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NORTH DAKOTA STUDENT ASSOCIATION

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# 2023-2028 Strategic Plan





## Preface

Over five decades ago, student government leaders from across the state of North Dakota gathered because of two concerns that they shared. The first was that they felt that college administrators had too much power in the governance of their institutions, and the second was that they felt that the general student population was unable or unwilling to get involved in their own student governments. Together, they gathered in 1969 and formed the North Dakota Student Association with the purpose of addressing these issues as well as to facilitate a way for students to come to the table and advocate for themselves in the State Legislature and the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education. This will has been passed down from generation to generation of student leaders, inspiring the continuous drive for positive change in higher education.

Today, the North Dakota Student Association has grown to be a powerful advocate in the realm of Higher Education in North Dakota. Over the last several decades, we were successful in advocating to have Student Member on the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education, and the implementation of countless policies for the betterment of all students in North Dakota. This is only possible due to the collaboration and the selfless work of all student government leaders from across the state of North Dakota, uniting for a common cause, to represent the students of North Dakota.

Over our history, one of the ways that NDSA has maximized our effectiveness in advocating for all students is the implementation of the NDSA Strategic Plan. From generation to generation of student leaders, the NDSA Strategic Plan is a major embodiment of the NDSA's goals and potential to expand for the next generation of student leaders.

And so, on behalf of our generation of student leaders to you, I am honored to present the 2023-2028 NDSA Strategic Plan.

I would like to thank all of those who have spent countless hours writing, reviewing, and revising this Strategic Plan. Your time and effort towards developing this plan have been invaluable.



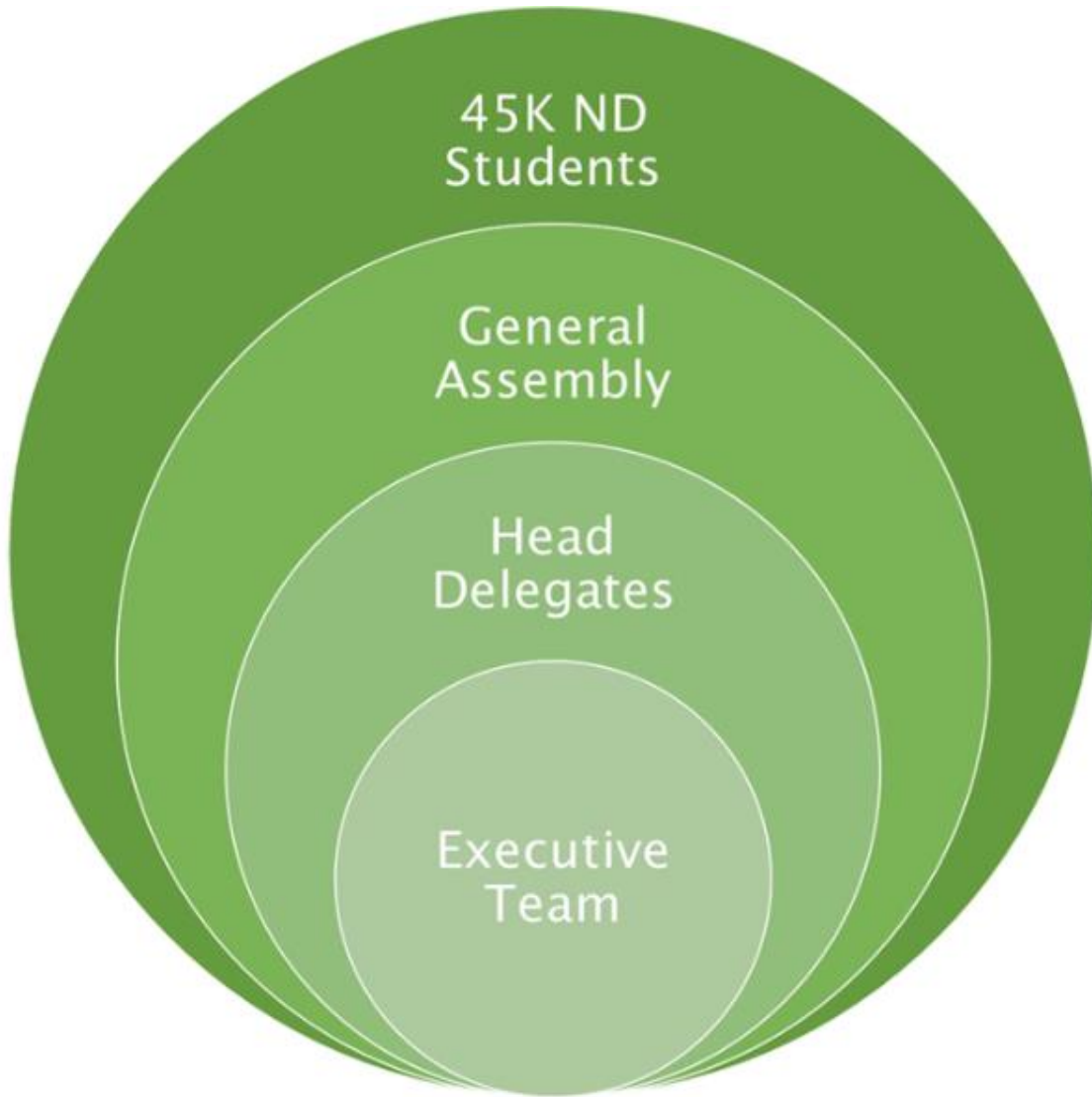
**In service,**  
**Christopher M. Scott,**  
**President of the General Assembly**  
**2022-2023 Executive Team**



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# ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

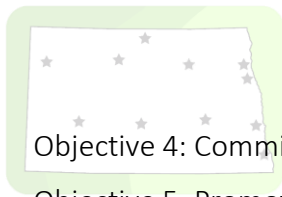
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## ABOUT NDSA

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On February 15, 1969, students from across North Dakota convened in Bismarck to adopt the first constitution for what would become the North Dakota Student Association (NDSA). While NDSA has evolved, its general purpose has remained the same: to connect and advocate for students' interests to statewide policymakers.

Today, NDSA represents the collective voice of over 45,000 public college and university students. As an organization funded by students with the singular interest of representing students, NDSA meets as a General Assembly monthly at its member institutions to discuss students and advance the common interests of North Dakota students. In addition, NDSA's General Assembly elects an Executive Team during the spring semester to administer the organization and represent the assembly to the State Board of Higher Education, state legislature, Governor's office, and University System.

### Plan Development Process

In pursuit of attaining long-term organizational sustainability and legitimacy, the North Dakota Student Association adopted a strategic plan on Saturday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023 during its monthly General Assembly meeting at North Dakota State University.

Development of the 2023-2028 Strategic Plan commenced in September 2022 with the creation and authorization of the Strategic Plan Taskforce. The Executive Team collected surveys regarding the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the organization filled out by delegates in each of the NDSA's committees. Additionally, the Taskforce conducted an extensive analysis of the internal and external issues, challenges, and implications facing the organization.

Intensive strategic planning meetings were held bi-weekly beginning November 2022 and concluding March 2023. The effort considered stakeholder feedback, reflections from General Assembly meetings in years past, the organization's previous strategic plan, and numerous discussions occurring within the Executive Team and taskforce members. The Taskforce desired two NDSA delegates to represent each institution respectively and intended to create a plan that catered to the domains NDSA works with the most: government, the University System, leadership and organizational development, and Student Government Associations.

NDSA's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan reaffirms the organization's purpose as a body representing students for the singular, dedicated interest of students.



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## VISION, MISSION, CORE VALUES

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**Vision:** The central vision and purpose of NDSA are to be The Voice of the Students. This broad vision recognizes that NDSA represents and speaks on behalf of all 45,000 students in the state, regardless of which public institutions they come from. NDSA collects and relays the concerns of students to changemakers in the higher education policy ecosystem.

**Mission:** The North Dakota Student Association (NDSA) advocates for all North Dakota University System students. NDSA provides opportunities for student engagement, enhancement of the University System, and student education about higher education policy. In addition, NDSA facilitates inter-campus collaboration and communication to ensure that diverse student interests are represented in formulating higher education policy.

### Core Values:

*Empowerment:* We create an environment that develops transformative leaders by giving them the skills to succeed in everyday endeavors. Our students will become the leaders of today and tomorrow.

*Transparency:* We practice honesty, openness, accountability, and integrity to ensure that the public and all stakeholders—internal and external—are informed of the intentions and actions of NDSA. We will be a model of transparent government to inspire ethical leadership.

*Inclusivity:* We amplify the voices of students from diverse viewpoints and backgrounds to secure their representation throughout the development of higher education policy.



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## SWOT ANALYSIS

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To shape the Student Association's strategic plan, the Executive Team completed an environment scan to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) affecting the organization. Data was collected via surveys administered to the Executive Team, past officers, and the General Assembly during its September North Dakota State University meeting. Additionally, the Executive Team expended significant time and energy in analyzing the issues, challenges, and implications facing the organization, which is reflected in the SWOT Analysis.

### Strengths

- NDSA is the only organization with the capacity and legitimacy to represent the voice of all NDUS students on the state level.
- The Governor's Office selects one of three students nominated by the NDSA General Assembly to serve as the Student Member of the SBHE, giving NDSA direct influence on the public governance of the NDUS.
- NDSA is a forum for educating students about the public policy issues of the day.
- NDSA membership includes insightful people who care about and want to impact higher education.
- Diverse membership allows for broad representation and the continuous inflow of new ideas.
- NDSA employs a sustainable funding model.
- Multiple years of growth, trust, and support creates a strong sense of legitimacy for NDSA as an organization.

### Weaknesses

- Lack of equal representation by institutions exists on the executive team.
- Lack of involvement from students who are not a member of their institutions' respective student government exists within the organization.
- Communication and collaboration among student leaders are challenging due to the geographical distribution of institutions.
- Lack of awareness exists among students not already involved with the NDSA.
- Institutions do not collaborate or communicate frequently outside of NDSA meetings.
- Institutions with unique and different characteristics create challenges for collaboration and advancement of students' needs.



- Numerous groups of students (i.e., graduate, international students, and other students, etc.) are not well represented within the General Assembly.
- Lack of attendance and inability to meet quorum.

## Opportunities

- Enhance the organization's strength as an advocacy group by promoting a more active General Assembly and executive teams.
- Provide a united front for higher education to state policymakers.
- Continuously receive more opportunities to participate in activities and collaborate with the University System and North Dakota state government.
- Foster leadership and professional development for students.
- Champion the student voice of today by adopting well-articulated positions on current issues facing students.

## Threats

- Dynamic political situations will impact higher education across North Dakota.
- Budgets related to higher education and its impact on the strength of NDSA can cause uncertainty.
- Lack of communication between institutions and a more persistent focus on internal affairs could result in fractures among the institutional delegations and internal strife.
- Communication within NDSA as an organization can be lackluster and leave many uninformed, create logistical problems, and harm transparency.
- External entities may seek NDSA's support on affairs not aligned with the organization's expressed mission statement, aims, and goals.
- One poor transition between executive teams would significantly undermine the organization's image and ability to provide quality leadership.



## Goal 1: Advocacy

NDSA's ability to influence advances the organization's vision as the voice of the students. Through public advocacy, NDSA exercises its ability to influence to support the concerns, needs, and issues facing all 45,000 students in North Dakota.

### Objective 1: Exert a political influence in state and legislative affairs.

Political developments at the state level wield a powerful impact on students' lives. Therefore, NDSA must practice its core value of advocacy by striving to influence the policymaking process to ensure the best interests of students remain the priority of government officials.

- Approve a Legislative Strategy during the fall semester preceding a legislative session.
- Host a Higher Education Social during the biennial legislative session to share the student perspective with policymakers.
- Attend state government meetings during the legislative and interim sessions.
- Publish an open letter to the state legislature in advance of the legislative session that communicates the legislative strategy.
- During legislative sessions, maintain a spreadsheet of all bills the NDSA pertaining to the interest of students in Higher Education.

### Objective 2: Foster a healthy relationship with the North Dakota University System.

Developing an intimate relationship with the NDUS allows NDSA to collaborate and pursue common objectives. The System Office works every day with higher education. Establishing rapport with the University System will enable NDSA to advance constructive changes to higher education policy.

- Invite NDUS staff to General Assembly meetings.
- Form NDSA task forces to advise and collaborate with the NDUS.
- Promote student representation on NDUS Councils.
- Attend meetings of the State Board of Higher Education.
- Attend meetings of the North Dakota Interim Higher Education Committee
- Advocate for student involvement with Envision 2030.



### **Objective 3: Partner with stakeholders to broaden NDSA's reach and amplify the student's voice.**

Partnering with stakeholders broadens NDSA's reach, amplifies the voice of the students by demonstrating widespread support for organizational goals and interests, and increases the credibility of NDSA by showing that other entities take the organization seriously.

- Maintain open lines of communication with college and university presidents and administrators.
- Build mutually beneficial relationships with state and local business leaders.
- Invite external stakeholders to NDSA meetings.

### **Objective 4: Build the capacity to be informed about and influence policymaking on the federal level.**

Advocacy on the federal level spreads NDSA's influence beyond North Dakota. This influence can be accomplished through partnerships with other student associations, meeting with national representatives, and creating task forces to track policy changes relevant to students on the federal level.

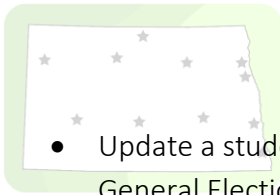
- Staff a task force responsible for being informed about discussions relating to higher education on the federal level and proposing action that NDSA can take.
- Organize an annual or biennial trip to Washington D.C. for student advocates to meet with federal representatives in session.

## **Goal 2: Empowerment**

NDSA devotes itself to providing students the tools and knowledge to use their voice for themselves and others. Students can transform the world of higher education by compiling, explaining, and sharing information. This coincides with NDSA's mission to provide opportunities for student engagement and enhance the University System as an empowered group.

### **Objective 1: Stress the importance of civic engagement.**

By stressing the importance of civic engagement, students will feel empowered to become informed advocates and voters about relevant issues. To achieve NDSA's mission of providing opportunities for student engagement, students must know how important it is to be involved in their communities and that their voice matters.



- Update a student voting guide explaining the steps required in voting in the North Dakota General Election.
- Invite guest speakers on civic engagement and public service.
- Generate a list of public service and civic leadership opportunities for students to pursue.

### **Objective 2: Connect students with opportunities to enhance their professional development.**

Nearly all NDSA delegates aim to move forward to some career requiring specialized knowledge but will still branch out in various areas to become multifaceted individuals. By providing the NDSA delegation with opportunities to grow professionally, they will gain the skills and expertise to succeed in their future endeavors.

- Support the reinstatement of an NDSA alumni organization to keep graduates connected to the organization and to enable professional networking.
- Design project-based Director positions for students to apply for to offer meaningful leadership experiences.
- Solicit requests from the General Assembly for specific presentation topics and guest speakers.
- Allow delegates to nominate students for selection as a “Delegate of the Month.”
- Embody a culture of professionalism that supports Executives, Directors, and other members of the General Assembly with producing professional-grade work applicable to their future careers.

### **Objective 3: Promote congeniality between institutions and delegations.**

When NDSA delegates are filled with respect and understanding for their peers, ideas may be shared more freely and frequently, which allows the assembly to work more productively. This further strengthens NDSA’s strong collaboration and community values and prevents conflict that would otherwise pollute the meeting space. The General Assembly cannot function to its total capacity without the input of each delegation.

- Cultivate intercollegiate friendships by organizing post-Friday meeting gatherings in the host community.
- The Executive Team should exemplify what a model delegate should look like and foster communication between institutions.
- Organize a formal icebreaker immediately before Friday’s General Assembly meetings.



- Foster a friendly meeting environment by incorporating teambuilding activities during NDSA committee meetings.

### Goal 3: Sustainability

The maintenance and improvement of the sustainability and operations of an organization are critical to its future success. Students also need access to an efficient organization to ensure their thoughts and opinions are heard. Therefore, NDSA must be sustainable and adequate to meet student needs, be the student's voice, and empower students to influence their respective institutions and the University System.

#### Objective 1: Ensure that General Assembly meetings are enjoyable and serve the needs of all delegates.

If students do not find any level of enjoyment in partaking in NDSA, then students will likely not return to the organization. Conversely, providing a meaningful experience will create an environment where students will want to return and invite other students. This would help increase and stabilize NDSA's attendance and membership.

- Implement governing structures that are efficient, transparent, equitable, and straightforward.
- Solicit feedback for improving monthly General Assembly meetings by distributing paper or digital surveys.
- Utilize one specific file-sharing system as a hub for all NDSA resources and documents.

#### Objective 2: Set consistent standards and deadlines for monthly General Assembly meetings.

Standards and deadlines provide a structure that enhances organizational legitimacy. In addition, these standards ensure delegates receive information on time so students can adequately prepare for meetings.

- Publish a preliminary meeting agenda two weeks before any General Assembly meeting.
- Publish a revised meeting agenda one week before any General Assembly meeting.
- Convene a Head Delegate meeting at least one week before any General Assembly meeting, as deemed necessary.
- Maintain a Hosting Guide that assists Head Delegates with hosting a General Assembly meeting.



### **Objective 3: Develop a curriculum to orient new members of NDSA.**

Properly onboarding new members to NDSA rapidly reduces the time required before they begin engaging with the organization. If new members do not feel comfortable with the organization, they could feel lost or isolated.

- Prepare workshops to teach topics including parliamentary procedure, resolution writing, and recruiting students for NDSA.
- Have a short breakout session during September's General Assembly that introduces new members to the organization.
- Develop a terminology guide that helps new members acclimate to NDSA.
- Encourage Head Delegates to brief new members about the inner workings of NDSA.

### **Objective 4: Commit to a strong transition between Executive Administrations.**

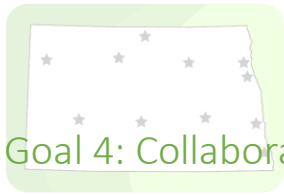
Strong transitions ensure that the work of one administration continues to blossom rather than being lost and forgotten. This step is especially critical if the organization intends to execute the strategic plan successfully.

- Require officers to submit structured transition documents midway through and at the end of their terms.
- Mandate that each Executive Team member has at least one meeting with their elected successor before the end of the academic year.
- Maintain an archive that serves as a collection site for NDSA documents that shall be transferred upon change of electronic platform.

### **Objective 5: Promote diversity within NDSA.**

Diversity within the General Assembly allows more viewpoints and experiences to be heard. This allows NDSA to satisfy diverse student interests and better represent the voice of all 45,000 students in North Dakota.

- Ensure that the NDUS Diversity Council continues to possess student representation.
- Empower the NDSA Executive Team to work with Head Delegates to develop an annual Diversity Action Plan to determine how online, graduate, minority, international, nontraditional, and other diverse student groups may be better represented within the voice of the students.
- Ensure that the NDSA is represented at the annual Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Conference.
- Create task forces to serve as empowered platforms in advancing the needs of underrepresented populations.



## Goal 4: Collaboration

Collaboration through NDSA is a critical tool that allows institutions and the Executive Team to work together and better represent the voice of the students. The organization's structure fulfills its mission and vision by creating a medium for representatives from North Dakota's 11 public institutions to come together and collectively represent and advocate for all 45,000 students.

### Objective 1: Empower the role of Head Delegates.

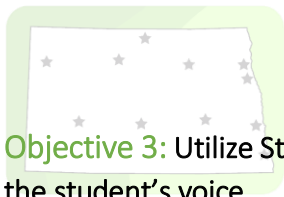
Empowering Head Delegates in NDSA allows them to promote the organization throughout their campus and be better leaders for their delegations, which benefits the General Assembly.

- Curate articles, data, and other vital information to distribute to Head Delegates for sharing with their constituents.
- Train Head Delegates as ambassadors of NDSA to their constituents so they can also prepare others to be ambassadors for students.
- Support Head Delegates by using NDSA to unite their voices with institutions with similar objectives.
- Provide instructions for seamless communication between Head Delegates and the Executive Team.

### Objective 2: Promote the relationship between NDSA and each of the NDUS institutions as a two-way partnership.

With the unique opportunity NDSA has, there must be a mutual cycle of meaningful information. Through the sharing of information with heavy sustenance, student government associations and their respective institutions can process the data and give the appropriate feedback to NDSA. Such feedback allows the organization to move forward with any given topic thanks to the hard work of those that help the information cycle.

- Have the Executive Team attend at least one Student Government meeting at each institution.
- Provide a "debriefing" document to each delegation following General Assembly meetings to highlight necessary actions taken.
- Conduct at least one campus visit to every institution each year, gathering input and feedback from staff, faculty, and students on the operations of the NDSA.



### **Objective 3:** Utilize Student Government Associations to promote the complete representation of the student's voice.

As an organization operating from a statewide, high-level perspective, it can be challenging to engage with students directly. Establishing working relationships with student governments supports NDSA's aim of directly impacting students.

- Encourage each institution to bring its full delegation size to every meeting, filling their delegation with at-large students as members.
- Promote the submission of resolutions to NDSA by Student Government Associations.
- Encourage student governments to actively promote and represent the presence of NDSA on their campuses.

### **Objective 4:** Build relations with other like-minded student-oriented entities.

As an organization, building relations with other entities increases the power to advocate for all parties involved. Establishing these relations helps create grounds for knowledge sharing of initiatives and ideas while maintaining a broader network of voices regarding policy.

- Actively seek out opportunities to collaborate with other state-wide organizations that deal with similar issues.
- Build a coalition with other State Student Associations to advance the common student interest.
- Form a relationship with the ND Student Cabinet and other K-12 entities to advance the interests of both organizations regarding education that affects both K-12 and Higher Education.

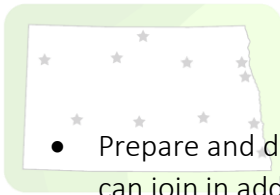
## **Goal 5: Awareness**

By increasing the public's awareness of NDSA, the organization can better represent and advocate for student interests and concerns. For students, the more they learn about NDSA, the more empowered they become to make changes that will shape higher education through participation in monthly meetings and insight into policies relating to their student experience. To be the voice of the students, NDSA should work to make stakeholders aware of our agency to expand our influence and recognition within the public sphere.

### **Objective 1:** Earn recognition by offering resources and services directly to the students.

Offering resources is critical to increasing awareness because it demonstrates how the organization provides value to its stakeholders.

- Prepare a student voting guide explaining the steps required in voting in the North Dakota General Election.



- Prepare and disperse resources for institutions to publicize NDSA as an organization they can join in addition to Student Government.
- Generate a list of public service and civic leadership opportunities for students to pursue.

### Objective 2: Share NDSA's achievements with relevant stakeholders.

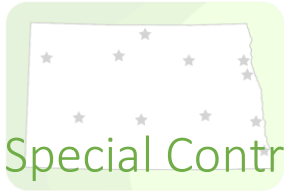
NDSA misses an opportunity to spread its reach whenever it fails to share its successes. Publicizing NDSA's triumphs allows relevant stakeholders to stay up to date, which builds a level of confidence in the effectiveness of the organization.

- Publish an email newsletter to be distributed to students following monthly General Assembly meetings.
- Create an annual report showcasing the NDSA's accomplishments from the year prior to be dispersed to the NDUS as a whole.
- Send a monthly update via email to each of the campus President's regarding NDSA activities.
- Give an annual State of NDSA Address.

### Objective 3: Market NDSA in the digital sphere and at NDUS institutions.

Using social media and the internet, NDSA can expand its awareness to reach as many students as possible. These tools allow students to learn about NDSA and discover resources to improve their experience. NDSA should maintain an active presence on social media platforms and its website to keep students and stakeholders informed.

- Post content to NDSA's social media pages on a regularly defined basis.
- Produce educational content relating to higher education.
- Maintain a professional-grade website with content accessible to the public.
- Hand out a NDSA poster annually to be placed around NDUS institutions.
- Ensure that the NDSA is as transparent as possible in all marketing and promotional platforms.



## Special Contributors

- Strategic Plan Taskforce Chair Gina Burtness
- Strategic Plan Taskforce Vice Chair Jason Fincel
- Strategic Plan Taskforce Secretary Celeste McCash

