2020 - 2024 American Hiking Society Strategic Plan
(Version for Sharing with Strategic Partners)

American Hiking Society’s new Strategic Plan sharpens our focus on what matters most: the hiking community. We have embodied that ethic in our modernized Mission statement: “Empowering all to enjoy, share, and preserve the hiking experience,” and in our revised Vision and Values statements. We used to say that we were the “voice for hikers,” but we’ve made a small, yet critical shift to “empowering hikers”. After all, the hiking community is the entire reason we exist, so we must be driven by its needs and must provide the tools and platforms for its members to make their voices heard at the national level about what matters most to them. That subtle shift moves us away from a top-down, “we’ll take care of it while you hike” model to a model that succeeds by broadening, diversifying, and activating our membership and social media following. Yes, by all means, hike as often as you can, but also join us in the fight to protect and create access to meaningful hiking experiences.

With that shift, it has become essential to break down the silos in our programming; to stop measuring numbers of events and numbers of participants and instead measure outcomes for the hiking community; to promote justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) on the trail with purposeful intent, as an ally, convener, and amplifier, led by traditionally disenfranchised communities; to dive head first into forward-leaning, public-facing advocacy, while continuing to nourish our deep behind-the-scenes advocacy relationships; and to forge a reciprocally beneficial relationship with our grassroots Alliance member organizations.

We started laying the groundwork for a modernized American Hiking in 2018 and 2019, with the shift in organizational leadership, piloting the NextGen Trail Leaders activist ambassador program for 18-40 year old rising stars and social media influencers, the inaugural Alternative Break scholarship for schools with student bodies historically disenfranchised from the outdoors, and the Vote Public Lands voter education and engagement campaign around the midterm elections.

The 2020-2024 Strategic Plan builds upon that foundation and embeds within it a stronger than ever accountability framework. We will ensure that our branding and marketing visibly promote American Hiking’s Mission, Vision, and Values and speak clearly to supporters, donors, and other funders, while also broadening and diversifying our members and followers. Building on successes from the past two years, we will purposefully activate our members and followers in our advocacy; thoughtfully expand our work in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI); and deepen and expand strategic partnerships. We will create an identity for National Trails Day as a national day of service, meaningfully deepening its impact and leveraging its massive appeal to advocate for public lands. Our volunteer programs will not operate in isolation, but will bolster our advocacy work by creating lifelong advocates for the hiking community, fostering authentic experiences, and building the next generation of outdoor leaders. With these changes, we will be able to further strengthen and stabilize our funding, diversify sources, and better engage private donors, which, in turn, will allow us to grow our internal expertise to take our programs to the next level.

The next five years will be evolutionary for American Hiking Society, positioning it as a stronger than ever player in public advocacy, and we are confident that the hiking community will feel the support.
Goal 1: Create a Strong Foundation to Remain Consistent with the Strategic Plan
Create systems that integrate review and use of the Strategic Plan in Staff and Board efforts. Reinforce the primacy of the Strategic Plan as a visioning document and a practical filter for existing and future programs.

Strategies:
- Staff report to the Board based on the structure of the Strategic Plan Goals and provides dashboard reinforcing progress (or lack thereof) on Strategic Plan Goals.
- Board Committees or Task Forces are assigned and/or created to provide oversight of priorities of Strategic Plan.
- Rework Board meeting agenda to focus Board on more high-level discussions.

We seek to improve connections between development and communications throughout all programs and initiatives of AHS.

Strategies:
- Utilize new Mission, Vision, and Values to establish a new brand for AHS that must reflect our new strategic direction: diversity of all types, hikers of all types, “hiking” defined as broadly as possible.
- Introduce AHS beyond traditional groups and supporters. Everyone can be an American Hiker.
- Increase social media presence and activate followers.
- Engage and serve a more inclusive and diverse demographic.

Goal 3: Leverage and Activate National Trails Day
AHS needs to embrace NTD as a way to promote the Mission of AHS and mobilize the hiking community around trail service and advocacy. NTD should be seen as a way to raise awareness of AHS, increase stewardship of trails, and mobilize trail activists.

Strategies:
- Explore partnerships that will leverage their reach, event-organizing structure, and relationships to broaden NTD appeal.
- Give NTD an identity as a national day of trail service and activism.
- Directly connect NTD participants with AHS.
Goal 4: Ensure that Fundraising Meets Strategic Plan Goals

We need to raise and sustain sufficient funding to achieve our goals; inspire new donors to contribute to our work, while continually strengthening relationships with existing donors; and keep our supporters updated about the work we accomplish together.

A large, diverse supporter base provides increased development opportunities and better represents the spectrum of American Hikers.

Strategies:
- Utilize new Mission, Vision, Values, and brand as an opportunity for new fundraising efforts.
- Continue to support Board participation in fundraising.
- Continue to deepen connection to donors.
- Continue to grow, diversify, and engage our supporter base.
- Explore transitioning away from the membership model.

Goal 5: Strengthen Our Position as an Advocacy Leader to the Hiking Community

Advocacy is AHS’s bread and butter. It is through public-facing and insider advocacy that we will achieve our Mission and Vision. AHS must revamp its public-facing advocacy to serve a more diverse and inclusive hiking community and engage and activate our members and followers. AHS’s volunteer programs are also critical to our advocacy work; they create lifelong advocates for the hiking community, bolster our advocacy programs with authentic content, and build the next generation of outdoor leaders. AHS must de-silo its advocacy and volunteer programs to achieve its optimal reach as an advocacy leader.

Strategies:
- Adopt a more forward-leaning (but still nonpartisan), public approach to advocacy, activating AHS members and followers, and providing advocacy platforms for the hiking community.
- Build coherent, clear advocacy messaging across AHS programs and throughout the year as part of branding, marketing, fundraising, and communications plans; and intentionally, publicly celebrating our successes.
- Thoughtfully expand AHS’s influence in the promotion of JEDI in the hiking community, in partnership and allyship with JEDI-focused groups.
- Remain involved in public lands and other national campaigns and leverage partnerships to increase exposure.
- Evaluate existing and potential partnerships based on strategic goals, on an ongoing basis.
- New Alliance model based on grassroots needs.
- Leverage AHS’s volunteer programs to build a trails service and advocacy movement, especially amongst NextGen.
- Intentionally position AHS as a Coalition and Partnership Builder.
Goal 6: Improve Recruitment and Retention of Talented Staff and Increase Staff Capacity

In order to succeed at the work we do, we must have the Staff capacity to support our programs.

Strategies

- Prioritize competitive and equitable Staff salaries.
- Ensure current Staff capacity supports existing programs, and develop plans for Staff and program growth in accordance with meeting Strategic Plan goals.
- Explore changes to Staff structure, job responsibilities, and location requirements, both within budget and current Staff capacity and under budget growth scenarios, to best meet programmatic needs.

**PERIODIC REVIEW AND UPDATING**

The successful implementation of any Strategic Plan requires meaningful periodic review to track the current path to success, and to update objectives and timelines as needed to keep the organization steadily progressing towards success.

Throughout the year, Staff should regularly review the Annual Plan to ensure they are meeting or exceeding their stated annual goals. Likewise, the Board and its Committees should regularly review the strategic plan to ensure they are meeting or exceeding their stated goals and take corrective actions if goals are not being met.

No less than each year, both the Board and Staff should review the Strategic Plan to ensure that annual activities are being set to achieve the annual indicators of success, and ultimately the 5-year objectives.

At the end of each of the initial 5-years under this Strategic Plan, the Board should review its progress and revise the Strategic Plan accordingly; effectively establishing a new 5-year plan. For example: (a) if the organization is on track to timely achieve a given 5-year objective, then that objective will become a new 2-year objective and a new 5-year objective might be set under the same categorical objective (or the Board may decide to let that categorical objective sunset once achieved); (b) if the organization is not on track to timely achieve a given 5-year objective, then the Board might decide to extend the timeline for achieving success and/or revise the annual indicators of success and/or determine that a new course of action in the Strategic Plan and Annual Plan is necessary for achieving that objective; and/or (c) the Board may decide to entirely remove existing categorical objectives from and/or add new categorical objectives to the Strategic Plan.

There will be a standing Strategic Planning Chair from the Board and a Strategic Planning Liaison from Staff, and the Task Force will re-constitute and meet as necessary. There will be at least an annual review of the Strategic Plan matched against Staff’s Annual Plan Scorecard. The annual review should include a Strategic Plan Scorecard to ground-truth the strategies that are identified in the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Planning Chair and Task Force shall bring strategic planning recommendations to the Board as necessary during the Strategic Plan cycle.