

# *Directions*

Journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators // Fall 2024

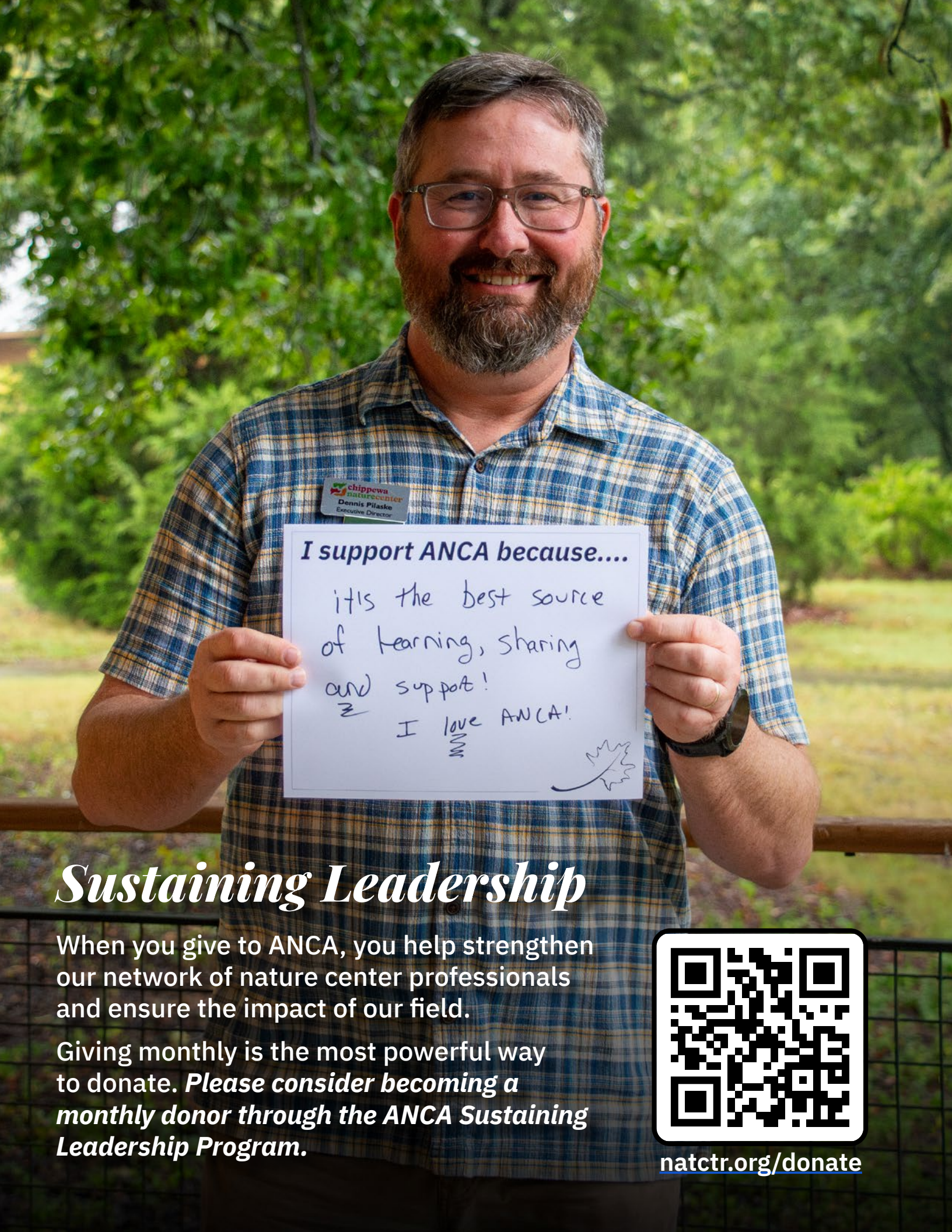
**ELEVATING  
OUR FIELD**

**OVERTIME  
RULES**

**BUILDING  
PARTNERSHIPS**

**SUCCESSFUL  
SUCCESSION**

*and more*



Chippewa  
Dennis Pilaske  
Executive Director

I support ANCA because....  
it's the best source  
of learning, sharing  
and support!  
I love ANCA!

## Sustaining Leadership

When you give to ANCA, you help strengthen our network of nature center professionals and ensure the impact of our field.

Giving monthly is the most powerful way to donate. *Please consider becoming a monthly donor through the ANCA Sustaining Leadership Program.*



[natctr.org/donate](https://natctr.org/donate)

## CONTENTS

- 1-2 Director's Notes
- 3-4 Overtime Rules Halted
- 5-7 Dot's Place: A Dedicated BIPOC Gathering Space
- 9-12 Restoring a Golf Course
- 13-15 Outdoor Escape Room
- 17-18 The Speed of Trust
- 19-24 Successful Succession
- 25-26 Solar-Powered Revolution

The *Directions* journal contains news and trends in the nature & environmental learning center profession, as well as relevant resources and stories of innovative leadership.

If you are part of the nature center profession and wish to receive more resources like *Directions*, see [ANCA membership levels](#).

*Directions* offers advertising space for [ANCA Business Partners](#), as well as individual [advertising opportunities](#).

Cover photo: An autumnal scene on a trail at Lime Hollow Nature Center in Cortland, New York. Lime Hollow is featured in the Overtime Rules article on page 3.

## About ANCA

The Association of Nature Center Administrators is a private nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting best leadership and management practices for nature and environmental learning centers. Serving more than 700 members, ANCA is the leader in the profession.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**PRESIDENT**  
Kristin Smith  
*Water Resources Education Center*

**PRESIDENT-ELECT**  
John Myers  
*Indian Creek Nature Center*

**V.P. STRATEGIC DIRECTION**  
Dennis Pilaske  
*Chippewa Nature Center*

**V.P. DEVELOPMENT**  
Chad Truxall  
*Marine Discovery Center*

**SECRETARY**  
Kitty Pochman  
*Linda Loring Nature Foundation*

**TREASURER**  
Jason Sanders  
*Dodge Nature Center*

### MEMBERS AT LARGE

Kay Carlson  
*Independent*  
Veronica Frehm  
*Friends of MacArthur Beach State Park*

Jeff Giesen  
*North Cascades Institute*  
John Harrod  
*Partnership for the Delaware Estuary*

Javier de León  
*Estero Llano Grande State Park & World Birding Center*

Allison Mackley  
*Berks Nature*  
Ann Wasser  
*Severson Dells Nature Center*

Andy Williams  
*Independent*  
Bryan Wood  
*Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center*

### STAFF

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
Jen Levy

**DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS**  
Asa Duffee

**DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS & MEMBER SERVICES**  
Daniel Auer



© 2024 Association of Nature Center Administrators  
P.O. Box 464, Logan, Utah 84323  
435.787.8209  
[natctr.org](https://natctr.org)



# Director's Notes: Elevating the Importance of Our Work

Jen Levy, ANCA Executive Director

**At the September 2024 Annual Summit in Memphis, the ANCA Board hosted an evening of roundtable discussions with members, designed to gather insights essential for our next strategic plan.**

We divided Summit attendees into ten peer groups based on leadership tenure, and each group met with one or two board members.

During these sessions, we asked each group:

- What are your biggest challenges?
- How are you addressing those challenges?
- What skills, experiences, or resources do you need?
- What trends or changes will most impact ANCA members over the next five years?
- What trends in the profession should we consider for our strategic planning?
- Is there anything we haven't asked that would be useful for planning?

We are now reviewing the notes from each discussion to identify key themes. One theme that currently stands out is the need to elevate our field's value and make a compelling case for ANCA's impact, as well as that of our members.

Creating a strong case for support is essential, both for our member organizations and for ANCA. We need to communicate our unique value, aligning stakeholders, donors, and members with shared goals. ANCA must stand out as the only organization dedicated to supporting nature center administrators. Like many of

our members, we rely on philanthropic support to fuel our mission.

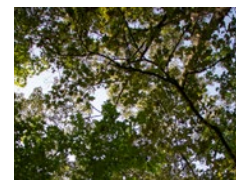
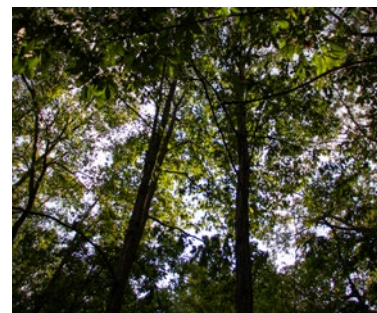
We are a nonprofit and have consistently sought contributed income to meet our budget and program objectives. We communicate the value of nature centers and our mission to support leaders, but we face challenges in showcasing quantifiable ways we elevate the field. We need a new case statement to demonstrate our impact clearly, highlighting our measurable contributions such as advancing leadership, advocating for best practices, and promoting sustainable programming. Success stories and data will underscore why ANCA's work is critical to environmental and nature education.

To help create this crucial case statement, we are partnering with James Misner, Founder and Owner of The Kipos Group. Hiring a consultant ensures the project is completed efficiently, without pulling ANCA staff from core responsibilities. This resulting work will anchor our fundraising efforts, articulating our value and impact. By investing in this process, we gain an external perspective from fundraising experts who can help us highlight strengths and address challenges effectively. We met James at the Summit. The Kipos Group was a Table Sponsor and James led two fundraising programs that were very well received by at-

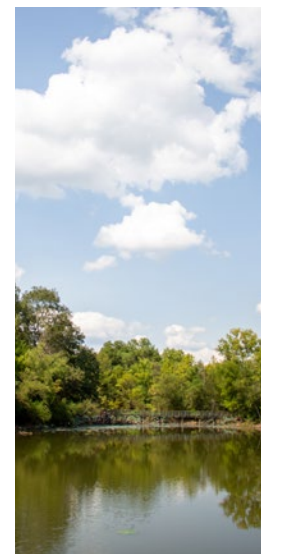
tendees. James is passionate about helping non-profit organizations achieve success and make a positive impact in their communities. We share a similar passion for our members' success and look forward to working with him.

Gathering member input at the Summit is essential as we plan, but not all our members attend this annual event. As we review the notes from the Summit discussions, we will look for themes and questions to explore with the full membership. A comprehensive understanding of our members' needs and priorities is critical in guiding ANCA's strategic direction.

As we move forward with our strategic planning, we remain committed to fostering a strong, unified voice for the nature center community. By leveraging the insights gathered from our members and working alongside experts like James Misner, ANCA aims to not only advance our mission but also to elevate the role of nature centers in their communities. We will continue engaging with our members throughout this process to ensure our goals and initiatives align with their needs and aspirations. Together, we can strengthen our field, amplify our impact, and secure the support needed to lead the next generation of nature center leadership. 🌱



*Pictured: Scenes from the 2024 ANCA Annual Summit at MoSH-Lichterman Nature Center in Memphis, Tennessee.*



# Overtime Rules Halted Amid ANCA Members' Preparation

Asa Duffee, ANCA Director of Marketing & Communications

**O**n November 15, a U.S. federal judge blocked nationwide regulations that would have expanded overtime benefits to more than 4 million workers. Nature centers across the country were in the middle of adapting to the new overtime rules, which had partially gone into effect.

In April the Department of Labor announced its plans for new minimum salary thresholds that determine who is eligible for overtime pay. The thresholds were planned to be implemented in two phases: the first phase went into effect on July 1, and the second phase was set for January 1, 2025.

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, executive, administrative, and professional employees earning less than a minimum salary threshold are automatically eligible for overtime pay, or 1.5 times their regular pay for any time worked over 40 hours a week. In 2019, the threshold was set to \$35,568 per year. This year's rules first phase raised the threshold in July to \$43,888 per year, and the second phase in January would have raised the threshold to \$58,656 per year. With the judge's decision, the threshold reverts to the 2019 level.

When the overtime changes were announced, many organizations were forced to have difficult conversations and implement changes to budgets, programs, and staff. Some ANCA member organizations already adapted employee classifications and organizational operations because the first salary threshold phase was implemented in July, and many organizations were preparing for the new threshold in 2025.

Now that the overtime rules have been struck down, many ANCA members are left frustrated and wondering how to proceed. For those who already implemented changes and had plans to adapt further, the question arises: is it easier to move forward with the changes rather than discard them?

In addition to complicating plans and operations, this saga surrounding overtime rules has brought new energy to discussions about equitable compensation and work-life balance within the nature center community.

Right: A trail in early autumn at Lime Hollow Nature Center in Cortland, New York.

## COMPENSATION IN OUR PROFESSION

As ANCA has shared previously, wages in our field are low compared to similar professions. [ANCA members are working toward equitable compensation](#), but such efforts take time, and there are no simple solutions.

The Labor Department's now-defunct 2025 salary threshold would have significantly impacted many nature centers, as the threshold was above what many nature center professionals earn.

Ilya Shmulenson, Executive Director of Lime Hollow Nature Center in Cortland, New York, directly connects profession-wide wages and the proposed salary thresholds.

"Historically, the wages have been so low in this

field that it's hard to get to those numbers for multiple positions," he says.

Shmulenson reports that of the 15 people who work at Lime Hollow year-round, only two are salaried and exempt. The organization is working toward higher wages, and strives to have more salaried and exempt staff in the future.

Shmulenson says that these efforts require considering how the nature center's business model can support such positions.

"It will help inform how we price programs, how we fundraise, how we communicate our costs," says Shmulenson.

## BEING PREPARED FOR FUTURE CHANGES

It is unclear how the incoming Trump administration will approach the overtime salary thresholds. The current thresholds were set under the first Trump administration in 2019.

While future updates are uncertain, organizations can be prepared

for any changes by ensuring that all staff position descriptions are accurate and up to date.

At Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center in Lanesboro, Minnesota, the organization audited all staff positions for Fair Labor Standards Act compliance when the Department of Labor last adjusted overtime rules in 2019. This provided Eagle Bluff with an existing framework for reviewing position descriptions this year.

Colleen Foehrenbacher, Executive Director of Eagle Bluff, says that the organization once again reviewed all positions for FLSA compliance, particularly looking at the duties of each role. Though the proposed overtime rules have been blocked, organizations like Eagle Bluff are now better positioned to adapt to future overtime regulation updates.

## FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING

The Labor Department's proposed rules would have upended how some ANCA member organizations have operated for years. Many nature centers offer flexible scheduling so that if an exempt employee works over 40 hours in a week, they can later take an equivalent amount of time off.

However, if that same employee were no longer exempt — as many expected to be under the now-defunct regulations — this type of flexible scheduling would not be permitted.

A culture of flexibility has been the norm for years at the Highlands Center for Natural History in Prescott, Arizona. Executive Direc-



Tapping a maple tree as part of a program at Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center in Lanesboro, Minnesota.

tor Sarah Vincent says they've long used that flexibility in busy times per year, like summer camps.

"In camp season, we are pulling some really big weeks," says Vincent. "Then we honor those with some really flexible scheduling right after camp with big chunks of time off."

Vincent emphasizes that the organization's approaches to flexibility have been structured to promote work-life balance, not prevent it.

Now, organizations like the Highlands Center can choose to continue such flexibility in their operations, but the recent events highlight that organizations could need to change such an approach depending on future updates to the overtime threshold.

## MOVING FORWARD

With the salary thresholds set to the 2019 level, employers can now decide whether to keep planned changes to organizational operations or employee classifications. ANCA is monitoring the impact of the recent ruling and will continue to share resources for employers. 🌿



The information provided here is intended for general guidance only and should not be considered legal or HR advice. When evaluating or implementing changes related to overtime rules, we recommend consulting with a qualified HR professional or legal advisor to ensure compliance with all applicable laws and regulations.



# Dot's Place: A 100-Year Tale of Inheritance, Displacement, and Nature Connection

*Emily A. Seiffert, Deputy Director  
North Branch Nature Center in Montpelier, Vermont*

**WHEN DR. OPEYEMI PARHAM RECEIVED AN INHERITANCE FROM HER AUNT SEVEN YEARS AGO**, she knew she wanted to use it to create something special: a place for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) to gather in a natural setting — a safe and beautiful space to build community, here in the **third-whitest state in the country**.

Little did she know, when she bought a yurt to bring this dream to fruition, that a 100-year flood a few years later would sweep the yurt away — nor that it would safely find its way to a nature center eager and ready to support her dream.

## A FAMILY INHERITANCE

Dr. Parham — or “Dr. O” as she warmly invites folks to call her — has lived in central Vermont for six years, but this story begins 100 years ago, and over 900 miles away in Union Point, Georgia. This is where Dr. O’s aunt — Dorothy Louise Parham, or “Dot,” as she was known — was born on her family’s farm, the third of four daughters. Being descendants of enslaved Africans, her family lived in fear of white Klansmen, who targeted Black families for owning and working their own land. So in the 1920s, the Parham family joined the Great Migration and moved north to Evanston, Illinois.

Dot loved to be outside, and dreamed of becoming a farmer. She planned to return to that land in Georgia and farm it, but societal expectations and a full scholarship to Howard University steered her onto a different path that led her to a happy marriage and a lucrative career. When Dot died at age 92, she gave ten loved ones (including her niece, Dr. O) access to intergenerational

wealth. Dr. O used her share to purchase a yurt, which she named “Dot’s Place,” and set about offering it to the community as a place for connection to nature, to self, and to others.

“BIPOC Americans have often been excluded from leisure time in nature and from programs that educate us about our relationship to the natural world, so after a career in medicine, I wanted to create a place to help people gather and access a different type of healing, in nature,” said Dr. O.

First located at a campground near the Winooski River in Plainfield, Vermont, Dot’s Place served as the nexus for Dr. O’s dream, but region-wide catastrophic flooding in July 2023 caused extensive damage to the campground and permanently changed the site’s topography, leaving no room for the yurt.

“Luckily, it floated, and was carried downstream a hundred yards before being gently deposited in a newly created wetland,” Dr. O explained. She quickly began searching for a safe new home for Dot’s Place, but the flooding had exacerbated an already **gridlocked real estate market**, with hundreds of families and businesses

in dozens of towns suddenly finding themselves displaced.

## FINDING A NEW HOME AT NBNC

Dr. O soon reached out to Sister Sankofa, a BIPOC activist and community advocate here in Montpelier, Vermont, who has been connected to North Branch Nature Center (NBNC) since 2021 when she began utilizing our free- and reduced-cost rentals for BIPOC folks. Sister Sankofa made introductions and soon we were all dreaming up the many ways that Dot’s Place could be used at the nature center. Before long, Dr. O generously offered to donate the yurt to NBNC, and we agreed to steward this gift by taking on responsibility for its repairs and upkeep, and by fostering its continued use as a BIPOC affinity space.

We were recently asked why NBNC chose to make space for Dot’s Place, and why we chose to pay for the requisite upfront repairs, site work, and permitting, which totaled \$10,000. Our answer is three-part:

It’s the right thing for Dr. O. She articulated a need and a vision to continue the legacy of Dot’s Place, and she told us that she felt safe and comfortable at NBNC. As white allies, we recognize that this feeling of belonging and safety is no small thing for a BIPOC woman in a predominantly white community. We are honored Dr. O chose to partner with NBNC, entrusting us with a piece of her family’s history and inheritance.

It’s the right thing for our community. Dr. O’s nature-based programs and gatherings are continuing in Dot’s Place, in its new location, which is fully wheelchair accessible (the old location was not). Sister Sankofa, Dr. O, and others have been dreaming of building a BIPOC community space — ideally a whole or shared

building in downtown Montpelier. Plans for a shared space with the local food pantry were destroyed by the same flooding that displaced Dot’s Place and filled most of our downtown buildings with water and mud. The yurt now serves as one option for a BIPOC gathering place, while the dream of a larger, downtown community space continues.

It’s right for NBNC, too. NBNC is 28 years old, and for the past decade we have been steadily and successfully growing our staff size, programs, and facilities. After a major facility expansion five years ago, we are again bursting at the seams. Our constituents ask for more programs, but we are limited by our number of indoor teaching spaces (a large multipurpose room and a small one-room preschool); and by our lack of sufficient meeting and office space (18 staff members share the six small converted bedrooms of our 1800s farmhouse). Dot’s Place provides much-needed breathing room for meetings and workspace, a lightning-safe indoor space for summer camp and other programs, and a cozy spot for winter programs. We are excited to start adding new programs based out of the yurt which will serve new audiences.

## WORKING TO CLOSE THE NATURE EQUITY GAP

Saying ‘yes’ to Dr. O was firmly rooted in our commitment to closing the Nature Equity Gap. We believe all people need and deserve access to nature and nature education, and we work to dismantle the barriers that exist.

Thanks to funding from two of our foundation partners, NBNC was able to add a new position — Community Engagement Coordinator — to our staff two years ago. This position is dedicated to advancing our organization’s commitment to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. Our focus has been on building community partnerships with and co-creating

*Dr. Opeyemi Parham cuts the ribbon at the dedication of Dot’s Yurt on Juneteenth.*



*Picture at top: an inside view of Dot’s Place.*

Dot's Place (cont.)

programs with and for people historically marginalized from our field — BIPOC, Disabled, LGBTQAI+, financially disadvantaged, and more.

Our biggest successes have come when we have built relationships directly with people from — and organizations led by — the communities we seek to better welcome. Working at the speed of trust, we are learning what people in these communities want and need from NBNC. With some partnerships, we work to co-create and jointly lead programs, leaving lots of room for feedback, reflection, and refinement. With others, like that with Dr. O, we are primarily giving her the space to run her own programs on the land, based out of Dot's Place.

**A DREAM FULFILLED**

“Dot never did get to farm, so I like knowing that Dot's Place will live on as a BIPOC gathering place, on a former sheep farm, next to a Community Garden, and embedded in an organization whose mission and work is connecting people with nature. Dot would love that,” said Dr. O.

We are so grateful to Dr. O for her tremendous gift and for choosing to partner with NBNC as we work to restore and increase access to nature. What better way is there to achieve deep and systemic change, than to literally share space, and time, and resources? 🌱



Dr. Parham, or “Dr. O,” donor of the yurt Dot's Place.

Advertisements

WEST CREEK

WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP CENTER

217.893.4874  
info@taylorstudios.com  
www.taylorstudios.com

**TAYLOR STUDIOS INC.**  
WE CREATE INSPIRING AND MEMORABLE EXHIBITS

Helping Nature Centers Succeed in a 21st Century World

**DAVID CATLIN CONSULTING LLC**

davidcatlin.com

**studioOutside**  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE & MASTER PLANNING

214.954.7160 | www.studiooutside.us

# Reduce costs on your water irrigation



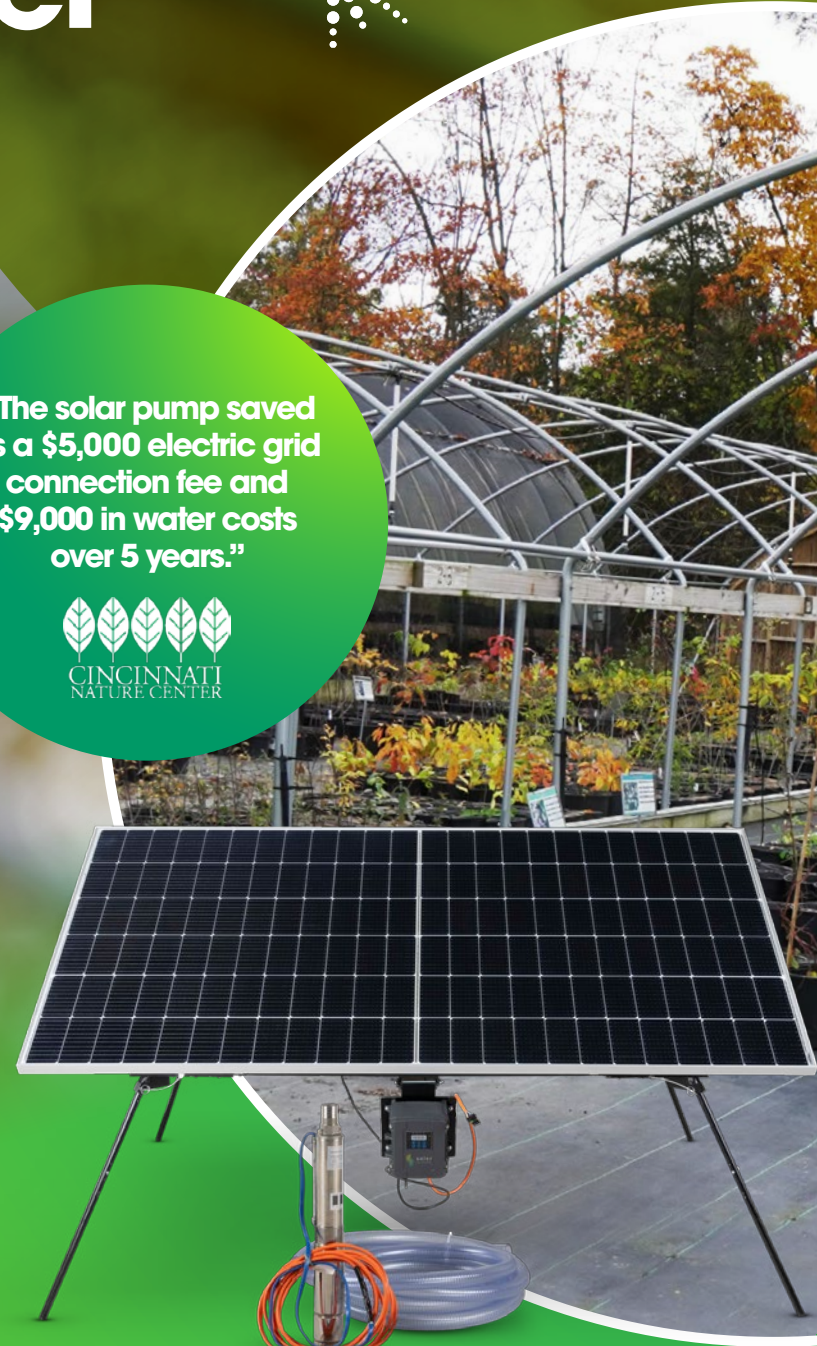
“The solar pump saved us a \$5,000 electric grid connection fee and \$9,000 in water costs over 5 years.”



We've designed a solar-powered water movement system that's unique to the horticultural market.

Get ready to revolutionize your Nature Center operations by using irrigation methods that reduce your water usage and save vital costs.

By harnessing the power of the sun, our water pumps operate with minimal carbon emissions, ensuring a greener future that aligns with your sustainability goals.



- Utilize a Natural Water source
- Sustainable water conservation
- Zero electricity required
- Saves costs increase efficiency



Scan for video case studies and to learn more

t. 513 874 7326  
e. info@solersolutions.com  
w. solersolutions.com

# Why Take on Restoring an Old Golf Course?

Ann Wasser, Executive Director  
Severson Dells Nature Center in Rockford, Illinois



Above: A view from the main building at the former Elliot Golf Course, which Severson Dells Nature Center has purchased. The property is temporarily being used for agriculture.

I am proud to share the exciting news about Severson Dells Nature Center’s decision to purchase and restore a 168-acre shuttered golf course in Rockford, Illinois. This project is more than just an expansion — it is a significant step toward fulfilling our mission and ensuring long-term organizational stability.

The restoration of this 165-acre tract of land offers a unique opportunity for conservation, community engagement, and environmental education, all while contributing to a growing national trend of repurposing underused spaces for ecological restoration.

## WHY A GOLF COURSE?

At first glance, the idea of a nature center purchasing a golf course may seem unconventional, but it’s a decision grounded in purpose. The Rockford Park District made the difficult decision to close Elliot Golf Course in 2021 as part of a larger consolidation plan. For Severson Dells, it presented a rare opportunity to transform a highly manicured landscape into a thriving natural habitat in a more urban environment.

By restoring this land, we are removing the chemical-intensive turf grass and non-native plant species typical of golf courses and replacing them with native habitats. This restoration directly contributes to the health of our local environment, creating vital habitat corridors for wildlife, while also increasing public access to nature.

One of the most significant pieces of the restoration process is daylighting and rewilding the creek that flows through the property. As a result of the property being a golf course, the creek was put into a culvert decades ago to keep the water off of the course. We will be removing the culvert and re-establishing the meander of the creek to slow the water down, re-establish natural riparian processes and improve the water quality of the creek before it flows into the Kishwaukee River. The Kishwaukee River is one of the healthiest rivers in Illinois and is home to a number of threatened and endangered species.

In addition, this purchase allows Severson Dells to expand our capacity for education and public engagement. This land will provide new opportunities to connect with nature through recreation, exploration, and learning.

## FITTING INTO OUR MISSION

The decision to purchase and restore the golf course is a natural extension of our core mission. This project provides a unique platform to engage the public in environmental stewardship, offering a tangible example of how golf courses and other highly manicured lands can be transformed into diverse native ecosystems.

Our existing programs have always emphasized the importance of preserving biodiversity, promoting sustainability, and fostering an appreciation for the natural world. This restoration project allows us to expand these educational efforts in powerful ways. Visitors will not only experience the beauty of natural habitats but also witness the dynamic process of ecological restoration firsthand. From prairie burns to wetland construction and species reintroduction, the site will become a living laboratory where people can learn about the complex relationships between land, water, plants, and animals.

Our vision is to turn this former course into a space that belongs to everyone. We are planning accessible

trails and interpretive signage, so all members of the community, regardless of physical ability or background, can enjoy and learn from the landscape.

## OPERATIONAL CHANGES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Acquiring and restoring this golf course presents both challenges and opportunities for our operations. One of the most immediate changes will be the land management responsibilities. Severson Dells Nature Center operates on a county forest preserve, so the county agency has maintained the land and the trails. With this purchase, Severson Dells will be the land holder and responsible for all of the habitat and trails, which will require increased staffing.

We have developed a comprehensive restoration plan that includes the removal of invasive species, re-planting of native vegetation, and the establishment of trails for public access. The rewilding of the landscape will take time and careful management. Because we have the opportunity to essentially start from scratch,

we want to be sure we take the time to do this restoration correctly the first time by investing the time to use conventional agriculture to rid the property of turf grass and flush the weed seed bank that has accumulated.

As we take on these responsibilities, we also recognize the opportunity to grow our team and deepen community involvement. We'll be expanding our AmeriCorps program with support from the Climate Corps program, to add more AmeriCorps positions. This will allow more people to get hands-on experience in ecological restoration. Whether it's helping with prairie planting, monitoring wildlife, or building trails, this project

Advertisement



**Pacific University Oregon**

**MASTER of NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP**

**Earn a masters in as little as 13 months in a 100% online program**

*"The opportunities to apply my classroom work to the real world are immediate, constant and never-ending."*  
-Scott C.

**Education and experiences to help you achieve leadership for your organization**

[pacificu.edu/nonprofit-leadership](http://pacificu.edu/nonprofit-leadership)

offers opportunities for this restoration to provide meaningful training and workforce development in land stewardship.

Educational programming will also expand in response to this new landscape. We'll develop new curricula focused on restoration ecology, allowing students and visitors to witness the transformation of the land over time. We're especially excited to partner with local schools and universities, inviting students to participate in research and field studies to monitor change over time. The diversity of habitats we're restoring—prairies, wetlands, woodlands—provides a rich resource for studying everything from soil health and hydrology to plant and animal interactions.

This expansion will also require us to rethink our infrastructure and visitor services. We'll be developing trails, installing interpretive signage, and ensuring that visitors can access and enjoy the site. This means a careful balance between providing access and preserving the integrity of the restored areas, something that will be central to our planning process in the coming months.

**A GROWING NATIONAL TREND: CONVERTING GOLF COURSES TO NATURAL AREAS**

Severson Dells' decision to restore a golf course is part of a larger national movement. Across the country, we're seeing more and more golf courses repurposed as natural areas, parks, and conservation lands. The Trust for Public Land has purchased and is restoring three shuttered courses in California. Blandford Nature Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan purchased the Highlands Golf Club adjacent to their property

and is currently working on its restoration. Summit Metro Parks in Akron, Ohio purchased and restored Valley View golf course to increase connectivity among its park properties. These are just a few of the many examples of golf course rewilding projects occurring across the country.

The environmental benefits of this trend are clear. Golf courses are often ecological deserts, supporting little biodiversity due to their emphasis on uniform, non-native turfgrass. Repurposing these lands offers a chance to restore native habitats, increase biodiversity, and improve the overall ecological health of the region. Wetlands, prairies, and woodlands, in particular, can provide critical habitat for wildlife, act as natural filters for stormwater, and mitigate the effects of climate change by sequestering carbon.

What's driving this trend is also a shift in public values. As communities recognize the importance of green spaces, particularly in urban and suburban areas, there's a growing desire for spaces that prioritize both people and the environment. Nature centers are uniquely positioned to lead these efforts because of our commitment to both conservation and education. By taking on these restoration projects, we're not only creating spaces for wildlife to thrive but also educating the public about the importance of ecological restoration and sustainable land use.

**LESSONS FOR OTHER NATURE CENTERS**

This process has been both challenging and rewarding, and I believe there are valuable lessons that other nature centers can learn from our experience. A few of the key takeaways:

- *The importance of partnerships.* Restoring a large tract of land requires collaboration — whether it's with local governments, conservation organizations, or volunteers. We've been fortunate to work with a wide range of partners who bring expertise, resources, and enthusiasm to the project.
- *Engage your local elected officials early.* I can't understate this enough. Please reach out to your local elected officials about the project early and often. They can help you gauge community interest in the project, connect you with local, state and federal funds and connect you with businesses that may be seeking development opportunities that need or want to offset the impact of their development by supporting a project like this.
- *Engage your key supporters early.* Hopefully, you have a core group of folks that you can go to and say, "Hey, we're considering this project. What do you think?" These conversations with key donors, past board members and other stakeholders were essential as we considered taking on this project. They brought thoughtful questions and considerations, gave us a list of other folks that we should talk to in the community that weren't already connected to the nature center and have become a significant part of the campaign planning process.

I encourage other nature centers to think big. Restoring a golf course might seem like a daunting task, but it's a powerful way to make a lasting impact on both the environment and the community. By turning these spaces into natural areas, we can address critical conservation issues while providing new opportunities for education and engagement. 🌱



Above: Students from the Rockford Boys & Girls Club Flodin Unit, which is located across the street from the former Elliot Golf Course.

# Into the Woods: An Outdoor Escape Room Experience

Abby de Buhr, Education Director  
Douglas-Hart Foundation in Mattoon, Illinois

*We all know the outdoors is a great escape, but what if you can't escape the outdoors?!*

In 2020, The Douglas-Hart Nature Center developed an outdoor escape room experience called *Into the Woods* when the outdoors was truly the only place you could go to escape. We are very proud of the experience we have created to encourage people to get outdoors in an unique (and challenging) way, and we want to share how it can easily be adapted to programming at your own facility.

## A PROGRAM ARISES

During the pandemic, our team was trying to think outside the box of how we can still continue to safely offer programs or events. Of course, we offered a variety of take home kits and e-learning opportunities, but we were ready to get back outside with people. On

top of that, we needed a good fundraiser! Times were tough!

Before I was education director, I was an environmental educator with the Foundation. I have always loved programs that allowed me to use my creativity, and I am very fortunate my supervisor let me run wild . . . with a relatively long leash. I have always loved incorporating scavenger hunts into my outdoor programming, so it was on my idea list for a long time to create an outdoor escape room, even though I had no idea what that looked like at the time.

One day, my boss came to me and said “Do you think you can pull it together in a month?” — and since I’m writing this article, you already know I said “Yes!”

*Program participants work to “escape” a station as part of Into the Woods.*



I had no idea how I was going to pull it off, but I accepted the challenge. I did some research, and the Foundation staff came together as a team to develop *Into the Woods: An Outdoor Escape Room Experience*.

## STRUCTURING THE EXPERIENCE

For this event, we invite families, friends, or any group of people to go into the woods to “escape” five different stations on a designated trail route. As groups arrive at the nature center, a staff member greets them and briefs them on what to expect before sending them down the trail to their first escape station. To ease your mind, groups are in no way actually locked in a room or area. Stations are simply designated areas along our trail route that have decorations and clues to fit the annual theme.

For example, we created a camping scene for our bigfoot station this year. As participants arrive at a station, their eyes will immediately start scouring the area for potential clues. Our station facilitators (staff or volunteers) welcome the group to the station and remind them to speak out loud to each other as they are finding things, use the scrap paper and pencil given at orientation to help keep track of clues, and to put important items on the table for all to see.

Then the countdown begins! Groups are given ten minutes at each station to “escape.” When the facilitators say “go,” groups begin searching for any and all clues! Puzzles, digital safes, lock boxes, decoders, puzzle boxes, decoys, and more are scattered throughout the station for groups to collect and examine to help them escape. Naturally, the stations have plenty of ‘fluff’ decor that helps pull together the theme, but it also misleads the group for an extra challenge.

TICK! TOCK! TICK! TOCK! While the time is ticking, groups are working together to unscramble letters, decipher codes, open locks, interpret riddles, and more! How do they know when they have successfully escaped the station? For the first four stations, participants are looking for a particular item shown to them during orientation that is needed to help them at the fifth (and final) station, where they will physically unlock a gate, door, or similar to “escape” the woods.

Uh oh! The facilitators have given a two-minute warning, and the group frantically starts searching for overlooked clues or contemplating using a mulligan. Each group receives two gold coins or mulligans at orientation that can be used to ‘purchase’ a hint from a station facilitator. They only get two for the entire event, so they must be used wisely!

RING! RING! RING! Time is up! If the group did

not finish in time, the station facilitators briefly explain how they could have connected the clues to retrieve the item and send them on their way to the next station, which is usually harder than the last! While the group heads down the trail to the next station, facilitators reset their station for the next group.

Every group that comes through our outdoor escape room experience hopes they are one of the few that successfully complete all five stations — only 25% of the groups in attendance escape all the stations!



*A collection of lock boxes used in Into the Woods.*

## APPLYING THIS CONCEPT TO OTHER SITES

Are you interested about how your organization could potentially host this event at your site? We have already heard of other organizations replicating this idea in different capacities, and we are happy to share insight on how you could too.

For our event, we like to offer a new theme each year that influences what stations we create on the trail. This year’s theme was cryptids, so we titled the event “Lurk Into the Woods” to better reflect the idea of mysterious folklore creatures lurking in the woods with stations featuring bigfoot, loch ness monster, and more!

We use the same trail route and station locations each year, so I encourage you to scope out your space to see if the trail can be self-led and how many stations would be best. Remember, more stations means more work!

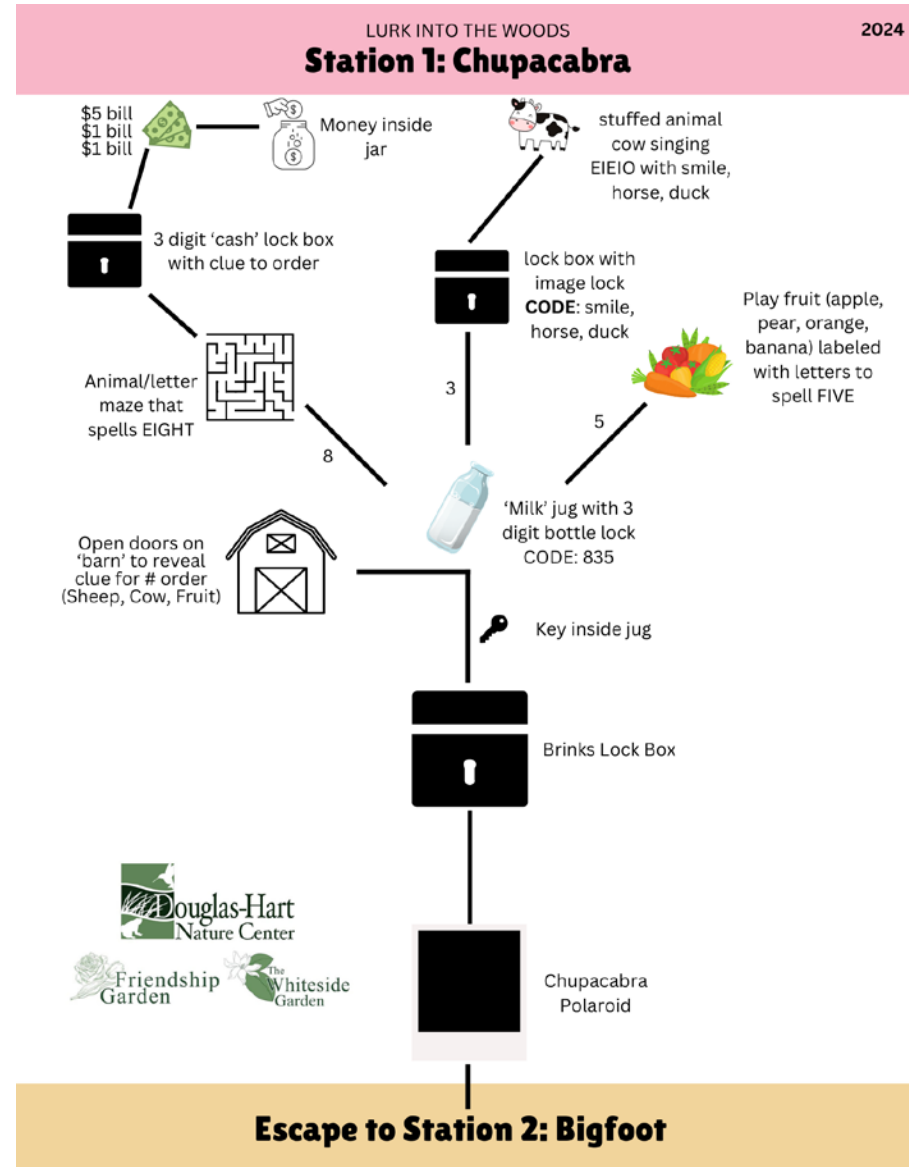
If you have not attended a professional escape room before, I highly recommend you doing so for research and inspiration. However, don’t think yours has to have all the bells and whistles like theirs to be suc-

cessful; a lot of our clues are handmade! I would then encourage you to start researching different clues and puzzle types. Google is your best friend! Simply type “DIY Escape Room” and you will be flooded with Pinterest posts, blogs, YouTube videos, and more to inspire you.

Your next step will be to collect locks, safes, decoys, and more that could be used to create your escape room experience. Variety is key (pun intended)!

You have your theme, inspiration, and materials — now what? It’s time to put it together into a mind map! What is a mind map you ask? It is essentially a visual representation of how the clues connect in each station for groups to escape. See the picture provided for an example. This is essential in planning and preparing materials, and this is used to help facilitators reset during the event. Don’t worry! Your first draft won’t look pretty and that is okay! My first attempt is always on a scratch piece of paper, and I

Below: A mind map of a station.



convert it into a digital format when I feel more confident in how I would like the clues to connect.

Once we have our plan in place, we assign individual staff members to prepare clues and props for each station. Because this event has a lot of potential for human error, don’t forget to complete a trial run (or two) with a group before the real deal!

**BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM**

It has been five years since our first Into the Woods event, and while it is a lot of prep work, we plan to continue this event for many reasons.

Most importantly, it is a unique way to promote individuals getting outdoors. This event is 99% outdoors, and 80% of our time slots sell out each year!

With this event, we reach a different audience than our other “traditional” programs. Not to mention, Coles County is a rural community with limited activities, so we are proud to provide this fun and engaging opportunity for our local community members. It also serves as a chance for local groups (scouts, sororities, etc.) businesses and organizations to come together for quality team building. Our staff also really enjoy this event as a fun and creative outlet.

We are already excited for Into the Woods 2025. Stay tuned on the [Douglas-Hart Foundation website](#) or our social media (@doug-lashartnc) for updates on next year’s outdoor escape room experience!

I understand that after reading this, you may feel you were in an escape room yourself trying to decipher all the information I’ve given you! Please do not hesitate to reach out and ask questions by emailing [programs@dhnature.org](mailto:programs@dhnature.org) and I will be happy to send you resources from a previous presentation on how you can recreate this event.

**Donate \$30 to ANCA and receive a Zebra Swallowtail Nature Nerd pin.**

Your donation will be invested in the ANCA Operational Reserve, which supports ANCA during difficult financial times. Past years’ pins are also available.

**G|W|W|O ARCHITECTS**

**THE NATURE PLACE**  
Reading, PA

**GWVO STRIVES TO ENRICH THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE THROUGH RESPONSIBLE DESIGN THAT IS INSPIRATIONAL, EVOCATIVE, AND PROGRESSIVE.**

410.332.1009 | [www.gwwoinc.com](http://www.gwwoinc.com)

**EARTHRISE DESIGNS**  
[WWW.EARTHRISEDESIGNS.com](http://WWW.EARTHRISEDESIGNS.com)

*interpretive planning  
trail guides & waysides  
exhibit design  
publications*

Linda Thomas, artist  
Don Watson, CIP

[Earthrise001@SBCglobal.net](mailto:Earthrise001@SBCglobal.net)

**4 YEARS**  
design with nature



# The Speed of Trust

## Linda Loring Nature Foundation & Nantucket Pride Collaborate on Queer Ecology Programs

*Seth Engelbourg, Naturalist Educator and Program Manager  
Linda Loring Nature Foundation in Nantucket, Massachusetts*

*Above: Participants on a Queer Ecology hike at the Linda Loring Nature Foundation.*

**T**HIS PAST JUNE IN HONOR OF PRIDE MONTH, the Linda Loring Nature Foundation (LLNF) in Nantucket, Massachusetts, established a new partnership with Nantucket Pride to run two Queer Ecology programs. The first was a lecture presentation at our local library, the Nantucket Atheneum; followed the next day by a queers hike at the LLNF trails.

If you have never heard of Queer Ecology, it is a field that strives for a truer understanding of the world. By recognizing that nature is complex and that species are vastly varied in their biological sex, sexual orientation, and social structures, Queer Ecology allows us to minimize harmful binary views of nature and celebrate diversity.

Unfortunately, in the past few years, science (or in some cases pseudo-science) has been weaponized to diminish LGBTQ+ people. Queer Ecology aims to support LGBTQ+ people by shining light on the true nature of the world around us and allowing queer people to feel safe in the field.

At the Linda Loring Nature Foundation our goal is to reach people of all ages and backgrounds. However, we are aware that queer people have historically been excluded from nature-based educational programming and some may not feel comfortable participating. To grow our audience and allow queer people to be authentically involved, we knew it would take both a targeted effort and a strong community partner.

Establishing our partnership with Nantucket Pride was not an achievement made overnight. LLNF staff started informal conversations with the organizers of Pride over 12 months in advance of when we hoped to debut these programs. This allowed us time not to simply discuss program logistics, but rather get to know

each other on a personal level. This model is based on prior collaborations we have developed at LLNF; one of our organization’s guiding quotes is that “change moves at the speed of trust.” After taking the time to develop a strong relationship, we then still needed to spend several months figuring out the logistics of our Queer Ecology programs, but by this point we all knew each other’s workstyles and the planning became easier.

Both Queer Ecology programs that we ran were a success. One of the key metrics for us was when looking at program participation, more than 75% of attendees were new people who had never previously interacted with LLNF. Although more qualitative, during the programs we also received excellent feedback and questions from participants, many of whom openly identified as LGBTQ+.

It was clear that these participants felt appreciated and comfortable in nature, and to be able to provide that opportunity was impactful for our organization. Additionally, including these programs benefited Nantucket Pride by incorporating an environmental component to their schedule.

Beyond this collaboration, LLNF and Nantucket Pride plan to continue our partnership. We are hoping to offer more events in June of 2025 but also spread programming throughout the calendar year. Despite

the success of Pride Month, we are committed to supporting queer people in nature not just in June but in all seasons.

I highly recommend that other ANCA members consider developing similar partnerships in their own communities. Over the past several years, the nature center field has advanced initiatives to promote equity and inclusion, and forging partnerships with diverse groups moves these goals toward action.

However, it is important when working with vulnerable populations and under-resourced groups to approach partnership development with intentionality. Please remember that true relationships take time to bloom and that in life people are often busy. Do not be discouraged if it takes months or years to reach your objective, because the time spent on the project will elevate your partnership from transactional to transformational. Above all, the goal should not be to elevate your organization or create publicity but to truly serve an audience in need.

I wish all success in forging these partnerships. When we support one group and make them feel included, we elevate the whole field. Only by accepting and appreciating our diverse audiences can we ensure a positive future for nature centers. 🌱

*Seth Engelbourg presents as part of a program on Queer Ecology.*



# Successful Succession for Continued Leadership

Corky McReynolds, PhD  
Director/Professor Emeritus (retired)

**O**UR PROFESSION IS BEING IMPACTED as retirements are increasing, and the dynamics of leadership transitions can be challenging. Many organizations are asking how to maintain momentum as leadership changes. This discussion focuses on a topic usually referred to as “succession planning.” However, there needs to be more clarity about what succession planning really is and what it means to a nonprofit organization. Based on the literature’s definition, most nonprofits are not genuinely practicing succession planning. This article presents the nature of succession planning and how it is integrated with the other processes that impact leadership change.

## SUCCESSION PLANNING

Succession planning is the process of “having the right people in the right positions at the right time” (Atwood, 2020). The concept of succession planning

arose from small family-owned businesses to identify an heir apparent. Nonprofits do not normally operate this way, so the concept evolved into identifying an individual to take over leadership if something happened and the Executive Director/CEO was suddenly unable to continue. The process of a temporary new leader is the result of a contingency plan, rather than a succession plan.

A Succession Plan requires a long-term investment of funds and time to develop the staff capacity to fill roles across the organization. This is a proactive process that requires an organizational assessment along with identifying the skills needed for future leadership (Wolford, 2009). To meet the industry’s definition of succession planning, the organization must budget funds for staff and board development, build shared leadership, and prepare for executive leadership (Atwood, 2020). A nonprofit ED/CEO’s responsibility for the succession plan is to build individuals for leadership in the profession, rather than to identify an

## Definitions

**Leadership Continuity Plan** — A comprehensive plan to identify and develop positions, people, and placements in the event of key leadership unplanned or planned change. The Leadership Continuity Plan includes the Succession, Contingency, and Leadership Transition Management plans.

- **Succession Plan** — A long-range development process that invests resources to build internal capacity and continuity for the replacement of people in key leadership positions.
- **Contingency Plan** — The Leadership Contingency Plan identifies an immediate and temporary replacement for the ED/CEO or other key leadership positions in the event of an emergency or sudden absence of the ED/CEO.
  - *Short-Term Absence* — 3 months or less
  - *Long-Term Absence* — 4 months or more
  - *Acting ED/CEO (or other lead position)* — A temporary (short or long-term) internally assigned role to serve as ED while remaining responsible for their permanent position.
  - *Interim ED/CEO (or other lead position)* — A temporary (usually no more than 12 months) and external seasoned professional hired to serve as ED, who only assumes the duties of that position.
- **Leadership Transition Management** — The process that prepares an organization for the planned replacement and transition of the ED/CEO includes three stages: organizational readiness, search and screen options, and transition activity for new leadership success.

individual as their permanent replacement (McReynolds, 2006).

A Succession Plan identifies an individual(s) and/or position(s) that could serve as an ED/CEO. Key skills for that position are listed, and an individual identifies gaps they may have. For example, a key skill may be financial management, but the individual may not have that knowledge or experience, so they enroll in a nonprofit financial management course. The organization pays for the course under the goals of the Succession Plan. In addition, the current ED/CEO or designee is assigned to mentor the individual and engage them with the organization’s financial management processes and procedures. Through formal education, direct experience, and mentoring is now prepared to serve in an ED/CEO capacity. However, this process does not identify this person as the heir to the position. Rather, the purpose is to prepare the individual for advancing in the profession.

## LEADERSHIP CONTINGENCY PLAN

The contingency plan is what many nonprofits call their succession plan. The question is, if there is an immediate departure of the ED/CEO who *temporarily* takes over? If the organization has had an active Succession Plan in place for a couple of years, then one or more individuals should be already identified and prepared for the role. If the organization does not yet have a Succession Plan, or the plan is new, then the Contingency Plan provides options for the board to consider and implement.

There are two basic options.

1. *Acting (Internal) ED/CEO* is a current staff person with qualifications to serve in that capacity. The contingency plan should identify the position rather than an individual since personnel could change. However, an individual could also be named since roles and positions within the organization could also change. If a #2 position (Associate, or Assistant Director) has been demonstrated in the organizational chart, then the Acting role should be automatically assigned to that position.
  - If an Acting is assigned, that person carries out the ED/CEO role while also remaining active in their original role. If the organization has the resources, then the Acting may be able to serve solely in that role while their position assignments can be distributed.
  - If the ED/CEO has a planned return, no other action must be taken.
  - If the ED/CEO is not returning, the board engages in the Leadership Transition process, which includes the eventual Search, Screen, and Select activities.

2. *Interim (External)* is a trained professional from outside the organization’s staffing resources. The Interim ED/CEO is a professional and is often a retired former ED/CEO. This can be expensive, and care should be taken to assess the approach and full costs of contracting a professional Interim. An interim can be a current or former board member with the experience and skill set needed for the position. This approach must also be approached with care, making sure the interim has the skills and the right attitude with no hidden agendas.

The board should establish limitations on the levels of responsibility. Both Acting and Interim roles are temporary, so some boundaries should be provided. Examples include no major shift in the organizational direction and no major expenditures without board approval.

## LEADERSHIP TRANSITION MANAGEMENT

Commonly referred to as the Search and Screen process, there are other activities to be included that lead to a more comprehensive and successful result. There are three phases to replacing a full-time permanent ED/CEO (Wolford, 2009).

1. *Organizational Readiness* is a set of internal explorations of the state of the nonprofit. During leadership change it is a good time to reflect on the current position of its direction, culture, and sustainability. This is less important if the nonprofit has a legacy of strategic planning with a current and viable vision and healthy culture. In this case, the internal assessment may be limited to interviewing and or surveying key stakeholders, staff, and board. If the organization faces substantial challenges, a deeper look into operations may be necessary. All of this is important information to align the anticipated needs of the organization with the next executive leader. If a search firm or a professional interim is contracted, then this assessment is usually part of that role.

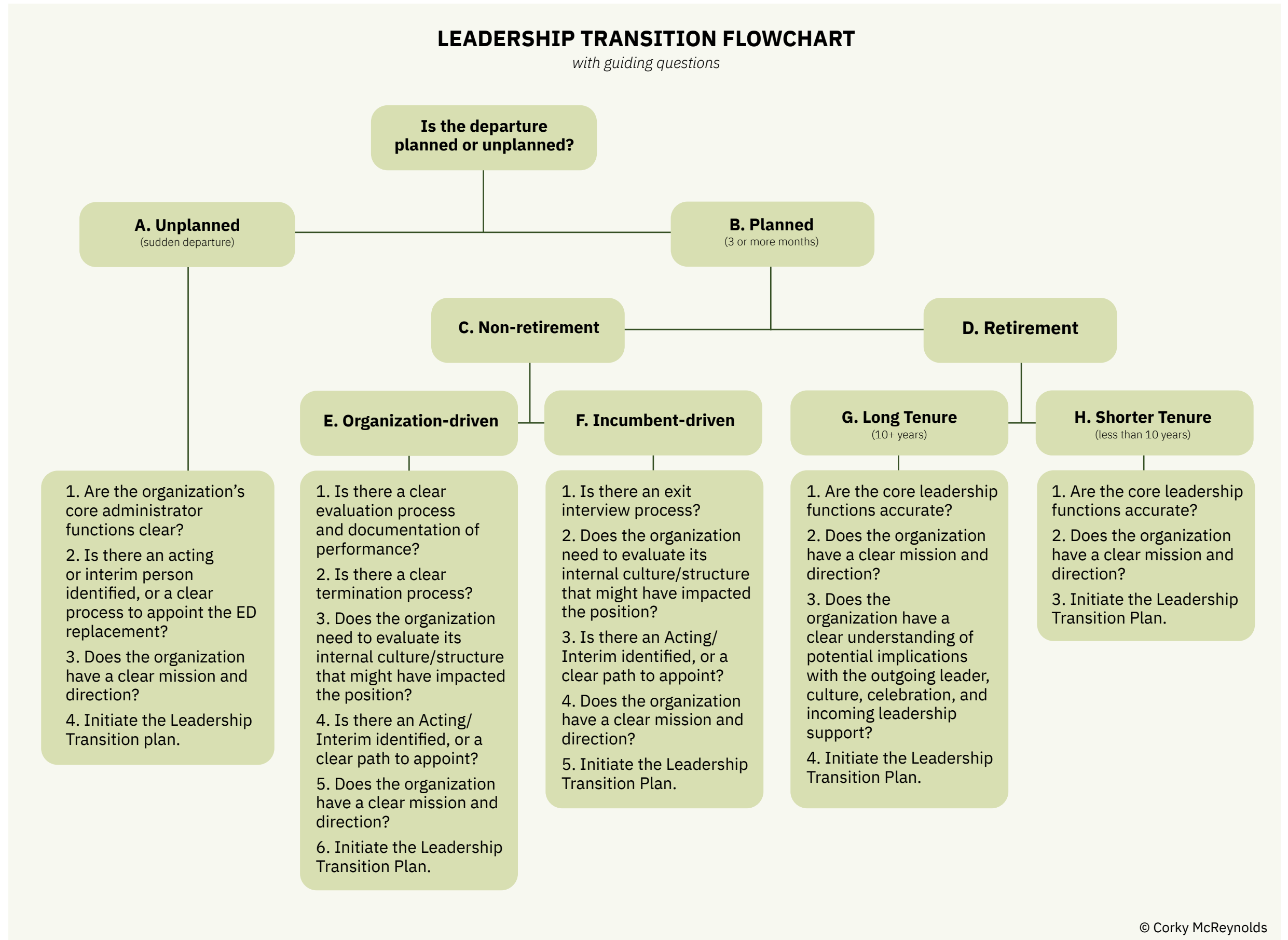
2. *Search & Screen (S&S)* is the process of seeking and reviewing applicants and then reaching a point of assessing final candidates that could serve as the next ED/CEO. (McReynolds, 2006). An ad hoc committee of board, staff, and a key stakeholder or two should be appointed to oversee the process. If a professional consultant or search firm is contracted, then the process is managed externally with committee engagement. If the process is handled internally, then the committee is engaged from the very beginning to the final decision. Careful consideration of cost and desired results must be a factor when engaging with an outside search firm or consultant.

3. *Transition* is the organization's responsibility to adequately guide the transfer of exiting leadership and the new leader entering the position. The ad hoc S&S team should sunset after its final recommendation has been forwarded to the board and a new leader has been contracted. A new ad hoc transition team should already be identified with the role of celebrating the former leader, welcoming the new leader, and providing orientation to things as trivial as the location of the ED/CEO's office to as important as introductions to key donors and stakeholders.

Why not keep this role with the S&S? First, it is a different responsibility although certainly a couple of S&S members may wish to continue, especially for the incoming board chair or key staff person. Secondly, the S&S folks, as a committee, are tired and have completed their role. New energy for a transition team with a new role will aid in the new leader's success.

**LEADERSHIP CONTINUITY PLAN**

This article describes three distinct and interrelated processes that, working together, can build and maintain leadership continuity during leadership change and transition. A Succession Plan builds capacity for future leadership. A Contingency Plan fills immediate and temporary leadership needs. The



## LEADERSHIP CONTINUITY PLAN

TYPE OF PLAN	PURPOSE	TIME ORIENTATION	RESOURCES
<b>Succession Plan</b>	Builds individual & organizational capacity	Future, long term	Strategic direction, organizational acumen, position reviews
<b>Leadership Contingency Plan</b>	Identifies emergency leadership	Now, short term	
<b>Leadership Transition Management</b>	Secures full-time leadership	Next term	

© Corky McReynolds

Transition Plan identifies, secures, and aids in the success of new and permanent leadership.

The current board and ED/CEO should review and determine the status of their plans and which plan may be needed, revised, or completed for leadership continuity and organizational well-being.

### SUMMARY

This article introduces the concepts and practices of leadership transition, but many details remain for each process. See resources for complete process descriptions.

Although somewhat outdated and needing more specific information on increasing opportunities for diversity, the monograph *In Search of Extraordinary Leadership* does describe best practices for the Search & Screen process. Refer to *Succession Planning Basics* for those details and *Managing Executive Transition* for the overall process.

A few pointers from years of experience working with executive leadership transitions include:

1. Be careful of executive search firms that remove the early stages of the process from the S&S team. Best practices keep the S&S in control of all stages to keep the process open and inclusive.

2. Communicate the progress to the board and staff on a regular basis, keeping individual applicant names confidential until the final candidates are invited to the organization.
3. The S&S should include the board, staff, and a key stakeholder or two while keeping the team to a manageable size of 7-9 members.
4. A Succession Plan only exists if funds are allocated and used for professional development.
5. Always keep the celebrations of the outgoing leader separate from the incoming leader.
6. Don't panic, and don't rush the process to replace a leader.
7. Avoid the temptation to hire a new leader that mirrors the outgoing leader.
8. A transition team is an undervalued and critically important part of the new leader's experience.

Although retired from consulting, I am happy to discuss leadership continuity based on the information in this article. You can reach me at [corky@leadteamconsulting.com](mailto:corky@leadteamconsulting.com).

## References: Succession Plan/Leadership Transition

### BOOKS

Atwood, C. (2020). *Succession Planning Basics*. ATD Press.

Bridges, W. (2009). *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*. De Capo Press.

Gilmore, T. (2003). *Making a Leadership Change*. Choice Press.

Kelly, M. & Powell, M. (2022). *Who Comes Next? Leadership Succession Plan Made Easy*. Sound Wisdom.

McReynolds, C. (2006). *In Search of Extraordinary Leadership: Securing Your Next Executive Director*. Association of Nature Center Administrators.

Tebbe, D. (2008). *Chief Executive Transitions: How to Hire and Support a Nonprofit CEO*. Board Source.

Wolfred, T. (2009). *Managing Executive Transitions: A Guide for Nonprofits*. Fieldstone Alliance.

### ARTICLES/HANDOUTS

Adams, T. (2006). *Staying Engaged, Stepping Up: Succession Planning and executive transition management for nonprofit boards of directors*. Annie Casey Foundation.

Wolfred, T. (2008). *Building Leadership Organizations: Succession Planning for Nonprofits*. Annie Casey Foundation.

NA. (2008). *ETI Overview of Succession Planning*. Greater Milwaukee Foundation.

NA. (2021). *The Clarity Transition Guide to Emergency Succession Planning*. Blue Avocado.

NA. (2018). *Graceful Exit: Succession Planning for High-Performance CEOs*. Leap of Reason Ambassadors Community.

Advertisements



**izone**  
Imaging

**SIGN SOLUTIONS**  
HPL PANELS • HARDWARE MOUNTS

- Wayfinding
- Interpretive Displays
- Park Signage

888-464-9663 | izeoneimaging.com



# A Solar-Powered Revolution in Water Sustainability at Cincinnati Nature Center by Soler Solutions

**A solar water pumping system:** this idea became the solution to the Cincinnati Nature Center’s dream of efficient, sustainable irrigation at its Long Branch Farm, a well-known Ohio nursery for native plants.

For years, the Cincinnati Nature Center’s Long Branch Farm faced a significant challenge — sustainable irrigation for its native plant nursery. The farm, known for nurturing plants essential to Ohio’s natural ecosystem, required a constant and reliable water source to maintain its operations from spring through fall. The Center was heavily dependent on water pumped through costly county lines and electricity from the grid. While a pond across the road could have provided a local solution, the cost of transferring water from the pond to the nursery was simply too high for the non-profit organization.

## UTILIZING RENEWABLE SOLAR ENERGY FOR SUSTAINABLE WATER MOVEMENT

This is where Soler Solutions stepped in, devising a solar-powered water pumping system that trans-

*Above: the native plant nursery at Cincinnati Nature Center.*

formed the nature center’s irrigation methods. The system, which utilizes renewable solar energy to draw water from the nearby cattle pond, has eliminated the need for traditional grid electricity and drastically reduced the Center’s water costs. What makes this system unique is its zero-carbon footprint — by harnessing the sun’s power, the nursery now irrigates its fields without contributing to greenhouse gas emissions or draining financial resources.

**[In an interview with Cincinnati Nature Center’s Native Plant Manager, Jake Sberna,](#)** he highlights the significance of this project. The Center strives to operate sustainably by reusing materials and minimizing waste, but water use has long been an obstacle to fully achieving that goal. This new solar-powered system not only aligns with the Center’s environmental values but also supports future expansion, enabling the nursery to scale up its plant production without increasing its carbon or financial footprint.

## THE BENEFITS OF INSTALLING THE SOLAR-POWERED WATER PUMP SYSTEM IN NATURE CENTERS

One of the most compelling aspects of the system

is its ease of assembly and immediate usability. The prototype was tested in collaboration with the Center, and the first mass-produced model was installed at Long Branch Farm in Summer 2023. Once fully implemented, the farm will be able to meet the water demands of both new plantings and mature specimens — all without a single kilowatt-hour of grid electricity.

This project doesn’t just stop at solving a problem for one non-profit farm — it represents a larger movement towards innovative, sustainable solutions that can be replicated on a global scale. Soler Solutions’ commitment to sustainability is an example of what can be achieved when technology, environmentalism, and community needs come together.

The implications of such a system are vast. From urban gardening to agricultural fields, solar-powered water pumping systems could play a pivotal role in reducing dependency on fossil fuels and unsustainable water use. They provide an affordable, eco-friendly alternative for operations that aim to align their practices with environmental stewardship.

Looking ahead, this partnership sets a precedent for

other organizations, showing that innovation doesn’t always have to come at a high cost. In fact, it can be the key to saving money while protecting the environment — a win-win for nature and the community.

## ADDRESSING THE ONGOING WATER CRISIS IN THE US

The Cincinnati Nature Center’s solar water movement system is more than just a local success; it’s a testament to the power of human ingenuity in solving some of the most pressing environmental issues of our time. As we continue to face the growing challenges of climate change, initiatives like this remind us that solutions are within our reach, and often, the answers lie in working with the natural resources all around us.

In a world where sustainability can sometimes seem daunting and distant, this project brings hope — hope that with the right mindset, partnerships, and technology, we can take meaningful steps toward a greener, more sustainable future.

**[Learn more about joining the water movement with a solar-powered water pump system here.](#)**

*Cincinnati Nature Center Native Plant Manager Jake Sberna poses with the solar-powered water pumping system.*



*save the date*

# ANCA Annual Summit 2025

*August 25-29*

Environmental Nature Center

NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA

