



## Vision 20/20 Retreat Summary

On September 26 and 27, Cornerstone New Jersey convened a remarkable group of individuals who share a common commitment to the vitality of the State of New Jersey. For two days, retreat participants worked in small groups and in large group dialogue framing the issues facing New Jersey, articulating strengths, and identifying opportunities and emerging trends to build upon. Tapping into the aspirations of the group, participants created a vision of what New Jersey could be in 2020, and co-designed strategies to move New Jersey toward that visionary future. This paper summarizes the retreat's key conversations, insights and directions.

Among the participants were Co-Chairs Bill Marino, Ralph Izzo and Dennis Bone, State Chamber President Joan Verplanck, over 30 Cornerstone New Jersey members, Governor Corzine, numerous Cabinet members, New Jersey legislative leaders, and other individuals key to the economic future of the state. These participants had purposeful, meaningful and honest conversations from their unique public and private sector perspectives and discovered consensus around many aspects of the state's future.

Retreat participants spent the first part of the meeting both getting to know each other better, and familiarizing themselves with facts about the state. Reviewing reports and fact sheets related to business climate, resident opinions, comparison with other states, demographics, education, and other relevant data, participants developed a sense of some of the underlying issues facing business, government and residents. Some of the data that were particularly striking were the diversity of New Jersey's demographics, the high proportion of young people who reside in the state, the disparities in educational achievement, and the small return of tax dollars New Jersey gets back from the federal government.

Using the data review as a foundation, retreat participants worked in small groups to identify New Jersey's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities on the horizon and the trends that the state can build on. Themes emerged around Home Rule as both a strength and a weakness, the state of the inner cities, about taxes and government spending, the aging workforce and about K-12 outcomes. The group identified the significant assets of New Jersey's institutions, particularly the higher education system, the opportunities with developing alternative energy, the continuing strength in biotech and pharma, and the need to maintain the competitive advantage of New Jersey's ports and strategic location to markets. There is widespread agreement that participants see the need and have a real commitment to move forward in tackling tough issues.

Using a structured facilitated process, the retreat participants then spent a considerable amount of time working on the question: *What do we want to see in place in New Jersey by the year 2020?* Bringing data, voices and opinions from outside the room, and the participants' own passion and interests, the group developed a vision encompassing nine elements, as follows:

- *One New Jersey: valuing and drawing economic strength from our diversity;*
- *A destination state to live, work and play – driven by an engaged citizenry;*
- *An accessible, measurable and high quality education system graduating skilled students prepared for life's work or higher education;*

- *An effective and efficient infrastructure, which leverages technological advances to meet present and future needs;*
- *A state capitalizing on the intersection of the green environment and the green economy;*
- *Quality and affordable health care for all;*
- *Right-sized government entities with performance standards as a basis for accountability;*
- *Vital urban centers that are economically, socially, and culturally robust – places where people choose to live;*
- *Thriving state economy driven by a culture of innovation and education.*

After considering the vision that they developed, the participants soberly considered what would be easier and harder to put in place, what would happen if they did nothing, and the kind of commitment that implementing such a vision would require. There was agreed sentiment that the people in the room were well positioned to get things done, and that it was their obligation to formulate a strategy that would identify critical next steps in helping move the state toward this vision.

Participants then discussed various obstacles— underlying patterns, attitudes, and images that might stand in the way of moving forward. These are recurring forces that could stop us from forward progress. Attendees identified complacency (no sense of urgency); New Jersey's self image (need to move from feisty survivor to classy competitor); the various dichotomies that split up the state into factions (home rule, north/south, generational, urban/rural, business/ government); partisanship; and weak collaboration between government and employers.

Having identified the underlying forces that could block the vision, participants worked on the question: *What are innovative substantial actions that deal with the underlying forces and move us towards our vision?* From this discussion, six strategic action arenas were identified, while acknowledging that further work needs to be done to prioritize and develop the right people and resources to engage in the work.

- *Leadership development and grassroots education*
- *On-going leadership council*
- *Advocacy – road show by us*
- *Government reform – vision statements from all political candidates*
- *Civic engagement inclusion strategy – people involved to create the solutions – one state, one dream*
- *Public relations outreach & sustained public awareness campaign – utilizing the power of NJN and “main street” strategy*

In the closing session, participants reflected on the work they had done, the insights they had gained, and the new vantage points that they acquired. There was agreement that a committee of retreat participants and other Cornerstone New Jersey members would meet to continue to work on these issues and craft further strategies to communicate the vision to other key partners and stakeholders, to involve others in taking this to the next level, and implementing actions that would begin moving us toward the vision.