



National
Capital
FreeNet

Libertel
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Nationale



2025-2028 Strategic Plan Overview

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Introduction

The Board and staff of National Capital FreeNet (NCF) are proud to present this overview of our new Strategic Plan for 2025-2028.

This plan outlines a framework to help NCF navigate its most pressing challenges while harnessing future opportunities. It is also intended to inform and engage NCF members and other stakeholders about our ongoing work to advance digital equity.

Together we can ensure that everyone in our region has access to affordable, high-quality internet services that they can understand how to use, while feeling safe online.

The previous Strategic Plan from 2019-2024 changed a lot as we lived through it. During the COVID-19 pandemic when school, work, health and government services all moved mostly online and the free internet access at libraries and coffee shops was often inaccessible, the extent and effects of the digital divide became even more obvious, sharpening the need for digital equity.

At the same time, NCF and many other not-for-profits and local businesses faced additional challenges sourcing equipment, products and services, staffing shortages and sharply rising costs. In the meantime, the Canadian telecommunications sector consolidated even further, entrenching the high prices and lack of choice offered by a few massive corporations.

Which is to say: there is a greater need than ever for NCF's work, but it is harder than ever to do that work.

This plan is designed to strengthen NCF's role in advancing digital equity and as a trusted not-for-profit provider of affordable and reliable internet and other digital services in the National Capital Region while addressing our challenges and constraints head on to ensure long-term sustainability.

Building on values of community and member engagement, inclusion and innovation, this strategy outlines clear objectives to expand our network capabilities and community services, enhancing member experiences and helping bridge the digital divide for underserved communities.

We believe that working collaboratively with partners, NCF can help meet the evolving digital needs of our community, ensuring that everyone in our region has the opportunity to connect, learn, and thrive in a digital world.

This plan was informed by a survey of NCF members and a survey of NCF staff, Board directors and other volunteers, as well as other research. It was conceived during a facilitated planning session of the NCF Board of Directors and management team. The resulting work was guided by the Strategic Planning Committee and approved by NCF's Board of Directors.

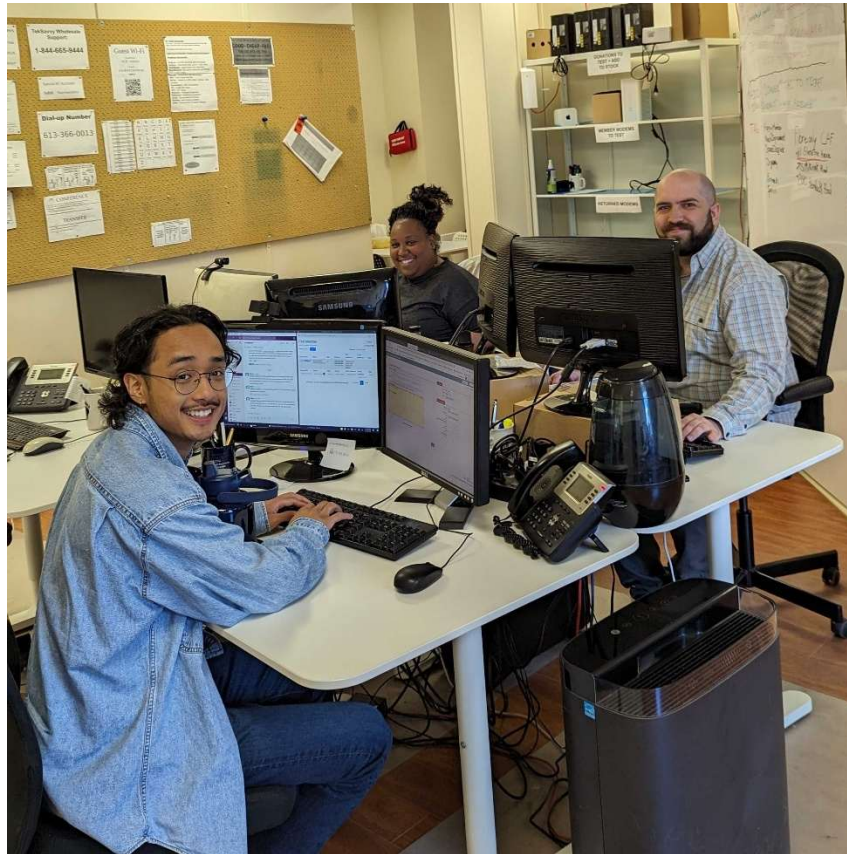
Strategic Planning Committee:

Majd Karam, Director

Stephen Fanjoy, Director

Asiya Shams, former Director

Shelley Robinson, Executive Director



Organization Overview: National Capital FreeNet

Founded in 1992 with a vision to connect all members of the community, National Capital FreeNet (NCF) is a federally incorporated not-for-profit organization and social enterprise.

As Ottawa's first internet provider and as a local alternative to big commercial providers, NCF has changed our services as technology has changed. From our start offering dial-up services and an online community portal, NCF now offers high-speed internet using wholesale access to national networks, including a lower-cost plan for Ottawa Community Housing tenants.

We also offer free (and ad-free) locally hosted email services, basic webhosting, an award-winning HelpDesk of staff and volunteers, and workshops and other resources to help people navigate the changing digital world.

Recently NCF also launched the first phase of CommuniFi, a free community WiFi network, to enable a different kind of community connection.

NCF's community-driven approach has always focused on members helping members, coming together not only as service recipients but as active participants in shaping our services and initiatives.

NCF's commitment to advancing digital equity extends beyond connectivity to include digital education, advocacy to the CRTC and the government to support a range of digital rights, and partnerships with organizations that share our mission.

Some of our past community partnerships include:

- A longstanding partnership with Ottawa Community Housing to offer a lower-cost internet plan through NCF's Community Access Fund
- Building the CommuniFi network with funding and other support from CIRA (the Canadian Internet Registration Authority) and in partnership with Ottawa Community Housing and Hiboo Networks, a wholly owned subsidiary of Hydro Ottawa.
- Working with Rideau-Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre, the Vanier Community Services Centre, the Shepherds of Good Hope, the Ottawa Mission and many other local social service agencies to expand CommuniFi across Vanier, Overbrook, parts of Lowertown, Sandy Hill and beyond.
- Establishing Digital Equity Ottawa with the Social Planning Council of Ottawa.
- Offering workshops in partnership with Ottawa Public Library and the Ottawa PC Users Group.

Our History

NCF was founded in September 1992 by volunteer community members, faculty and staff from Carleton University and with the support of a number of local community organizations as well as the City of Ottawa, the Ottawa Public Library and with donations from the local tech sector.

NCF was one of the first free-nets in the world, which was a global movement of local organizations committed to offering public access to a community-owned network of digital resources and community information.

Over the last 30 years, NCF has connected more than 100,000 members.

Who We Serve

NCF currently serves more than 4000 members, including individuals, organizations and local businesses that subscribe to NCF's internet services, use NCF email or webhosting, and those who want to be able to guide NCF's future as a member.

NCF also offers community services beyond its membership, including digital skills training and other supports for those who need it most.

NCF's award-winning HelpDesk includes paid staff and trained community volunteers who share their digital skills with their community while also gaining professional experience.



Our Impact

- NCF connects thousands of local households, organizations and local businesses to the internet at affordable rates and with skilled local tech support
- More than 300 Ottawa Community Housing tenants use NCF's Community Access Fund for lower-cost internet access
- As a local employer, NCF pays its staff a living wage and participates in training programs to support those facing barriers to employment
- We have recruited and trained hundreds of HelpDesk volunteers who offer peer support to their fellow members
- Dozens of workshops including those on Disinformation and Misinformation, ensuring digital privacy while using free online services, how to apply online for the Ontario Electricity Support Program and the Canada Learning Bond, and many more
- Diverting thousands of pounds of e-waste from the landfill while ensuring people's digital safety
- In its first three months of service, the CommuniFi WiFi network has already connected more than 700 users
- Co-founding Digital Access Day in 2018 and Digital Equity Ottawa in 2020
- Advocating for affordable internet and other digital equity initiatives to the CRTC and Canadian government

Our Mission

National Capital FreeNet is a not-for-profit internet provider committed to advancing digital equity. **We believe everyone has a right to affordable, high-quality internet that they can understand how to use, while feeling safe online.**

NCF provides internet access, digital skills support, and advocates for affordability and digital equity to help connect everyone in our community, with the understanding that some groups are disproportionately impacted by the digital divide.



Our Strategic Goals

National Capital FreeNet (NCF) is set to embark on an ambitious strategic plan for the 2025-2028 period, aiming to ensure a solid foundation to amplify our impact and drive digital equity across the National Capital Region.

1. Achieving Organizational Sustainability

We are committed to NCF's future by ensuring long-term organizational resilience, supporting digital equity through social business practices. This includes optimizing resources, enhancing operational efficiency, and environmental and financial stewardship.

This goal focuses on building a stable foundation for NCF that supports growth, adapts to changing circumstances, and safeguards the organization's mission and activities for future generations.

2. Increase NCF's Social Impact

We want to expand NCF's reach and deepen our influence by growing and developing programs and services, special initiatives and partnerships that help drive digital equity in our region.

This goal aims to create lasting positive outcomes, addressing critical community needs and enhancing the well-being of the diverse range of individuals and communities we serve.

Our Key Objectives

Our strategic goals are supported by measurable objectives.

Goal 1: Achieving Organizational Sustainability

Key Objectives:

- **01.1: Maximize Network Performance and Reliability**
Enhance network capacity, resilience, and redundancy, consistently achieving and maintaining 99.999% network availability to deliver exceptional service reliability to our members.
- **01.2: Drive Revenue Growth Through Service Innovation**
Diversify revenue streams by launching at least one new service per year, each contributing \$10,000 in net revenue annually, with a cumulative target of \$100,000 in net revenue by 2028.
- **01.3: Achieve Financial Surplus Through Business Expansion**
Generate surplus from earned revenue lines of business by 2028 that can be re-invested into NCF's work, reinforcing financial sustainability and supporting future growth opportunities.
- **01.4: Strengthen Fundraising Initiatives to Boost Revenue**
Increase revenue from donations, grants, sponsorships, and other fundraising initiatives by 1% annually, enhancing our capacity to reinvest in community programs and technological advancements.
- **01.5: Enhance Engagement through Net Promoter Score (NPS) Initiatives**
Establish baseline Net Promoter Scores (NPS) for both members and staff (including paid and volunteer), and drive continuous improvement year over year, cultivating a highly engaged and motivated community.

Goal 2: Increase NCF’s Social Impact

Key Objectives:

- **02.1: Expand CommuniFi WiFi Network Through Strategic Partnerships**
Leverage strategic partnerships to grow CommuniFi to at least 50 sites and 50,000 users by 2028, enhancing digital equity and community access.
- **02.2: Amplify Digital Skills Through Collaboration**
Partner with external organizations to provide NCF members with at least 12 digital equity and digital skills resources annually, promoting inclusivity and knowledge sharing.
- **02.3: Increase Community Access Fund (CAF) Membership**
Double the number of member-subscribers in NCF’s Community Access Fund (CAF) by 2028, expanding NCF’s support for underserved and low-income households.

Plan Overview

