



Charles River Conservancy

STRATEGIC PLAN 2026



2025 STRATEGY REFRESH

The Charles River Conservancy (CRC) believes that **everyone is entitled to a core memory on the Charles**—bountiful, transformative experiences that create lasting connections. By inviting people to find their place along the Charles River, we can activate environmental awareness, decrease tension between the human and natural worlds —and build a healthier, more vibrant future for our river and our communities. We operate in a spirit of possibility —embracing the power of inspiration, innovation, community, and joy — as the best tools to combat the deep challenges facing the Lower Charles. We provide programming that connects people to the river, projects that enhance the river’s wellbeing as a natural urban space, and advocacy that centers community participation.

Together, the CRC Staff and Board have worked to articulate and approve a multi-year strategic plan, summarized below. Importantly, this plan will guide an exciting phase of growth for the organization, brought on by increased demand for the role we play as a convener and collaborator across public and private partners. The following document will serve as our foundation as we continue to evolve and adapt to meet the needs of our dynamic river and diverse communities under the guidance of the mission, values and goals described below.

MISSION

The Charles River Conservancy works to amplify community voice and catalyze bold solutions, to make the Lower Charles River and its parks more vibrant, healthy and welcoming now and in the future. Our work aligns with 3 “C”s:

Connect organizations, people and communities to each other and the river and its parks

Create bold, impactful solutions that elevate and strengthen the river and its parks as an essential ecological foundation and cultural asset for Greater Boston

Celebrate the river and its parks and the intersection of people and nature to inspire involvement





VALUES

LEADERSHIP THROUGH COLLABORATION

Engaging across sectors, actively listening, enabling collective action and involving diverse stakeholders creates better, more inclusive, equitable solutions, leads to better social and environmental outcomes and earns the respect and trust of our partners and the communities in which we operate.

EQUITY THROUGH ACCESS

Removing barriers to create welcoming spaces by the river enables belonging, enjoyment, awareness, appreciation - and ultimately greater equity; this in turn fosters increased ownership, stewardship, and support for conservation.

CONNECTION THROUGH DISCOVERY

The river and its parks hold enormous potential to enable celebration, joy, connection, and learning for individuals, organizations, and communities.

INNOVATION THROUGH EXPERIMENTATION

Just as the river continues to evolve and adapt, we must work differently—trying new, entrepreneurial approaches and pushing data-driven decision making to get to better outcomes for the river and its parks, and the communities that surround it.

PROGRESS THROUGH POSSIBILITY

We must embrace the challenge and urgency of improving and protecting the ecology and health of the river and its parks from a positive perspective and by pursuing the intentional, sustainable growth and development needed for communities to thrive.

GOALS

Goals articulated in 2020 have guided CRC through an extremely successful period of growth and development. While largely consistent with the tenets that have guided the last five years, they have been refined for further clarity.



2025 REFINED GOALS



PEOPLE Community Resilience

Cultivate public engagement and advocacy



PLACES Climate Resilience

Advance river and park health



PROCESS Organizational Resilience

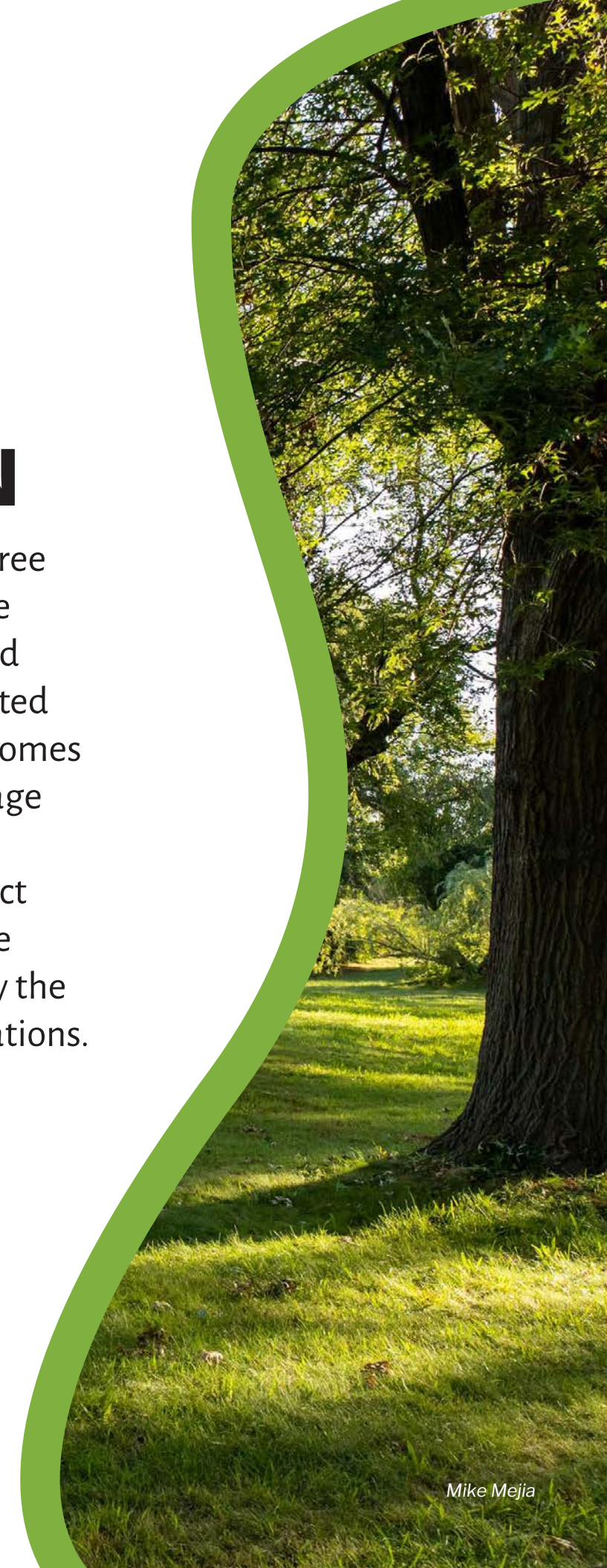
Invest in our capacity and culture



Tucker Horan

3-YEAR ACTIVATION

As important as defining our three distinct goals is how they will be activated by our board, staff, and volunteers. Each goal is articulated through a series of desired outcomes and concrete actions that leverage the CRC's ability to combine people, place, and policy to effect change. These actions will guide the next three years and also lay the foundation for long-term aspirations.



Mike Mejia



Save the Harbor/Save the Bay

PEOPLE

Community Resilience

Cultivate public engagement and advocacy



LONG-TERM OUTCOME

The CRC is an organization that invites joy, discovery, and new connections to the Charles Riverfront through education, arts, and culture.

ACTION 1A

Increase discovery and connection with the river through partnership-focused programming that matches the diversity and vibrancy of the Charles River Reservation's neighboring communities.

- Grow educational programming in areas where the CRC brings unique value
- Build on success of pilot public art at Lynch Family Skatepark to develop an expanded, collaborative arts and culture strategy
- Leverage relationship with DCR, municipalities and other key stakeholders to increase quantity and diversity of programming along the Charles



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LONG-TERM OUTCOME

The CRC is a trusted partner to decision makers, collectively shaping positive change in the environment through collaboration and community participation.

ACTION 1B

Leverage the CRC's position as a trusted partner to DCR, and municipalities to channel and communicate community feedback into decisions that will shape the future of the Lower Charles Basin.

- Increase tracking of priority projects and policies that impact the lower Charles River
- Strengthen civic participation in decisions and issues that impact the Charles River Reservation
- Ensure the CRC is well positioned to influence key decisions that affect the Charles

LONG-TERM OUTCOME

City Splash is a beloved component of the local events calendar, continually inspiring efforts for a regularly swimmable Charles.

ACTION 1C

Leverage City Splash to advance community and climate resilience goals.

- Harness event to amplify organizational voice and mission visibility
- Seek execution strategies to ensure a safe, welcoming and successful event
- Revisit feasibility of more regular swimming and swimming areas along the Charles





Russ Laman



Rendering by Perkins&Will

PLACES

Climate Resilience

Advance river and park health



LONG-TERM OUTCOME

The CRC involves the widest possible range of stakeholders and convenes experts to push bold solutions for climate adaptation.

ACTION 2A

Expand floating wetlands in the Charles River to highlight the power of climate innovation.

- Build momentum, collect feedback and activate floating wetland expansion through community and stakeholder engagement
- Design and implement an expansion plan for the Broad Canal
- Ensure success of floating wetland expansion through policy, research and public-private partnerships

LONG-TERM OUTCOME

The CRC offers hands-on opportunities for all to improve and protect the ecology and health of the river and its parks, addressing the urgency of climate change through collective, positive action.

ACTION 2B

Leverage the CRC's position as a convener and organizer of volunteers to address the river's most pressing climate challenges.

- Provide high-quality, model-worthy volunteer opportunities to inspire environmentalism and improve park and river health
- Increase biodiversity with invasive species management, replanting and education
- Activate relationships, volunteers, advocacy and funding resources to improve the health of the Lower Charles Basin's tree canopy

LONG-TERM OUTCOME

The CRC is a model for leveraging public-private interests for the benefit of public park land health and access.

ACTION 2C

Facilitate high-impact park improvement projects.

- Identify and map high-priority projects
- Develop strategies for Charles River Reservation-wide improvements
- Formalize CRC role in park improvements





PROCESS

Organizational Resilience

Invest in our capacity and culture



LONG-TERM OUTCOME

The CRC is where all feel safe, earning the respect and trust of our partners and the communities in which we operate.

ACTION 3A

Integrate and advance diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging practices across all facets of the organization.

- Invest in external expertise for organization-wide evaluation and planning to center each strategic goal on DEIB
- Build an organizational ecosystem that is reflective of the communities we partner with
- Connect organizational DEIB goals and actions to advance regional environmental justice efforts
- Integrate ongoing training, shared norms and competency building across board and staff



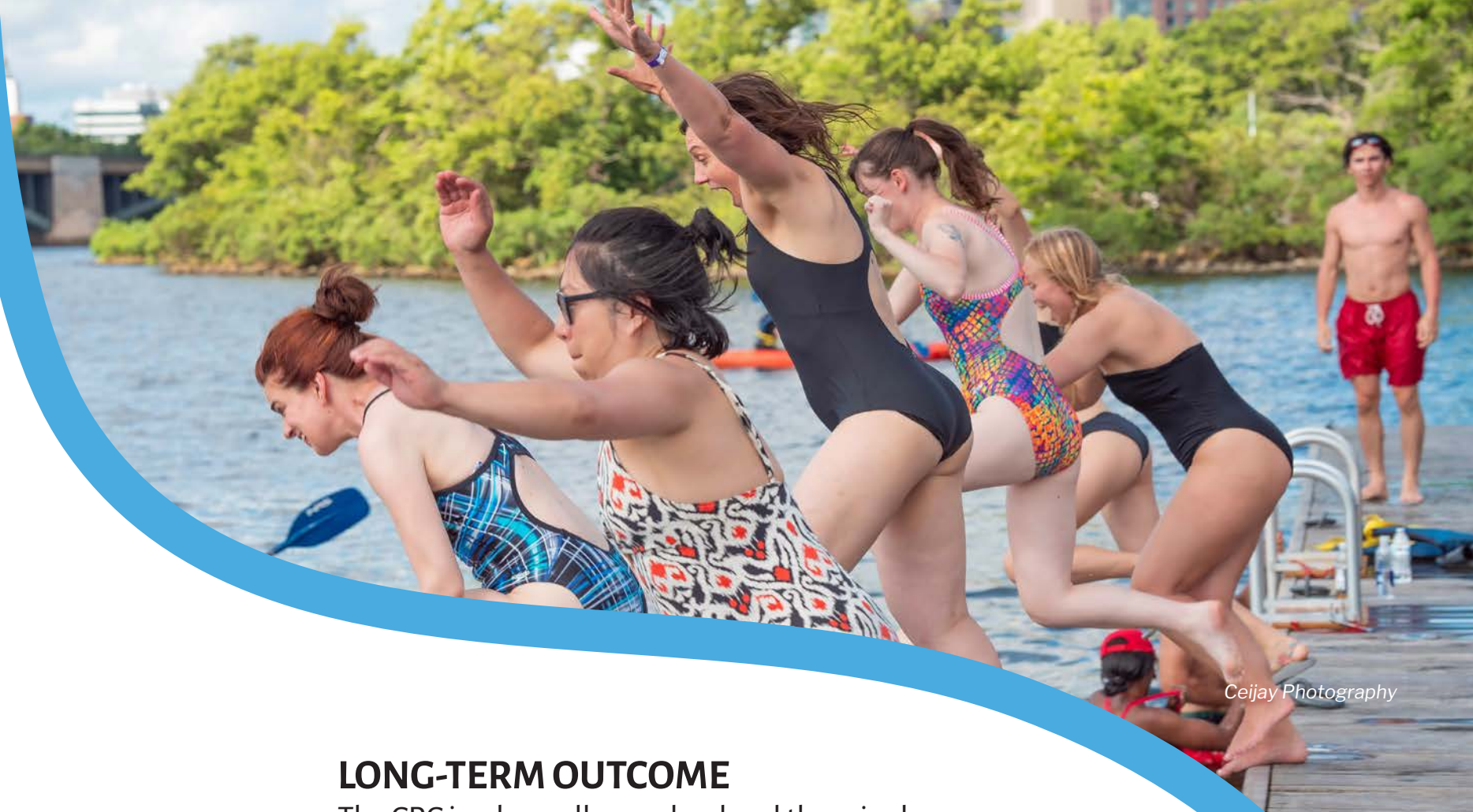
LONG-TERM OUTCOME

The CRC is where all are supported and have agency to balance professional and personal priorities.

ACTION 3B

Add capacity with key hires and board expertise.

- Hire Impact Director to strength organizational leadership, strategic planning, program growth and evaluation practices
- Hire Project Manager to lead floating wetland expansion and park improvements
- Add support staff for programming to enable program/ project growth and leadership opportunities for Managers
- Strengthen Board of Directors through membership, culture-setting and procedures



Cejay Photography

LONG-TERM OUTCOME

The CRC is where all are valued and there is always an opportunity to learn and grow individually and collectively.

ACTION 3C

Foster and invest in a culture of growth and feedback.

- Increase and vary opportunities for 360 feedback
- Hold regular retreats to share lessons learned, best practices and feedback; and uncover more opportunities for collaboration
- Develop consistent planning and training tools to increase transparency and efficiency
- Grow and celebrate staff development with improved policy and practices



LONG-TERM OUTCOME

The CRC is where all feel secure within a well-resourced, balanced organization that focuses on high ROI opportunities and long-term relationships.

ACTION 3D

Ensure adequate resources for continuing organizational growth.

- Invest in systems and practices to build CRC development capacity
- Grow individual philanthropic giving with data and increased outreach
- Develop consistent planning and training tools to increase transparency and efficiency
- Grow and celebrate staff development with improved policy and practices



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Front cover photo by Mike Mejia

Back cover photo by Hans Nedde



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