

**Overview of Pierce Cedar Creek Institute's
Long-range Planning (LRP) Efforts**

Date: April 25, 2023

Background:

Since its inception in 2001, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute has operated under the direction of regularly updated strategic plans. These plans provided the frameworks for how various objectives were to be accomplished to pursue the Institute's mission and vision. For example, in the 2018 – 2019 Strategic Plan, one of the objectives was to: Enhance science literacy in preschool and elementary populations through improved science instruction, while another was to: Serve as a hub of restoration and natural ecosystem management research for Michigan and the Great Lakes area.

Over the years, Institute programs have been built and adjusted, and growth has been seen in various areas such as program attendance, fundraising support, staff resources, and facility and property development. With nearly 20 years of history behind us and encouragement from Board leadership, it was decided to step back from strategic planning, which generally encompasses a two-year timeframe, and look further into the future to develop a long-range plan. This long-range plan will define where we want the Institute to be in ten years, not two. It will provide a shared picture of what our mission and vision truly mean, allowing for the development of strategic plans that will determine how we will use our mission to accomplish our vision.

Mission: Inspire appreciation and stewardship of our environment.

Vision: To be a leading force and vibrant center for environmental education and research, resulting in awareness, appreciation, and preservation of the natural world.

Past strategic plans have focused more on what efforts we wanted to accomplish versus what changes we wanted to see. For example, we wanted to build a research program for undergraduate students. That could be defined as an activity and the results as an outcome or change in behavior.

Using a tool called Outcome Mapping, our long-range plan will define the behavioral changes we want to see in targeted audiences due to our programs and efforts. We don't exist to provide programs; we exist to affect change. With these outcomes or behavioral changes defined, strategic plans will then be developed to create the activities and programs that will produce the targeted outcomes. The three-stage Outcome Mapping process will also provide the framework to document how we will monitor our contributions to the changes in behavior and how success will be evaluated.

OUTCOME MAPPING STAGES



There are two main benefits of using Outcome Mapping to produce a long-range plan.

1. **Shared Vision:** Going through this process will guide us through the development of a clear and commonly understood definition of what the Institute's mission and vision genuinely mean. We won't change the Institute's current mission and vision; we'll create expanded mission and vision statements that provide clarification to the current vision and mission. For example, what does it really mean to be a leading force and vibrant center for environmental education and research, resulting in awareness, appreciation, and preservation of the natural world? With that vision defined and input from various constituents, we can decide, for example, whether to expand our trail system, build a children's garden, create a new research program, focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, or provide more community programs.
2. **Measurement:** Monitoring performance and conducting evaluations are essential elements of Outcome Mapping. These processes will help us become more effective in gathering data, monitoring short-term and long-term outcomes, and evaluating results and adjusting our efforts to be more effective and impactful.

After the COVID pandemic subsided a bit and staff members were able to hold in-person gatherings, long-range planning efforts began. In March 2021, the Institute's education and marketing staff, led by Executive Director Michelle Skedgell, began meeting to work through the Intentional Design stage of Outcome Mapping. In addition, board member Jim Toburen provided consulting support, and all Board members were updated on progress and provided feedback.

Since March 2021, and through over a dozen meetings, the LRP Team has developed a draft document that is ready to share with and gather input from the Institute's constituents. Once that input is gathered and incorporated into the draft long-range plan, the document will be presented to the Institute's Board of Trustees for approval. This long-range plan will provide the basis for creating the first two-year strategic or action plan.

Outcome Mapping Process and Long-range Planning Draft Documents

Step 1 & 2: Expanded Vision & Expanded Mission

| Intentional Design | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Step 1 | Vision |
| Step 2 | Mission |
| Step 3 | Boundary partners |
| Step 4 | Outcome challenges |
| Step 5 | Progress markers |
| Step 6 | Strategy maps |
| Step 7 | Organisational practices |

Following the process defined for long-range planning using Outcome Mapping, the LRP Team first worked to complete Steps 1 and 2 of the Intentional Design stage to develop the Expanded Vision and Expanded Mission statements in support of the Institute's current vision and mission.

The Institute's Current Vision:

Vision: To be a leading force and vibrant center for environmental education and research, resulting in awareness, appreciation, and preservation of the natural world.

Expanded Vision – In Support of the Current Vision

The Pierce Cedar Creek Institute Community, defined as members and guests from Barry County and the adjoining counties of Allegan, Calhoun, Eaton, Ionia, Kalamazoo, and Kent, enjoy nature's health benefits through all four seasons and are inspired to learn more about the natural environment and their place in it. They understand they are not separate from nature and engage in actions to support their mutual health now and in the future.

Community members of all ages are scientifically literate, meaning they know and understand scientific concepts and processes and make their decisions on that understanding, not on opinion. They see environmental protection as a standard to be maintained and recognize that healthy, functioning ecosystems are the foundation of healthy communities. Community members support conservation efforts and the sustainable use of natural resources to enhance biodiversity.

A diverse community of college students and faculty use the Institute to engage with the environment through research, natural resource management planning, and various creative pursuits. Area ecosystem biodiversity and land management decisions are strengthened by applying Institute research findings, which provide a better understanding of a diverse ecosystem's environmental, economic, and social benefits. Long-term research data is also used to understand environmental challenges and changes. Community members celebrate, learn from, and are inspired to practice stewardship because of the creative projects, research, and natural resource fellowships that are offered at the Institute.

The Institute's work is financially supported by its endowment and funding from individuals and local, state, regional, and national organizations. Clean air, clean water, healthy soil, and biological diversity are accessible to all ecosystem inhabitants because protecting the environment is no longer a niche issue; it's simply "business as usual." Supported by residents and

organizations with the interest and skill sets needed to ensure its continued well-being, the Pierce Cedar Creek Institute Community is healthy and resilient.

The Institute's Current Mission:

Mission: Inspire appreciation and stewardship of our environment.

Expanded Mission – In Support of the Current Mission

In support of the Expanded Vision, Pierce Cedar Creek Institute will encourage all Community members to develop and build a mutually beneficial relationship with the natural world. The Institute will inspire the conservation of healthy ecosystems and motivate the community to spend time in nature by making its property accessible to all.

Contributing to the development of science literacy among students, teachers, and community members of all ages, the Institute will play an integral role in improved science instruction provided by pre-kindergarten through college educators and environmental professionals through access to curriculum, professional training, and support of hands-on learning experiences.

In addition, the Institute will provide opportunities for research, natural resource management, and creative arts to faculty and students from the colleges and universities in the Pierce Cedar Creek Institute Consortium and other institutions of higher learning. These experiences will foster a deeper appreciation of the natural world and guide faculty and student professional development.

The Institute will foster the biodiversity of its property to ensure its research value is maintained. The research will result in the collection, interpretation, and dissemination of high-quality data that will contribute to informed land management activities at the Institute and its Community. Strategic partnerships will be developed and strengthened to encourage diverse perspectives and innovative land management conservation strategies.

The Institute will secure the diverse support needed to ensure continued, effective operations. In this work, the Institute will be guided by its strategic values. It will play a leading role in the community's recognition of conservation and stewardship as the foundation of a healthy community.

Step 3: Boundary Partners

Next, the LRP Team identified various Boundary partners and Strategic partners. Boundary partners are individuals, groups, or organizations the Institute plans to work with to influence change. Strategic partners are organizations the Institute intends to partner with and share resources to strengthen both entities' reach and effectiveness.

From the ten Boundary partners identified, five were chosen to focus on first, and later narrowed down to four. Narrowing down the targeted Boundary partners should ensure resources are available to support efforts and success. Other Boundary partners will be added as resources and opportunities increase.

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The Four Focus Boundary Partners are:

- 1. Barry County Formal & Informal Educators & Students
- 2. Institute Members & Volunteers
- 3. Biological Field Station Researchers, Artists, & Writers
- 4. Private Land Owners & Riparian Residents

The Other Boundary Partners Identified are:

- Barry County Governmental Officials (was in the original 5 chosen)
- Agribusiness & Agricultural Producers
- Hospital & Health Organizations
- Outdoor Recreation Organizations
- Barry County Businesses
- Barry County Community

Strategic Partners were also Identified.

Although there are no doubt many more, these Strategic partners are categories of organizations the Institute would like to partner and share resources with to strengthen both entities' reach and effectiveness.

They are:

- Environmental Nonprofits & Natural Resource Organizations
- Tribal Groups
- Local Media
- Professional Land Managers and Organizations

Step 4: Outcomes

Outcome Challenges are the changed behaviors, relationships, activities, or actions of the Boundary partners that the Institute is working to bring about. The Institute's "challenge" is to help bring about these changes. Outcomes are the desired effects of achieving Outcome Challenges.

The LRP Team brainstormed multiple Outcomes for each Boundary Partner, then condensed the list down to four main Outcomes that were consistent among all Boundary partners.

The Four Outcomes for the Four Boundary partners are:

- 1. *Boundary partners make scientifically-literate decisions that support and create healthy ecosystems.*
- 2. *Boundary partners develop individual connections to the natural world.*
- 3. *Boundary partners engage in conservation efforts to maintain and improve ecosystem health.*
- 4. *Boundary partners utilize civic engagement to support and create healthy ecosystems.*

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Step 5: Progress Markers

The fifth step involved defining the Progress Markers that will confirm advancement is being accomplished toward the Outcomes. These are a set of graduated indicators of changed behavior. Progress Markers can be categorized as what the Institute: 1. Expects to see, 2. Would like to see, and 3. Would love to see. These can also be categorized as short-, medium-, and long-term indicators.

Many Progress Markers were identified for each of the four Boundary partners. Those below were more general and consistent among all or most of the four targeted Boundary partners.

1. Understand how to use scientific reasoning and use that tool in making life choices.
2. Visit the Institute regularly for educational programs, hike trails, and spend time in nature.
3. Share knowledge learned at the Institute by becoming "ambassadors" and promoting involvement with the Institute.
4. Change consumption choices based on knowledge gained at the Institute.
5. Plant and manage native plants in their own landscapes and help with stewardship efforts at the Institute and within their community.
6. Know what a healthy ecosystem is and engage in stewardship activities.
7. Advocate with local governments and organizations to protect water quality and healthy ecosystems, and address other environmental issues such as climate change mitigation.

Other, more specific Progress Markers included:

Educators & Students:

- Teachers regularly use outdoor spaces to teach science.
- MSTEP scores in science consistently improve.
- Schools use the Institute for field trips, and Pre-K through elementary classes visit the Institute at least once a year.

Biological Field Station Researchers:

- Translate and share research findings with the public.
- Publish research studies in peer-reviewed journals and publications.
- Conduct cross-site, multi-year research projects for more significant research impact.

Barry County Land Owners & Managers:

- Develop and implement a land management plan for their property.
- Secure a conservation easement on their property.

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Step 6: Strategy Maps

In this step, the Team worked to identify the strategies that would contribute to achieving the Outcome Challenges for each Boundary partner, creating a Strategy Map. Again, many efforts, activities, and programs were brainstormed. For example, program ideas included the development of a research experience and increased professional development for teachers, expansion of family programming, and the creation of various advisory panels. This list was narrowed down with many ideas from the Strategy Map development benefiting multiple Boundary partners.

For example, this list includes:

- Build an outdoor classroom/pavilion at the Institute for teaching classes and providing programs.
- Install an ADA-accessible trail at the Institute and make accessibility improvements to the facilities.
- Provide ongoing water monitoring and assessment for the community.
- Update the Institute's website with valuable information that helps people make changes to support a healthier environment.
- Start an equipment loan program to provide the resources for stewardship efforts.
- Provide funding or grants to support stewardship and educational efforts.
- Theme the Gift Shop to support more environmentally-friendly buying choices.

Some more specific ideas include:

- Develop a career series to connect students with people in the STEM fields.
- Create a high school research program.

While other ideas were more targeted at increasing the Institute's resources:

- Facilitate a docent program to help with educational efforts.
- Hire an onsite scientist. Provide regular volunteer projects with a volunteer training program.
- Connect with other organizations focused on water, such as GVSU and MSU.

Step 7: Organizational Practices

The final step of the Intentional Design stage of Outcome Mapping is Organizational Practices. The purpose of this step is to evaluate the organization to ensure it is equipped to achieve and sustain the defined efforts.

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Before beginning this step, the LRP Team decided it was important to build their understanding around three ideas:

1. The difference between Activities and Outcomes.
2. The use of data in measurement and evaluation efforts.
3. How to better manage change around behavior-centered design principles.

Work will progress on developing a better understanding in these areas as the LRP Team gathers constituent feedback and reassess the draft long-range plan. Once these efforts are completed, the Team will go back and relook in detail at the eight Organizational Practices, which will help us evaluate our potential for successfully fulfilling our Expanded Vision and Expanded Mission.

Some Final Thoughts on Outcome Mapping and Stage 1 – Intentional Design

The term Intentional Design implies the organization using Outcome Mapping is framing its activities based on the changes or outcomes it intends to help bring about. It is not focusing first on the activities or programs it “thinks” or “believes” will best serve its vision and mission. Because an organization has influence over but not full control over its Boundary partners, it can only claim that a contribution has been made to bring about change and should never attempt attribution.

Pierce Cedar Creek Institute is working to better understand Outcome Mapping and is committed to its framework that focuses on outcomes or changes in behavior. It is a people-focused system for building capacity that supports long-term changes.