

National Caucus of Environmental Legislators

2021 - 2024 Strategic Plan Overview





STRATEGIC PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since its founding in 1996, NCEL has grown into a robust, powerful network of state legislators with wide-ranging success at advancing solutions to critical environmental issues.

However, as the impacts of climate change have worsened, key environmental regulations have been lost, and awareness and action on systemic racism grows, NCEL and its members know their work is more critical than ever.

NCEL occupies a unique and essential space in the environmental advocacy world. It provides inspiration for state lawmakers to progress environmental agendas in their states and offers ongoing assistance to them in their efforts. NCEL leverages the knowledge within its network to catalyze multi-state, regional, and national action on climate and the most pressing environmental threats. As policymakers across the country grapple with how to incorporate environmental justice and equity in their work, NCEL ensures that state legislators have access to expertise and knowledge to help them pursue a more inclusive agenda that benefits all.

The focus of this strategic plan is to answer the central question:

How does NCEL best leverage its capacity and its unique position to meet the moment and help members to maximize their impact?

The process revealed a consensus that NCEL should maintain its current trajectory, while deepening its impact and further developing its issue areas, member offerings, and program staff. The plan is designed to continually adapt to increase organizational prioritization of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and to create methods for NCEL to continually revisit and revise its goals as needed.

At 25 years old, NCEL is at its strongest point ever, and the board and staff are excited at the vision and goals outlined in this process. The NCEL team has already begun enacting many of the proposed changes. We look forward to sharing our progress with our members and partners in the years ahead.



ABOUT NCEL

Created by and for state legislators, NCEL provides lawmakers with opportunities for shared learning and action on climate and the environment. NCEL acts as a connecting tissue, allowing legislators to collaborate across state and party lines, share lessons learned, and raise a collective voice to the federal government.

By connecting legislators to their peers, convening them at national and regional meetings, providing personalized assistance, and creating a supportive community, NCEL empowers state lawmakers to advance a proactive environmental and conservation agenda, and unite against polluting interests.



MISSION

NCEL empowers a nonpartisan network of legislative champions to protect, conserve, and improve the natural and human environment.



VISION

State leadership advances a clean and healthy environment for all.





NCEL VALUES

While NCEL's program work encompasses a variety of issues and priorities, the values outlined below establish a foundation that guides the organization's thinking and actions.



Everyone Should Benefit

Protecting, conserving, and improving the natural and human environment are about more than just our physical surroundings. Our work, done well, grows economic opportunities, addresses systemic inequities, and enhances the health, safety, and wellbeing of all.



Shared Opportunity

A healthy environment is good for the economy, and all communities should equitably enjoy the health and economic benefits from clean air, water, lands, and energy.



States Matter

Addressing environmental issues at the state level and within communities is essential, regardless of federal action or inaction.



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Our work must be grounded in an understanding that environmental issues impact different communities in different ways and to different degrees. NCEL's leadership, staff, members, and partners should reflect our country's diversity so that all relevant voices are included in the conversation.



Nonpartisanship

We endeavor to engage all legislators who seek to protect, conserve, and improve the environment. Our nonpartisanship does not diminish our commitment to taking strong, decisive action.



NCEL STRATEGIC GOALS

How does NCEL best leverage its capacity and its unique position to meet the moment and help members to maximize their impact?

Goal #1

Enable NCEL's network of environmental champions to lead and create significant impact on top environmental issues.

Goal #2

Expand and sustain a diverse and inclusive network of state legislators who strongly identify as part of NCEL.

Goal #3

Refresh, update, and expand NCEL programs and resources to meet the evolving needs of its members, especially in regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion and working across the aisle in a time of increased partisanship.

Goal #4

Be seen by members, partners, funders, media sources, and environmental policymakers as a go-to resource for environmental policy trends and as the point of access to state legislators working on environmental issues.

Goal #5

Diversify and develop a sustainable funding model that allows NCEL to grow, have control over its agenda and priorities, and increase long-term stability.

Organization Capacity Goal

Ensure that NCEL has the capacity it needs to successfully achieve its strategic goals.



STRATEGIC GOALS IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS

Goal 1: Enable NCEL's network of environmental champions to lead and create significant impact on top environmental issues.

This member-focused goal recommends that NCEL continue to innovate on its educational offerings, as well as take a more intentional approach to how it manages its network as a whole, including organizing new opportunities for members' skills building.

Action Steps:

- Continue to build out a State Policy Support Program of the three issue areas, all with a greater incorporation of environmental justice and equity.
- Institute a "Member and Network Development" program that tracks NCEL participants' placement on a "ladder of engagement."
- Develop a peer-to-peer coaching and skills training program for members.

Goal 2: Expand and sustain a diverse and inclusive network of state legislators who strongly identify as part of NCEL.

Ensuring the organization centers its work and priorities on diversity, equity, and inclusion requires greater focus from the NCEL team at the personal, staff, and organization level. This also includes more information on justice and equity integrated throughout issue outreach.

Action Steps:

- Create a task force of board and staff members to guide NCEL's organizational DEI efforts.
- Recruit a more diverse representation of speakers, experts, and attendees at our events.
- Grow our overall membership by 15% and increase event participation by 10%.

Goal 3: Refresh, update, and expand NCEL programs and resources to meet the evolving needs of its members, especially in regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion and working across the aisle in a time of increased partisanship.

One reason for NCEL's success is its ability to adapt to constantly changing conditions. This means recognizing emerging environmental threats and readjusting tactics as members' needs change.

Action Steps:

- Form a member advisory group to provide input on annual forum and overall policy agenda.
- Develop tools for staff workload prioritization, to assist NCEL team members in balancing the increasing number of tasks created by organizational growth.
- Institute working groups of legislators dedicated to specific issues so they can coach each other in real time as they advance multi-state initiatives.



Goal 4: Establish NCEL as the go-to resource for environmental policy trends and connection to state legislators working on environmental issues for members, partners, funders, and influential media sources.

By further enhancing its reputation as the premier resource for environmental policy trends, NCEL also elevates its members' stature. This builds on NCEL's credibility and name recognition to recruit new members and serve as the authoritative source on state environmental policy.

Action Steps:

- Develop an annual trends analysis regarding state-level environmental policy.
- Better communicate to members how NCEL can assist them in their goals, including help with media relations and op-ed placement.
- Increase media hits for NCEL members and citations for members by 10%.

Goal 5: Diversify and develop a sustainable funding model that allows NCEL to grow, exercise more control over its agenda and priorities, and increase long-term stability.

Currently, NCEL largely relies largely on foundations for funding. Diversifying NCEL's funding model will also help the organization to achieve a more sustainable balance between operational and restricted funding.

Action Steps:

- Hire and onboard NCEL's first-ever Development Officer to create and refine NCEL's fundraising systems.
- Launch an individual giving program, enhanced by cultivation of NCEL's alumni network of former legislators.
- Empower members to lead on their issues, collaborating on strategy and funding, bringing new projects and potential new funding to the organization.





ABOUT NCEL: HOW WE WORK

NCEL was created by and for state legislators. Our job is to equip our members to meet the moment and protect, conserve, and improve the natural and human environment.

We do this by:

- Empowering members - skills, information, models, ideas, strategies, and connections
- Working with partners - educate members, develop and implement strategies, etc.
- Identifying and capitalizing on points of leverage within the NCEL network.
- Communicating the value of NCEL to members and members' work, and the important role of state legislators to partners, funders, and the media.

Get Involved

- [Sign up](#) to receive special strategic plan updates.
- Have thoughts or feedback to share? [Email us.](#)
- Are you a state legislator but not yet a member? [Join NCEL today.](#)



Members rely on us for accurate, actionable information.

We sort through available resources and scientific research to provide members the most updated and relevant information in formats tailored to their needs. We even act as remote staffers – fulfilling research requests to help members on niche issues.



Members turn to us to learn about issues and solutions.

Our members don't have time to reinvent the wheel. They need access to experts and advocates in their own states; model policies and proven strategies; and exposure to innovative ideas to be effective.



Members connect with one and other through NCEL.

For most of our members, the relationships they build with their fellow lawmakers is the most powerful benefit of being part of NCEL. Members connect at regional or issue-based meetings, our annual National Forum, or through a direct introduction facilitated by NCEL staff.



Members come together at NCEL to impact issues at the regional and national levels.

The relevance of the issues our members work on or the lessons they learn don't end at the state border. Our members come together in cross-state efforts like the [Mississippi River Legislative Caucus](#) and the [Carbon Costs Coalition](#). NCEL boosts members' work in the media and shares their successes across the network to further increase the impact of their efforts.



PARTNERS & FUNDERS: MORE POWERFUL TOGETHER

Everything NCEL does is a collaboration. We bring together legislators, issue experts, partner organizations, and funders to protect, conserve, and improve the natural and human environment.

Our most productive collaborations are with our strategic partners – joint efforts with funders or other organizations based on shared strategic goals and complementary strengths.



We have a state and nationwide perspective.

We are able to track emerging legislative trends, spot opportunities and obstacles, and identify the elements critical to successfully defending against detrimental and promoting beneficial environmental policies.



Our reach with environmentally interested state legislators is unparalleled.

We have members in all 50 states and on both sides of the aisle. We don't lobby them, we're nonpartisan, and we don't disclose our membership list. Our members trust our staff and the information and resources we provide.



We empower members to make an impact beyond their state.

Collaborative efforts such as the [Mississippi River Legislative Caucus](#) and the [Carbon Costs Coalition](#) convene state legislators to leverage their strength and make an impact at regional and national levels.



We equip our members to be effective environmental champions.

We ensure that they have access to accurate, reliable information, model policies, and colleagues across the country. And we actively connect them with trusted partners and local groups who can support their efforts.

