and local connection and sustained relationships (find champions for certain issues; list relationships and match with respective issues)
 - Meet with members regularly through NCHER-led meetings
 - Provide data on how “it” helps their constituents
 - Teachers members how to build “champion” relationships
 - Make case in state and bridge to the federal level
- Mitigate impact of high-toxic political environment:
 - Build relationships with both sides (engage state officials – AGs, invite to conferences, and support Democratic initiatives)
 - Build Democratic champions
- Address members not active at the federal level:

- Have each member identify government relations resource to coordinate campaigns
- Assess key inactive states to find a way for them to engage
- Address lack of hard research data:
 - Create a data clearinghouse of program information at NCHER
 - Collect borrower-friendly stories
 - Update research priorities
 - Hire intern to do in-house work

Goal #2: What prevents NCHER from deploying a communications strategy...

- Staff is small, declining revenue – sufficient and dedicated resources to carry out the goal? – 20 votes
- Lack of hard research data – 15 votes
- Competing agendas among member organizations – 13 votes
- Not always up to the trade association to control or provide answers to the media, Congress, or the Administration – 10 votes
- Difficult to message student loans (complicated system) – 9 votes
- Bad actors in the industry – 9 votes
- Lack of comprehensive approach to communications – 9 votes
- Changes in federal programs or agencies – 2 votes
- Members distrust media – 3 votes
- Members lack interest/knowledge of social media – 0 votes

Goal #2 Solutions

- Address staff capacity barriers, declining revenue:
 - Survey membership on most important communications
 - Find ways to free Pam to work with reporters
 - Explore streamlining the Daily Briefing
 - Dedicate a single resource to communications
 - Build system to garner data from members (create communications committee)
 - Add intern to help Pam
 - Update NCHER Communications Plan
- Address lack of hard research data:
 - See prior solutions
 - Anticipate issues and compile data in advance (develop calendar of events)
 - Encourage members to share issue pieces with NCHER
- Address competing agendas among members:
 - Form communications committee to include diverse sectors of the membership – majority interest rules

- Focus on those activities that benefit students as the unifying element
- Mitigate impact of lack of ability of the trade association to influence media:
 - Pivot to issuing industry positive news when bad press occurs
 - Establish better relations with education reporters and focus on selected issues if needed
 - Shorten 'bad' news cycle by not always having a response
- Address difficult to message on student loans:
 - Regular communication stream – positive issues
 - Use social media to push information
 - Work effectively with outside organizations that can support our message
 - Work with other trade communication directors
- Address lack of a comprehensive plan:
 - Hold monthly communication committee calls
 - Update NCHER Communications Plan
- Mitigate level of bad actors in the industry:
 - Review conference attendees and restrict access to those members that have signed an NCHER Code of Conduct
 - Policy of not accepting debt relief/document prep companies as members
 - Work with AGs to reject document prep companies' behavior
 - Eliminate non-member conference registrations

Goal #3: What prevents NCHER from providing high-quality support...

- Staff is small, declining revenue – sufficient and dedicated resources to carry out the goal? – 21 votes
- Fewer members mean fewer subject matter experts and conference attendees – 18 votes
- Members not willing to share proprietary information – 15 votes
- Members travel budgets are limited – 6 votes
- Experts are focused on loan programs – 6 votes
- Lack of centralized data on different member services – 5 votes
- Diverse membership with differing needs – 4 votes
- NCHER seen as more of a leader on GA issues – 4 votes
- Diversity of best practices depending on location – 3 votes
- ED is ultimate decider of best practices – 0 votes

Goal #3 Solutions

- Address staff capacity barriers, declining revenue:

- See prior solutions
- Have membership step forward to lead caucuses and committees
- Look at committees to fold into bigger committees to get critical mass and efficiency
- Reevaluate when meetings are held to maximize participation
- Reduce calls to every other month
- Address fewer members = fewer subject matter experts:
 - Facilitate knowledge transfer to drive professional development
 - Videotape key conference sessions and make them available on-line
 - NCHER to facilitate mentoring program to develop and bring new members along
 - “Lunch and Learn” podcasts
 - Develop a process to bring new people into ‘neg-reg’ and other key committees
- Address the issue of members not willing to share:
 - Build database on new initiatives that members are willing to share
 - Invite expert non-members to speak at our annual conferences
 - Seed “others” who are sharing in meeting to encourage others to contribute
 - Hold Leadership Conference/CEO Roundtable to discuss lessons learned on new product/strategic issues
 - Engage member Board members at NCHER conferences or send NCHER staff to more BOD meetings

Goal #4: What prevents NCHER from collaborating with other organizations...

- Partners not always willing to collaborate – 17 votes
- Competition for members/value proposition – 11 votes
- Competing interests – 11 votes
- Competing hierarchy of needs – 9 votes
- Not seen as subject matter experts – 8 votes
- Hard to distinguish NCHER from partners 7 votes
- Hard to collaborate with differing staff leads (NCHER: exec staff / EFC: CEOs) – 6 votes
- Partners not always trustworthy – 5 votes
- Possible competing messages – 4 votes
- Staff is small, declining revenue – sufficient and dedicated resources to carry out the goal? – 2 votes
- Hard to get members engaged at the elementary and secondary level – 0 votes
- Other organizations want credit/don’t want to be led – 0 votes

Goal #4 Solutions

- Address partners not willing to collaborate:
 - Be willing to let others take the lead
 - Use key issues like 150(d) to draw associations together

- Hold monthly CEO-level calls with key associations (EFC, NCHER, SLSA, and CBA meet monthly – consider adding other associations like NASFAA, NASSGAP, etc.)
- Engage common members to collaborate as basis to bring the associations together

- Address competition for members/value proposition:
 - Maintain NCHER value proposition
 - Keep NCHER transparent
 - Keep balance between competition but ultimately focus on doing the best for our members
 - Don't take collaboration for granted

- Address competing interests:
 - Don't force issues where there is disagreement
 - Recognize that we won't always agree
 - Present case diplomatically to other organizations – don't bash them
 - Provide a forum for other organizations to discuss issues – invite to conference

- Address competing hierarchy of needs:
 - Keep lines of communication open with large ex-members (Navient and Nelnet)
 - Look for money for NCHER-supported activities