



ACORNS, Inc.

Strategic Plan 2025-2030

	2019-2024	Proposed 2025-2030
Our Vision	ACORNS was founded upon a vision in which Genesee County Parks provide people of all ages an opportunity for outdoor adventure, inspiration, and a sense of wonder...where children and adults can explore, learn, and enjoy our natural world.	No changes
Our Mission	ACORNS supports Genesee County Parks by connecting people with nature through outdoor learning, exploration and fun.	No changes
Who We Serve	ACORNS provides support to promote the use and appreciation of Genesee County Parks for outdoor recreation and environmental education to residents, visitors, local municipalities, youth organizations and school districts.	No changes
Our Current Projects	<u>Genesee County Park Interpretive Center (Center) and Outdoor Learning Center (OLC)</u> • Providing resources for new and updated displays, equipment, and facilities in the Center, and materials and native plantings for the OLC • Developing and expanding the OLC for use by the general public and for public and school/youth programs	



ACORNS, Inc.

Strategic Plan 2025-2030

	<u>Run for the ACORNS Annual Event</u> • Annual 5K/10K trail run/walk held in the fall in the Genesee County Park with over 200 participants plus their families; raised over \$84,000 in 13 years of the event; proceeds used to pay for interns to assist in environmental education, acquire equipment and supplies used for environmental education, and subsidize transportation costs for school groups. <u>Music in the Park</u> • Music In the Park is an annual community event sponsored by the ACORNS. GoArt has also given support through their grant program. The concert is performed by a local band usually at DeWitt Park on the first Saturday in August. It was held at the Genesee County Park when it first began. <u>Junior ACORNS</u> • Started in 2025, Junior Acorns gives kids age 7 to 14 the opportunity to get • more involved in Park activities and to learn more about Nature and the	
--	---	--



ACORNS, Inc. Strategic Plan 2025-2030

	• opportunities the world outside affords them. It is also a vehicle for the • Acorns to perpetuate its future, bringing new and future Members with • different talents and ideas into our organization. <u>Wildlife/Habitat Monitoring and Restoration</u> • Project Feederwatch • Bluebird box monitoring • Butterfly and pollinator gardens • Monarch butterfly monitoring • Invasive species management • Maintaining bird feeders in the winter	
Our Programs and Services	ACORNS provides the following assistance, programs, and services: • Fundraising/grant writing to support habitat restoration, environmental education and community outreach events • Park stewardship, assistance with trail maintenance and visitor facilities operations • Interpretive center operation and maintenance and improvements • Outreach and education • Internship opportunities	



ACORNS, Inc. Strategic Plan 2025-2030

Our Goals: 2025-2030	1. Recruit volunteers and grow membership 2. Develop and implement a marketing and communication strategy 3. Develop a comprehensive spending plan and leverage private funds with grants 4. Expand outdoor recreation and educational programs and facilities 5. Develop an operations manual and board succession plan	Proposed adjustments 1. Recruit volunteers and grow membership 2. Develop and implement a marketing and communication strategy 3. Provide volunteers, funding and support to improve visitor experiences 4. Expand ACORNS programs and fundraising events 5. Improve coordination and communication with Park and Park staff 6. Develop annual budget, comprehensive spending plan and leverage private funds with grants wherever possible 7. Maintain an operations manual and develop a board succession plan
--	--	---

Background and Context



ACORNS, Inc. Strategic Plan 2025-2030

ACORNS (Association for Conservation of Recreational and Natural Spaces) is a 501(c)(3) designated service and support organization for the parks and recreation areas in Genesee County, NY. Since 2007 we have generated additional resources and support for the Genesee County Parks through participation in work projects, public workshops, exhibits, interpretive programs, fundraising, guided tours, and additional activities or events which support the missions of the Genesee County Parks and Interpretive Nature Center.

As ACORNS, we believe in the value of public outdoor recreation and environmental education opportunities for everyone. Open space and public outdoor facilities are increasingly important as people look for ways to support and improve their quality of life through physical activity, nature exploration, and life-long learning opportunities. Residents and families, children and adults, all benefit from time spent outdoors. Genesee County Parks provide an important resource for traditional recreation such as hiking, kayaking, jogging, biking, and picnics. The parks also facilitate nature-based recreation such as wildlife photography and birdwatching, and environmental learning and exploration programs such as orienteering, plant identification, bee keeping, and recycling. ACORNS embarked on a strategic planning process to ensure that we maintain and grow our capacity to support Genesee County Parks and the irreplaceable resources it provides to people who live, work, and play in Genesee County.

The ACORNS Board of Directors developed this strategic plan with an understanding that in today's environment, local governments are under a great deal of pressure to provide community services of all kinds and at a growing cost. At the same time, public open space and recreational facilities are more important than ever to the health and well-being of people and to the conservation of our natural resources. ACORNS was founded, and is uniquely positioned, to provide service and support to Genesee County to ensure that it meets its goals, today and in the future. This plan identifies priorities and implementation strategies that chart a course for ACORNS to promote Genesee County Parks over the next five years.

Membership & Volunteer Definitions

ACORNS Member: An individual with active annual dues or honorary status based on service.

ACORNS Volunteer: A community member who volunteers at ACORNS events without receiving membership benefits.

Parks Volunteer: A volunteer for Parks programs who is not an ACORNS member.



ACORNS, Inc. Strategic Plan 2025-2030

ACORNS' organizational skills and services:

- *Fundraising, grant writing*
- *Dedicated and talented membership and volunteer base*
- *Teaching and assisting with educational programs*
- *Support for park operations and events*
- *Assistance with operations and maintenance of the Park Interpretive Center*
- *Media, websites, announcements*
- *Trail monitoring*

Our Goals: 2025-2030

Goal 1: Recruit volunteers and grow/retain membership

Strategies:

- a. Develop list of talent needed for member base (e.g. grant writer, graphic design, natural resource professionals, etc.).
- b. Recruit and engage active members through person to person and social media outreach.
- c. Engage/hire member coordinator to assist with recruitment and retention of high-quality members
- d. Coordinate training opportunities for board, members and volunteers
- e. Conduct personal outreach calls to new ACORNS members
- f. Promote Junior ACORNS family memberships
- g. More ACORNS only events
- h. Honorary members for one year for all new park volunteers
- i. Identify members/support to create material and regular, on-going messaging, bounce back programming coordinate events
- j. Implement a routine SWAG purchasing schedule to enhance member engagement and retention



ACORNS, Inc. Strategic Plan 2025-2030

Metrics:

- *Achieve 75% membership retention each year over the next 5 years*
- *Recruit at least 5 new members/year (not honorary)*
- *Maintain quarterly ACORNS only events (at a minimum) and track participation in order to identify successful programs that appeal to the larger membership pool*
- *Maintain quarterly SWAG purchasing schedule*

Goal 2: Develop and implement a marketing and communication strategy

Strategies:

- a. Develop target audience including stakeholders, major donors, County Legislature, and grants.
- b. Determine marketing/communication vehicle most suited to each type of audience.
- c. NEW Social media – find someone passionate about this, consider grant opportunities
- d. Community engagement through participation in local parades

Metrics:

- Achieve 1,000 views/month on social media outreach
- Increase followers by 5% each month

Former Goal Leader(s): Kathy Purcell, George Squires, Lewis Tandy

NEW Membership and Communication Committee: Ashley McKeown, Pete Stanbridge, George? Lewis? Jim? Jeff?

Committee Chair:



ACORNS, Inc. Strategic Plan 2025-2030

Goal 3: Provide volunteers, funding and support to improve visitor facilities experiences

Strategies:

- ~~a. Develop new and/or update educational workshops, materials, and facilities including school programs and visitor displays such as new wildlife mounts, webcam for nesting birds, bees, etc.~~
- b. Diversify programs and events including adding musical programs, canoe/kayak rentals, outdoor photography and art, summer camps.
- c. Develop an “Adopt a bed” program so members can contribute to Outdoor Learning Center (OLC) maintenance on their own time
- d. Collaborate with service organizations to spearhead springtime weeding needs in OLC annually
- e. Prioritize low maintenance OLC projects
- f. Improve coordination and communication with park staff

Metrics:

- ~~• Add five new educational or public programs or features, add 10 new school groups by year 5.~~
- ~~• Develop three new and unique annual programs or events by year 5.~~
- Develop one new and unique program by year 5
- Develop 3 new OLC features
- Hold annual meeting of park staff and ACORNS Board of Directors to establish annual collaborative plans

Former Goal Leader(s): Shannon Lyaski, Sam Leadley and Sara Balduf

Goal 4: Expand ACORNS programs and fundraising events

Strategies:



ACORNS, Inc. Strategic Plan 2025-2030

Metrics:

Goal 5: Improve coordination and communication with Park staff

Strategies:

- a. Monthly topic at board meetings
- b. Annual discussion at August/September board meeting once mutual budgets have been established
- c. Develop communication pathways

Metrics:

NEW Programs, Facilities & Fundraising Committee: Julia Garver, Ashley McKeown, Claudia Nusstein, Paul Osborn, Pete Stanbridge, Lewis Tandy, Kathy Woika

Committee Chair:

Goal 6: Develop an annual budget, comprehensive spending plan and leverage private funds with grants wherever possible

Strategies:

- a. Expand annual budgeting process to include a specific spending plan.
- b. Identify match funds (private dollars) and team with partners or grant writer to leverage for state and federal grants (e.g. NYS Consolidated Funding Application).

Metrics:



ACORNS, Inc. Strategic Plan 2025-2030

- Annual budget with spending plan and successful leveraging of three grants.

Former Goal Leader(s): George Squires and Jeff Langsdon

Goal 7: Maintain an operation manual and develop a board succession plan

Strategies:

- Inventory recurring organizational roles/responsibilities for all active board members
- Identify annual programs, activities, and events.
 - NEW Junior ACORNS points for feederwatch
 - NEW Feederwatch expectations for center sitters
- Document standard operating procedures and policies.
- Identify key members and develop individual succession plans.
- Recruit people with the necessary background and talents to train and fill roles as transitions occur.

Metrics:

- Operations Manual complete by December 2020.
- Succession plans complete by December 2019

Former Goal Leader(s): Julia Garver and Jerome Gentry

NEW Governing & Finance Committee:

Committee Chair:

EVALUTION AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT



ACORNS, Inc.

Strategic Plan 2025-2030

We will monitor activity and progress toward achieving the goals of our strategic plan at board meetings on a quarterly basis or as needed. Goal Leaders will provide updates to the board in advance of meetings for discussion. Review will include determination of progress, if additional information or resources are needed, or if the goal needs to be modified or exchanged. Review and progress analyzed carefully at November meeting to support budget process and allocation of funding and resources for next fiscal year.



ACORNS, Inc.

Strategic Plan 2025-2030

About ACORNS's Strategic Planning Process

ACORNS' 2019-2024 strategic planning process began in January 2019 and included a planning workshop and draft strategic plan facilitated by Sheila S. Hess with CC Environment & Planning. The board of directors and key volunteers met to refine and finalize the strategic plan to present at the Annual Meeting of Members in May 2019.

NEW In 2023, the Board of Directors determined that the strategic plan should be revisited due to disruptions in goal progress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. A planning workshop was subsequently held on May 8, 2024, with facilitator Sheila Hess to review the existing plan and identify necessary updates.

These recommendations were revisited on October 4, 2025, and we have since established quarterly strategic planning meetings to support the development and implementation of the 2025–2030 strategic plan.

Strategic Planning Committee Members

Sarah Balduf

Julia Garver

Jerome Gentry

Jeff Langdon

Shannon Lyaski

Bill Moon

Paul Osborn

Jim Schmitt



ACORNS, Inc. Strategic Plan 2025-2030

George Squires
Pete Stanbridge
Lewis Tandy
Bonnie Tandy
Chris Nickerson
Brad Nickerson
Laurie McKenzie
Ashley McKeown
Claudia Nusstein