Neutral Zone Strategic Plan
2017-2022

Overview

Mission:
The Neutral Zone is a diverse, youth-driven teen center dedicated to promoting personal growth through artistic expression, community leadership and the exchange of ideas.

A brief history:
In 1998, a group of Ann Arbor teens gathered to discuss the need for a place where teens could congregate after school and on weekends. From the very beginning, they felt this place should be more than just a hangout; that is could be a safe place to make new friends, mix with youth from different backgrounds, explore new ideas, learn new skills and do it all in a setting that was teen friendly and teen driven. Teens wrote the mission statement and the first grant proposal to the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation and, with seed money in hand, enlisted parents and friends to turn an old brick and timber warehouse into a teen center.

It’s been years since that original group of teens realized their dream and they have moved on with their lives. Their legacy lives on, however, in the Neutral Zone’s mission statement. From that first handful of teens, attendance has grown to more than 17,000 visits a year, serving 450 youth annually. Today, in addition to drop-in and free tutoring after school, the Neutral Zone offers more than 20 programs in the areas of Education, Literary Arts, Community Leadership, Music and the Visual Arts. However, the Neutral Zone is just not a place. It is the sum total of all of the teens who come through its doors. Their energy, creativity, passion and ideas, shape and direct our programs and activities.

Vision:
Based on a strategic vision, by 2022 Neutral Zone:

- Is an inclusive culture and community where all teens matter and belong
- Has developed processes and supports in place to deliver high-quality programs
- Delivers strong external outreach and communications for impactful community engagement
- Exhibits a robust capacity to meet the needs and vision of growth for our organization
- Effectively utilizes and shares the model of youth-driven spaces
Our Process

Neutral Zone Strategic Plan Process

Stories of the future
Staff and key board members are asked to imagine what NZ will look like in 2022. Executive Director compiles these ideas into a vision story.

Visioning Team (October 2016)
Executive leadership, and key board members meet with Consulting to co-create a strategic planning process.

Board and Staff Visioning Retreat
Staff and board members convene to discuss the NZ 2022 Vision story to provide feedback.

Input Feedback
Feedback is added to the NZ 2022 Vision story. Community members offer further input to the NZ Vision.

Board Approval (August 2017)
Board members adopt the NZ strategic vision and plan for 2022.

Annual Action Planning and Review
Every March, staff and board come together to review the previous year's successes and challenges and set goals for upcoming year.

Annual Endorsement by Board
Every August, the board approves the upcoming year's strategic action plan.
The 5 Pillars

Pillar 1: Is an inclusive culture and community where all teens matter and belong

- To ensure Neutral Zone serves youth who are traditionally left out (e.g., youth of color, LGBT+ youth, youth from low socio-economic status)
- To build an inclusive culture across all social identities and programs
- To implement restorative practices across the NZ
- To strengthen youth adult partnerships

Pillar 2: Has developed processes and supports to deliver high-quality programs

- To ensure innovative youth-led programming at NZ
- To build stronger school-based programmatic partnerships
- To develop an NZ logic model as a gauge for evaluation
- To strengthen crisis resources

Pillar 3: Delivers strong external outreach and communications for impactful community engagement

- To improve social and media footprint
- To create a consistent communication pathway with alumni
- To create a consistent communication pathway with past board members
- To ensure NZ articulates a mission that authentically reflects NZ values and programs

Pillar 4: Exhibits robust capacity to meet the needs and vision of growth for our organization

- To support building and technology infrastructure for high-quality Neutral Zone experiences
- To foster staff sustainability at Neutral Zone
- To ensure that all Neutral Zone staff are appropriately trained to thrive in their work
- To develop board members to a higher level of effectiveness
- To ensure a strong connection with board members after they transition from their term
- To build long-term financial sustainability

Pillar 5: Effectively utilizes and shares the model of youth-driven spaces
To expand relationships with other organizations, schools, and other institutions to broaden YDS reach
To create new professional development paths in YDS

**Goals and Objectives**

**Pillar 1: Is an inclusive culture and community where all teens matter and belong**

- To ensure Neutral Zone serves youth who are traditionally left out (eg. youth of color, lgbt+ youth, youth from low socio-economic status, court-involved youth)
  - To build intentional and personal outreach initiatives with communities of color
  - To strengthen Gay and Queer Straight Alliances
  - To establish a year-round Juvenile Justice program
  - To establish a transition program for success beyond high school
- To build an inclusive culture across all social identities for strong inter-program collaboration
  - To create a bridge experience for teens in drop-in programming to other Neutral Zone programming
  - To create an inclusivity year-long initiative (diversity forums, funding incentivizing, cross program collaborations)
  - To support identity leadership programming around young people of color
  - To ensure TAC is inclusive across all program areas and identities
  - To strengthening teen experiences on community impact
- To implement restorative practices across the NZ
  - To develop programmatic opportunities to strengthen mattering and belonging
- To strengthen youth adult partnerships across the NZ
  - To strengthen youth adult partnerships on board of directors
  - To strengthen youth adult partnerships with administrative staff, volunteers, and teens

**Pillar 2: Has developed processes and supports to deliver high-quality programs**

- To ensure innovative youth-led programming at NZ
  - To discuss how to phase-out programs with limited youth interest
  - To strengthen LEAD team
- To build stronger school-based programmatic partnerships
  - To create middle school outreach experiences
  - To create high school based initiatives in core based program areas
- To use the NZ logic model as a gauge for evaluation
- To strengthen crisis resources
  - To develop partnerships with crisis resource organizations including schools
  - To explore a joint clinical social worker at NZ with other partnering organizations
To strengthen knowledge of staff members around crisis resources

Pillar 3: Delivers strong external outreach and communications for impactful community engagement

- To improve social and media footprint
  - To get increase followers on social media
  - To increase local and national publications
  - To develop training around social media and marketing for staff
- To create a consistent communication pathway with alumni
  - To explore a tool to track and update alumni
  - To leverage 200 alumni donations by 2022
- To create a consistent communication pathway with past board members
  - To create a communication chain for the new LegeNZ group
- To create a consistent communication pathway with former staff
- To ensure NZ articulates a mission that authentically reflects NZ values and programs
  - To collectively evaluate NZ's mission

Pillar 4: Exhibits robust capacity to meet the needs and vision of growth for our organization

- To support building and technology infrastructure for high quality Neutral Zone experiences
  - To provide high quality technology equipment for teens and staff
  - To update the venue to provide a high quality performance venue experience
  - To support a dedicated space for literary arts
  - To replace the roof
  - To explore building out the 2nd floor
  - To explore an alternative drive system information platform available to everyone
- To foster staff sustainability at Neutral Zone
  - To outline a Neutral Zone Wage Matrix
  - To develop an operations manual and protocol to support staff transitions
- To ensure that all Neutral Zone staff are appropriately supported to thrive in their work
  - To reevaluate and implement a new onboarding process
  - To provide staff professional development goal-setting for all Neutral Zone staff
  - To ensure staff professional development training for all salaried staff
  - To run an annual staff satisfaction survey
- To develop board members to a higher level of effectiveness
  - To better support board members participate meaningfully in giving and fundraising
  - To have an alumni on the Board of Directors
To better connect board members to NZ programs

- To build long-term financial sustainability
  - To establish an endowment at the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation
  - To implement a planned giving strategy
  - To build a parent engagement pipeline to supporting Neutral Zone
  - To implement a major donor giving strategy

**Pillar 5: Effectively utilizes and shares the model of youth-driven spaces**

- To expand relationships with other organizations, schools, and other institutions to broaden YDS reach
  - To design and initiate a formal YDS Network
  - To establish a new YDS cohort in a new Midwestern region
  - To build a formal partnership with an institute of higher learning

- To create new professional development paths in YDS
  - To develop the YDS certification
  - To create YDS courses for academic credit