

SEVERSON DELLS NATURE CENTER



STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2023



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Severson Dells Nature Center opened its doors in 1976 as a result of a generous donation of the property by Fannie and Harry Severson to the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County in 1975.

The Nature Center is a partnership between the Severson Dells Education Foundation and the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County. The Foundation operates the Center including all educational programming and exhibits and raises funds for these activities. The Forest Preserves owns and maintains the building and the property, including all major repairs.

Since its inception, the Severson Dells Education Foundation has connected people to nature through education and research. As we move into the future, our board and staff are getting more creative in how we engage this next generation of nature enthusiasts.

This plan outlines our five major goals and the strategies and measurable objectives we will pursue to achieve these goals. We look forward to what the future holds and we look forward to having you join us.

FIVE MAJOR GOALS

Goal 1: Organizational Capacity- Build the organizational capacity to accomplish the goals, strategies and objectives laid out in the strategic plan

Goal 2: Program Excellence- Strengthen and expand Severson Dells educational program offerings to better serve all demographics of Northern Illinois

Goal 3: Collaborations and Partnerships- Promote the mission of Severson Dells through effective community collaborations and partnerships

Goal 4: Financial Sustainability- Develop a strong, self-sustaining base to ensure the long-term fiscal strength of Severson Dells

Goal 5: Visitor Experience- Transform the guest experience in the nature center and on the grounds to create a community of users that shares a connection with the natural world and Severson Dells.



Goal 1: Organizational Capacity

Build the organizational capacity to accomplish the goals, strategies and objectives laid out in the strategic plan

Promote our Human Capital	Maintain a healthy, productive, collegial, collaborative and innovative work environment	Ongoing
	Identify and participate in professional development opportunities through conferences, seminars, and classes	Annually
	Develop and implement a peer evaluation/coaching process for staff and volunteers who deliver education programs	Q3, FY18, ongoing thereafter
	Conduct employee satisfaction surveys and take appropriate action to improve in areas highlighted	Q4, FY18, annually thereafter
	Benchmark renowned nature centers to generate ideas and learn best practices	Q4, FY18, annually thereafter

Review and refine policies and procedures	Review general operating policies and procedures	Q4, FY18, annually thereafter
	Streamline data collection to create a better development program	Q2, FY18
	Develop policies, as needed, to keep with current nonprofit standards and best practices	Annually

Implement the staffing model to achieve the goals of this plan (as funding allows)	Hire an Education Programs Manager	Q1, FY21
	Hire a Development and Marketing Coordinator	Q3, FY19
	Hire a Camp, Scout and Family Programs Coordinator	Q1, FY20
	Hire a .5 FTE Volunteer Coordinator	Q1, FY19

Goal 1: Organizational Capacity

Continued

Develop and diversify the Severson Dells Board of Directors	<p>Review and improve new board member orientation packet and onboarding process</p> <p>As vacancies on the board occur, recruit new board members that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Have a passion for Severson Dells mission and vision- Possess the skill sets and expertise that help advance our mission and vision- Meet the diversity needs of our audiences (ethnic, cultural, business, age, economic status, geographic) <p>Review board policies and procedures</p> <p>Develop a board self-assessment and continuous improvement plan</p> <p>Review board committee structure and adjust based on current objectives</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Annually</p> <p>Q3, FY18, ongoing thereafter</p> <p>Q4, FY18, annually thereafter</p> <p>Q4, FY18, annually thereafter</p>
Develop a yearly marketing plan	<p>Develop a marketing plan for each fiscal year that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Confirming budgeto Identifying key marketing goals and objectives with set time frame/implementationo Inclusion of public relation efforts that complement marketing efforts	<p>Q1, Annually</p>
Develop and implement a rebrand of Severson Dells	<p>Revamp the Severson Dells brand and brand promise to align with the vision</p> <p>Collect/conduct a collateral audit of all Severson Dells print and web materials to identify pieces needing to be updated</p> <p>Update visual representation on all print and web materials</p> <p>Develop a brand brief for Severson Dells</p>	<p>Q2, FY18</p> <p>Q3, FY 18, annually thereafter</p> <p>Q4, FY18</p> <p>Q3, FY18</p>

Goal 1: Organizational Capacity

Continued

Ensure implementation of the strategic plan	Develop an annual work plan for each fiscal year for both staff and board	Q4, Annually
	Conduct a biannual review of the strategic plan progress	Q1 & Q3, Annually

Strengthen Volunteer Program	Grow a diverse volunteer group that represents the diversity of the northern Illinois community	Ongoing
	Develop a thorough volunteer training program	Q1, FY 19
	Develop a volunteer recruitment plan to increase the number and diversity (age, ethnicity, economic status) of volunteers	Q3, FY19
	Clearly outline volunteer job roles in the organization	Q2, FY 18
	Develop a volunteer recognition plan	Q4, FY 18
	Engage with volunteers to provide program feedback and collaborate on new program ideas	Q4, Annually



Goal 2: Program Excellence

Strengthen and expand Severson Dells educational program offerings to better serve all demographics of Northern Illinois

Strengthen current programs consistent with the mission and vision	Develop a rubric to evaluate current programs for scientific rigor, alignment to current educational standards, financial stability and overall program effectiveness	Q3, FY 18
	Conduct annual evaluations of program content and curriculum for improvement	Q1, Annually
	Increase school program curriculum allowing progressive grade-level usage.	Q3, FY20
	Inventory and analyze database of historical school partnerships to identify trends and opportunities.	Q1 FY 18 (annual after)
	Conduct recruitment presentations to at least 2 schools, districts or Regional Offices of Education as a means of increasing number of student participants by 10% per year	Ongoing beginning FY18

Evaluate expansion of program capacity (number of people served)	Review current program capacity to determine possible areas of growth	Q4, FY 18
	Participate in at least 5 community events/summer camp fairs as a means of increasing camp and family programs participation by 10% per year	Annually
	Every student in Winnebago County attends at least one Severson Dells school program before 5th grade	Q4, FY 21

Goal 2: Program Excellence

Continued

Evaluate expansion of program offerings (types of programs)	Review current programming to determine potential areas of growth	Q4, FY 18
	Assess community interest and need for program offerings via participant surveys	Ongoing
	Review program offerings by other regional nature centers and science institutions to identify program gaps and overlaps	Q1, FY19
	Review at least 5 nature centers/science centers outside our geographic area to look for models of additional programming	Q1, Annually
	Develop and implement programs and business plans for two new education programs	Q4, FY 19

Diversify demographics of program participants	Collect demographic data on program participants to assess the current demographics of attendees	FY 18, FY 19
	Develop a marketing plan to reach out to demographics underserved in current programming	Q1, FY 20
	Develop a school scholarship program for Title 1 schools in Winnebago, Boone and Ogle Counties to reduce barriers to participation	Q1, FY20



Goal 3: Collaborations & Partnerships

Promote the mission of Severson Dells through effective community collaborations and partnerships.

Develop and maintain a network of like-minded community partners	Develop a list of current and potential partner organizations including why the partnership is beneficial to both parties	Q1, FY 19
	Meet at least annually with each partner group to work to increase science literacy and environmental awareness	Annually
	Develop a plan to increase awareness of science and nature program opportunities to increase science and environmental literacy of the community	Q2, FY 20
Increase community group engagement	Inventory and analyze the database of historical partnerships to identify trends and opportunities.	Q2 FY18
	Identify community groups with environmental and conservation programming needs.	Q4, FY 18
	Contact two new community groups, annually, to increase potential partnership programming opportunities and current program attendance.	Q3 FY18, annually thereafter
	Increase number of community partnerships by 10%, annually.	Q4, Annually

Goal 3: Collaborations & Partnerships

Continued

Maintain a strong partnership with the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County	Identify current resource-sharing.	Q1 FY18
	Identify inefficiencies and opportunities.	Q2 FY18
	Develop a resource-sharing plan.	Q4 FY18

Develop and strengthen the relationship with the local business community	Meet with local Chambers of Commerce	Q3, Annually
	Develop, implement and advertise a business membership program	Q2, FY 19



Goal 4: Financial Sustainability

Develop a strong, self-sustaining base to ensure the long-term fiscal strength of Severson Dells

Build a Fund Development Plan

Segment audiences engaged with Severson Dells Nature Center effectively Q1, FY 19

Develop a communications plan and strategy for building relationships with each constituent group Q3, FY 20

Improve development processes to improve efficiency and effectiveness Q4, Annually

Develop a planned giving program Q3, FY 18
o Pursue basic level technical expertise on planned giving opportunities for in-house staff or partner with outside resources

Grow earned revenue programs that align with the mission, brand and visitor experience

Assess current earned revenue programs for financial viability, scalability and mission impact Q3, FY 18

Develop three new earned revenue programs Q4, FY 19

Grow earned revenue programs by 15% per year Ongoing



Goal 4: Financial Sustainability

Continued

Improve membership program and benefits	Develop a clearly outlined membership benefits program	Q1, FY 18
	Grow membership by 15% annually	Ongoing
	Increase membership revenue by \$10,000 over FY 2017	Q4, FY 19

Ensure that Severson Dells investment policies are consistent with the intended purpose of the fund(s) and the Center's financial needs	Develop an investment policy that aligns with the mission and needs of Severson Dells	Q4, FY 18
	Review investment policy with our investment advisors to ensure that we are in compliance with our investment policy	Q1, FY 19, ongoing thereafter
	Review the investment policy annually with the Finance Committee	Annually



Goal 5: Visitor Experience

Transform the guest experience in the nature center and on the grounds to create a community of users that shares a connection with the natural world and Severson Dells.

To develop interpretive materials and displays that represent the local ecosystems.	Create interpretive elements for immediate use in the facility.	Q3, FY 18
	Design the total visitor experience beginning with welcoming and identity and considering traffic flow, technology, messaging and learning content, multiple uses, etc.	Q4, FY 18
	Plan and create interpretive displays and materials to improve the guest experience in the building.	Q4, FY 18

To develop interpretation on trails and within preserve.	Create interpretive elements for immediate use in the facility.	Q2, FY20
	Design the total visitor experience beginning with welcoming and identity and considering traffic flow, technology, messaging and learning content, multiple uses, etc.	Q4, FY21
	Plan and create interpretive displays and materials to improve the guest experience in the building.	Q4, FY 20



Goal 5: Visitor Experience

Continued

To maintain and enhance The Grove experience.	Inventory existing elements and associated maintenance needs.	Q1, FY 19
	Develop a maintenance plan with budget and timeline for The Grove with the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County.	Q3, FY 18
	Develop a plan for expansion into disturbed areas to the east while protecting undisturbed areas from future development/expansion.	Q1, FY 20
	Develop partnerships with artists to create temporary art exhibits in degraded areas or where natural areas will not be disturbed	Q2, FY 20

Develop a digital visitor experience	Identify planned visitor interactions and content and use this to develop an app for use within the preserve.	Q2, FY 22
	Create and implement a plan for a stronger web-based relationship with the community to increase visitation to the center and property and increase science and environmental literacy.	Q3, FY 20
	Develop social media plan utilizing multiple platforms.	Q1, FY 20
	Utilize technology in citizen science programming and share data with constituents.	Q2, FY 19
	Further develop the website and Google AdWords to maximize Google Grant.	Q1, FY 19
	Expand and plan for quality press and media opportunities.	Ongoing