

North Branch Nature Center

2022 Annual Progress Report



Overview



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From welcoming a new Executive Director, to navigating the ups and downs of the continued pandemic, to seeing program after program fill to capacity, 2022 was both dynamic and gave us all a taste of much-needed normalcy. 2022 started with NBNC's largest ever staff compensation increases, paired with our first operating budget to exceed \$1 million — both exciting landmarks for our 27th year. In 2022 we planted an orchard with the help of many volunteers, and received NBNC's largest grant to date: \$240,000 over three years from the Canaday Family Foundation, to fund increased community engagement. The year ended with the establishment of retirement plans for staff, considerable updates to our benefits and personnel policies, and the donation of a new 15-passenger van already dubbed "The Nature Mobile."

Staff growth was one of the consistent trends of 2022:

- Promoted longtime staffer Emily Seiffert to a new role, Deputy Director.
- Welcomed NBNC's second-ever Executive Director, Naomi Heindel.
- Outgoing Executive Director Chip Darmstadt became Birding Ambassador.
- Said farewell to Amy Butler and Sue Pratt.
- Promoted Ken Benton to Director of Education.
- Hired new Teacher-Naturalist, Victoria Lee.
- Expanded Forest Preschool team to include Megan French and Ginny Brooke.
- Welcomed Sarah Galbraith as Administrative and Finance Assistant.
- Hosted three AmeriCorps members: Griffin Cummings, Kerry Brosnan, and Annie Jackson.



Program Updates



The NBNC community was clearly ready to dive back into nature programs in 2022, from Robin's Nest Playgroup, which saw increased participation; to Summer Camps, which filled almost instantaneously; to ECO, which expanded to 12 schools in our region. We added several new, family-friendly, free or low-cost programs including river walks and night hikes; saw increased interest in our Amphibian Road Crossing program and owl banding nights; and ran a full program of Naturalist Journeys, Biodiversity University, Vermont Master Naturalist, and Educator Institutes.

The rest of this report details the progress made towards the specific 2022 Action Steps we had set out in the 2020 – 2024 Strategic Plan, organized within each goal.

Goal 1: NBNC is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Develop diversity recruitment processes.

- Engaged JEDI consultant on the recruitment and hiring process for Community Engagement Coordinator (CEC).

Create staff lead on equity.

- Welcomed Catherine Griset as CEC in January 2023 to take the lead on increased community engagement, access, equity, and inclusion in all programs and initiatives.

Fundraise for equitable programming.

- Awarded \$25,300 in financial aid across many programs, including full financial support for Summer Camp spots for Capstone Community Action and ECO families, funded by donors to the Kids Need Nature Fund, the Jean and Miles Matthews Scholarship Fund, and the new Chip and Alisa Darmstadt Education Fund.

Staff equity and inclusivity training.

- Participated in trainings on gender equity and inclusivity, trauma-informed nature-based programming, birding for all abilities, and Abenaki curriculum.

Refine programs and launch new programs.

- Started community-focused projects including book groups, LGBTQIA+ outings, a memorial garden, and an Indigenous-Led Garden. Launched PLACE Montpelier programs and free and low-cost family-friendly programming.

Pursue Circulator Bus-stop status; acquire van or bus.

- Thanks to a donor, purchased a new 15-passenger van to increase Summer Camp and other program accessibility, reduce gas consumption, and expand programs into underserved areas.

Goal 2: NBNC is a well-known, engaging, inspiring, and educational place to visit, any day of the year.

Visitor Experience installations.

- Constructed two new kiosks to house benches, maps, guidebooks, and other wayfinding and interpretive materials. Wrote, designed, and commissioned art for interpretive panels and secured funding for a universally accessible trail.

Complete Capital Campaign facility renovations and property improvements.

- Wrapped up the Capital Campaign and made plans to shore up a corner of the foundation.

Grow Property Management/Volunteer Coordination position; implement Property Management Plan (PMP).

- AmeriCorps Conservation Stewardship Technician and volunteers planted and cared for new orchard and other trees, removed invasives, and maintained trails.

Increase Facilities Rentals.

- Purchased a tent, hosted two weddings, and significantly grew facility rentals.



Goal 3: NBNC cultivates current and future generations of environmental stewards.

Develop Environmental Best Practices and Ecological Resilience Plan.

- Planted 400 saplings and cared for those and the surviving 2021 plantings, representing more than 300 volunteer hours.
- Mapped out property management goals and ecological restoration work through 2024.

Integrate stewardship and Community Science into NBNC programming.

- Integrated Community Science into NBNC's Education Team's work through curricula, cross training, and regular stewardship projects.

Articulate teaching philosophy.

- Reviewed documentation and began work towards a general teaching philosophy and a Forest Preschool teaching philosophy.

Refine and improve program design and evaluation process.

- Added evaluation forms to all programs.
- NBNC Program Director presented a talk on the “Changing Role of Nature Centers” at regional conference and to NBNC staff and Board. Laid groundwork to offer more unstructured, exploratory nature connection opportunities.

Strengthen existing and pursue new partnerships.

- Worked with many partners, old and new, and are grateful for their help with programming, stewardship, funding, and helping us reach more people.

**Goal 4: NBNC is a financially sound organization, providing sustainable and rewarding opportunities for employment, volunteerism, and philanthropy.****Grow the administrative team and increase development staff-hours.**

- Hired Administrative and Finance Assistant, increased Communications Coordinator's position, promoted Development Director to Deputy Director, and welcomed new Executive Director, adding administrative, finance, and development capacity and energy.

Craft a five-year budget.

- Focused on long term financial strategy, established reserve fund, worked with nonprofit financial consultant, and established Board Finance Committee.

Complete Capital Campaign Fundraising and establish a Reserve Fund.

- Capital Campaign is complete, and the reserve fund will reach \$95,000 by early 2023.

Grow donor outreach programs and increase contributed income.

- Raised \$549,400 in contributed income, 14% over 2021, including significant grants from the Canaday Family Charitable Trust, the Harris & Frances Block Foundation, the Vermont Arts Council, and others.
- Met with major donors to share gratitude, discuss opportunities and challenges, and invite further support.
- Hatched plans for revamped membership and enhanced planned giving programs.

Improve data management software and systems.

- Replaced Summer Camp registration software.

Ensure a smooth ED transition.

- Naomi onboarded in March and met with staff, Board, and community members. Chip transitioned to Birding Ambassador, leading birding trips near and far.

Cultivate Board-staff cohesion.

- Jointly hosted welcome party for Naomi, farewell party for Chip, summer community open house, and fall barbeque and potluck.
- Board meetings held in person at NBNC, allowing for more Board engagement.

Improve sustainability of NBNC workforce.

- Formed Human Resources (HR) Committee and hired HR Consultant, leading to big benefit, policy, and HR improvements.
- Implemented SIMPLE IRA retirement plans for all eligible employees.
- Reviewed and updated all NBNC job descriptions.
- Improved staff morale, work/life balance and boundaries, clarity of roles and responsibilities, energy, trust, confidence, and workplace camaraderie.

Increase staff compensation, benefits, and HR support.

- Increased staff compensation 10% in January and another \$1/hr in July. Board directed a major portion of reserves towards improved compensation and benefits over the next three years.



We are proud of the progress we've made towards our Strategic Plan goals, and we are deeply appreciative of our donors and members who have helped make all of this possible.

For more information, visit or call:

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NorthBranchNatureCenter.org