











NCRGEA Strategic Plan July 2021 - July 2024

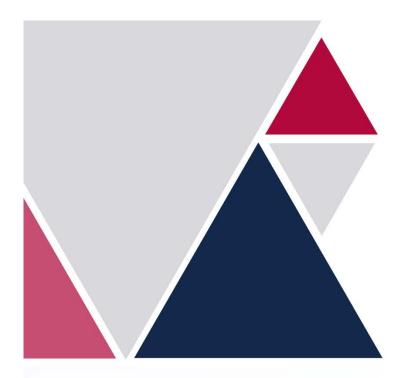






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PROCESS

NCRGEA's plan - and the priorities identified within - were derived from careful examination of the current state and capabilities of the organization, its interactions with close partners and constituents, and key stakeholders' aspirations for the organization's future.

NCRGEA engaged <u>Setser Group</u> to facilitate a process, between October 2020 and June 2021 of data collection, analysis, stakeholder input, Board of Director, and staff reflection, and ultimately the production of this document. In creating the strategic plan, NCRGEA and Setser Group took care to ensure that the organization's strategy was realistic in scope and sufficiently flexible in implementation, fostered engagement and buy-in from a variety of constituents, and aligned the board and staff in making decisions based on the strategy.

SWOT ANALYSIS

NCRGEA asked Setser Group to help guide NCRGEA through a SWOT analysis process to inform recommendations and a strategic platform presentation by December of 2020. This set the course for further strategic planning work in 2021.

Composed of fourteen members of NCRGEA's Board of Directors, the NCRGEA SWOT Committee met during eight virtual sessions to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of NCRGEA as an organization, and recommended a strategic positioning platform to inform the full strategic plan. This group participated in interviews, artifact reviews, and synthesis decision exercises, and supported and endorsed the process to NCRGEA's full Board of Directors and broader stakeholders.

The resulting SWOT analysis and strategic positioning platform was also informed by the following inputs:

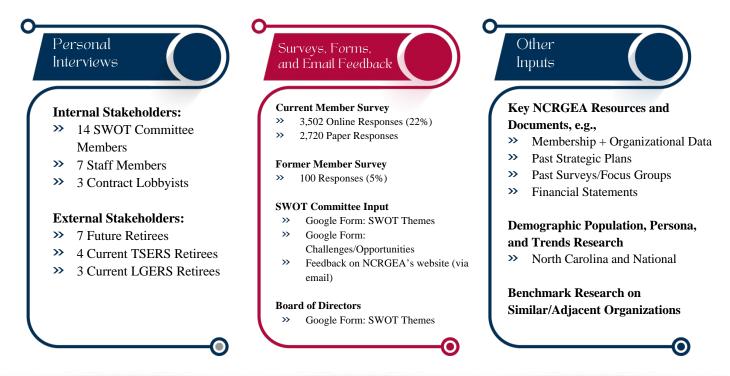


Figure 1. SWOT Analysis Inputs



Strategic Planning, January - June 2021

Based on the SWOT analysis and strategic positioning platform created in Fall 2020, NCRGEA again engaged Setser Group to facilitate a six-month process in Spring 2021 to create a complete three-year strategic plan, including priorities, strategies, key performance indicators (KPIs), action plans, as well as likely resource requirements for implementation.

- NCRGEA Strategic Planning Steering Committee Composed of fourteen members of NCRGEA's Board of Directors, the NCRGEA Strategic Planning Committee met during nine virtual sessions, and provided substantial feedback in between these sessions, to articulate key strategic objectives and ultimately approve the full strategic plan document.
- <u>Six (6) Priority Sub-Committees</u> Six sub-committees were formed, including both members of the Board of Director and NCRGEA staff, and met five to six times each to build out individual strategic priorities including KPIs, key strategies, and estimates of key resource needs.
- Mission, Vision, and Values Sub-Committee Additionally, a committee was formed to develop mission, vision, and values statements for NCRGEA, and iterate on them given feedback from the Strategic Planning Steering Committee.
- Executive Committee Composed of NCRGEA's Executive Committee and select staff, this group reviewed all draft plans presented by sub-committees to ensure alignment across priorities as well as develop an organizational budget supporting the strategic plan. The Executive Committee also discussed Board structures and processes for NCRGEA, as well as innovation and change management going forward.

SWOT Analysis

As described above, NCRGEA undertook a SWOT analysis to assess the organization's greatest strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Below is a summary of the themes uncovered throughout this process:





Strengths:

- >> Large, varied membership
- >> Trusted and respected by members
- >> Strong financial position
- >> Dedicated staff and board

Weaknesses:

- >>> Brand recognition
- >> Member engagement
- >> Digital capabilities
- >> Membership data

Opportunities:

- >> Expand membership as retirements increase
- >> Adopt more "relationship-centric" member engagement practices
- >> Expand service-oriented offerings
- Expand political influence
- >> More intentionally empower and involve both members and Board

Threats:

- >> Declining success in obtaining COLAs and other retirement benefits
- >> Declining relevance/perceived value to members
- >> Unfavorable public perceptions of government service
- >> Inability to evolve fast enough to meet changing conditions

In addition to identifying the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the SWOT Committee, with support from Setser Group, concluded its work by articulating a draft strategic positioning platform as a draft of the essential elements of NCRGEA's strategic plan - big vision and goals, positioning statements, and key strategic priorities.

Draft Strategic Positioning Platform				
Big Goal	>> Capture 30% of available market within the next three years by becoming go-to resource center for government retirees in NC.			
	>>> We strive to protect members' ability to live a thriving retirement life, through strong health, financial security, and the continued ability to contribute to society.			
Positioning Statements	>> We believe that government retirees are powerful members of their communities, and that their careers of public service do not end with retirement.			
	>> We live in a rapidly changing world. We are committed to supporting continual learning and growth to take advantage of new opportunities, both for our organization and our members.			
	» Become more service-oriented by expanding informational and educational offerings.			
	Focus on becoming a relationship-centric organization through creating local chapters and more local opportunities for engagement.			
Key Strategic Priorities	Strengthen awareness among pre-retirees through partnerships and targeted outreach.			
	>>> Build capacity to expand communications and the strategic use of technology in order to better engage membership (internal and external).			
	>>> Expand political agenda and influence through a compelling vision, leadership, and the intentional engagement of key stakeholders.			

Table 1. Draft Strategic Positioning Platform

While this draft continued to be reworked, revised, and detailed out during the full strategic planning process (e.g., by revising several of the key strategic priorities), this platform remained at the backbone of NCRGEA's strategic plan.

MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

During the strategic planning process, NCRGEA also revised the organization's mission statement, articulated a vision statement, and identified organizational values to guide NCRGEA's work into the future.



NCRGEA Mission Statement

To advance, promote, and protect the benefits, interests, and well-being of North Carolina's retired state and local public servants.



NCRGEA Vision Statement

The voice and go-to resource for North Carolina's retired public servants.



NCRGEA Core Values

SERVICE - Keep our members and their needs at the forefront of everything we do.

INTEGRITY - Be principled in all interactions with members, decision-makers, and the public.

COLLABORATION – Work with other organizations and individuals who share our common goals.

DIVERSITY - Celebrate and reflect the individual differences and demographics of our members in all aspects of our work.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

In determining its overall strategic direction, the NCRGEA Board of Directors articulated and agreed upon the following organizational goal as its overarching objective driving its strategic vision and plan over the next three years:

Capture 30% of available market within the next three years by becoming go-to resource center for government retirees in NC

In order to reach this ambitious goal, the following six strategic priorities were developed by the NCRGEA Board of Directors using the SWOT analysis, stakeholder feedback received throughout the process, and an analysis of each priority's alignment with NCRGEA's mission as well as an assessment of what will be required to execute the identified strategies.

Strategic Priority	3-Year Objective
Strengthen awareness among pre-retirees through partnerships and targeted outreach	35% of new retirees join NCRGEA within 9 months of retirement
Become more service-oriented by expanding informational and educational offerings	Average of 10% increase in people who watch, read, or engage with NCRGEA content offerings per quarter (includes views of YouTube videos + views of web pages containing educational/informational content)
Become a relationship-centric organization through more local opportunities for engagement	At least quarterly opportunities for membership engagement through local community groups annually within each of NCRGEA's 9 districts, by 2022
	Each local community group meets their individual goals, through 2024
Build capacity to expand strategic use of digital communications to better engage membership	3 10% increase per quarter in engagement across digital communications (total time spent on NCRGEA website, social media followers, opens of digital emails)
Expand policy agenda and influence through a compelling vision, leadership, and the intentional engagement of key stakeholders	At least 10% annual growth in the % of members who believe NCRGEA is influential in showing the worth of, and protecting/ expanding benefits for, NC government retirees
Boost public perception of public service and public servants	» Reach 6 million North Carolinians through TV/Radio/Newspaper ads
	>> Raise \$200,000 from sponsors to support ad campaign

Table 2. Strategic Priorities and Objectives

In addition, NCRGEA recognizes that this vision for organizational transformation will not happen overnight, and has sequenced its work across these priorities over the next three years:



Year 1 Focus: Infrastructure and Awareness Building

- » Launch new website, digital communications strategies, and improved database system
- » Promote the brand to meet the moment and strengthen public image
- » Strengthen membership engagement infrastructures (local engagement groups, advocacy training)
- » Build the change and innovation culture at NCRGEA



Year 2 Focus: Targeted Outreach and Engagment

- » Highly relevant and targeted information (including internal policy expertise) pushed out
- » Targeted digital outreach to HR departments and pre-retirees
- » Member-to-member recruitment drive



Year 3 Focus: Consolidate Influence and Connection

- » Increased local engagement opportunities
- » Mobilize membership in local lobbying and advocacy
- Ongoing member recruitment

Figure 2. Three-Year Vision

STRENGTHEN AWARENESS AMONG PRE-RETIREES THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS AND TARGETED OUTREACH

Currently, most of NCRGEA's membership recruitment efforts begin once prospective members have already retired, rather than while they are still employed. This is largely driven by a reliance on retiree lists from the State Treasurer's Office for marketing efforts, which unfortunately, provide only very limited information about retirees, and are only available to NCRGEA once they have already retired and received their first retirement pay.

NCRGEA seeks to develop systems and strategies to introduce NCRGEA to people considering retirement (specifically employees who are likely within a year of retirement), before or at the time of their retirement from a NC government system.

Overall Objective: 35% of new retirees join NCRGEA within nine months of retirement

	Build/Deepen Relationships with Employers to Reach Current Government Employees	Learn More About Needs of Pre-Retirees	Leverage Current Members to Recruit Others
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	 At least 100 HR departments in database showing NCRGEA contact within the past year (beginning Summer 2022) Digital communications strategy for HR reps (including targeted info/resources) launched by Fall 2022 	 Launch survey, obtaining at least 250 responses by Fall 2022 Through survey responses and personal conversations with HR Directors, identify information and tactics that will best serve pre-retirees and make them most likely to engage with NCRGEA in the future (by Fall 2022) 	>> 500 new members who join NCRGEA through a current member or board referral each year (beginning Summer 2022)

Strategy #1: Build/deepen relationships with state and local employers/ partners to reach current government employees

Because NCRGEA receives very limited information about new retirees, and after they have already retired, it is crucial for NCRGEA to build relationships with a wide range of NC governmental employers, in order to share information with government employees *before* they retire. While currently NCRGEA conducts outreach efforts with HR departments primarily through in-person intro visits, there is a desire to increase the number and frequency of these contacts with employers to maximize their role in sharing information about NCRGEA's services and benefits, and to ultimately become members.

One potential barrier to working through employer HR departments to reach pre-retirees is not seeing the value in building a relationship with NCRGEA, not understanding the value NCRGEA provides to retirees, or not being incentivized to actively share information about NCRGEA with its pre-retirement employees. As part of this effort to ensure that NCRGEA is making it as easy as possible for HR departments to share information about and to introduce pre-retirement employees with NCRGEA, NCRGEA seeks to better understand employer needs, including their preference in method of communication, types of resources and other useful information.

Strategy #2: Learn more about needs of pre-retirees

NCRGEA will have the best chance of converting pre-retirees into members if it understands what pre-retirees are looking for in terms of information and resources. As part of its work to better understand the needs of pre-retirees, NCRGEA will leverage its relationships with employers to learn more about how (and how often) pre-retirees would prefer to communicate and work with NCRGEA, as well as the types of resources and information that might be most useful.

Strategy #3: Leverage current members to recruit others

NCRGEA's large membership is one of its greatest assets as an organization, and there is opportunity to leverage its current membership base to reach and convert even more eligible prospective members into NCRGEA members. In addition, with 100 counties, 565 municipalities, 116 school districts, and a large number of state agencies, NCRGEA recognizes that it is not practical to expect someone from the Association headquarters to assume the entire responsibility of attracting and recruiting new members.

BECOME MORE SERVICE-ORIENTED BY EXPANDING INFORMATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS

One of the key themes emerging from the SWOT analysis is that NCRGEA must expand its informational and educational offerings to become the "go-to" resource for government retirees in North Carolina. This will allow retirees to see NCRGEA as even more valuable to their lives and see the multitude of benefits of being a member of NCRGEA, beyond only advocacy for COLAs and other retirement benefits.

Overall Objective: Average of 10% increase in people who watch, read, or engage with NCRGEA content offerings per quarter (includes views of YouTube videos + views of websites containing educational/informational content)

	Design New Information and Education Content to Address Needs of Members	Develop Channels for Sharing Content and Opportunities	Leverage Partnerships to Increase Reach and Breadth of Content
cators (KPIs)	By Summer 2021, the NCRGEA will have defined purpose, mission, roles of Staff/Board/ Members and values of the community	By Q2 2022, a minimum of nine community groups formed and initial meetings held	>>> By Q1 2022, attendance in established community groups grows by 25% per year
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	 group initiative By Summer 2021, the NCRGEA will have developed guidelines for local groups and engagement 		By Q2 2023, each local community group sets individual goals for numbers and types of activities offered for local membership engagement

Strategy #1: Design new information and education content to address needs of members

To become a more service-oriented organization that is valued by its membership, NCRGEA must ensure that the information and educational offerings being produced and shared with members are relevant to, and meet the needs of, its members.

NCRGEA seeks to increase both the quantity as well as the quality and relevancy of content for its members on topics such as available benefits, how to make the most of retirement life, and "how-to" topics like health and finance. The exact topics and methods of communication will be informed by an understanding of what topics members most want to learn more about, as well as what methods they prefer for receiving information and/or engaging with NCRGEA.

Strategy #2: Develop channels for sharing content and opportunities

In addition to creating relevant and engaging content for its members, NCRGEA will need to find ways to maximize member engagement with these resources. A recent current member survey showed that members prefer "push" communication methods which alert them to new content, rather than needing to seek it on their own.

Strategy #3: Leverage partnerships to increase reach and breadth of content

In addition to leveraging its own channels, NCRGEA seeks to leverage partnerships with other organizations to expand its audience and reach. In addition, partnerships with others provides NCRGEA with opportunities to expand the resources it offers members by also sharing information and educational resources put out by partners.

BECOME A RELATIONSHIP-CENTRIC ORGANIZATION THROUGH MORE LOCAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

To increase member engagement and create a sense of belonging within the Association, and to create a broader and more positive footprint locally and statewide, NCRGEA strives to create more opportunities to connect with its membership which is spread throughout the state of North Carolina.

Overall Objective: At least quarterly opportunities for membership engagement through local community groups annually within each of NCRGEA's nine districts by 2022

	Articulate Vision, Purpose, and General Guidelines for Local Community Groups	Create Local Community Groups Tailored to Local Needs	Initiate Loca Events, a Opportur Engage	nd Other nities for	Develop Partnerships with other Local Associations, Groups, and Organizations
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	 By Summer 2021, the NCRGEA will have defined purpose, mission, roles of Staff/Board/ Members and values of the community group initiative By Summer 2021, the NCRGEA will have developed guidelines for local groups and engagement 	» By Q2 2022, a minimum of nine community groups formed and initial meetings held	grows by yearBy Q2 20 local con group set goals for and types	ce in ed ity groups y 25% per 023, each nmunity its individual numbers s of offered for mbership	By Q3 2022, at least one partnership established with a local group or organization that provides beneficial services pertinent to NCRGEA members in each of the nine districts

Strategy #1: Articulate vision, purpose, and general guidelines for local groups

To better engage its membership, and create an enhanced sense of belonging within membership, NCRGEA seeks to create local structures/networks for the organization of local events, meetings, and other activities. This is a strategy employed by other comparable retiree associations, with many having multiple local chapters.

While there is recognition that these will need to be tailored to meet the needs of specific communities, NCRGEA will develop general guidelines and establish the overall vision and purpose of these groups. In addition, general roles, responsibilities for different parties (including staff, board, and participating members) will be developed.

Strategy #2: Create local community groups tailored to local needs

Taking the organization-wide guidance created through the first strategy, NCRGEA will create local groups for NCRGEA members which create opportunities for further engagement. In order to maximize the success of these local groups, NCRGEA will first seek to better understand the ways in which members would like to be engaged, and the best opportunities to do so, while minimizing strain on current staff.

Strategy #3: Initiate local activities, events, and other opportunities for engagement within groups

To create deeper and more meaningful relationships with its members, NCRGEA seeks to provide opportunities for members to engage with the Association through local events and opportunities. This step will be informed by how the groups are organized in the first strategy (may be at district level, county level, city level); the number and type of engagements within a given district may vary greatly. NCRGEA believes this should be done at a local level for each individual group, as what works for the members in the mountains may not be of interest to the members on the coast.

Strategy #4: Develop partnerships with other local associations, groups, and organizations

To reach the broadest and largest audience possible, NCRGEA will develop working relationships with local networks, groups, and other organizations who are currently serving retirees and/or offering beneficial and related services for members across the State.

BUILD CAPACITY TO EXPAND STRATEGIC USE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS TO BETTER ENGAGE MEMBERSHIP

To move effectively into the future and fully meet the needs of its current and future members, NCRGEA knows that it must enhance and improve its digital presence and digital communication strategies.

Overall Objective: 10% increase per quarter in engagement across digital communications (total time spent on NCRGEA website, social media followers, open of digital emails)

Ts)	Optimize Website for Increased Member Engagement	Improve Social Media Presence	Improve Database of Membership Information
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	 Digital communications capacity contracted by August 2021 10% increase per quarter in total time spent on NCRGEA website (total number of sessions x session duration) 	 Social media strategy created, and staff trained in how it relates to their work, by December 2021 10% increase per quarter in Facebook + Twitter + YouTube followers 	 Database software updated and/or replaced to meet technical requirements and allow for future membership growth, by Spring 2022 10% increase per quarter in members with full information in database (including email address, system retired from and geographic district)

Strategy #1: Optimize website for increased member engagement

NCRGEA seeks to have a website that members seek out and rely on for their retirement news, their health and wellness, for opportunities to be engaged in Association priorities, and to connect with each other.

Strategy #2: Improve social media presence

NCRGEA seeks to maximize its use of social media channels (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube) in order to engage its members in two-way conversations, push out important and timely information and updates, and stay connected to the needs of its members.

Strategy #3: Improve database of membership information

To drive more personalized communication, NCRGEA must first ensure that it has the information it needs to fully support its members, including up-to-date contact information, demographic information, services/benefits received, as well as communication and other preferences. This will allow the Association to reach out with pertinent information or relevant requests to designated segments of the membership, based on benefits received, district residence, interest in political involvement, etc. Customization of services is the goal here.

EXPAND POLICY AGENDA AND INFLUENCE THROUGH A COMPELLING VISION, LEADERSHIP, AND THE INTENTIONAL ENGAGEMENT OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS

One of the core values which NCRGEA provides its members throughout the state is being an advocate and voice for the retired government workers of North Carolina. Its representatives lobby the legislature and other policy makers on issues like healthcare, pension sustainability, and cost of living adjustments for retirees. However, in more recent years, achieving progress toward our legislative goals has become more complex due to the changing political tides and conflicts that make them increasingly more difficult to accomplish.

NCRGEA seeks to expand its policy influence, not only by continuing to work towards securing COLAs, but by demonstrating to its members how it continues to fight for and secure a better quality of life for retirees in NC.

Overall Objective: At least 10% annual growth in the percent of members who believe NCRGEA is influential in showing the worth of and protecting/expanding benefits for NC government retirees

	Mobilize Membership in Local Lobbying to Develop Political Influence	For Flexible Partnerships to Amplify Influence	Develop NCRGEA's Internal Research and Information Capacity	Build Influence with Members of Legislature, Relevant State Agencies and Executive Branch Through Direct Education and Lobbying
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	 100 NCRGEA members attend advocacy training webinar in the first year 50% of members attending training webinar report through feedback mechanism that they contacted their representative 	3-5 collaborative initiatives formed with partners	 Consult with national expertise engaged by Fall 2021 Visible alternatives developed and shared externally to enhance long-term visibility of pension system and maintenance of pension value by Summer 2022 	 Meet with 25 legislators in their district annually Communicate priorities to leadership, with personal meetings within first two months of long session, and with first month of short session

Strategy #1: Mobilize membership in local lobbying to develop political influence

The late US House Speaker Tip O'Neill said, "All politics is local". NCRGEA believes that in order to build influence which focuses attention on the needs and concerns of all government retirees, NCRGEA must leverage its large and diverse membership which is spread throughout our nine districts (which include all 100 of North Carolina' counties) and focus on local lobbying of representatives in each of our members' districts. NCRGEA seeks to build a partnership between our local and state elected officials and our membership, and to be politically savvy but not identifiably partisan. NCRGEA believes its membership can be a strong force to accomplish our lobbying priorities.

Strategy #2: Form flexible partnerships to amplify influence

NCRGEA will seek to develop flexible/floating partnerships with other groups when we share common goals, issue by issue and without regard to partisanship. The Association will work in partnership with agencies or associations with whom we share a common issue but limit our work to that issue at that time.

Strategy #3: Develop NCRGEA's internal research and information capacity

Currently information about retiree benefits received by NCRGEA originates within the systems themselves or from other sources outside of NCRGEA. NCRGEA seeks to broaden the resources which we share so that we frame the information in a way that makes sense to our members, rather than simply sharing explanations or analyses which incorporate the perspectives or biases of others. Capturing independent actuarial expertise around pension and health plans to confirm data, information, and insights allows us to tell our own story, rather than letting others drive our narrative. Doing so also gives members greater confidence in NCRGEA credibility as a go-to resource for all matters related to retirement.

Strategy #4: Build influence with members of legislature, relevant state agencies and the executive branch through direct education and lobbying

NCRGEA will continue to employ professional lobbyists to work with the NCRGEA Executive Director. These lobbyists will be additional eyes and ears to help NCRGEA stay on top of threats to its goals and help educate legislators and state leaders about potential actions that affect pensions, health care, and well-being of retired public servants.

There are 170 members of the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA), plus staff, as well as state agencies and the governor's office. We need boots on the ground in Raleigh to respond quickly, alert members to contact their local legislators when key bills and votes are under consideration and educate legislators who often have limited understanding on many issues related to pensions and public servants.

Our approach to NCRGEA issues with leadership as well as rank and file members of the NCGA shall always be non-partisan in nature.

STRENGTHEN PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC SERVICE/ SERVANTS

One of the biggest barriers to NCRGEA in building political influence and continuing to achieve policies which improve the quality of life of its members is negative public and legislative perceptions of public service and government workers, as well as a general mistrust of these groups. This initiative can only be successful if decades of erosion to the public pride, esteem, trust, and confidence in and of the retired and active government workforce is restored in the eyes of the legislature and the general public. Through this strategy, NCRGEA hopes to restore the government's obligation, both real and implied, to care for the health and well-being of those who devoted their working lives to government work.

- >> Reach 6 million North Carolinians through TV/Radio/Newspaper Ads
- >> Raise \$200,000 from sponsors to support ad campaign

STRATEGIC POSITIONING PLATFORM

To accompany this fully strategic plan, NCRGEA is also developing a strategic positioning platform to drive progress over the next three years and ensure transparency with its members.

Available on NCRGEA's website, the Association's strategic positioning platform is a visual summary capturing all of the essential elements of its strategic plan - big vision and goals, positioning statements, and key strategic priorities. NCRGEA will update this platform regularly to ensure clear communication and expression, including links to show progress on key performance indicators (KPIs).

Capture 30% of available market within the next 3 years by becoming go-to resource center for government retirees in North Carolina

Strengthen Awareness Among Pre- Retirees through partnerships and targeted outreach	Become More Service-oriented by Expanding Informational and Educational Offerings	Focus on Becoming a Relationship- Centric Organization Through More Local Opportunities for Engagement	Build Capacity to Expand Strategic Use of Digital Communications to Better Engage Membership	Reimage Public Perception of Public Service and Public Servants	Expand Policy Agenda and Influence Through a Compelling Vision, Leadership, and the Intentional Engagement of Key Stakeholders
Build /deepen relationships with employers to reach current government employees Learn more about needs of preretirees Leverage current members to recruit others	Design new information and education content to address needs of members Develop channels for sharing content and opportunities Leverage partnerships to increase reach and breadth of content	Articulate vision, purpose, and general guidelines for creation of local groups Create local groups tailored to local community needs Initiate local activities, events, and other opportunities for engagement Develop partnerships with other local associations, groups, and organizations	Optimize website for increased member engagement Improve social media presence Improve database of membership information	Reimagine public perception of public service and public servants	Mobilize membership in local lobbying to develop political influence Form flexible partnerships to amplify influence Develop NCRGEA's research and information capacity Build influence with members of legislature, relevant state agencies, and executive branch through direct education and lobbying