



## 2023 Sierra Watershed Education Partnerships Strategic Plan

February 2023

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# Gratitude

Thank you to the following individuals for their contributions in preparing this plan.

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*Consulting*



## About Our Strategy

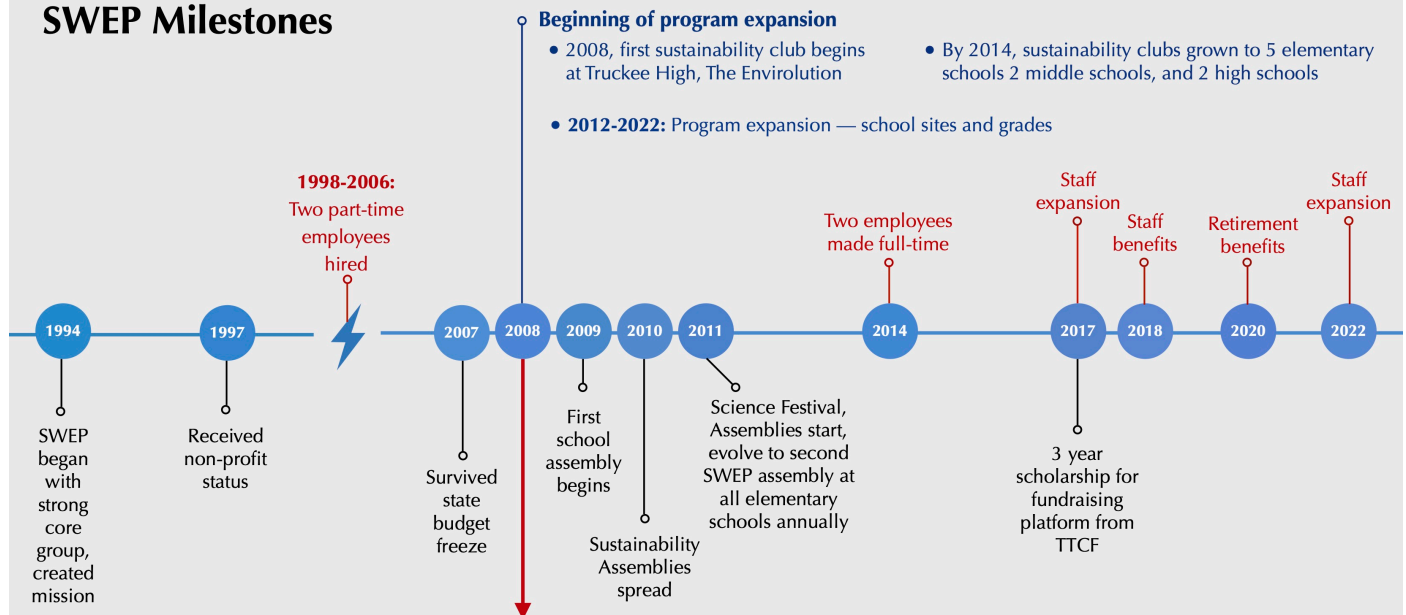
This three-year strategic plan defines a path forward for Sierra Watershed Education Partnerships (SWEP) aimed at strengthening and growing the organization's systems, programs, and partners. Over the next three years, SWEP seeks to serve significantly more students in the Tahoe Truckee Unified School District (TTUSD) region with high quality environmental education that increases connections and care for each other and our planet.

We put forth this strategy knowing that it will evolve. We are committed to being flexible and understand that there are many partners and factors involved with our work and, therefore, will continue to evolve SWEP and this strategy in the coming years.

# Honoring Our 29 Year History

We are excited to be celebrating the 29th year of SWEP in 2023. Over almost three decades we have had the honor of serving thousands of students by working with hundreds of partners and implementing hundreds of local service projects. We have experienced hardships, but also fun and amazing moments with students along the way. We look forward to continuing to work with partners to build future stewards of our planet. Below is a snapshot of SWEP milestones over nearly three decades of programming.

## SWEP Milestones



## Expand and Diversify Funding Partnerships

- 2008: Winter Programming begins in partnership with Tahoe Cross Country through Excellence in Education Funding
- 2009: Grants through Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation
- 2010: Partnership with the Town of Truckee and Truckee Donner Public Utility District; then others: North Tahoe Public Utility District, Tahoe City Public Utility District, and Tahoe Truckee Sierra Disposal
- 2012: Partnership with CLIF Bar Family Foundation begins
- 2014: First Tahoe Truckee Unified School District annual contract (Sustainability Clubs)
- 2017: Second Tahoe Truckee Unified School District annual contract (Waste Management)
- 2019: Partnership with Tahoe Mountain Resorts Foundation; contracts expand with Truckee River Watershed Council
- 2020: Partnership with Placer County; expansion with Excellence in Education and CLIF Bar Family Foundation
- 2022: Partnership with Truckee Tahoe Airport Community Partner and The Patchwork Collective Family Foundation

\* Prior to 2009 (1997-2008), funding was primarily through state grants



## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

SWEP is committed to bringing environmental education programs to as many students as possible in the Tahoe/Truckee region. Over 35% of the students that SWEP serves in the public Tahoe Truckee Unified School District (TTUSD) qualify for free-and-reduced lunch – an indicator of household income. Many of these families struggle to meet basic needs. Access to experiences in nature are not always available or guaranteed. We strive to design curriculum that is accessible to the diverse student body that we serve and honors the Washoe People whose land we are honored to explore. As we strengthen our organization over the next three years we will work to develop a specific Equity Plan that will consider and track how we are meeting these goals.

## Committed to Partnerships

Since our founding, partnerships have been key to our model. We partner with our community of teachers, school administrators, and other environmental groups to deliver programs and engage students in service; we partner with funders to move our mission forward; and most importantly, we partner with students to build a life-long commitment to environmental stewardship. As we look to the future, we will continue to honor these partnerships and work to strengthen the bonds that support all of the collective goals of our partners.





## Core Values

Our core values reflect the SWEP culture – what we care about and what drives our decisions every day.



### Connection

We are connected to our community and our environment. Our connection to teachers, parents, students, and partners is what sustains and informs us. We believe that students who are connected to the natural world will choose to protect it.



### Respect

We respect the natural world, the communities we serve, and the full history of the land where we work. We teach students to do the same.



### Equity

We believe that all students, no matter their background, should have access to the natural world and the knowledge that enriches their connection to it.



### Empowerment

We believe that by giving students a voice and encouraging them to be leaders in their communities, they have the power to bring about positive and meaningful environmental change.



### Action

We believe that students can make a difference for the planet and their community through action and fostering hope for the future.





## Our Mission

SWEP promotes environmental stewardship by connecting students to their local community and environment.

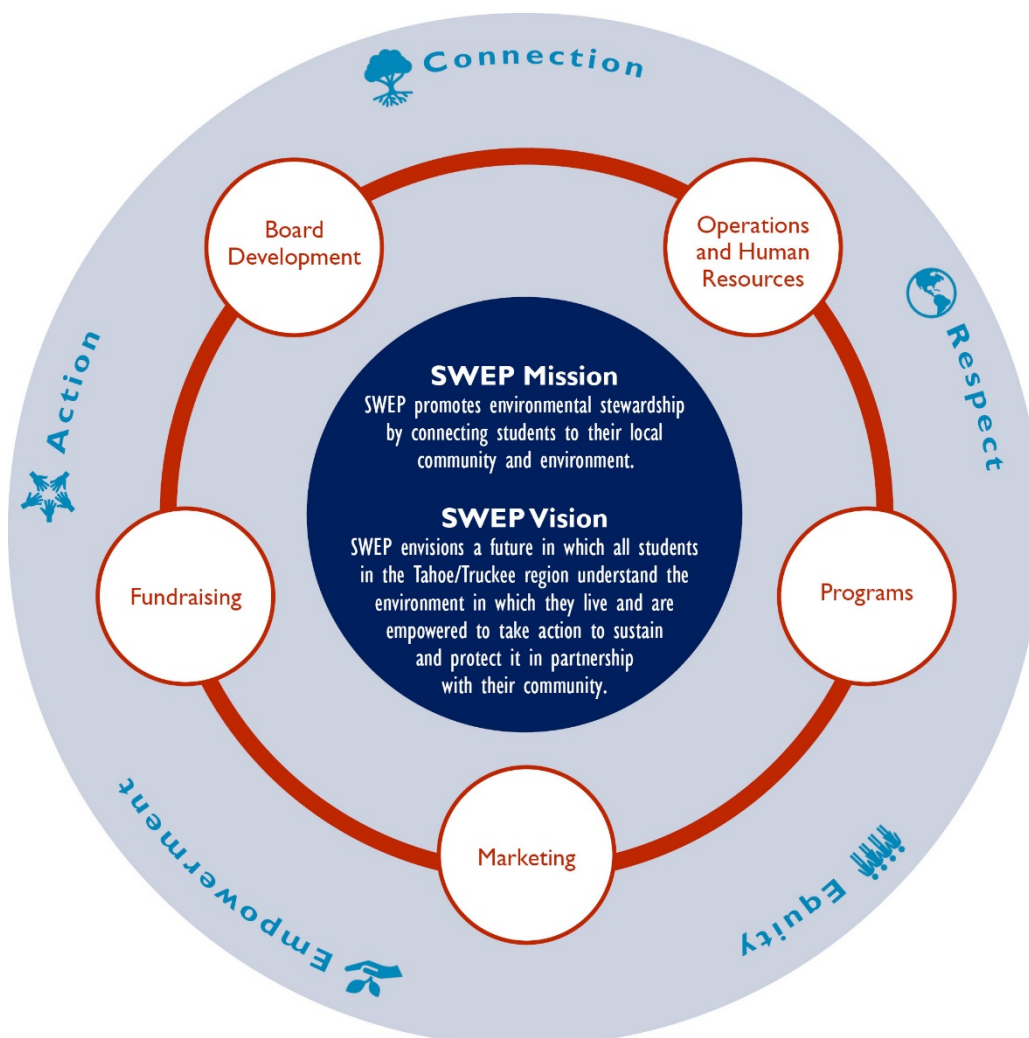
## Our Vision

SWEP envisions a future in which all students in the Tahoe/Truckee region understand the environment in which they live and are empowered to take action to sustain and protect it in partnership with their community.



## Strategic Plan Framework

SWEP's 2023-2026 Strategy consists of five focus areas that will guide the organization's work over the next three years. The graphic below demonstrates how SWEP's vision, mission, core values, and strategic focus areas overlap. Each focus area has a clear goal and a set of objectives and milestones that track progress toward each goal.



## **Focus Area 1: OPERATIONS**

### ***Goal: Invest in Staff and Internal Systems for Long-term Sustainability***

For the past 29 years, SWEP has delivered exceptional programs with minimal staff and budget. Much of the success has come from the hard work of a few individuals, donors, and partners. Due to the reputation and merits of the programs, funding and partners have increased over the past three years to allow the organization to bolster operations, staffing, and expand programing reach and impacts. In 2022, a major three-year gift from a family foundation nearly doubled SWEP's annual budget in an immediate and profound way. This generous donation offers SWEP the unique opportunity to pause, look inward and design future strategies that strengthen the operations and staffing systems of the organization.

Five objectives outline a set of tasks aimed at strengthening our organization to ensure the long-term growth and success of SWEP.

#### **Objective 1: Improve HR systems and planning to support and retain staff**

- Strategy 1: Create organization-wide staffing plan to clarify existing and future roles and responsibilities, pay scale, division of labor, and areas of individual growth.
- Strategy 2: Clarify staff benefits package including outline of total compensation scales and professional development budget and opportunities.
- Strategy 3: Codify employee performance evaluation timeline and process and how it links to compensation.
- Strategy 4: Codify new employee onboarding process and training.
- Strategy 5: Update SWEP Employee Handbook.

#### **Objective 2: Prioritize staff training and professional development**

- Strategy 1: Design a staff training and professional development plan for on-going support and growth.

Potential deliverables:

- Identify key internal staff training topics and corresponding calendar; design and develop trainings.
- Identify key external staff professional development opportunities, costs, and calendar; develop processes for using individual PD budget.
- Create a graphic calendar to visually show programmatic seasonality, changes over the year and how this corresponds to changes in roles and responsibilities; include in staff training.

#### **Objective 3: Leverage full potential of fundraising database**

- Strategy 1: Understand the full offerings and application of the existing fundraising platform (for development, outreach, reporting).
- Strategy 2: Train staff on capabilities of the fundraising platform and designate roles and responsibilities.

#### **Objective 4: Streamline management of contracts and reporting**

- Strategy 1: Create tracking process for managing and completing contracts.
- Strategy 2: Identify and train staff to manage contracts and reporting.



## Objective 5: Explore mobile and semi-permanent classroom options

Strategy 1: Research cost and feasibility of a SWEP mobile classroom van; explore ways to use van for marketing and how SWEP would develop a campaign to raise funds to purchase.

Strategy 2: Research cost and feasibility of establishing permanent “pods” at school sites.

## Focus Area 2: PROGRAMS

### *Goal: Increase Student Access/Impact Through Expansion and Evaluation*

TTUSD serves 4,177 students and SWEP reaches 81% of these each year across grades K through 12. Some students, especially in the lower grades, participate in multiple SWEP programs each year, which resulted in 11,149 student contacts during the 2021/22 school year. The power of the SWEP model is in the potential impact of the programming on students during their K-12 journey. Over the next three years, SWEP will evaluate our program’s impact across grade levels and will assess gaps in programming. In 2026, SWEP aims to have a touch point in each grade and have these touch points build on each other content-wise.

## Objective 1: Evaluate programmatic impact

Strategy 1: Design evaluation plan that looks at the breadth and frequency of programming across grades, evaluates the efficacy and impact of current programming, and establishes a strategy for annual program evaluation.

Tactic: Survey teachers, counselors, health and wellness centers, students, admin, and partners for interests and needs (i.e., cross-curricular, experiential, arts, social-emotional, etc.).

## Objective 2: Grow SWEP nature-based programming

Strategy 1: Explore program expansion to connect with climate science, service learning, student wellness, accessibility to a diverse student body, and to the Native History of the region.

Strategy 2: Explore program expansion with other local environmental education providers.

Strategy 3: Explore options for expanding SWEP programming across grade levels, to include other school district priorities (for example, literacy, mental health, school attendance).

Tactic: Utilize staff and partner input to strategize and meet requests and possible opportunities for new and innovative programming.

## Focus Area 3: MARKETING

### *Goal: Refresh SWEP Brand to Build Greater Support and Recognition*

For the last 29 years, SWEP has had one logo represent the organization and it is now outdated. Designing a new logo will serve to energize board and staff as well as communicate to the community that SWEP is modernizing its brand to reflect the new growth and enthusiasm for the work. Additionally, along with a new logo and staff capacity, SWEP will focus on implementing a robust marketing plan in the next year. The goal

of increasing marketing efforts is to build greater support and understanding of the SWEP mission in the region. Specifically, the goal over the next three years is to expand awareness of SWEP work beyond the classroom and funding partners to reach parents and the wider community by extending the lessons into the home.

### Objective 1: Develop and implement a marketing plan

- Strategy 1: Review existing graphic assets (fliers, photos, pamphlets) to evaluate need and budget.
- Strategy 2: Define the audience, core messaging, and goals based on research – link to TTUSD and community priorities and fundraising platform database.
- Strategy 3: Create a one-year marketing plan and calendar based on above.
- Strategy 4: Hire a graphic designer to assist with new logo and other marketing materials including development materials.
- Strategy 5: Create an ad hoc board member and staff marketing committee to assist with implementation.

### Objective 2: Update and create new SWEP materials (part of marketing plan)

- Strategy 1: Update logo and tagline.
- Strategy 2: Update website.
- Strategy 3: Produce regular newsletters and social media posts based on a new communications calendar.
- Strategy 4: Create new marketing materials including Program Offerings Brochure, Impact or Annual Report, Donor Outreach Materials, etc.

### Objective 3: Increase outreach to parents

- Strategy 1: Host educational forums for parents (on Zoom or bring in speakers).
- Strategy 2: Host or sponsor events to capture parent participation.

## Focus Area 4: FUNDRAISING

### *Goal: Financially Sustain a Growing Organization*

Today, SWEP has a \$500,000 annual operating budget. Revenue is raised in three ways: (1) contracts for services, (2) donations, and (3) grants. Over the past five years, SWEP has made great strides in diversifying the number of funders and partners supporting the organization across all three areas. Most significantly, in the last year, the SWEP budget doubled with a generous unrestricted three-year capacity-building grant from a family foundation. This grant allows SWEP to bolster operations, marketing, and grow programs as reflected in this strategic plan. The fundraising goal for the next three years is to build capacity to sustain the \$500K budget once the 3-year grant sunsets. The following objectives outline a strategy to do this.

### Objective 1: Develop/implement a 3-yr fund development plan w specific targets

- Strategy 1: Work with the board and an external fund development consultant to assist staff in analyzing current donor database, systems, and opportunities, and to create a plan that includes specific targets.

- Strategy 2: Create a calendar for fundraising appeals.
- Strategy 3: Expand fee-for-service to meet fundraising goals.
- Strategy 4: Grow number of donors and amount each donor gives to meet fundraising goals.
- Strategy 5: Grow large-gift donor base, find matches for anchor gifts, and grow end-of-the-year campaign.
- Strategy 6: Hire contract staff as needed to assist with implementation (i.e., grant writer, donor letter writer, etc.).

## Objective 2: Train board and staff on fundraising

- Strategy 1: Train staff and board on fundraising platform database reports and tools.
- Strategy 2: Bring in local experts on fundraising to train board on their role in major donor relations, “How to Make an Ask”, etc.

## **Focus Area 5: BOARD DEVELOPMENT**

### *Goal: Strengthen the Board to Support Growth of SWEP*

SWEP has big goals to strengthen and grow the organization. Having a strong board will be key to the success of implementing the goals outlined in this strategic plan. As SWEP evolves from a small non-profit into a more sophisticated mid-sized non-profit, board composition and governance will be a critical component to supporting the organization. Training the board on fund development and their roles of will also be important moving forward.

## Objective 1: Update board governance documents and policies

- Strategy 1: Create board handbook that outlines roles, expectations, and committee involvement.
- Strategy 2: Conduct an audit of board governance documents and develop missing pieces.
- Strategy 3: Define board roles specific to implementation of strategic plan.

## Objective 2: Strengthen board and staff relationships to build the SWEP team

- Strategy 1: Define board calendar to include opportunities for major events and get-togethers.
- Strategy 2: Include team-building activities in annual calendar.
- Strategy 3: Hang out, have fun.

## Objective 3: Create board calendar of trainings and committee work

- Strategy 1: Set up training calendar and invite local colleagues to present about their processes and successes (finance, operations, development).
- Strategy 2: Share meeting dates, volunteer opportunities, major events, and get-togethers.
- Strategy 3: Create new visuals from financial data to increase accessibility of information for the board.



## Objective 4: Grow the board to support the strategic plan implementation

Strategy 1: Set growth targets for the board.

Strategy 2: Using the board skills matrix, identify skills needed on the board. Include criteria of inclusivity value in board growth decisions. Ensure the matrix is updated regularly.

Strategy 3: Share skills matrix at board meetings and dedicate time to new board member discussion.

Strategy 4: Create a plan for board recruitment.

## Objective 5: Continue long-range planning

Strategy 1: Create partnership matrix to understand strengths of all the regional environmental programs.

Strategy 2: Create a plan for long-term partnership opportunities.



## Implementation and Tracking Progress

To ensure that SWEP is effective in setting priorities and moving forward, it is essential to create a work plan that is derived from this strategic plan and frequently review it. Tracking each objective and its subsequent strategies will show change over time, provide opportunities to reassess, and ensure accountability to the organization's goals.

A detailed annual work plan will include Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Responsibilities and Timelines. Our review process will include regular times each month to check progress towards objectives. This will be done with a staff or a staff and board committee. Strategic plan updates will be included on board meeting agendas quarterly.

## Conclusion

SWEP has long been an organization delivering strong programming and has earned its reputation as a loyal and trustworthy partner. We have succeeded in our work with few staff and finite resources. The next three years, outlined in this strategic plan, will define the organization's way forward into its next phase of impact and growth. By 2026, we envision an organization that has a thriving permanent staff, strong programming that serves TTUSD's students across grades K-12 and has a large and engaged board.



Sierra Watershed Education Partnerships is a 501(c)3 organization. SWEP is a California charitable corporation.