

North Branch Nature Center

2020 Annual Progress Report



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Introduction

Having begun a Strategic Planning process in the spring of 2019, North Branch Nature Center staff spent time in January and February of 2020 finalizing the content of our Strategic Plan, getting it ready to publish later that spring. The first two months of 2020 also saw us writing and getting ready to post our Executive Director job description. Then the pandemic hit and we quickly realized that both of these top-priority projects needed to be set aside for a time.

Though the pandemic caused much disruption — including the cancelation of several NBNC festivals and programs and a one-year hibernation of our preschool and summer camps — our organization has proved resilient and many of our programs were actually able to evolve and grow in 2020. We quickly and successfully launched several online program areas which proved very appealing to longstanding and new constituents alike, including ECO Online (to continue our partnerships with a dozen Central Vermont public schools as they went online last spring and throughout this current school year of in-person, online and hybrid learning), Forest Preschool Online (to maintain contact and learning through the '19-'20 school year), Nature Now (online courses), Virtual Nature Walks, a Sit Spot Initiative, an Online Bird Banding Station, and dozens of webinars and presentations.

Concurrent with that program growth, our administrative team supported staff through the transitions, secured a PPP loan, launched a successful Resiliency Fund, and secured other grants and gifts resulting in 2020 yielding a 31% increase in contributed income over 2019 — nearly achieving our goal of a 35% increase in contributed income.

By the last quarter of 2020 we returned to the finalization of the Strategic Plan and found a few opportunities to adjust and strengthen it, based on our experiences of both the pandemic and the racial justice movement. Our Executive Director search has been postponed until later in 2021, with an expected hire date by the end of March, 2022, and with an overlap period of about two months. We finalized the **Strategic Plan** in December 2020 and are distributing it in the first quarter of 2021, along with this 2020 Progress Report.

The rest of this report details the progress made towards the specific Action Steps we had set out for ourselves for 2020, organized within each goal.





2020 Progress on Goal 1: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Develop diversity recruitment processes.

In progress. Steps we have taken include new job posting language about our Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) commitment, and increasing the number/types of places we post job openings to better reach diverse communities.

Create & continually engage with community focus groups.

In progress. NBNC reached out to a member of the indigenous community, Chief Don Stevens, who assisted us with our land acknowledgement statement and with whom we are building a deeper relationship.

Revise mission statement.

Completed, along with vision statement and shared values: all appear in the Strategic Plan (SP).

Acquire hearing-assist devices.

We purchased six of these in the spring to test the system, and will purchase more after they have received more use and review.

2020 Progress on Goal 2: Visitor Engagement

Develop comprehensive Visitor Experience (VE) plan.

This has been largely included in our Property Management Plan (PMP) and its Interpretive Materials List. Next steps are to create a more comprehensive map to visualize where all the planned VE installations will go over the next five years, and further discuss other components of VE that aren't mentioned in the SP.

VE installations.

Interpretive materials and kiosks are being designed for later in 2021, with additional plans for 2022-2025. The ongoing aquarium installation is a big part of this year's plan.

Create property management plan.

Completed.

Complete Capital Campaign facilities renovations.

Exterior farmhouse construction and weatherization was completed in 2020, and interior renovation began in February, 2021. We also added a beautiful new entrance sign. Outside improvements to trails, kiosks, etc. are slated for 2021, possibly into 2022.

2020 Progress on Goal 3: Environmental Stewardship

Develop Environmental Best Practices (EBPs) and Ecological Resilience Plan (ERP).

We determined that developing a really granular EBP/ERP document will probably not be worthwhile yet, because it wouldn't contribute much more guidance than the SP and PMP already do. So instead, we included brief sections in the PMP addressing ecological resilience, which mostly pertains to the invasive species removal and native plant restoration work we are planning over the next several years.

Articulate teaching philosophy.

A focus group has formed, slated to begin digging into this in early 2021.

Improve program design and evaluation process.

Largely due to the pandemic forcing what was/wasn't possible in 2020, this was shifted to begin in early 2021.

Evaluate existing partnerships.

No formal evaluation has been done to analyze who we're currently partnering with. Our JEDI focus has brought to the fore many new and different partnerships to explore in 2021 and beyond.

2020 Progress on Goal 4: Sound & Sustainable Organization



Increase Development staff-hours.

Significantly expanded development hours expanded in 2020 with promotion of Development Director in January 2020. Communications Coordinator hire planned for March 2021 will allow Development Director to allocate yet more hours to fundraising. Neon, our new CRM (constituent relationship management) software initiated in late 2020, will increase the capacity of our development functions.

Increase contributed income.

2020 operating (non-campaign) gifts totaled \$243K: a 31% increase over 2019 gifts of \$184K. Our 2021 budget includes \$355K in contributed income (a budgeted increase of 46% over 2020 contributed giving).

Grow donor outreach program.

The Resiliency Fund proved to be an excellent outreach tool for new donors (243) and lapsed donors (250) alike. We also retained 268 donors in 2020 for a total donor count of 761, our most ever. Our new CRM will give us the ability to see our donors/members, program participants and volunteers as the whole people that they are, allowing us to engage our donors in a deeper and more efficient way.

Grow Administrative Team (Finance, Development, HR, Communications).

Increased staff hours dedicated to Finance and currently exploring how to augment HR functions. Hiring a Communications Coordinator in March, 2021.

Ensure a smooth ED transition.

Job description was nearly ready to post in March, 2020. Departure date delayed by one year due to pandemic.

Cultivate board-staff cohesion.

Several staff presented at board meetings in 2020 and several active committees included both staff and board. No gatherings due to Covid. Online JEDI work began in Fall, 2020 and included anti-racism workshops in January, 2021.

Improve sustainability of NBNC workforce.

Administrative Team has made significant progress in restructuring many workflows to a more team-based approach, resulting in increased organizational strength and resilience. Forest Preschool hibernation has opened an opportunity to sustainably restructure.

Expand HR services to staff.

No action in 2020 due to the pandemic affecting staff capacity. However, NBNC assisted staff in navigating making unemployment claims in 2020.

Increase staff compensation.

In progress, although financial uncertainties during the pandemic have made it difficult to address in 2020-2021.

For more information, visit or call:

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