

NHC strategic planning overview (2026-2027)

Context: We are undertaking this strategic planning process because we see opportunities to refresh our programming and organizational model. Several years of struggle with site consistency and planning timelines, combined with the COVID pandemic, have made volunteer recruitment a struggle. We have persisted with largely the same programmatic offerings in spite of currently having half the number of Institute participants as we had a decade ago. While the New England retreat maintains its cadence, the once-vibrant Chesapeake Retreat has petered out and NHC online offerings are inconsistent. At the same time, we have real strengths. We have core volunteers who are deeply committed, plus we have cultivated some new core team leadership in recent years. We have reasonable financial reserves in the bank currently. Our staff members are seasoned and capable. We have strong representation across generations.

Purpose: With new energy on the NHC Board, we are undertaking a strategic planning exercise to recenter on our core priorities as a community, so that we can deliberately use our collective time, energy, and resources in the coming years. The NHC is more than 46 years old, and has undergone several evolutions to keep pace with the needs of its members. How can we refresh our approach in order to continue thriving as a community?

Scope: In developing a strategic plan, we seek to balance *inclusion* – given the rich diversity of our community, and how much we value egalitarian participation – with *efficiency* – so that the process doesn't overwhelm our capacity or become unwieldy. Ideally, the process itself knits our community closer together, as we come to better understand each other's needs.

It also will inevitably require some hard choices, as we balance between competing values and strive to make bold shifts if needed. The Board will endeavor to make such decisions with utmost care and transparency, based on community input.

Outcome: We intend for the result of this process to be a strategic plan that is concise, easily understandable, and practically useful in making strategic trade-offs as an organization. The format might be a brief document or a powerpoint, accompanied by an online share-back session for the community.

Process:

- **Phase 1: Listening / Feedback / Scoping**
 - Listening sessions (1 at Institute and at least 1 online) provide opportunities for community members to provide input on what they hold

most dear about the NHC (in terms of values and programming) and where they see opportunities for growth

- TBD: How to structure the online listening session(s) – open session or multiple, targeted toward specific demographics?
- Survey to enable additional participation and input
- One-on-one conversations to get a sampling of more in-depth perspectives. These could be with both long-term and relatively newer members of the NHC as well as with folks who are not (yet) members of our community but share our values.
- Strategic planning team consolidates key findings from the listening sessions/survey and reports back to the community on broad take-aways
- **Phase 2: Developing options**
 - Based on the feedback in Phase 1, the strategic planning team identifies options for adjustments we could make to our operations or programming that would address growth areas while holding true to core values. These may include changes such as (for example) – streamlining Institute programming, relying more on staff for certain roles, deliberately spending down a limited amount of resources to recruit a certain demographic, etc.
 - The team will identify and weigh a range of options
- **Phase 3: Charting a path forward**
 - The strategic planning team will propose certain options to pursue
 - The team will hold a feedback session with community members to discuss and receive input on the proposed way forward
 - Input will be incorporated, adjustments made as needed
 - A final strategic plan will be voted on by the Board
 - Communication of the plan to the wider NHC community via online sessions, presentation at next Institute, etc.

Timeline:

- **August 2026 – October 2026** – Phase 1: Listening / Feedback / Scoping
- **November 2026 – January 2027** – Phase 2: Developing options
- **February 2027 – April 2027** – Phase 3: Charting a path forward