



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is “*The Highground Rising*”?

The Highground Rising is a \$4M capital campaign undertaken by The Highground Board of Directors and led by a group of approximately 75 volunteers. The campaign, which will take place over the next 12 to 18 months through August 2021, has two main goals: to pay off the \$450,000 mortgage and construct a 12,000 square-foot Welcome and Visitor Center. The center will improve operational efficiency, accessibility, safety, and programs that support U.S. Veterans and their families, and better serve its 225,000 annual visitors and stakeholders.

The expansion campaign will:

- Fund construction of a \$2.5M centralized location for Veterans activities. This complex will include a Museum, Gift Shop and Visitor Center. Once operational, it will increase revenue and provide services desired by Veterans and visitors.
- Pay off the \$450,000 mortgage, thereby providing long-term financial stability by retiring a \$2,000 monthly loan payment.
- Develop formal mental health referrals, programs and retreats
- Enhance ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance, ensuring increased facility safety and accessibility through improved traffic flow.
- Increase awareness of the largest, privately funded, continuously staffed Veterans memorial park in the nation.

2. Why is the expansion needed?

The current multi-building configuration throughout The Highground does not lend itself to operating efficiency. Limited ADA accessibility impedes safe access to the grounds for disabled Veterans. The new Welcome and Visitor Center will also provide an indoor gathering space capable of hosting 150 to 200, a capacity often required to adequately accommodate large special events, stone placement ceremonies and holiday crowds. Currently, there is no sheltered area suitable for use when inclement weather arises during large events. The expanded facility will bring all staff offices and volunteer functions, including the museum, library, and archival collection, under one roof. This will not only improve operating efficiency, but will also reduce overall heating and cooling costs.

3. Why is the expansion campaign being undertaken at this time?

At present, the organization cannot effectively meet the needs of a growing visitor base. This need alone warrants the construction of a single building large enough to serve a variety of needs. Additionally, paying off the mortgage will free increased operational dollars for other worthwhile uses. Lastly, formalizing and implementing protocols for the implementation of mental health referrals, programming and additional services offered to Veterans and their families will be enjoyed as an immeasurable benefit of the expansion project.

4. How many people visit The Highground annually?

In 2018, 225,000 people visited The Highground. With the construction of a larger, more accessible gathering space, attendance is expected to continue to increase.

5. Who are the main individuals served by The Highground?

While the needs of Veterans and their families remain the main focus of The Highground, the organization also strives to raise awareness of Veterans issues to the wider community.

6. Isn't The Highground just a place that recognizes Vietnam War Veterans?

The Highground was initially established to honor and recognize Veterans of the Vietnam War. It has matured and evolved into a sacred space that honors all Veterans, including those who served during Vietnam, World War I, World War II, Korea, The Persian Gulf, all female Veterans, Vietnam Era American Indian Veterans and the Gold Star Families of fallen Veterans. It also prides itself in serving the families of all Veterans while seeking to highlight the sacrifice of our military and their families alike.

7. What benefits will stakeholders and visitors receive after the expansion is completed?

The expansion will improve services to Veterans, as well as Honor, Educate and Heal by:

- Increasing accessibility and safety for all those who visit The Highground, especially disabled Veterans.
- Strengthening opportunities to honor Veterans through memorials.
- Implementing programming designed to support Veterans and their families.
- Expanding opportunities to educate citizens about the sacrifice of our military.
- Providing new formal referral and counseling services and therapy programs for Veterans.

8. Wasn't there a campaign for a Welcome and Visitor Center undertaken in 2016? What happened to the funds that were raised for that initiative?

In 2016, the idea of constructing a new Welcome and Visitor Center was investigated and actively pursued by The Highground Board. However, that proposed project quickly increased to a size, scope and cost the Board felt was impractical and unattainable at the time. Each gift given for that effort will be recognized in the level it was given. Those who gave major gifts will be recognized in the Donor Recognition Plan, with Naming Rights available commensurate with the amount of the gift. Those who gave verbal pledges, but who had not completed their pledges at the time the original project was put on hold, will be asked to consider making that gift in support of today's project details.

9. What is the operating budget of this privately-operated organization?

The annual operating cost of The Highground for 2020-2021 is approximately \$756,000.

10. What is the proposed increase in the operating budget following the building expansion?

Paying off the \$450,000 mortgage will free up funds that can then be used to cover operational costs or provide improved services for Veterans. Consolidating all functions under one roof should decrease costs from the current multi-building arrangement.

11. What is the final proposed design?

A building committee researched a number of architectural firms and chose Excel Engineering from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. The Board of Directors approved the recommendations of the committee based on a number of factors including expertise, cost and the ability to construct a facility that will serve the organization for the next several generations.

12. Will The Highground be able to afford this expansion?

Due to the consolidation of buildings and a more functional and sustainable design, the new facility is expected to increase costs only modestly. Monthly savings resulting from paying off the mortgage will help cover other potential cost increases should they be realized.

13. In what ways will funds be designated to support Veterans needs for healing?

Although planning is in preliminary stages, the Board envisions hiring an on-staff mental health-focused team member. This staff member will undertake on-site support services, serve as a resource guide for formal mental health programs, refer individuals to programs in their local area and manage retreats and support groups as needed.

14. How many more staff is the organization going to be able to accommodate?

The organization currently has seven full-time paid staff members and four part-time positions to support organization operations in addition to over 200 volunteers. The Board recently completed a Strategic Planning effort that identified the possibility of increasing staffing over the next five years as the organization and its mission continue to grow. Planning allows for modest staff growth over time.

15. Will The Highground have enough volunteers and donors to sustain the expanded organization?

As The Highground expands, the staff will assess the need to recruit additional staff. The donor base includes thousands of individuals, corporations and foundations from across the United States. The Board of Directors is confident a successful campaign, an effective marketing approach and a more formalized financial development effort will bring an increase in funding for annual operating.

16. Is the funding coming from Neillsville area residents and businesses or will it be widespread?

The Highground has had thousands of donors over the years, representing nearly all 50 states. Those who are able to regularly attend The Highground activities and events may be more inclined to give to this campaign than those who live farther away. However, contributions will be sought regionally, throughout Wisconsin and nationwide.

17. Why would you want to spend so much money on new programs that duplicate existing programs?

Healing is a key component of the mission, and the Board endeavors to meet this important need with better and more effective programs. The organization currently does not have any formal counseling or referral programs for Veterans; however, some informal support programs, which Veterans have found extremely beneficial over the years, do exist. The organization wishes to build on these successes.

18. What about parking?

Improved parking is a key component of the overall plan. This will allow safer access to memorials and to the Welcome and Visitor Center and will accommodate attendance at larger gatherings. In conjunction with the proposed new building, a nearby parking lot will be created specifically for the use of disabled Veterans and their vehicles.

19. Does The Highground have the right design?

Campaign leaders are confident in the ability of Excel Engineering to create the best conceptual design possible. The aim is to develop a forward-thinking solution for safety, accessibility, sustainability, and functionality while staying within the proposed \$2.5M budget. Volunteers and stakeholders will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed final design.

20. Does The Highground need a big event center that may be a burden to operate?

The Board anticipates building a Welcome and Visitor Center that will accommodate 150 to 200 people. This size facility will not be too large to operate efficiently, and it will offer an appropriate and sheltered venue for both exhibits and events.

21. Does The Highground have the right people in place to address mental health needs? The Highground will hire needed staff when the building expansion is complete. The Board of Directors believes now is the time to strengthen this area due to the growing mental health needs of Veterans from all wars and conflicts. The Board wishes to create a place to honor them, remember their sacrifice and support them in any way possible as they heal from the obvious as well as the hidden wounds of their service.

22. Would it be better to start this project at a slower pace?

Beginning in 2018, research and studies on the planned expansion were carried out. The Board has undertaken the expansion project in a responsible way. Although the impact of COVID-19 could not have been anticipated, the Board still strongly believes the expansion fundraising goal will be achieved and the growing needs of the organization and its stakeholders will be met now and for generations to come.

23. When will construction start? When will it be completed?

Funds will be secured during 2020 and 2021. Pledges may be remitted over three to five years. Construction is now expected to start in 2023 and last approximately nine months to one year.

24. What is the economic impact of The Highground to the Neillsville area?

Based on research from Clark County, the economic impact of The Highground on the county is estimated at \$12M annually.

25. Is there enough financial support possible from regional, state and national stakeholders?

A Campaign Readiness Study was completed by Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC, with more than 65 respondents sharing their thoughts on the proposed campaign. Study results determined \$4M in private funding would be possible once further cultivation and planning have been completed.

26. Who is coordinating the campaign?

Several dozen volunteers and stakeholders, along with the Board, are providing leadership for the

campaign. Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC, who have completed more than 40 successful capital campaigns over the last 22 years, managed the capital campaign through the launch event.

27. How does the fundraising consultants contract work?

The Highground Board of Directors pays consultants for the time spent managing the campaign, not based on how much is raised. Pre-approved consulting fees will not increase should the campaign raise more than the stated goal.

28. What is the timing of the fundraising campaign?

After identifying prospective contributors, securing campaign leadership and finalizing the campaign case statement which provides the rationale for the campaign, the pre-campaign was completed by October 2020. The campaign's silent phase was held at the end of 2020 and into early 2021. The campaign formally launched in March 2021.

29. What is a pledge and how does payment toward a pledge work?

A pledge is a donor's promise to give a specified financial gift to a campaign over time. The specific amount to be given regularly will be decided by the donor. Payments may be given over several years from 2020 to 2024. Individuals and businesses may make payments semi-annually or annually at their discretion. Reminders will be sent based on the donor's wishes. Some major employers may have employee matching programs. Donors will be encouraged to check with the Human Resources Departments of their employers to identify if such a matching gift program is available and work with The Highground staff when completing their pledge when possible.

30. What options can people use to fulfill pledges?

- Donors may give cash, appreciated property such as stocks, real estate, paid-up insurance policies, and, in some cases, in-kind gifts.
- An established account to transfer tax-deductible stock.
- When a gift of stock is made to the campaign it will be sold and the resultant funds issued to the campaign.
- Checks, commodities, appreciated property, land sale, or other property may be used to satisfy pledge payments according to each donor's desired schedule.
- Payroll deductions may also be an option if companies wish to offer this to their employees.
- Employees of companies offering matching programs for charitable contributions are encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity.

31. Do most people fulfill their pledges?

Yes. Midwest communities conducting campaigns typically experience pledge fulfillment in the 95 to 105 percent range. According to Crescendo Fundraising Professionals, LLC, one-half of all pledges are usually paid into the campaign during the first year, one-third is typically paid in the second year, and one-sixth in years three to five.

32. Are contributions tax-deductible?

Each contribution is tax-deductible according to IRS standards. The campaign office will send an acknowledgment of all pledges. As payments are remitted over time, donors will receive "thank you" receipts and substantiation of the amount gifted for their and their tax advisor's records.

33. Is there a plan if The Highground doesn't raise all the money?

Due to the positive study that was completed in preparation for the campaign and the strong interest to be involved in pre-campaign committees, we are confident the goal will be met. In the unforeseen event that the full goal is not obtained, The Highground Board will use money raised to first pay off the mortgage. Construction of the Welcome and Visitor Center would follow as funds allow. (These were the recommendations identified by stakeholders during the Campaign Readiness Study.)

34. Will campaign volunteers seek foundation support?

The campaign will apply for private foundation grants. However, philanthropic research shows the majority of funds given in the U.S. comes from individuals. In 2019, individuals contributed almost \$300 Billion of the more than \$427 Billion given in this country. The Highground Rising campaign is hopeful that approximately 10 to 15 percent of the total goal will be secured from foundations. (This is the average amount of gifts secured from foundations in the nation.) The majority of funds for this project must come from the people and businesses who are most interested in Veterans and in raising awareness and support for Veterans and their families.

35. Will a challenge or matching gift be offered to help encourage giving?

Opportunities may exist for donors wishing to provide a challenge grant. More information will be available as campaign plans continue and the donors' wishes are put into place with the consultants, Campaign Co-chairs and the Steering committee.

36. What if someone wants to give an in-kind gift?

Raising cash to pay the mortgage and construction is the first priority for the campaign at this time. However, in-kind gifts of construction supplies, materials, and potentially labor, would be welcomed and may provide significant support to defray the total cost of the construction.

37. Does The Highground have an endowment fund?

The Highground has established a small endowment for future emphasis. Once the campaign is completed, the Board of Directors will begin a marketing effort to share the importance of growing the endowment through legacy and bequest gifts.

38. How do I give?

Each contributor should consult with his or her tax advisor to identify tax advantages for his or her specific situation. Please call The Highground if you have additional questions. Donors may pledge or give a one-time gift, whichever is their preference. The campaign will verify each gift.

39. How can I help?

When someone asks you to be involved or give to The Highground Rising, please say, "Yes!" When you are asked to give, please give generously! If you are interested in becoming involved, please call **Chris Pettis, Executive Director, at 715-743-4224**. Please view campaign information on the campaign website at thehighground.us.

