



MAGNET SCHOOLS OF AMERICA STRATEGIC DESIGN PLAN  
2017



Strategic Design PWG

## MAGNET SCHOOLS OF AMERICA

### Strategic Design Planning Project Work Group

The Strategic Design Planning Project Work Group (The PWG) met on July 13, 2016. The purpose was to update the previous design completed in 2011. The staff for MSA met on August 30, 2016 to begin to complete action items to approximate the design.

Members of the PWG included:

- ✦ All National Office staff (Todd Mann, Judy Shen, John Laughner, Fawzia Ampaware, Elaina Hundley, Kelly Bucherie, Lauren Falotico)
- ✦ Members of the Executive Committee (Sara Wheeler, Susan King, Bill Magnotta, Doreen Marvin)
- ✦ Board Members (Kim Burkhalter- Regional Director, Donna Elam- Specialized Director, Robert Brooks- Past President)
- ✦ Ex-Officio Board Member (Diane Creekmore- Past President)
- ✦ General School/District Member (Tammy Armand-Golden)

The PWG would like to express sincere thanks to Specialized Director, Maree Sneed, for the use of three conference rooms at Hogan Lovells. The conference rooms were instrumental in allowing the PWG to have small and large groups discussions and to prepare documents. The hospitality was greatly appreciated.

Doreen Marvin, Immediate Past President facilitated the process and serves as chair of the project work group.

***It is important to note that all listed resources needed in the Call to Action are approximate and new monies, new expenditures, reallocated resources and reallocated expenditures would be approved by the Board via the annual budget process.***

***As with all designs and plans contextual or member demands may change and the design needs to flex with the demand. This document should be viewed as a guide to influence the future and may need to be adjusted as time moves along.***

## DESIGN

Designers spend much of their time thinking through problems from the ‘outside in.’ Contrasted with the ‘inside out’ approaches that typify corporate business agendas, this methodology focuses on the perspective of customers and end users when analyzing and crafting solutions. Applying this perspective to strategic work creates more genuine relevance.

Luke Wroblewski

## **INTRODUCTION**

As one reads this plan it will be important to understand the lens of the world of magnet schools and MSA. To assist the reader, we offer the following descriptions of terms and organizations mentioned in the paper:

**MAGNET SCHOOLS OF AMERICA(MSA)** is *The National Association of Magnet and Theme-Based Schools Providing leadership for high quality innovative instructional programs that promote choice, equity, diversity, and academic excellence for all students.*

**MAGNET SCHOOLS** are Magnet schools are built on the foundation of five pillars and are free public elementary and secondary schools of choice that are operated by school districts or a consortium of districts. Magnet schools have a focused theme and aligned curricula in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Fine and Performing Arts, International Baccalaureate, International Studies, MicroSociety, Career and Technical Education (CTE), World Languages (immersion and non-immersion) and many others. Magnet schools are typically more “hands on – minds on” and use an approach to learning that is inquiry or performance/project based. They use state, district, or Common Core standards in all subject areas, however, they are taught within the overall theme of the school.

Most magnet schools do not have entrance criteria, but rather, embody the belief that all students have interests and talents that families and educators believe are better cultivated in a magnet school. They often use a random computer-based lottery system for admission. There are also magnet schools that may utilize student assessment data and teacher or parent recommendations for selection.

Diversity is a core element of a magnet school. Students from a wide array of backgrounds attend magnet schools. As a result, they promote higher level cognitive and social learning. Magnet schools make the extra effort to create a sense of classroom and school community and cultivate school spirit. Curriculum is also clear and transparent for families so they can more fully engage in the learning of their students.

Magnet schools serve all students including English learners as well as students receiving special education services. Transportation is typically also provided for no cost to families by the school district.

**NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR MAGNET SCHOOL LEADERSHIP (NIMSL)** The National Institute for Magnet School Leadership (NIMSL) is the technical assistance arm of Magnet Schools of America. NIMSL's mission is provide professional expertise to our member districts through specialized training and fee for service contracts. NIMSL has contracted a team of national experts who have intimate knowledge of the skills and nuances that make magnet schools and the districts they function in successful.

NIMSL has trained principals, assisted in the development of state and/or regional associations, and currently provides technical assistance to local school districts through on-site leadership training and evaluation of magnet school programs. NIMSL also reviews policies and procedures relating to theme selection, marketing, and student assignment.

**PILLARS OF MAGNET SCHOOLS** MSA believes that the foundations of magnet schools are critical to implementation and sustainability. MSA, as the source for the more than 4000 magnet schools across the country, adopted and lives by the Pillars.

- **Diversity** is a cornerstone to offering students a global educational experience. Schools, through recruitment and lotteries, strive to have student populations that are reflective of the community. Culturally competent educational environments model empathy, respect, and working collaboratively with a variety of persons.
- **Innovative Curriculum and Professional Development** is developed to assure theme-based relevant instruction to students. Effective teaching strategies, emulating from best practices, are implemented through the inclusion of the school's theme. Curriculum is based on high quality rigorous standards that prepare students for higher education and career success.
- **Academic Excellence** is demonstrated through a commitment to multi-dimensional instruction focused on learner needs. Multiple assessment strategies are employed to monitor student learning, progress, and success. High expectations are clearly articulated and personalized supports are in place to address the interests and aspirations of all students.
- **High Quality Instructional Systems** are rooted in well-prepared, well-educated professional educators. Teachers and administrators who are student-centered, collaborative, and inquisitive prepare learners to be world ready, workforce ready, and higher education ready.
- **Family and Community Partnerships** are mutually beneficial, offer a system of support, shared ownership, and a caring spirit and are designed to enhance a theme integrated educational environment. Partnerships with parents are essential for a rich educational experience for students. Community partnerships include a diverse array of stakeholders including business, health and human services, and policy makers to support the education of all students.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS** consist of these positions: President, President Elect, Immediate Past President, Treasurer, Secretary, Past Presidents (voting and ex-officio), Specialized Directors, Regional Directors, and Parliamentarian. One can refer to the MSA By-Laws and for specifics of each of these roles.

**STAFF POSITIONS IN THE NATIONAL OFFICE** are: Executive Director (Todd Mann); Director of Magnet School Leadership (Kelly Bucherie); Director of Operations (Judy Shen); Sponsorship and Exhibits Manager (Lauren Falotico); Accounting Manager (Jynaya Joiner); Legislative and Communications Manager (John Laughner); Membership Coordinator (Elaina Hundley); Administrative Assistant (Fawzia Ampaware)

**PROJECT WORK GROUPS** are the working committees for the organization. A compendium of the PWG's are included in the appendix of this paper. MSA adopted the use of Project Work Groups with the goal of being able to bring a variety of people to the work of the organization. Project Work Groups allow members of the organization (i.e. school and district staff, consultants) and experts from a variety of associated fields to participate, engage with, and drive the work of the organization. The Board of Directors' members participate on PWGs together. This structure has allowed greater engagement of the membership and has brought valuable resources to the organization.

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):** The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015. This bipartisan measure reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation’s national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students. The new law builds on key areas of progress in recent years, made possible by the efforts of educators, communities, parents, and students across the country. For example, today, high school graduation rates are at all-time highs. Dropout rates are at historic lows. And more students are going to college than ever before. These achievements provide a firm foundation for further work to expand educational opportunity and improve student outcomes under ESSA.

**EQUITY ASSISTANCE CENTERS** are funded by the United States Department of Education to provide technical assistance and training, upon request, in the areas of race, sex, and national origin to public school districts and other responsible governmental agencies to promote equitable education opportunities.

**MAGNET SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM** The Magnet Schools Assistance program provides grants to eligible local educational agencies to establish and operate magnet schools that are operated under a court-ordered or federally approved voluntary desegregation plan. These grants assist in the desegregation of public schools by supporting the elimination, reduction, and prevention of minority group isolation in elementary and secondary schools with substantial numbers of minority group students. In order to meet the statutory purposes of the program, projects also must support the development and implementation of magnet schools that assist in the achievement of systemic reforms and provide all students with the opportunity to meet challenging academic content and student academic achievement standards. Projects support the development and design of innovative education methods and practices that promote diversity and increase choices in public education programs. The program supports capacity development—the ability of a school to help all its students meet more challenging standards—through professional development and other activities that will enable the continued operation of the magnet schools at a high performance level after funding ends. Finally, the program supports the implementation of courses of instruction in magnet schools that strengthen students’ knowledge of academic subjects and their grasp of tangible and marketable vocational skills.

The statute defines a magnet school as a public elementary school, public secondary school, public elementary education center, or public secondary education center that offers a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial backgrounds.

**NATIONAL COALITION FOR SCHOOL DIVERSITY (NCSD)** is a network of **national civil rights organizations, university-based research centers, and state and local coalitions** working to expand support for government policies that promote school diversity and reduce racial and economic isolation in elementary and secondary schools. We also support the work of state and local school diversity practitioners. Our work is informed by an **advisory panel of scholars and academic researchers** whose work relates to issues of equity, diversity, and desegregation/integration.

**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS (AASA)**, the School Superintendents Association, advocates for the highest quality public education for all students, and develops and supports school system leaders. AASA, the School Superintendents Association, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders in the United States and throughout the world. AASA members range from chief executive officers, superintendents and senior level school

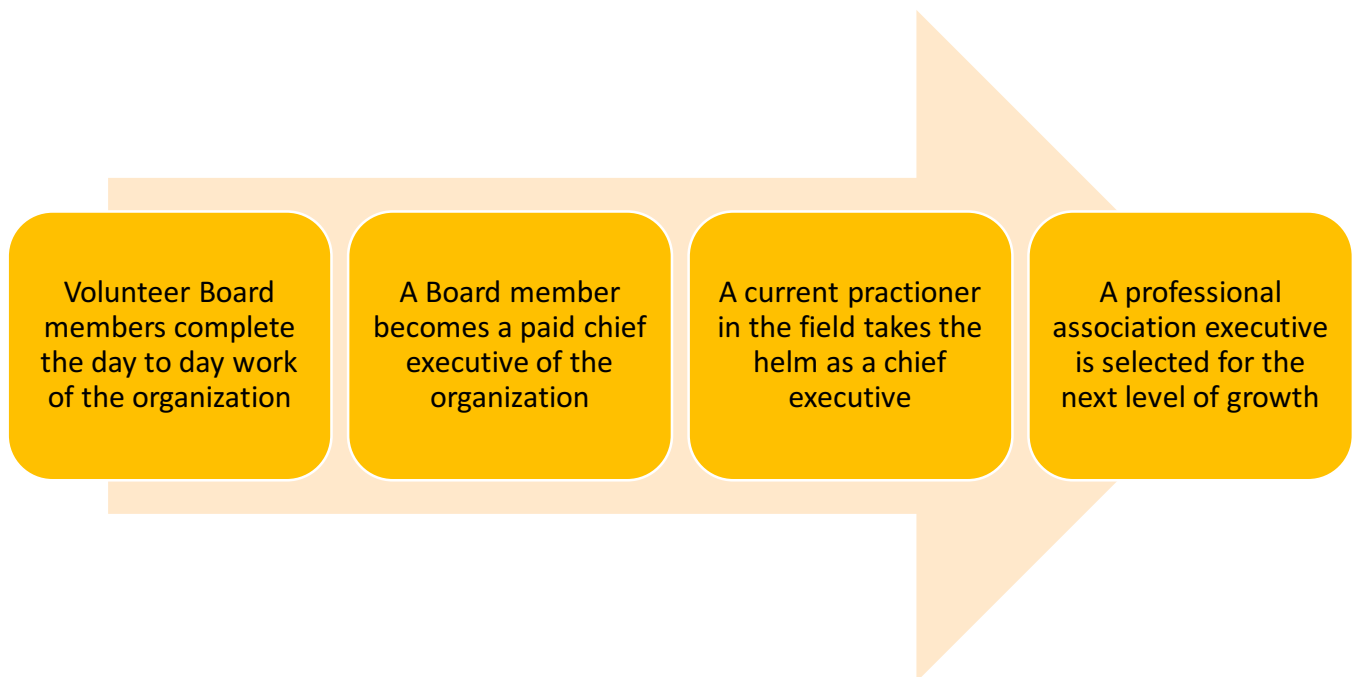
administrators to cabinet members, professors and aspiring school system leaders. AASA members are the chief education advocates for children. AASA members advance the goals of public education and champion children’s causes in their districts and nationwide. As school system leaders, AASA members set the pace for academic achievement. They help shape policy, oversee its implementation and represent school districts to the public at large.

Highlighting some terms and words contained within this paper was important to the Board of Directors and Project Work Group.

**COLLABORATIVELY:** As the PWG and Board worked on this Strategic Design they wanted to build on the recent path of having MSA members join in the activities and tasks of the organization. The word collaboratively is key to the next vision of MSA and to the action needed to achieve the vision. MSA is **dedicated to working with and beside its members and partners** to achieve equity for all children.

**REFLECTIONS:** Since **diversity and equity are cornerstones of magnet schools and MSA**, reflecting on the development and changes from the Civil Rights movement, the implementation of magnet schools, and the landscape of public school choice was critical to this design. This paper strives to **honor the traditions** of magnet schools and MSA while recognizing the need to meet the new needs of members and the field of school choice.

**MATURITY:** Over the past 22 years as a non-profit Association and almost 30 years as an Association, MSA has transitioned through many typical stages of maturity. The graphic demonstrates the stages for MSA.



MSA as an organization is working to embrace this maturity. Critical to this is honoring the history while embracing the new needs of members and schools. Change can be difficult; the Board may have difficult decisions to make. As a whole, the Board needs to create a pathway that allows the work of the organization to meet this growth and change. For example, being intentional about diversifying income

and investments of all resources will assist the organization to *influence change and situate itself in a place where the growth can happen (page 35)*. Being intentional about bringing in partners and sharing opportunities with members will be important (page 25). Additional examples include influencing the field of magnet education research (page 23); investing in public relations and communications (page 31.)

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## Magnet Schools of America

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### CONTEXT

The 16-member project work group (PWG) members used a Design Methodology that goes beyond traditional strategic planning. It is a method that can address systemic changes and create a multi-year framework for Magnet Schools of America to create the future it wants. The design describes the organizational system the stakeholders would collectively *choose to have* rather than simply incremental improvement of what it has now. This work is based from a success mindset, not a deficit mindset. The PWG reviewed data from members and stakeholders, financial information, and trend data from professional learning sessions and conferences.

Traditional strategic planning begins with the assumption that the future can be predicted well enough to define gaps between the *anticipated* future and the present. Those gaps, then, are filled with strategies that attempt to make the organization successful in the predicted future environment. It is as though the future is barreling down the tunnel toward us and all we can do is get ready for it to hit us.

Design begins with a different assumption—that the future cannot be predicted but that it can be influenced. Design, therefore, seeks to define the *preferred* future and creates strategies to bring it about. In this case, what happens in the future depends a lot on what’s done between now and then. The importance of the shift in thinking between the two methods of strategic planning and design cannot be overemphasized. Briefly, the design process involves three phases: understanding the context and set of interacting problems facing the designers, generating design options based on community preferences and systems theory, and planning for implementation. Design methods and systems principles will help MSA, the MSA membership community, and the portfolio of choice options identify what the next generation of services can look like.

**REFLECTIONS:** It is important, particularly at this time, to reflect on the foundations of magnet



IF YOU HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE  
THINGS BETTER AND YOU DON'T, THEN YOU  
ARE WASTING YOUR TIME ON EARTH

Roberto Clemente

schools and the early stages of Magnet Schools of America (MSA). Why particularly at this time? Recent racially motivated political and violent events, data that reveals a re-segregation across the country, and the maturity level of MSA in its development as an organization dedicated to high-quality equitable education all lend themselves to understanding the history and the context of magnet schools and MSA.

As one looks back in time and studies the history of the Civil Rights Movement and the subsequent federal Civil Rights Act and other related legislation, one finds many instances of



mandatory and voluntary actions for change in schools and equitable education. Recently, Supreme Court Justices have written that diversity is a compelling governmental interest.

Many of the long-time members and supporters of MSA have roots in the Civil Rights movements and acts.

Magnet schools were the original public school choice and more than 50 years later remain the only public school choice option directly focused on diversity and equity and academic achievement. While legislation nationally and locally in many states have policies directed toward reducing racial and ethnic isolation, the federally funded Magnet Schools Assistance Program remains the single federal funding source for public school choice with dual top priorities of reducing minority group isolation and improving student achievement.

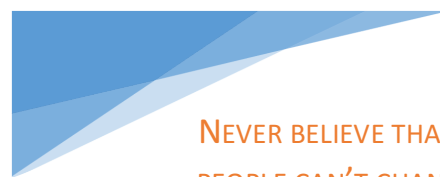
One might argue that current Secretary of Education John King's hoped for policies are clearly directed at racial, ethnic and socio-economic isolation. This argument is true, yet the most recent federal budget being debated (summer 2016) removes all funding for magnet schools and continues to increase funding for other forms of school choice (public and non-public) for which there is no requirement to reduce isolation. Furthermore, a policy decision was made to reduce the number of federally funded Equity Centers from 10 nationwide to 4 nationwide. As the government administration changes, the USDOE is seeing a decrease in historical knowledge base for some funding areas. Time will tell how committed we are as a nation to the celebration of our rich diverse populations.

*In the meantime, MSA must continue to influence its future, serve its members and impact these policies.*

MSA and its founders have had informal collaborative efforts supporting magnet schools since the 1970's. MSA operated as an association through the 1980's and became a formal 501c3 in 1994. Like many start-up associations location of offices made many transitions from different states and shared offices until 2000 when a permanent presence was made in Washington DC. By 2005 the solid financial base, member base, and services base were readily established. These meager beginnings and development into a nationally recognized specialty organization are truly due to the strength, passion, and dedication of the founders/charter members- some of whom continue to be able to support the organization and serve on the board. It is an admirable story.

**GROWTH:** As a result of this dedication, strong leadership, and follow through on the most recent strategic design the organization has accomplished much. Most notably the accomplishments include increased revenue which allowed for strategic investments in the National Institute for Magnet School Leadership (NIMSL) (Magnet Standards, Leadership Training, Magnet Certification), public relations, and professional learning for the staff. NIMSL was founded in 2008 to support an emphasis on school leadership. Its growth expanded to 250 leaders trained by 2010, and this growth continues today.

All these efforts have led to a more notable presence. Ties have been re-strengthened with the USDOE,



NEVER BELIEVE THAT A FEW CARING  
PEOPLE CAN'T CHANGE THE WORLD.  
FOR, INDEED THAT'S ALL WHO EVER HAD

Margaret Mead

OCR (as an arm of USDOE) and strategic collaborations with other associations and organizations have grown. MSA has contracted with the University of North Carolina at Charlotte for specific research on the presence of magnet schools state by state.

Since 2012, the organization has seen two Executive Directors, additional staffing, staff changes, a new Board of Directors structure (voted upon as a result of the past strategic design), and a more inclusive voting process that includes electronic voting for members. Prior to 2012 MSA had a long tenured Executive Director for ten years. While overall membership numbers have fluctuated, the average number of district and school members over five years is steady. Member needs have definitely changed and the organization has been defining member value and shifting services to meet these needs; this includes the growth of NIMSL. In the past three years, the number of applications for recognition awards has tripled, new awards were developed, and the number of schools recognized with awards has grown significantly.

There has been a recent growth of interest among members interested in a position on the Board of Directors. This has grown steadily since the change in board structure, strategic communications about board openings, and the electronic voting processes. Furthermore, the Board and organization have realized positive shifts with its influence in the world of legislation.

**MATURITY:** Given that May 2016 saw the successful hosting of the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conference for Magnet Schools with close to 1500 participants, it is evident that the excitement in the roots of the organization started by a small number of passionate people continues to grow and the organization has a real vibrancy. This growth, maturity, and vibrancy demonstrate the trajectory of moving from a Board run organization to a Board led and directed organization with a professional staff responsible for the day to day successes and challenges. The strength of the organization and this maturity is evident in the creation and definition of what MSA has coined The Pillars of Magnet Schools. One will note that the first pillar is Diversity- a core value. Additional pillars support high quality innovative academic experiences for students supported by professional learning for the adults in the learning environment. The pillars are rounded out by recognizing the importance and positive impact of partnerships with family and community. The maturity of the pillars has been scaffolding from identification to definition to shared vision for the organization and its members. A natural next step and one that has been three years in the development is the development of standards and indicators for each pillar. These standards and indicators were received enthusiastically by the education field, USDOE, and MSA members. In the progressive development of the pillars, a magnet certification process was released after a year of beta testing in May. The allotted 100 opportunities for schools were filled within one hour- a testament to the customer need, interest, and significant work of the Standards & Certification Project Work Group.

**SHIFTS:** The importance of staying focused on the purpose of magnet schools cannot be overstated. While the political landscape of education ebbs and flows with a focus on achievement for all students, a significant growth of Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) (federal funds) has not been realized. Although the funds have not increased, the guidelines for MSAP will be changing in the next year. For example, reduction of isolation will remain a priority- racial group isolation and a new focus on socio-economic isolation are included in the guidelines. As mentioned previously, currently the MSAP funds are the only federal education funding focused on supporting diverse learning environments. School

Choice is and will continue to be a demand by the consumers of public education; MSA supports public school choice. *MSA will continue to influence the education funding landscape to include more*



**WE DID NOT COME TO FEAR THE FUTURE.  
WE CAME TO SHAPE IT.**

Barak Obama. President

*opportunity for diverse learning environments in public education, particularly magnet schools.*

Public education has seen significant shifts- in particular a shift from its origin of access for all to **No Child Left Behind** to the newly passed **Every Student Succeeds Act**. The nation is seeing a rise of parents “opting out” of standardized high-stakes testing mandated by legislation for their child. At the same time, there is a shift

within school districts for personalizing learning, learner-based assessments, and standards-based grading. School leadership demands have grown and changed. Evaluation systems for certified teachers are now including a component of student achievement and student growth as a result of the federal legislation. MSA needs to be poised to support these educational demands and shifts for its members.

Our national knowledge-based economy, a national demand for employees with science, technology, engineering, and math backgrounds and technology changing at the speed of light all directly point to impacting MSA members and others in public education. MSA has a responsibility to support those seeking innovative educational responses and to keep balance in the responses; for instance, educating the public on the benefits of integrating the arts in education. *MSA will need to shift its professional learning to support the new learning demands.*

Research, data-driven instruction, virtual learning, theme integration are all important components to a professional learning system that brings coherence to a district’s vision. Districts are supporting teacher and learner growth with professional learning that proves a positive impact through data. Teacher leadership is expanding across the country. Changes are also evident in districts partnering with their community for very specific purposes, such as authentic project/problem based learning. Teaching and learning is changing through the use and availability of digital resources and a need to be more efficient with extremely restricted budgets.

Changing demographics across the country, racial tensions, and evidence of re-segregation in communities and schools continue to reveal the need for MSA and its supports for magnet and theme-based schools. *MSA’s expertise is important and it is clear that shifts across the spectrum of education are driving a need for MSA to meet new and relevant needs of its members.*

During the past strategic design process, MSA specifications related to being at “the table” in the school choice dialogues nationally. *MSA has certainly demonstrated growth in that national dialogue; now MSA is at a level of influence maturity to create a new “table”. The organization is poised to influence the diversity dialogue.*

**MEMBER INPUT AND DATA TRENDS:** The following table is a summary of the five segments of information the PWG gathered and reviewed. The five segments: Finances, National Institute for Magnet School Leadership, Membership, Policy, and Professional Learning included data

trends for three to five years. These data trends included feedback from members and stakeholders. The PWG also engaged in a series of facilitated discussions related to a historical view of magnets and MSA, political influences, economic influences, and customer needs. One will see function, structure, and process elements within the system of MSA as a whole.

FINANCE	NIMSL	MEMBERSHIP	POLICY	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
Trends over 5 years	NIMSL is working; data supports this	Expansion this year; drop is back up; consistency	Launched Action Center 2.5 years ago- growth from 51 participants to 1238 users	Trend up in all areas for conferences
2 mil organization	Position is being increasingly supported by revenue	Need to bring in more members	Increase participation in larger states	Location does matter not only for district support and cost of expenses/services but also for vendors and sponsors
New revenue sources	80% evaluations demonstrate very positive reactions and satisfaction; 99% report that they get new ideas	Positive feedback; yet knowledge of all the services was only "somewhat" known	What was happening in the states that had high participation rates? Used Chicago as an example	Re-look at the who for Policy conference and the attraction of speakers; the shift to including MSAP brought in additional draw.- if \$ goes away what will the draw be
Reduce the amount MSA relies on conferences and membership	How do we get from 80% to a higher number	Promotion of NIMSL for member benefit awareness; get more specific	Increase participation through community partners and have them also use the Action Center on our behalf	Summer could be more regional
Net assets could go quickly; need to get reserves back up for protection; to what extent do we want to bring that back up and to what extent do we want to re-invest in organization budget	65% return rate on evaluations	Creating a clear approach to highlighting the value	Keep participation up even during non-crisis times (school tours, etc.)	Networking in the Fall; starting up

FINANCE	NIMSL	MEMBERSHIP	POLICY	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
Fundraising revenue stagnant	Response to this 65% number is already in place with a new process	Those utilizing all the services; are highly satisfied	Educate the users and potential users of the system	Create a strong identity for each PL conference
Membership growing	Increase number of trained highly trained consultants	Dip in 14-15 in membership and now back to 13-14 numbers	Is the “back to the future” process of a phone tree a worthwhile process? Use of Social Media	Need to bring a steady source of sponsorships
Capitalizing on ESSA	Increase promotions; Use the full name in reporting the stats and promoting	All members need to know all the benefits	Training for Regional Directors	More return of surveys
Careful consideration for conference sites and recognizing the impact on the budget	Balance the “ladies/men in waiting” with service delivery demand	Redefine district member to reflect the diversity of our membership		Better use of regional business meetings at National
	Building relations with magnet schools			
	Look and test the name- one suggestion is to not use acronym			
	Need to collect data from site specific services- Process is now in place			
	Growth plan needed with projections- NIMSL influence its own future- what is the point that certification is its own entity?			

Table 1

<sup>1</sup> Table 1 PWG work product

## CHALLENGE AND RESPONSIBILITY

“Let nobody fool you, all the loud noises we hear today are nothing but the death groans of the dying system. The old order is passing away; the new order is coming into being. But whenever there is anything new there are new responsibilities. As we think of this coming new world we must think of the challenge that we confront and the new responsibilities that stand before us. We must prepare to live in a new world.” Martin Luther King

## CHALLENGES

**INTERACTING PROBLEMS:** “Houston, we have a problem!” Those five words trigger instant recall for anyone who watched the 1995 movie *Apollo 13* starring Tom Hanks as astronaut and flight commander Jim Lovell. Apollo 13 suffered a crippling explosion that started an avalanche of problems in the complex spacecraft that was on its way to the moon for what looked to be a routine lunar landing. NASA went to work, trying desperately to reconfigure existing components to solve the complicated and interconnected set of problems that threatened the lives of the three men on the mission. Solutions required that entire sections of the craft be jettisoned into space and that other sections be re-purposed. The lunar landing module, never designed to serve this purpose, became the lifeboat for the crew’s re-entry to earth’s atmosphere. It’s a powerful story about American ingenuity: when faced with a life-or-death situation, inventiveness and creativity can prevail. It’s a story appropriate for the next generation of Magnet Schools of America.

Problems like Apollo 13 faced in 1970 and organizations like MSA are a special breed. They are called “wicked” problems, and they’ve been known to students of organization and planning since at least 1973. Wickedness is not a matter of difficulty, but a matter of the inadequacy of traditional solutions.<sup>2</sup> Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, John Camillus observed that,

*A wicked problem has innumerable causes, is tough to describe, and doesn’t have a right answer... Environmental degradation, terrorism, and poverty—these are classic examples of wicked problems. They’re the opposite of hard but ordinary problems, which people can solve in a finite time period by applying standard techniques. Not only do conventional processes fail to tackle wicked problems, but they may exacerbate situations by generating undesirable consequences.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Susan Leddick, PKR, Inc. 2010

<sup>3</sup> J.C. Camillus. “Strategy as a Wicked Problem.” *Harvard Business Review*. May, 2008.

We can add contemporary educational organizations' problems to the list Camillus published.

Wicked problems are no fun! They come in bunches. They do not appear in a nice list, ready to be solved and checked off one-by-one. Instead, they are a tangle of interactions...a set of interconnected forces that operate on each other in a variety of ways and in varying strengths. They may not have been seen before. They do not necessarily have known solutions. To make things worse, they are often the source of disagreement among different groups of people, and that social aspect makes them even harder to address.

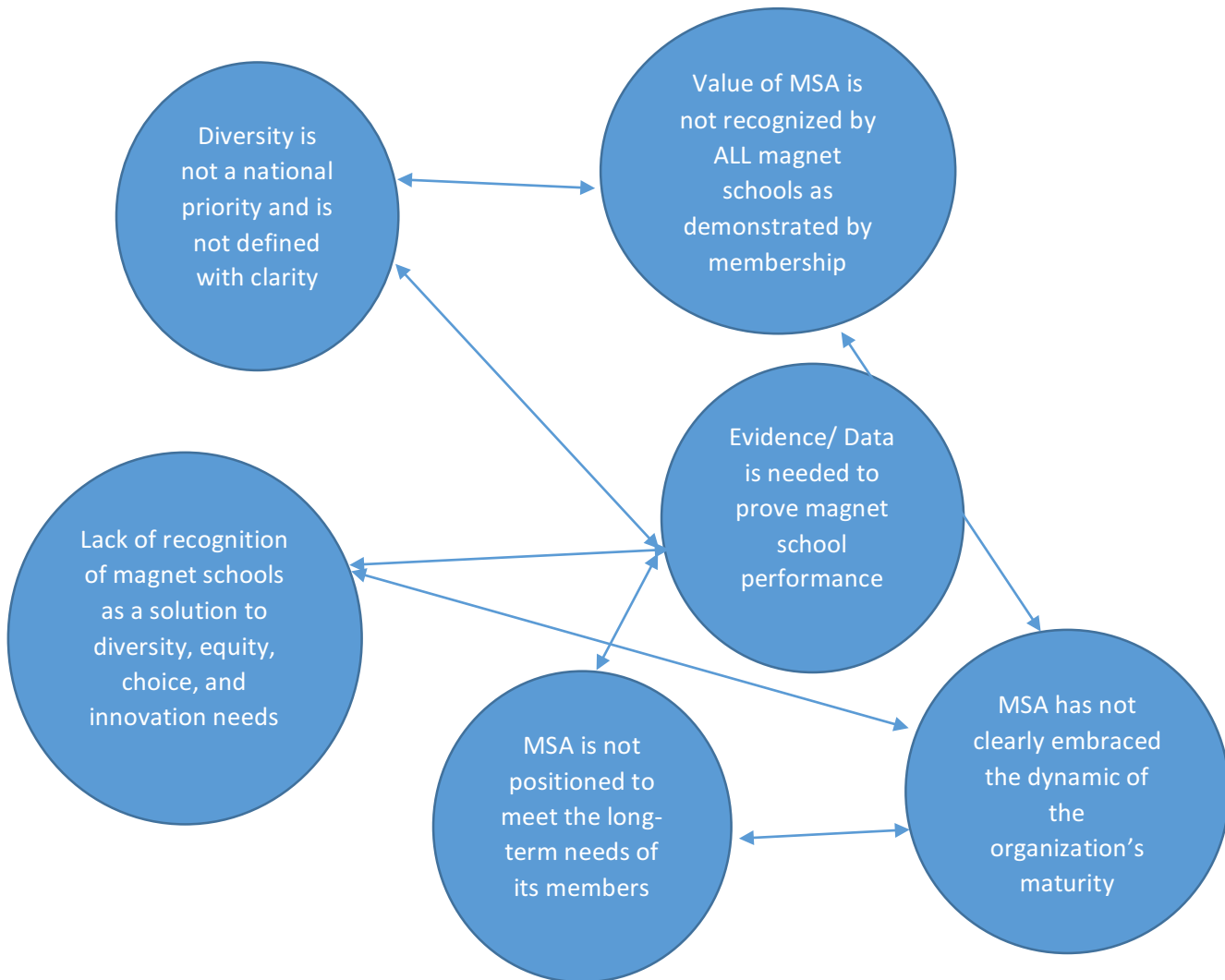
The PWG worked on problems and solutions simultaneously by separating into two groups. One group was a solution group and the other group was a problem identification group. They had engaged in such deep conversations during their design morning, that the trust for this process and trust among the group was palpable. It is important to note that each group switched roles and were encouraged to edit the previous group's work. Furthermore, it is even more important to note that each group was very pleased with the previous group's work. Each made edits, however, they were minor and resulted in small additions. The group, as a whole and in smaller segments, was in sync. This is a testament to each person's commitment to listen, hear, question, and commit to the rest of the group.

The identified set of "wicked problems" or interacting challenges are:

1. Diversity is not recognized as a national priority, nor is it defined with clarity.
2. Not all magnet schools are members of MSA
3. Lack of evidence/data to support magnet school performance (academic achievement, public school reform, student or school diversity)
4. Magnet schools are not recognized as a preferred choice option to the extent of other choice options: vouchers and charters
5. MSA is not positioned to meet the long-term needs of its members
6. We have not clearly embraced the dynamic of our organization's maturity as it addresses magnet and theme-based schools

One of the most important elements of the design process is to identify how the challenges interact with one another- impacting the system whole not just individual parts. The following diagram is the work completed.

Set of Interacting Challenges (Figure. 1)<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Figure 1 Set of Interacting Challenges PWG work product



## SOLUTIONS

Just as an engineer or architect designs to a set of specifications by the customer, so did the MSA PWG. Following additional review and analysis of the set of interacting challenges, the data trends, and other elements of the context the PWG determined the following set of specifications for the next journey of Magnet Schools of America. These specifications are not stagnant goals and the solutions are the means to influence the future of the organization based on customer expectations. The PWG sees the next iteration of MSA as having a very connected working relationship **with** its members and partners not just **for** its members and partners. Hence, one will see that the specifications begin with the word **collaboratively**. This is an important tenet and a deliberate shift based on member input for MSA. The influencing idea is to continue to build on the growth of the member participation on project work groups, increasing award interest, and growth of NIMSL- *A future that ensures a strong organization that provides leadership for high quality innovative instructional programs that promote equity, diversity, and academic excellence for all students.*

...DON'T SIT DOWN AND WAIT FOR THE OPPORTUNITIES TO COME. YOU HAVE TO GET UP AND MAKE THEM.

MADAM C.J. WALKER

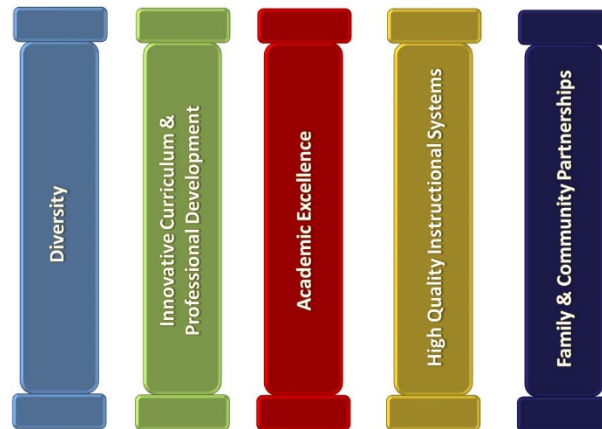
**SPECIFICATIONS:** **Collaboratively, with its members and partners**, Magnet Schools of America will

- Be the recognized school choice leader for equitable education and international diversity
- Be the leading resources for innovation in integrated theme based teaching and learning
- Have technology-rich accessible services to support the needs of the magnet community
- Serve as the public voice for exemplar magnet schools and high-quality instructional practices
- Influence and impact policy and research locally and nationally
- Have significant relationships and partnerships supporting diversity, educational reform, and community and family engagement.

## APPROXIMATION:

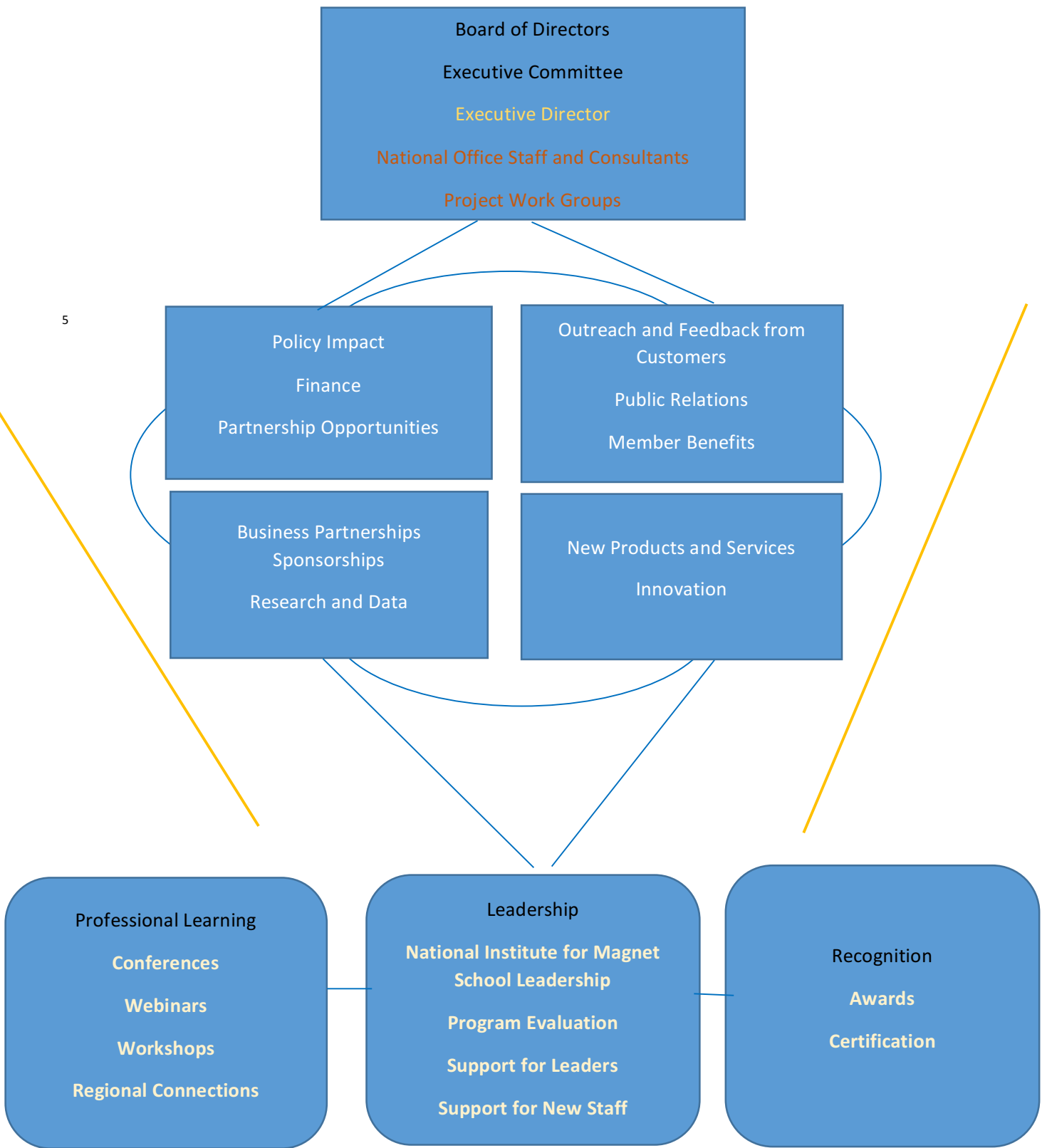
**FUNCTION OF MSA:** To provide leadership for high quality innovative instructional programs that promote choice, equity, diversity, and academic excellence for all students.

## PILLARS



- **Diversity** is a cornerstone to offering students a global educational experience. Schools, through recruitment and lotteries, strive to have student populations that are reflective of the community. Culturally competent educational environments model empathy, respect, and working collaboratively with a variety of persons.
- **Innovative Curriculum and Professional Development** is developed to assure theme-based relevant instruction to students. Effective teaching strategies, emulating from best practices, are implemented through the inclusion of the school's theme. Curriculum is based on high-quality rigorous standards that prepare students for higher education and career success.
- **Academic Excellence** is demonstrated through a commitment to multi-dimensional instruction focused on learner needs. Multiple assessment strategies are employed to monitor student learning, progress, and success. High expectations are clearly articulated and personalized supports are in place to address the interests and aspirations of all students.
- **High Quality Instructional Systems** are rooted in well-prepared, well-educated professional educators. Teachers and administrators who are student-centered, collaborative, and inquisitive prepare learners to be world ready, workforce ready, and higher education ready.
- **Family and Community Partnerships** are mutually beneficial, offer a system of support, shared ownership, and a caring spirit and are designed to enhance a theme integrated educational environment. Partnerships with parents are essential for a rich educational experience for students. Community partnerships include a diverse array of stakeholders including business, health and human services, and policy makers to support the education of all students.

**STRUCTURE:** The PWG is not recommending any major changes to the structure of the organization. They recognize that new products and services will be forthcoming but can fit into the current structure and delivery platforms. Please see figure 2 on page 19.



<sup>5</sup> Figure 2 Organizational Design and Services

“Look for intelligence and judgment, and most critically, a capacity to anticipate, to see around corners. Keep looking below surface appearances. Don’t shrink from doing so just because you might not like what you find. Organization doesn’t really accomplish anything. Plans don’t much matter. Endeavors succeed or fail because of the people involved. Only by attracting the best people will you accomplish great deeds.” Colin Powell

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**SPECIFICATIONS:** Collaboratively, with its members and partners, Magnet Schools of America will

- Be the recognized school choice leader for equitable education and international diversity
- Be the leading resources for innovation in integrated theme based teaching and learning
- Have technology rich accessible services to support the needs of the magnet community
- Serve as the public voice for exemplar magnet schools and high quality instructional practices
- Influence and impact policy and research locally and nationally
- Have significant relationships and partnerships supporting diversity, educational reform, and community and family engagement.

**STRATEGIES:** Action items to approximate the design over the next three years

- Create a mechanism for MSA to support magnets as an incubator for leading innovation that impacts theme related academics, achievement, and diversity
  - Continue with research with UNC Charlotte or a new University to expand the research to other Magnet School information
  - Gain interest with other institutions conducting research
  - Determine elements of Magnet schools that current research would support
    - Heterogeneity
    - Housing and zoning
    - Achievement gap
    - MSAP funded evaluations
    - School Climate
    - Family Engagement
  - Grow partnerships sponsorships for innovation
    - Opportunities for members
    - Collaborate with other educational associations
    - Relationships with funders (directly related to research)
- Increase the recognition of Magnet Certification among districts and by DOE
  - Increase the number of magnet schools certified to 500 in five years
  - Create coherence through MSA Awards and Certification
  - Determine the criteria for moving Magnet Certification to its own delivery platform within MSA
- Give value to members

- through a totally interactive website
  - Digital professional learning, resources, action center, access to other members
- At least three high-quality, interactive face to face professional development conferences or seminars
- Increase the current NIMSL services to more members
  - Expand the current NIMSL services
  - Increase brand recognition of NIMSL
- Increase the value and recognition of MSA as a leader in diversity, equity in education, public school choice, and education reform models
  - Public relations campaigns to continue
    - Be seen as a solution oriented association to address issues of diversity and achievement
    - Increase support for magnets at the local, state, and national levels
      - Call for every Governor to dedicate up to 2% of their budget to educational and community diversity programs
      - Use our Grass Roots Action Campaigns to assist at the state level
  - Create connections to magnet school alumni
    - Use them in PR and marketing
  - Create connections to magnet parents
    - Use them in PR and marketing
  - Convene a session of educational partners to share the message of diversity
    - Build the platform for continued discussion
- Situate the organization to meet its maturity stages to continue on a path of strategic stable growth
  - Create a risk assessed investment plan and determine a base policy for the amount of reserves the organization keeps on hand
  - Grow the reserves as appropriate
  - Diversify income
  - Board training regarding
    - Association/Organization Growth
    - Board Member Responsibilities
    - How to Maximize Board Impact
    - Communications
    - Board Mindset
    - Board Orientation and Context of the Organization

## ***Indicators of Progress and Success***

- Increase in the financial portfolio as a result of investments (baseline to be 2017 fiscal year) then a minimum of 3% per year increase
- Increase in the % of diversified income; with 2017 fiscal year as a baseline, then conference and dues as a percentage of the total budget decrease by a total of 10% each year thereafter
- Presence at 3 other organizations' events (presentations, meeting with board, article in their newsletter)
- Data distribution highlighting magnet successes (data from certification, merit award applications, research as it progresses, book) 3 times per year culminating in an Annual Report released by January 2018 and annually thereafter
- Three new opportunities (vendor product or service vetted by PWG or offerings by NIMSL) for members per year
- Increase satisfaction rates from MSA members
- Increase satisfaction rates from NIMSL service customers
- Increase in the % of magnets completing the certification in one year
- Have articles or op-ed pieces in 3 publications per year minimum
- Increase the number of members (district or school/individual) each year