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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Goal 5: Visitor Experience** – Transform the guest experience in the nature center and on the grounds to create a community of users that shares a connection with the natural world and Severson Dells.
### Goal 1: Organizational Capacity

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promote our Human Capital</th>
<th>Review and refine policies and procedures</th>
<th>Implement the staffing model to achieve the goals of this plan (as funding allows)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a healthy, productive, collegial, collaborative and innovative work environment</td>
<td>Review general operating policies and procedures</td>
<td>Hire an Education Programs Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify and participate in professional development opportunities through conferences, seminars, and classes</td>
<td>Streamline data collection to create a better development program</td>
<td>Hire a Development and Marketing Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop and implement a peer evaluation/coaching process for staff and volunteers who deliver education programs</td>
<td>Develop policies, as needed, to keep with current nonprofit standards and best practices</td>
<td>Hire a Camp, Scout and Family Programs Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct employee satisfaction surveys and take appropriate action to improve in areas highlighted</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hire a .5 FTE Volunteer Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benchmark renowned nature centers to generate ideas and learn best practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Q4, FY18, annually thereafter</td>
<td>Q4, FY21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annually</td>
<td></td>
<td>Q3, FY19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3, FY18, ongoing thereafter</td>
<td>Q2, FY18</td>
<td>Q1, FY20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4, FY18, annually thereafter</td>
<td>Annually</td>
<td>Q1, FY19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Goal 1: Organizational Capacity

### Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop and diversify the Severson Dells Board of Directors</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and improve new board member orientation packet and onboarding process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As vacancies on the board occur, recruit new board members that:</td>
<td>Annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have a passion for Severson Dells mission and vision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Possess the skill sets and expertise that help advance our</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mission and vision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Meet the diversity needs of our audiences (ethnic, cultural,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>business, age, economic status, geographic)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review board policies and procedures</td>
<td>Q3, FY18, ongoing thereafter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a board self-assessment and continuous improvement plan</td>
<td>Q4, FY18, annually thereafter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review board committee structure and adjust based on current objectives</td>
<td>Q4, FY18, annually thereafter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop a yearly marketing plan</td>
<td>Q1, Annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a marketing plan for each fiscal year that includes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Confirming budget</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Identifying key marketing goals and objectives</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>with set time frame/implementation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o Inclusion of public relation efforts that complement marketing efforts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop and implement a rebrand of Severson Dells</td>
<td>Q2, FY18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revamp the Severson Dells brand and brand promise to align with the vision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect/conduct a collateral audit of all Severson Dells print and web materials to identify pieces needing to be updated</td>
<td>Q3, FY 18, annually thereafter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update visual representation on all print and web materials</td>
<td>Q4, FY18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a brand brief for Severson Dells</td>
<td>Q3, FY18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Goal 1: Organizational Capacity

### Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ensure implementation of the strategic plan</th>
<th>Develop an annual work plan for each fiscal year for both staff and board</th>
<th>Q4, Annually</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct a biannual review of the strategic plan progress</td>
<td>Q1 &amp; Q3, Annually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Strengthen Volunteer Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grow a diverse volunteer group that represents the diversity of the northern Illinois community</th>
<th>Ongoing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop a thorough volunteer training program</td>
<td>Q1, FY 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop a volunteer recruitment plan to increase the number and diversity (age, ethnicity, economic status) of volunteers</td>
<td>Q3, FY19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clearly outline volunteer job roles in the organization</td>
<td>Q2, FY 18</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop a volunteer recognition plan</td>
<td>Q4, FY 18</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engage with volunteers to provide program feedback and collaborate on new program ideas</td>
<td>Q4, Annually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goal 2: Program Excellence

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

**Strengthen current programs consistent with the mission and vision**

- Develop a rubric to evaluate current programs for scientific rigor, alignment to current educational standards, financial stability and overall program effectiveness. **Q3, FY 18**
- Conduct annual evaluations of program content and curriculum for improvement. **Q1, Annually**
- Increase school program curriculum allowing progressive grade-level usage. **Q3, FY 20**
- Inventory and analyze database of historical school partnerships to identify trends and opportunities. **Q1, FY 18** (annual after)
- Conduct recruitment presentations to at least 2 schools, districts or Regional Offices of Education as a means of increasing number of student participants by 10% per year. **Ongoing beginning FY 18**

**Evaluate expansion of program capacity (number of people served)**

- Review current program capacity to determine possible areas of growth. **Q4, FY 18**
- Participate in at least 5 community events/summer camp fairs as a means of increasing camp and family programs participation by 10% per year. Annually
- Every student in Winnebago County attends at least one Severson Dells school program before 5th grade. **Q4, FY 21**
Goal 2: Program Excellence

Continued

Evaluate expansion of program offerings (types of programs)

- Review current programming to determine potential areas of growth
  - Q4, FY 18

- Assess community interest and need for program offerings via participant surveys
  - Ongoing

- Review program offerings by other regional nature centers and science institutions to identify program gaps and overlaps
  - Q1, FY19

- Review at least 5 nature centers/science centers outside our geographic area to look for models of additional programming
  - Q1, Annually

- Develop and implement programs and business plans for two new education programs
  - Q4, FY 19

Diversify demographics of program participants

- Collect demographic data on program participants to assess the current demographics of attendees
  - FY 18, FY 19

- Develop a marketing plan to reach out to demographics underserved in current programming
  - Q1, FY 20

- Develop a school scholarship program for Title 1 schools in Winnebago, Boone and Ogle Counties to reduce barriers to participation
  - Q1, FY20
Goal 3: Collaborations & Partnerships

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

Develop and maintain a network of like-minded community partners

- Develop a list of current and potential partner organizations including why the partnership is beneficial to both parties.  
  Q1, FY 19

- Meet at least annually with each partner group to work to increase science literacy and environmental awareness.  
  Annually

- Develop a plan to increase awareness of science and nature program opportunities to increase science and environmental literacy of the community.  
  Q2, FY 20

Increase community group engagement

- Inventory and analyze the database of historical partnerships to identify trends and opportunities.  
  Q2, FY 18

- Identify community groups with environmental and conservation programming needs.  
  Q4, FY 18

- Contact two new community groups, annually, to increase potential partnership programming opportunities and current program attendance.  
  Q3, FY 18, annually thereafter

- Increase number of community partnerships by 10%, annually.  
  Q4, Annually
## Goal 3: Collaborations & Partnerships

### Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a strong partnership with the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County</td>
<td>Q1 FY18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify current resource-sharing.</td>
<td>Q2 FY18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify inefficiencies and opportunities.</td>
<td>Q3 FY18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a resource-sharing plan.</td>
<td>Q4 FY18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with local Chambers of Commerce</td>
<td>Q3 Annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop, implement and advertise a business membership program</td>
<td>Q2 FY 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Goal 4: Financial Sustainability

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

Build a Fund Development Plan

Segment audiences engaged with Severson Dells Nature Center effectively

Q1, FY 19

Develop a communications plan and strategy for building relationships with each constituent group

Q3, FY 20

Improve development processes to improve efficiency and effectiveness

Q4, Annually

Develop a planned giving program

Q3, FY 18

- Pursue basic level technical expertise on planned giving opportunities for in-house staff or partner with outside resources

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

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

Q3, FY 18

Develop three new earned revenue programs

Q4, FY 19

Grow earned revenue programs by 15% per year

Ongoing
Goal 4: Financial Sustainability

Continued

Improve membership program and benefits

Develop a clearly outlined membership benefits program

Grow membership by 15% annually

Increase membership revenue by $10,000 over FY 2017

Q1, FY 18

Ongoing

Q4, FY 19

Ensure that Severson Dells investment policies are consistent with the intended purpose of the fund(s) and the Center’s financial needs

Develop an investment policy that aligns with the mission and needs of Severson Dells

Review investment policy with our investment advisors to ensure that we are in compliance with our investment policy

Review the investment policy annually with the Finance Committee

Q4, FY 18

Q1, FY 19, ongoing thereafter

Annually
Goal 5: Visitor Experience

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

To develop interpretive materials and displays that represent the local ecosystems.

Create interpretive elements for immediate use in the facility.  
Q3, FY 18

Design the total visitor experience beginning with welcoming and identity and considering traffic flow, technology, messaging and learning content, multiple uses, etc.  
Q4, FY 18

Plan and create interpretive displays and materials to improve the guest experience in the building.  
Q4, FY 18

To develop interpretation on trails and within preserve.

Create interpretive elements for immediate use in the facility.  
Q2, FY 20

Design the total visitor experience beginning with welcoming and identity and considering traffic flow, technology, messaging and learning content, multiple uses, etc.  
Q4, FY 21

Plan and create interpretive displays and materials to improve the guest experience in the building.  
Q4, FY 20
Goal 5: Visitor Experience

Continued

To maintain and enhance The Grove experience:

Inventory existing elements and associated maintenance needs.  
Q1, FY 19

Develop a maintenance plan with budget and timeline for The Grove with the Forest Preserves of Winnebago County.  
Q3, FY 18

Develop a plan for expansion into disturbed areas to the east while protecting undisturbed areas from future development/expansion.  
Q1, FY 20

Develop partnerships with artists to create temporary art exhibits in degraded areas or where natural areas will not be disturbed.  
Q2, FY 20

Develop a digital visitor experience:

Identify planned visitor interactions and content and use this to develop an app for use within the preserve.  
Q2, FY 22

Create and implement a plan for a stronger web-based relationship with the community to increase visitation to the center and property and increase science and environmental literacy.  
Q3, FY 20

Develop social media plan utilizing multiple platforms.  
Q1, FY 20

Utilize technology in citizen science programming and share data with constituents.  
Q2, FY 19

Further develop the website and Google AdWords to maximize Google Grant.  
Q1, FY 19

Expand and plan for quality press and media opportunities.  
Ongoing