

GREATER GRAND FORKS
**Young
Professionals**



Three-Year Strategic Plan

2023-2026

Authored on August 17, 2022 by:

Sam Jenson (Executive Director 2021- present)
Kevin Hatcher (President 2022- 2022)
Adrian Cummings (Vice President 2022-2022)
Maggie Brockling (Member at Large 2020-2022)
Alicia Fadley (Community Involvement 2022-2023)
Meghann Edwards (Social Events 2022-2022)
Abigayle Lindgren (Internal Advisor 2022- 2023)
Svea Benefield (Secretary 2022- 2023)

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Executive Summary:

In 2022, the Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals (GGFYP) embarked on a strategic planning process. The purpose of creating a strategic plan is to identify areas where the organization can improve, and to come up with solutions for these gaps. The Board of Directors formed a strategic planning committee that was tasked with the responsibility of collecting data, reviewing the organizations mission statement, and building a strategic plan to help guide the organization. An organization like GGFYP has consistent turnover with board member serving 2-3 year terms, so it was important for the committee to implement processes that allow the organization to run efficiently even during times of major turnover. Giving the organization the ability to continue operating during annual turnover will allow GGFYP to avoid starting from scratch each year.

Introduction:

Next Generation Consulting was contracted by the Launch Grand Forks Committee in 2008, and it was discovered that the Greater Grand Forks region could lose up to \$160 million over a four-year period due to the flight of younger professionals. Henceforth, the Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals (GGFYP) was established in 2009 in order to get young professionals more connected to Grand Forks/East Grand Forks. Fast forward 13 years and the organization has survived economic recessions, executive turnover, and a global pandemic. GGFYP didn't just survive these troublesome times, they thrived during them! The Greater Grand Forks businesses supported GGFYP through difficult times because of the value GGFYP provides the community.

Today, the organization is a well-oiled machine that hosts 36 events on an annual basis. The events are hosted by GGFYP's three committees: Social Events, Community Involvement, and Professional Development. Each of these committees is led by their respective chairs, who serve two-year terms on the GGFYP Board of Directors, and the monthly events are organized by individuals who hold general membership.

In 2022, the Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals decided to create a strategic plan to evaluate the organization. The board of directors created an internal strategic planning committee which was responsible for building an organizational strategic plan. The internal committee, chaired by board president Kevin Hatcher, collected data from GGFYP

members, advisory board members, and conducted a board of director retreat. The goal of the committee was to establish an identity for the organization and put in place systems that help the organization run more efficiently.

Organizational Mission and Vision:

The name "young professionals" (YP) was heavily scrutinized throughout the strategic planning process. The concept of "young professionals" was consistently brought up during planning conversations and was discussed during the focus group portion of data collection. Both of the terms in the organization's name can be found by some to be exclusionary which could limit prospective member interest. The term "young" could be seen as restrictive for those who are 40 or older. Our bylaws define a YP as an individual who is 20-40 years old. With this information, we have made a concerted effort to change how we think of the word "young". The general consensus for keeping the term "young" is the association with one's career level. For instance, a 55-year-old entering into a new career phase would be considered a young professional due to their novice experience level. Similarly, a 47-year-old seeking to develop new skills would be considered a young professional. The benefit of including non-traditional "young professionals" leads to greater diversity, inclusion, and network expansion.

The term "professional" was discussed as being limiting for those in industries that aren't reflective of white collared professionals. GGFYP's goal is to have a wide membership base consisting of individuals of all careers, backgrounds, and experiences. GGFYP recognizes someone as a professional for being skilled at what they do and expressing the desire to improve every day instead of conceding to the typical usage of the term professional. The strategic planning committee is working to reshape the public perceptions of what a young professional is and plans to develop a marketing campaign that communicates the inclusivity of our organization. In conclusion, the committee found it best to not undergo a complete re-branding and to stick with the name "Young Professionals." Young Professionals is a recognizable national brand, which allows new members of the Greater Grand Forks community the ability to easily find our organization.

It became our priority to look into GGFYP's mission; analyze our vision, and determine what role GGFYP plays in the community after investigating the impacts of our brand. The mission statement for GGFYP is: to enhance our community, create connections, and invest in each other. Each aspect of this mission statement was studied by GGFYP and then ranked

in order of importance during the board of directors retreat. This allowed GGFYP to understand which of these values are a priority to give us insight into how to effectively structure our programming. The board indicated almost unanimously that the "creating connections" component of the mission statement best represents why GGFYP exists.

It was clear that YP exists to create environments conducive to networking. We identified this as a critical component of the mission statement. Creating spaces that allow our members to meet new people and expand their networks is what GGFYP does best. This should be at the forefront of committee members' minds when planning future events. Prioritizing the best interests of our members doesn't just include hosting quality networking events, it also means providing substantive services that allow them to grow into the mold of the professional they desire to one day become. Substantive services such as mentorship, professional headshots, and soft skill development are in demand by GGFYP members and must be prioritized at the same level as regular GGFYP programming.

Data Collection Review:

Largely, the strategic planning process had to do with data collection. The strategic planning committee, composed of GGFYP board members, collected data from general YP membership, advisory board members, and the current board of directors.

Data was collected from the general membership through a survey featured in our weekly newsletter, the Band App (membership chat app), and social media (Facebook, Instagram Stories, and LinkedIn). We felt these modalities would effectively capture responses from where young professionals typically frequent. The survey sent out to YP members was meant to collect information concerning their level of involvement with the organization; what events they enjoy; and what GGFYP can do to get more people involved. The survey that ran in the "Monday Take" newsletter for a total of two weeks generated a variety of responses. The strategic planning committee conducted a focus group on March 31, 2022, with the intention of garnering more in-depth feedback. There were 18 total participants that were divided into three groups with each group being led by a "conversation captain". These conversations resulted in helpful information for the strategic planning committee to review and analyze. Common topics that were brought up included: marketing shortfalls, event culture, and our relationship with other community organizations such as the Grand Forks Air Base, the university, Downtown Development Association, and others.

A separate, customized survey was also sent out to GGFYP Advisory Board Members to receive feedback from some of the organization's key stakeholders and community leaders. The survey asked respondents to give their thoughts on what role GGFYP should serve in the Greater Grand Forks community and asked them to offer suggestions on how we can make more of an impact in the region. A total of seven advisory board members completed the survey, providing valuable feedback on what perceptions they have of GGFYP. Common themes that arose from the advisory board survey included: the need for more public awareness of the organization; the desire for GGFYP to play a larger role in relation to workforce issues; and organizational consistency; the inclusion of tradesmen/blue-collar workers; community college students and university students.

The Board of Directors for GGFYP participated in a retreat in July of 2022 facilitated by Mark Schill from the Praxis Strategy Group. The three-hour retreat was designed to delve into the perceptions, priorities, values, and intentionality of the organization. The retreat generated significant and thoughtful conversations that were translated into action items.

Action Items:

The strategic planning process clarified multiple areas where we should edit our bylaws; implement transition systems; improve our marketing; and more. In relation to our bylaws, the age range for membership in our organization was 20-40 years old. The strategic planning committee decided to amend the bylaws to state: anyone who considers themselves a professional is welcome in our organization, regardless of age. The transition process occurs on an annual basis with board member turnover, along with the frequent Executive Director attrition. The strategic planning committee made it a priority to develop operating procedures and document protocols to ensure smooth transitions. This will assist in the efficiency and continuity of operations in times of change.

It came to our attention, during the focus group section, that our members tend to form social groups within the general membership. New members may struggle to integrate into these social groups. Social groups have benefits and consequences which we discussed during the retreat. Creating connections is an important attribute of the mission and is being achieved when members develop new friendships within GGFYP. Conversely, new members may feel isolated which could result in a negative experience and possibly, negative passive marketing. The board of directors is working to create a clearer role for the members at large to ensure new members are introduced and wrapped into the social

circles. A mentorship program is being constructed to bridge community leaders with university students.

Gaps + How We're Addressing Them:

- Issue:** lack of brand awareness
Action: an intern will be hired to assist with promotion, marketing, and outreach
Alternative Actions: contract a third party to support marketing efforts or create a board role to support marketing
Timeline: 2023
Intended Outcome(s): increased member registration by 20 percent; Increase attendance at events by 15%; Increase post interaction and page following by 10%
- Issue:** determining who our target audience is for event attendance
Action(s): Market directly to HR offices of corporate sponsors; Target college students/recent college graduates; target underrepresented communities in the region
Alternative Actions: conduct on-going surveys within the general membership with event specific questions
Timeline: 2023-2025, ongoing
Intended Outcome(s): increased higher education student involvement by 20% percent; Having a more diverse membership; grow the event attendance; gain a better understanding of what events are desired and should be repeated; Increase corporate sponsor employee engagement
- Issue:** fragmentation of operations and historical awareness
Action: develop and record our current processes for implementation in times of change; clarify board roles with deliverables
Alternative Actions: consult with past presidents and executive directors to glean a better understanding of historical processes
Timeline: Q 1 of 2023 for document creation with on-going edits to ensure it is current
Intended Outcome(s): a special folder within Google Drive to house executive director day-to-day processes and distinct roles of each board position; reduce uncertainty and liability of lost knowledge; smooth transitions; plug-and-play
- Issue:** Increased involvement within the general membership
Action: leverage member at large board role to serve as an ambassador for new members; provide name tags at events; introductions at events; other innovative ways to engage members
Alternative Actions: create a member match to pair similar members and create a sense of belonging; annual surveys
Timeline: Q1 & Q2 of 2023 for development and implementation

Intended Outcome(s): reduction in non-active members; increased attendance; a general sense of belonging shared among all members; improved culture and sense of belonging

5. **Issue:** improve internal administration of the organization

Action: utilize contractors (accounting services) and software (CRM) to offset the workload for the executive director

Alternative Actions: direct hire permanent staff; hire interns; hire consultant or contractors

Timeline: Q1 & Q2 of 2023 assess and contact providers; Q3 proposals to board; Q4 implement; Q1 2024 assess

Intended Outcome(s): reduced stress and workload of executive director; improved turnaround time; improved historical data; reciprocal support of the board and staff; reduced attrition; reduced liabilities and redundancy; ability to secure grants; improved organizational transparency; support from automation; increased productivity