

**CHILDREN'S
FOREST**



**CENTRAL
OREGON**

2021-2023

STRATEGIC PLAN

Children's Forest of Central Oregon



INTRODUCTION

WHO WE ARE

The mission of the Children's Forest of Central Oregon is to *unite our community to inspire lifelong connections to nature for each child*. We are a network of 28 public, private, and non-profit organizations representing education, recreation, natural resources, and health care. Together, we work to connect children and families to nature through learning, exploration, and play. With the average American child spending 4 to 7 minutes a day in unstructured play outdoors, and over 7 hours a day in front of a screen, we believe that ALL of our kids, families, and communities will grow healthier and happier if we get families outside more often.

HISTORY

The Children's Forest of Central Oregon, began in May of 2011 when Deschutes National Forest, partnering with Discover Your Northwest, was awarded a national grant to become the first nationally recognized Children's Forest in the Pacific Northwest. The Children's Forest of Central Oregon (CFCO) emerged out of a dynamic coalition of committed and diverse partners. In a unique twist, the health care industry joined together with educators, natural resource and recreation professionals, and conservationists to develop the Children's Forest of Central Oregon for the benefit of healthy minds, healthy bodies and healthy forests.

Since 2011, the Children's Forest of Central Oregon has grown to include 28 community partners from across Central Oregon. Run by a small "backbone" staff, it has been designed to add value to the work of existing organizations and agencies by providing increased coordination, additional funding, and intentional focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

OUR PROCESS

This Strategic Plan is the result of a six month process involving Board members, staff, and partner organizations of the Children's Forest. The plan affirms our mission, vision, and values that have evolved over the last 10 years. It establishes strategies for five primary goals in addition to measurable outputs and key metrics. Our intent was to integrate our values with our competitive advantage, to define strategies that make the best use of our resources.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- We confirmed our intention for the Children's Forest to focus our operations on serving as Collective Impact organization, while also maintaining a small number of internal programs.
- Equity and inclusion has become increasingly important to our organization, with the majority of strategies affirming and deepening this commitment.
- Rather than launching a large new program area, or significantly expanding our reach, we are seeking to increase and bring clarity to the measurable impact of our work.
- Like all organizations, the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the value of getting kids outside, and helped to clarify our priorities as we move beyond the pandemic.

MISSION, VISION, & VALUES

MISSION *Uniting our community to inspire lifelong connections to nature for each child.*

VISION *A world in which each child is inspired by nature to become a healthy individual and create a sustainable future.*

OUR VALUES

1

Equity guides our work

Not all kids have equal access to the outdoors, and not everyone feels safe and welcome in outdoor spaces. It is imperative that we work together to dismantle the systems and barriers that create inequitable access.

2

Outdoor time is essential for our health

The health and wellbeing of children, families, and communities improves when people connect to the outdoors.

3

Time outdoors looks and feels different for every person

We recognize and value the diversity of ways and places people connect with nature. We strive to create a more inclusive narrative for what time outdoors looks like.

4

Nature-based curriculum strengthens core education programs

Learning in the outdoors enhances educational outcomes by improving children's academic performance, focus, behavior, and love of learning.

5

Outdoor engagement builds the next generation of leaders

Youth need regular and positive experiences in the outdoors to develop an appreciation of the natural world, stewardship ethics, and an interest in careers in natural resources.

6

Collaboration and inclusion are essential to our success

No one organization can achieve our mission alone. Our work to lift up individuals and organizations who bring diverse perspectives and skills and create a culture of respect and continuous learning.

GOALS & STRATEGIES



GOAL 1

Serve as a catalytic leader in supporting our partners to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in their programs and organizations.

Strategy 1.1:

Provide trainings to front-line outdoor educators in our network that support them in providing inclusive, welcoming, and culturally-relevant programs.

Strategy 1.2:

Provide organizational leaders of CFCO partners on-going training and support related to key DEI issues including hiring, workplace culture, and evaluation.

Strategy 1.3:

Engage with our partners to integrate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into their programs, in partnership with tribal communities.

Strategy 1.4:

Provide resources to support affinity spaces for staff from underrepresented communities in our network.

Strategy 1.5:

Develop a communications plan to document, story tell, and amplify our impact.

GOAL 2

Develop and sustain programs that connect underrepresented communities and a diversity of families to the outdoors. We define underrepresented communities as BIPOC youth, tribal youth, LGBTQIA+ youth, youth experiencing disabilities, rural youth, and low-income youth.

Strategy 2.1:

Sustain our support for Vámonos Outside to increase the capacity and reach of the program.

Strategy 2.3:

Increase partnerships and impact in rural and tribal communities through youth and family programs.

Strategy 2.2:

Increase sub-grants to Children's Forest partners to deliver programs to underrepresented communities.

Strategy 2.4:

Develop a data and evaluation system to track the reach and impact of family and out-of-school programs provided by the Children's Forest network.

GOAL 3

Enrich student learning and foster stewardship behaviors for PreK-12th grade students, by providing outdoor and place-based learning, focusing on rural schools and schools with a high percentage of families living in poverty.

Strategy 3.1:

Increase teacher and administrator awareness and support for the Children's Forest in all Central Oregon school districts.

Strategy 3.4:

Explore the feasibility of developing a new outdoor classroom site.

Strategy 3.2:

Increase regional resources to support outdoor learning.

Strategy 3.3:

Support the development of outdoor learning programs and resources for early childhood.



GOAL 4

Improve the mental, emotional, and physical health of children through connection to nature.

Strategy 4.1:

Implement and share a middle school curriculum focused on the health benefits of nature.

Strategy 4.2:

Advocate to city governments and public works to ensure that all children in Central Oregon have safe access to quality greenspaces near their homes.

Strategy 4.3:

Provide parents and caregivers quality information from trusted sources about the health benefits of outdoor time.



GOAL 5

Support a more diverse and inclusive generation of environmental stewards and outdoor and natural resources employees, through youth leadership and career training opportunities.

Strategy 5.1:

Increase career training opportunities in the outdoor and natural resources sector.

Strategy 5.2:

Integrate youth voice into our network and sector, and provide leadership opportunities for youth that improve our environment.

Strategy 5.3:

Align partner recruitment efforts to support hiring of seasonal staff and interns.

Strategy 5.4:

Increase connection to destination employers, including federal land management agencies.

Implementation of the strategies will follow an Action Plan developed by Children's Forest staff. The Action Plan includes measurable outputs for each strategy.

MEASURING PROGRESS

The Children's Forest has defined six key metrics to evaluate the impact and outcomes of our goals and strategies for 2021-2023. The Board is responsible for monitoring progress towards these key metrics on an annual basis. Our Action Plan also includes measurable outputs for each strategy, plus benchmark activities to be completed. These will be monitored by Children's Forest staff quarterly, and reported to the Board biannually.

Strategy	Key Metric/Desired Outcome
1.2	85% of non-profit partner organizations are implementing inclusive hiring practices by June 2022
1.3	80% of environmental education programs are incorporating indigenous content into curriculum in alignment with best practices by December 2022
2.1	70% of Vámonos Outside repeat participants will report feeling more comfortable outdoors as a result of engagement with the program
3.1-3.2	60% of elementary schools with less than 1.5 student days outside/enrollment in 2018-2019 (13 elementary schools), will have met this metric by June 2023
4.3	At least 40 health care providers/pediatricians are providing Children's Forest resources to their patients by June 2023
5.1-5.4	At least 8 alumni from career training programs will get hired by Children's Forest partners, federal land management agencies, or other destination employers in our sector by June 2023, with 75% being from underrepresented communities.