



BOXERWOOD
Education Association

STRATEGIC PLAN
2022 - 2024

Vision

A thriving Earth and a community transformed by caring for the natural world, our home.

Mission

Educate and inspire people of all ages to be environmentally responsible stewards of the Earth.

**Boxerwood
is more than
the sum of its parts.**

What is Boxerwood? Ask many people and get many answers. It's a problem of mistaking the leaves for the tree. Boxerwood Education Association (BEA) is first and foremost a value-informed idea, sunk in the soil of a real place and reaching toward its fulfillment with real people in a particular place at a particular time. That idea is caring for the Earth that sustains us all, a concept known to us at Boxerwood as earth stewardship.

Inspired by the vision, creativity, and vocation of the garden's first tender, Dr. Robert Munger, BEA is on a healing mission for the Earth and for ourselves. In 2000, the founders of BEA set forth the vision to educate and inspire people of all ages to become environmentally responsible stewards of the Earth. That expansive mission came with a strategy: to work locally, go deep, create networks, and just like a well-planted tree, to bloom where we are planted — and in time serve as a model and inspiration for others. For the past 22 years, Boxerwood has been carrying out this mission through two intertwining pathways:

1) ever-evolving community programming that connects people to nature, its care, and to one another, and 2) provision and maintenance of a free-to-the-public 15-acre woodland garden that both supports this educational mission and is itself a wonder and a sanctuary.

Depending on who you are, you might best know Boxerwood as a program: a camp, a delightful preschool foray, an afterschool bird club, a community composting initiative, a hands-on teacher workshop, a 6th grade river trek. Or you might describe Boxerwood as a place: the magical garden, a place to savor a cool summer evening listening to live music, a haven for migrating birds, or a weed bed for garden volunteers. It's easy to get lost in the foliage of all that Boxerwood-facilitated experience. We have written this document to help you see the essential structures of Boxerwood and how these seemingly disparate elements rise intentionally and thoughtfully from that one guiding vision: to encourage people to actively care for the earth. To be healers, and thus themselves be healed.

Entering our third decade of operation, BEA continues to grow in service of this mission. This growth reflects an ever-deepening and expanding root system comprised of community support, financial resources, partner networks, technical expertise, and volunteer service. Thanks to this robust support structure, BEA not only sustained the challenges of the pandemic years but flourished. BEA's growth is timely. At every scale the natural systems of our planet are

under pressure, as are many systems of living that promote mutual well-being. This includes challenges even in our own community, buffeted by pandemic and societal strains. We can do our part. Even as many things feel beyond our control, we can root and bloom where we are planted. Boxerwood has the opportunity and resources right now to maintain and grow our core work

while also stepping forward in several new areas of opportunity and need. This strategic plan affirms plans for our essential work and outlines areas for growth, our most recent contribution toward that orienting vision: a thriving life for all.



The ever-growing Boxerwood tree.

To illustrate how Boxerwood is growing, we turn to an apt metaphor — a tree! Sustained by BEA’s mission (the trunk), we connect with our community via two major pathways: Programs and Place. Each of these limbs in turn branches into supporting initiatives, all of which are sustained by the vital roots and resources that keep the whole tree flourishing.

Over the next several years, Boxerwood will sustain its core programmatic commitments while also pursuing new initiatives. These new ventures are made possible by the success of our existing initiatives and, in fact, build upon them. We will support these endeavors by expanding the resources within our existing root system. Guiding us in all this work are seven closely-aligned Strategic Goals that together strengthen Boxerwood’s capacity to carry out its earth care mission.

programs

Goal #1: Promote environmental learning by sustaining Project NEST and related educational initiatives.

By a matter of strategy and justice, Boxerwood provides high-quality nature-based programming to all youth attending school in the Rockbridge area, regardless of schools’ ability to pay. Our award-winning school partnership program, Project NEST (Nurturing Environmental Stewardship Together) ensures more than 2,500 children preK - HS participate in field-based learning each year. Project NEST and related Boxerwood initiatives create equitable opportunities for all local youth to develop the knowledge, skills, and passion to become effective stewards of the Earth. Over the next two years we will continue to prioritize the partnerships and resources needed to sustain and grow this essential program as well as related initiatives such as camps, after school clubs, family weekend programming, and other community-based conservation endeavors.

Goal #2: Accelerate local earth care by promoting COREworks as an innovative climate education and action tool.

COREworks (Community Offsets for a Regenerative Economy) is a community development tool operating at the intersection of education and action. Designed by BEA over two years, COREworks engages people in climate change conversation and action via a local carbon offset marketplace. In turn, 100% of the proceeds from the marketplace help launch additional emission-reducing

projects within Rockbridge, thus perpetuating benefits. Reflecting core values, our innovation purposefully creates educational and engagement opportunities for youth, low-income residents, and rural neighbors who are too often excluded from the emerging green economy. Once fully implemented COREworks will advance projects that promote clean energy, tree-planting, food waste diversion, and regenerative agriculture within the Rockbridge community. Our early start-up years will focus on expanding public engagement and increasing the number of climate-friendly projects in the COREworks portfolio.

Goal #3: Build regional capacity for environmental learning by exploring an AmeriCorps State Direct Service Program.

Boxerwood is ready to lead more broadly while also remaining rooted in our local work. To that end, we are investigating how BEA might host an AmeriCorps program to support the greater nonprofit environmental education community. This federally-supported program would recruit young adults to provide twelve months of direct service to Boxerwood and other ecologically-focused nonprofits in the Blue Ridge region. These AmeriCorps service members would strengthen each organization’s outreach while also building related work skills and value: an investment in the rising generation and in our collective work.



place

Our 15-acre woodland garden is a place to wander, reflect, and enjoy nature in an unstructured way. Paths are purposely limited. The varied ecosystems and natural play areas invite exploration. The woodland garden includes native species as well as a robust collection of unique tree specimens from around the world, planted more than 50 years ago.

Our beloved woodland garden also serves as an interactive outdoor classroom. The children’s play trail, native plant installations, wetland ecologies, pollinator gardens, diverse wildlife habitat, perennial gardens, stormwater management systems, wastewater reclamation facility, and solar array all demonstrate ecological stewardship. Caretaking and improving this free-to-the public facility is critical to our mission and strategy.

Goal #4: Protect our garden by implementing the Stewardship Master Plan.

Boxerwood will make place-based improvements that elevate our ability to model ecological sustainability. We will implement the following major upgrades over the next two years:

- Cultivate a food forest permaculture installation.
- Restore waterways and wetlands.
- Create a comprehensive, evidence-based stormwater management solution.
- Update and expand upon the self-guided nature tour signage.
- Upgrade our Nature Emulating Wastewater Treatment System (NEWTS).
- Convert the utility right-of-way into a pollinator corridor.
- Rebuild the Wetland Walk.
- Add features to our famed PlayTrail and our Pavilion.

Goal #5: Discern operational possibilities with The Meadow.

The Meadow is a “Green Cemetery” adjacent to the Boxerwood property, privately owned and operated by BEA’s founders, Hunter Mohring and Karen Bailey. As invited by Hunter and KB, we are collectively exploring the possibility of *grafting* The Meadow onto Boxerwood’s tree. Boxerwood’s institutional stewardship of this venerated space would ensure this sustainable end-of-life endeavor continues to serve our community for years to come.

roots

Boxerwood flourishes because of broad, on-going community support. Throughout the county, our educators are greeted enthusiastically by excited children who have participated in Boxerwood programming for years. Volunteers assist in the garden, sharing native plant and Master Gardeners’ expertise, serving as ambassadors or as members of our Board of Directors.



Goal #6: Build our capacity by investing in those who serve Boxerwood.

People are the lifeblood of Boxerwood. To deepen our collective capacity and impact, we will invest in ongoing professional development for our staff and valued board members. We will also work to create clearer pathways for recruiting, training, and celebrating volunteers, expanding the size, durability, and wisdom of our network.

Goal #7: Strengthen our fundraising by sharing our story more fully.

As we expand our community reach, our effectiveness at sharing Boxerwood’s story and cultivating new supporters must keep pace. We will deepen and broaden our networks of support by sharing and celebrating what’s happening at Boxerwood through an enhanced communication plan. Additionally, we have a proven track record

Individual donors and local business sponsors financially support Boxerwood, sustaining us as a public nature area. These donors also help bridge the gap between the costs of providing our programs and the fees that we must collect to conduct them, ensuring that our programs are available to all learners regardless of ability to pay.

In recent years, Boxerwood’s annual budget has fluctuated between \$325,000 - \$375,000. Three major income streams support our work:

of winning competitive regional and national grants. We will build on this success by sharing our stories with additional investors, including foundations and businesses.



principles of growth

Boxerwood is pursuing ambitious but vital goals in support of its mission over the next several years. These five principles explain how our organizational values will inform this critical work.

Spread by Seeds. A well-ripened seed head, bursting on the wind, changes the landscape faster than any single stalk might grow.

Our replicable models for ecological stewardship have garnered regional and national attention. We inspire, we teach, and we share with others our Boxerwood innovations such as the Play Trail, Project NEST, and COREworks.

Collaborate, Collaborate, Collaborate. In a fungally-rich forest, mycelial networks share messages and resources among all ecological players, building ecological strength.

Boxerwood's strength lies in its relationships. We advance our mission through partnership and collaboration. In the months ahead, we will sustain our partnerships with area schools and expand collaboration with both civic and municipal entities near and far.

Move with the Seasons. Many plants bloom, seed, and die back for the winter. Lower tree limbs, vital for early stage growth, give way to higher, better-lit fellows.

Boxerwood nourishes what best serves our mission, and we gracefully compost what is no longer needed. As we pursue our strategic plan, we will attentively review our endeavors with the needs and aspirations of our organization and community in mind.

Work in the Margins, Respect the Edges. The blurred borders between ecosystems — wetlands, meadows, and stream banks — are places where diversity blooms.

As part of our ongoing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we build connections between cultures, generations, and communities. In keeping with our mission, we will continue to ensure Boxerwood and its programs are accessible to all of us who call Rockbridge home.

Care for Place, Care for People. Healthy land builds healthy people. Caring for the earth around us helps us discover our agency and thus our capacity to make a positive change.

Grounded in place, we can discover our agency to care for the natural world that sustains us all. Boxerwood will continue to create opportunities to empower people of all ages to become successful earth stewards. In this way we promote healing for the planet and ourselves.

Catch us on the trail ahead...

Change is afoot, and the journey is long. We are so excited! As we move forward, here are a few of the milestones that ensure we are on track to advance our mission for the benefit of our community and the natural world.

Spring 2022

Conduct a robust Project NEST spring season. Launch COREworks, an innovative Boxerwood tool for advancing climate conversation, education, equity, and action at the local level.

Summer 2022

Provide nature-based experiences for more than 375 children through a variety of private and publicly-funded Boxerwood summer day camps. Make progress towards planning for an AmeriCorps pilot program, elect 3-5 new board members, and recruit volunteers to strengthen our Boxerwood Ambassador program and Music in the Garden operations.

Fall 2022

Provide robust Project NEST fall programming for 17 preschools and 10 public schools. Finalize organization-wide Communication, Development, Stewardship, and Volunteer Management Plans.



Winter 2023

After a period of discernment, determine whether or not to bring The Meadow under long-term Boxerwood management. Complete two projects supporting the Stewardship Master Plan.

Spring 2023

Provide another robust Project NEST season along with stewardship actions. Continue to engage with AmeriCorps program partners to ensure program feasibility and determine a timeline for program launch.

Summer 2023

Connect COREworks with hundreds of local people and fund two additional emission reducing projects in Rockbridge County.

Fall 2023

Through COREworks, fund two additional earth care projects. Complete two more Stewardship Master Plan projects. Diversify our donor pool, grow Boxerwood's endowment fund, and increase our operational funding.

