



# **2020 Summary Strategic Plan**

## Introduction

The Irvine Nature Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization founded in 1975 and located in Owings Mills, Maryland. Irvine provides opportunities for nature exploration and education to youth and adults through structured programming and access to its campus. Irvine is committed to the following mission:

*“We all thrive outdoors. We encourage lifelong engagement with the natural world through environmental learning and green living. At Irvine, we inspire people to explore, respect and protect nature.”*

Irvine delivers on its mission through place-based educational programming including a nature preschool, nature camps, field trip hosting, after school programs, and a breadth of adult learning programs and volunteer opportunities, as well as off-site and outreach sessions in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and surrounding county schools, community centers, and senior centers. Irvine “spreads the word” about nature in the Piedmont Province, which includes greater Baltimore, through the weekly broadcast “The Nature of Things”, hosted by Executive Director Brooks Paternotte on WYPR. Irvine has developed and continues to add to a suite of family-based programming, including pre-shipped materials and branded virtual resources to support nature education in situations where the campus is not accessible to large groups.

Irvine’s evolution from a 25-acre nature center in 1975 to its current footprint of 211 acres has included a 7-mile relocation, major construction projects, a restoration of wetlands, and three land acquisitions. Much of this change has taken place over the last decade. Irvine has reinvented itself several times and bears little physical resemblance to the original nature center; its mission and focus, however, have been unwavering for the last 45 years. Irvine has aptly adjusted with each change to seize the new programming opportunities provided by its land and facility, which, along with community, are central to Irvine’s identity. It is with this same innovative spirit that Irvine responded in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Although the challenges of the pandemic limited access to spaces such as nature centers, Irvine is examining how it can deliver on its mission under different circumstances.

Today, Irvine is a complex organization, in terms of the programming it provides, the physical assets it manages, and the relationships with staff, donors, visitors and communities that it develops and maintains. Over the next five years, the organization will address this complexity through thoughtful planning and inclusive implementation of near-, mid-, and long-term initiatives that characterize a mature and sustainable organization. These initiatives are focused on five “Strategic Priorities”.

Irvine recognizes the connections and interdependencies of the Strategic Priorities, with Land and Community central to its mission, supported by impactful programs and a high functioning organization; financial stability allows Irvine to reliably support all of its Strategic Priorities. Further, Irvine recognizes the importance of preparedness, equity, wellness and different platforms for delivering education that have been elevated by the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020.

## Strategic Priorities

Irvine's Strategic Priorities were developed with feedback from the Board, Staff, Funders and Program participants, and were informed by research into peer organizations and community demographics. The five Strategic Priorities include:

***Stewarding Irvine's Land and Facilities***, to ensure that Irvine nurtures and protects its most unique asset, demonstrates leadership in conservation and sustainability, and provides a foundation for excellent nature programming.

***Creating Strong Community Connections***, to ensure that Irvine is a place where all feel welcome, to broaden awareness of Irvine within current and new communities, and to establish Irvine's role as a community partner.

***Investing in Organizational Capacity***, to support Irvine's organizational growth in alignment with the growth of its land and facilities, to ensure that Irvine's Staff and Board are prepared to most effectively support the mission of the organization, and to develop a strong and supportive organizational culture based on Irvine's values.

***Delivering Robust and Impactful Programming***, to ensure that Irvine is providing the highest quality, mission-aligned programming to the communities it serves.

***Ensuring Irvine's Financial Sustainability***, to align funding with strategic priorities and assure Irvine's long-term financial stability.



## Strategic Plan Management

The objective of this plan is to accomplish the identified goals for each of the above stated priorities over the next three to five years. The impact of some of these strategic priorities will be part of Irvine's business model for years to come.

The success in meeting or exceeding the expectations laid out in detail in this plan will be driven by the level of commitment from Irvine's Leadership, Board and Staff to hold themselves and each other accountable for each initiative, on a timely basis. Organizational and environmental factors will influence the implementation of this plan; given the uncertainties created by the COVID-19 pandemic, Irvine has learned that an interruption to the implementation to this plan is possible. Near-term initiatives supporting each Strategic Priority are designed to ensure that Irvine is as prepared as possible for such an interruption.

A commitment on behalf of Leadership, the Board of Trustees and Staff to actively and intentionally implementing this plan will allow this group of leaders to leave a lasting legacy for Irvine and the communities it serves.