



Strategic Plan 2025-2030

**Prepared by: Nicole Draper
Executive Director**

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Community,

As we look toward the future of our parks and public spaces, it is with great excitement and commitment that I share with you our new Strategic Plan. This plan represents not only the direction in which we are headed but also the foundation upon which we will build a more vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable community.

The heart of our mission has always been to provide safe, accessible, and engaging spaces for all people—whether you're a young child learning to explore nature, a family enjoying outdoor recreation, or a senior finding peace in the beauty of our parks. But we recognize that a vibrant community is not built on services alone. It is built through thoughtful planning, intentional growth, and a deep commitment to meeting the diverse needs of every member of our community.

Our Strategic Plan is designed to guide us in achieving these goals with a focus on equity, innovation, and stewardship. It is a blueprint for transforming our parks and recreational programs into spaces that foster personal well-being, social connection, and environmental sustainability. This plan will also ensure that we close gaps in access related to race, gender, age, and economic situation, so that everyone has the opportunity to experience the benefits of public parks and recreation.

As we move forward, we will be engaging with you—our residents, staff, volunteers, and community partners—every step of the way. Your input will help shape programs that reflect the diverse voices of our community and will ensure that our efforts are aligned with the values that matter most to you.

I am confident that through the implementation of this plan, we will not only enhance the quality of life in our community but also create spaces that encourage play, learning, and connection. Together, we can build a stronger, healthier community where everyone feels welcome and empowered to thrive.

Thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to working alongside all of you in creating a vibrant future for our parks and recreation services.

Warm regards,

Nicole Draper

Executive Director, Swanton Recreation Department

WHY PARKS AND RECREATION IS IMPORTANT.

Everyone benefits from parks. Parks offer opportunities for all people to play, relax, meet their neighbors, and enjoy nature. They strengthen a community's social cohesion, public health outcomes, and climate resiliency. This begins with easy and available park access for all.

Park access makes neighborhoods and downtowns more attractive places to live, work, and play. Park access connects us to a community hub with services that support a thriving neighborhood. Park access brings communities together and encourages interactions that break down barriers between diverse groups. Park access also improves our public health outcomes. Research demonstrates that park access promotes a more active lifestyle, decreases chronic illnesses, and reduces doctors' visits and healthcare costs

The COVID-19 pandemic only accentuated the importance of these health and social benefits. During that time, people across the world turned to their parks like never before—for fresh air, exercise, solace, and a much-needed break from the stresses of a quickly changing world. Park access simply means a better, healthier world for everyone. The power of parks extends into improving the well-being of the planet we share. As we wrestle with the threats of the climate crisis, parks and green spaces have a significant role to play in securing our future.

WHY HAVE A STRATEGIC PLAN?

This Strategic Plan will help achieve Swanton Recreation's vision on promoting our recreational offering as top notch amenities in the Vermont Outdoor Recreational Climate. This plan will guide our direction, decision making, and growth for the next five years. The Plan sets forth a course of action for both our internal improvements and our external work across Swanton. It also sets benchmarks to track our progress and ensure we are meeting our goals.

WHY PREPARE THIS PLAN NOW?

Franklin County is a rapidly changing, dynamic region, requiring recreation, programming, and services that adapt to those changes.

County residents also experienced a dramatic increase in their cost of living, and in turn, increased housing insecurity and homelessness. However, we cannot meet these

changing needs without improving parks and park access for the County's vulnerable populations.

To meet shifts in economic and demographic changes, Swanton Recreation has developed a visionary Strategic Plan that responds to and supports Swanton's most vulnerable populations through improved park access, recreational programming, and other services that adapt to the region's changing needs.

We are equitably distributing our resources for programming, infrastructure, and services. Our team is identifying new community needs by regularly collaborating on programming and planning with residents and community-based organizations.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

This plan lays out our Department's action plan through a series of goals, strategies, and actions. Taken together, these steps articulate the direction and priorities of our work for the next five years.

They were developed through extensive engagement with staff at all levels, external stakeholder groups, and the community.

Our Strategic Plan consists of six goals. Each goal is a broad statement of what we want to accomplish to achieve our vision. Following each goal is a set of strategies, which describe how we plan to achieve our goals and impact the community. Each strategy has a list of actions that outline the specific activities we will undertake to achieve the strategies. The goals, strategies, and actions are not ranked and are only numbered for reference. However, actions are likely listed in chronological order.

WHO WE ARE

OUR MISSION VISION AND VALUES

Mission

- **Current Mission statement** : Develop diverse, affordable, recreational programs and activities for the community in a safe and welcoming environment.
- Serve as stewards of all parks and recreational assets in Swanton
- Build healthy and resilient communities.
- Advance social equity and cohesion.

Vision

- To be a top quality parks and recreation organization.

Values

- Compassion – We cultivate emotional and cultural awareness that ensures empathy toward our diverse population.
- Health and Wellness – We are dedicated to enhancing the health and wellness of the communities and people we serve.
- Inclusion – We will intentionally seek diversity in the experience of our staff and ensure our offerings reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.
- Innovation – We dream big and combine creativity and productivity to design forward looking solutions.
- Integrity and Dedication – We exhibit loyalty, commitment, honor, and truthfulness in actions and deeds.
- Stewardship and Sustainability – We strive to balance social, economic, and environmental needs through proactive stewardship and conservation practices.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

This process uses internal engagement within the Department to develop the Plan's goals, strategies, and actions and external engagement with stakeholders and community members to help prioritize the strategies. We engaged our staff internally through interviews, surveys and roundtable discussions. External stakeholder engagement included interviews with key stakeholders and thematic roundtables with community-based organizations. Community engagement included interviews with groups of members, pop-up events at community events.

Engagement Summaries

Process and Objectives

Work with Swanton Recreation staff and board of directors to develop the Strategic Plan Goals, gauge internal alignment with the existing mission, vision, and value statements, construct a snapshot of the current state of the Department, and identify opportunities and challenges for the Department.

Key Takeaways

- *Existing mission, vision, and values:* Participants felt that the Department's current work was strongly aligned with Swanton Recreation's guiding purpose statements.
- *Facilities and land assets:* Swanton Recreation's current facilities are used to max capacity in the spring and fall. Lack of indoor space has inhibited growth in the summer and winter months.
- *Leveraging human resources:* Swanton Recreation staff are the heart and soul of the Department. Top priorities for staff included improving existing staff capacity, investing in training and succession planning, and building a jobs pipeline for the next generation of Swanton Recreation employees.
- *Technology and data:* We need to continue to invest in technology

INTERVIEWS & ROUNDTABLES

This part of the process included public agency representatives, community based organizations, advocates, philanthropy, programming partners, and community leaders.

Roundtable topics included Prevention, Park Equity, Out of School Time (OST) Programming, Third Space, Workforce Development, and Core and Community Partners.

This engagement gauged external alignment with the Swanton Recreation Department's mission, vision, and values, identified future opportunities and challenges in relevant work areas, provided feedback on programming and partnerships, and ultimately helped to prioritize the draft strategies of the Plan.

Key Takeaways

- **Importance of strategic planning:** Strategic planning is vital for our continued success. It is important to create a mechanism that ties new initiatives back to the Plan and tracks progress on the goals.

- Safety at parks: Creating safe park spaces and pathways to parks is a key priority.
- Partnerships: Improving existing partnership structures and creating new collaborations with community-based organizations can cultivate long-term relationships in vulnerable communities.
- Communication strategies: We should develop new communication strategies with and for community-based organizations.
- Staffing and job opportunities: Investing in the capacity of Swanton Recreation staff and creating new job pathways into the work we provide for the community are top priorities.

Community Feedback Surveys

[2025 Community Needs Survey](#)

[2026 Community Needs Survey](#)

Purpose of the Survey: The community feedback survey is designed to gather insights from program participants, residents, facility users, and other stakeholders to ensure that the strategic plan reflects the diverse needs and priorities of the community. The feedback helps guide decisions on how public spaces and recreation programs can better serve all residents, with a focus on promoting equity, improving health outcomes, and enhancing community well-being.

Survey Design: The survey includes a mix of questions designed to assess community members' experiences, needs, and aspirations regarding park and recreation facilities and programs. The survey questions are informed by key areas identified in the strategic planning process, such as:

- Activities, Events and Programs
 - Out of School Time/ Day Camps
 - Athletic/ Fitness activities
 - Non Athletic/ Educational/Cultural Programs
 - Drop in Participation
- Community engagement and participation
- Communication
- Recreational Assets and Usage
- Outdoor Recreation

The survey is available in multiple formats (online, paper, and in-person) to ensure broad participation.

Data Collection: The survey is open ended so that the community can add feedback as they seem fit over the year. This allows ample time for community members to participate. During this time, community members are encouraged to share their perspectives about the park usage, existing programs, and the kinds of new services or improvements they would like to see.

Analyzing the Feedback: Once the annual survey period is completed, responses are compiled and analyzed to identify key themes, trends, and priorities. This process may involve:

- Quantitative analysis of closed-ended questions to identify patterns in preferences
- Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses to capture nuanced feedback and personal stories
- Segmentation of feedback by demographic factors (age, race, gender, etc.) to ensure diverse voices are considered

Sharing the Results: To maintain transparency, the results of the community feedback survey are summarized and shared with the public, in our year end evaluation. This information is also shared at community meetings, reports to the Swanton Recreation Board as well as the Town of Swanton Selectboard. Data points are also presented at local events. Key insights from the survey, including community priorities, challenges, and opportunities for improvement, will be presented clearly.

Incorporating Feedback into the Strategic Plan: The feedback gathered from these types of surveys is integral to shaping the direction of the strategic plan. The final plan should reflect the community's desires for:

- Improved access to parks and recreation services
- Equitable opportunities for participation
- Enhanced focus on health, wellness, and inclusion in programming

The strategic plan will also outline measurable goals and objectives based on community feedback to track progress and make adjustments as needed.

Outcomes of the Community Feedback Process:

- **Greater Community Engagement:** Increased participation in the survey indicates stronger community interest in local parks and recreation programs and a shared sense of ownership in their development.
- **Informed Decision-Making:** The feedback directly informs the priorities and recommendations in the strategic plan, ensuring that decisions align with the community's needs and desires.
- **Enhanced Transparency and Trust:** By openly sharing the process and results of the survey, the community feels that their voices are valued and that they are contributing to the creation of a plan that directly impacts their lives.

This transparent approach ensures that the final strategic plan is not just a top-down initiative, but one that is rooted in community needs and perspectives.

Swanton Recreations Strategic Plan for 2025-2030

These goals help us to build strategies to ensure the delivery of high-quality recreation opportunities to the community where there is the most need.

These strategies support equitable public health outcomes, offer programming that closes access gaps based on race, gender, sexuality, age, or economic situation, and are hosted at safe and welcoming park facilities.

These goals, much like the Swanton's Municipal Plan are to help guide Swanton Recreation Leadership to create life impacting change for residents utilizing recreational principals. This plan is also meant to help boost the economic impact of recreation in Swanton.

Goal #1: Promote play and well-being of youth, families, and seniors

Context:

- **Demographics:** Youth, families, and seniors represent key community groups with diverse needs for recreation, social connection, and physical activity.
- **Barriers:** Historical inequities limit access for marginalized populations, including families with low incomes, seniors with mobility challenges, and vulnerable youth.
- **Health Outcomes:** Physical and mental well-being are deeply tied to access to safe, engaging recreational opportunities. Parks and recreation play a critical role in addressing public health disparities.

Impact:

- **Community Health:** Enhanced physical and mental health through regular access to recreational opportunities for all ages.
- **Social Cohesion:** Strengthened intergenerational and intercultural connections fostered by inclusive programming and shared spaces.
- **Economic Equity:** Reduced financial barriers to participation in programs, ensuring broader access to benefits.
- **Lifelong Engagement:** Cultivation of active lifestyles across generations, improving overall quality of life.

Strategies:

1. Program Development

- Introduce multigenerational programs such as family fitness days, senior-youth mentoring activities, and community gardening initiatives.
- Offer low-cost or free programs addressing physical, mental, and social health needs (e.g., playgroups for families, walking clubs for seniors).

2. Inclusive Facilities

- Ensure all park facilities meet ADA standards, offering universal design features to accommodate users of all abilities.
- Create dedicated spaces for intergenerational activities, such as shared playgrounds with senior-friendly exercise stations.

3. Targeted Outreach

- Partner with schools, senior centers, and community organizations to reach underrepresented populations.

4. Equity-Driven Policies

- Develop a fee assistance program for low-income households.
- Prioritize investment in underserved park enhancements and program delivery.

5. Data and Evaluation

- Conduct regular surveys to assess community needs and satisfaction with programming and facilities.
- Measure program participation rates by demographic groups to identify and close equity gaps.

Evaluation, (Successes/ Challenges)

Year 1: Swanton Recreation has made significant progress toward Goal #1 by expanding youth and family programming, strengthening community engagement, and developing equitable policy frameworks. New offerings for middle and high school youth—such as clubs, leadership opportunities, and expanded Teen Lounge hours—have increased participation and strengthened connections with local schools. With development of family-focused playgroups, workshops, and low-cost events we have further supported wellness and social connection. Targeted outreach through strengthened partnerships and improved digital communications, including consistent marketing cycles and campaigns like #OurRecStory or #smalltownBIGrec, has helped reach underserved populations and boost community awareness.

The department also advanced equity-driven policy development with draft field and facility usage guidelines, a transparent fee schedule for field and facility usage, as well as updated operations plans to ensure safety and consistency. Despite these successes, challenges persist in scaling adult and aging Vermonter programming due to limited accessible indoor space and mobility barriers. To address long-term needs and enhance community voice, a Parks & Recreation Advisory Panel has been proposed to guide programming, policy, and facility development with broad resident representation.

Year 2:

Year 3:

Year 4:

Year 5:

Final Report:

Goal #2 Strengthen programs, experiences, and engagement in community

Context

- **Community Connection:** Many communities face a lack of meaningful connections due to social isolation, cultural divides, and economic barriers. Parks and recreation can be a hub for fostering these connections.
- **Program Gaps:** Existing programs may not fully reflect the community's diversity or meet their evolving needs and preferences.
- **Engagement Challenges:** Building trust and sustained participation requires authentic outreach and responsive programming.

Impact

- **Increased Participation:** Enhanced community programs draw more diverse participants, fostering inclusion and belonging.
- **Social Resilience:** Programs that encourage shared experiences strengthen neighborhood ties, cultural exchange, and mutual support.
- **Empowered Community Voice:** Engaging residents in decision-making leads to programs that better serve their needs and reflect their values.
- **Enhanced Quality of Life:** A broader range of experiences improves the physical, mental, and social well-being of community members.

Strategies

1. Expand and Diversify Programming

- **Culturally Responsive Programs:**
 - Offer events that celebrate cultural diversity, such as heritage festivals, cooking classes, or music and dance workshops.
 - Work with cultural groups to co-develop programs that resonate with their traditions and practices.
- **Pop-Up and Mobile Activities:**
 - Bring programs directly to underserved areas with pop-up play spaces, art workshops, or mobile fitness classes.
- **Skill-Building Opportunities:**
 - Develop programs that teach practical skills, such as resume writing, digital literacy, or language learning.

- Introduce youth leadership initiatives, mentoring, and volunteer opportunities.

2. Enhance Community Experiences

- **Event-Driven Engagement:**
 - Host regular community events like movie nights, concerts, community service or volunteer engagements events
 - Introduce rotating themes or seasonal activities to maintain excitement and variety.
- **Interactive Spaces:**
 - Incorporate hands-on, experiential elements in parks, such as community art projects, sensory gardens, or interpretive trails with local history markers.
- **Collaborative Programming:**
 - Partner with libraries, schools, and nonprofits to expand offerings such as book clubs, STEM programs, or health workshops.

3. Foster Community Engagement

- **Participatory Decision-Making:**
 - Invite community members representing diverse community voices to guide program planning.
- **Feedback Channels:**
 - Create simple, accessible ways for community members to share suggestions (e.g., online surveys, feedback kiosks at events).
- **Volunteer Opportunities:**
 - Build a robust volunteer program with roles for all ages and skills, fostering deeper connections to park spaces and programs.

4. Increase Accessibility and Inclusion

- **Accessible Facilities and Communication:**
 - Provide sensory-friendly options, and ADA accommodates for programs and events.
- **Flexible Scheduling:**
 - Offer programs at various times to accommodate different schedules (e.g., after school, evenings, weekends).
- **Equity Audits:**
 - Regularly review program offerings to ensure they reflect the needs of underrepresented groups and adapt as needed.

5. Use Data to Build and Sustain Engagement

- **Community Needs Assessments:**
 - Periodically conduct needs assessments to understand shifts in demographic trends and interests.
- **Impact Measurement:**
 - Track participation rates, user satisfaction, and community health outcomes linked to programs.
- **Iterative Improvement:**
 - Use data insights to refine programs, ensuring they remain relevant, engaging, and equitable.

Evaluation, (Successes/ Challenges)

Year 1: In the first year of Goal #2 implementation, Swanton Recreation achieved notable progress in expanding relevant skills-based opportunities, deepening collaborative programming, strengthening volunteer engagement, and conducting early-stage equity audits. Skill-building initiatives—such as youth leadership programs, digital literacy components in teen activities, and introductory workforce-readiness experiences—successfully supported personal growth across age groups. Partnerships with libraries, schools, and nonprofits led to expanded offerings in STEM, arts, reading programs, and wellness workshops, which broadened access to high-quality community learning experiences. Volunteer engagement increased through structured opportunities at community events and youth programs, fostering stronger resident involvement. Additionally, an initial equity audit of program design and participation patterns helped identify gaps in representation and informed early adjustments to communication and scheduling.

Challenges persisted in several areas, including community experiences and events, which were limited by staffing capacity, facility constraints, and inconsistent participation across demographics. Efforts to expand participatory decision-making—such as resident input sessions and youth advisory components—saw minimal engagement, demonstrating the need for more accessible and culturally responsive outreach strategies. Accessibility and communication barriers also remained, particularly for residents requiring ADA accommodations, alternative communication formats, or sensory-friendly options. To address these issues and guide long-term improvements, Swanton Recreation will conduct a comprehensive **Community Needs Focus Study in FY25**, which will provide a full assessment of community priorities, engagement gaps, culturally relevant interests, and accessibility needs to strengthen programming and community experiences moving forward.

Year 2:

Year 3:

Year 4:

Year 5:

Final Report:

Goal #3 Increase park equity and access to innovative recreational assets

Context

- **Inequities in Access:** Rural communities often lack proximity to parks, quality facilities, or innovative recreational opportunities, exacerbating health and social disparities.
- **Aging Infrastructure:** Many park facilities require modernization to meet current needs and accommodate emerging recreational trends.
- **Changing Preferences:** Communities increasingly seek diverse, flexible, and innovative park assets that go beyond traditional offerings.

Impact

- **Improved Equity:** Addressing access gaps ensures all residents, regardless of location or socioeconomic status, benefit from quality parks and recreation.
- **Enhanced Health Outcomes:** Innovative recreational assets encourage active lifestyles, improving physical and mental well-being.
- **Economic Benefits:** Investment in equitable and innovative parks boosts local economies, property values, and tourism.
- **Community Cohesion:** Well-designed parks foster a sense of pride and belonging, bringing people together.

Strategies

1. Address Access Gaps in Underserved Areas

- **Data Mapping:**
 - Use tools to identify high use park times and capture user experiences, prioritize investments in these recreational assets
- **Park Development**
 - Develop parks, greenways, or pocket parks to best suit the community needs.
 - Convert vacant lots or underused spaces into vibrant community assets.
- **Accessible Design:**
 - Ensure new parks and renovations meet universal design standards, offering facilities for all ages and abilities.

2. Introduce Innovative Recreational Assets

- **Emerging Trends:**
 - Install innovative features like splash pads, adventure playgrounds, or fitness parks with obstacle courses.
 - Explore nature-based play areas, e-sports zones, or augmented reality trails for tech-savvy users.
- **Flexible Spaces:**
 - Design multipurpose spaces that can host diverse activities like yoga, community markets, or performances.
- **Sustainable Features:**
 - Incorporate eco-friendly designs, such as solar-powered lighting, rain gardens, and native landscaping.

3. Promote Accessibility and Inclusion

- **Transportation Solutions:**
 - Partner with transit agencies to improve transportation options to parks, for youth users during before and after school times.
 - Develop safe bike and pedestrian pathways connecting neighborhoods to parks.
- **Fee Assistance Programs:**
 - Offer reduced-cost or free access for low-income families.

4. Community-Driven Park Design

- **Engage Residents in Planning:**
 - Host design charrettes, workshops, or surveys to involve community members in park planning.
- **Reflect Local Culture:**
 - Incorporate public art, landscaping, and design elements that celebrate local heritage and culture.

5. Leverage Partnerships and Funding

- **Public-Private Partnerships:**
 - Collaborate with local businesses, nonprofits, and developers to fund park improvements and innovative features.
- **Grants and Sponsorships:**
 - Seek grants from organizations like the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) or state-level conservation programs.
 - Offer sponsorship opportunities for businesses to support new assets.

6. Monitor and Adapt for Long-Term Success

- **Equity Audits:**
 - Regularly evaluate how well park investments close equity gaps and adjust strategies accordingly.
- **User Feedback:**
 - Gather ongoing input from park users through surveys or digital platforms.
- **Performance Metrics:**
 - Track visitation rates, demographic reach, and user satisfaction to measure impact and guide future improvements.

Evaluation, (Successes/ Challenges)

Year 1: During the first year of Goal #3 implementation, Swanton Recreation made measurable progress in park development, innovative recreation planning, and equity-focused policy advancement. Significant strides were achieved at the dedicated Swanton Recreation site, including improvements that enhance visitor experience and support long-term facility modernization. A major milestone is the proposal of a **joint municipal Parks and Recreation Advisory Panel**, designed to ensure equitable oversight, investment, and collaborative management of all community parks and green spaces. In emerging trends, Swanton Recreation introduced an **e-sports zone**, increasing access to modern, tech-based recreation for youth who may not engage in traditional athletics. Equity efforts expanded through continued **fee assistance programs** for low-income families, and community identity was strengthened with new public art installations and ongoing support for cultural events such as the **Abenaki Heritage Festival**. User feedback mechanisms, including surveys and event-based input, helped guide facility improvements, and local businesses contributed sponsorship support that boosted programming and park enhancements.

Challenges remain in several key strategic areas. **Data mapping** and consistent **performance metrics** were difficult to implement without dedicated staff capacity, limiting the department's ability to track usage, identify access gaps, and guide investment decisions based on real-time data. **Transportation solutions**—particularly improving youth access to parks before and after school—did not progress due to limited coordination with transit partners and infrastructure constraints. Additionally, efforts to create **flexible multipurpose spaces** were slowed by budget limitations and the need for updated facility planning. These challenges highlight the importance of stronger interagency collaboration, improved data systems, and long-range capital planning to advance park equity. Continued updates will draw on targeted user feedback and the emerging Parks and Recreation Advisory Panel to guide actionable improvements in Year 2.

Year 2:

Year 3:

Year 4:

Year 5:

Final Report:

Goal #4 Invest in staff and volunteers

Context

- **Critical Role of Human Capital:** Staff and volunteers are the backbone of successful parks and recreation programs, yet they often face challenges such as inadequate training, burnout, or limited opportunities for growth.
- **Changing Expectations:** Modern recreation demands culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and tech-savvy approaches, requiring ongoing professional development.
- **Volunteer Retention:** Volunteers bring vital energy and community connections, but retention rates can suffer without meaningful roles and recognition.

Impact

- **Improved Program Quality:** Well-trained and supported staff and volunteers deliver engaging, inclusive, and impactful programs.
- **Enhanced Job Satisfaction:** Investing in staff well-being and growth reduces turnover, creating a more stable and experienced workforce.
- **Stronger Community Ties:** Empowered volunteers act as ambassadors, deepening trust and connection between parks and their communities.
- **Long-Term Sustainability:** Skilled and committed personnel ensure the longevity and success of initiatives, even amid resource constraints.

Strategies

1. Expand Professional Development for Staff

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Offer **culturally responsive training** to help staff design and deliver inclusive programs.
 - Introduce **trauma-informed care workshops** to prepare staff to support participants facing challenges.
 - Provide certifications in emerging areas, such as adaptive recreation, sustainability, or digital engagement.
 - Create a **mentorship program** where experienced staff coach new volunteers

2. Build a Strong Volunteer Program

- **Implementation Plan:**

- Develop a **volunteer onboarding process** and create a digital volunteer handbook
- Create **specialized volunteer roles** (e.g., event coordinators, nature guides, youth mentors) to match skills with needs.
- Use digital platforms to manage volunteer scheduling, track contributions, and share updates.
- Establish a **tiered recognition system** with awards, public acknowledgment, and perks for long-term volunteers.

3. Prioritize Staff and Volunteer Well-Being

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Introduce flexible scheduling options to promote work-life balance.
 - Provide access to **mental health resources**, such as employee assistance programs or wellness stipends.
 - Host regular team-building activities to foster camaraderie and reduce stress.
 - Create **safe spaces for feedback**, allowing staff and volunteers to share concerns or ideas.

4. Strengthen Recruitment Efforts

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Partner with local schools, colleges, and workforce development organizations to recruit diverse talent.
 - Use targeted marketing campaigns to highlight the benefits of working or volunteering with parks and recreation.
 - Host open houses or job fairs showcasing career and volunteer opportunities.
 - Establish **internship programs** for students interested in parks, recreation, or public service.

5. Foster a Culture of Appreciation

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Celebrate staff and volunteer contributions during annual events, such as an awards banquet, appreciation picnic, or at a community event such as National Night out.
 - Share success stories and highlight individual achievements through newsletters, social media, or community reports.

- Regularly solicit feedback on recognition efforts to ensure they resonate with the team.

6. Integrate Technology to Support Staff and Volunteers

- **Implementation Plan:**

- Use digital learning platforms for ongoing training and skill development.
- Implement a **staff portal** for accessing schedules, policies, and resources.
- Leverage volunteer management software to streamline recruitment, onboarding, and communication.

7. Evaluate and Adapt

- **Implementation Plan:**

- Conduct annual surveys to assess staff and volunteer satisfaction and gather suggestions for improvement.
- Monitor retention rates and adjust strategies to address challenges.
- Create an advisory committee of staff and volunteers to provide regular input on policies and initiatives.

Evaluation, (Successes/ Challenges)

Year 1: In Year 1, Swanton Recreation made strong progress in strengthening its staff and volunteer infrastructure through expanded professional development, new training systems, and improved recruitment pathways. Staff were provided dedicated time and resources to attend workshops and annual conferences, increasing access to culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and recreation-specific learning. Seasonal employees benefited from newly developed training modules that improved onboarding consistency and program quality. The department also advanced its internal mentorship framework and expanded partnerships with mentor-based organizations to support youth leadership and staff development. Volunteer outreach grew through targeted marketing and clearer role descriptions, and a continuing partnership with **MVSD Afterschool** resulted in another year of hosting a teen intern—broadening workforce development opportunities within the department. Additionally, annual staff evaluations and seasonal exit interviews were formalized to strengthen feedback loops and inform future improvements.

Challenges remain in building a strong community culture of appreciation and ensuring staff and volunteer efforts are consistently recognized. Limited staffing capacity continues to affect work-life balance, making it difficult to sustain high demand while maintaining employee well-being. Public acknowledgment of volunteer contributions—an important factor for retention—was also an area of struggle, with inconsistent recognition across programs and events. Continued investment in staffing capacity, recognition systems, and appreciation

campaigns will be essential in Year 2 to reinforce staff morale, volunteer engagement, and long-term stability.

Year 2:

Year 3:

Year 4:

Year 5:

Final Report:

Goal #5 Provide stewardship of public lands and natural resources

Context

- **Environmental Responsibility:** Parks and recreation agencies play a critical role in preserving ecosystems, combating climate change, and ensuring natural resources remain accessible for future generations.
- **Community Expectations:** Residents increasingly value sustainable practices and expect park systems to reflect their environmental priorities.
- **Intersection with Other Goals:** Stewardship aligns with enhancing equity, promoting well-being, and providing innovative, nature-based recreational assets.

Impact

- **Environmental Sustainability:** Improved management of natural resources reduces carbon footprints, enhances biodiversity, and mitigates climate impacts.
- **Enhanced Public Health:** Clean, well-maintained natural spaces support physical and mental well-being.
- **Community Engagement:** Involving residents in stewardship efforts fosters a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for public lands.
- **Educational Opportunities:** Stewardship initiatives offer hands-on learning about conservation, sustainability, and environmental science.

Strategies

1. Preserve and Enhance Natural Spaces

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Conduct assessments to identify critical areas for restoration, and opportunities for conservation.
 - Implement native plantings and habitat restoration projects to support biodiversity.
 - Use green infrastructure techniques, such as rain gardens and permeable pavements, to manage stormwater and reduce environmental impact.

2. Integrate Sustainability Across Operations

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Establish energy efficiency standards for new construction and renovations.

- Adopt eco-friendly maintenance practices, such as electric landscaping equipment.

3. Promote Community Involvement in Stewardship

- **Implementation Plan:**

- Develop volunteer opportunities focused on stewardship, such as tree planting, litter cleanup, and invasive species removal.
- Host educational workshops on topics like water conservation, pollinator gardens, and sustainable gardening.
- Create "adopt-a-park" programs where community groups take active roles in maintaining and enhancing local green spaces.

4. Connect Stewardship to Recreational Programs

- **Implementation Plan:**

- Incorporate nature-based programming into other goals, such as family outdoor wellness days (Goal #1) or youth-led park cleanups (Goal #2).
- Develop innovative recreational features that integrate education, such as interpretive trails with augmented reality elements (Goal #3).
- Partner with schools to create environmental education field trips tied to state or national standards.

5. Address Equity in Access to Natural Resources

- **Implementation Plan:**

- Prioritize preservation and improvement efforts in underserved neighborhoods to ensure equitable access to nature (Goal #3).
- Incorporate accessible trails and sensory-friendly natural areas to promote inclusivity (Goals #1 & #3).
- Provide free or low-cost transportation options to nature preserves and parks for low-income families.

6. Build Partnerships for Resource Management

- **Implementation Plan:**

- Partner with environmental organizations, universities, and local governments to share expertise, resources, and funding.
- Collaborate with Indigenous communities to integrate traditional ecological knowledge into stewardship practices.
- Work with businesses to sponsor sustainable initiatives, such as solar lighting or community gardens.

7. Educate and Inspire the Public

- **Implementation Plan:**

- Launch awareness campaigns highlighting the value of stewardship and the role of parks in environmental protection.
- Use social media and storytelling to showcase successful projects and resident contributions.
- Develop interpretive signage and digital resources to educate park visitors about local ecosystems and sustainability efforts.

Evaluation, (Successes/ Challenges)

Year 1: In Year 1, Swanton Recreation made meaningful progress in advancing stewardship through youth engagement and community-driven environmental projects. Youth involvement increased significantly through participation in **community work days, park cleanups, and litter removal events**, supporting both environmental responsibility and educational opportunities. The department also successfully established a **community pollinator garden**, enhancing biodiversity and offering a hands-on sustainability project for residents of all ages. Additionally, the **community garden was redeveloped and clearer guidelines were set**, improving user experience, garden health, and long-term maintenance planning. These initiatives strengthened community ownership of public lands and aligned with broader goals of environmental protection and intergenerational learning.

Challenges emerged in providing consistent **natural resource and stewardship education**, mainly due to limited staffing, curriculum materials, and partnership capacity. Developing and implementing **sustainable, eco-friendly maintenance practices**, particularly in pest management, also proved difficult. The department's current infrastructure and equipment make it challenging to transition to greener approaches such as electric tools, integrated pest management, and climate-smart landscaping. Addressing these gaps will require expanded partnerships, staff training, and long-term investment in sustainable operations

Year 2:

Year 3:

Year 4:

Year 5:

Final Report:

Goal #6 Advance organizational excellence

Context

- **Evolving Community Needs:** As demographics shift and societal expectations rise, parks and recreation agencies must continuously adapt to deliver high-quality, equitable services.
- **Resource Challenges:** Limited budgets, staffing constraints, and increasing demands make efficient operations and innovation essential.
- **Staff Engagement:** A strong organizational culture supports motivated, skilled teams that drive the agency's mission.
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Leveraging technology and metrics is critical for evaluating programs, improving efficiency, and justifying investments.

Impact

- **Enhanced Service Delivery:** Streamlined operations and innovative practices ensure consistent, high-quality programming and facility management.
- **Equity and Inclusivity:** Advanced organizational practices embed equity across all areas, fostering trust and accessibility.
- **Staff Retention and Development:** A supportive and growth-oriented environment empowers staff and attracts top talent.
- **Community Trust and Support:** Transparent, responsive operations strengthen community confidence in public investments.

Strategies

1. Strengthen Leadership and Governance

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Develop a strategic governance model that clarifies roles, responsibilities, and accountability.
 - Foster a culture of transparency through regular public reporting and communication about decisions.

2. Leverage Technology for Operational Efficiency

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Implement centralized systems for scheduling, resource allocation, and facility management.
 - Use customer relationship management (CRM) tools to enhance communication and engagement with participants.
 - Adopt data visualization tools to track key performance indicators and support decision-making.

3. Cultivate a Culture of Continuous Improvement

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Regularly review programs, policies, and operations to identify areas for enhancement.
 - Establish cross-departmental teams to foster collaboration and innovation.
 - Create a structured system for staff and community feedback, integrating insights into decision-making.

4. Build Financial Resilience

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Diversify revenue streams through grants, sponsorships, and earned income opportunities (e.g., facility rentals, special events).
 - Develop partnerships with private organizations, nonprofits, and other government agencies to pool resources.
 - Develop standard operating procedures for accounting, outlining allowed usage per line items, including a capital investment plan for capital investment funds and a contingency fund/ special funds line item for emergencies or unforeseen expenses.

5. Enhance Communication and Outreach

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Develop a comprehensive communication plan to ensure clear, consistent messaging to the community and stakeholders.

- Use digital platforms, such as social media and email newsletters, to increase engagement.
- Create multilingual materials to reach diverse audiences.

6. Prioritize Staff Development and Well-Being

- **Implementation Plan:**
 - Invest in professional development opportunities, such as certifications, workshops, and conferences.
 - Implement flexible work options and wellness initiatives to reduce burnout and improve job satisfaction.

Evaluation, (Successes/ Challenges)

Year 1: wanton Recreation made important strides in strengthening organizational infrastructure and improving internal accountability during the first year of Goal #6 implementation. Key successes included updates to the **commission's bylaws and constitution**, clarifying governance roles and supporting more transparent decision-making. The department also instituted regular reviews of programs, policies, and operational practices, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. **Quarterly public reporting** was established, increasing transparency and strengthening trust with community partners and municipal leadership. Financial management practices advanced significantly with the creation of a **grant purchasing plan** to ensure responsible, compliant spending and the implementation of a **quarterly expenditure plan** to support sustainable resource allocation, financial resilience, and long-term planning.

Challenges remain in advancing the department's communication strategy and building the capacity needed to consistently administer it. Limited staffing has made it difficult to fully implement a comprehensive communication plan or maintain frequency across all platforms. Additional improvements are also needed in the **utilization of CRM software systems**, particularly for participant engagement, program tracking, and streamlined operations. Finally, while progress has been made in professional development, it remains difficult to fully prioritize **staff well-being and team cohesion** amid high program demands and current workforce limitations. Strengthening internal capacity and refining communication and technology systems will be essential priorities moving into Year 2

Year 2:

Year 3:

Year 4:

Year 5:

Final Report:

This **5-year timeline** for the **Swanton Recreation Strategic Plan** incorporates an **internal review at Year 3** to ensure that our department is on track to meet its goals. This extended timeline provides flexibility for adjustments while maintaining alignment with our mission of promoting equity, stewardship, and organizational excellence.

Year 1: Foundation and Initial Development

1. Build Internal Capacity (Goals 1–6)

- 1.1. Launch **staff training programs** focused on cultural competence, sustainability, and equity.
- 1.2. Initiate a **volunteer engagement strategy** to enhance park stewardship and program delivery.
- 1.3. Conduct a **governance review** to clarify roles, responsibilities, and accountability structures within the organization.

2. Conduct Needs Assessments (Goals 2 & 3)

- 2.1. Begin **community outreach** to understand needs related to park access, equity, and innovation.
- 2.2. Conduct a **community survey** to gather data on the current state of park services, public health outcomes, and sustainability efforts.

3. Develop Strategic Plans (Goals 1–6)

- 3.1. Finalize and **adopt a 5-year strategic plan** covering park equity, innovative recreation assets, community engagement, and staff development.
- 3.2. Develop an **environmental stewardship plan** aligned with sustainability goals (Goal 5).

4. Secure Funding and Partnerships (Goal 6)

- 4.1. Start applying for **grants** that support environmental stewardship, innovative programs, and staff development.
- 4.2. Establish initial **partnerships** for program expansion and environmental collaboration.

5. Pilot Initial Programs (Goals 1–2, 5, 6)

- 5.1. Launch **small-scale pilot projects** such as **eco-friendly programs** and **community-led stewardship events**.
- 6. **Implement Technology Systems (Goal 6)**
 - 6.1. Begin using **volunteer management software** and **Customer Relationship Management tools** for customer engagement and tracking participation.
- 7. **Initiate Stewardship Projects (Goal 5)**
 - 7.1. Start **restoration** and **conservation efforts** in priority areas, like **native planting** or **water conservation** projects.
- 8. **Strengthen Community Engagement (Goal 2)**
 - 8.1. Begin **listening sessions** and **focus groups** to ensure that all community voices, especially marginalized groups, are involved in planning.

Strategic Plan Year 1 Evaluation Summary

In Year 1 of implementing the Swanton Recreation Strategic Plan, the department focused on building internal capacity, strengthening governance, expanding community partnerships, and piloting programs that advance equity, sustainability, and organizational excellence. Staff and volunteer development were prioritized through training initiatives, improved onboarding processes, and the launch of a volunteer engagement strategy. A full governance review resulted in updated commission bylaws and a clearer operational framework. Community surveys, listening sessions, and early outreach efforts informed planning around park equity, innovative recreation opportunities, and access needs. These findings contributed to the development of multi-year strategic plans to guide future programming and park improvements.

The department also expanded youth, family, and teen programming; strengthened partnerships with local schools and organizations; and enhanced communication through more consistent marketing, digital engagement, and public reporting. Pilot initiatives—including youth-led cleanups, community pollinator gardens, e-sports activities, and small-scale conservation projects—helped activate parks and build early momentum toward long-term goals. Financial resilience improved through new grant purchasing procedures, a quarterly expenditure plan, and the initiation of partnerships to support programmatic growth. Challenges remain in communication capacity, ADA and sensory accessibility, sustainable eco-friendly maintenance practices, and staff well-being; however, Year 1 established a strong foundation for continued progress. Year 2 will focus on expanding stewardship education, improving CRM and communication tools, deepening equity-driven outreach, and advancing capital and facility planning.

Year 2: Program Expansion and Innovation

1. **Expand Professional Development (Goal 4)**
 - 1.1. Provide **advanced leadership training** and **specialized staff development**
2. **Launch Campaign to Explore New Park Features (Goals 1, 2, & 3)**
 - 2.1. Start the **design and construction** of **innovative park assets** (e.g., eco-friendly playgrounds, nature trails, fitness zones).
 - 2.2. Incorporate **sustainability features** like **solar-powered lights** and **green infrastructure** into park designs.
3. **Develop Financial Resilience (Goal 6)**
 - 3.1. Launch a **fundraising campaign** targeting **eco-friendly park development** and **sustainability projects**.
 - 3.2. Explore **revenue diversification strategies**, such as **sponsorships** and **earned income** from special events.
4. **Enhance Park Accessibility (Goal 3)**
 - 4.1. Focus on making parks more **inclusive**, with accessible **natural spaces**, sensory gardens, and **wheelchair-friendly trails**.
5. **Strengthen Partnerships (Goal 6)**
 - 5.1. Solidify partnerships with **local organizations**, **environmental groups**, and **universities** for joint initiatives.
6. **Expand Community Stewardship Initiatives (Goal 5)**
 - 6.1. Implement additional **community-led stewardship**
 - 6.2. Support the efforts of the Swanton Enhancement : Beautification Committee in community planting and beautification efforts

Year 3: Internal Review and Consolidation

1. Conduct Internal Review (Goals 1–6)

- 1.1. Review **progress on each goal**, ensuring alignment with the strategic plan.
- 1.2. **Evaluate program performance**, assess **staff satisfaction**, and analyze **community participation**.
- 1.3. Adjust goals and strategies as needed based on findings from the review.

2. Strengthen Internal Infrastructure (Goal 6)

- 2.1. Evaluate and improve **internal systems** (e.g., scheduling, data management, volunteer coordination).
- 2.2. Assess **staffing levels** and **volunteer capacity** to ensure future growth is sustainable.

3. Enhance Community Engagement (Goal 2)

- 3.1. Expand **community ambassador programs** and **volunteer recruitment**.
- 3.2. Offer additional **engagement opportunities** such as **environmental education** workshops and **youth leadership programs**.

4. Revisit Resource Management (Goal 5)

- 4.1. Evaluate the effectiveness of environmental initiatives like **habitat restoration** and **green infrastructure**.
- 4.2. **Increase public involvement** in conservation efforts through volunteer programs and educational campaigns.

5. Launch Innovative Program Enhancements (Goals 1, 2, 3)

- 5.1. Incorporate **technology** (e.g., app-based trail maps, virtual park tours) into park services to enhance engagement and accessibility.

Year 4: Program Growth and Systematic Expansion

1. Expand Programs and Services (Goals 1, 2, 4)

- 1.1. Grow successful programs such as **youth leadership initiatives**, **family wellness events**, and **community stewardship programs**.
- 1.2. Implement new programs to promote **public health** and **mental well-being** through outdoor recreation and nature connection.

2. Increase Park Accessibility and Equity (Goal 3)

- 2.1. Expand **inclusive features**, focusing on areas like **senior-friendly park spaces**, **accessible restrooms**, and **universal playgrounds**.

3. Consolidate Financial Sustainability (Goal 6)

- 3.1. Diversify revenue streams through **public-private partnerships**, **fundraising events**, and **grants**.
- 3.2. Begin the **endowment fund** for long-term park sustainability and **innovation projects**.

4. Integrate Technology and Innovation (Goal 6)

- 4.1. Expand the use of **data-driven management** to optimize operations and service delivery.
- 4.2. Test **augmented reality (AR)** or other cutting-edge tech to enhance **educational programming** in parks.

Year 5: Long-Term Sustainability and Community Empowerment

1. Evaluate Program Impact (Goals 1–6)

- 1.1. Conduct a **final evaluation** to assess the impact of all initiatives, focusing on **sustainability, equity, and community well-being**.
- 1.2. Collect **community feedback** on park services, staff satisfaction, and program success.

2. Plan for the Future (Goals 1–6)

- 2.1. Develop the **next phase** of the strategic plan based on insights from the 5-year review.
- 2.2. Set **long-term sustainability goals** for continued environmental stewardship, program innovation, and staff development.

3. Celebrate Achievements (Goals 1–6)

- 3.1. Hold a **community celebration** to recognize the contributions of staff, volunteers, and community partners.
- 3.2. Highlight the agency's **progress on sustainability, community engagement, and organizational excellence** through reports and public-facing campaigns.

4. Solidify Partnerships and Prepare for Future Growth (Goal 6)

- 4.1. Strengthen **community partnerships** to ensure continued collaboration on environmental and social initiatives.
- 4.2. Develop plans for expanding park facilities and programming in underserved areas.

Key Milestones for Each Goal

- **Goal #4 (Invest in Staff and Volunteers):** Ongoing professional development, volunteer engagement programs, and mentorship.
- **Goal #5 (Provide Stewardship of Public Lands):** Stewardship projects launched in Year 1, evaluated and expanded in Year 3, with continued community involvement.
- **Goal #6 (Advance Organizational Excellence):** Internal reviews in Year 3 to adjust strategies, with technology and data-driven operations integrated into Year 4.

