In 2022, Wilderness Inquiry embarked on an intentional path forward for the organization with the development of a new, five-year strategic plan. Guided by our commitment to equitable inclusion in the outdoors, the plan sets the course for building stronger organizational efficiency, excellence, and long-term sustainability, while expanding our reach and impact. Through collaborative planning, we’ve created the momentum needed to shape our future and the future of outdoor learning, recreation, and engagement.

Plan Process

Wilderness Inquiry partnered with DeYoung Consulting Services to assist in developing the five-year (2023-2027) strategic plan that will guide Wilderness Inquiry’s activities in accordance with our vision, core values, and mission. During the nine-month strategic plan development process, DeYoung consulted with a Steering Committee to gather extensive feedback and to center commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access throughout the process. The environmental scan collected insights from a diverse group of stakeholders, including staff, board members, trip participants, and partner organizations. This scan included a survey that was completed by more than 300 people, eight focus group sessions, and 21 individual interviews. All told, almost 400 stakeholders provided feedback and suggestions regarding the organization’s mission, efficacy, and reach. Wilderness Inquiry’s leaders, board members, employees, and key stakeholders played significant roles throughout the process to ensure that the strategic plan creates a desired future for the organization.

As a result of this engagement and feedback process, Wilderness Inquiry updated our mission statement to be more inclusive, focused on providing equitable outcomes, and explicit about building meaningful connections.

Wilderness Inquiry connects people of all ages, backgrounds, identities, and abilities through shared outdoor adventures so that all people can equitably experience the benefits of time spent in nature.

Wilderness Inquiry staff and leadership also affirmed our guiding belief and our core values:

Everyone Belongs in the Outdoors (“Everyone Belongs”)

Using input from the Environmental Scan process, a Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, & Results Analysis (“SOAR Analysis”) found that Wilderness Inquiry has:

1. A strong connection with people with disabilities, youth, and long-time supporters and travelers
2. An established and successful brand, with Canoemobile being one of our most recognized programs
3. **Appealing programs and demonstrable outcomes** that provide opportunities for people of different abilities, backgrounds, ages, and identities to experience nature and personal growth

4. **A strong aspiration to center diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA)** throughout all of our programs and organizational structures

5. **A desire to focus on reaching and effectively serving four core communities**: youth; people with disabilities; BIPOC; and LGBTQ+

6. **Opportunities to better share our story and positive impacts** with people of different backgrounds, especially through expanded partnerships

7. **Opportunities to expand and deepen** our reach and impact in various cities across the United States

8. **Opportunities to strengthen our funding model and internal operations** to create a more sustainable future

Following the Environmental Scan and SOAR Analysis, Wilderness Inquiry developed the following strategic priorities and goals.

**Five-Year Strategic Priorities and Goals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGIC PLAN (2023-2027)</th>
<th>MISSION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>To connect people of all ages, backgrounds, identities, and abilities through shared outdoor adventures so that everyone can equitably experience the benefits of time spent in nature</td>
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<tr>
<th>STRATEGIC PRIORITIES</th>
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<td>National Brand with National Reach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Efficiency and Excellence</td>
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<td>Long-Term Sustainability</td>
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<th>GOALS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1.1:</strong> Improve and grow our strong base in the Midwest and strategically expand around the country in a manner that will consistently provide sustainable, high-quality programs and experiences</td>
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<td><strong>1.2:</strong> Develop a strong and engaging brand that is synonymous with equitable inclusion in the outdoors</td>
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<td><strong>2.1:</strong> Build staffing capacities (seasonal and permanent staff)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2.2:</strong> Enhance the organizational capacity to deliver safe, equitable, high-quality, and meaningful programming</td>
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<td><strong>3.1:</strong> Create intentional and sustainable partnerships</td>
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<td><strong>3.2:</strong> Develop a clear and diversified funding/fundraising strategy</td>
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<td><strong>3.3:</strong> Track and measure progress on the strategic framework</td>
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<td><strong>3.4:</strong> Attract and retain new participants and funders</td>
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Outcomes from Strategic Actions

1. National Brand with National Reach

Wilderness Inquiry views the expansion of the national brand and reach as a strategic priority for the next five years. The expansion of program reach and depth will connect more people with the health/wellness benefits of time spent outdoors and attract additional resources to forward our mission to advance inclusion and improve quality of life (e.g., funding, scholarships, political will, etc.). The importance of the programs offered by Wilderness Inquiry for our identified core focus communities underlines the need to provide our services to everyone in the country. Access to a national network of funders with a passion for connecting all people to the natural world is critical for sustaining the organization and providing opportunities for individuals without the means to otherwise benefit from Wilderness Inquiry programs (e.g., financial aid for participants).

We will know we have succeeded in our work if the following outcomes are achieved:

- Our brand is synonymous with equitable inclusion in the outdoors and is well respected among our core participant communities (youth; people with disabilities; BIPOC; and LGBTQ+) and outdoor recreation communities around the country.
- Programs are provided in a sustainable way in strategically selected communities, anchored by regional programming locations around the country.
- Our Twin Cities headquarters and Base Camp at Little Sand Bay are thoughtfully developed and maintained.

2. Organizational Efficiency and Excellence

Wilderness Inquiry acknowledges that increasing internal organizational capacity is needed to achieve our goals. It is important for the organization to grow from within and ensure that it has the capability to equitably deliver high-quality and inclusive services. Wilderness Inquiry intends to attract diverse participants, staff, and funders, and the internal processes must reflect these intentions of the organization.

We will know we have succeeded in our work if the following outcomes are achieved:

- Staff is representative of the core audiences we serve, and retention and satisfaction are improved so the annual return rate of seasonal outdoor leaders exceeds outdoor industry standards.
- Wilderness Inquiry is a workplace of choice with excellent workplace culture and a compelling mission.
- Strong internal operations and systems are in place that will continuously and consistently deliver high-quality programs/experiences and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA).
- Our outdoor equipment and high-quality vehicle and boat fleets are well maintained.
- Communications, business operations, and technology consistently meet or exceed industry best practices.

3. Long-Term Sustainability

Wilderness Inquiry will need to make long-term process and efficiency improvements to continue to sustainably provide quality services. The organization acknowledges that external factors – political, economic, and environmental – will likely influence our ability to provide services. Based on this understanding, the organization will need to further develop adaptable strategies to ensure long-term sustainability.
We will know we have succeeded in our work if the following outcomes are achieved:

- Wilderness Inquiry has strategically developed diverse, robust, and mutually beneficial programming partnerships with organizations that are highly satisfied with outcomes of our programming.
- Wilderness Inquiry has diverse local, regional, and national revenue sources that offer long-term stability, adaptability through economic changes, and significant control over our future success (earned revenue).
- Our organization and partners understand our long-term vision, which is intentionally advanced through effective programs with clear measures for desired outcomes.
- A diverse and inclusive community of travelers, participants, and funders around the country are attracted to, and participate in, our programs.

**Adopting the Plan**

This strategic plan was developed by identifying strategic priorities, goals, outcomes, and strategic actions. The priorities will guide Wilderness Inquiry’s overarching strategy and growth over the next five years and will provide a pathway for the future. Strategic actions are more specific, and help articulate how the organization can realize these priorities. As such, the strategic actions are likely to shift over time as the work progresses. Wilderness Inquiry staff has developed metrics to measure progress on each strategic action and identify when shifts need to be made.

This Strategic Plan is intended to be iterative. Its implementation will reveal further opportunities for adjustment and improvement. Future strategic plans will build on the successes and lessons of this iteration, while Wilderness Inquiry’s commitment to ongoing plan evaluation will remain constant.

The implementation of this plan will be broken down into short- and medium-range goals that will feed into the long-term goals (five-year plan) to ensure continuity. This will also help to determine whether the plan is on track, or if there is a need to re-evaluate the strategies and tactics.

To ensure that the strategic plan is effectively implemented, the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors will review the progress of the plan quarterly, and the full Board will review progress twice per year.

Before the end of each fiscal year, Wilderness Inquiry will: review the year’s accomplishments; assess progress toward goals; engage stakeholders to refine programs / initiatives; create annual plans and goals based on strategic priorities, goals, outcomes, and strategic actions; and set and track benchmarks for the next year with quarterly checkpoints.

Through this work, we remain grounded by our mission and core values that guide our day-to-day work of connecting people of all ages, backgrounds, identities, and abilities to the natural world. The future of Wilderness Inquiry lies before us, set on a strong foundation and ready for us to shape it for future generations.

> “The Wilderness Inquiry trips I have participated in have always provided me, through your inclusive mission, a renewed optimism, a greater vision for myself, my life, and a confirmation of the inherent kindness of others.”