



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

## **STRATEGIC PLAN SNAPSHOT**

### **NAGPS - in a nutshell**

NAGPS is a nationally representative and internationally recognized Association that advocates for institutional and structural changes to improve graduate and professional education in the United States.

### **Key Strategies**

1. Look outward for financial support so we rely less on membership fees
2. Re-imagine membership based on SWOT analysis and member needs
3. Think of our organization as an athlete in training - cut out fat and build targeted muscle

### **Major actions**

1. Establish alumni engagement and fundraising programs
2. Re-structure advocacy board and regional boards to re-focus energies on the membership
3. Build an NAGPS Institute to increase the value-add for membership

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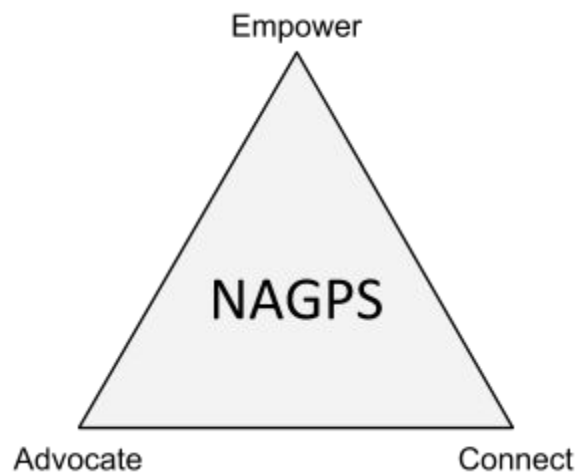
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# Executive Summary

The 2015 Strategic Plan aims to affirm, direct, and strengthen the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS). This plan fulfills a directive from NAGPS' 2007 five-year strategic plan to prepare a new strategic plan upon the completion of the term covered in the 2007 plan. To write and produce this current plan, NAGPS has worked collectively from 2013-2015 to produce not just an updated strategic plan but a bold new outlook. This plan concludes with a call for a new multi-year plan to be presented to the membership in five years at the 34th annual National Conference in Fall 2020.

## Mission

NAGPS' mission continues to be built on the three key principles set out in the 2007 strategic plan: empower, advocate, and connect. The mission of the organization in 2007 is defined below:



NAGPS has a threefold mission for the graduate and professional student community in the United States of America: (1) develop and sustain a member network to connect graduate and professional students and their associations, (2) provide resources and support to empower members, and (3) advocate at local and national levels on their behalf.

# Strategic Outlook

1. **Becoming independently financially viable** to enable us to operate without requiring members to supplement the costs of our activities, leaving our member schools in the position to contribute to the profile and power of our network directly.
2. **Growing our community** to represent more graduate and professional students and their interests.
3. **Raising our social and political profile** to increase our opportunities and ability to serve our constituent body.

## Strategy 1 - Looking outward to increase our financial viability:

The strategy for increasing revenue to support our Boards activities is going to be to look outward to our stakeholders, our sponsors, and supporters for donations, grants, and sponsorship. The following activities will be the work of our Ex-com, Director of Relations, and Regional Boards.

### Short term

#### 1.1 Actively seeking new sponsors and partners

##### **Actions Needed:**

1. Work with Shaw Bransford & Roth (SB&R), the National Advisory Board (NAB), and our friends and partners in Washington DC to identify potential partners that can financially contribute to the association
2. Develop an action plan for seeking partnerships/sponsorships and identifying specific targets
3. Identify and engage previous contributors to the Association to renew those relationships
4. Establish a recordkeeping system that allows for easy transitions between leadership

#### 1.2 Solidifying or renegotiating current relationships

##### **Actions Needed:**

1. Examine relationships with current partners and work to improve them where possible
2. Work to codify and transition short term partnerships into longer term partnerships

## **Long term**

### **1.3 Developing an alumni engagement program**

#### **Actions Needed:**

1. Develop a process to engage alumni aside from providing financial assistance
2. Develop a process to maintain contact with new and old alumni
3. Develop a process for sustained alumni communication (e.g. newsletters, awards, guest invites)

### **1.4 Establishing annual fundraising activities for the Association, engaging alumni**

#### **Actions Needed:**

1. Develop an Alumni engagement program and an Alumni fundraising program
2. Develop an annual fundraising event(s) outside of the annual giving program (e.g. NAGPS Gala)
3. Consult with SB&R about potential partnering opportunities

### **1.5 Offering services leveraging our capabilities and community to internal and external parties**

#### **Actions Needed:**

1. Investigate ways in which NAPGS can leverage its intellectual and social capital to create streams of new direct revenue or partnerships that can lead sponsorships

## **Strategy 2 - Re-imagining the membership pipeline to increase the size and activeness of our community:**

As our SWOT analysis (see appendix B) indicates, the NAGPS sees bursts of activity due to the intense time constraints of being graduate student lead. This is a challenge for the NAGPS leadership as well as member schools. In response to this challenge, NAGPS is re-conceptualizing how our member schools become integrated into the NAGPS and either maintain, grow, or reduce involvement.

## **Short term**

### **2.1 Retain active members and increase number of new members**

#### **Actions Needed:**

1. Task Outreach Board with developing and “New Member” Handbook and protocol (Better communication of our member services, discounts, etc)
2. Require regional Boards to establish recruitment plans
3. Develop an annual outreach plan with specific methods of engagement and goals
4. Develop strong regional activity that encourages active participation in NAGPS and advocacy in general
5. Develop more ways to engage individual member schools and graduate-professional students
6. Develop ways for members to be active and engaged with NAGPS outside of national events
7. Develop incentives for members to assist in outreach
8. Improve tangible member benefits

## **2.2 Increase member participation**

### **Actions Needed:**

1. Consistently engage with members at national events to find out how NAGPS can improve their service to them and what the impediments are
2. Develop an annual Membership Activity Assessment so that the Regional and National Boards can effectively plan recruitment and retention efforts each year.

## **Long term**

### **2.3 Improve communication and interaction with membership**

#### **Actions Needed:**

1. Develop ways to increase connectivity with our members through multiple mechanisms
2. Developing a comprehensive long term social media and communications strategy
3. Building an alumni network or database through our President’s Council
4. Investigate possibility of offering insurance to graduate students again

## **Strategy 3 - Re-shaping the NAGPS like an athlete – strengthen the core, cut the fat, and build the muscle:**

The major strength (see SWOT analysis) of the Association has been the reputation that it has built among its members as a nationwide leader in graduate student advocacy and member development. Cutting the fat to build muscle means having a strategic growth plan which refocuses our energies on a significant increase in institutional efficiency and robustness.

## **Short term**

### **3.1 Improve organizational structure and efficiency**

#### **Actions Needed:**

1. Restructuring and improving the efficiency of the advocacy board and regional boards that promote participation and improve effectiveness
2. Investigate ways to improve the structure and efficiency of the executive committee
3. Better our transition documents to capture institutional member and facilitate seamless turnover.

### **3.2 Develop Stronger Media Relations. Be nationally and internationally engaged**

#### **Actions Needed:**

- Work more closely with Shaw Bransford & Roth to develop a robust media engagement strategy. Expand our services with SB&R.
- Regularly produce newsworthy pieces
- Seek partnerships with other like-minded organizations
- Engage of international counterparts

### **3.3 More diversity of members and leadership**

#### **Actions needed:**

- Actively engage HBCU's
- Actively engage professional schools and organizations

## **Long term**

### **3.4 Words???**

1. Use SWOT analysis to guide planning at National and Regional levels.
2. Managing for institutional memory and institutional knowledge e.g through the NAGPS Institute<sup>1</sup>

\*See appendix for chart a chart laying out the priorities of different areas of the organization.

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<sup>1</sup> The NAGPS Institute will be a data driven advocacy archive available for our members which will help respond to the SWOT analysis which indicated a weakness in our research activities which can be converted into advocacy resources.

# APPENDIX

## A. Priorities to support our core

Area of NAGPS	Key priorities	Secondary priorities	Tertiary priorities	Supplemental priorities
<b>Regional Board</b>	Membership recruitment (communicating resources such as our discounts and sharing NAGPS Institute materials)	Supporting media relations	Supporting stakeholder relations to support the LCC and our financial stability	
<b>Outreach Board</b>	Membership recruitment (communicating resources such as our discounts and sharing NAGPS Institute materials)	Supporting media relations	Supporting stakeholder relations to support the LCC and our financial stability	
<b>Advocacy Board</b>	Supporting membership	Contributing to NAGPS Institute (in service of first goal and membership recruitment efforts)	Producing materials which serve our media and stakeholder relations	Supporting LCC
<b>LCC</b>	Executing the legislative agenda	Executing the legislative agenda	Executing the legislative agenda	Contributing to the NAGPS Institute
<b>Ex-Com</b>	Management of membership support, stakeholder relations, media relations, and LCC agenda	Planning and supporting the facilitation of our annual events at our member schools.	Communication with Advisory Board and President's Council.	

## **B. Critical Assessment (SWOT) 2013**

### **Strengths**

1. We are viewed as a professional organization in the legislative advocacy community and have grown substantially in our ability to promote legislation and issues related to graduate students over the past several years.
2. Infrastructure exists to better communicate and collaborate. Our various membership options, the diversity in membership and leadership, our new website developed this year, and database upgrade to Salesforce are key to the strength of NAGPS.
3. We have a board that has the breadth and depth to capture a wide range of issues, thereby allowing us to tackle many important aspects of graduate and professional student life.
4. Members of the Advisory Board have a strong working knowledge of the past few years of the Association, which helps alleviate some of the burden with high board turnover.
5. There is an active core of the membership supporting board activities (primarily legacy members). This helps continue the flow of leadership within the organization.
6. We have experience on how to develop and preserve graduate and professional student associations. We have some long-standing members who can give us good information and are rich of participating graduate student associations.
7. Leadership development activities such as the Leadership Summit, regional and national conferences provide a range of training opportunities for our members.
8. Participation NAGPS' Legislative Action Days provides a unique set of benefits to member organizations, who rarely have the opportunity to receive advocacy training and participate in the legislative process.

### **Weaknesses**

1. NAGPS still does not have the capability to communicate directly with individual students at member schools or alumni.
2. With a lack of paid assistance in DC, all administrative tasks are left to the Board of Directors, many of whom struggle with time commitments to other activities. This results in inconsistent bursts of productivity.
3. There is a lack of consistent communication between the regional and national boards.
4. There is no established procedure for transitions within the Board of Directors.
5. NAGPS has been more reactive than proactive to federal issues that affect graduate and professional students. This is partially due to the lack of permanent staff that monitors movements in DC.
6. High board turnover has affected the stability of the board during each term.
7. In recent years, NAGPS has not done any research that can be converted into resources for members.



8. While the NAGPS member network is over 90 universities, only half of those members consistently pay dues, which is a significant strain on the annual budget.

## **Opportunities**

1. There is great potential in partnering to provide further benefits and resources to our membership through external partnerships that individual graduate and professional students on their campuses can access.
2. NAGPS has the opportunity to partner with other student led organizations within and outside the United States, to strengthen the student voice around the issue.
3. NAGPS has a broad alumni base, which, if engaged could assist the Association in its efforts.
4. The NAGPS member network represents (X%) of total higher education institutions in the United States with graduate student populations. NAGPS has the opportunity to significantly expand its member network.
5. NAGPS has the opportunity offer more value to our members through research and reports that assist members in the work that they do on their campuses.

## **Threats**

1. Graduate and professional students are a transient population that is constantly changing.
2. Partisan gridlock is a challenge in promoting our legislative issues.
3. Organizations such as Students Advocating for Graduate Education (SAGE) and Ivy Summit present challenges in recruiting members who might already have loyalty to those other organizations.
4. The perception of graduate education as a private good, combined with legislative focus on K-12 and undergraduate education and flat funding for higher education, put graduate and professional students at risk of more legislation that negatively affect graduate and professional students.

## **C. NAGPS History, Constituents, and Resources**

It has been 28 years since students around the nation expressed their need for the founding of a national organization. In 1986, students attending the first National Teaching Assistant Training Conference at the Ohio State University proposed the creation of a national association to represent graduate and professional students.

During the Association's 28 years, we have been the voice for over 600,000 graduate and professional students on NAGPS member campuses and the over 3 million graduate and professional students across the United States. Under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue code, NAGPS is a registered non-profit organization. Membership dues and donations are, therefore, tax deductible as provided by and allowable by state and federal law. NAGPS does not discriminate on the basis of age, disability, ethnic or national origin, gender, marital status, political orientation, race, religion, sexual orientation, sexual identity or expression, or socioeconomic status.

NAGPS represents both graduate and professional students, and graduate and professional student associations. The Association fulfills its mission by providing three primary benefits to these constituents: leadership development, organized advocacy, and access to benefits and resources. NAGPS offers opportunities for graduate and professional students to develop essential leadership skills through nine annual events we coordinate each year:

1. Our annual national conference each fall
2. The leadership summit every summer
3. Spring and fall Legislative Action Days (LAD)
4. Five regional conferences each spring.

At these events, graduate and professional students share best practices and also participate in sessions led by leaders in higher education, non-profit leadership, and advocacy.

NAGPS represents graduate and professional students and graduate and/or professional student associations. We also provide special representation for our individual and institutional members. NAGPS presents our constituents with an alternative to student unions, offering a dedicated channel to voice concerns specific to graduate & professional students and work them out.

Historically, NAGPS has represented graduate and professional students at universities nationwide, with membership peaking at over 121 schools in 34 states during the 1998-1999 period. As of August 2014, NAGPS has the following legacy members:

- Carnegie Mellon University
- Syracuse University,

- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT),
- University of Cincinnati
- Western Michigan University
- Duke University
- University of California San Diego
- University of Colorado
- Washington State University.

As of August 2013, NAGPS represents over 90 schools in 30 states. There are 72 regular organizational members; 5 supporting organizational members; 2 affiliate members; and 107 individual members. Northeast and Southeast regions represent the largest regions in terms of number of member schools and dues revenue. This is a shift from the 2007 strategic plan when Midwest and Western regions represented the largest regions.

In the Northeast, one of the greatest competitive challenges faced is the Ivy Summit (members being the Ivy League Schools). At R1 research universities, SAGE's representation (Students Advocating for Graduate Education) limits our ability to advocate directly for students' concerns. Due to STEM disciplines' traditional relationship with R1 campuses, NAGPS should re-develop relationships with SAGE campuses and identify ways to co-locate events and share channels of communications with students.

The executive board works with the regional chairs who then communicate to the universities in the region directly or by means of their respective regional boards. The national and regional conferences are a key way of communicating with members. The primary purpose of conferences is to encourage networking and collaboration at both the national and regional levels. At the national conference we: elect board members, exchange ideas, meet other member schools, set the legislative platform, select the site for next national meeting, and promote the services available from our corporate sponsors. The regional conferences create networking and collaborative opportunities for schools who share a geographic proximity. At these meetings we promote the NAGPS annual meeting, Graduate Professional Student Appreciation Week, collected updated contact information from attendees and member organizations, elect new regional officers, and select a site and host for the next regional conference.

NAGPS also publishes newsletters to communicate information to members. Currently, regional coordinators are charged with publishing a quarterly newsletter for their region. In 2012 we began publishing a full-feature electronic newsletter taking on the format of a magazine. This was named the Post Graduate Voice (PGV). Two versions were published in 2012, and the format and quantity were continued into 2013. The Director of Communications is charged for overseeing the development of this publication.

Regional Chairs conduct the bulk of our communication with member schools. They send emails to individual schools (communicating one-on-one), and group emails to the entire region with updates for the national or regional level. In addition, regional chairs make many phone calls to member and potential member schools to recruit and sustain membership. A biweekly email is also sent out by the President and Director of Communications. NAGPS has moved away from sending print mailings over the past several years. NAGPS has email listservs for national members, regional members, and individual committees. Due to constant changes in membership, and the lack of a centralized database, these listservs have been difficult to update.

The NAGPS website is the first line of contact for the majority of our potential members. Our member organizations link to the NAGPS website from their own. We also use the website to post information about events including Legislative Action Days, and the regional and national conferences. These are also some of the key ways through which we represent and advocate on behalf of our members. The NAGPS website went through a full redesign and platform change (from Drupal to Wordpress) in April 2013. This has also meant more integration of communications through Facebook and Twitter to get the word out about NAGPS events and services to the membership.

NAGPS also serves its members by providing member benefits that include: advocacy, (in the past) a student health insurance program, a discount on GEICO auto insurance, as well as discounts at Hertz, Chronicle of Higher Education, and Student Advantage. NAGPS also provides members with an International Student Guide, developed by the International Student Concerns Committee in 2013. As of 2013 due to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) the NAGPS was forced to end its offering of student health insurance.

The Association underwent significant internal and external changes in recent years that have shaped the organization into its current form. NAGPS has undergone a number of internal changes; due to the elimination of the Executive Director Position and increased responsibility on board members. Due to financial issues, the organization made the decision to eliminate the Executive Director position in 2006. The board hoped to eventually bring the position back after rebuilding the organization and stabilizing its finances

Increased and new responsibilities among board members resulted in the board expanding from fifteen officers and chairs in 2009 to the current board of eighteen directors and chairs. The expansion was primarily in the managing directors. Without an Executive Director, some of responsibilities in that position have shifted to board members, providing more responsibility for some positions than they had previously. For example, administration, which formerly dealt primarily with agendas and Roberts Rules of Order, now also handles some website changes, etc. Also, Director of Legislation became much more important, as there was no longer as Executive Director to maintain contact and communications in Washington D.C.

NAGPS relies heavily on membership dues and sponsorship revenue. Programs and services have been totally dependent on funding received either from membership dues or corporate partners from year to year. A small portion of income from conference registration fees offsets conference expenses. NAGPS expenses continue to be dominated by Board of Directors travel, primarily to various conferences, Legislative Action Days, and others. Also of significant amount are expenses incurred in running the various NAGPS conferences throughout the year and administrative expenses. While substantial, the administrative expenses include core services, such as website maintenance, customer management software, bank fees, shipping, etc.

Additionally, NAGPS maintains an endowment fund containing legacy member dues payments. This endowment fund has not provided significant returns in past years, due to prevailing market conditions.

In 2014, the NAGPS Board of Directors voted to establish a President's Council that comprises past members of the NAGPS Board. The goal of the President's Council is to create a mechanism that allows NAGPS to engage alumni, and to allow alumni to continue to be involved and invested in assisting the Association to achieve its goals. In its current form, the President's Council will be focused on engaging NAGPS Board alumni, but is a first step towards establishing a larger association that alumni of any NAGPS member institution can be involved in.