



# CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN

## Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023

Thanks to the foresight of our founders and strong leadership, the Garden has been on an incredible trajectory of growth. Since 2005, both our attendance and our operating budgets have grown by 59 percent. The commitment to contemporary design, and the decision to honor the architectural vocabulary established by Edward Larrabee Barnes and to use the world's best landscape designers from the original John O. Simonds masterplan to gardens by Michael Van Valkenburgh, Mikyoung Kim, Dan Kiley, and Oehme, Van Sweden were visionary.

There are a few things that our early founders did not anticipate and three are significant: that our front door, designed to host 600,000 people a year, would host more than 1 million; that we would be active off-site through urban agriculture and science; and that our steady state of funding from the Forest Preserves of Cook County might one day decline.

Our opportunity, and responsibility, now is to capitalize on our growth, ride the consumer trends that make our Garden experience very attractive, and secure our financial future in light of the potential for the ongoing decline of local government support.

Our proposed five-year strategic plan responds to these opportunities and challenges. It is not a list of projects but a guide to decision-making on projects large and small. It represents the beginning of ongoing work at both the Board and staff levels that will transform this plan into a living, breathing document that moves us forward into the second half of our first century.

In conducting our work, we took a comprehensive approach, reviewing new developments and changes in the external environment while addressing critical and immediate issues for our organization.

Our mission — we cultivate the power of plants to sustain and enrich life — is evergreen, and our outstanding core experience — our Garden in Glencoe — is the foundation from which all else builds. **Our long-term ambition is to be globally recognized for the role our Garden and its plant-based learning experiences play in shaping how people value, perceive, and care for the environment.** Our opportunity is to take our core product — the Garden and its plant-based learning experiences — to a broader audience. As important, the defining characteristic across all our work is the quality of our products, services, and visitor experience.

In updating our strategy, we are guided by the Garden's long-standing, core beliefs:

- **We believe** people live better, healthier lives when they can create, care for, and enjoy gardens and green space.
- **We believe** beautiful gardens and natural environments are fundamentally important to the mental and physical well-being of all people.
- **We believe** that the future of life on Earth depends on how well we understand, value, and protect plants, other wildlife, and the natural habitats that sustain our world.



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Our five strategies that will help us achieve our ambitious goal are:

1. Elevate, leverage, and sustain the beauty of our Garden to ensure that it is a vibrant, thriving cultural institution for future generations.
2. Advance the Garden's role as a leading center for learning in plant science and conservation, horticulture, and education, shaping the way individuals and communities value, perceive, and care for the environment.
3. Expand the Garden's reach to engage more people in the full breadth and depth of our work.
4. Make certain that our people and our processes are capable of meeting the needs of a large, forward-thinking, and evolving organization.
5. Grow and diversify revenue to secure our financial future.

Implementation of this strategic plan begins by using it to guide our decision-making on major projects and policy changes for the Garden and by establishing priorities in facilities management and programming needs. The Garden staff, in collaboration with the Board of Directors, will determine these priorities and realize them through future funding initiatives and financial planning. The Garden staff will apply these strategies to our annual operating plans.

### **1. Elevate, leverage, and sustain the beauty of our Garden to ensure that it is a vibrant, thriving cultural institution for future generations.**

1. Invest in the maintenance, improvement, and sustainability of our landscapes, collections, buildings, and site while keeping to the spirit of the original master site plan and architectural vocabulary.
2. Make our natural areas — water, woodland, and prairie — obvious and accessible points of connection to our conservation and restoration work.
3. Make our living collection distinctive and resilient.
4. Use the Garden to reveal our behind-the-scenes and off-site work.
5. Draw on the natural synergy between the arts, humanities, and sciences, using our collection, exhibitions, and programs to help us tell this story and exploit the natural crossover between audiences interested in the connections among these topics.
6. Partner to deliver on-site enhancements of the Garden experience.
7. Invest in our indoor facilities to raise attendance between October and May.

### **2. Advance the Garden's role as a leading center for learning in plant science and conservation, horticulture, and education, shaping the way individuals and communities value, perceive, and care for the environment.**

1. Continually review and assess the strength and viability of our programs to improve focus, maximize impact, and demonstrate the relevance of our work on the lives of individuals and communities.
2. Document and share program impacts through rigorous evaluation, research partnerships, and advocacy.
3. Maximize partnerships and collaborations with those who add value to our brand and help us achieve our goal to provide learning experiences about plant science, conservation, and gardening to children, adults, and families at the Garden and beyond.



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4. Create the next-generation leadership in plant science, conservation, restoration, horticulture, and urban agriculture.
5. Leverage our science and conservation work through practical applications within the Forest Preserves of Cook County and other urban green spaces.
6. Using the latest technology, maximize the reach, excitement, and accessibility of our citizen science initiatives.
7. Leverage existing networks to strengthen the Garden through recognition, recruitment, and support.
8. Refine horticultural therapy practice and focus on target audiences with greatest need.
9. Make Windy City Harvest the partner of choice in the Chicago region for urban agriculture and a global model of best practices.
10. Increase the impact and visibility of our community outreach by using our Windy City Harvest sites as strategic hubs for coordinated programming.

### **3. Expand the Garden's reach to engage more people in the full breadth and depth of our work.**

1. Shift people's expectations of the Garden from a destination to a generous idea focusing on the power of plants to sustain and enrich life.
2. Grow and diversify our audiences in order to attract the next generation of members, visitors, and donors.
3. Invest in drawing audiences that have potential for lifelong relationships with the Garden by maintaining our loyal membership and growing our visitorship, especially from families.
4. Establish the Garden as a must-visit destination for the residents of Cook County and the greater Chicago metropolitan area.
5. Ensure that our site can accommodate a growing visitor base while maintaining the quality of the experience and providing exceptional accessibility.
6. Provide a welcoming, inclusive experience for all who visit the Garden and participate in our programs.
7. Recruit Board, staff, and volunteers to reflect the breadth of the audience we strive to serve.

### **4. Make certain that our people and our processes are capable of meeting the needs of a large, forward-thinking, and evolving organization.**

1. Review future opportunities to ensure that the work aligns with the Garden's strategic priorities and that we have the people, skills, and expertise to deliver with excellence.
2. Working with strategic partners, create a pipeline of talent in plant science, conservation, restoration, horticulture, and urban agriculture to meet the future skill requirements of the Garden.
3. Review and re-engineer key processes for efficient and effective operations.
4. Invest in essential requirements in finance, external communications, information systems, data collection and management, and analytics, and ensure that staff skill sets in key positions effectively meet these needs.
5. Ensure that we have competitive recruitment practices and policies that position us to attract and retain the most talented staff and volunteers for the Garden.



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### **5. Grow and diversify revenue to secure our financial future.**

1. Demonstrate the value of the Forest Preserves of Cook County's investment in the Garden.
2. Strengthen our ability and competitiveness to win both public and private grants in science, education, and urban agriculture.
3. Grow the Garden's endowment to provide financial opportunity and to mitigate financial risks.
4. Invest in increasing earned and raised revenue from 60% to 80% of the operating budget by 2023.
5. Continually review and assess the strength and viability of our programs to improve focus and maximize impact.