# A Message from Our President

December 28, 2018

Dear Colleagues:

Since our revolutionary start on November 16, 1940, the National Federation of the Blind has carefully crafted strategies built upon the priorities of the membership and executed by the leaders of the organization resulting in tremendous growth. Over the years, the growth of the organization has brought great opportunities and increased complexity to the movement. Consequently, we must continuously review, revise, and communicate the evolved plans of the organization. The enclosed strategic plan is built on that tradition and reflects the organization’s priorities for our next phase of growth. The plan is significant for what is not included in it as much as what is included.

This strategic plan is rooted in our national convention. To quote our constitution, the convention is the “supreme authority of the Federation.” Our convention is where dreams are developed, policies are established, priorities are adjusted, and leaders are elected. This plan, like everything we do, is subject to review and adjustment by the national convention. During our 2018 convention in Orlando, Florida, focus groups with a diverse range of members identified a number of important themes for strengthening and expanding the reach of our movement. There are no references to the national convention in the plan itself, because the convention is what everything is built upon. There may be other specific programs not directly mentioned; you can be assured that we continue to review and execute all aspects of the Federation that are now well-established programs and activities. This means that the plan does not represent the entire scope of our work but rather key areas of focus for the next few years.

Our current strategic plan has four pillars to organize our next phase of growth: Education, Rehabilitation, and Employment; Membership and Community Building; Advocacy; and, Development. Each pillar contains objectives to drive our focus in that particular area. The board of directors of the National Federation of the Blind identified strategies and goals to assist in measuring progress towards those objectives and will regularly review and update them as progress is made and new opportunities are realized. All of the pillars are a natural extension of our progress as a movement and advances we have made during the past decade.

As the elected President of this organization, I have the humbling responsibility of leading the implementation of this plan. I have been deeply involved in the development of the plan including spending time reviewing the extensive notes from our focus groups with members. I am filled with hope, energy, and determination when I imagine what the prospects for blind Americans will be once we have met the objectives in this plan. It will take the collective efforts of our thousands of members across the country to achieve all that we imagine. I look forward to your participation in reaching our goals for this strategic plan. Once these objectives are achieved, we will generate new objectives in order to continue raising expectations and advancing our march for independence.

In closing, this plan represents the details of the promise we make to each other in this organization on a daily basis. A promise that is fulfilled in the large-scale strategic work we are doing to build our movement and the small acts of friendship that are shared between members on a daily basis. That promise is that together with love, hope, and determination, we will transform dreams into reality.

Let’s go build the National Federation of the Blind.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Riccobono, President

National Federation of the Blind

# National Federation of the Blind 2019-2021 Strategic Plan

## Introduction

Welcome to the blind movement! Together with love, hope, and determination, let’s transform dreams into reality. The National Federation of the Blind is a community of members and friends who believe in the hopes and dreams of the nation’s blind. Through the efforts of the blind pioneers before us, we are the largest and oldest organization of blind people continuously working towards securing independence and respect for all blind and low-vision people including adults, seniors, veterans, students, and children. To carry out our vital mission, we develop and implement strategic plans based on the priorities of our members.

Our Strategic Plan for 2019-2021 consists of four major pillars. Each pillar outlines objectives and strategies to drive engagement and growth to its particular focus. As a result, numerous goals and action plans will emerge to pursue. This plan invites active participation of all of our stakeholders as we continue raising expectations and advancing our march for independence.

## Strategic Pillars

### Pillar I - Education, Rehabilitation, and Employment

### Pillar 2 - Membership and Community Building

### Pillar 3 - Advocacy

### Pillar 4 - Development

## Vision, Objectives, and Strategies

### Pillar I - Education, Rehabilitation, and Employment

#### Vision:

*The National Federation of the Blind develops, leads, and supports high-impact programs and initiatives that offer best practices to rehabilitation professionals, educators, and employers, while also ensuring blind people build skills and confidence to thrive in twenty-first-century classrooms, careers, and everyday life.*

#### Objective #1: To increase employment readiness of blind people

* Strategy 1: Hard Skills: Develop programs that prepare blind individuals to work in twenty-first-century careers (e.g., college programs in STEM and access tech).
* Strategy 2: Blindness Skills: Maximize training centers in terms of manageability and resources.
* Strategy 3: Soft Skills: Develop internship and career mentoring opportunities for members.

#### Objective #2: To ensure that blindness professionals understand what blind people need to succeed and what skills are required to help blind people turn their dreams into reality

* Strategy 1: Regularly attend and present at conferences and programs where blindness professionals receive training.
* Strategy 2: Develop paid internships for blindness professionals at our centers.
* Strategy 3: Create opportunities for blindness professionals to earn continuing education units (CEU) during programming offered at national and state conventions.
* Strategy 4: Engage chapters to grow membership of teachers and blindness professionals.

#### Objective #3: To set high expectations for and by blind individuals, their families, and the community in education, rehabilitation, and independent living

* Strategy 1: Maximize use of the BELL Academy to teach Braille and expose young blind people to alternative skills of blindness and successful blind mentors.
* Strategy 2: Maximize use of STEM programs.

#### Objective #4: To ensure that employers make employment decisions based on skills and capacities of potential employees, not misconceptions based on blindness

* Strategy 1: Develop publicity pieces and presentations that can be sent to and shared with HR professionals, etc.
* Strategy 2: Identify opportunities to demystify blindness among professionals.
* Strategy 3: Develop an employment leadership network as a part of the Center for Employment Opportunities.

### Pillar II - Membership and Community Building

#### Vision:

*The National Federation of the Blind has an active, diverse, coordinated, and ever-growing network of affiliates, chapters, and divisions across the country. Engagement in our innovative and empowering initiatives attracts lifelong members who build a community unified in our purpose.*

#### Objective #1: To develop and implement a more formal and standardized new membership process for the National Federation of the Blind

* Strategy 1: Develop a guiding document outlining pre-membership conversations.
* Strategy 2: Establish a standardized welcoming ceremony.
* Strategy 3: Develop and implement a standardized new member orientation that includes mentoring.

#### Objective #2: To ensure that chapters and affiliates are executing common brand and program priorities and organizational practices

* Strategy 1: Identify and document common practices.
* Strategy 2: Develop infrastructure for implementing the common practices.
* Strategy 3: Establish a process for reviewing the need for development in affiliates.

#### Objective #3: To strengthen tools and strategies for leadership development at all levels of the organization

* Strategy 1: Train a core of leaders at the national level to conduct leadership training in the field.
* Strategy 2: Develop a collection of best practices for identifying potential leaders.
* Strategy 3: Create a training specific to affiliate board development.
* Strategy 4: Maximize the success of the scholarship program by increasing both the number of applicants and the retention of members who were previously scholarship applicants and winners.

#### Objective #4: To further develop methods and practices for recruitment of new diverse members from a diverse pool

* Strategy 1: Form a network of blind parents across the country to share information and strengthen community.
* Strategy 2: Create a multimedia campaign to invite people to join the organization.
* Strategy 3: Establish an open national member recruitment teleconference once a month.
* Strategy 4: Develop a collection of best practices for recruiting new members at the local level.

### Pillar III - Advocacy

#### Vision:

*The National Federation of the Blind is the leading advocate for all blind Americans in areas such as education, employment, transportation, voting, and civil rights. Blind people, their families, agencies for the blind, corporations, and the government turn to our organization for expert advice on programs, skills building, encouragement, nonvisual access, and technology that level the playing field for blind people.*

#### Objective #1: To strengthen the advocacy capacity of National Federation of the Blind members

* Strategy 1: Develop an “advocacy leadership core” within the National Federation of the Blind.
* Strategy 2: Train more of our members on the fundamentals of advocacy.
* Strategy 3: Train more of our members in specific content areas, such as education, employment, civil rights, social security, and rehabilitation.

#### Objective #2: To establish and strengthen our relationships with industry and federal, state, and local government officials

* Strategy 1: Educate our membership on the importance, value, and techniques for building relationships with elected representatives, agencies, and staff.
* Strategy 2: Develop relevant national-level, industry relationships.
* Strategy 3: Develop relationships with state and local businesses.

#### OBJECTIVE #3: To increase public support to achieve acceptance, full integration, and equal opportunity of blind people

* Strategy 1: Develop and carry out public awareness campaigns at all levels.

### Pillar IV - Development

#### Vision:

*The National Federation of the Blind builds synergistic community and corporate relationships that are mutually enriching. The stories of our impact and of members' achievements are widely known and celebrated. Our brand is so well recognized and respected that it empowers our members and enables us to expand our reach to our community, new members, and the world.*

#### Objective #1: To ensure that we have the financial resources needed to continue and expand the transformational work we do

* Strategy 1: Plan and conduct a human capital campaign that focuses on blindness initiatives around education and employment.
* Strategy 2: Cultivate new contributors and steward existing supporters.
* Strategy 3: Support affiliates and chapters in their fundraising efforts.

#### Objective #2: To create new relationships and develop existing partnerships into true synergistic collaborations

* Strategy 1: Identify new event sponsors and exhibitors.
* Strategy 2: Nurture existing sponsor and exhibitor relationships so that they work with us on a broader range of programs and projects.
* Strategy 3: Identify and develop new relationships with not-for-profit and grant-maker organizations.

#### Objective #3: To ensure that the general public and the blindness community understand that the National Federation of the Blind makes a difference, creates opportunities, and is the voice of the nation’s blind

* Strategy 1: Consistently communicate our philosophy and brand.
* Strategy 2: Educate the medical community and organizations that serve senior citizens.
* Strategy 3: Create a campaign including social, broadcast, and print media that positions the National Federation of the Blind as the go-to source.
* Strategy 4: Leverage the Bolotin Awards to increase awareness and engagement in the National Federation of the Blind.