



Strategic Action Plan

October 2021

Report prepared by:

Jennifer Horn-Frasier
Bluebird Sky, LLC
Jennifer@BluebirdSkySolutions.com
319.936.0831







CORE IDENTITY ELEMENTS: A DECISION-MAKING FRAMEWORK

The **mission** of an organization is why the organization exists, its reason for existence. An organization's **core values** summarize how the organization behaves, the means by which it does its work. And the **future vision** of an organization is a statement of where it is going, the reality it is working to bring into existence by a defined point in the future.

Taken together, mission + core values + vision create a decision-making framework guiding what the organization chooses to do and how—what to say “yes” to and what to say “no” to. Therefore, it is critical to determine and to clearly articulate these three elements.

There was not opportunity to finalize these elements during the strategy workshops. But using the input from the discussion, along with the survey results, it is possible to articulate solid draft versions for discussion. The discussion about these elements should continue in the near future in order to finalize them and have in place a guide for the planning and activity for the coming years.

DRAFT Mission (why the NLCP exists): The North Liberty Community Pantry engages the community in sharing resources to feed, clothe, and support the well-being of one another.

DRAFT Core Values (how the NLCP behaves):

Community: Building connection and collaboration among people and organizations

Compassion: Responding to those in need with care and generosity

Health: Offering resources to support the well-being of the whole person

Respect: Treating all with dignity

Welcoming: Helping all who are connected with the Pantry feel at home

Future Vision (what the NLCP is working to bring to life in the future):

The group developed a two-tier vision for the future. The discussion about the future vision was guided by this **framing question**:

Imagine that in 2030 the North Liberty Community Pantry is the hub of a social services network that collaboratively supports our neighbors in need. What does that look like?





In answer, the NLCP team developed both a long-term and a short-term vision. The NLCP will work to bring this **long-term vision** to life:

By 2030, every North Liberty household will have a connection with the Pantry, and the North Liberty Community Pantry will be the leader in meeting residents' basic needs and in working to eliminate hunger in our community.

As a necessary bridge to the long-term vision, the NLCP established this **short-term vision**:

By 2024, the NLCP will be the community leader in understanding the basic food, clothing, and well-being needs of North Liberty residents and will have established the staff, volunteer base, and space needed to build its capacity to lead the community in more fully meeting those needs by 2030.

The NLCP recognizes that an individual's or family's needs vary over time. In fact, it is the deep desire of the NLCP to help create a reality in which people who once needed and benefitted from receiving the services provided by the Pantry will reach a point of well-being such that they are then able to benefit from helping to provide such services to others. Thus, these statements of future vision strive to encompass the community as a whole, rather than to divide the community into two groups: those offering help and those receiving help. They also recognize that those who receive support from the Pantry also very often have resources to share with others—time, skills, and more—and that having opportunities to contribute as each of us is able is validating and beneficial to all.

PRIORITIES

The 2017 strategic plan laid out the following five goals:

- Goal 1: Meet our service area's needs for food, clothing, and personal care essentials.
- Goal 2: Foster equitable opportunities among neighbors for engagement.
- Goal 3: Be the path in the community towards improved quality of life.
- Goal 4: Be a sustainable community organization.
- Goal 5: Promote healthy food choices.

Tremendous progress has been made toward achieving these goals since 2017. Goals 1, 2, 4, and 5 are, in many ways, states that must be maintained. They are fundamental to the NLCP and must simply remain part of its standard operation. Goal 3 has also been addressed significantly since 2017, but there is still potential for additional progress in this area.

As the NLCP team reviewed achievements of the past several years, reflected on the Framing Question, and explored ideas for building its future, three themes emerged as Priorities.

- **Expansion.** This priority includes supporting a larger number of people and more fully meeting basic needs. The implications of this priority include a need for increased physical space, staffing, volunteers, and resources to offer to those in need. It also suggests opportunities to innovate regarding how the NLCP connects with those it serves, including, for instance, a





“distributed” model with locations throughout the community or using technology to improve how those in need can be supported.

- **Community building.** The NLCP mission is about serving at the heart of the community. This priority focuses on being the community leader or hub for addressing the basic needs of North Liberty residents. Doing so involves connecting all households to the Pantry in some way; fostering collaboration among individuals and organizations across the community; and welcoming diversity in all aspects of the Pantry’s operation, from products provided to board representation. The Pantry aims to create a community whose members are actively engaged in mutual support of one another.
- **Caring for the whole person.** A core value of the NLCP is respect, treating all with dignity. This value acknowledges the worth of all facets of our fellow human beings and suggests that, while the mission of the Pantry focuses on food and clothing, it also supports people in meeting the full range of basic needs.

AREAS OF WORK

Through the process of discussing these priorities, the group identified four key Areas of Work viewed to be most important for bringing the future vision to life. These four Areas of Work form the basis of the new Strategic Action Plan. Furthermore, the group has sequenced the four Areas of Work into two phases, with Space and People being addressed in the first phase, and Community Outreach and Understanding Community Needs being addressed in the second phase.

- 1) **Space:** Given that most of the ideas and dreams for the NLCP bump up against a space-related challenge or barrier, this is a critical area to address. Everything from staffing to products and services offered involves space-related considerations. A strategic action team has been formed to address this topic, which will likely take two to three years.
- 2) **People:** The pandemic has created special challenges for both staffing and volunteer management. Having challenges rise up in such a pronounced way creates an opportunity to examine at a deep level how to approach both of these people-oriented areas. A strategic action team has been formed to address this topic, as well, and among its first tasks will be to look at strengthening HR practices and organizational structure, and to look at options for building up the volunteer pool and schedule.
- 3) **Community Outreach:** This focus area will be part of Phase 2, and it will be focused on making connections between the NCLP and every household in the community, as well as on relationship building with other organizations.
- 4) **Understanding Community Needs:** Also part of Phase 2, this focus area will be the means by which the NLCP develops a clear understanding of the basic needs across the community and translates this data and insight into programming and other initiatives for the Pantry.





SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Who Are We? [2021 mission] "North Liberty Community Pantry exists to engage our community in feeding, clothing and connecting our neighbors to resources and services."
 Our values are * Community * Compassion * Health * Respect * Welcoming

Where Are We Going? **By 2024:** The NLCP will be the community leader in understanding the basic food, clothing, and well-being needs of North Liberty residents and will have established the staff, volunteer base, and space needed to build its capacity to lead the community in more fully meeting those needs by 2030.

By 2030: Every North Liberty household will have a connection with the Pantry, and the North Liberty Community Pantry will be the leader in meeting residents’ basic needs and in working to eliminate hunger in our community.

How Will We Get There? Prioritizing *expansion, community building, and caring for the whole person*, we will focus on four Areas of Work.

Area of Work	Responsible Committee	Strategic Outcome	Metrics to Gauge Our Progress
Space (Phase 1)	Building Committee	The NLCP will have sufficient and appropriate space to support the achievement of the 2030 vision. There will be appropriate space for the staff, volunteers, inventory, and programs. The space will allow for flexibility to adapt to the changing needs of the community.	The Action Team will determine specific metrics related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target square footage • How space will be obtained
People (Phase 1)	Executive Committee (staff) & Volunteer Support Committee (volunteers)	Staff size and volunteer pool size will increase. Staff roles will be clearly defined, benefits will be made more competitive, and staff retention and career path opportunities will improve. Volunteer participation and retention will also improve.	The Action Team will determine specific metrics related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational structure • HR policies • Staff and volunteer retention
Community Outreach (Phase 2)	Fundraising/Marketing Committee	Establish and nurture connections between the NLCP and every household in the community. Develop new and deeper relationships with other organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every household in North Liberty will have a connection to the Pantry.
Understanding Community Needs (Phase 2)	Operations Committee	Develop a clear understanding of the basic needs across the community, and translate this data and insight into programming and other initiatives for the Pantry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking system for key data points to identify needs • Services addressing top needs



BRINGING THE FUTURE VISION TO LIFE

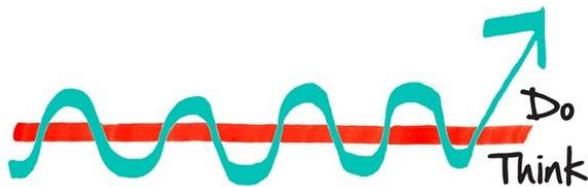
Strategic Doing

NLCP leadership has chosen to implement this strategic action plan using the principles of Strategic Doing. This is a methodology designed to help people and networks form agile collaborations quickly. It brings together people who share a desire to address an issue, uncovers the resources represented by the people around the table, explores how those resources might be creatively used and combined to address the issue, and establishes a discipline for taking action.

It is important to point out that traditional strategic planning may be visually represented this way:



In contrast, Strategic Doing may be visually depicted like this:



In other words, traditional strategic planning typically is implemented only after a long period of planning, and it does not easily—if at all—adapt to changing conditions or learning that takes place in the implementation. On the other hand, Strategic Doing is designed to ensure that all participants share a clear idea of where the group is headed, and then provides a structure in which to plan, take smaller action, learn from the results, adjust as needed, plan, and take the next action. It is an iterative process designed both to get to results more quickly and to better manage risk by allowing the organization to remain responsive and agile.

The Beginning: Bringing the Future Vision into Focus

The initial work of developing a shared vision of the future that the NLCP will now work to bring to life is done. Imagining this future vision is guided by the question: Imagine that in 2030 the North Liberty Community Pantry is the hub of a social services network that collaboratively supports our neighbors in need. What does that look like?

The NLCP has answered this question in two steps. First, the shorter-term vision is this: By 2024, the NLCP will be the community leader in understanding the basic food, clothing, and well-being needs of North Liberty residents and will have established the staff, volunteer base, and space needed to build its capacity to lead the community in more fully meeting those needs by 2030.

By the time the NLCP has brought this part of the future vision to life in 2024, the organization will be well positioned to re-evaluate and, if warranted, affirm that the longer-term vision remains appropriate:





By 2030, every North Liberty household will have a connection with the Pantry, and the North Liberty Community Pantry will be the leader in meeting residents' basic needs and in working to eliminate hunger in our community.

Taking Action

The future vision will be brought to life with critical support and effort of Strategic Action Teams. The two teams supporting Phase 1 of the action plan are Space (expansion) and People (staff and volunteers).

Phase 2 will begin once sufficient progress has been made on Phase 1 and once the Pantry has capacity to begin this work. At that time, Strategic Action Teams will be formed for Community Outreach and for Understanding Community Needs.

The idea of “doing the doable” guides this work. Teams will work together to identify what *can* be done to move in the direction of the vision and will consistently take small steps that, over time, add up to result in the big impact of achieving the goals. The general process the teams will follow is this:

- 1) Clarify the **strategic outcome** the team is working toward, and define three to five key metrics to use to measure progress. When thinking about the strategic outcome, envision what people will see and feel when the strategic outcome is achieved, as well as how their lives will be different.
- 2) Engage in a series of **Pathfinder Projects**. These are smaller projects that can be completed in 2 to 4 months. These projects test ideas for working toward the strategic outcome, and they build upon one another. Once one Pathfinder Project is completed, the team identifies the next logical project, repeating the process until the overarching strategic outcome is achieved.
- 3) The teams meet approximately every 30 days (these meetings may be referred to as “**30/30**” **meetings**—they review what has been done and learned from the past 30 days, and they look ahead and plan action for the next 30 days). The agenda for 30/30 meetings includes the following (notes templates are included in the appendices of this report):
 - Set the date and time for the next meeting and determine who will serve in the role of team guide, note keeper, and “nudger” this time around
 - Review/refine the team’s overarching strategic outcome, including characteristics of success and metrics for measuring progress
 - Define or refine the current Pathfinder Project (small project to move the work toward the overarching strategic outcome), including interim milestones to track progress along the way
 - Look back at what each team member accomplished since the previous meeting and what has been learned related to the project in that time
 - Look forward to what must happen next and have each team member specifically commit to approximately an hour’s worth of effort before the next meeting

Coordinating the Action

Because the work of any given Strategic Action Team will affect the work of the others, and because it is critically important for the entire organization to continuously evaluate progress and make sure there is





one shared vision for the future, it is important to communicate frequently and clearly. The following two recommendations support this end:

- 1) **Transparency in Communication and Documentation:** Establish systems for storing and sharing documentation such that they are easily accessed and used by all, including people who join the work in the months and years to come. Tools such as Google Drive or Basecamp may be useful for this purpose. Be sure to teach everyone how to use the tools, and encourage reluctant adopters by celebrating productive use of them.
- 2) **Regular Alignment Checks:** Review all team actions on a quarterly basis.
 - Consider progress toward the future vision
 - Track the degree to which key metrics are being met
 - Reflect on what has been learned through the activities of the past quarter
 - Evaluate whether changes in goals or plans are needed for the next quarter, either based on recent learning or on changing circumstances.

ONWARD

The North Liberty Community Pantry is in a terrific position to enter a successful period of growth and expansion in the years to come, despite the extreme and unforeseen challenges of the past two years. The work done in the fall of 2021 to develop a strategic action plan has already started to turn into action, which also bodes very well for the future of the Pantry.

The challenge now will be to maintain the energy and momentum that has started. One of the most important tools for doing this is the discipline of the Strategic Action Teams in using 30/30 meetings to define and execute pathfinder projects that incrementally move the organization in the direction of the future that has been collectively envisioned.

Doing the doable.

Starting small to go big.

Personally committing to and following through on small, regular actions.

Inviting others to contribute to the work as they can.

Clearly documenting and communicating.

Learning from what's been tried.

Regularly evaluating progress and adjusting the path accordingly.

These are the practices that will help the NLCP navigate the uncertain, changing world and allow it to continue to fulfill its mission, regardless of the bumps in the road. The future is bright!



