



# STRATEGIC PLAN

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2021-2026





What do worms eat?  
 They like to eat worms together.  
 They like to eat together and curl  
 up together.  
 Three worms together.  
 Worms can have feelings for each other.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. MISSION, VISION & VALUES	04
2. ABOUT US & HISTORY	05
3. FOUR PILLARS	10
4. GOALS, STRATEGIES & MEASURABLES	11
5. EDUCATIONAL PEDAGOGY	19
6. BOARD, STAFF & CONTACT INFORMATION	22

**Our 5-year strategic plan is meant to be used to guide major and minor decision making by board and staff and to be consistent with the values, goals, and objectives such that Connolly Ranch Education Center can best fulfill its mission.**

## MISSION

Connolly Ranch Education Center (CREC) is a leader in farm-based education. We instill children of all ages with a deep respect for the environment; a strong understanding of farming and sustainable agriculture; and a love for the natural world.

## VISION

A world where children of all ages have a deep respect for the land and a connection to nature.

## VALUES & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### **Intention:**

We believe in the benefits of setting intentions. Working with intention enriches the conversation, creates connection, cultivates respect, and often ensures the highest quality outcome.

### **Stewardship:**

To care for the natural world and its inhabitants, Connolly Ranch Education Center promotes stewardship through discovery-based education, which results in a meaningful connection to nature and humankind.

### **Curiosity:**

We believe that learning is a lifelong journey spurred by curiosity. We encourage children of all ages to ask questions and continue on their quest for knowledge and to look to nature for the answers.

### **Collaboration:**

In the words of Henry Ford, "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success." We know that collaboration takes effort and believe it is worthwhile as it will create a cross-functional success beyond our wildest dreams.

### **Longevity:**

How will our actions shape the future? Thinking, planning and taking action for the long term allows for Connolly Ranch Education Center to fulfill its mission and teach the power of a legacy.

### **Adaptation:**

When we understand the current state of things, thoughtful and impactful change is possible. We witness nature's ability to adapt to the ever-changing environment and we want to mirror that ability to thrive.



## ABOUT US

Our beautiful, historic property in the heart of Napa is the perfect place for children of all ages to discover the joys and wonders of nature in our outdoor classrooms. We incorporate sustainable land management and farming practices to preserve the historical context and natural beauty of the property and promote environmental stewardship through discovery-based education. Whether it's visiting with our animals, working in our edible garden, or exploring our Wild Spaces, CREC offers everyone an opportunity to make a mindful connection with the natural world.

## HISTORY

In 1915 the Connolly Family moved to Napa County and acquired the property on which the present day Connolly Ranch Education Center operates. They cultivated a small farm and homestead on the land, which stayed in their family until the early 1990's when Peggy Connolly generously donated the property to the Land Trust of Napa County with the intention to help Napa Valley youth create a deep connection with the land and learn for it.

Through this noble philanthropic act and the subsequent efforts of the Land Trust, Connolly Ranch was soon established as a protected place in which children of all ages could expand their knowledge of nature and farming. The Ranch hosted its first field trip in 1993 and steadily developed into the dynamic farm-based education institution it is today.



## THE ANIMALS & FARM OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

At CREC our animals are considered to be one of our most valuable resources. The Ranch is home to chickens, goats, sheep, pigs, geese, miniature horses and donkeys. We implement humane animal husbandry practices and partner with top-notch local animal care professionals to ensure that they live long, happy and productive lives teaching children about stewardship and natural science. CREC celebrates heritage breeds of livestock as means of preserving agricultural heritage and showcasing animals that look significantly different than those we see in popular media. We harvest eggs from our chickens and fiber and wool from our goats and sheep to utilize in Farm-to-Table cooking projects and crafts.

Our farm animals provide a unique opportunity for children to develop empathy, respect and compassion for all living things. Our interactive curriculum fosters an understanding of human impact on animals wellbeing as children learn how to take care of our livestock. Through these personal interactions, our students develop an understanding of the inherent nature and individual personalities of other living things.



# THE GARDEN OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

Our educational garden at CREC serves as an outdoor classroom and play space in which children can learn and explore core concepts of biodynamic farming, nutrition and the natural sciences. We cultivate a diversified produce garden year-round and utilize the harvest in Farm-to-Table cooking activities and craft projects.

We care for numerous fruit trees, perennials and California native flora to foster a pollinator-friendly environment. Compost generated on site is used to amend planting beds and ensure optimal soil health. Exploration of the garden leads to the discovery of worms, roly polys, blue belly lizards and other tiny creatures inspiring a connection to nature that can't be obtained in an indoor classroom.

In the Edible Garden, we learn how to be present in nature by engaging our 5 senses. Through hands-on gardening, children learn not only about where their food comes from, they actually play an essential role in the seed to table process. Our Farm-to-Table programs allow children to harvest directly from the garden and learn the ins and outs of cooking a fresh meal.





## THE WILD SPACES OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

The Wild Spaces surrounding the farm lend to the freedom of exploration - a space where children can dive into their imaginations and have meaningful connections with nature. This is where divergent thinking comes alive as kids are presented with endless opportunities to problem solve and work together. Whether they are designing a tree fort, attempting to get a heavy log from one end to the other or playing a group game, children are taking risks, communicating with one another and building lasting self - confidence.





# OUR CORE PILLARS TO GROWTH & SUCCESS

Our core pillars for growth and success are the foundation of what we believe, how we work, and where we put our resources.



EDUCATION



COMMUNITY



FARM & FACILITY



FINANCE

# GOAL #1 EDUCATION

**To provide meaningful, lifelong educational experiences that empower individuals to build healthy relationships with themselves, others and the natural world.**

## **Objective 1:**

To create and facilitate a cohesive continuum of educational experiences that meet individuals where they are while providing a pathway for personal growth.

### **Strategies:**

- Develop and define a curriculum for every age and developmental milestone.
- Create a student evaluation system that allows educators and parents to work together and have a strong understanding of the child's development and developmental goals. Opened Fall and Winter Outdoor School for K-6 graders to compliment state required virtual learning.

### **Measurable:**

Sustain a 25% re-enrollment at the family level, across milestone programs such as Parent/Child to Earthlings to Explorers and Afterschool.

## **Objective 2:**

To expand educational programs and outreach to further address the needs of middle school, high school, and adult students.

### **Strategy:**

- Build out a defined high school internship program.
- Partner with Napa Unified School District and surrounding school districts and provide a built out field trip program and pathway that complements the elementary, middle and high school curriculums.
- Create an Education Committee.

### **Measurable:**

Increase the number of middle and high school students enrolled from a baseline of 1 in 2019 to 4 by 2025.

# GOAL #1 **EDUCATION** *(continued)*

**To provide meaningful, lifelong educational experiences that empower individuals to build healthy relationships with themselves, others and the natural world.**

## **Objective 3:**

To capture the knowledge of environmental science and sustainability experts to enhance and bring to life CREC's discovery-based curriculum.

### **Strategies:**

- Invest in professional development to cultivate exemplary nature/outdoor and farm-based educators.
- Purposefully manage CREC's farm animals to complement our curriculum.
- Utilize farm and environmental experts to augment curriculum and enhance children's experience of the farm.

### **Measurable:**

Three to four outsourced experts will have reviewed and enhanced CREC's discovery-based curriculum every year to prepare for the upcoming school calendar year.

## **Objective 4:**

To lead and serve as a model for other educational organizations (curriculum, culture, diversity, 4 pillars, etc.)

### **Strategies:**

- Copyright CREC's Hourglass Model of Learning and Relationships and other original CREC curriculum.
- Present at national conferences, e.g. Farm Based Education Network or Children and Nature Network.
- Strengthen inclusionary practices in our programs and curriculum, with our organizational structure and with our community partners.
- To provide internal training and education to volunteers and educators and invest in professional development opportunities.

### **Measurable:**

Increase the number of views on the Educational Pedagogy page of CREC's website by 10% YOY, along with the number of conference presentations dependent on conference schedules.

## GOAL #2 COMMUNITY

To provide a unique outdoor environment where all communities are welcome to the farm, take part in stewardship, and experience the magic of the natural world.

### Objective 1:

Have a strong relationship with the community in order to provide meaningful experiences that deliver on our mission and ensure our role as a community asset.

#### Strategies:

- Develop strong working relationships with key community partners and participate in their events around education, agriculture and farming.
- Be active participants in community and city resource organizations.

#### Measurable:

Increase community programs registration by 10% year-over-year and get feedback through an annual community partner survey.

### Objective 2:

Develop a defined educational curriculum around community programming that invites children of all ages and backgrounds to create meaningful connections with nature.

#### Strategies:

- Have an established financial assistance program, a majority of which is funded by donations and program revenue.
- Further develop weekend programming that invites Napa Valley residents and visitors to connect with nature and better understand our region's unique agricultural landscape.
- Have a dedicated educator that oversees all community programs to solidify the bridge between our four pillars.

#### Measurable:

Review feedback from the box provided at every community program and identify top 3 common occurring themes and provide a solution or action plan.

## GOAL #2 **COMMUNITY** *(continued)*

To provide a unique outdoor environment where all communities are welcome to the farm, take part in stewardship, and experience the magic of the natural world.

### **Objective 3:**

Provide opportunities for community members to have meaningful involvement at Connolly Ranch.

### **Strategy:**

- Develop opportunities for community members to become volunteers and interns on the farm, financial supporters and/or committee members.

### **Measurable:**

Increase volunteer and intern enrollment by 5-10% year-over-year.



## GOAL #3 FARM & FACILITIES

**Fully utilize our farm and facilities in a sustainable manner to support Connolly Ranch's mission consistent with the donor's original intent.**

### **Objective 1:**

Maintain and optimize our use of its wild space, farm and garden for education programs for children that instill a respect for the environment and a love of the natural world.

### **Strategies:**

- Define CREC's wild spaces to be used for outdoor education.
- Use the farm and garden to impart a strong understanding of farming and sustainable agriculture.
- Create and document curriculum aligned with nature/outdoor education and conservation best practices.
- Continue to expand/refine curriculum aligned with sustainable agriculture and farm-based education best practices.
- Invest in educators' professional development to support exemplary nature/outdoor and farm-based education.
- Expand the existing programming to optimize the use of CREC's land for educational purposes.
- Purposefully manage CREC's farm animals to complement farm-based education curriculum.
- Utilize farm experts to augment curriculum and enhance children's experience on the farm.
- (Periodically) evaluate CREC's outdoor education and farm-based programs and refine in response to the evaluation's findings.
- Regularly re-evaluate CREC's third-party accreditation.
- Expand programming to a broad and diverse audience to educate the community about sustainable agriculture and farming.

### **Measurable:**

Beginning and end of session evaluations measure/document children's connection and love of the natural world and their development consistent with the CREC programs' (Earthlings, Explorers, Outdoor Afterschool) long-term goals.

## GOAL #3 **FARM & FACILITIES** *(continued)*

**Fully utilize our farm and facilities in a sustainable manner to support Connolly Ranch's mission consistent with the donor's original intent.**

### **Objective 2:**

Execute against a comprehensive facility management plan aligned with programming that ensures the viability of Connolly Ranch as a permanent asset.

#### **Strategies:**

- Develop physical infrastructure to carry out existing and new programmatic objectives.
- Develop and execute on a multi-year facility maintenance plan.
- Adapt farming practices to align with principles of sustainable agriculture.
- Adjust and document land management practices to be more environmentally sustainable.

#### **Measurable:**

A multi-year comprehensive facility management plan in place by end of 2021; reviewed/progress measured at what intervals annual at budget review.

### **Objective 3:**

Permanent protection of Connolly Ranch to honor and preserve the donor's intent.

#### **Strategies:**

- Solidify CREC long-term financial position and our ability to sustain the farm into the future.
- Continue to communicate to the community the donor's original intent for Connolly Ranch.
- Employ multiple ways to protect the Ranch in perpetuity.

#### **Measurable:**

Create a strategic plan and proposal for permanent land protection.

## GOAL #4 **FINANCE**

To build a strong and continuously improving finance and administration program that results in the financial health and stability of CREC in perpetuity.

### **Objective 1:**

To build a strong and continuously improving finance and administration program that results in the financial health and stability of CREC in perpetuity.

#### **Strategy:**

- Allocate funds within the annual budget towards a cash reserve.

#### **Measurable:**

Six month cash reserve by 2026 to ensure CREC's longevity.

### **Objective 2:**

Set quarterly reviews of all financial statements (balance sheet, P&L, cash flow) with analysis and strategic financial plan provided by Executive Directors and Internal Affairs Committee.

#### **Strategies:**

- Provide direct cash flow forecast during the quarterly review.
- Provide the community with an annual report and 990 to be distributed in April each year.
- Dedicate an Internal Affairs Committee meeting every quarter to an in depth review of all finances, plus an annual audit.

#### **Measurable:**

Document agreed tactics discussed in quarterly Internal Affairs Committee's review of financial statements.





## GOAL #4 **FINANCE** *(continued)*

**To build a strong and continuously improving finance and administration program that results in the financial health and stability of CREC in perpetuity.**

### **Objective 3:**

Execute against a comprehensive finance and administration plan aligned with programming that ensures the viability of Connolly Ranch as a permanent asset.

#### **Strategies:**

- Provide a defined matrix of roles and responsibilities and conduct annual performance evaluations to ensure predictable success.
- Define an annual farm and facilities and educational programs budget to support overall growth and development within the organization.

#### **Measurable:**

Annual performance review that assess manager, coordinator and director level performance reviews to ensure alignment with budgetary objectives and actuals.

### **Objective 4:**

To define and articulate CREC's philosophy, values and approach to education and serving our community.

#### **Strategies:**

- Provide formal documentation and marketing materials that reflect CREC's values and philosophy.
- Include review of CREC's philosophy, values and approach to education and serving our community in all employees' onboarding.
- Use values and guiding principles as benchmarks in performance reviews.

#### **Measurable:**

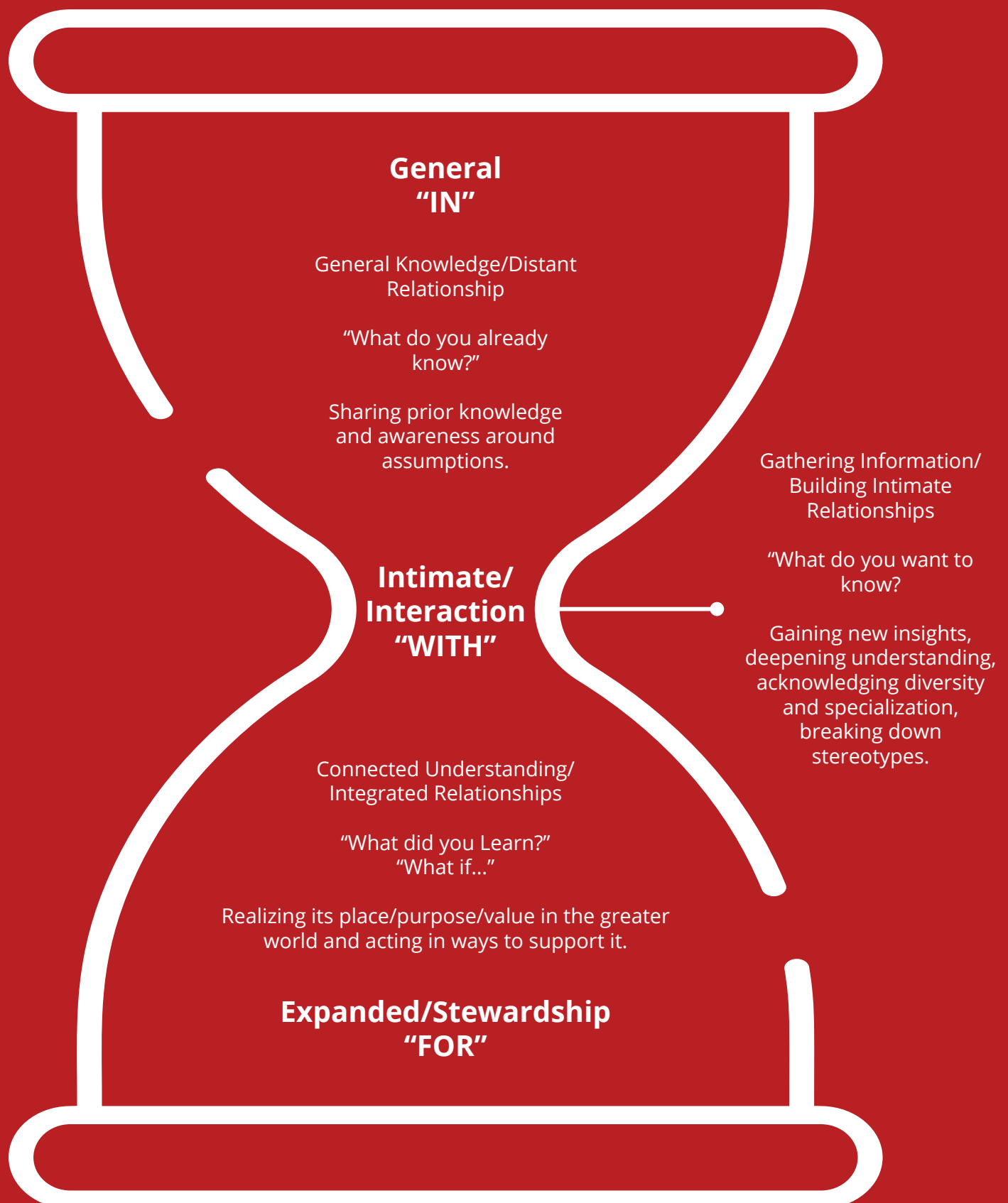
Performance reviews measure if a staff member is ready to take on more or less responsibility within the organization.

# EDUCATIONAL PEDAGOGY

Connolly Ranch Education Center's unique discovery-based pedagogy is centered around cultivating social, emotional and ecological intelligence as children of all ages explore and interact with our animals, garden and wild spaces. Our natural and ever-changing educational environment provides spontaneous opportunities to explore and learn from "what just happened." We lead with inquiry to encourage children to become dynamic learners, mindful leaders, and divergent thinkers.



# HOURGLASS MODEL OF LEARNING & RELATIONSHIPS<sup>©</sup>





## HOURGLASS MODEL OF LEARNING & RELATIONSHIPS<sup>©</sup>

How we grow as individuals, families, communities, and beyond comes down to relationships. Connolly Ranch provides learning experiences that help children build healthy relationships with themselves, other people, and the natural world.

### **GENERAL KNOWLEDGE / DISTANT RELATIONSHIPS (IN NATURE)**

Children share prior knowledge and awareness around a particular topic

### **INFORMATION GATHERING / INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS (WITH NATURE)**

Guide children to recognize more intimate, personalized experiences, feelings or insights in order to deepen their understanding

### **CONNECTIVE UNDERSTANDING / INTEGRATED RELATIONSHIPS (FOR NATURE)**

Children expand out to the greater world to make connections with other experiences or knowledge



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*Per Casey, Board Chair*

Katharine Falace

Craig Finster

Gene Kelly

Chelsea Kohler

Arthur Roosa

## STAFF

*Katie Hackett, Co Executive Director*

*Heidi Soldinger, Co Executive Director*

*Karla Compagnon, Lead Dual Language Educator*

*Jessica Eutsler, Farm & Garden Coordinator*

*Jeff Freed, Lead Outdoor School Educator*

*Kevin Giselbach, Facilities Coordinator*

*Micayla Lowe, Program Manager*

*Mackenzie Miller, Lead Program & Community Educator*

*Cheryl Moore, Administrative Manager*

*Maddie Thompson, Lead Early Childhood Educator*

3141 Browns Valley Road, Napa, CA 94558

707 224 1894

[info@connollyranch.org](mailto:info@connollyranch.org) | [www.connollyranch.org](http://www.connollyranch.org)

501(c)3 nonprofit organization

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