

To: NMC Board of Trustees
From: Nick Nissley, Ed.D.
Jason Slade, Vice President, Strategic Initiatives
Date: August 7, 2026
Subject: *Strategic Driver: Community Partnerships*

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

As previously shared, 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 objectives aligned with NMC's values, previous initiatives, and output from previous strategic plans. Each strategy contains all four strategic drivers.

Strategic Driver 2: Community Partnerships

The Community Partnerships strategic driver is a core part of the 2026–2029 Strategic Plan, creating a practical way to connect departments and align college goals with regional needs. By working with local partners, NMC can enhance key community involvement and support regional economic growth. This ensures that major projects, such as the Freshwater Research and Innovation Center and the UAS corridor, directly support new industries in northern Michigan while benefiting NMC. The value of this driver is that it builds upon our active advisory boards and established relationships to add partnerships that can scale or strengthen a key action.

Community partnerships need to be beneficial to both parties and this driver should be used to identify and prioritize the partnerships that are most beneficial to our students, faculty, staff, and initiatives. This evaluation is critical as the college determines how best to use its resources.

The examples below illustrate how this driver is shaping partnerships and collaboration across the strategic plan.

Strengthening Student Skills & Regional Employers

- Working with advisory boards, hiring managers of key industry partners, and university partners (transfer institutions) to identify the durable and AI skills necessary for NMC students to succeed in the workplace.
- Building a curriculum creation model through a project with Center on Rural Innovation (CORI) to deliver AI training to community members and industry partners.
- Development and rollout of employment-based scholarships with local food industry businesses including Lobdell restaurants, the Delmar, the Mill, Amical, Dexter Hotel, and the Dan Deering Fund (Tom's Food Markets). The majority are tied to GLCI program opportunities.
- Industry support for our programs including philanthropic funding for the surveying program (recruiter, trailer, and outreach materials), development of incentive programs for Munson nurses and surgical technicians.
- Through the NMC Office of Innovation & Entrepreneurship, supporting entrepreneurial students by connecting them with mentorship, startup support, networking, and funding opportunities available through SCORE, the Grove Community Incubator, 20Fathoms, Northern Michigan Startup Week, GVSU's Michigan Veteran Entrepreneur Lab, Traverse Connect's Traverse City Young Professionals Network, and Michigan SBDC.

Transformational Economic Development

- Not only the Freshwater Research and Innovation Center partnership with Traverse Connect, Discovery Pier, 20Fathoms, and Michigan Tech, but the larger "Northern Michigan BlueTech Innovation Hub" which brings in partners like the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission, FishPass, LakeBed 2030, and the support of industry partners.

- The NorthSky Consortium is a regional alliance formed to position Traverse City and northern Michigan as an Uncrewed Innovation Zone bringing beyond visual line of sight testing and development to northern Michigan. The initiative would bring economic growth and job opportunities to our uncrewed aerial system students and was recently touted by Senator Slotkin at the ReShore 2026 event in July.
- Led by NMC and Northern Michigan Works!, the Northern Michigan Attainment Collaborative (NOMIAC) is a 10-county collaborative effort to cultivate a skilled workforce by increasing the percentage of people with a credential or degree to 60% by 2030. This initiative will expand the middle class, provide families with opportunities to thrive, drive economic growth and stability across the region, and support our flexible learning pathways objective. This complements our existing program-specific advisory board structure.

Building Community & Supporting Employees

- Renovation of the Mark and Helen Osterlin Building into a one-stop shop for student services like admissions, financial aid, advising, and tutoring (master plan project).
- Community-building and fostering vibrancy across northern Michigan via International Affairs Forum's Satellite Partnerships at Leland's Old Art Building, Zonta Club of Rogers City Area, and special convenings with Press Forward Northern Michigan (press freedom), regional environmental conservation leaders (Rights of Nature), and Leland Public Library "Summinars" Series (two partner events: international refugee regime/today's Middle East).
- The Student Managed Investment Fund, supported by the NMC Foundation and Student Life, is led by the NMC Foundation Treasurer Chris Lamb, and immerses NMC students in a dynamic, real-world financial environment where they actively manage a portion of the Foundation's portfolio. Through market analysis, collaborative debate, and professional presentations to their peers, students gain invaluable hands-on experience in portfolio management, economics, and corporate decision-making.
- Planned expansion of our student life team resulting in more networking and collaboration opportunities with community partners to better support and connect our on-campus and adult students to the region.
- Partnering with Yen Yoga as part of our employee wellness initiatives.

Summary

Strategic drivers create a framework for objectives to tie initiatives and departments together. The highlighted examples show how developing and strengthening partnerships can make our objectives more impactful, benefiting the college and the community.

Looking Ahead Strategy 1: **Future-Focused Education** will be September's focus.