

NEW YORK STATE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL, INC.

NYSILC

empowering new yorkers with disabilities

NEW YORK STATE
INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL, INC.

Fund Development Goals and Strategies

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Situation

The New York State Independent Living Council (NYSILC) is a not-for-profit, non-governmental, consumer-controlled organization. The council is composed of 26 appointees from around the state, a majority of whom have disabilities, representing diverse cultures and needs in the state. NYSILC is responsible for jointly developing, monitoring, and evaluating the three-year Statewide Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). The State Plan partners include NYSILC and the federal Centers for Independent Living (CILs). The New York State Education Department/Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) serves as the Designated State Entity (DSE).

Statewide Independent Living Councils (SILCs) are established under Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. NYSILC conducts surveys, develops reports, and has an active committee structure that addresses significant issues impacting New Yorkers with disabilities.

Over 98 percent of NYSILC's annual budget is government contract-dependent. The council has never had a fund development plan. Federal legislation passed in 2015, and subsequent changes to the state plan in 2017, opened doors for statewide independent living councils to engage in fund development. In response, NYSILC formed a Development Committee and began to take steps to raise both awareness and non-grant funding.

Plan Development Process

In the summer of 2019, the Association Development Group, Inc. began working with NYSILC leadership on the creation of a fund development plan. This process had three components:

- **Data collection** – ADG staff conducted an in-depth interview with NYSILC’s executive director and a complete review of its bylaws, procedures, website and current fundraising practices.
- **Survey** – NYSILC board members answered a survey designed to engage them in specific discussions regarding revenue sources, fund development strategy, organizational structure around fundraising, and other infrastructure considerations in support of a fund development plan. A full summary of the survey appears in the Appendix to this report.
- **Discussion** – On September 20, ADG presented the survey results to the NYSILC board and facilitated a discussion on board engagement in fund development and the creation of a fund development plan. Because this is a new area for NYSILC, board members also reviewed key principles of fund development and core elements of a fund development plan, summaries of which appear in the Appendix to this report.
- **Presentation of Objectives** – The first draft of NYSILC’s Fund Development Goals were developed and presented to the Council by ADG on November 15, 2019. Input on Goals and Strategies was gathered from council members and executive director.

- **Plan Development** – In early 2020, with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, ADG and NYSILC’s executive director revisited the Fund Development Goals and Strategies to realign them in light of the need to postpone for one year the Hall of Fame induction planned for May 2020. This change opened up timing and resources to focus on strategies that would have been scheduled for 2021.

Goals and Strategies

The NYSILC board has set a goal of raising \$75,000 to match its current \$75,000 and achieve \$150,000 by 2025.

Based on responses to a board survey and leadership contributions to the discussion session, board members identified the following strategic objectives:

- **Infrastructure – Build the donor base and develop ways to engage them, while exploring additional sources of funds.**

Suggestions in this category included establishing a list of giving priorities (e.g., scholarships, leadership development), adding a fundraiser or grant writer to the staff, creating an annual giving campaign, setting up a donor match program, and offering estate and legacy giving options.

Also suggested were pursuing private grants, selling NYSILC-branded products and services (e.g., training programs), and participating in AmazonSmile.

- **Board support – All board members should play an active role in fundraising by being donors themselves and bringing in donations.**

There is strong support for 100 percent board participation in giving. It was also suggested that each board member make NYSILC one of his or her top three giving priorities, and that those who have a will include NYSILC in their estate planning.

Board members should also secure at least five donations from others by any method, such as sponsorships or major gifts, and identify at least five ways they can individually contribute “time, talent and/or treasure.”

It is important to ensure that the structure of the board supports NYSILC’s fundraising needs, and that all board members understand what is expected of them and are fully committed to fulfilling expectations.

- **Enhanced communications – Develop a consistent message and tagline, and tell the independent living story on social media.**

Information to be shared could include news about events, advocacy initiatives and other developments as well as independent living success stories from individuals and local Independent Living Centers. Board members should be telling these stories on their own social media channels as well.

- **Disability Rights Hall of Fame – Grow event and donor engagement.**

Board members suggested securing additional financial support for the Hall of Fame event and using it as a donor cultivation opportunity.

Recommendations for 2020 Campaign

Fundraising is essential to NYSILC’s mission and accomplishment of its goals of greater advocacy and increased support for independent living centers and the rights of people with disabilities in New York State. NYSILC is in new territory, having been 98% dependent upon grant funding. A thoughtful and deliberate rollout of a development plan is essential for long term success.

These goals are achievable, will provide a solid foundation for NYSILC to build an annual giving program, and will help build anticipation and involvement leading up to the 2021 Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony. The “Sample 2020 NYSILC Development Strategy Chart” appended to the initial Fund Development Goals document provided in November 2019 has been developed into “A Strategic Action Plan for 2020” see Appendix A on page 10).

1. **Define a fundraising strategy,** with time built in to assess progress. The fundraising strategy must include agreement on goals, financial and otherwise, 100% board support for the plan, board training with clear expectations, and a designated staff person to lead NYSILC development initiatives.

2. **Build out NYSILC’s “Donate” page with specific information on why to give and ways to give.** NYSILC’s current website has a donor button; however, it does not include specific information about giving nor does it include a call to action, such as, “Support Independent Living. Give Today.” This page should also include donor recognition.
3. **Build upon what NYSILC has already accomplished.** NYSILC has had great success with engaging broader audiences through increased communication and with the Council’s Disability Rights Hall of Fame. It is recommended that NYSILC focus its 2020 fundraising campaign on three key initiatives:
 - A. Grow the Hall of Fame fundraiser through securing large corporate support in addition to the traditional giving structure
 - B. Develop a stewardship program to reach Hall of Fame attendees, thank them for supporting the event, share what will be accomplished because of it, and identify new ways to get involved/contribute.
 - C. Develop an “Annual Giving Campaign” that is launched in September, and runs through the end of the year
 - D. Create a simple, achievable, board challenge. For example, **20 new donors in 2020** -- at any amount. The idea is to cast a wider net and engage new people in supporting NYSILC. This will also help to establish board roles and board support for NYSILC’s fundraising efforts.

4. **Tell the NYSILC story**, and the stories of those NYSILC supports, through a branded monthly eCommunication -- *NYSILC Donor News*. It's okay to be overt about NYSILC's fundraising efforts. A big piece of NYSILC's initiatives in these early years is anchoring giving to the Council in the minds of potential donors, or current donors who may not think of giving to NYSILC beyond its Hall of Fame event.

Conclusion

NYSILC board members are committed to creating a fund development plan and to playing a major role in it as supporters and facilitators. As with any strategic plan, however, the hardest part of the process is executing the plan. After the strategic discussion, and once the demands of work and business go back into full gear, it can be easy to focus on immediate issues at hand only.

Good strategic planning includes an implementation plan and takes into consideration:

- Putting the resources behind strategic initiatives to make sure they happen
- Being realistic about staff and volunteer capacity
- Prioritizing goals within a reasonable time frame. While we'd like to do it all, doing it effectively is more important

- Assigning goals and objectives to appropriate committees and task forces where applicable
- Measuring success and assessing progress along the way

NYSILC's fund development plan is everyone's responsibility. It needs to be formally approved by the leadership and kept out in front of the board throughout the year. Most of all, it should be a living, breathing document. Environments change, issues arise, resources ebb and flow. The more adaptable to change a plan is, the more likely it is to be implemented.

Appendices

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Appendix A

Strategic Action Plan for 2020

Goal: Raise \$75,000 by 2025 to support NYSILC mission and initiatives including scholarship programs, civic engagement, and advocacy.

| Strategy | Actions | Timeline | Assignment |
|----------------------|---|---------------|--|
| Build Infrastructure | Merge and migrate donor data to NYSILC's CiviCRM database | Aug 1, 2020 | ADG, Amy Wink |
| | Train NYSILC staff in donor/prospect record entry and update procedures | Aug 15, 2020 | ADG, Amy Wink |
| | Develop a list of giving opportunities to be used for "Reasons to Give" webpage, messaging and contribution form | Sept 15, 2020 | ADG, NYSILC Staff, and NYSILC Development Committee |
| | Develop electronic contribution form with pledging and recurring gift capabilities. | Sept 30, 2020 | ADG Creative |
| | Develop templates for NYSILC "Donor News" eCommunication | Sept 30, 2020 | ADG Creative |
| | Set up Facebook fundraising capabilities to allow online giving via Facebook and creation of individual fundraisers to benefit NYSILC | Sept 1, 2020 | NYSILC Staff with support of ADG Creative |
| | Identify step-by-step process to launch structure to accept gifts of stocks and annuities | Oct 1, 2020 | NYSILC Staff and Development Committee |
| | Develop an Annual Sponsorship Prospectus for potential corporate donors | Nov 1, 2020 | NYSILC Staff, Development Committee and ADG Creative |

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| Grow Council/Board | Provide Stewardship Training for full Council | Sept. 25, 2020 | ADG and NYSILC Staff |
| | Develop policy proposal for Council/Board Support | Nov 30, 2020 | NYSILC Development Committee |
| | Develop board giving toolkit to reinforce stewardship training | Dec 1, 2020 | ADG Creative |
| | Engage Council in Social Media sharing; create contests as incentives | Sept. 25, 2020 | NYSILC Staff with support of ADG Creative |
| Target Communications | Brand the 2020 Annual Giving Campaign | Oct. 1, 2020 | ADG Creative, NYSILC Staff and Development Committee |
| | Develop copy for “Giving to NYSILC” web landing page and prospectus that clearly states: why to give, what your donations will do, how to give | Sept 15, 2020 | ADG Creative in cooperation with NYSILC Staff with support of ADG Creative |
| | Develop and launch monthly <i>NYSILC Donor News</i> , announce annual giving campaign | Oct 1, 2020 | NYSILC Staff in cooperation with ADG Creative |
| | Develop short videos of past Hall of Fame inductees and scholarship recipients on impact of support | Oct 1, 2020 | ADG Creative in cooperation with NYSILC Staff |
| | Develop messaging and communication schedule through 2021 HOF Induction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADA Anniversary July 26 • Back to School • Emergency Preparedness • Election Access • Veterans • Thanksgiving/Giving Tuesday • December Holiday Giving • End-of-Year Giving Tax Advantages • New Year/New Opportunities • Transportation Access • Valentine’s Day • Developmental Disability Awareness (March) • Healthcare Access | Sept 1, 2020 | NYSILC Staff and Development Committee with support of ADG Creative |

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| Grow Hall of Fame Visibility, Attendance, Engagement and Corporate Support | Secure well-known MC for 2021 Hall of Fame | Dec 1, 2020 | NYSLIC with Support of ADG Creative |
| | Create HoF-related fundraising goals for Council Members: "Fill a Table," one sponsor each; one auction item each | Dec 1, 2020 | NYSLIC Staff and Development Committee |
| | Create and launch social media ramp-up campaign for HoF | Jan 1, 2021 | NYSLIC Staff with Support of ADG Creative |
| Assess Progress | Assess each initiative for responsiveness, action and impact | Monthly through Jan 1, 2021 | NYSLIC Staff with support of ADG Creative |

Appendix B

Key Principles of Fund Development

- Culture matters. Nothing can happen without a strong philanthropic culture already in place.
- Identify current donors, those predisposed to give and prospective donors.
- Donors deserve your attention – know who they are and why they give, thank them, keep them informed and make time for them.
- The No. 1 reason people give is because you asked.
- Boards must give, too. Boards that give foster a culture of philanthropy.
- Fundraising needs an annual plan to sustain itself.

Core Elements of a Fund Development Plan

- If possible, do a feasibility study. Know your capabilities.
- Get the right people in the room to define fundraising goals.
- Align fundraising goals with larger organizational mission, strategy and structure.
- Clearly identify targets: donors, those predisposed to give, and prospects.
- Define solicitation strategies and tools for implementation.

- Agree on measures of success.
- Build a fundraising calendar.
- Assess progress.
- Maintain relationships through communication and personal outreach during and between fundraising campaigns.

Appendix C

Survey Summary

In the spring of 2019, NYSILC leaders participated in meetings and subsequent discussions focused on board responsibilities and commitment to philanthropic duty. The exercise resulted in six core areas of emphasis:

1. Visioning and strategy
2. Succession planning and executive performance
3. Council recruitment, training and development
4. Review and update of NYSILC policies, including the Standards & Indications Manual
5. Overall Council assessment and positioning
6. Board engagement in fund development, and the creation of a fund development plan

Over the summer of 2019, NYSILC leaders completed a strategic survey designed to support NYSILC's objective of self-assessment, visioning and strategy.

A subsequent survey was designed to engage NYSILC's board members in specific discussions regarding revenue sources, fund development strategy, organizational structure around fundraising, and other infrastructure considerations in support of a fund development plan. Those survey results are contained in this report.

Eight of the 11 questions in the survey were open-ended, requiring board members to answer in their own words. Three questions asked respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with a statement on a scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

Eleven board members responded. Percentages are provided for the agree/disagree questions only and have been rounded.

Question 1: NYSILC's mission statement is as follows:

NYSILC's mission is to promote independent living or people with disabilities across New York State, in partnership with the network of community-based Centers for Independent Living (CILs).

What about NYSILC's mission or its overall goals motivates you to serve?

Five of the 11 board members responded that their primary motivation for serving is the promotion of independent living for all persons with disabilities. Two also mentioned the opportunity to play a role in changing laws affecting people with disabilities. Two others mentioned their commitment to partnerships with Independent Living Centers.

Respondents also mentioned:

- Pat Figueroa scholarships
- Disability Rights Hall of Fame
- Maintaining the momentum of the deinstitutionalization movement

Question 2: Often, when fundraising, we are competing with a crowded field of non-profits looking to support their important work through donations. As an established non-profit organization with a respected position in the disability community, how does NYSILC distinguish its work from other disability-related non-profits? What makes NYSILC unique?

Five board members cited the fact that NYSILC is led by people with disabilities. Three mentioned that NYSILC is structurally different from other nonprofits serving this population – one compared it to a “private foundation” and a “non-profit planning body” rather than a charitable organization. Two noted that the entire state is represented on the NYSILC board.

Also mentioned:

- New York state focus – NYS donor gifts will be used close to home
- Focus on systemic change
- Support for independence and integration

Question 3: In NYSILC's Council Member Agreement, it sets forth the following:

It is a council member's duty to know NYSILC's budget, to be active in planning the budget, and to ensure a fiscal audit is conducted every year. It is also important to identify sources of revenue and fund development.

Please share your top four specific ideas for growing sources of revenue. This may include new grant opportunities, fund development activities, annual giving and more.

Board members had diverse responses to this question, but most fell into one of a few categories:

- Fundraising campaign
 - Annual giving request mailing
 - Donor match program
- Events
 - Grow Hall of Fame event
 - Additional fundraising/celebratory event
 - Presence at Abilities Expo, Disability Pride events, etc.
- Sourcing
 - Identifying possible grant sources
 - Pursuing increased direct/single-source funding from state
 - Outreach to successful people with disabilities
 - Financial support from board members

- Sale of products and services
 - NYSILC branded products
 - Training programs on disability issues/independent living for state and federal agencies and other groups
- Expanded opportunities to receive donations
 - Set up broker account to receive gifts of stock
 - AmazonSmile, Patreon and other external fundraising platforms
 - Legacy giving

Question 4: Over 98 percent of NYSILC’s annual budget is government contract dependent. Federal legislation passed in 2015, and subsequent changes to the state plan in 2017, opened doors for statewide independent living councils to engage in fund development. In response, NYSILC formed a Development Committee and began to take steps to both raise awareness and non-grant funding for NYSILC.

In your opinion, how does NYSILC best use the resources of its 26 council members and three staff to build an infrastructure to support fund development? In other words, in addition to the Development Committee, what is needed organizationally to support its fundraising needs? If you believe additional structure or resources are needed, please note that in your response.

Responses to this question were also varied. One expressed interest in hiring a staff person specifically for fundraising, and

another mentioned finding someone who is skilled in creating “asks” on social media. Two suggested using the membership to fundraise statewide.

One respondent cited the importance of prioritizing NYSILC’s goals and pursuing funding in accordance with those goals. “For example, if it’s to support existing infrastructure, focus should be on fundraising activities. If we want to expand programs, we may want to commit a budget line to grant writing services.”

Also mentioned:

- Annual donations from board members
- Monthly outreach by Development Committee
- Identifying areas of expertise for fee-for-service opportunities
- Increased social media presence
- Regular communication about who is donating and when the donation comes in
- Sample donation request letters
- Assessing what can be done now with existing resources and what is possible in the future
- See what works for other organizations

Question 5: When giving, donors want to know two things: WHAT, and HOW. What is the cause? And how will my donation have an impact? In your own words, please answer the following as succinctly as possible:

What is NYSILC's cause?

How will donations to NYSILC make a difference?

Responses should be specific to the impact of donations to NYSILC. The "how" question requires three responses.

NYSILC's cause is ...

Promoting independent living received the most mentions, followed by fostering and supporting programs that advance independent living.

Also mentioned:

- Supporting organizations that serve people with disabilities
- Disability rights
- Making the lives of people with disabilities independent and meaningful

Donations to NYSILC will make a difference by ...

There was no clear front-runner among the answers, but the following received multiple mentions:

- Fostering young leaders for the independent living movement, through scholarships, national event tuition, etc.
- Empowerment and improved quality of life for people with disabilities

- Expanding reach of ILCs in communities throughout New York State

Also mentioned:

- Training on independent living topics for education and health care providers
- Making New York a leader in disability rights and integration
- Recognizing the achievements of people with disabilities
- Ensuring regular assessment of community needs

Question 6: It is understood by leaders serving on non-profit boards that they are ambassadors of the organization they are leading. In addition to being a face and voice to the greater community, building contacts and relationships is also key.

As NYSILC looks to grow its donor base and expand its reach, it will need to grow its donor and stakeholder relations. These can include individuals, other non-profits, private sector companies, community leaders, foundations, families, religious institutions and more. Please identify up to 10 potential donors (at any level) that fall into any of the categories noted above.

Respondents generated a long list of potential donors that ranged from individuals and foundations to Fortune 500 companies. Only one – the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation – made more than one list. Most fell into one of several categories:

- Foundations
 - Van Ameringen Foundation
 - New York Health Foundation
 - Health Foundation of Central and Western New York
 - EJ Nobel Foundation
 - AARP Foundation
 - MacArthur Foundation
 - Ford Foundation
 - Open Society Foundation
 - Alibis Foundation
 - Community Foundation of Tompkins County
 - Park Foundation
 - Dreamscape Foundation
- Nonprofits
 - ILCs and other NYSILC partner organizations
 - Civic/fraternal organizations (Lions, Elks)
 - Catholic Charities Campaign for Human Development

- United Way
- Disability Rights Fund
- Business
 - Brookfield Energy
 - National Grid
 - Lyft
 - IBM
 - Major league sports teams
 - Companies that want to market to ILCs
 - Casinos
 - Insurance companies
 - Personal injury law firms
- Other
 - Transit authorities
 - Former NYSILC members (including chairs)

Question 7: Please respond to the following statement:

I have been involved with fund development in the past and welcome the opportunity to support NYSILC's future fund development plan.

Strongly agree: 3 (27%)

Agree: 2 (18%)

Neither agree nor disagree: 5 (45%)

Disagree: 0

Strongly disagree: 1 (9%)

Total agree: 5 (45%)

Total disagree: 1 (9%)

Question 8: Please respond to the following statement:

Fund development is new to me; however, I understand its importance to NYSILC's future and look forward to contributing to the extent I can.

Strongly agree: 3 (27%)

Agree: 2 (18%)

Neither agree nor disagree: 1 (9%)

Disagree: 2 (18%)

Strongly disagree: 3 (27%)

Total agree: 5 (45%)

Total disagree: 5 (45%)

Question 9: Please respond to the following statement:

I am unfamiliar with fundraising, and find it something I will need to learn more about in my role as a NYSILC leader.

Strongly agree: 0

Agree: 3 (27%)

Neither agree nor disagree: 2 (18%)

Disagree: 3 (27%)

Strongly disagree: 3 (27%)

Total agree: 3 (27%)

Total disagree: 6 (55%)

Question 10: What specific skills do you bring to your NYSILC service as it relates specifically to fund development?

Three respondents listed their communications skills and experience as assets they bring to NYSILC. The following areas received two mentions each:

- Grant writing
- Project development
- Experience writing appeal letters
- Marketing/branding
- Networking
- Public speaking

Also mentioned:

- Public interaction
- Organizational skills
- Previous work on a local ILC's capital campaign
- Willingness to ask for donations
- Event planning
- Experience as an attorney representing people with disabilities
- Free time
- Currently working in development
- Personal philanthropy
- Academic in nonprofit world

Question 11: What three fund development goals do you recommend the Council establish for next year?

Some of the answers to earlier questions resurfaced in board members' responses to this question, including:

- Expansion of, and full participation in, Hall of Fame event
- Broker account to accept gifts of stock
- Requiring board members to donate
- Additional in-person fundraising/celebratory event

- Identify potential major donors and partners
- Annual giving campaign

Also mentioned:

- Training in fundraising for board members
- Create/enhance NYSILC's brand
- Increase funding for Pat Figueroa scholarships

One respondent cited the importance of ensuring that fund development is informed by NYSILC's strategic goals and is not the leading factor in program development.

Conclusion

NYSILC's board members have a wealth of ideas for fund development and bring a variety of skills to the table to leverage in the organization's development efforts. About half have fundraising experience, and those who do not are willing to learn.

They are also aware of the importance of keeping fund development in line with NYSILC's strategic goals and pursuing funding sources that best serve its objectives.

NYSILC is in a unique position among organizations in the disability field. It is run by people with disabilities, for people with disabilities. Supporting NYSILC is not handing money to a charity to help people who can't help themselves. It's empowering people to help themselves and others. This is the message NYSILC should be sending in its fund development efforts.

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empowering new yorkers with disabilities