

Just Neighbors

Strategic Plan 2020-2024

Background

Just Neighbors Ministry (JN) began in 1996 as a tax-exempt organization to serve and support the immigrant community in Northern Virginia. Just Neighbors' Board and staff gathered in October 2020 to discuss strategic priorities for the next 4 years. This document, emerging from those conversations, serves as the strategic plan by which JN will fulfill its mission throughout that period.

Mission

The mission of Just Neighbors is:

To provide high-quality immigration legal services to low-income immigrants, asylees and refugees in Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia; and, to build community among clients, staff, volunteers and the larger society through education, advocacy, and volunteerism.

This mission emphasizes our primary purpose of providing high-quality direct legal services and acknowledges our secondary focus on educating the community on immigration issues, advocating alongside our clients, and building community through the engagement of volunteers. This statement also reflects the new geographic boundaries to include Maryland, Washington, DC, and all of Virginia (not just Northern Virginia).

The specification of low-income specifically identifies those who are below 200 percent of poverty level as established by the federal guidelines. We focus primarily on humanitarian cases. Our clients are among the most vulnerable in our society, not only because of financial limitations or their ability to obtain legal representation, but also because most have experienced co-occurring vulnerabilities: domestic or other violence, complex trauma, minimal education, homelessness, disability, age, and youth. These factors help us identify priority cases within our capacity constraints. We build community by providing enriching opportunities through volunteer interaction with clients. Both our volunteers and clients come from different nationalities, faith traditions, and have unique life experiences. One-on-one interactions help break down assumptions about cultural differences and support greater awareness, understanding, and empathy. We also seek to educate the public on immigration law and how it impacts our clients and the entire community. We advocate to the community and elected officials on issues that directly impact the immigrant community.

Vision

The vision of Just Neighbors is that all immigrants in Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia are able to live with dignity and full membership in the community. To do this, we seek to increase our capacity to serve more clients by expanding our visibility in our footprint, growing sustainable funding sources, increasing the size of our staff and volunteer forces, and continuing to strengthen our infrastructure.

Values

- **Welcoming Environment:** Just Neighbors maintains an environment in which clients are treated with respect and compassion while ensuring confidentiality and safety.
- **Inclusivity:** We serve clients regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, ideology, gender, or sexual orientation. We strive for diversity among our board, staff, and volunteers.
- **High-quality Service:** We are committed to providing high-quality, professional immigration legal services to every client.
- **Collaborative Organization:** We build partnerships with organizations across our footprint and network to learn from one another and to meet the needs of our clients most effectively.

Goals

We aim to “serve more clients,” that is, to help more low-income immigrants successfully apply for immigration status with excellent legal support and a culture that is welcoming and inclusive. We strive for a work environment for staff and volunteers that is supportive and fulfilling.

More specifically, we have adopted the following four key strategic goals/objectives:

1. Implement organization best practices to deliver high-quality legal services to low-income immigrants:

We commit to meet and exceed organization standards of excellence as established by National Justice For Our Neighbors by:

- Generating new and sustainable funds to grow the organization by building the donor base and obtaining more grant funding from both private foundations and government agencies, especially those located in our expanded footprint. Managing appropriate workloads for both staff and attorneys. For the attorneys, this involves balancing the number of clients and types of cases assigned with experience, expertise, and outreach commitments. On the administrative side, this equates to matching the administrative and development support systems and workload to the increasing volume of legal

work, while at that same time ensuring that the organizational structure provides appropriate controls and opportunities for career growth.

- Building relationships with communities and stakeholders. While well established in Northern Virginia, it is critical to build awareness of our work and partnerships to serve clients across the broader Maryland and Virginia footprints. Fellow immigration legal service providers, other social service providers – particularly those serving the immigrant community, local/county governments, elected officials, and faith communities, are essential in building trust among the client community and establishing opportunities for funding the work.
- Ensuring attorney access to training and mentoring resources. As the staff grows, spans of control for supervision, subject matter expertise, mentoring resources and continuing education are necessary to ensure that each attorney is equipped with the tools and knowledge resources necessary to maintain the excellent quality for which we are known.
- Assessing our programmatic capabilities (client need vs. JN capacity). We will constantly assess the types of cases for which clients are seeking assistance and adjust our response to reflect changes in the immigration policy environment or in the availability of services from other providers, while maintaining commitment to grantors.
- Recruiting and training volunteers, both attorney and non-attorney, across the footprint. Volunteers are essential to the success of our work and especially impact our capacity. Volunteer training needs to be constantly assessed to ensure that the level of work quality and adherence to our values are maintained.
- Establishing pro-bono programs where appropriate. Historically, Just Neighbors has been more oriented towards the use of dedicated, in-office volunteer attorneys. As the footprint has expanded, it may be more effective to implement a pro bono model in parts of the footprint that are further removed from our local offices.
- Nurturing the organizational culture. Staff members stay and volunteers return (sometimes as staff) because of the organizational culture of Just Neighbors. As the organization grows, it is critical that the things that make Just Neighbors a great place to work and volunteer are if possible, or modified if necessary, with an eye toward maintaining an inclusive, collaborative, and life-giving environment. (Maintaining the practices of daily lunching together (post-COVID-19), yoga sessions, and other morale boosting and stress reducing activities.)
- Assessing and modifying the staffing structure to support the growth of the team. As the staff continues to grow, creating some new managing roles will provide career growth opportunities for staff members and ensure manageable spans of control while maintaining relatively flat structure.

Targets:

	2021	2022	2023	2024
# of clients*	800	850	925	1000
Revenue	\$1.13 million	\$1.4 million	\$1.6 million	\$1.8 million
New attorneys	1	1	1	1
New volunteers	25	25	25	25
Volunteer attorneys/pro bono	Tbd	Tbd	Tbd	Tbd

*client numbers could fluctuate dramatically with programs like DACA. These targets are for sustained number of clients served.

2. Be a fully inclusive organization that creates a welcoming environment:

Just Neighbors will strive to achieve full inclusiveness through: 1) the assessment of our policies and practices, 2) the continuing education of our board, staff and volunteers, and 3) the involvement of our clients and immigrants in the community. We recognize that every individual connected to the organization must be willing to be vulnerable and open to working to achieve systemic change. This will require us to:

- View all internal/external efforts through an equity lens. Hiring, promotions, and board membership as well as personnel policies will need to be assessed through a tool that will ensure inclusion of marginalized populations.
- Be advocates for an inclusive society for immigrants, especially by using our platform to amplify immigrant voices and advocacy whenever possible. Our community education and advocacy work must include focus on the contributions of immigrants to all aspects of society and work to address issues of exclusion (such as stimulus packages) that intentionally impact the immigrant community.
- Engage board, staff, and volunteers in identifying personal and organizational inequities. Individually and collectively, we commit to a continual self-assessment of our own personal biases, how it impacts our work, relationships, and policies.
- Listen to stakeholders. We will survey our stakeholders to assess our effectiveness at being inclusive and eliminating racial inequities. This includes, but is not limited to, clients, donors, partner organizations, staff, board, and volunteers.

Targets:

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Equity training for board and staff	100%	100%	100%	100%
Equity committee will develop operational definitions of assessing equity lens	✓			
Increase representation in diversity/equity categories in leadership, board, and staff	✓	✓	✓	✓
Volunteer training incorporating equity	✓	✓	✓	✓
Evaluate staff and board on racial sensitivity	✓	✓	✓	✓
Annual stakeholder survey	✓	✓	✓	✓
Establish mediation process for concerns	✓			
Annual review and update of personnel policies to include inclusivity	✓	✓	✓	✓
Include equity effort update in annual report	✓	✓	✓	✓

3. Accelerate outreach and build partnerships:

Just Neighbors is well known among the client population and a becoming more-well known among social services, funders, and donors. In our expansion areas, we have significantly less recognition among the stakeholder population. As a result, it is critical to establish relationships in the new footprint as quickly as possible. This will require us to:

- Seek out key individuals and organizations within the new footprint that have already built trust within the client community. With assurance from these groups, potential clients (many of whom have been victimized by fraudulent resources) are more likely to trust us.
- Identify and connect with strategic partners that provide key wrap-around services that are needed by clients, platforms for working on advocacy issues in the new footprint, and revenue opportunities (foundations, government grants, corporate donors, faith

communities and individual supporters). For many clients, their needs extend well beyond immigration status. Helping clients navigate to other resources addresses many client concerns that may even interfere with their ability to do the work needed to obtain legal status.

- Maintain and continue to grow relationships in Northern Virginia to help serve more clients in NOVA and since they sometimes overlap across the DC metro area and may also be connected to providers in other parts of the footprint.
- Implement an advocacy strategy that builds on lessons from the two-year Justice and Advocacy fellowship, identifying board, staff, and volunteer leaders for various actions.
- Build and implement a strategic volunteer engagement plan and training for all volunteers. Volunteers continue to be a key element to our success. Engaging volunteers throughout the footprint to help with outreach, client services, and fundraising is essential to our success. A comprehensive training process for volunteers to equip them for these roles will be crucial.

Targets:

	2021	2022	2023	2024
3-5 new significant grantors for direct services in Maryland and rural areas	✓	✓	✓	✓
Strategic Advocacy Plan adopted and implemented	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increased client awareness and trust of Just Neighbors Services	✓ Measured through Telephone Intake	✓	✓	✓
Clients connected to other social services as needed	✓ Social worker intern	✓	✓	✓
10% increase in collaborative engagements	✓ Measured in outreach tracking	✓	✓	✓
Volunteer navigators assist 15% of clients in post-closed case connections	✓	✓	✓	✓

4. Grow financial resources to fulfill the vision and mission:

Just Neighbors has more than doubled its operating budget since 2016. While this has enabled growth in both the number of staff, and as a result, the number of clients served, the ability to serve more clients has been offset by the addition of more complicated case types (asylum, bond/removal defense) and much more complex application procedures established by the Trump administration. This has significantly increased the amount of time it takes to prepare a successful application. In addition, the processing time at USCIS has increased as well. Adding the impact of the pandemic and all-remote client interactions, it has been difficult to proportionately increase the number of clients served. With the overarching goal of serving more clients, the need to sustain and grow revenue is paramount. Critical success factors include:

- Developing and implementing a plan to increase, engage and commit large donors. This requires significant relationship building with current donors as well as seeking out new potential large donors.
- Promoting and growing the endowment to build long-term security. The endowment was established in 2020 with the intent to secure a base of funding that could generate income, even in the short-term, while building assets for the long-term protection against loss of grants or major economic downturns. Recognizing that most of the gifts to the endowment will be bequeaths, the greater benefits will be long-term.
- Obtaining strategic funding for outreach, advocacy, and partnerships. While our main fundraising focus is for direct legal services, much of the work that supports this legal work is achieved through outreach, advocacy, and partnerships. More grants need to include funding to support the outreach and advocacy work necessary to be able to do the legal work.
- Developing a plan to continue revenue growth for Northern Virginia. While there is relatively little opportunity for significant grant increase in Northern Virginia, there are substantial opportunities to expand the individual donor base as well as that of faith communities and businesses. Additionally, some granting agencies may be willing to either increase funding of existing grants or open the door for some new grants given the larger service areas.
- Identifying revenue opportunities in Maryland and DC as well as the entire Commonwealth of Virginia. DC/Maryland funding, in particular, must be diversified (approximately 80% comes from the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church) to include more grants from governments and foundations as well as donations from faith communities, businesses, and individual donors. In Virginia (outside immediate Northern Virginia), building relationships with foundations, local

governments, and state organizations that work for rural areas must be a top priority to fund the capacity needed to serve the broader Virginia footprint. Faith communities and individual donors will also play a significant part.

- Maintaining the diverse revenue streams. Just Neighbors has built a very good balance of government grants, private foundation grants, organizational funding (faith communities and businesses), and individual donors. This balance supports continuity of operations if one or more revenue streams are disrupted. It also means that most of our funds are unrestricted to jurisdiction or casetype giving us the flexibility to shift direction as client needs demand.

Targets:

	2021	2022	2023	2024
100% increase in number of accounts in the donor management system	+600	+600	+600	+600
5 new large donors each year (\$10k+)	5	5	5	5
Endowment target of \$3 million (real and bequest intent)	\$250,000 in funds \$500,000 in new bequest intent	\$100,000 in new funds \$500,000 in new bequest intent	\$100,000 in new funds \$750,000 in new bequest intent	\$100,000 in new funds \$1,000,000 in new bequest intent
Increase the number of individuals who designate Just Neighbors in their wills	5	5	5	5
3-5 new funding resources for outreach, advocacy, and partnerships	✓	✓	✓	✓