

# MAIN LINE SCHOOL NIGHT STRATEGIC PLAN (2019/20 – 2021/22)

## INTRODUCTION

In 2018 Main Line School Night (MLSN) celebrates eight decades of providing area residents with opportunities to learn new skills, explore artistic expression, travel, and engage in spirited discussion as part of a welcoming learning community.

MLSN last approved a strategic plan in 2013. The strategic initiatives outlined in that plan have been largely addressed or achieved. As MLSN embarks on its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this current strategic plan lays out an organization-wide framework to set the path for stability and sustainability in continuing to deliver value to our customers while remaining relevant to the community. It is intended to help us improve what is already a successful organization.

This strategic plan was developed and drafted by a subset of the MLSN Board of Directors comprised of the Executive Committee and subcommittee Chairs and *(will be)* endorsed by the full Board.

It should be emphasized that this strategic plan is reflective of the current environment and needs and will guide our efforts appropriately. However, as material changes occur in any relevant aspect of the environment, the plan will be monitored and revised as needed.

## MISSION

The continued growth in our student numbers as a result of our favorable programming choices, the improvement in the financial outlook, and the ongoing increase in our donor support suggest that the mission as outlined in the 2013 strategic plan has served the organization well. As such, it has been left largely as previously stated and updated only slightly to be more reflective of the changing environment in which the organization operates.

*Main Line School Night offers adults of all ages affordable educational experiences to promote personal enrichment and to enhance the quality of our community*

## VISION

MLSN's vision is reflective of the organization's desire to be relevant to the community in an ever-increasing competitive environment.

*Be the first choice in our community to inspire and provide exciting lifelong learning experiences.*

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES.

The following guiding principles confirm the important values from which MLSN will operate.

- *Foster positive, collaborative internal and external relationships through an open and accessible organization.*
- *Offer high-quality, innovative, affordable, and diverse educational experiences.*
- *Be a student-centered organization.*
- *Provide convenient locations and class schedules.*
- *Maintain a financially sustainable organization.*

## STRATEGIC ISSUES & CHALLENGES

Reviews of the current operations, programs, customer feedback, customer analytics, financial performance, and competitive environment were leveraged as part of the development of this strategic plan, including:

- Discussion with staff and the committee regarding perspective on current gaps, challenges and opportunities
- Staff perspective on the competitive landscape
- Review of customer surveys
- Staff and committee perspective regarding trends in the customer environment (eg, lifelong learning)
- Discussion with the staff and committee regarding priority areas that need improvement, both organizationally and in the services offered by MLSN, to maintain and sustain the quality and relevance of MLSN.

These data and discussions were assessed within a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis to develop the list of key strategic issues and challenges, leading to the list of agreed strategic initiatives. It should be noted that this plan focuses on a short list of key initiatives – ones which can be realistically progressed within the three-year timeline of this plan. Efforts have been taken to avoid listing as strategic initiatives activities that are considered as necessary ongoing operations (eg, maintenance of facilities). The final list of key strategic issues that are imperative to address in this current strategic plan are:

1. *Lack of sufficient tools, data, and skills to strengthen organizational infrastructure.*
2. *How to build and retain student diversity in the face of increasing competition.*
3. *Ability to generate a minimum of approximately 10% of operating expenses via non-tuition-based methods.*

## STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

It is important to note that these initiatives do not replace anything MLSN is currently doing. In fact, they will be incremental to the on-going efforts, activities and operations of MLSN. As such, it should be recognized that increased resources may be required to assess and/or implement the appropriate plans. In most instances, the resources required to deliver on the plans will not be known until such time as the plans are fully

developed and approved by the Board. The progression of even these limited strategic initiatives may be challenging given the lean structure of the MLSN organization (people and money).

The individual strategic initiatives/goals and associated actions are described below.

- 1) Strategic Goal - Develop and deliver a strategy that will build and retain students and community partners in the face of increasing competition.
  - a) Strategy - Understand needs/wants of and identify/define competition for all students
  - b) Strategy - Grow 40-55 (pre-retirement) age customer group
  - c) Strategy - Develop facilities and spaces to match program and staff needs
  - d) Strategy - Understand how to effectively communicate with target groups
  - e) Strategy – Expand strategic partnerships
  
- 2) Strategic Goal - Build sufficient tools, data, and skills to strengthen and sustain the organizational infrastructure.
  - a) Strategy - Improve digital information platforms (students, donors, and faculty) and digital tools in support of operations and communications
  - b) Strategy - Recruit more diverse (skills and attributes) board members
  - c) Strategy - Staff cross-training and skill development
  - d) Strategy - Cultivate a more diverse (enhanced skill sets) volunteer pool
  - e) Strategy - Enhance staff marketing skills, competencies and tools.
  
- 3) Strategic Goal - Develop and initiate execution of a sustainable financial profile including generating approximately 90% of operating expenses via tuition
  - a) Strategy - Diversify non-tuition funding sources (individual, corporate and community donors; grants; foundation; endowment)
  - b) Strategy - Investigate and be willing to act on tuition elasticity

For each of the actions, owners will be identified and plans, including specific deliverables and timelines, will be developed, and routinely reviewed by the Board to ensure measurable progress. It should be noted that there will be significant need to coordinate across actions as there are many points where the ability to define elements of a plan in one area will be dependent upon elements of plans in another area.