

MOUNT ST. HELENS INSTITUTE STRATEGIC PLAN

2018 - 2024

2024 Progress Report



MOUNT ST. HELENS
INSTITUTE



Mission

The Mount St. Helens Institute advances understanding and stewardship of the Earth through science, education, and exploration of volcanic landscapes.

Vision

We envision a world where *all people* have a meaningful connection to the Earth, living in harmony with each other and the natural world.

Our Story

Mount St. Helens Institute is widely recognized and respected for offering experiences of connection for people of all ages and backgrounds to learn from, engage in, and be inspired by the science, cultural history, and unique landscapes of Mount St. Helens.

Our exceptional science and outdoor education programs nurture curiosity about nature and build critical thinking and career skills for future decision-makers and leaders. We strengthen conservation and stewardship activities so that Mount St. Helens and public lands thrive for future generations. Unique facilities around the volcano provide a multitude of experiences that attract groups large and small, from near and far.

We are an integral part of our regional communities, with a large and diverse cadre of volunteers sustaining all that we do. Our staff, board, volunteers, partners, and participants reflect the diversity of communities around the volcano, helping in our work to remove barriers to experiencing and learning from the volcano. We provide an environment that values staff, ensuring they are compensated for and supported in their hard work and dedication.

As a strong, stable and sustainable organization, we are able to adapt to change while fostering growth in relevance and impact in both the short and long term.



Values

We believe in the power of science to help solve problems, inspire critical thinking, and make the world a better place.

We believe that the natural world and public lands around us are an irreplaceable resource to be respected, loved, understood, and cared for.

We believe that everyone, regardless of their appearance, background, physical ability, or economic status, can learn from and be inspired by the volcano in our backyard.

We believe our organization, programs, and partnerships should be inclusive and reflective of the needs and interests of people of all backgrounds, cultures, and abilities.

Exposure to the transformative and inspiring landscape of Mount St. Helens should be open and accessible to all. At Mount St. Helens Institute, we advocate for that access. We value people from all backgrounds and honor the innumerable ways of learning and knowing, because diverse perspectives and cultural knowledge are integral to achieving a deeper understanding of this landscape and its history.



Equity Statement

We acknowledge sociocultural inequities—including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, and classism—limit certain communities’ exposure to science, education, and exploration of the natural world. We grow based on who and how we serve, so to confront and work against these inequities, we strive to:

- Commit to making diversity, equity and inclusion evident in our organization’s culture, policies, curriculum, programs, and partnerships
- Value, respect, and acknowledge the unique experiences, talents, and backgrounds of our staff, board, volunteers, partners, and program participants
- Build collaborative relationships, aware that it takes time and effort to develop authentic and deep connections
- Remain willing to learn from our mistakes, open to critique and dialogue, and continue to actively learn about diversity, equity and inclusion practices
- Establish a culture of respect, openness, integrity, and honesty in order to inspire each person’s curiosity and joy

We recognize that we undertake these efforts at a time of reckoning. Though there are signs of increasing accountability, systemic injustice remains deeply rooted in the U.S. The complicated matter of addressing these issues is a core component of our all of work.

The Process

Strategic planning is most effective when organizations implement actions based on priorities and the plan is systematically reviewed and revised. MSHI has committed to establishing and engaging in a continuous process resulting in key strategic priorities and actions for the 4 year period from 2018-2021. The process results in immediate actionable items and will be reviewed and revised annually. Within this period MSHI will be able to create a culture of planning, implementation, and revision designed to reach its desired direction and mission.

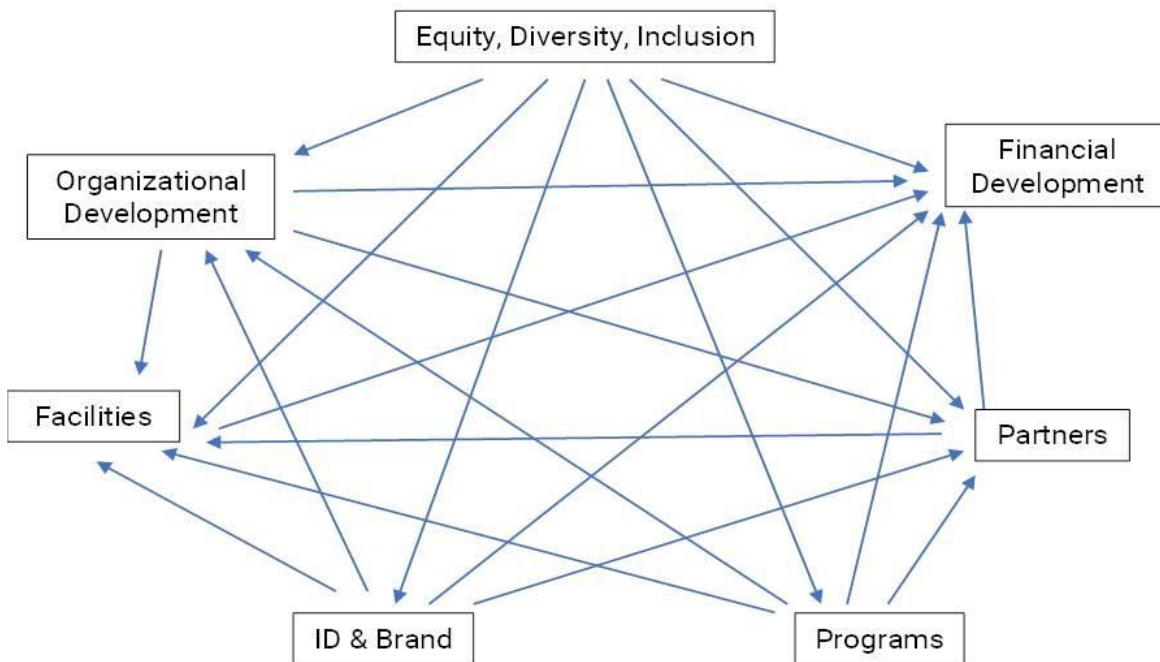
The strategic planning workshop was designed to create direction and action for the five year period. The results of the pre-planning work conducted internally by MSHI staff and board culminated with a strategic planning & implementation workshop in June 2017, with continued development through the rest of 2017.

In 2022, MSHI staff and board decided to continue using the seven key strategic issues as a framework for ongoing planning and implementation until 2024.

Strategic Issues and Interrelationship Digraph

The Interrelationship Digraph is a tool used to determine which of our top priorities is the best place to start. If one of the top priorities is a driver it can influence the successful accomplishments of the others. During the process, a consensus was achieved which drew arrows from drivers to priorities that it influences.

We had developed seven key strategic issues which were affirmed in the creation of the vision story. The ID activity used those seven strategic issues to determine which one or more would be the best place to start developing strategies, and action for the five-year strategic plan.



Strategic Priority #1 - Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Implement a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) through all aspects of the organization. See MSHI's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan for additional details.

2018-2024 Accomplishments & Impact

- Participated in Intertwine Alliance's EDI cohort trainings
- Board adopted Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Plan
- Created organizational equity statement, committee charter, and lens
- Ongoing programmatic and training improvement
- Feedback from students and teachers shows inspiration and inclusive programming

2025 Actions

- Create an achievable 2025 action plan based on the EDI plan with measurable outcomes
- Rethink EDI committee objectives with a focus on providing consultation for practical challenges; integrate all staff into committee objectives
- Develop messaging and action to ensure EDI is infused into MSHI's work
- Examine cost barrier for guided programs

Strategic Priority #2 - Identity

Establish the Mount St. Helens Institute as the leading source of outdoor and educational opportunities at Mount St. Helens and throughout the region.

2018-2024 Accomplishments & Impact

- Developed communications toolkit
- Improved brand relevancy and identity: People in the outdoor community know recognize and know about MSHI
- Marketing & program sales success: 2024 spring field trips full, climbs 97% full, guided adventures 90% full
- Built and strengthened relationships with policy makers
- Increased collaboration with other regional outdoor school providers
- Great media coverage around GeoGirls and cornice awareness

2025 Actions

- Continue to strengthen and define MSHI identity amidst changing landscape
- Hire a talented Marketing & Communications Coordinator
- Restart the Strategic Communications Committee
- Use data to define marketing strategies for 2025
- Launch new website
- Improve social media presence
- Develop improved print materials
- Train staff & volunteers to be brand ambassadors across all departments

Strategic Priority #3 - Programming

Ensure inclusive, high-quality science, education, and exploration programs are responsive to community needs and reduce barriers.

2018-2024 Accomplishments & Impact

- Programs and impact thrived through covid-19 adaptations (2020-21) and executive leadership transition (2024)
- Expanded outreach with regional school districts and supported Outdoor Schools WA
- Developed and improved program-specific logical frameworks and evaluations
- Improved staff and volunteer training with a focus on equity and developing staff capacity/leadership
- Expanded program partnerships with Cowlitz Tribe, community serving organizations, affinity groups, schools and districts
- New programming: Virtual Field Trips, Artist in Residence, MSHI Trail Crew, Photography Workshops

2025 Actions

- Improve safety and risk management training to build more seasonal staff confidence
- Improve outreach to schools and youth organizations
- Assess guided adventures accessibility for the 2026 program season
- Assess and develop guided tourism opportunities.

Strategic Priority #4 - Organizational Development

Expand organizational capacity and function to support long-term sustainability

2018-2024 Accomplishments & Impact

- Focused on stability after significant staffing changes
- Improved file management
- Supporting staff - staff training, internal promotions
- Strengthened policies and practices (mileage, financial management)
- Seasonal staff satisfaction - stayed through the year, many seasonal staff returned
- Began modernizing systems - implemented new financial system to gain visibility of finances, streamlined payroll/HR systems and onboarding processes

2025 Actions

- Continue to modernize systems - continued implementation of financial system and human resources/application process
- Set Key Performance Indicators across the organization
- Strengthen financial health - KPI dashboard, reduce borrowing from Restricted Funds, show modest increase in reserves
- Provide more opportunities for staff to engage in new strategic planning process
- Conduct internal organizational assessment
- Develop strategies for improved staff retention
- Develop and provide pathways for conflict management
- Build improved structure around staff meetings

Strategic Priority #5 - Partnerships

Build community through strong relationships with a diverse range of actively engaged partners who support and enrich our programs and share our values

2018-2024 Accomplishments & Impact

- Cultivated Cowlitz County community partnerships
- Strengthened partnerships - Forest Service, USGS including drafting MOUs
- Cultivated relationships with local school districts (both formal and informal)
- Engaged legislators
- New partnerships - Cowlitz Community Partners, WA State Parks, WA Outdoor School Coalition, programmatic community partners.

2025 Actions

- Develop a partner map
- Include key partners in strategic planning/feedback
- Expand business partnerships (tourism, sponsorship, rentals/retreats)
- Portland sponsorships
- Expand Cowlitz County partnerships

Strategic Priority #6 - Facilities

Develop facilities that provide meaningful and inclusive experiences for our programs and communities with a unique focus on the Coldwater Ridge campus

2018-2024 Accomplishments & Impact

- Garnered support for future vision from US Forest Service and other community groups
- Developed business plan and financial model for Mount St. Helens Lodge and Education Center
- Developed Mount St. Helens Lodge and Education Center master plan
- Completed financial feasibility studies
- Obtained 30 year Special Use Permits from US Forest Service to operate and develop site.
- Progressed on design and engineering work for trail connectors and campground
- Kitchen improvements and repairs - dishwasher, combi ovens

2025 Actions

- Ensure infrastructure meets current staff needs: office supplies, technology (hardware and software), vehicles
- Assess and plan for improved access for volunteers and guide staff
- Chart course for capital development

Strategic Priority #7 – Fund Development

Establish sustainable funding streams informed by MSHI partnerships, programs, and operational platform to achieve developmental goals

2018-2024 Accomplishments & Impact

- Adapted to emergent needs in development
- Established finance committee
- Expanded fundraising capacity and skills
- Success fundraising to sustain organization through the challenges of the pandemic
- Transitioned to NeonCRM (donor management); improved data management
- Strengthened donor communications
- Continued success of Boots & Bow Ties
- Hired Development & Community Engagement Director
- Cultivated donor relationships with new leadership

2025 Actions

- Create a comprehensive, strategic, and actionable development plan
- Continue to strengthen donor cultivation, stewardship, and recognition
- Expand business sponsorship opportunities
- Rethink fundraising events
- Develop donor-adjacent events



For more information, please contact:

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