

FutureGenerations/Graduate School

To Research, To Demonstrate, To Teach – How Communities Change

Strategic Plan 2010-2015

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Mission Statement

Future Generations teaches and enables a process for equitable community change that integrates environmental conservation with development. As an international school for communities offering graduate degrees in Applied Community Change and Conservation, we provide training and higher education through on-site and distance learning. Toward this end, we support field-based research, promote successes that provide for rapid expansion, and build partnerships with an evolving network of communities that are working together to improve their lives and the lives of generations yet to come.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction.....	1
II. Background and Context	1
III. Accomplishments and Challenges.....	3
IV. Strategic Goals and Objectives	4
A. Strategic Goal #1. Strengthen the Graduate School institution	4
Objective 1.1	5
Objective 1.2	5
Objective 1.3	5
Objective 1.4	6
Objective 1.5	6
Objective 1.6	6
Objective 1.7	7
B. Strategic Goal #2. Develop and implement a teaching and evaluation model that addresses the multilevel educational needs of the Graduate School’s constituents and results in lasting impact at the community level.....	7
Objective 2.1	7
Objective 2.2	8
Objective 2.3	9
C. Strategic Goal #3. Develop a clear research agenda and program.	10
Objective 3.1	10
Objective 3.2	11
D. Strategic Goal #4 Identify and address on-going and emerging issues	11
Objective 4.1	11
Objective 4.2	11
Objective 4.3	12
Appendix A: Development Plan	13
Appendix B: Learning Objectives.....	15

I. Introduction

This strategic plan for the Future Generations Graduate School of Research and Applied Studies in Community Change and Conservation (the Graduate School) is intended to specify clear goals and objectives that can serve as a foundation for developing an action plan and a path toward the accomplishment of the goals over the next five years, while being responsive to and consistent with guidance obtained through the accreditation process. The plan is grounded in the accomplishments of the Graduate School to date, guided by the Future Generations mission statement, and forward-looking in its orientation. It acknowledges the relationship between the Civil Society Organization (CSO) component of Future Generations that operates field programs in community change and conservation in selected developing countries and the Graduate School that seeks to train individuals who are engaged in their communities seeking to guide and support the local change process.

This strategic plan is intended to be a living document that will itself evolve as the educational needs of its students and the understanding of the change process, gleaned in part from the ongoing field program, evolve. This is intended to be a strategic guidance document, focused on higher level strategies and organized around a set of goals and objectives. While activities are under way to meet many of these goals, next steps will include specifying the actions, tactics, and timelines required to achieve each of the strategic goals and objectives. Some of the goals and objectives are more important than others, and call for priority attention. Reviewing, prioritizing, and taking action are all important next steps.

II. Background and Context

The Future Generations Graduate School was initially authorized in 2003 by the State of West Virginia to grant Masters Degrees in Community Change and Conservation. The Graduate School shares its mission statement with the CSO, its founding organization:

Future Generations teaches and enables a process for equitable community change that integrates environmental conservation with development.

These two organizations combine their core strengths in education, research, and field implementations to extend more effective practices in development and conservation. These two organizational components of Future Generations both learn from and seek to strengthen community-based approaches to common global challenges, such as maternal and child mortality, poverty, hunger and unsafe water, conflict, and depletion of natural resources. Community-based approaches to addressing these problems emphasize bottom-up local leadership and action, along with partnerships with governments (national, regional and local) and external agencies.

The Graduate School offers a Master's Degree in Applied Community Change and Conservation. Its graduate instruction offers academic courses through an innovative pedagogy called *blended learning*, an approach that integrates periodic residencies in host countries, distance learning support for student research and education while engaged in their own communities, research and demonstration in communities, and on-going interaction between students and faculty throughout the two-year Master's program. This educational approach, in which teaching, research and demonstration are synergistically interrelated, can be illustrated as shown in Figure 1.

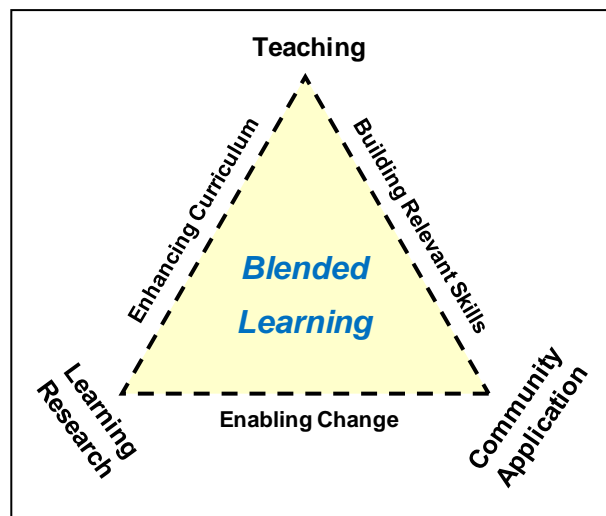


Figure 1. Blended Learning Triangle

The Master's Degree program speaks to a great need in the development community for highly skilled individuals who can direct ongoing projects, develop new programs, function as operational managers, and lead the transition to the emerging paradigm of community-based work. These leaders need to have a perspective and training that integrates knowledge and skills in processes of community change and development with the capability for setting the development agenda, empowering communities to actively participate in their self-development processes, building teams with diversity of membership, and skills in negotiation, conflict management, and partnership building.

The Graduate School's blended learning approach combines:

- Residencies at outstanding international demonstration sites;
- Ongoing research and development in the students' communities; and,
- Interactive on-line instruction and student-to-student and student-to-faculty communication.

As the Graduate School grows and matures it must refine its priorities and objectives. This Strategic Plan will chart the process by which to achieve:

- Mission and vision
- Goals and objectives
- Actions to be taken
- Timelines and milestones to be met

This document builds on the previous work of the Board, administration, faculty and staff, and incorporates evidence derived from the experience of the first three classes, research into market niche and funding sources, and the expectations and recommendations of the Higher Learning Commission.

III. Accomplishments and Challenges

Since Future Generations first initiated the Master's Degree program in 2003, there have been significant foundation-building accomplishments. The organization has:

- Designed, implemented, and continues to refine an innovative, applied educational program to improve the effectiveness of community-based approaches to education and training around the world.
- Pioneered a model for blended and community-based learning and refined it over three student cohorts.
- Graduated two classes of Master's Degree students in 2005 and 2007 with a total of 19 graduates from 12 countries, with a third class to graduate in 2009.
- Documented successes achieved by a number of graduate students who have applied their learning and research in their own communities.
- Received candidacy for initial accreditation from the North Central Association of the Higher Learning Commission.
- Legally separated the CSO from the Graduate School in 2008, with separate Boards and separate accounting.

Along with its accomplishments, the Graduate School has faced, and continues to face, a number of significant challenges that are addressed in this Strategic Plan. These challenges include:

- Developing an effective recruitment process to reach the targeted student population, including developing an expanded network of partners to help identify the most promising candidates.
- Assessing the extent to which student learning is translated into tangible benefits for the student's sponsoring community.
- Refining the process for insuring uniform high standards of student learning, including minimal English language proficiency.
- Enlarging the donor base to assure long-term financial stability.

- Enhancing the efficiency and reducing the constraints of engaging in interactive learning and teaching with a widely diverse and dispersed student body, many of whom live and work in very remote places.
- Evaluating performance with regard to the achievement of the learning outcomes and continually enhancing the academic curriculum to meet the requirements of the students.
- Developing and refining the research program to more effectively translate what is being learned in the Future Generations field programs, and in community change worldwide, into refinements of the curriculum of the Graduate School.

Our target group of community change practitioners often reside in remote areas, have limited resources to pay for a graduate education, and may have limited undergraduate training and English language proficiency. Thus, a fundamental challenge identified above is maintaining an adequate number of students with sufficient financial support. This strategic plan addresses these challenges and needs as a way to guide future activities and better assure the ability to build upon the successes already achieved.

IV. Strategic Goals and Objectives

A. Strategic Goal #1.

Strengthen the Graduate School institution

Accreditation, coupled with adequate financial support and student enrollments, are essential for the Graduate School's long-term success. Criterion One for accreditation is Mission and Integrity and requires that *“the organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.”* This calls on the Graduate School to be a self-sustaining institution with a well-established operational structure.

A fundamental challenge for the Graduate School is to maintain an adequate number of students to support annual targets, keep administrative costs per student low, attract and retain the best faculty, and fulfill its mission. A fundraising strategy is needed to support less financially privileged students. The Graduate School seeks to attract students who will receive support from their communities, foundations, or governments, but this has been difficult to accomplish. New approaches to fundraising are called for.

As the Graduate School seeks to be competitive and to improve its product, three areas of potential growth stand out:

- 1) Continued refinement of the Master's curriculum as informed by research underway in the Graduate School, insights emerging from the experiences of the CSO country programs, and an understanding of global conditions and trends;
- 2) Establishment of regionally focused programs; and,
- 3) Formation of partnerships with other institutions.

Future Generations has a powerful product that can benefit from establishing a well understood and recognizable brand.

Objective 1.1: Assure accreditation by 2010.

1.1.1: Complete all requirements for North Central accreditation.

Objective 1.2: Strengthen the financial foundation of the Graduate School.

1.2.1: Raise at least \$500,000 annually for master's degree operations.

1.2.2: Develop and periodically update a fundraising plan, and engage the President, Board, faculty and staff of the Graduate School in support of the plan (see Appendix A).

Objective 1.3: Prepare a student recruitment plan to identify and enroll highly qualified students in sufficient numbers to sustain the Master's Degree program.

Students apply to the Graduate School seeking to learn and practice the skills of community change. They include community leaders, staff of non-profit organizations and government agencies, and others who work daily to improve conditions for the world's poor and the environment. Recruitment emphasizes "Depth for the Best"—The M.A. offers an opportunity to train the staff of an organization's best grantees to build stronger leadership and management skills within the best institutions already being funded.

1.3.1: Recruit qualified candidates for enrollment in Master's Degree classes that will matriculate in 2010 and beyond. Specifically, recruit and enroll Class IV with 20 students by January 2010, with full financial support for each student. Emphasize experiential and geographic diversity.

1.3.2: Refine the process for insuring uniform high standards of student learning, including minimal English language proficiency.

1.3.3: Learn from other practitioners, partners and organizations and refine the learning objectives and curriculum content based on best practices.

Objective 1.4: Strengthen understanding and support of the Graduate School's mission and goals.

1.4.1: Ensure the Board, administration, faculty, staff, and students understand, articulate, and support the institution's mission and goals in a consistent manner.

1.4.2: Brand and market the Graduate School's competitive advantages. Prepare and distribute outreach and communication materials, highlight the world class faculty, and emphasize partnering in the global learning network.

Objective 1.5: Strengthen organizational governance and administration to promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the Graduate School to fulfill its mission and goals.

1.5.1: The Board shall enable the Graduate School's Dean and administrative personnel to exercise effective leadership.

1.5.2: The Board shall clearly define governance structures, processes, and activities.

1.5.3: The Board shall ensure appropriate qualifications of personnel through professional development training for administration, faculty, and staff, and develop a search, vetting, and hiring protocol for future employees.

1.5.4: The staff shall develop methods and schedules for regular evaluation of organizational structures and processes.

1.5.5: Assure identification, recruitment and retention of the most qualified faculty.

Objective 1.6: Uphold and protect the Graduate School's integrity.

1.6.1: All members of the Graduate School present its mission, goals, and accomplishments accurately and consistently to the public.

1.6.2: The Graduate School understands and abides by all laws and regulations in all countries in which it operates.

1.6.3: The Graduate School develops and implements protocols and assessment criteria to ensure the safety, personal growth and productivity of its employees and students.

Objective 1.7: Design and implement evaluation protocols to assist and support faculty, administration, staff and students in defining and achieving goals and quality standards.

1.7.1: Set schedule for evaluations.

1.7.2: Set clear goals, work plans, and measurable quality standards for each category.

B. Strategic Goal #2.

Develop and implement a teaching and evaluation model that addresses the multilevel educational needs of the Graduate School's constituents and results in lasting impact at the community level.

Criteria 2, 3 and 5 of the accreditation process offer the following guidance for Goal 2:

Criterion 2: Preparing for the future: The organization's allocation of resource and its process for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Criterion 3: Student learning and effective teaching: The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

Criterion 5: Engagement and service: As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

The Graduate School has been focused on preparing students for a Master's Degree, and more recently it has begun considering alternative forms of education and training, including shorter credit-granting courses and other approaches in an effort to better meet the identified needs of its target communities.

Objective 2.1: Strengthen the core Master's Degree program.

It is the priority of the Graduate School to maintain and evolve the blended learning pedagogy, and to develop and strengthen the Master's Degree grounded in this pedagogical model to create a highly effective, sustainable program that meets the needs of the students and their communities, now and in the future.

2.1.1: Develop and implement an effective learning assessment plan for the Master's Degree program.

- 2.1.2:** Build partnerships with institutions of higher learning, NGOs, INGOs and foundations that broaden the Graduate School's educational reach and enrich the curriculum for students.
- 2.1.3:** Build human resources capacity through training to increase existing skill sets, and hire faculty and staff to expand the areas of Graduate School institutional expertise and capacity.
- 2.1.4:** Continue to build a world-class faculty, with full time, part time, and endowed positions. Develop a recruitment plan and strategy for faculty retention. Create a supportive continuous learning environment in which faculty can grow and be creative. Define faculty attributes needed to meet changing educational needs.

Objective 2.2: Improving Curriculum and Ensuring Learning Outcomes

The Board of the Graduate School, the faculty and staff, and current and former students have a strong belief in the model and pedagogy of the school. While the current delivery of courses has had many successes, it is important that the Board, staff, faculty, alumni and students carefully review ways of improving the curriculum and delivery. This is especially true for the online interactive communication structures that are used, given the limited face-to-face interaction between faculty and students. Some important lessons can be learned through self-assessment and study of the operations of comparable academic programs.

The curriculum will be reviewed to determine the soundest ways to refine it and make it even more responsive to needs. Accordingly, the following activities can help create stabilization and enhancement.

- 2.2.1:** Periodically review and refine the curriculum to more effectively and fully address the evolving needs of emerging leaders and managers in the development and conservation of communities. Ensure the curriculum is meeting the needs of the students and supports the learning objectives (see Appendix B).
- 2.2.2:** Improve and assess the interactive and other communication structures in the triangle of teaching, learning/research, and community action.
- 2.2.3:** Stay current with the development research and literature, and learn from the experiences of other practitioners.

Objective 2.3: Explore additional delivery models

To stay abreast of constantly changing needs of organizations working in community development and conservation, NGOs and IOs require strong networks and regular updates of skills and capacity for their professional and staff personnel. The Graduate School will apply its expertise and teaching model to develop and implement training in partnership with NGOs, IOs, governments, and communities to address the specific needs and networking potential of these partners. For example, Future Generations could consider granting credit for specific courses to meet very specific needs for students who are not seeking a Master's Degree. Seminars might also be offered, but in all cases with a focus on core goals, the blended learning pedagogy, and financial viability. The feasibility of such an expansion will be assessed so that going forward Future Generations is not limited by the current design (i.e., mixed international student body with teaching in English).

- 2.3.1:** Identify and contact potential partner organizations for discussion and assessment of specific needs and networking potential.
- 2.3.2:** Assess in-house expertise and determine where additional expertise and technical assistance are needed for design and implementation of programs.
- 2.3.3:** Develop program details including baseline and post-implementation assessment methodologies.
- 2.3.4:** Determine criteria for granting Graduate School credits toward the Master's Degree.
- 2.3.5:** Explore the potential for developing the Master's program with a regional focus, and prepare a detailed plan for identified opportunities.
- 2.3.6:** Consider offering specialized programs in languages other than English, either for the full two-year Master's Degree or for shorter credit courses.
- 2.3.7:** Engage the Diasporas in fundraising for selected regional programs.

One example of a regional course that has been considered is a focus on the drug and alcohol problems affecting women in West Virginia. It is easy to extend this concept to the whole Appalachian region, recognizing that West Virginia is the only state entirely within that region. By considering Future Generations model of women's empowerment and community development, an entire graduate school class could be recruited and

organized around the topic of drug and alcohol problems, and through this single issue as a starting point, use educational courses on community development to bring about cultural and social change in the locality where the Graduate School is chartered.

Another example would be an African program with all students recruited from communities in an African nation or nations.

New residential locations could be identified, that, for example, are focused on exposing students to conflict and post-conflict issues, and are closely coordinated with other partner organizations.

In conjunction with any of these alternative models it will be useful to explore providing instruction in a local language other than English.

C. Strategic Goal #3. Develop a clear research agenda and program.

The challenges of community-based development and conservation include questions regarding best practices, effectiveness evaluation, key elements of success, and sustainability of community programs with potential for scaling up to national and regional levels. To answer these questions and offer replicable solutions, the Graduate School reviews the global literature, documents case evidence, and conducts applied field-based research. The Graduate School will develop a comprehensive research program addressing the needs of its students, the communities and organizations it serves, and the field of development and conservation community studies.

Objective 3.1: Define the Graduate School's research program

3.1.1: Hire and maintain a position of Research Director, with responsibilities to oversee all research activities of the Graduate School.

3.1.2: Establish a policy for research that encourages and guides the application of sound research design and methodology, encourages faculty and student research, and supports the principle that scientifically grounded findings shall guide the work and products of Future Generations.

3.1.3: Develop an in-house process for identifying, preparing and submitting research proposals.

3.1.4: Develop a set of performance indicators that can be used to measure the success of the educational program in such terms as success in meeting learning

objectives, role in catalyzing community change, success in scaling community change to other communities, and similar core indicators of performance.

3.1.5: Design an internal review and approval process for concept papers, publications, and proposals to be executed prior to submission or distribution outside the Graduate School.

3.1.6: Conduct research to enhance understanding of what works well in the blended learning pedagogy and to further develop and refine its content and effectiveness to meet the evolving needs of the Master's program.

Objective 3.2: Build Future Generations reputation for conducting sound research.

3.2.1: Develop research to strengthen the Graduate School's reputation in academia and the applied field of development and conservation. Areas of focus should include:

- Blended Learning and action-research to support and enhance students' work
- Development, particularly in health, peace building and leadership Conservation
Collaborative research with Country Programs such that the Graduate School residential programming and the Future Generations CSO country programming are synergistically enhanced.
- Publication of research findings in reputable international journals.

**D. Strategic Goal #4
Identify and address on-going and emerging issues**

Objective 4.1: Define requirements for the physical infrastructure.

4.1.1: Complete the plans for a new Graduate School building at North Mountain.

Objective 4.2: Continue to creatively address marketing challenges.

4.2.1: The Future Generations web site is an essential marketing tool that requires on-going attention and fine tuning. Explore ways to evaluate the web site's impact and improve upon it wherever possible. Emphasize keeping the web site current in all its topical areas.

Objective 4.3: Develop and implement procedures to build alumni network and lifelong learning opportunities.

4.3.1: Students who have graduated from the Future Generations program constitute a critical asset to the organization as well as to their country. The Graduate School shall maintain contact with these students, continue to learn from their experiences and successes, and support them as agents of sustainable change.

Appendix A: Development Plan

FutureGenerations/Graduate School

Development Plan: Future Generations Graduate School

As the Graduate School continues its process of maturation, the institution is refining its approach and protocol for seeking funds from foundations and individual donors. An adjustment is also being made in the make-up of the Graduate School's funding portfolio, which has historically relied heavily on individual donors.

The approach to fundraising can be summarized in four steps:

1. Prospect research – Information gathering about the prospect's mission, the criteria for project funding, current projects, and the mechanisms for requesting funds. As this information is gathered, the question will be asked, "What are the needs of the donor that can be met by a solution from the Graduate School?" While the needs of the Graduate School inform the selection of potential donors, they alone do not drive the process. The institution approaches potential donors in the role of problem-solver, as opposed to help-seeker.
2. Analysis – Following the initial data gathering, the development team meets to discuss the best 'product' to offer the prospect and the conceptual model to use for presenting to the funder.
3. Meeting with the donor or foundation representative – This is still an information-gathering step—a chance to interview and listen to the donor or representative and gain further insight into their needs and gaps in program activities.
4. Follow-up – Next steps must be determined promptly. Depending on the outcome of the data gathering and analysis, appropriate next steps may include the drafting of a letter, concept paper, proposal or further meeting. Each of these steps will, in turn, require proper follow-up until funding is awarded.

For most fellowship and scholarship programs, applications typically come from the students, not institutions. However, the Graduate School may find it beneficial to become an eligible institution for some of these programs, which serve a recruitment and screening role.

The Graduate School's development approach may also benefit from joining the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, an organization whose mission is to "*advance and support educational institutions around the world by enhancing the effectiveness of the alumni relations, communications, marketing, fundraising, and other advancement professionals who serve them.*" It may also be to the Graduate School's advantage to continue to cultivating relationships with program staff at selected foundations.

Because the Graduate School is not associated with a larger university and its student body is physically dispersed most of the year, it faces very different challenges and needs from many graduate programs and higher education institutions. The Graduate School's fundraising strategy and practices will likely look very different from the strategies of many other graduate degree programs. Also, the fundraising strategy for the Graduate School may look quite different from that of the CSO, given the different nature of the two institutions and as the Graduate School learns more about best practice in higher education fundraising.

Appendix B: Learning Objectives

FutureGenerations/Graduate School

Program Learning Objectives

1. Critical thinking – Graduates can analyze a problem and reach their own evidence-based conclusions.

- Perceive problem and assess how to frame the question
- Identify assumptions and bias
- Formulate independent conclusions

2. Knowledge of development issues – Graduates can demonstrate a theoretical and practical understanding of key development issues by analyzing the social, economic, political, and environmental implications.

- Demonstrate knowledge of applied principles in content areas of graduate degree, e.g. conservation and ecology, public health, management, leadership, and peace-building.
- Apply understanding of human rights, gender, and class to development issues
- Relate local development to national and global forces of change

3. Community change facilitation and leadership – Graduates can demonstrate knowledge and skills necessary to be agents of change and empowerment in their communities.

- Demonstrate facilitation skills of active listening, consensus building, and promotion of respectful dialogue.
- Identify and promote leadership
- Network to bring appropriate resources and expertise to bear on a problem

4. Program design and management – Graduates can independently design and implement sustainable development programs, using Seed-Scale and other development models.

- Conduct valid surveys and develop a work plan
- Manage program logistics, human resources, and financial records
- Apply principles of resource allocation economics

5. Monitoring and evaluation – Graduates can develop quantitative and qualitative methods to monitor and evaluate a program and can adapt the program based on assessment results.

- Gather accurate baseline data used in setting up a monitoring and evaluation program
- Identify significant indicators of progress and implement monitoring/evaluation plan
- Update program based on evaluation data

6. Communications – Graduates can write and communicate with excellence.

- Fund-raising for community prospects
- Write effective reports and grant proposals
- Deliver effective oral presentations to diverse groups with diverse language skills

7. Research and evidence-based decisions - Graduates can synthesize and analyze information learned through courses, books, the internet, and on the field, using it to meaningfully address community problems.

- Access web-based information, discerning what is most appropriate and factual
- Determine appropriate instruments for field-based research