

# **National Labor College Strategic Plan 2013 - 2016**



**Table of Contents**

*About the National Labor College: What Makes Us Unique*.....2  
*Mission Statement* .....3  
*Institutional Goals*.....3  
*Learning Outcomes* .....3  
*Values*.....5  
*The Internal Context for Planning* .....6  
*The External Environment for the Plan* .....8  
*National Labor College: 2020 Vision Statement* .....10  
*Goals of the Strategic Plan*.....11  
*Key Indicators of Success* .....12

**About the National Labor College: What Makes Us Unique**

National Labor College (NLC) is one of a kind, the only college in the United States with an exclusive mission to serve the educational needs of the labor movement. It is an activist institution made up of students, faculty and alumni who together form a learning community based on a common understanding of the world of work and the ecology of the labor movement. The College respects that its student body is made up of experienced, highly-skilled working adults who have multiple commitments to family, job, union and community. In its academic programs, NLC honors higher learning that takes place both inside and outside the collegiate community.



## **Mission Statement**

By establishing the physical and intellectual space for the labor movement to imagine its future, the mission of NLC is to make higher education available to workers, to prepare union members, leaders and staff for the challenges of a changing global environment; and to serve as a center for progressive thought and learning.

## **Institutional Goals**

In order to fulfill the mission, NLC seeks to achieve the following institutional goals:

1. To articulate and transmit the values of the labor movement to successive generations of union members
2. To respond to the needs of those in the labor movement for knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to secure their futures and those of their families
3. To incorporate workplace and union learning into degree programs in order to provide efficient and effective pathways to degree completion for workers
4. To provide unions and labor-related organizations with a diverse group of members and leaders who are critical thinkers and skilled communicators
5. To work in partnership with unions and other organizations who support the labor movement to provide relevant and collaborative programs that advance the movement

## **Learning Outcomes**

NLC academic programs are grounded in the liberal arts in order to provide students with a broad range of skills necessary to be most effective in their unions, at their jobs, in their families and in their communities. As a result of their educational experience, all NLC graduates in all programs achieve the following learning outcomes which are rooted in the mission and values:

1. **Leadership:** The ability to reflect upon, share and deconstruct experience with a goal of improving personal and organizational leadership practices.
2. **Critical Thinking:** The ability to understand, question, analyze and discuss underlying assumptions that define a particular position or viewpoint.



3. **Effective Communication:** The ability to clearly communicate, orally and in writing.
4. **Global Thinking:** The ability to understand complexities of the economic, political and social environment.
5. **Information Literacy:** The ability to analyze and make intelligent decisions based upon massive amounts of information, determine the nature and extent of needed information, know where to obtain critical information, and assess the validity of sources.
6. **Technological Proficiency:** The ability to understand and use basic digital communication tools to function effectively in the changing society.



## Values

Since its inception in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the American labor movement has placed great emphasis on education. In 1969 the leaders of this movement founded the George Meany Center for Labor Studies, which was created to offer the high quality training programs that would produce a diverse movement of working men and women dedicated to a more equitable and just society. In 1997, National Labor College was founded as an extension of the Meany Center, to provide not only training programs but high quality higher education to meet the needs of workers.

The contemporary labor movement faces the twin challenges of rapid technological change and a hostile political environment, which have together produced a long-term decline in union density. In recognition of these challenges, another critical role of NLC is to explore labor's often underappreciated role in the development of a stable middle class in the world's most prosperous society and to transmit the values of the movement to all workers, especially younger people who may not know of labor's essential role in the development of this society.

The labor movement's values that are embodied today at NLC are the same values that first brought working people together in a common movement to advance and protect their interests in the spheres of politics, economics and culture. Among these values are the following:

- Labor is the source of all wealth.
- There is honor and dignity in all work.
- Working people should have equal protection under the law and the freedom to bargain collectively to advance and protect their interests.
- Education is the key to a free and democratic labor movement.
- Democratic trade unions are essential to economic justice and to a free and democratic society.
- For working people to fully realize their potential and that of their children, they must have equal access to high quality education at all levels.
- Labor arts and culture are an essential part of education, as they provide the labor movement with its soul and spirit.



## **The Internal Context for Planning**

For the last five years, NLC has faced one challenge after another, each one, taken alone, might have been sufficient to deter or even to defeat most small organizations. The most notable of these includes the two-year struggle to renew regional accreditation, the development of a joint venture with a for-profit partner followed by the financial collapse when the partner backed out, two different layoff notices for all faculty and staff, and finally the hard decision to close the conference center and sell the property. Each of these crises generated waves of concern, negativity, skepticism, and even down right ridicule among the college's constituencies, including its faculty and staff, students and alumni, and union supporters and critics alike.

It seemed that no one believed in a future for NLC, no one except the Board of Trustees and the AFL-CIO leadership who chose to put its full support behind giving NLC a chance to create a future which would be very different from its past. With this support, the leadership of NLC has been stalwart and pressed on through each new challenge with resilience, treating each crisis as an opportunity to display remarkable problem-solving skills. The College has not only survived, it has prevailed in the face of enormous odds, opening new programs, hiring new faculty and staff to help breathe new life into the College, growing the student body while shortening the time to degree completion, achieving retention rates that are twice as good as the national norm for adult learners, succeeding in review after review from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, and creating an environment where faculty and staff participate actively in planning for the future of NLC.

While NLC has ridden the waves of financial adversity with tenacity, it has remained well positioned to ride the waves of change that are rushing through higher education right now. As an innovative institution designed to serve experienced adult learners since its founding, the College currently uses all the best and most talked about practices today, including:

- Flexible, high quality online learning delivery using nationally recognized best practices that actively engage students each week with professors and fellow-students in discussions, projects, and webcasts
- Rigorous prior learning assessment practices to recognize external, work place, union-based and competency-based learning
- Opportunity for students to start programs three times a year, or take a term off during the year without falling behind
- Tightly planned academic semester schedules to facilitate degree planning for students and help them accelerate their degree completion



- State of the art retention practices that result in 85% term-to-term retention:
  - Student orientation/student success course for all students
  - Academic advising to create well defined “guided pathways” for each student, including having students take 2 courses per term
  - Writing lab and writing tutors aligned with writing-intensive courses
- Capstone experience for students to integrate their learning from their whole programs
- Common intellectual experiences:
  - Labor and Work in the US
  - Labor and Work in a Global Economy

Academically, NLC is strong and is positioned where many institutions want to be. And it is the benefits and value that we provide for students, bringing them high quality, rigorous higher education that has carried NLC through the tough times.

The planning process that has resulted in the 2013-2016 Strategic Plan has harnessed the commitment to students of all faculty and staff, has leveraged everyone’s native knowledge and intuition about the College, beginning with the Board of Trustees feedback. And most importantly, as the faculty and staff provided thoughtful insights and observations to the 2020 Vision, the planning process has united the entire community around the future of NLC as it is envisioned in this plan. We are ready to turn the corner on the past together to create an institution that has more programs and more academically enriched dimensions with a brand that is recognized for its innovation and contributions to the labor movement, even as the movement is being reimagined for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a global economy.



## **The External Environment for the Plan**

The purported ancient Chinese curse “May you live in interesting times” certainly applies to the environment of the world that NLC lives in. During the Board of Trustees meeting and several town halls with all faculty and staff, NLC community created the following analysis of the external environment and the challenges that it creates for NLC:

- If you pay attention to the media, there is a sense that traditional labor is in trouble. President Trumka’s vision for the future of the labor movement sets the stage for a brighter future, with new models of organizing and support for immigration.
- The current weak economy and bad economic structure negatively affect the ability and willingness of potential students to pay for higher education. Yet when unemployment rises, colleges and universities see more returning adult students.
- National Labor College has a variety of “customers” -- including individual students, unions, staffers and their children, who speak a different language/colloquialism. We need unique ways to communicate with them and elucidate their needs.
  - We can expand outside the US via unions’ international allies
  - We need a deeper understanding of global dynamics
  - The labor movement has aged
  - The Latino workforce has grown
- The future of communication and information technology is unknown and ever changing. The college needs to keep up with hardware, software, and training for students, faculty, and staff.
- Until now, the financial situation has overwhelmed NLC narrative. It is time to establish our reputation and identity beyond our finances.
- The Middle States Commission on Higher Education, our regional accreditor, accepted our three-year projection showing significant enrollment growth and financial stability.

The issues of closing the conference center and selling the campus have been intertwined with the financial situation. We need to get the word out that NLC is healthy and growing, albeit no longer based at the Meany Campus.

  - Many like-minded organizations don’t know we exist.
  - International unions are not marketing NLC to the local level.
  - There are still rumors that the college is closing.



- We have many stakeholders, some of whom ask us to respond to non-strategic issues. We need to focus on our core mission and act strategically in our relationship with the AFL-CIO and international unions.
- We face many demographic unknowns which will direct our market research agenda:
  - Who are the adult learners of the future? What motivates them?
  - Where is labor expanding? Who are the new brothers and sisters?
  - The market we need to address is more diverse in culture, color, location, and workplace. The work force is no longer tied to centralized industries.
  - What is the potential to expand outside the U.S. and Canada?
  - Now that we have an Associate's degree program, what is the demand for Master's programs?
- We face competition:
  - Other colleges and universities offer programs in labor studies and other related areas. The list is short but varied.
  - With government support, public institutions can offer low tuition rates for residents.
  - Other institutions have caught on to "best practices" that we pioneered.
  - There are surely best practices we are not yet aware of.
  - Other institutions have realized that undocumented students are a new market.
  - MOOCS are here! Institutions large and small, public and private, are contemplating if and how to fit them into their culture.

The goals of the Strategic Plan grow out of the internal context of our planning and consider the rapidly changing external environment.



### **National Labor College: 2020 Vision Statement**

By the year 2020, National Labor College will be the college of choice for people who share the values of the labor movement. An NLC education will enable them to secure the future for themselves, their families, and successive generations. Employing state-of-the-art technology and strategic partnerships with like-minded organizations, NLC will be a dynamic place of learning at the intersection of thought and action. Students and faculty will come together with union leaders, policy makers, scholars and activists to generate, exchange and test ideas. As critical thinkers and skilled communicators, NLC graduates with associate, bachelor or master degrees will foster change within a diverse and progressive global labor movement. NLC will be a catalyst for building international solidarity and broadening labor's political, economic, social and cultural influence.



## **Goals of the Strategic Plan**

The 2012-2015 Strategic Plan was organized around the functional units of NLC, around academics, student services, finance and technology. That was indicative of the need to hunker down and work hard to maximize our minimal resources around needed improvements in each of these areas. One of the most valuable resources that any institution has is the mindshare of its staff and faculty, and much of our mindshare was already diverted to the various challenges that we faced that directly impacted these areas.

As we put these challenges behind us, the college is proud to bring forward a strategic plan that calls for integrative action throughout NLC. All of our departments and programs will be working together on three goals, that, when achieved, will make us a vastly different college in 2020 than we are today.

- **Align National Labor College programs and services with the vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century labor movement.**

In order to fulfill our mission, we must be aligned with the needs and interests of the labor movement. Under the leadership of AFL-CIO President and NLC Board Chair Richard Trumka, the labor movement is considering “new models and new ways to represent workers” including new ways to join the labor movement, new ways to organize strategically and new ways to deploy resources. NLC will align its programs and its outreach with these new models and will deploy its own resources to provide education and training for these new models and new populations of workers.

- **Become a high tech, grassroots organization.**

Grassroots organizations are characterized by lots of members, by getting in the news, by being known for their brand, by using every tool at their disposal to get the word out, and by asking for new members everywhere, all the time. NLC will become a well-known grassroots organization, using current and emerging technologies and social media to grow and thrive.

- **Create a process-driven organization that excels at adding value for students by empowering staff with the right tools and training.**

Small colleges can serve their students one at a time, using an on-demand schedule. NLC has a history of working this way. Large and effective colleges and universities can serve larger numbers of students even better through standard processes that are well understood by all staff and consistently practiced across the organization. NLC will grow and as it grows, it will become a process driven organization that provides timely, fair and consistent service to its students, each time every time.



## **Key Indicators of Success**

The following key indicators of success will guide faculty and staff as we develop our annual action plans to fulfill our goals, and will underpin the evaluation of our plan and NLC's success in reaching its goals.

- **New Programs:** Through market research, NLC will continue to expand its degree and continuing education programs, offering new programs in new areas and at new levels, including graduate education.
- **New Markets:** The NLC student body will be characterized by diversity, including a broader range of unions, younger workers, workers from community affiliated groups, and international students.
- **Enriched Educational Opportunities:** NLC will have many dimensions beyond degree programs and training programs, including residential conferences around the United States and abroad, programs for students at union and labor education conferences, internships, study abroad, and exchanges
- **New and Invigorated Relationships:** NLC will work in active partnership with a wide range of unions, worker centers and community-based social justice focused organizations, providing degree programs, continuing education programs, and customized programs
- **Increased Financial Support:** NLC will expand its circle of donors as well as build relationships and receive funding from foundations and new government programs, moving toward financial self-sufficiency.
- **Increased Student Satisfaction:** NLC will employ state of the art technology, streamlined processes, and faculty and staff training to improve student services, resulting in greater student satisfaction with all aspects of their NLC experience.



Goals	Year 1 <i>Launch Into New Territory</i>	Year 3 <i>Implementation Underway</i>	Year 5 <i>Things Coming to Fruition</i>	Year 7 <i>International Labor College, the Ivy League of Labor</i>
<p><b>Align National Labor College programs and services with the vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century labor movement.</b></p>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An established relationship with at least one international labor college</li> <li>• Enrichment residencies at at least two labor conferences</li> <li>• Understanding of workers and unions employment trends and anticipated needs through research</li> <li>• Multi-year plan for new academic programs</li> <li>• Advisory board for Bonnie Laden Union Skills (BLUS) program made up of individuals that are working in new and experimental areas in labor movement</li> <li>• BLUS certificate on trusteeship developed</li> <li>• Established relationship with at least one community-based organization to deliver training programs</li> <li>• Customized training for at least two new unions</li> <li>• Student body which includes at least 10% of students from unions the college has not historically served and from other new markets</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least two residencies at international locations</li> <li>• An annual conference for all NLC students and labor constituents</li> <li>• At least two new degree programs launched with courses and program outcomes including a global perspective</li> <li>• Student internships available</li> <li>• Sustained relationship with at least three unions the college currently does not serve</li> <li>• Expanded BLUS program that responds to needs of new models of labor movement, offered in multiple formats (including online) and in Illinois and California as well as Maryland and Washington DC</li> <li>• Outreach to community based and labor affiliated organizations with bilingual outreach staff</li> <li>• Alumni Association outreach to their local unions</li> <li>• Student body which includes at least 15% of students from unions the college has not historically served and from other new markets</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established and recognized brand</li> <li>• Global labor study/travel programs in 3 countries</li> <li>• At least two new degree programs launched with course and program outcomes including a global perspective</li> <li>• Understanding of emerging needs of workers for new programs through research</li> <li>• At least one faculty exchange program with international labor college</li> <li>• Joint enrichment program with at least one group of workers associated with new forms of organizing</li> <li>• Grant funding of at least \$1 million to support new outreach and program initiatives</li> <li>• Student body which includes at least 20% of students from unions the college has not historically served and from other new markets, including international students</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One graduate program launched with course and program outcomes including a global perspective</li> <li>• Established brand as “the international labor college”</li> <li>• Global perspective in all courses</li> <li>• Affiliated with at least two global labor unions</li> <li>• Aligned and affiliated with the Solidarity Center</li> <li>• Student body which includes at least 25% of students from unions the college has not historically served and from other new markets, including international students</li> <li>• Innovative BLUS program includes certificates, workshops, webinars, online courses and hybrid courses</li> <li>• 15% of student body participates in study abroad enrichment programs, including international residencies</li> </ul>
<p><b>Become a high tech, grassroots organization.</b></p>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robust, comprehensive continuous communication plan for students and alumni</li> <li>• Revitalized, active Alumni Association with a plan for growth</li> <li>• Fundraising for online annual fund using social media techniques (at least \$10,000)</li> <li>• At least 50% of leads generated by marketing and recruitment through local unions</li> <li>• Expert social media person on staff</li> <li>• Increased diversity of unions that send students to the college</li> <li>• Marketing partnership with at least 2 west coast large locals</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer a Friend program for student recruitment for students and alumni</li> <li>• Active outreach and recruitment in strategically aligned domestic markets of community-based organizations and workers centers, and at least one international market</li> <li>• Enrollment growth of at least 10% from unions not currently served by college</li> <li>• Increased inquiry: enrollment ratios</li> <li>• Career planning and placement service available for students and alumni focusing on synergy between education and jobs</li> <li>• Fundraising events in at least 3 cities outside Washington DC</li> <li>• Annual Fund at least 10% of total giving</li> <li>• Single sign-on for students and faculty to all functionality</li> <li>• Operations calendar in use by all departments of college</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individualized and customized messaging for students, alumni and donors</li> <li>• At least two residencies sponsored by local unions</li> <li>• Active partnerships with at least a dozen unions through their locals</li> <li>• NLC featured in at least a dozen union publications each month</li> <li>• Faculty and administrators speak at at least a dozen union meetings</li> <li>• NLC is well known for its programs and services among all national unions and among the largest locals around the country</li> <li>• Active outreach to at least 3 international markets</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New media communication dominates marketing</li> <li>• Robust, comprehensive international marketing plan in place</li> <li>• Enrollment balanced among unions and new markets</li> <li>• NLC faculty and staff sought after for presentations, projects, and partnerships by unions and community-based organizations</li> <li>• All unions promote NLC in their publications and on their websites</li> <li>• NLC exhibits at all union conventions and strategic regional and local meetings held during the year</li> <li>• Alumni association raises 10% of all giving to the College</li> <li>• Annual Fund at least 15% of all giving</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Create a process-driven organization that excels at adding value for students by empowering staff with the right tools and training</b></p>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New core technology infrastructure in place</li> <li>• Data standards across the board established</li> <li>• Financial aid processing in-house with Powerfaids</li> <li>• New course management system in place</li> <li>• New bookstore provider in place</li> <li>• Reliable data in all systems: HR, financial aid, enrollment, finance, student records data base, learning management system, Raisers Edge</li> <li>• One stop shop for new and continuing students in place</li> <li>• Self-serve functions of system used by at least 75% of students</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced technological enterprise system with all modules in use and customized apps</li> <li>• Consistently high student satisfaction (at least 80% very satisfied or satisfied) with all college services</li> <li>• All adjunct faculty use NLC email and communication technology</li> <li>• All staff trained in enterprise system functions</li> <li>• Staff and faculty training program in place featuring programs for both regulatory and personal development needs and interests</li> <li>• “Customer Relationship Management” System in place for student recruitment</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in new and emerging technologies and functionality to support students</li> <li>• High inquiry yields (above national standards) from sophisticated prospect management system with a marketing budget lower than previous year</li> <li>• New student services available online</li> <li>• Fully paperless</li> <li>• Consistently high student satisfaction (at least 85% very satisfied or satisfied) with all college services</li> </ul>	<p><b>Key Indicators of Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All new systems for work processes are in place and integrated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Upgraded PowerFaids</li> <li>○ One-stop shop for student services</li> <li>○ High functioning enterprise system</li> <li>○ Financial operations integrated</li> <li>○ Learning management system easily accessible to students and faculty</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consistently high student satisfaction (at least 90% very satisfied or satisfied) with all college services</li> <li>• Student term-to-term retention at least 90%</li> <li>• 100% of students empowered to use all college technology and functionality</li> <li>• Trained and technologically proficient staff</li> <li>• Transparency into all processes and outcomes through effective reports and reporting</li> </ul>