

To: NMC Board of Trustees
From: Nick Nissley, Ed.D.
Jason Slade, Vice President, Strategic Initiatives
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Subject: *Strategic Driver: Living Our Brand*

NMC Strategic Plan 2026 - 2029: ANCHOR AND EDGE

We deliver education and training that is essential for our region, and we grow through the distinguished programs that set us apart and help drive northern Michigan's future.

Strategic Driver Development

Strategic drivers were a new element developed for this strategic plan. They were designed to create a framework for objectives to reach across departments, break down silos, and tie initiatives together. These strategic drivers exhibit the characteristics that our stakeholders felt were a MUST in the next plan.

STRATEGIC DRIVERS

- 1. Living Our Brand:** Strengthen NMC's distinct identity by focusing investments on what makes the college unique and in demand among students, employees, and the community.
- 2. Community Partnerships:** Leverage strategic partnerships to deepen community engagement, drive regional prosperity, and expand opportunities for lifelong learning.
- 3. Stewardship & Sustainability:** Secure NMC's long-term vitality and growth by strategically leveraging smart resource investments, innovative funding models, optimized operations, and forward-thinking partnerships.
- 4. People First:** Foster an inclusive, supportive, and empowering environment that prioritizes the well-being, success, and continuous development of every student and employee.

Strategic Driver Role

Objectives within each strategy are deliberately supported by or connected to the strategic drivers, and action steps are developed with the drivers as guiding principles. This results in cross-department development, diverse action teams, and the objectives aligned with NMC's values, initiatives, and output from previous strategic plans. Each strategy contains all four strategic drivers.

Strategic Driver 1: Living Our Brand

The focus for this month's board meeting is the **Living Our Brand** strategic driver. It reflects the integration of NMC's brand strategy into the college's broader strategic structure. The brand platform provides a common framework for aligning priorities, investments, and opportunities with the unique strengths that drive NMC's competitive advantage.

At the strategic level, the brand platform guides institutional decision-making through the centering idea of transformative impact and the four brand pillars: distinguished academic programs, culture of innovation, purposeful education pathways, and community cornerstone. Together, these elements help shape institutional priorities, partnerships, and investments.

The brand platform also guides how NMC communicates through its brand promise, brand character, and visual identity. Together, brand leadership, which guides institutional strategy, and brand management, which drives consistent implementation, help ensure that college priorities are consistently reflected in communications and stakeholder experiences.

As the strategic plan is implemented, **Living Our Brand** serves as a cross-cutting driver reflected across academic programs, student success initiatives, and institutional priorities. The examples below illustrate how this driver is shaping priorities and implementation throughout the college.

Brand Leadership in Action

- Culture of Innovation - *the "Edge"*
 - Strengthen student institutional performance and workforce readiness through effective use of AI across teaching, learning, and operations.
 - Expand experiential learning to include goals for the nEXt endorsement and alignment with the needs of industry and transfer partners.
 - Modernize operational systems to reduce friction, improve coordination, and strengthen efficiency.
- Purposeful Education Pathways - *the "Anchor"*
 - Align and integrate durable skills that employers need into the curriculum to increase employability of graduates.
 - Integrate and strengthen a unified, data-informed enrollment ecosystem to ease enrollment and success pathways and increase the college attendance rates.
 - Expand learning options and clarify stackable pathways so every student, especially adult, rural, and part-time learners, can advance toward employment or further education.
 - Create a coordinated advising system that ensures every student chooses a clear path early and stays on track to complete it.
- Distinguished Academic Programs - *the "Edge"*
 - Promotion, marketing, and outreach centered around enrollment growth and sustainability in programs that draw from outside the region and across the country.

- Leadership and partnership in the BlueTech economy through GLWSI's role in the Freshwater Research and Innovation Center and the training for high-demand marine tech jobs.
- Support and leadership for the development of a "beyond visual line of sight" drone corridor providing learning and economic opportunities for our students and the region.
- Community Cornerstone - *the "Anchor"*
 - Increase industry and community partnerships for internships and apprenticeships.
 - Develop alumni and career connections for regional employment and/or future education.
 - Strengthen NMC's reputation as an employer of choice.

Brand Management in Action

- Visual identity implementation
 - Deliver master-plan projects as visible commitments to a modern, student-centered campus.
 - Improve campus spaces to create a welcoming environment that reflects NMC's quality and community.
 - Implement and roll out a successful Dennon Museum rebrand.
- Communications
 - Build a coordinated communication and information system to ease and support a successful student journey.
 - Integrate and strengthen a unified, data-informed enrollment ecosystem to ease enrollment and success pathways and increase attendance rates.

Living Our Brand Champion

Because the brand work is significant and intertwined throughout the plan, a strategic driver champion, Joan Sodini, was selected. This is the first strategic driver to have its own champion providing better support for champions and objective leads.

Summary

Strategic drivers create a framework for objectives to tie initiatives and departments together. The examples highlighted show how leveraging our brand within our strategies aligns priorities, investments, and opportunities with the unique strengths that drive NMC's competitive advantage.

Looking Ahead

Strategic Driver **Community Partnerships** will be the focus for August.