



Hamburg Natural History Society, Inc.

Operators of Penn Dixie Fossil Park and Nature Reserve

2020-2025 Strategic Plan

Adopted March 19, 2020

Table of Contents

Mission, Vision, and Values

Goals for 2020-2025

How We Will Engage Communities

How We Will Grow Organizational Capacity

How We Will Advance Our Mission

Further Reading and Resources

Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

The Hamburg Natural History Society promotes the hands on study of natural sciences, including geology, astronomy, and ecology through the operation of the Penn Dixie Fossil Park and Nature Reserve, a tourist attraction for individuals of all ages and backgrounds.

Vision

Our vision is to create a welcoming outdoor and science education destination on yesterday's ancient seas and today's great lakes.

Values with which we execute our Mission to fulfill our Vision

1. Advancing science education
2. Preserving nature and the outdoors
3. Facilitating outdoor fun and recreation
4. Creating inclusive learning settings
5. Providing unique fossil collecting experiences

Goals for 2020-2025

1. Engaging Communities

The catalyst of our work is community. The origin of our work is in response to community needs.

The land Penn Dixie Fossil Park and Nature Reserve sits on was once a quarry for the Pennsylvania Dixie Cement Company. When the company went bankrupt in the 1970s the land became an illegal dumping ground for hazardous construction and household waste materials. The land was destined to become industrialized once more in the late 1980s in a business known for air and water pollution in other communities.

A group of dedicated neighbors, environmentalists, scientists, teachers, and local government officials volunteered their time, energy, and resources to preserving the land for safe outdoor recreation, protection of air and water, and natural sciences education. This stance was not neutral, was political, and did not please everyone, but it

stood by the needs of the communities living in the Buffalo River and Lake Erie Watersheds.

Growth in the scope, form, and volume of our work will also be in response to community needs, in alignment with our mission. Environmental preservation and accurate, accessible, experiential natural sciences education is not neutral, is political, and will not please everyone, but will stand by the needs of communities living in the Buffalo River and Lake Erie Watersheds.

2. Growing Organizational Capacity

Our work requires a steadily growing coalition of staff, volunteers, and supporters, on and off the Board of Directors and its working committees, aligned with our values. While this coalition grows in size, its governance and self-management will also evolve to create effective work flows and an organizational culture reflecting our values.

3. Advancing Our Mission

Resources do not change our work, mission, vision, or values. Resources change the scope, form, and volume of our work. Resources stabilize the consistency of our work. Resources change the size of our coalition. Resources maintain the experience we provide to staff, board members, committee members, volunteers, supporters, visitors, teachers, students, and program participants.

How We Will Engage Communities

1. Teacher resources

Teacher professional development programming will expand to meet demand for training in hands on education experiences aligned with New York State Next Generation Science Standards for Project Based Learning. Teacher professional development resources to help teachers access funding for student experiences and incorporate science and outdoor learning into interdisciplinary curricula in humanities courses will also be made available.

2. Student resources

Students will continue to be actively engaged as volunteers, staff, and interns. Pathways for proposal, execution, and evaluation of student projects meeting the needs of a variety of service organizations, schools, and research opportunities will be established. All volunteers and staff of the organization will be prepared to act as mentors to students as appropriate. Volunteers and staff will also endeavor to find appropriate mentors for students outside the organization when needed. Effort will be taken to continue engagement with students formerly involved with the organization and their career paths will be tracked when possible.

3. On-site and off-site programming

The range, scope, and volume of on and off site programming will grow with the capacity and resources of the organization. A pathway for program proposals will be established to ensure member and volunteer interests are represented in new programming. Education programs with learning goals and outcomes, versus large scale educational family entertainment events, will be differentiated in reporting. Impact evaluations of education programs will be formalized to ensure every new program is a learning experience for the planning and implementation of future high quality education programming. Programs that do not meet projected attendance or revenue, but clearly meet a mission aligned need will be modified and relaunched addressing deficiencies that affected participation when possible. Annual increases in the numbers of offered programs and numbers of visitors will ensure added revenue that helps offset increasing expenses associated with payroll costs and insurance.

4. Out of town visitors

Out of town and out of state supporters were present and vocal in a recent email survey. Partnerships with local businesses and cultural institutions will expand to help create region wide experiences appealing to out of town visitors. Out of town visitors will be encouraged to engage with the organization online and to invite their friends and family to also enjoy a trip to Penn Dixie. Aligned out of town institutions and organizations will be engaged to encourage group trips to Penn Dixie as well.

5. Diversity, accessibility, and inclusion

Diversity

A recent survey of members and supporters show we primarily engage a limited range of communities, which is supported by our programming data. This narrow scope of engagement does not meet science and outdoor education needs in Western New York, New York State, nationally, or globally. Our coalition must be comfortable proactively addressing implicit biases, stereotypes, and assumptions that impose restrictions on effectively engaging all communities seeking science and outdoor education programming. Proactively addressing barriers to effective engagement across communities may look like trainings for coalition members, outside assessments of the organization's culture and operations, and/or dedicating coalition time to researching equity in science and outdoor education issues in scope and appropriate handling. When the coalition proactively addresses barriers to effective engagement across communities they will do the following: listen to and support coalition members from communities new to the organization, listen to and support organizational partners representing communities new to the organization, look internally when asking why some communities infrequently interact with the organization, and acknowledge present forms of diversity cannot stand in for absent forms of diversity.

Accessibility

We are encouraged to see fossil parks and nature reserves around the country take steps to become more accessible to more visitors. To maintain our status as the most accessible fossil park in the United States, as determined by a 2011 Geological Society of America study, we must take additional steps alongside communities who currently face barriers to fully enjoying the experiences we have to offer. We must acknowledge that the level of accessibility currently enjoyed in the park, above other fossils parks, is partially incidental, due to the park's suburban versus rural location and proximity of fossil hunting to parking. Intentional universal design steps in both the future physical features and resources of the park and the education programming provided by the organization, are necessary.

Inclusion

Coalition transparency and timely communication are the keys to creating a welcoming environment where there is minimal effort required to enter into the coalition and participate in appropriate and available roles. Conflict will be accepted as part of the process of bringing together a group of individuals and executing a mission collectively. All individuals will be seen as valuable and conflict will be resolved to move the coalition forward, not to return to the status quo that produced the conflict.

How We Will Grow Organizational Capacity

1. Staff

Core staff members will be any staff member that works with the organization year round. Core staff members will be included in consensus driven strategic decision making on a quarterly basis or as appropriate. Core staff members will determine programming and activities that execute the organization's mission. Core staff members will learn about each other's' duties and cross train skill sets where appropriate so that no one person is the only person who can perform a given task. This ensures the organization can run effectively regardless of the schedule of any individual, promotes transparency and mutual understanding, allows for democratic decision making, disrupts power imbalance, and ensures all staff are valued as a member of the team. Staff members will record and archive their work so it is accessible to all other staff members.

2. Board

Board Members will continue to serve as directed by the bylaws of the organization and as legally required. Board Members will serve in long term process oversight roles, resource growth roles, and organizational representation roles. Board members will receive quarterly reports on the activities, emerging policies, and budget of the organization or as appropriate. Board Members will have access to recorded work of staff members. Board Members will ask staff about confusing or concerning activities and are only expected to interfere if reports show evidence of misappropriation or mission

drift. Board Members will be encouraged to volunteer in additional capacities to maintain familiarity with the organization's work.

3. Volunteers

The organization's history rests on the dedication and hard work of numerous volunteers. Volunteers, in all roles, will be treated as valuable members of the team. Their time will be respected and recognized. Long term, reliable, volunteers will be invited to participate in decision making and their interests aligned with mission advancing activities will be invested in. Volunteers will be encouraged to also become members of the organization.

4. Members

The organization's membership program will be focused on friendraising, the practice of starting and sustaining committed relationships of care and concern for the work of the organization, not fundraising. Membership perks will include events and discounts to encourage consistent engagement with the organization; without discouraging full-price ticket sales, non-discounted merchandise sales, and donations from out of town visitors or visitors who are not interested in engagement outside infrequent visits or program participation. We seek to grow our member base 5% annually. Members will be fully informed of their voting rights in the annual election of the Board of Directors and given access to transparent information about how to become more involved in the organization in all available capacities.

5. Supporters

Non-member supporters will be recognized for contributions of their time, expertise, or resources as appropriate. Supporters may be thanked with complimentary memberships as appropriate. Potential supporters that do not align with our values or set us back in the execution or advancement of our mission will be turned away.

How We Will Advance Our Mission

1. Fundraising

Grants

Grant opportunities will be pursued wherever possible to advance our fundraising objectives and organizational needs. This includes, but is not limited to, grants for programming and the capital campaign.

Operational fundraising

Operational funding is currently disproportionately reliant on a small number of sources. As the current grant funding trend is explicitly away from operational funding, it is imperative that operational fundraising be a consistent, year round effort that all coalition participants are aware of and are willing to help facilitate.

We will work to reduce our reliance on governmental support while increasing our annual revenues. A growth of 5% is ideal.

Endowment

We are fortunate to have a principal with which to start an endowment to support our operations. In order to see dividends for this intended purpose we must grow the principal and find an investment manager willing to invest our supporters' resources with their values in mind.

Capital fundraising

Capital campaigns for specific asset growth will be planned and executed with the involvement of the entire coalition.

Sponsors and financial partnerships

Sponsors and other financial partners will be presented with contracts outlining their commitments as well as ours. Potential sponsors or financial partners that do not align with our values or set us back in the execution or advancement of our mission will be turned away.

2. Asset growth and site planning

Digital Assets and Trademarks

To further the organization's national branding; trademarks for logos, unique merchandise, and other digital assets will be pursued as appropriate.

Ongoing Waste Remediation and Clean Up

As a nature reserve we are tasked with stewardship of the land. As our land is a former industrial site and was once an illegal dump, this work will continue as a visible part of our organization's history, present, and future.

Use of Land for Conservation Efforts

As a nature reserve, with significant areas of cleared land, not used for programming, we have unique opportunities to partner with a variety of conservation efforts that will be explored.

On Site Interpretive Signage

At the present time guests must rely on paper maps, which can be blown away or lost, and educators to navigate the site with awareness of all the experiences and educational value we have to offer. Directional and educational signage will be updated and implemented throughout all phases of site maintenance and planning.

Entrance Movement to Jeffrey Boulevard

The entrance to the site will be moved from a residential street to Jeffrey Boulevard to better serve our neighbors and increased numbers of guests. These plans will be in collaboration with the Town of Hamburg and be complementary to future site improvements.

Science and Outdoor Education Center

A Science and Outdoor Education Center will be built on Jeffrey Boulevard, adding permanent bathrooms, office space, a classroom, a multipurpose programming space, and interactive exhibits to our assets.

Further Reading and Resources

Allers, Chris (2013) *The Six P's of Successful Fund-Raising*. Georgia Center for Nonprofits.

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