

January 30, 2023

Erin Mao  
Operations Director  
National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition  
PO Box 33878  
Washington, D.C. 20033

Dear Erin:

Thank you for considering our enclosed proposal to provide strategic planning consulting services for NEUAC. Our expertise in strategic planning spans successful projects for nonprofit organizations in a variety of sectors.

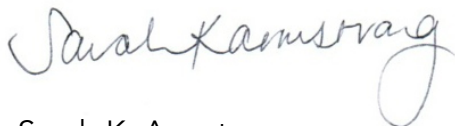
Our inclusive, customizable, and data-driven approach results in high-quality plans that help nonprofit organizations best meet their missions and serve the needs of their constituents. These plans are intended to be thoughtful, concise, and regularly referenced to guide the work of staff, not stowed away on a high shelf.

As an intentionally small, family-owned business that is devoted to working with mission-driven organizations, we maintain a strong commitment to fiscal responsibility and accountability to our clients and their stakeholders.

Please see our detailed proposal outlining a scope of work, which can be customized to best suit the needs of your organization. We are excited at the prospect of helping NEUAC set the best course for its future and continue raising awareness about the energy needs and their solutions that impact under-resourced energy consumers.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Sarah K. Armstrong  
Principal Consultant





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building upon the first ten years of the National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition’s (NEUAC)’s role in ending energy poverty, and aligning with the objectives detailed in the organization’s request for strategic planning consulting proposals, we propose a scope of work that not only engages various stakeholder groups, but also that produces a plan that provides a relevant, ambitious, yet grounded strategic direction for the organization as it moves into its next phase of growth.

We propose the following scope of work, which is detailed in the following pages:

PROJECT STAGE	TIMELINE	PURPOSE	STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT
<b>Stage One:</b> Needs Assessment	February – March 2023	Conduct organizational research and assessment; engage and gather input from organization stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staff</li> <li>▪ Board of Directors</li> <li>▪ Advisory Board</li> <li>▪ Ex-Officio Board</li> <li>▪ Members</li> <li>▪ Federal policymakers</li> </ul>
<b>Stage Two:</b> Strategic Plan Creation	April – July 2023	Develop a strategic plan that identifies the organization’s mission, vision, priority areas, goals, and strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staff</li> <li>▪ Board</li> </ul>
<b>Stage Three:</b> Implementation + Evaluation Plan	September – October 2023	Identify and plan for early implementation steps and meaningful evaluation metrics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staff</li> </ul>





## QUALIFICATIONS & REFERENCES

### OUR APPROACH TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

Sarah Keister Armstrong + Associates, LLC is a small business that specializes in needs assessments and strategic planning, program evaluation, and communications for public and nonprofit organizations. We embrace data and its value to telling an organization's story, communicating its impact, and identifying ways to improve its work. We understand the challenges facing today's nonprofit organizations and are at our best when helping organizations maximize their positive impacts on the world.

We believe it is essential that nonprofit organizations have a focused understanding of the roles they play within the industry sectors and communities they serve. Like other mission-driven organizations, nonprofit organizations will be most successful when they maximize their relevance to their stakeholders. Thoughtful engagement with stakeholder groups and analysis of available data will guide the development of useful planning tools to support their missions and reflect the needs of those they serve.

#### **Our approach to project management**

- actively engages those meaningfully influenced by the project
- includes regular communication with project leads, and
- results in high-quality products that help organizations chart meaningful progress for the future.

**Our philosophy as a firm** is to be **lean, results-focused, efficient, and effective for our clients**. In working with public and nonprofit institutions, we maintain a strong commitment to **fiscal responsibility and accountability** to the stakeholders of the organizations we assist. We examine all aspects of projects through an **equity lens**.

Our approach strives to engage all parts of the stakeholder community as active participants in the process. To do so, we advocate using modern communications tools and innovative strategies, rather than top-heavy and expensive methods often recommended by larger and less nimble firms.

In projects such as these, we work not only for the organization but also on behalf of its stakeholders, facilitating a process that truly serves all. In working with public and nonprofit organizations, we tailor our services to the needs, desires, and philosophies of each organization.





## QUALIFICATIONS

We have a strong understanding of the nonprofit landscape and the numerous considerations facing today's organizations. Our team's comprehensive background has enabled us to complete actionable projects in a variety of fields, including evaluations of nonprofit program management, public library service delivery, and communications planning and management.

The success of our work stems from our ability to design customized tools and processes, effectively implement them, and synthesize data intended to inform decision-making. This end-to-end servicing of client needs reflects our philosophy of working with clients to meet their needs rather than for clients using pre-packaged tools and methods.

We're proud to have led a number of successful assessment and strategic planning projects for public and nonprofit organizations with the belief that when their operations are aligned with identified needs, mission-driven organizations can drive meaningful change in our society. Our modern perspectives on how to collect, analyze, and communicate data-driven recommendations result in straight-forward, dynamic documents that produce actionable results.



### **Key strengths we bring to strategic planning that would effect a meaningful impact on NEUAC's upcoming strategic planning project include:**

- Philosophy of facilitating a strategic planning process that is engaging, energizing, and fun;
- Capacity to incorporate multiple methods of stakeholder engagement, promoting an inclusive planning process that maximizes their likelihood of successful implementation;
- Organized and timely project management, customized to the needs of our clients;
- Experience creating and executing communication plans for nonprofit organizations;
- Ability to effectively engage, challenge, and bring together organization stakeholders;
- Experience collecting, analyzing, synthesizing, and communicating quantitative and qualitative data to drive change;
- Ability to facilitate discussion within a welcoming environment that encourages open conversation, thought processes, and progress; and
- Foresight to connect implementation strategies and evaluation metrics with a newly created strategic plan.



A selected list of our current and past clients includes:

- Addison Public Library, Addison, IL
- American Library Association, Chicago, IL
- Antioch Area Healthcare Accessibility Alliance, Antioch, IL
- Arlington Heights Memorial Library, Arlington Heights, IL
- Burlington Public Library, Burlington, WI
- Chicago Brewseum, Chicago, IL
- Cicero Public Library, Cicero, IL
- City of Glendale, Glendale, WI
- Cook Memorial Public Library District, Libertyville, IL
- Delafield Public Library, Delafield, IL
- Dorchester Seniors, Summerville, SC
- ElderCare Lake County, Waukegan, IL
- Glencoe Public Library, Glencoe, IL
- Grayslake Area Public Library District, Grayslake, IL
- Hillside Public Library, Hillside, IL
- Jacksonville Public Library, Jacksonville, IL
- Lake Forest Public Library, Lake Forest, IL
- Lake Geneva Public Library, Lake Geneva, WI
- Le Mars Public Library, Le Mars, IA
- Maine Humanities Council, Portland, ME
- Mano a Mano Family Resource Center, Round Lake Park, IL
- McHenry Public Library District, McHenry, IL
- Messenger Public Library District, North Aurora, IL
- Mukwonago Public Library, Mukwonago, WI
- National Stuttering Association, NYC, NY
- New Jersey Council for the Humanities, Camden, NJ
- Pekin Public Library, Pekin, IL
- Round Lake Area Public Library District, Round Lake, IL
- Stillwater Public Library, Stillwater, MN
- Warrenville Public Library, Warrenville, IL
- Wheaton Public Library, Wheaton, IL
- Zion Benton Children's Service, Zion, IL

We regularly present and write on data collection, community engagement, and strategic planning to professional audiences and conferences, including the following:

- *Creating Effective Surveys*  
Presentation, Wisconsin/Illinois Library Users Group, June 2022
- *Embracing Strategic Planning as a Community Engagement Tool*  
Presentation, Nonprofit Learning Lab, Aug. 2021
- *Using Data for Storytelling: Data for Driving Strategy & Measuring Impact*  
Panel Presentation, Forefront and the Association of Consultants to Nonprofits, Feb. 2021
- *Embracing Strategic Planning as a Community Engagement Tool*  
Presentation, Lead the Way: Libraries at the Heart of Community Engagement, Nov. 2020
- *Strategic Planning for Small & Rural Libraries*  
Presentation, Illinois Heartland Library System, July 2019
- *Engaging Your Board, Staff and Community in Strategic Planning*  
Presented during the Wisconsin Library Association Trustee Training Week, Aug. 2017
- *Advocacy from the Top: Spring Your Board to Action*  
Presentation at the Michigan Library Association Annual Conference, Oct. 2017





## REFERENCES

### **Michelle Krooswyk**

New Lenox Public Library  
New Lenox, IL  
mkrooswyk@newlenoxlibrary.org  
815-655-2526

### **Liz Garibay**

Chicago Brewseum  
Chicago, Illinois  
liz@chicagobrewseum.org  
773-456-2529

### **Leigh Thomson**

Dorchester Seniors  
Summerville, South Carolina  
LThomson@dorchesterseniors.com  
843-871-5053

## OUR TEAM

Our team has been helping organizations lead strategic planning projects since 2013.

### **SARAH KEISTER ARMSTRONG, PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT**

Sarah has provided evaluation, strategic planning, and grant writing consulting services to public and nonprofit organizations since 2013. She brings experience in statistical analysis and using quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate public policies and programs.

Her expertise helps organizations effectively collect and analyze meaningful data, determine the implications of data on planning goals, and communicate the nexus of data, planning, and action. Sarah regularly presents to professional audiences about strategies to successfully incorporate data-driven practices into their community engagement and planning work.

### **Key qualifications**

- Master of Public Policy and Administration, University of Massachusetts Amherst
- Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Sociology, Illinois Wesleyan University
- Recipient of the federal government's prestigious Presidential Management Fellowship
- Professional experience in program evaluation, and public policy assessment in federal, regional and state-level offices
- Public service: vice president of local public library, board member of a large regional library system, executive board member of the Illinois Library Association, volunteer with nonprofit organization I AM ALS, and precinct committeeperson





## DAN ARMSTRONG, PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, COMMUNICATIONS

Dan is co-principal of the firm and leads its communications services work. A respected information professional with over a decade of experience leading communications and community engagement efforts for educational and nonprofit organizations, he is experienced in developing and implementing public relations, community engagement, and social media strategies.



### Key Qualifications

- Master of Library and Information Science, Dominican University
- Bachelor of Arts in English-writing and Sociology, Illinois Wesleyan University
- Professional experience in higher education, K-12, and social services nonprofit communications
- Began career in journalism, covering a broad array of topics
- Seven years as director of communications for nationally recognized school district
- Numerous statewide awards for writing, publication design, and multimedia production
- Public service: Guest speaker in numerous secondary and college courses, Cub Scout leader





## PROJECT PLAN

Building upon the national position NEAUC has held since incorporating in its current form and aligning with the objectives detailed in the organization’s recent request for proposals for strategic planning services, we propose a scope of work that not only engages various stakeholder groups, but also that produces a plan that provides a relevant, ambitious, yet grounded strategic direction for the organization. The strategic planning process will be centered on the following goals:

- Bringing focus to NEUAC’s leadership role as a broad-based coalition highlight the energy needs of low-income households;
- Honing the organization’s understanding of the needs of its member organizations;
- Assuring that all strategies developed are girded by a strong understanding of how issues of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion inform and are affected by them; and
- Articulating strategies that position NEUAC as a leading voice in advancing policies and programs to help reduce the energy burdens on low-income households.

The proposed scope of work includes three stages:

1. Needs Assessment (February – March 2023),
2. Strategic Plan Creation (April – July 2023), and
3. Implementation + Evaluation Planning (August – September 2023).





## STAGE ONE: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The primary objectives of the first stage of the strategic planning project are to:

- Conduct organizational research and assessments
- Engage and gather input from the organization's stakeholders to inform the development of the strategic plan.

### → STAGE ONE SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

#### INITIAL ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

SKA + Associates will conduct research and review processes of the organization, as outlined below. This information will be compiled into a preliminary organizational assessment, earmarking key findings to be further explored in surveys and listening sessions.

The primary focus of this assessment will be an organizational analysis of NEUAC, including any past plans and data reports, with a focus on key areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. Working with NEUAC staff, we will compile an inventory of current activities, strategic partnerships, and impact on member organizations. In addition, we will research other the broader low-income energy need landscape, to identify gaps, areas of competition, and opportunities for potential partnerships.

#### LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS

We believe that the individuals in leadership roles within the organization represent great sources of insight to NEUAC's achievements and accountability. We propose conducting an individual informational interview with each member of the Board of Directors (35 members), as well as staff leadership (two staff members), to gain insight that will strengthen the development of the data collection tools discussed below.



## STAKEHOLDER SURVEYS

We propose conducting surveys of NEUAC's stakeholder groups to gain deep insight into the strengths of the organization, threats to its future success, and the role the organization can play in ending energy poverty by increasing awareness of the energy needs of low-income energy consumers and advocating for sustainable solutions. Stakeholder groups for whom survey questionnaires will be designed include:

- Members of the Advisory Board and Ex-Officio Board;
- NEUAC's 250+ member organizations (utilities, nonprofit organizations, government entities, tribes, and trade associations; and
- Federal policymakers.

Surveys will be administered via email to stakeholders, and hard copies will be provided as needed. We will lead the design of survey questions and the development of the survey tools to provide answers to the following areas of inquiry:

1. What impact has NEUAC had on stakeholder organizations and similar entities since its inception? What progress has been made on the goals named in the organization's 2020-2023 strategic plan?
2. How does NEUAC specifically work toward its mission? What gaps exist that, if filled, may benefit under-resourced energy consumers across the country? What differentiation is needed across geographic regions, if any?
3. In what ways is NEUAC's work informed by JEDI considerations, and in which areas can the organization lean in to lead efforts in response?
4. What communication methods and messages best suit the furthering of NEUAC's mission?
5. Where do opportunities exist among NEUAC and its partners to better use existing resources, leverage collaboration for stronger outcomes, or coordinate efforts to work in pursuit of its mission?
6. What resources would be most useful to both NEUAC and its members?
7. How should NEUAC prioritize its advocacy work?



## LISTENING SESSIONS

We propose facilitating a series of three virtual listening sessions, with representatives of NEUAC’s membership.

The final composition of groups will be determined by the strategic planning team. We will work collaboratively with NEUAC to develop lines of inquiry for these sessions that build upon the data collected during the stakeholder survey. These listening sessions are intended to provide guidance to define the priorities of the new strategic plan.

Sessions will be conducted virtually via Zoom or other videoconferencing software. SKA + Associates will seek assistance from NEUAC as needed to facilitate selection, recruitment, and scheduling of participants.

### → STAGE ONE TIMELINE

**February  
2023**

- Conduct organizational and external assessments.
- Conduct stakeholder interviews with members of the Board of Directors and staff.
- Conduct stakeholder surveys.

**March  
2023**

- Conduct listening sessions.
- Develop and submit written initial findings report from the Needs Assessment Stage.

### → STAGE ONE DELIVERABLES

- Initial findings report.



## STAGE TWO: STRATEGIC PLAN CREATION

The primary objective of this second stage of the strategic planning project is to develop a comprehensive strategic plan that identifies:

- The organization’s mission, vision, and value proposition;
- Priority areas, strategies, and initial tactics that support their achievement;
- Measurable goals that will be supported by an evaluation plan in the third project stage; and
- Actionable steps that can be connected to specific roles and timelines.

### → STAGE TWO SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

*Please note: We recommend that organizations—especially those, like NEUAC, that have a large governing board—form a strategic planning committee or task force that includes representation of the staff and board. Ideally, this team will have six to nine participants.*

#### FACILITATE PLANNING SESSION 1

We will facilitate the first of two virtual planning sessions with the strategic planning committee to develop goals that focus on NEUAC’s strategic direction for the next three to four years.

First, we will convene the strategic planning committee to participate in a SOAR session to solicit feedback about the organization’s strengths, potential opportunities, aspirations for its future, and desired results of its future success. This SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) analysis is our preferred method analogous to a SWOT analysis. We will review the data and feedback provided in the initial findings report from Stage One and discuss its implications on the organization’s priorities moving forward.

Next, this session will also include a work session to identify long-term goals, broad priority areas, and strategies that support their achievement. These components will be discussed in the context of the organization’s current mission and vision. Should the committee indicate that changes to the mission or vision—or addition of core values—be meaningful, this conversation will be included in the first planning session.

Following the first planning session, SKA + Associates will provide a foundational strategic plan to the committee. The committee will have the opportunity to provide feedback asynchronously on this draft, prior to the committee’s second planning session.





## FACILITATE PLANNING SESSION 2

We will facilitate the second of the project’s two planning sessions to revisit and reach consensus on the long-term goals and broad priority areas drafted following the first planning session. This second session also will provide an opportunity to move forward with identifying following:

- Short-term goals;
- Actionable steps that can be connected to specific roles, timelines, and metrics; and
- Communication strategies.

Following the second planning session, SKA + Associates will provide a draft strategic plan to the committee, which will integrate the initial findings report and the foundational strategic plan produced following the first planning session.

The participants of the planning sessions will then have a second opportunity to asynchronously provide feedback before SKA + Associates provide a refined version of the strategic plan, prepared for board review at its June 12, 2023 board meeting.

## BOARD REVIEW

The Board of Directors will be presented with a full strategic plan draft, as well as relevant supplemental materials for the June 12, 2023 board meeting in San Diego. To minimize the total project cost, SKA + Associates will not be available in person for this meeting. We will provide NEUAC’s strategic planning committee with a structure for discussing the draft with the full Board of Directors and will convene the committee following the board meeting to discuss and make any recommended revisions to the strategic plan draft.

### → STAGE TWO TIMELINE


**April  
2023**

Facilitate first planning session with the strategic planning committee.  
Following the session, prepare and disseminate draft of strategic plan.

**May  
2023**

Facilitate second planning session with the strategic planning committee.  
Following the session, prepare and disseminate draft of strategic plan.  
Planning session participants provide asynchronous feedback on strategic plan draft.





June 2023

The strategic plan committee presents the strategic plan draft to the full Board of Directors at the June 12, 2023 board meeting.

July 2023

Facilitate third planning session with the strategic planning committee to review recommended revisions to the strategic plan draft. Following the session, prepare and disseminate a revised draft of the strategic plan.

→ *STAGE TWO DELIVERABLES*

- Foundational plan, framing the major strategic outcomes and objectives of the new plan;
- Draft strategic plan; and
- Final strategic plan.



## STAGE THREE: IMPLEMENTATION + EVALUATION PLAN

The primary objective of this third stage of the strategic planning project is to identify early actionable steps and to identify metrics and outcomes that can be reasonably evaluated.

STRATEGIC PLAN	IMPLEMENTATION	EVALUATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is our mission?</li> <li>What are our values?</li> <li>What are our immediate, short-term, and long-term goals?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What actionable steps can we take to reach our identified goals?</li> <li>What resources will we need to take these steps?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can we show progress toward our goals?</li> <li>How will we know if we are successful?</li> <li>Does each strategy include consideration of JEDI issues?</li> </ul>

### → STAGE THREE SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

We will work collaboratively with NEUAC’s staff to create an implementation, evaluation, and resources plan that identifies metrics and outcomes to be measured as the strategic plan progresses, as well as resources needed to accomplish goals.

Rather than be embedded in the strategic plan itself, these metrics will comprise a theory of change and logic model that correspond to the measurable goals developed during the second planning session of the second stage of this planning project. We recommend that organizations adopt a system of creating annual goals and metrics to guide attention and accountability to the plan, while maintaining the high-level direction an effective strategic plan provides.

### → STAGE THREE TIMELINE

**August - September  
2023**

Develop an evaluation plan with key metrics to communicate progress of the strategic plan.

Submit finalized strategic plan documents to the Board of Directors.

\*At no cost and at the option of the organization, SKA will re-engage virtually with NEUAC at the conclusion of Year One of the plan.

### → STAGE THREE DELIVERABLES

- Evaluation plan, including theory of change.





## PROJECT BUDGET

Sarah Keister Armstrong + Associates sets its fees as total project costs, which include labor, and materials, incurred by Sarah Keister Armstrong + Associates. The total project cost of the approach and work schedule outlined above is not to exceed \$17,500, as delineated below:

PROJECT STAGE	PROJECT FEE
NEEDS ASSESSMENT	\$7,500
STRATEGIC PLAN CREATION	\$8,500
IMPLEMENTATION + EVALUATION PLAN	\$1,500
<b>TOTAL FEE</b>	<b>\$17,500</b>

The project will be invoiced as follows: 30% at contract award; 40% at completion of Stage 2, and 30% at project completion.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

**Sarah Keister Armstrong, Principal Consultant**

Sarah Keister Armstrong + Associates, LLC  
218 Greentree Parkway, Libertyville, Illinois 60048  
(224) 305-2701  
sarah@skaassociates.com  
www.skaassociates.com

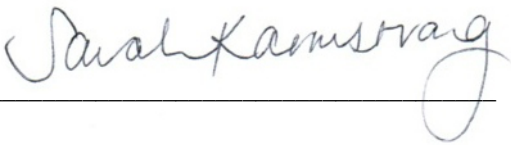




This agreement may be terminated:

- a. Without cause, by 30 days prior written notice by either party and with payment for the appropriate completed phase(s) due within 30 days of invoicing; or
- b. With cause, immediately upon material breach of any term of this agreement by either of the parties.

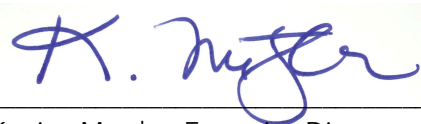
We look forward to working with you. If these terms are acceptable, please sign this letter and return one copy to us. Thank you.



Sarah Keister Armstrong, Principal & Owner  
Sarah Keister Armstrong & Associates, LLC

February 10, 2023

Date



Katrina Metzler, Executive Director  
National Energy and Utility Affordability Coalition

2/10/2023

Date

