

Hitchcock Center for the Environment, Strategic Plan 2021-2025

Approved by the Board, October 2021

The Hitchcock Center's mission is to educate and to inspire action for a healthy planet. Through our experiential programs and sustainable living building, we provide people with lifelong learning opportunities to connect more deeply with the natural world and with each other, motivating and equipping them to take action for a sustainable future. We model actionable hope for a just and sustainable world, one that recognizes that ecological, human, and economic health and vitality are interdependent. Our work is grounded in four core values:

- **Sustainability** - Climate change and the complex environmental challenges we face today require new ways of thinking, acting, and being. Modeling a sustainable future, built on nature's design principles (biomimicry) is core to everything we do.
- **Integrity** - Our relationships and practices, inside and outside of our organization, are built on honesty, transparency, fairness, accountability, and mutual respect. Programs rely on expertise, sound science, and long-range thinking to develop solutions.
- **Inclusion** - We are committed to adapting our operations and programs to create a relevant, meaningful, and inclusive culture where all are welcomed, supported, and engaged. The diversity of our Board, staff, and volunteers needs to be responsive to the communities we serve.
- **Innovation** - We strive to continually generate new ideas and approaches that keep our programs at the forefront of environmental leadership, our operations viable, and our workplace healthy. This requires us to be creative, think critically, have curiosity, use imagination, take risks, and stay current on the latest research.

The following Strategic Plan objectives will serve as a guide for priority-setting and decision making over the next five years (2021-2025):

1. Build greater internal capacity to deliver high-quality climate change, sustainability, and environmental justice education in school and community settings. Nearly two thirds of Americans rarely or never discuss climate change with their friends and family, leading to a lack of civic engagement on the most pressing environmental issue of our time. Many simply do not believe that their own actions will make a difference or that elected decision-makers will respond. We also recognize that climate change is as much a justice issue as it is an environmental issue. This compels us to recognize systemic racism and income inequality and work to ensure an environmental movement that supports equitable and socially just environmental solutions. We will:

- Create a new narrative about climate change that uses storytelling and interpersonal conversations as powerful tactics to build hope and support for climate action.
- Champion nature-based education to instill a life-long love of nature among children during their formative years
- Expand our existing efforts in building youth leadership, providing professional development and curriculum for educators, and using our Living Building as a resource for learning about sustainability.
- Increase staffing, develop new partnerships, and target funding support to meet the critical need for a well-informed, environmentally literate, and engaged public.
- Advance the field of environmental education through greater engagement with national and statewide peer networks, associations, and member organizations.

2. Leverage the Center's building and grounds as a resource for learning in and from nature. The Hitchcock Center is home to the 23rd Certified Living Building in the world, a physical manifestation of using nature's design principles. Our net zero energy building harvests and recycles its own water, uses composting toilets, and was constructed with responsibly sourced, nontoxic materials. It is designed to be regenerative and self-sufficient, and to create a positive impact on the human and natural systems that interact with it. We will:

- Create a high quality experience for visitors by using our teaching gardens, nature play areas, and nature trails to create an unrivaled destination for outdoor and community learning and exploration.
- Use our convening power to promote creative public dialog about the relationship between humans and nature, particularly as it relates to environmental and human health.

3. Build a more diverse, equitable and inclusive organization. We strive to be a welcoming, anti-racist organization, with a strong culture of respect and inclusion for all, actively working against systems of oppression. We will:

- Recruit and retain a diverse staff and build a strong culture of inclusion.
- Increase our reach and diversify our program participants, volunteers, partners, donors, and supporters to ensure that we are serving all communities.
- Expand use of a sliding scale fee structure to lower barriers to program access.
- Convene a Task Force to develop and implement a comprehensive and ongoing DEI strategy for programs, staff training, operations, HR practices, communication, and governance.
- Ensure that staff feel meaningfully engaged, highly supported, and fairly compensated.
- Increase professional development opportunities for staff so that they can perform with the highest level of knowledge and expertise.

4. Increase the visibility, recognition, understanding, and support of the Hitchcock Center. While HCE is known to many in the community, the “new” HCE is not well known, and there are new audiences who may be totally unfamiliar with HCE. We will:

- Develop and implement more effective communication and marketing strategies to broaden and deepen engagement with the Center.
- Implement a well-coordinated and integrated fundraising, grant, and communications plan designed to increase ongoing annual support.

5. Ensure that sound financial management approaches are in place to secure the organization’s long-term financial sustainability. We will:

- Develop recommended budgets for staffing, facility and site maintenance, IT, marketing and advertising, and capital replacement needs.
- Develop a multi-year operating budget and plan for endowment growth to meet the needs of the Plan.

6. Increase effective board engagement to support the work of the Center. We will:

- Increase board diversity in support of DEI goals.
- Use quantifiable and measurable performance metrics and program evaluation to assess progress toward strategic goals, and strengthen use of data-driven decision making.
- Adjust strategies and manage resources to incorporate evolution of the plan.

Over the next 5 years, the Strategic Plan will enable us to strengthen alignment of our programs, operations, external relations, and governance to increase and sustain our mission impact.