



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Center for
Governmental Studies**

Outreach Engagement and Regional Development

CENTER FOR GOVERNMENTAL STUDIES

STRATEGIC PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strategic planning is a preferred approach to guiding an organization's future rather than making decisions issue by issue. The Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) invited an outside facilitator familiar with non-profit and educational institutions to help with key exercises for the 2023 strategic planning process. The process began in December 2022 with a day-long strategic reset retreat which included feedback from a staff survey and a series of key partner interviews conducted by the project's independent facilitator. Supplemental to the exercises and discussion sessions, CGS' strategic planning group sought out staff member and stakeholder input to gather perspectives and ideas on the Center's strategic direction, mission, challenges, and opportunities as well as guide goal-setting and action steps. With perspectives from the survey and interviews, combined with the output of prior plans serving as a starting point for discussion, the initial retreat, and subsequent workshop sessions, provided a positive atmosphere to set aside time to methodically – “strategically” – determine where CGS intends to go in the future.



The art of progress is to **preserve order amid change**,
and change amid order...

-A.N. Whitehead

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF CGS

Bridging Knowledge and Innovation Through Engagement for 54 years

The Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) is a public service, technical assistance, and public policy studies organization. Its mission is to provide expertise that helps decision makers understand, analyze and create strategies and approaches to address social, economic, policy, governance, and information management issues that face all levels of government. In 2019, CGS celebrated its 50th anniversary. The Center hosted a one-day conference and a series of workshops, as well as special issues of Policy Profiles, to mark the occasion. The anniversary's events were a testament to not only the longevity of the Center, but more importantly, to its evolution. So much has happened over the past fifty years of its history: new practice areas, new employees, policy challenges, university changes, and shifts in the surrounding communities both near and far. Throughout it all, CGS has evolved to meet the changing needs of its clients and partners.

Since its inception, CGS has been oriented to serving the needs of the University's civic and community stakeholders and partners. Founded in 1969 via Northern Illinois University (NIU) and the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the Center was created at a time when higher education's roles were seen as important contributors to the nation's emerging and changing economic and social challenges. Over the past fifty-four years, CGS has helped fulfill the University's commitment to regional service and community outreach through accessible public service, applied research and technical assistance, and capacity development. In keeping with this mission, the Center became an integral component of NIU's Division of Outreach, Engagement, and Regional Development (OERD) when it was created in 2001 to enhance the University's ability to deliver a comprehensive and accessible set of outreach and engagement activities to the Northern Illinois region and the State of Illinois.

CGS MISSION AND VISION UPDATES

As part of the 2023 process, the Center's strategic leadership group determined that an update to the CGS mission and vision statements were important to consider. As a result, and with input from all CGS staff completing the survey, the following updated statements were developed to renew and revise the Center's prior mission and vision statements. The revisions were not seen as wholesale replacements, but rather as refinements and fine-tuning of prior statements and descriptions of the Center's mission as a part of NIU's bridge to civic and governmental leaders and the communities they serve.

Updated CGS Mission Statement

"To provide expertise that helps public sector decision makers understand, evaluate, enhance and implement, effective, sustainable and equitable approaches to the social, governmental, economic, informatic and civic challenges of our time"

Updated CGS Vision Statement

"CGS is a recognized leader in developing, analyzing, and implementing strategies, policies and practices that empower decision-makers"

STRATEGIC APPROACH, PILLARS AND FOCUS AREAS

As part of the 2023 strategic plan update process, the CGS group team developed a strategic framework for the organization that helps describe, define, and guide the work, research, and technical assistance its teams of professionals provide. The CGS strategic framework graphic below captures the strategic approach to CGS' work, the three strategic pillars CGS as an organization rests upon and, the strategic focus/activity areas that it's time, talent and resources are devoted to.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

CGS connects NIU's knowledge with public sector leaders through research, assistance and engagement.

STRATEGIC PILLARS

Thought Leadership

Share and apply gained knowledge and insights on all areas of CGS programs and activities

Governmental Expertise

Inform, assist, engage, and strengthen public sector decision makers by sharing knowledge and providing expertise

Capacity Building

Elevate, enhance, and advance CGS' expertise, abilities, human capital and culture, and the capabilities of our civic partners

STRATEGIC ACTIVITY AREAS

Assess
Economic
and
Community
Impacts

Leverage
Information
and
Technology

Support State
and Local
Governments

Inform
Sound
Decision
Making

Advance
Equitable
Workforce
Programs

Promote
Balanced,
Sustainable
and
Adaptable
Communities

STRATEGIC GOALS

Presented by Strategic Pillar

Governmental Expertise

Inform, assist, engage, and strengthen public sector decision makers by sharing knowledge and providing expertise

1. Remain a trusted, independent, and knowledgeable provider/convener of government leaders for near and long-term strategies and solutions.
2. Strengthen awareness, brand, and reputation of CGS as the “go-to” expert for government leaders and industry sectors impacted by government policy and programs.
3. Continue to develop innovative trainings, curriculums, seminars, and conferences to explore new ideas and trends and proven and emerging approaches to community and organizational challenges and opportunities.
4. Provide cutting edge technology and informatic assistance and expertise to apply/deploy practical solutions to address real world problems.
5. Connect government leaders and professionals with knowledge and resources on sustainability and adaptability.
6. Be the expert source for assisting government organizations in developing and tracking outcome and performance measures.

Thought Leadership

Share and apply gained knowledge and insights on all areas of CGS programs and activities

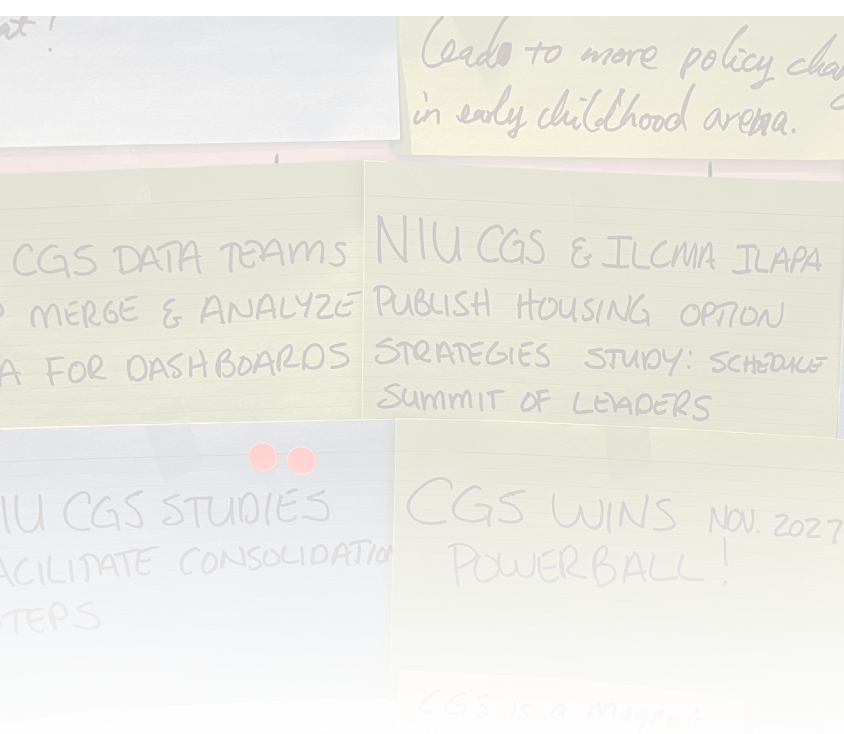
1. Increase awareness of CGS’ capabilities, work, and expertise among all levels of policy makers and administrators.
2. Promote interdisciplinary/inter-unit collaboration: collect and share empirical and observational data and collaborate with faculty and NIU centers to report results.
3. Establish CGS as a regional/nationally recognized expert in key governmental arenas.
4. Facilitate and develop a range of innovative and implementable strategies and actions for responsive, diverse, and equitable sustainability and adaptability of communities, businesses, and the stakeholders they serve.
5. Be an active contributor and facilitator of NIU SPGA activities, collaboration, and applied research across SPGA and related disciplines.
6. Advance and enhance the intersection of government policies and programs with the impacts and actions necessary to address changing climate conditions.

Capacity Building

Elevate, enhance, and advance CGS’ expertise, abilities, human capital and culture, and the capabilities of our civic partners

1. Enhance professional development opportunities to build/add skills; increase cross-training, advance career growth and leadership opportunities internally and for external partners.
2. Provide staff with the technology and tools necessary for success and, maintain capabilities and utilization of emerging approaches/methods.
3. Create/design a CGS succession framework; focus on retention of key staff and team stability/continuity.
4. Assist government leaders and units of government in building their internal capabilities and capacities through technical assistance and training.
5. Identify needs and opportunities in governmental skills, structures, and settings within CGS and with SPGA partners, to provide redesign and adaptation strategies and solutions for stakeholders.
6. Enhance revenue and funding sources and types to add variations and adaptability.

For a listing of the Action Steps and Action Items associated with the strategic goals above, please see the full summary report of the 2023 Strategic Planning Process for the Center.



The next step is for CGS' senior staff to review the results, develop action strategies, and launch the activities necessary to bring the ideas and goals to life. The actions and progress the Center's staff take on each of the goals will assure that CGS makes progress toward the future vision. What became apparent throughout this process is that the exchange of ideas and dialogue during the discussion sessions and workshops were an immense benefit to the organization and its future. As futurist Joel Barker puts it "it's better to shape the future rather than just arrive there."

The future is bright as CGS embraces the challenges and opportunities it offers to build on its 54 years of service and strengths to the civic landscape NIU serves. Providing trusted and objective mission-driven assistance to those facing the dynamic conditions of today's governments is our pledge. The civic and governmental questions that lie ahead are challenges that the Center and its team of professionals stand ready to meet.