

GREATER EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Strategic Planning Summary Report

February 7, 2015

Facilitation and report prepared by
Deb Merlock, *President*



Greater Excellence in Education Foundation Strategic Plan February 7, 2015

Executive Summary

This plan outlines board identified goals and priorities for implementation during the 2015-2016 year. The plan provides a framework and action steps that the board of directors can use to successfully achieve the determined goals. Highlights of the plan include:

- ❖ Identification of Strength, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities
 - What are the challenges to the fiscal position of the organization
 - What external dynamics affect the foundation
 - What are the obstacles or opportunities to achieve the organizations goals
- ❖ Review of the strategic goals and priorities as determined at the planning session
 - **Board Development:** Evaluate board composition and leadership
 - **Image:** Develop and implement an effective communication plan that achieves awareness, recognition, and support of the Greater Excellence in Education Foundation throughout the community.
 - **Fund Development:** Establish a sustainable funding base by improving community relations, reaching our financial goals while fulfilling operational and programmatic objectives, and by maintaining a focus on the annual budget
- ❖ A 2015 – 2016 **action plan** to address the immediate goals to achieve long term goals of the organization.
- ❖ A proposed timeline to implement the 2015 – 2016 action plan.

Greater Excellence in Education Foundation was formed as a steering committee in 2003 and received its charitable status 10 years ago (December, 2004) with a defined target to serve the students of the Edgewood Feeder System. In 2010, the board redefined its mission to serve all students of Harford County Public Schools and renamed to the Greater Excellence in Education Foundation. The purpose of the rebranding was to sustain support for students being served by foundation programs who had moved to a different feeder system because of home challenges. The foundation is a 501c3 tax-exempt charitable organization. The foundation is governed by a volunteer board of directors. A strategic planning session was held on February 7, 2015 and attended by 7 board members and the president of the foundation.

The mission of the Greater Excellence in Education Foundation provides educational, social and fiscal resources to foster excellence in learning so all Harford County Public School students, with an emphasis on vulnerable students, can be successful in college and in life.

A strategic planning retreat was held on Saturday, February 07, 2015 and attended by education foundation staff and directors of the board as follows:

Warren Hamilton
Cynthia Hergenhan
Mark Wolkow

Janet Gomes
Terry Troy
Deb Merlock

Lisa Sundquist
Rob Sargent

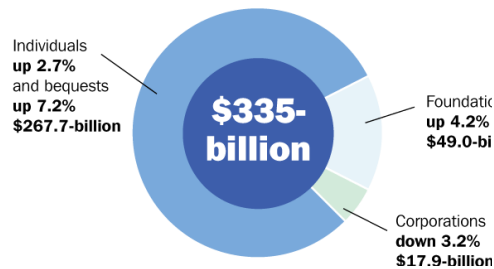
Excused: Doug Eder, Wayne Perry, Pat Skebeck, Laurie Slizewski, and Mary Austin

Environmental Analysis

Trends in Educational Philanthropy

Contributions from individuals, corporations and foundations totaled \$335-billion in 2013, a 3-percent increase over 2012, when adjusted for inflation, according to *Giving USA*, the yearbook of American philanthropy. In addition, the giving to public charities through the subcategory of education saw an increase of 7.4% after inflation.

2013 charitable giving
Total = \$336 billion



Individuals powered the 3 percent growth in giving last year, but foundations also contributed to the rise, according to *Giving USA*. Donations by living Americans grew 2.7 percent while contributions from bequests rose 7.2 percent; foundations increased their giving by 4.2 percent and corporate giving dropped 3.2 percent.

Among the fastest-growing beneficiaries were donor-advised funds. Donations to donor-advised funds increased by 7 percent, giving support for organizations to have endowments established for living and nonliving gifts.

It is important to note that most of the philanthropic dollars come from individuals. However, statistically, larger or “transformational” gifts are contributed by individuals as the organization matures. Considering the foundation redefined its mission in 2010, corporate contribution may provide the majority of the larger gifts as experienced for most young organizations and in the short term will provide the most giving power for the foundation.

Fundraising Activities and Resource Allocation

The foundation uses multiple channels to generate funding resources. An annual gala and Mardi Gras benefit are primary fundraisers. Grant writing and local government grants support programs. The funds are utilized for operating costs and a myriad of programs including leadership programs, Tools for Schools school supply program, Books in Hand summer reading skills and other programs to support student achievement.

Board Perceptions of the Greater Excellence in Education Foundation

Gaining insight and perceptions from board members are essential to effective planning. Online surveys were distributed to the board of directors in advance of the planning session. It should be noted that only 6 out of the 15 board members completed the survey. The following are highlights of the responses to those survey questions:

Board member responses (Percentages are based on the number of respondents)

- 84% feel the board understands the mission and purpose of the organization
- 84% feel the board is compliant with federal, state and local regulations
- 100% feel the board safeguards assets from misuse, waste, and embezzlement
- 33% feel the board participates in determining program strategies and long term priorities
- 67% feel the board ensures a realistic budget that maximizes resources
- 67% feel the board makes sure the organization has an overall fundraising strategy
- 83% feel the board regularly assesses whether the organization is achieving its purpose
- 67% feel the board members clearly understand their board responsibilities and fulfill them
- 67% feel the board has a clear understanding of the responsibilities of board members fundraising
- 17% feel the board actively recruits, orients, and trains new board members and removes those members who are not fulfilling their agreed on responsibilities
- 100% feel the board encourages and supports individuals to treat fellow board members with respect, trust, and understanding.
- 50% feel the board meetings are interesting, well run, and effective
- 67% feel the board has the necessary effective board leadership
- 100% feel they participate in raising adequate financial resources
- 84% feel they act as an ambassador to the community on behalf of the organization
- 100% feel they understand and fulfill governance and support responsibilities as a member of the board
- 100% feel they are knowledgeable about the organization's mission, programs and services
- 84% feel they come prepared to board and committee meetings and follow through on commitments
- 67% feel their colleagues are fulfilling their governance and support responsibilities to the organization.

[Note: a clear disparity of opinion exists between the results of the self-assessment and the SWOT analysis.]

STRATEGIC VISIONING

Strategic visioning is a process in which board members discuss past and present organizational issues, determine positive qualities and assets, identify future goals, design a plan for the organization, carry out a series of actions, and evaluate the outcomes. A strategic visioning process provides a framework to identify board core values and assets, describe overall goals, and determine specific objectives and strategies that assist with decision making. The process outlines what the foundation could be or should be in the short and long-term future.

Through collective dialogue and reflection, strategic visioning has the potential to lead to action by creating a “road map” to the future. After the board evaluated where we are, the board then conferred on where we should be.

These board statements reflect where the directors feel the organization should be at this point in time.

- Meet fiscal, budget and programmatic needs.
- Have a cash reserve, and be financially stable.
- Be a high performing board where all members are engaged.
- Messaging and communication entrenched so all stakeholders know what GEEF is.
- To be recognized district wide as the education foundation of Harford County Public Schools

[It is significant to note that in the analysis of where the board feels the organization should be at this moment in time, there was no mention of programs, nor measurable outcomes of the programs.]

Nonprofit boards have life cycles – they have beginnings, they grow, they mature. At each stage they have different needs and characteristics. To get the organization to where it should be, the board will have to move into the growth cycle. In order to grow, characteristics of a high-performing board must be present.

The following are characteristics of a high-performing board:

- The individual board members are engaged to “being all in”;
- The board practices effective governance, especially related to recruitment and reappointment;
- Board leadership succession is an integral part of the culture;
- Different perspectives are valued and groupthink is discouraged;
- There is a strong focus on performance, results and measures of success;
- There is constant communication to key stakeholders on the organization’s achievements;
- The board actively participates in fundraising;
- The board assesses and measures its own performance; and,
- The board holds the organization accountable as well as other board members.

SWOT Update

Strategic planning focuses in part on understanding the organization and its internal and external environment. An organization that engages in the strategic planning process has an improved understanding of its current situation and therefore, potential future. A SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats) analysis was conducted at the retreat. Below are the comments:

Strengths (Internal)

- Passion for education
- Family (stakeholder) support
- Foundation/district partnership
- Breadth of programs
- Mission focused
- Institutional knowledge

Weaknesses (Internal)

- Communication (marketing) to the community
- Lack of board member fundraising
- Inadequate staffing
- No dedicated grant writer
- Not being ambassadors in the community
- Board participation (not all involved)
- Insufficient board composition
- Lack of board leadership succession plan

Opportunities (External)

- Improve communications (outsource public relation/strategic communication (pro bono))
- Continue dialogue with Superintendent
- Evaluate efficiencies with program costs where appropriate
- Analyze board composition and engage high performing leaders for the board
- Increase committee composition and effectiveness

Threats (External)

- Insufficient fiscal responsibility
- Competitive market for donor funds
- Limited public awareness

Goals Derived From Prioritized Areas

The participants reviewed the key areas identified and agreed that some overlapped or could be combined under one heading. From the SWOT analysis, three broad areas were identified and goal statements developed for each. The following are the goals to be addressed in 2015-2016

Greater Excellence in Education Foundation 2015-2016 Strategic Goals and Objectives

Board Development

Goal Area 1: Evaluate board composition and leadership

Strategic Objectives:

- *Implement a board analysis to determine board assets based on skill and social capacity*
- *Assess the ongoing health and effectiveness of the board and make necessary changes*
- *Identify potential board members who can contribute effectively to board governance and the financial stability of the organization*
- *Implement a board leadership succession plan*

Image

Goal Area 2: Develop and implement an effective communication plan that achieves awareness, recognition, and support of the Greater Excellence in Education Foundation throughout the community.

Strategic Objectives:

- *Identify appropriate channel to outsource strategic communication to foundation stakeholders*
- *Develop communication plan*
- *Identify messaging strategy for each audience*
- *Identify and target marketing opportunities for the foundation*
- *Evaluate current marketing materials*

Fund Development

Goal Area 3: Establish a sustainable funding base by having better community relations, reaching our financial goals while fulfilling operational and programmatic objectives, and by maintaining a focus on the annual budget.

Strategic Objectives:

- *Create fund development plan to achieve the funding goals of the foundation*
- *Build realistic budget and utilize multiple funding strategies*
- *Reach funding goals*
- *Create an endowment for reliable source of income in perpetuity the organization can count on for annual distributions for its charitable work*

2015 – 2016 Action Plan

Goal Area 1	Objective	Who	Will Do What	By When	Evaluation Measure
Evaluate board composition and leadership	Implement a board analysis to determine board assets based on skill and social capacity				
	Assess the ongoing health and effectiveness of the board and make necessary changes				
	Identify potential board members who can contribute effectively to board governance and the financial stability of the organization				
	Implement a board leadership succession plan				

Goal Area 2	Objective	Who	Will Do What	By When	Evaluation Measure
Develop and implement an effective communication plan that achieves awareness, recognition, and support of the Greater Excellence in Education Foundation throughout the community.	Identify appropriate channel to outsource strategic communication to foundation stakeholders				
	Develop communication plan				
	Identify messaging strategy for each audience				
	Identify and target marketing opportunities for the foundation				
	Evaluate current marketing materials				

Goal Area 3	Objective	Who	Will Do What	By When	Evaluation Measure
Establish a sustainable funding base by having better community relations, reaching our financial goals while fulfilling operational and programmatic objectives, and by maintaining a focus on the annual budget.	Create fund development plan to achieve the funding goals of the foundation				
	Build realistic budget and utilize multiple funding strategies				
	Reach funding goals				
	Create an endowment for reliable source of income in perpetuity the organization can count on for annual distributions for its charitable work				