

NEPC STRATEGY

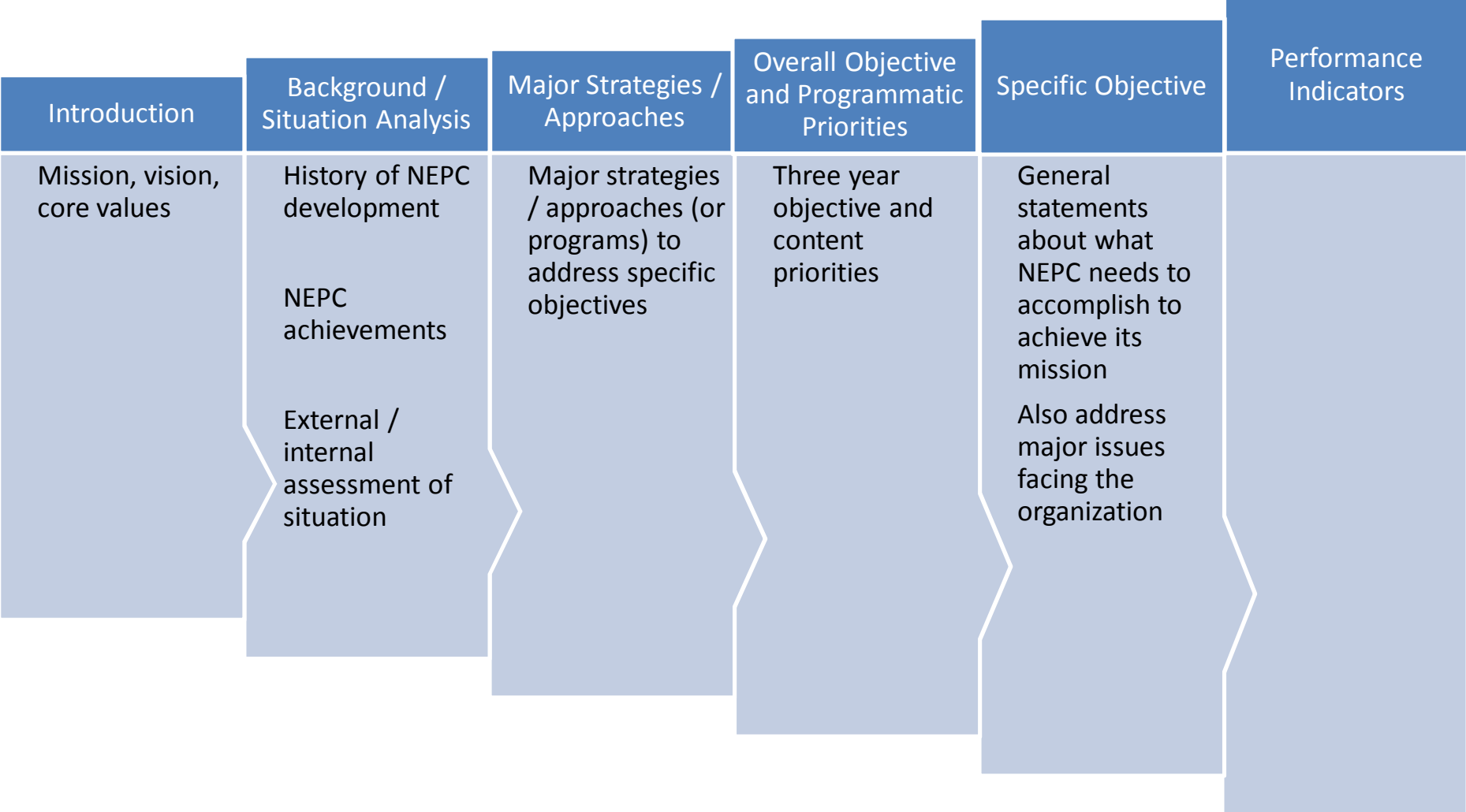
Draft framework – work in progress

2013 – 2015

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Strategy Framework



Introduction

Network of Education Policy Centers (NEPC) is an international non-governmental membership organization of education policy centers.

NEPC's mission is to strengthen local and regional expertise to promote participatory and evidence-based education policies and to advocate for open society values in education internationally.

NEPC's core values

NEPC fosters the values of an **open, democratic, multicultural and pluralistic society** by **supporting equal access to quality education for all; democratic school governance; participatory learning and teaching;** and **transparent, evidence-based policy making** and implementation.

NEPC is devoted to promoting **democratization** and **inclusiveness in education**, as well as **Education for Sustainability**.

Background

History of NEPC development

NEPC, founded in 2006 as a formal international network of education policy centers, was actually born long before the organization became official. Although still rather young, NEPC has had a challenging, yet dynamic, evolution. Its pre-history began during the symbolic shift to a new millennium, amidst new and challenging realities and paradigm shifts affecting systems of education throughout the world. From an informal group of individuals from different countries whose educational departments had formerly partnered with the Open Society Institute emerged the idea of founding an education policy network. These education sector actors felt the need to maintain and further develop strong linkages with other similar entities. For various reasons, these diverse stakeholders shared a powerful desire to participate proactively in the process of educational transformation.

NEPC was born from this informal group of people sharing common values grounded in the belief that educational change is *the* key to societal change and a better future. From the collective belief that together they could make a difference, strengthened by shared enthusiasm, stamina, hope, worry, certainty and uncertainty, and maybe even some of the stereotypical romanticism ascribed to those who imagine new realities, NEPC became an official institution in 2006. Since then, sustained by dedicated collective and individual efforts and a lot of hard work, NEPC has achieved visible impacts in many of the educational systems of its members. NEPC has evolved through a number of development phases that encompass processes of reflection, debate, communication, action, success and sometimes failure. The following phases outline NEPC's path to becoming a strong and effective network in a relatively short time:

Establishing a unique organizational identity with a solid institutional vision and mission (2006-2008). NEPC is a complex organization; conceptual, institutional and strategic foundations had to be carefully thought through, shared and reflected upon, discussed and agreed to, and then translated into concrete action. This process was not easy at all, but the end result is an institutional profile with clear vision and mission, aims and priorities, and institutional structures and procedures, as well as a long term strategy and action plan.

Implementing the mission (2008-2010). NEPC's focus shifted toward creating a clearly defined professional niche and earning the type of prestige and recognition that only substantive educational projects and their results can bring. Projects were designed and implemented, new priorities and financing opportunities were identified, and the range of financing sources was enlarged. During this phase, NEPC created its brands – the Summer School and the Policy Lab. NEPC put into place internal and external mechanisms and competent experts who effectively engage in a high quality project management cycle from needs analysis to project implementation and dissemination of best practices. Gradually, as the quality of its projects and results improved, NEPC became well-known for its unique project topics and research approaches, not only in the region covered by its membership, but also in much broader professional and geographic spheres.

Engaging in reflection and growing from experience (2010-2012). With its foundations established and experience to learn from, NEPC began a reflective process of questioning the strength of the organization's underlying philosophy, established processes, structures, and procedures. Lessons learned fed back into NEPC's every day practices. Valuable concepts, such as the nature of unity in a network and how to truly make an abstract institutional concept into a grassroots reality, were explored and clarified. Self-assessment and external evaluation were carried out in order to support reflection. From a supply-driven network that decided its steps according to the dynamics of external financing bodies, NEPC became a network driven by its own demands and priorities.

Looking forward. In 2013, NEPC's initially selected Executive Board was refreshed and tasked with finalizing and operationalizing effective responses to the findings of the organization's previous reflective phase. A stronger and more dynamic NEPC should emerge with a solid strategy ensuring that the organization can successfully navigate the ever evolving challenges of achieving its mission in the years to come.

NEPC achievements

Since it became a registered association in 2006, NEPC has developed into a vibrant, multi-faceted network of education policy organizations and experts engaged in changing education in a number of countries, from Estonia to Mongolia. NEPC's membership comprises 24 organizations in 20 countries, including 6 European Union (EU) member states, 5 CIS countries, and 8 EU pre-accession countries. Twenty of the top education policy think tanks listed in University of Pennsylvania's 2012 *Global Go To Think Tanks Report and Policy Advice* report are NEPC members.

Since it started operations, NEPC has conducted 10 multi-country projects in 20 countries. The network's contribution to improving education policies in this region is reflected in its highly diverse project portfolio, which includes large projects involving several countries, such as the Education for Sustainable Development Partnership Initiative (see text box on p 4) and Divided Education Divided Citizens? (supported by the Open Society Foundations with a grant of about 100,000 Euros).

The impact of NEPC as an international organization cannot be separated from that of its institutional members and the active role they play in policy research and advocacy in their given countries. The organization's work has helped to highlight several unexplored or under-recognized trends in the education sector, such as the extent of hidden or informal private payments for public education, the subtle ways in which history and social studies teaching and learning materials promote tolerance or intolerance, and the importance of critical thinking and curricular revisions to promote education for sustainable development. NEPC research on the prevalence of private tutoring brought the previously unrecognized issue to the fore and highlighted the equity and legal dimensions inherent in public sector teachers restricting the teaching of core subject content to private tutoring session. Further, NEPC research has informed policy debates and the national and international (EU) level as well as changes to curriculum and textbooks at the national level.

Education for Sustainable Development Partnership Initiative (supported by the European Commission cca 450,000 Euros)

Mapped the coverage of sustainability topics in the compulsory education national curriculum in partner countries resulting in :

- 8 national reports mapping the coverage of sustainable development content in pre-secondary education curricula in the countries involved in the project; a reviewed comparative book on these findings;
- Comparative book: "Civil Rights and Obligations are Connected to Environmental Issues" . One of its reviewers of the Professor Daniella Tilbury, wrote the following: „Numerous reports on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) have been commissioned in the lead up to Rio+20 but few provide empirical evidence which map the state of play and have the potential to inform policy and practice at a national level. This ENjoinED publication is rather special in that it brings together civil society organisations with research institutes to inquire as to the presence of ESD within formal curricula. The book which is informed by empirical evidence makes a valuable contribution to the ESD literature through asking critical questions, marrying qualitative and quantitative analysis and through focusing on a region where ESD at the national level is under researched.”

Developed of Adult Environment Educational Modules (AEEM) resulting in:

- adult education modules on sustainability developed (for teachers, public authorities and business)

Developed Policy Recommendations and Advocating for Policy Change resulting in:

- 7 environmental education policy briefs developed
- accompanying advocacies conducted;

Created sustainable partnership between educational and environmental CSO's on national and regional level resulting in :

- 4 workshops held to share information and expertise between environmental and educational CSO target group members;
- a signed common statement formalising the commitment to partnership for education for sustainable development.

NEPC has been successful at providing international expertise for its members' projects, from Kosovo to Kyrgyzstan. These projects not only to improve education policies and practices across the region,

but also serve to develop analytical and research capacities within NEPC's membership, engage policy makers and practitioners in a number of countries, and foster networking among education NGOs, academics and educators.

Through its participation in SIRIUS, a European Policy Network on the education of children and young people with a migrant background, NEPC engages in ongoing dialogue with the European Commission on education policies for migrants in Europe. This policy area is of high importance both to the societies of EU member states and to migrants from many of the countries where NEPC members are based.

NEPC contributes to current international debate on education policy issues by publishing studies on topics including citizenship education, private tutoring, and education for sustainable development. NEPC regularly presents its work for discussion at international education fora, such as the Comparative and International Education Society annual conference, European Conference on Educational Research, World Congress of Comparative Education.

Situation Analysis

External

Education communities and systems in the regions under the scope of the NEPC continue to face numerous challenges, exacerbated by the lasting global economic crisis.

Despite serious education reforms and profound structural changes to the organization and funding of education processes in most countries in the NEPC region in the last two decades, accessibility and quality of education have not always improved, nor have tolerance and democratic values necessarily expanded.

NEPC's programmatic priorities – education based on values and rights (tolerance, respect for difference, multiculturalism, civic education, etc.), participatory policy development and democratic school governance – do not often top the education policy agenda of national governments. Nor do these priorities top the agendas of the EU or World Bank, major investors in education in the region.

It should be stressed that NEPC's priorities and objectives align with those of the Education First global initiative of the United Nations (UN), particularly the global citizenship component; the UN's Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), led by UNESCO; World Bank Education Strategy 2020; and the education policy of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Internal

Based on the SWOT analysis structured planning method, the following can be concluded about the current internal situation of NEPC:

The strengths of NEPC lie in its diverse membership, regional coverage, large pool of experts and researchers, knowledge sharing between members, international learning opportunities for

members and beneficiaries, openness to understanding and analyzing new education policy issues and discovering innovative policy options, and ability to strengthen policy capacity in the region, as well as produce new knowledge by bringing global discourse to the region and facilitating locally relevant contextualization.

NEPC needs to improve horizontal communication between members and internal knowledge sharing. NEPC should ensure sufficient space for members to present their work and decentralize operations by expanding beyond research to create additional opportunities for collaborative work between members. Lastly, NEPC should ordinate itself to programmatic thinking. In the long run, these steps should reduce the threat of over-reliance on the work of the Executive Board and Secretariat, and also address the major threat of unstable institutional funding.

The opportunities for NEPC include using its strengths and its new programmatic strategy to engage Civil Society Organizations (CSO) members and others in regional policy dialogue with NEPC in a facilitation role; doing policy research and policy analysis; engaging members and other actors in promoting education for sustainability, inclusive education, and other topics of importance; and being a voice of CSOs from the region in policy dialogue with international education players and national governments.

Major Strategies and Approaches for the Next Three Years

By the end of 2015, NEPC's objective is to become an internationally recognized source of reliable evidence on educational issues and an active agent of change within the priority areas of NEPC in Europe and Asia. NEPC intends to expand its membership to new countries in the region. The network will rely on a strong professional membership and an effective, sustainable funding mechanism.

Between 2013 and 2015, NEPC will maintain and work to improve the effectiveness of its support and agency roles. As a network of independent institutions, NEPC's core strength comes from the capacity of its members; it is therefore essential that the Executive Board and Secretariat keep investing in that capacity with a well-defined and realistic support role. On the other hand, its agency role enables NEPC to tackle critical challenges in education through global advocacy, often by using evidence generated by its members. These two roles complement each other and, when effectively implemented, promise to generate value for all NEPC members. The Executive Board and Secretariat are expected to ensure a dynamic (responsive to emerging developments and needs) and well-balanced combination of these roles, while developing and implementing operational and financial plans.

Challenging government tendencies to monopolize education policy-making requires pooled resources and strong reliance on international experience to strengthen participatory approaches to education policy development and impact policy processes. NEPC can provide consolidated support to national civil society organizations when they experience difficulties in breaking a government policy-making monopoly, especially regarding sensitive issues. NEPC can also provide international backing and support for opening in-country policy debate. NEPC supports **transparent, evidence-based policy making** by analysing existing policies, providing evidence for policies and

recommendations for policy implementation, monitoring policy implementation, and piloting implementation. NEPC can also add value by sharing information and know-how, and building capacity in the areas of education policy analysis and advocacy.

To expand NEPC's international advocacy and increase its effectiveness during the next plan term, the Executive Board and Secretariat will focus on designing and implementing a new strategic communication plan. Emphasis will be given to magnifying the evidence base generated by network members and exposing NEPC's distributed research capacity to regional and international key players.

After carefully assessing NEPC's institutional capacity, membership profile and geographic reach, the Executive Board suggests further penetrating its current region of South East and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia by recruiting new members, especially in countries where NEPC does not currently have members, rather than expanding to new regions (i.e., the Middle East or North Africa).

In the past, NEPC's operations were primarily funded by core grants from the Open Society Foundations, specific project funding, and occasional consultancy services. However, it is now apparent that NEPC needs to reconsider its fundraising strategy and think about new and innovative measures. It appears that research projects have been instrumental in funding both support and agency roles of the network. These projects provided opportunities for researchers and experts within the NEPC membership to work together on issues of mutual interest. These opportunities have proven valuable in strengthening the research capacity of NEPC members and generating an evidence base to support national and international advocacy. In order to replicate success to non-research collaborative work, NEPC will strengthen its inter-learning activities and, in addition to its traditional summer schools and policy labs, invest in regular learning events based on NEPC programs.

Between 2013 and 2015, NEPC aims to diversify its funding sources to expand its support of members and to expand its international advocacy activities. Increasing the share of each member's contribution will be a key aspect of next term's strategy. While realistic and modest increases in annual fees are expected, the Secretariat will begin charging fees to members who benefit from NEPC's project management and referral services, if approved by the General Assembly. It is critical that members assume more financial responsibility for ensuring NEPC's long-term sustainability.

The Executive Board and Secretariat will look at additional grants opportunities, particularly with European foundations through the European Foundation Center. Another key fundraising approach will include revenue-generating services, such as consultancies. The Secretariat will look for opportunities to join consortiums that bid for technical assistance tenders for EU funded projects across the region. It is critical that the Executive Board and Secretariat collaborate with members to explore and realize such opportunities.

The 2013 – 2015 strategy requires strengthening NEPC's operations without sacrificing the already uncertain financial sustainability of the organization. The Board and the Secretariat will develop different scenarios that potentially ensure this outcome and implement the most viable option by the end of 2013.

Programmatic priorities

There has been a significant shift in NEPC's strategy towards using programmatic priorities to guide operations. NEPC identifies education for sustainability, inclusive education and teacher policies as programmatic priorities and will therefore focus on developing and implementing research and advocacy activities in the framework of these three priorities. This transition is already happening and the Executive Board and Secretariat are committed to further catalyzing the transition in the coming term. These programmatic foci are expected to help the network focus on priority areas and adopt a more systematic and long-term approach to making an impact.

NEPC also has a history of work on the topics of privatization in education and corruption in education. There are a few projects that fall within the realm of these topics in the application pipeline, so NEPC will continue to engage these particular topics on a project by project basis.

Education for sustainability

Education for sustainability should be a core value and one of the principles on which modern education is founded. It is a comprehensive concept for quality education and learning that addresses global key issues such as global citizenship, health, solidarity, new economic models, poverty reduction, sustainable livelihoods, climate change, gender equality, corporate social responsibility, and other key issues under the core values of NEPC. Education for sustainability is a very beneficial overarching topic that incorporates most of the issues that NEPC has been engaged with in the past, such as equity in education, education of ethnic and other minorities, and corruption in education. This topic also covers issues that the network has been shifting its interest to, such as migration and education, privatization in education, and the impact of poverty on education. Moreover, education for sustainability is not only about academic content but also has serious pedagogical implications that allow teaching for (and through) social and cooperative learning, participation, and activism.

NEPC's strategic approach is to build this program on its already existing ENjoinED initiative, spread it to new countries, involve new partners and stakeholders, implement activities at school level, and provide policy options to introduce education for sustainability into the educational systems in the region. NEPC sees this process as crucial in societies that face economic, social and environmental crises but have not yet set sustainability as an educational priority.

Inclusive education

Inclusive education applies to a set of principles, values, and practices based on ensuring equal rights to education for all children regardless of gender, ethnicity, or social and developmental issues. Inclusive education thus applies to and is a right for all children. It is driven by the principle of social justice and the need to remove all forms of inequity from our education systems. It stems from the realization that when the best interests of each child are promoted by the entire school community, education promotes social cohesion, belonging, and active participation in learning. NEPC recognizes that the principles of inclusion must be realized within all education systems in order for all children to reach their full potential. This is a difficult process of exchanging deeply embedded social and

educational inequalities for a set of principles, values, and practices that, if put into action, can transform school cultures and entire communities. It involves changing school cultures deeply embedded with exclusionary beliefs and advocating for a system of values centered on the best interests of the student. NEPC's strategic approach is to support its member organizations as catalysts, bringing inclusive principles to national education systems and working for the empowerment of every child. As an international organization, NEPC will continue to develop and fundraise for multi-country research and policy analysis projects on the topic of inclusive education.

Teacher policies

Teachers are the core agents of all real change at the grassroots level and without highly professional and motivated teachers a quality education system cannot be built, nor can effectiveness in learning be achieved without proactive teacher policies. NEPC's Teacher Policies Program is an intrinsic part of the sustainable paradigm shift the organization seeks in the field of education. On one hand, the purpose of this program is to collect and assess existing and new evidence concerning teacher policies that can inform national public policies and promote quality public dialogue for effective and coherent teacher policies and underlying practices. Although this approach would generally lead towards constructing a model or guide for robust national policies that will ensure teachers are prepared and supported in ways that facilitate effective teaching and learning in the classroom, NEPC's program also intends to offer direct support to teachers. NEPC does this by involving teachers in the network's activities and projects, and by sharing best practices related to teacher development and training programs implemented by its members.

Specific Objectives

NEPC will become an internationally recognized source of reliable evidence on educational issues within the programmatic priorities in Europe and Asia.

- Identify important policy-relevant research questions unexplored by others
 - develop an internal mechanism to identify such questions
 - encourage new ideas by organizing an annual essay competition among members
- Initiate and carry out research projects to tackle the identified questions (policy challenge)
- Create an external communication and dissemination plan
 - identify effective channels for delivering policy messages to stakeholders and policy makers

NEPC will become an active agent of change on educational issues within the programmatic priorities in Europe and Asia.

- Highlight relevant policy issues to stakeholders and international players
 - publish policy briefs
 - organize policy labs and conferences
 - lobby international organizations
- Promote policy research and analyze capacity in the region
 - continue publishing the edition of *NEPC Comparative Studies in Education*

- involve local researchers and policy analysts in all activities
- Provide learning opportunities to members and other local researchers and stakeholders
 - summer schools
 - workshops aligned with programmatic priorities
- Channel policy-relevant findings of members and local researchers into international policy debate
 - participate in international conferences, meetings and workshops
 - become members of other international networks, platforms and initiatives

NEPC will strengthen ties with and between members.

- Improve horizontal communication and visibility between centers
 - develop an internal communication plan
 - quarterly news updates (NL)
 - create an e-Platform for NEPC by using Wikispaces to share knowledge and ideas among members
 - promote use of NEPC Facebook profile for sharing news and information
 - provide space for presenting members' work and communicate best practices at annual General Assembly
- Empower and advance the network
 - organize internships between members
 - inform all centers about grant calls and opportunities to join them
 - encourage less developed centers to become involved in NEPC projects
 - outsource Secretariat activities by delegating tasks to individual centers
- Present good results among the network members
 - create an index of members' involvement and networking
 - publish and highlight members' accomplishments

NEPC will gain additional members in countries already represented and expand its membership to new countries in the region & additional members in countries already represented.

- Attract new members from countries in which NEPC already has members
 - map new centers within countries where NEPC is active
 - create a communication strategy to attract new centers with the involvement of member centers
 - promote cooperation between member centers and newly identified candidates through including and inviting them to participate in current and planned NEPC activities and projects, and increase their participation in country- based policy advocacy
- Expand membership to new countries in the region
 - identify new centers in new countries in operational region (SEE, Caucasus and SA) and develop communication links with them
 - identify effective channels for inclusion of those centers in NEPC activities

NEPC will achieve an effective and sustainable institutional funding mechanism.

- Develop a business plan
- Diversify client base
 - UNESCO, WBI, OECD, UNICEF and European Foundations Center (ESP)
 - approach regional foundations
- Identify appropriate tender and service contracts
 - join consortiums
 - encourage members to invite NEPC to consortiums
 - map and forecast tenders in the region and beyond
- Identify (with the membership) ways members can contribute to sustainable institutional funding of NEPC
 - gradually increase membership fees by 2015
 - encourage members to invite NEPC to partner on national projects when appropriate
 - establish an explicit referral fee
 - establish an overhead project management fee (up to 5%)
- Generate funds from providing in-house expertise
 - trainings (policy analysis, advocacy and NEPC educational topics)
 - methodology design
- Develop a financial policies and procedures document

Performance Indicators

NEPC will become an internationally recognized source of reliable evidence on educational issues within the priority areas in Europe and Asia.

- Identify important policy-relevant research questions unexplored by others
 - at least one discussion or position paper on a new issue every year
 - NEPC annual essay competition organized and carried out every year
- Initiate and undertake research project to tackle the identified questions (policy challenge)
 - at least one research project on identified topic carried out by the end of 2015
- Create an external communication and dissemination plan by 2013

NEPC will become an active agent of change on educational issues within the priority areas in Europe and Asia.

- Highlight relevant policy issues to stakeholders and international players
 - at least 5 policy briefs published by 2015
 - track number of web hits
 - track citations of policy briefs and other NEPC publications
 - track translations to national languages
 - track media references
 - organize at least three policy labs by the end of 2015

- track number of outside NEPC participants in the policy labs and other events
- track countries represented in NEPC events
- track policy makers present at NEPC events
- organize at least one international conference by the end of 2015
- track content in international organization documents highlighting NEPC
- track new clients
- track invited panelists
- track new partners
- Promote policy research and analysis capacity in the region
 - publish (at least) issue no. 3 of *NEPC Comparative Studies in Education*
 - track local researchers and experts involved in NEPC activities
- Provide learning opportunities for members and other local researchers and stakeholders
 - at least three summer schools organized by the end of 2015
 - at least one Workshop on each programmatic priority each year, beginning in 2014
- Channel policy-relevant findings of members and local researchers into international policy debate
 - track funded members who attend international events
 - track presentations at international conferences
 - track articles in international media
 - track articles in scientific and professional journals
 - track international requests for input

NEPC will strengthen ties with and between members.

- Improve horizontal communication and visibility between centers
 - Develop an internal communication plan by the end of 2013
 - create e-Platform on Wikispaces for sharing knowledge and ideas among members
 - track users of Wikispace
 - track uploads on Wikispace
 - track number of NEPC Facebook friends and posts by members
 - provide space for at least two members to present their work at each annual assembly, beginning in 2013
- Empower and advance network
 - track internships carried out
 - track the number of informational emails sent to members on a yearly basis
 - track the number of members involved in NEPC projects who were not previously active
 - track the number of Secretariat tasks outsourced to member centers
- Present good results among the network members
 - create an index of members' involvement and networking
 - present the results of the index at every General Assembly, beginning in 2013
 - track the number of members' accomplishments published on NEPC webpage

NEPC will gain additional members in countries already represented and expand its membership to new countries in the region.

- Attract new members from countries in which NEPC already has members
 - create a list of candidate centers by the end of 2013
 - create a communication strategy to attract new centers by the end of 2013
 - contact at least ten new centers and receive feedback
 - involve at least five new centers in new NEPC projects
 - ensure participation of 10 persons from these new centers in NEPC activities and trainings (e.g., summer school, conferences, best practices sharing)
 - extend membership to at least three new centers from countries already represented in the membership by 2015

- Expand membership to new countries in the region
 - contact at least five centers in new countries and receive feedback

NEPC will achieve an effective and sustainable funding mechanism.

- Develop a business plan that is approved by the General Assembly in 2013
- Engage a Development Manager on flexible terms (60 – 80 working days) by the end of 2013
- Develop a financial policies and procedures document that is approved by the General Assembly in 2013
- Finalize one training package from the expertise of NEPC per year that is ready for “sale” advertisement, beginning in 2013
- Secure at least one new funder/client or one new source of funding for long term funding or a long term project by end of 2013
- Institutionalize 20% of NEPC’s annual budget raised from sales (e.g., consultancy, training, referral and management fees) and/or other new sources of funding