

Neutral Zone Strategic Plan

2022-2027

The Neutral Zone engaged teens, staff and board in a series of workshops with the support of the Emergence Collective to identify these commitments over a year long process from October 2021 to May 2022 to provide direction to create this organization strategic plan to guide the Center over the five years.

Our Commitment:

The Neutral Zone intentionally fosters a youth-driven culture where youth know they belong and matter in our community.

We endeavor to be a restorative space of ongoing learning and healing by embracing the identities and lived experiences of individuals as they show up authentically and courageously.

We will provide inclusive, accessible experiences for youth well-being, activism, and creativity. And, we will extend our programs for youth 18-24 years of age to have transformational opportunities for employment, education, and mentorship to transition to adulthood.

We will lead training, coaching and consulting for schools, organizations and communities to embrace our youth driven space approach. We will strategically work to ensure *Youth Driven Spaces* has the capacity for long term success and sustainability.

We will bolster staff and board capacity, be an accessible and safe building, create broad community relationships and ensure sustainable financial resources to provide significant growth and resilience.

Through these commitments, we strive to be a community that is equitable, just and makes a lasting impact.

Key Strategic Goals and Objectives:

NZ Mission and Identity - Support by Board Leadership

Ensure the mission of the Neutral Zone is aligned with the current values, programs and practices of the center.

- Reflect upon and update the mission of the center.
- Rebrand the NZ to support an updated mission statement.

- Identify and respond to how the NZ social justice issues relevant to youth in our community.

Organization and Board Leadership - Support by Board Leadership

Build skills and structures for strong and equitable youth-adult partnerships at NZ and throughout the community.

- Increase professional development opportunities for staff & board to strengthen partnerships with individual teens.
- Reflect on and identify new supports and resources to strengthen teen board leadership.
- Retain and grow leadership, with an emphasis on BIPOC leadership for staff and Board of Directors.

Community Relations and Fund Development - Support by Development Committee

Ensure strong financial health for NZ organization.

- Establish a teen ambassador group to strengthen youth outreach, community relationships, and fund development work.
- Create and implement an intentional alumni engagement plan to support volunteering, residencies, networks, and ongoing contributions.
- Lead a giving campaign to increase monthly giving for a broad community individually giving - \$100 annually.
- Host a 25th anniversary party in 2023 that engages past community supporters, parent alumni, alumni and current teens to share our story and impact in the community.
- Leverage an additional 1-2 large multi-year grants for ongoing and sustainable support.

Financial Growth and Sustainability - Support by Finance Committee

Ensure strong financial health of NZ organization.

- Increase the NZ operating reserve fund to at least six month of operating expenses.
- Establish a financial investment advisory committee to oversee an investment management firm.
- Secure an investment management firm to manage equities.
- Develop an investment management policy to guide use of equities.
- Develop short and long term financial plan that includes building upgrades and additions.

Staff Capacity - Support by HR Committee

Increase support and opportunities to retain and grow staff for long term a positive work culture and organizational sustainability.

- Increase opportunities for staff professional development, learning, and networking.
- Review salary scale with a continuous plan to increase compensation and benefits.
- Identify and document critical standard operating procedures.
- Create succession plans for staff roles to support healthy transitions.

- Review the onboarding process to consider greater involvement of youth and adult board members in the process.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Activism Culture - Support by DEI Advisory

Create a culture of continuous learning and intentionality that fosters diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- Create a teen leadership approach and advisory group to provide youth driven leadership for programming development, evaluation and training.
- Intentional and ongoing professional development for staff, board, and teens that emphasizes DEI+A
- Create DEI +A objectives for program experiences as part of the program evaluation.
- Create tools and checkpoints to promote an environment for of constant bi-directional feedback for all groups
- Create opportunities for holistic, somatic healing as part of DEI work and staff well-being.

Access and Equity Supports within Programs - Support by Program Staff

- Provide transportation for youth from the East side of the county to access the NZ.
- Create a space that welcomes teens and adults and does not limit the participation of people with disabilities.
- Increases support and learning for youth to have financial literacy, technology advancement and learning, and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- Extend Future Corps to grow structural and community support for youth to transition into adulthood through employment, education, mentorship and coaching.
- Promote opportunities for inclusion and support for teens to develop technological advancement including infrastructure to promote digital equity as well as online training and coaching.

Health and Well-Being - Support by Human Resource Committee

Support an approach to health and wellness for staff and volunteers in the individual and collective community.

- Create a community safety/fund system to support staff emergencies.
- Provide training and resources to implement a human-centered management approach.
- Reflect on the staff onboarding and performance review process to create new protocols that prioritize health and wellness.
- Establish a mentorship for new staff for ongoing support throughout the first year of employment.

Community Partnerships - Support by Program Staff

Explore extended NZ presence to broader geography through intentional partnerships.

- Increase school partnerships through intentional program experiences through artists in residence programs.
- Support community organizations and schools to utilize the NZ resources and opportunities.
- Expand programming to the Ypsilanti/East side of the county.

Building Accessibility - Support by Finance and Operations Director

Create a safe, accessible and environmentally friendly space that welcomes teens and adults.

- Improve building accessibility according to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to accommodate people with disabilities who use the center.
 - Create a plan and install an elevator to access the second floor
 - Upgrade the second floor to accommodate for wheelchair accessibility
- Make building more friendly to eco-conscious behavior for teens and staff
- Install air exchange units to improve the air quality and safety of the upstairs program spaces.
- Assess opportunities for a future building extension with potential architecture/estimate cost.

YDS Services, Growth and Sustainability - Support by Youth Driven Spaces Staff

Increase dissemination of YDS services and implement structures and systems that will allow YDS to grow and be sustainable:

- Create new resources (training, digital, publication) to disseminate to other orgs/schools/communities to be youth driven and restorative.
- Expand a youth-driven network and movement across nonprofits and other youth-serving organizations in Southeast Michigan.
- Grow online training and coaching offerings to expand and grow partnerships and services.
- Organization/Board considers YDS strategic plan recommendations and implements new structures and supports, based on plan.
- Intentionally focus on equity as a YDS goal and develop new structures, strategies and training to center equity in our dissemination structures, training and coaching supports.
- Develop a funding plan to help sustain and grow YDS work that sets targets for earned revenue and grants for the next 5 years.

Voted on by the NZ Board of Directors, May 26, 2022