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# **High Park Nature Centre**

## **Two Year Strategic Plan**

### **2011-2013**

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**June/July 2011**

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## 1. High Park Nature Centre's Mission Statement

The **High Park Nature Centre** will be one of the **recognized Toronto leaders** in **outdoor environmental education** and will **promote awareness, understanding and respect** through **hands-on year-round environmental education** in **Toronto's largest green space, High Park.**

## 2. Background and Assumptions

### A) Background

#### Our History

High Park was generously given to the City of Toronto in 1873 by John Howard on condition that the park remains in as natural a state as possible and free in perpetuity to its citizens. Despite constant pressure from development and a large number of recreational facilities, one-third of the park is still considered to be ecologically significant, including the world's 4<sup>th</sup> largest remnant of rare Black Oak Savannah.

The park has always enjoyed strong community support, which in 1999, led to the creation of the High Park Nature Centre ("HPNC"), and in 2003 to the formation of the not-for-profit organization "High Park initiatives" ("HPI") to manage HPNC's staff and activities.

#### The Nature Centre

HPNC offers year-round outdoor experience-based environmental education programs to park visitors of all ages but with a focus on children and families. Users of HPNC are also offered the opportunity to gain an appreciation of the park's unique ecosystems and to participate in the restoration of the park's natural areas. Last year, HPNC offered 95 unique programs (ranging from Knee-High Naturalists, Edible Hike, Summer in the Savannah, Moth Night to Migration Celebration) and served over 7,000 visitors from varied cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds across the Greater Toronto Area. All of HPNC's educational programs are developed to meet objectives laid out in the curricula of both the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Toronto Boards of Education.

HPNC is located in High Park on Parkside Drive (in what used to be the old lawn bowling premises). HPNC employs a part-time Executive Director, 3 full-time Program Coordinators, 3 part-time staff and approximately 50 dedicated community volunteers. The HPNC is able to offer its programs to the public as a result of the assistance of the City of Toronto (with respect to the rental and maintenance of its premises), the fees it earns from program participants as well as a result of the support from various private organizations, foundations and individuals. These latter funds are critical to allow HPNC to keep its fees low so that a broad cross section of the community can enjoy what HPNC has to offer (approximately 35% of HPNC's funding must be raised from these sources to offer its current calendar of programming).

## 2. Background and Assumptions

Both HPI and HPNC work as closely as possible with other organizations both within High Park (City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation department, High Park Community Advisory Council and any successor organizations such as the High Park Resource Group, High Park Natural Environment Committee, High Park Volunteer Stewardship Program), our programming partners (Ducks Unlimited, Colborne Lodge and the High Park Children's Garden) and outside of High Park (local community organizations, daycares, community centres and schools).

Additional information on HPNC, its funders/partnerships and the programs it offers can be found on HPNC's website located at: [www.highparknaturecentre.com](http://www.highparknaturecentre.com).

### **B) Assumptions**

As with any future looking strategic plan, certain assumptions must be made and the strategic plans formed are contingent on those assumptions remaining true.

Should the assumptions change then the plan based on those assumptions must also adapt.

The central assumptions on which this strategic plan is based are that:

- The finances currently available to HPNC (including the current leasing and maintenance arrangements with The City of Toronto) do not decrease. If the current level of financial support was to decline, HPNC would have to make some critical decisions about its current expenditures including the level and type of programs offered.;
- HPNC operates from its current premises located at 440 Parkside Drive. If HPNC were offered the opportunity of moving to a larger location, its current slate of programming, staffing, financing and expenditures would all have to be re-assessed in light of that change.; and
- The staffing at HPNC consists of a minimum of one part-time Executive Director and 3 full- time Program Coordinators. Should the core staffing of HPNC dip below these levels, HPNC's ability to execute this strategic plan would be compromised.

### 3. HPNC Two Year Strategy and How It Contributes to HPNC's Mission

Initiatives	Action Plans and Outcomes		Performance Indicators
<b>#1: Programming:</b> Focus on outdoor environmental and stewardship education for children, youth and families in High Park	Year 1 (2011/12)	a) Evaluate existing programs to determine opportunities for growth and change  b) Develop and implement new programs to replace retired programs	a) analyze existing program data including statistics and review program evaluations from past 2 years  b) Establish trajectory for each program based on program analysis (ie retire program/adjust program/continue program as is/increase promotion for program)  c) Use plan developed in b) to determine feasibility and direction of program expansion  a) In addition to c) above, survey HPNC users to determine community needs  b) Establish a formal procedure for new program development, program committee approval and Board input  c) Expand program committee to increase expertise and generate new program concepts
	Year 2 (2012/13)	a) increase program accessibility for high-needs schools and students	a) increase available number of fully sponsored school programs from 10 to 20  b) implement youth mentorship program  c) investigate and make recommendations on a Community Access Fund

### 3. HPNC Two Year Strategy and How It Contributes to HPNC's Mission

Initiatives	Action Plans and Outcomes		Performance Indicators
<p>#2: Partnerships: Develop strategic partnerships, diminish ineffectual relationships and build community.</p>	<p>Year 1 (2011/12)</p>	<p>a) Have all local environmental groups and partners as active Nature Centre members</p> <p>b) Reduce and Eliminate confusion between similar sounding local environmental groups</p> <p>c) Identify and nurture several key relationships such as online nature awareness groups, educational or potential sponsorship organizations</p>	<p>a) Reach out to all current City and volunteer environmental programs to explain Nature Centre mandate and benefits</p> <p>b) Sponsor High Park environmental planning day to coordinate information amongst environmental groups as well as generate membership programs, events and activities.</p> <p>c) Co-host membership events with local groups and partners.</p> <p>a) Maintain distinct HPNC identity</p> <p>b) change name of "Members" to "Friends of NC"</p> <p>c) clarify relationship with "HPCAC" (and any successor organizations such as the High Park Resources Group)</p> <p>a) recruit Fundraising Director to sit on Board of Directors</p> <p>b) re-establish fundraising committee</p> <p>c) create fundraising plan including target amount to sustain NC programs and necessary funding to secure adequate staffing levels</p> <p>d) identify corporate/individual/foundation/government funding prospects for NC program</p> <p>e) concentrate on high yield fundraising events (more than \$3000)</p>

### 3. HPNC Two Year Strategy and How It Contributes to HPNC's Mission

Initiatives	Action Plans and Outcomes		Performance Indicators
		d) Grow and stabilize financial partnerships to meet HPNC's strategies, goals and objectives	
	Year 2 (2012/13)	a) Assess resources and partnerships needed to contemplate move to larger premises and create plan to achieve.  b) Develop and execute plan to capitalize on partnerships with local people and organizations that have an interest in High Park (neighbourhood, park users etc)	a) Create physical space assessment b) Create partnerships plan

### 3. HPNC Two Year Strategy and How It Contributes to HPNC's Mission

Initiatives	Action Plans and Outcomes		Performance Indicators
<p>#3: Membership: Deeply and meaningfully reconnect with membership</p>	<p>Year 1 (2011/12)</p>	<p>a) Create membership-only content specific to outdoor education and naturalist knowledge</p> <p>b) Improve transparency and flow of information to members</p> <p>c) Make a positive contribution to the natural environment of High Park (and the City) Sponsor member events, activities and updates that promote giving back to High Park</p>	<p>a) Establish membership website/webpage or web presence and provide current content related to either outdoor education or naturalist knowledge</p> <p>b) Host membership-only forums and information sessions. Have the Nature Centre sponsor meetings (provide space or resources) for other environmental groups within the park.</p> <p>c) Provide daily updates about environmental conditions and activities within the park (Twitter, daily news releases). Establish working relationship with all staff so that they can report on a daily conditions within High Park.</p> <p>a) Establish membership website/webpage or web presence</p> <p>b) Produce quarterly membership newsletter</p> <p>c) Host membership-only forums and information sessions</p> <p>a) Provide daily updates about environmental conditions and activities within the park (Twitter, daily news releases ...).</p> <p>b) Hold members only stewardship events that provides training and supervision, in coordination with the City, to help alleviate environmental impact of Nature Centre programs.</p>

### 3. HPNC Two Year Strategy and How It Contributes to HPNC's Mission

Initiatives	Action Plans and Outcomes		Performance Indicators
	Year 2 (2012/13)	a) Double membership and membership contributions in two years	a) Rebrand and relaunch members under Nature Centre umbrella. Friends of High Park Nature Centre, Nature Centre Neighbours ...  b) Set benefits of membership. Discounts or early access on HPNC programs, discounts with local merchants, members-only discussion panels/workshops  c) Promote membership at all events  d) Bring community and corporate partners into the membership program. Establish community/corporate membership levels and provide membership to all large corporate donors.

### 3. HPNC Two Year Strategy and How It Contributes to HPNC's Mission

Initiatives	Action Plans and Outcomes		Performance Indicators
#4: Marketing and Communication: Establish reputation of the Nature Centre as the Toronto leader in outdoor education.	Year 1 (2011/12)	a) Create clear and consistent messaging which confirms HPNC's mandate	a) clarify organizational phraseology;  b) create a logo that is distinct from other groups and represents the key characteristics of the NC;  c) develop a tagline that captures a key phrase or words;  d) a web site with enhanced capabilities such as online registration  e) a wikipedia entry  f) increased media exposure to major events and stories  g) legal name change from HPI to NC  h) signage and materials with consistent branding that result in a greater profile for events at which the NC is present/organizing
	Year 2 (2012/13)	a) Have a more clearly defined identity, community and brand associated with the HPNC	a) Online community growth from 1000 fans on Facebook to 1500



### 3. HPNC Two Year Strategy and How It Contributes to HPNC's Mission

Initiatives	Action Plans and Outcomes		Performance Indicators
	Year 2 (2012/13)	a) Review Strategic Plan and actions to date to ensure HPNC is on track to achieve (or amend plan as required)  b) Further Broaden Board of Directors	a) add 1-2 Board additional members who have expertise which is needed by HPNC but lacking on the then current Board of Directors

#### 4. Risk Assessment

In order of significance, events of material significance that might impede HPNC's pursuit of stated objectives along with the best response to the event.

#	Description	Impact	Response
1.	Lack of Adequate Financial Resources	<p>Either current or risk of reduced support from City of Toronto in light of current discussion re City's budget shortfall.</p> <p>Assuming financial support for the High Park Nature Centre were to stay at current levels, there is an inability to offer additional courses or expanded programming forces HPNC to rely upon grants and fundraising for a significant portion of its budget. A large portion of volunteer and staff time is therefore dedicated to ensure funding rather than on environmental education and restoration.</p>	
2.	Inability to Expand Programs	<p>The lack of adequate funding along with the physical constraints of HPNC's current location forces HPI to limit programming, depriving many members of the surrounding community of an environmental education and the ability to actively engage in the stewardship of High Park. Labour intensive programs, such as restoration and stewardship, are limited and key sectors of the community, such as youth and seniors, are unable to participate.</p>	
3.	Confusion in the Natural Environment Education marketplace	<p>Diversion of funding and program users to other organizations that are mistaken for HPNC.</p>	