



**NORTH DAKOTA
PLANNING ASSOCIATION**

2024-2028
**STRATEGIC
PLAN**

ADOPTED:
December 7, 2023



President's Note

I would like to give special thanks to all who participated throughout our first ever, strategic planning process, especially those that were doubly involved in providing volunteer hours planning for conferences, reviewing technological and other process improvements, creating educational materials, and interfacing with other planning-related organizations such as American Planning Association, Western Central Chapter, Western Planner, and several other state planning associations. Thank you to Stantec Consulting Inc. for administering a member survey for this plan.

Lastly, thank you to the NDPA Board of Directors, past and present, for their commitment to NDPA and all strategic efforts. Although this is NDPA's first organization strategic plan, it is built off the collective efforts of all past and current activities.

John Van Dyke, AICP, CFM
2023-2024 NPDA President

About the Organization

01



Who We Are

The NDPA was established in 1973 and strives to be a forum for a diverse population across the state. We serve professional planners, economic developers, state agency staff and officials, regional council and city and county planning board members, private individuals, businesses and utilities.

What We Do

The NDPA provides a place for an exchange of ideas, educational opportunities, legislative information, developing training opportunities and tackling the issues of the 21st century.

BOARD LEADERSHIP

2023-2024

John Van Dyke, AICP – PRESIDENT
 Rachel Laqua, AICP – VICE PRESIDENT
 Daniel Nairn, AICP – TREASURER
 Andrea Edwardson, AICP – SECRETARY
 Sandy Rohde – PAST PRESIDENT
 Will Hutchings, AICP – AT-LARGE MEMBER
 Donald Kress – AT-LARGE MEMBER

VOLUNTEERS

Stacey Swanson – COMMUNICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this strategic plan is to provide the Board with a guiding document to assist in decision-making surrounding the allocation of limited resources towards achieving established goals. Further, the strategic plan provides the general membership with predictability with regard to the direction of the organization as a whole.

This is the first strategic plan undertaken since the organization was first established in 1973. The idea to undertake a strategic planning effort was presented at the Annual Membership meeting in Fall 2021. The strategic planning process began in Spring 2022 culminating with a draft of the document presented to the general membership at the Annual Membership meeting in Fall 2023.

As the NDPA continues to mature and new members volunteer in general or leadership capacities, the strategic plan will need to be reevaluated to ensure it's reflective of the desires of the overall organization. Organizational strategic plans generally have a shelf life of three to five years and then require an update. It is the hope that future volunteers will continue to build from this effort and grow the organization in the most efficient, effective, and proactive means possible.

This document contains several acronyms common to the planning profession within North Dakota and beyond. They are provided below for reference.

NDPA	North Dakota Planning Association
WCC	American Planning Association - Western Central Chapter
WP	Western Planner
APA	American Planning Association
NDLC	North Dakota League of Cities
NDACo	North Dakota Association of Counties
AICP	American Institute of Certified Planners (Professional Planning Accreditation by APA)
CM	Certification Maintenance (AICP specific CEC)

NDPA STATEMENTS

Mission

The mission statement describes NDPA's intentions and demonstrates how the organization is striving to fulfill its vision:

We educate individuals, legislators, and planning professionals on the importance of planning and contemporary planning best practices, partner with those with a passion toward community-based efforts in planning and related fields, and advocate for the future success of communities through good policy and plan-making.

Vision

The vision statement summarizes the role and influence the NDPA will have in North Dakota as it strives to achieve its goals.

To be the primary partnership for planning-related information and activities within the State of North Dakota which connects and supports a growing planning profession that is well respected in the state and fosters an understanding amid the general public on the planning issues within the state.

Value

The value statement reflects the values of the NDPA. The profession relies on the ethical principles espoused in the AICP Code of Ethics.

Working together according to the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct to effect good planning practice for all people of North Dakota.

Operational Areas and Strategies

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Core Operational Areas



The NDPA maintains several core operational areas. At least one strategic planning session was held on each of these five core areas between Summer 2022 and Spring 2023 to gather input from participants. In addition, a general membership survey that provided summaries of the strategic planning sessions and asked subject-related questions was conducted in Summer 2023.

The strategic planning session summaries and survey information are consolidated, where possible, and corresponding goals and objectives are provided within each section.

There are currently five NDPA core operational areas.



Education

Education is the lynch pin of benefits provided by the organization to its membership and is generally provided directly from other members or indirectly through the sharing of educational opportunities from other organizations.

- In-person presentations
- Webinars
- Articles



Membership

Membership is the lifeblood of any all-volunteer organization, with members having the potential of being leaders, educators, administrators, and consumers at various times throughout their membership.

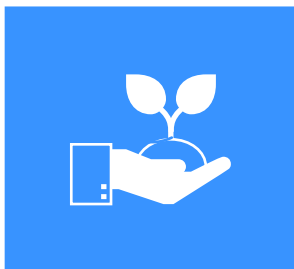
- Membership Goals
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Defined Subcommittees
- Member Benefits



Legislation

Legislation is a critical component of the organization, with changes in state law potentially acting to either cause disruption or increase opportunities to achieve the organization's goals.

- Topical Areas of Concern
- Organizational Approach to Legislation



Professional Relationships

Professional organizational relationships have the potential to create synergistic outcomes, allowing each organization to achieve more by working together.

- Primary Relationships
- Secondary Relationships
- Planning and Planning Associated Organizations



Finance

Finance must be considered within any organization, producing priorities due to the limited resources available to achieve its goals.

- Membership Fees
- Other Revenues
- Expenses
- Proper Tax Submittals

EDUCATION



Education through the NDPA has historically been provided through written newsletters, webinars, and annual conferences. In addition, the NDPA shares information it receives from Western Planner, Western Central Chapter, American Planning Association, and other planning organizations regarding other training opportunities.

Until a few years ago, the NDPA provided digital newsletters to its membership. The effort required a large number of volunteer hours in order to secure individual commitments for the research and writing of articles and packaging the material into a polished newsletter format. This wasn't always successful, resulting in late or skipped editions of the published newsletter, Many volunteers becoming burned out and withdrawing their willingness to continue serving NDPA in that capacity.

The Western Planner, which NDPA members are subscribed to as a result of NDPA being a sponsoring agency, also produces newsletter content. The Western Planner consists of 13 western states and much of the content generated is focused on topics relevant to small urban, rural, or tribal communities.

Historically NDPA members have contributed articles to WP after publication by NDPA, and this is a trend that should be continued with the adjusted amount of content generation listed in the strategies. In addition, NDPA should continue to distribute WP newsletters so additional content is shared with NDPA members.

More recently, NDPA has been providing educational webinars to its membership and beyond, covering various topics of discussion such as variances and non-conformities, as well as the more general planning and zoning commissioner trainings. These have been fairly well-attended historically and upon creation of the initial presentation, are easily repeatable for future offerings. In addition, webinars may be prerecorded and included on the NDPA webpage for use by individual members and organizations at a later time.

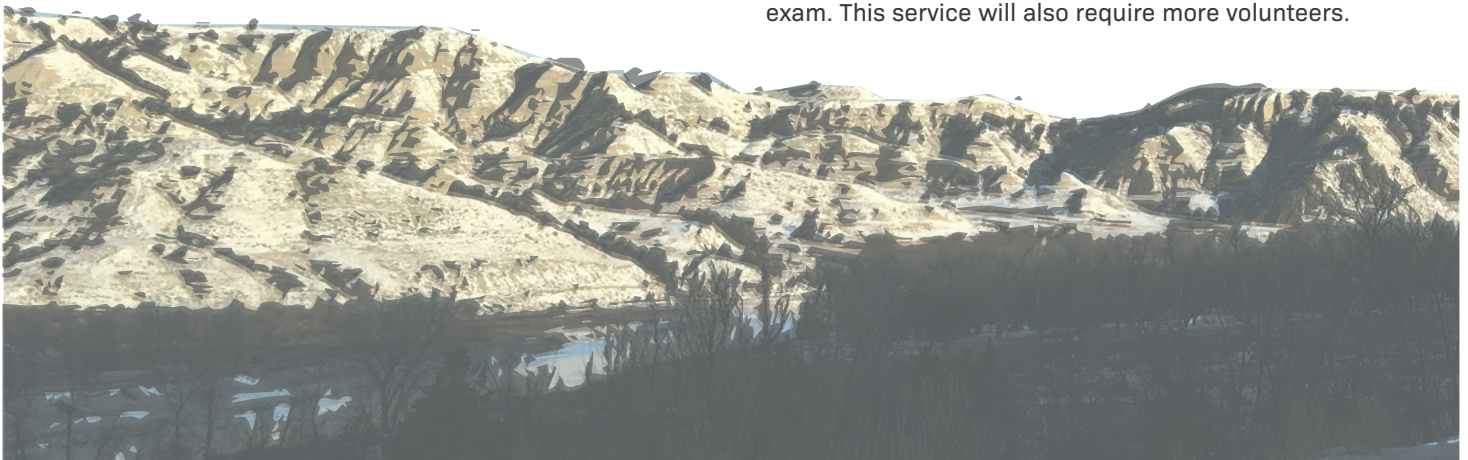
Within the survey, members were asked to rank their preferred means of information and education, with the options being written articles, webinars, and in-person presentations. The order of preference for the respondents is as follows:

- 1) Webinars
- 2) Written Articles
- 3) In-person Presentations

The results align with the general direction that the organization has taken over the past several years in providing more webinar-based training and educational opportunities. Written articles cannot be ignored as a valuable means to obtain information for the general membership. This however will require identification of additional volunteers in order to provide regular written material for consumption. Given the relatively low ranking of in-person presentations, the annual or bi-annual conference that NDPA provides currently appears adequate at this time.

In addition, general members were asked via the survey whether they believed the information received from the American Planning Association was more valuable than local information. Most respondents agreed that American Planning Association newsletters are less valuable than more localized newsletter information. In contrast, respondents were divided whether local information was more valuable overall than American Planning Association information. This may be interpreted as meaning that American Planning Association planning topics are of interest to the membership, although the topical information is preferred to be analyzed through a local lens with examples of localized application.

Finally, the survey included questions surrounding the provision of certification management credits (CM Credits) for American Institute of Certified Planner (AICP) members and AICP exam preparation assistance. The results were overwhelmingly favorable toward NDPA providing more opportunities to obtain CM Credits and to assist members in preparing to take their exam. This service will also require more volunteers.



Goals & Objectives

Goal #1: Improve Volunteerism in the Area of Planning Education

Objective #1: At a minimum, annually solicit volunteers interested and willing to assist with educational material creation such as webinars, written articles, and conference planning.

Objective #2: Explore division of the Education Committee into three groups - webinars, written articles, and conference planning.

Objective #3: Identify one or more AICP members to act as a mentor to non-AICP members wishing to obtain their certified status.

Goal #2: Generate Quarterly Webinars

Objective #1: Survey membership periodically to identify topical preferences for future webinars.

Objective #2: Annually map topics to be provided to NDPA members.

Objective #3: Ensure a minimum of one webinar each year is eligible for AICP CM Credits

Objective #4: Include recorded webinars on the NDPA website.

Goal #3: Reestablish Periodic Newsletter Creation

Objective #1: Provide quarterly news articles topically consistent with quarterly webinar

Objective #2: Identify group of member volunteers focused on generating periodic newsletter containing novel written material related or unrelated to webinars.

Objective #3: Consider analyzing or assessing national-level articles through the lens and applicability in North Dakota.

Goal #4: Hold Annual or Bi-annual Conference

Objective #1: Establish a conference planning subcommittee within the Education Committee to handle coordination of volunteer efforts related to conference planning.

Objective #2: Evaluate feasibility with regard to holding a conference annually versus bi-annually.

Objective #3: Continue dialogue with Wyoming (WyoPass) and South Dakota (SDPA) with regard to establishing a Western Central Chapter conference.

Objective #4: Explore creation of a Spring mini conference for those years where an annual conference is not provided to membership.

Objective #5: Identify means to record annual conference presentations and incorporate them into NDPA webpage for future viewing



MEMBERSHIP



The membership strategic planning session evaluated current membership composition based on the place of employment and indicated job titles provided by members at time of registration.

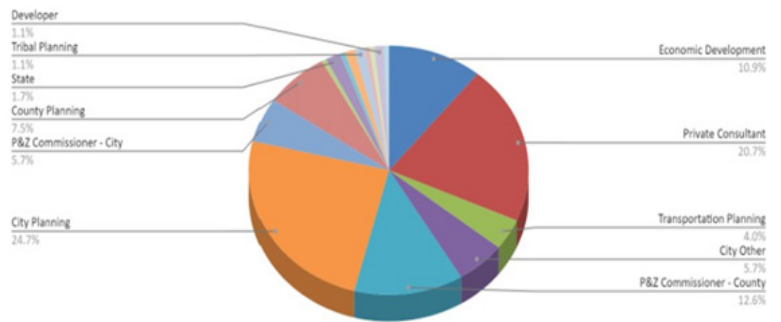
Based on this information, NDPA membership maintains a high percentages of municipal and private sector consultant practitioners, but is lacking in the areas such as tribal, MPO/COG (only one MPO was a member as of May '23), and elected or appointed officials such as Planning & Zoning Commissioners. The discussion at the strategic planning session highlighted the need for member outreach activities to those groups as well as identifying ways for relevant boards (e.g. Board of Adjustments, Renaissance Zone Authorities, Historic Preservation Commissions, etc.) could benefit from stronger partnerships with NDPA. Further, the discussion explored possibilities to provide highly discounted rates to elected or appointed officials with commitment to look further into potential solutions. The general membership survey echoed this sentiment, with the majority of respondents noting that elected officials and Planning and Zoning Commissioners should be the focus of attraction and retention of new membership.

Other discussion at the strategic planning session revolved around membership value, or what is gained by being a member of NDPA. Many ideas were shared surrounding what information should be available to the general public versus only available to members. The technologies required to incorporate member-access-only information is not without its own effort and cost, as NDPA has only recently invested in a new program Wild Apricot. As the

Who are our Members?

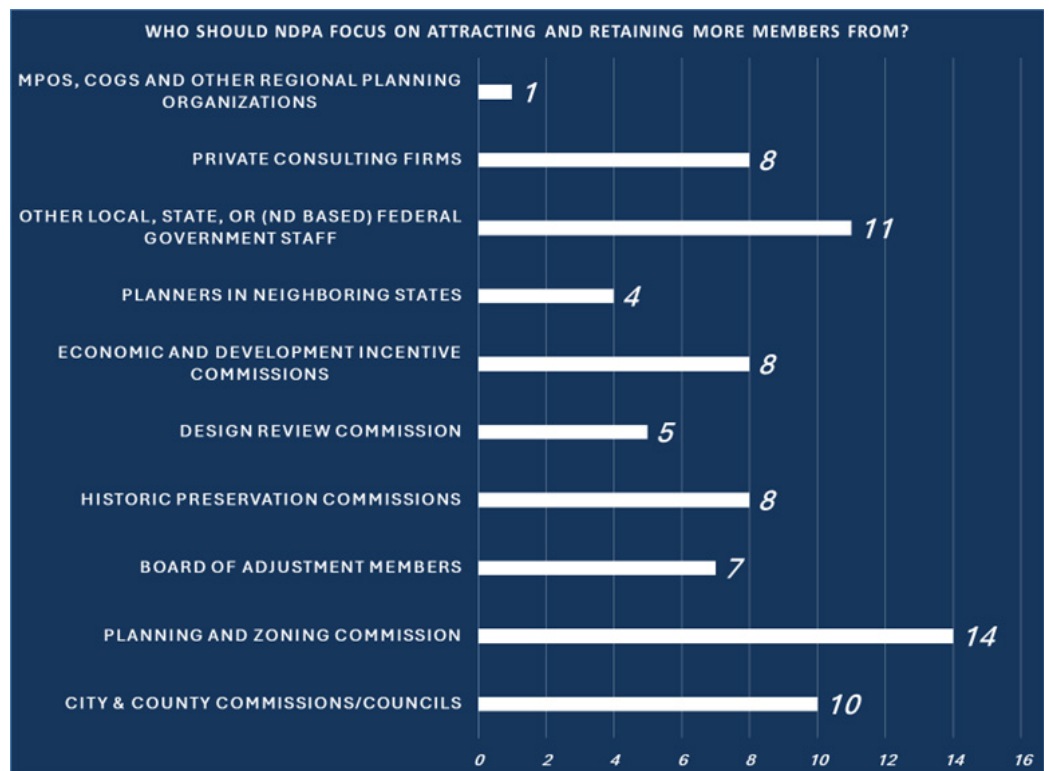
- City Planners and Private Consultants make up majority of our members.
- County P&Z Commissioner representation 2x higher than City P&Z
- Tribal planning representation low
- 2 of 3 MPOs not represented
- Low City Commission/City Council representation (1)
- No member representatives of any Board of Adjustment, RZA, Historic Preservation, etc.)

Count of Category



organization continues to invest in technologies to modernize the organization, educational materials and other information will need to be continually evaluated to determine what should and should not be available to members-only. Nonetheless, it is recognized that there should be clear value in becoming a member of NDPA and member-only access is essential to maintain and grow membership numbers.

As with all strategic planning sessions, the need for more volunteers to assist with managing communication to the membership and beyond, assisting in social media presence, managing membership drives and collecting dues, etc. was highlighted as critical if NDPA is to continue to be effective in the future.



Goals & Objectives

Goal #1: Better Define Scope of Membership Committee

Objective #1: Identify additional volunteers willing to assist with membership-related activities.

Objective #2: Explore monetary or other compensation options for volunteers to incentivize participation.

Objective #3: Continually review, invest, and incorporate technologies to create efficiencies in membership-related activities.

Goal #2: Increase Membership to 200+

Objective #1: Evaluate general membership fees annually.

Objective #2: Explore new membership categories or group rates to incentivize elected and appointed officials.

Objective #3: Work closely with the Education Committee in identifying priority educational materials to improve attraction and retention efforts.

Objective #4: Continually establish members-only resources to improve membership value.

Goal #3: Improve Member Communication and NDPA Branding

Objective #1: Explore division of membership committee into two separate committees, where one committee focuses on membership attraction, retention, and dues collection, while the other committee focuses on communication and exploration and utilization of new technologies to improve effectiveness of the NDPA.

Objective #2: Establish policy or guide surrounding content and frequency of communication.

Objective #3: Incorporate NDPA brand in all communications, including outreach, presentations, and print.



LEGISLATION



Historically, NDPA has had limited capacity to get in front of legislative concerns. NDPA has generally been in a reactive position, defending the planning tools that political subdivisions have been granted by the legislature. This is in contrast to proactively advocating for new legislation to be introduced. The NDPA has a good working relationship with the North Dakota League of Cities and the North Dakota Association of Counties and has historically been able to lean on the proactive advocacy capacity of these two organizations.

At the legislation strategic planning session, the participants concluded that NDPA maintains limited capacity to proactively advocate regarding legislative affairs and should rather focus

the organization's efforts towards law-makers and decision-makers' education to avert the amount of effort required each biennium to battle poor legislation attacking good planning principles.

This aligns with survey responses where the majority of respondents, or 62%, indicated that presenting testimony for or against bills is the number one legislative priority of NDPA. In addition, over half of the respondents noted that generating position papers regarding frequently attacked topics, such as extra-territorial jurisdiction and non-conformities should be a priority.

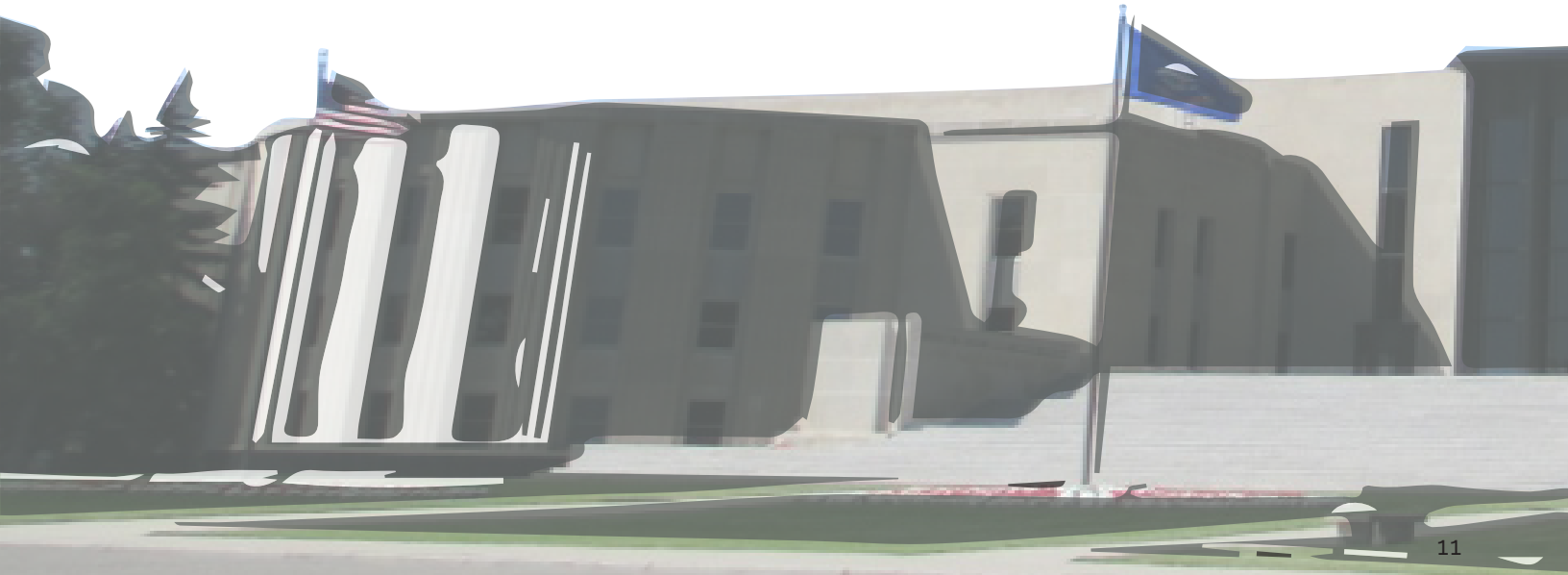
Goals & Objectives

Goal #1: Expand Coordination with Partner Organizations

- Objective #1: Identify opportunities to provide value-added services to advocacy organizations such as North Dakota League of Cities (NDLC) and North Dakota Association of Counties (NDACo)
- Objective #2: Work to provide presentations at each of the annual conferences for NDLC and NDACo related to important planning principles.
- Objective #3: Identify other critical partnerships with other organizations involved in areas of significant interest to planning (e.g. housing authorities & affordable housing initiatives/legislation).

Goal #2: Increase Proactive Legislative Activities

- Objective #1: Generate position papers on commonly attacked planning principles.
- Objective #2: Build rapport with key legislators and routinely invite them to participate in NDPA activities.
- Objective #3: Work with state legislators to introduce a bill to re-write/thoroughly update enabling planning legislation.
- Objective #4: Identify additional volunteers interested in building relationships, writing educational materials, and presenting testimony.





PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS



Historically, the NDPA has been involved in two overarching organizations: Western Planner (WP) and the American Planning Association (APA) via Western Central Chapter (WCC), which is a multistate umbrella organization representing North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and, until recently, Montana. WP and APA are not affiliated. The NDPA has traditionally heavily supported WP, as has the WCC.

The NDPA board and strategic planning session participants reviewed the APA and WCC partnership. WCC provides no APA affiliated programming or resources, and therefore NDPA has not interacted with APA beyond AICP Certification Maintenance (CM) credits being available at NDPA conferences and paying dues to WCC. The WCC will be changing significantly in the next several years, as Montana has left the WCC and has established its own independent APA chapter. The groups concluded that, if possible, NDPA should advocate for increased participation between APA and WCC, including items such as forwarding APA information that comes to WCC for disbursement, potentially partnering with WCC members on yearly conferences, and for WCC to operate more similarly to the New England APA Chapter, in which the APA chapter funds part of the individual state organizations and acts as a central point of contact. Currently, WCC collects dues from member states and then utilizes the funds in support of or directly disburses the collected funds to Western Planner. General membership survey respondents generally agreed with the concept of WCC acting as a central disbursement point for APA information and chapter funds.

Western Planner was the subject of much discussion during the strategic planning series and associated board meetings. For a period of time, NDPA contributed \$2,500 per year, but the board determined that this was unsustainable given that it amounted to approximately 50% of NDPA's annual budget revenues. The board noted that WP membership includes: co-hosting/assisting with a WP/NDPA conference once every 10 years, hosted job postings on WP website, newsletters, and assistance with internal NDPA conferences, if requested. The board and strategic planning group reaffirmed that participation in WP conferences, content generation, etc. is important to NDPA.

Further, the NDPA board and strategic planning session participants evaluated several other organizations that NDPA frequently or commonly interacts with in an effort to identify opportunities for further collaboration. Several were identified as primary versus secondary, with all of them being important and valuable, but due to limited resources related to member volunteers, building relationships with all organizations equally is not possible.

NDPA's other relationships are primarily with: North Dakota League of Cities, North Dakota Association of Counties, and the Department of Commerce. NDPA's secondary relationships include ND Township Officer's Association, other Vision West, Surveyor's Association, and other Regional Planning Associations.



PRIMARY



SECONDARY



Planning Focused

Planning Related

Goals & Objectives

Goal #1: Continue Advocating for NDPA with Associated Planning Organizations

Objective #1: Annually evaluate financial and other contributions relative to the benefits received from Western Planner and any other organization which receives funds from NDPA.

Objective #2: Continue to push for reform of Western Central Chapter to provide the services and benefits paid for by American Planning Association dues-paying members.

Objective #3: Meet, at a minimum, annually with Western Central Chapter fellow organizations WyoPass and SDPA

Objective #4: Evaluate NDPA bylaws mandating interconnection between certain organizations and make necessary changes following, or in conjunction with, Western Central Chapter bylaw amendment process.

Goal #2: Generate Quarterly Webinars

Objective #1: Annually identify and pursue opportunities for collaboration, participation, and overall networking with North Dakota League of Cities, North Dakota Association of Counties, and the Department of Commerce.

Objective #2: Share information on educational opportunities, NDPA position papers, and any other information that may be of interest or relevance to NDPA's primary non-planning organizations.

Objective #3: Coordinate closely, prior to and during, each legislative biennium to ensure broad representation and project solidarity





FINANCE

The NDPA maintains a healthy reserve of approximately \$50,000 that has accumulated over time. Annually, revenues range between five and ten-thousand dollars, with a small percentage of that amount rolling into reserves each year. Revenues are generated from two primary sources - conferences and membership dues. Expenses include website maintenance, Western Planner fees, and other technologies such as programs that facilitate online payments, webinars and virtual meetings, membership tracking, and email distribution lists. Conferences, when held, generally dominate the respective year's budget expenses, although revenues generated by the conference cover associated expenses at a minimum.

Until recently, budgets were fairly consistent between years. However, in 2023 it was identified that the organization did not maintain a non-profit status and that taxes had not been paid, or at least filed, for some time in the past. A significant effort and cost has been put into rectifying this error in 2023. While this continues to be resolved and the possibility of additional unknown expenses exist related to this correction, fiscal conservancy must be applied.

In addition, the present board understands the limitations of a strictly volunteer organization and has dedicated additional funds, at least temporarily, toward improved and efficient technologies to support efforts and reduce the number of individuals relied upon at any one time.

Goals & Objectives

Goal #1: Organize and Optimize NDPA Finances

Objective #1: Resolve and maintain non-profit status and current and historical tax filings.

Objective #2: The Treasurer should work to create and maintain walk-throughs and guidance for future members to better understand the nuance of responsibilities of the elected role within the organization.

Objective #3: Explore investment opportunities for a percentage of cash reserves that would accumulate interest annually similar to some other non-profit organizations.

