

# Outdoors for All Theory of Change

December 2018

*By naming and reducing barriers and ensuring all people have opportunities to explore and enjoy nature, we will improve lives while inspiring a new generation of leaders to protect the environment.*

## Contents

- I. [Vision](#)
- II. [Introduction](#)
- III. [Values](#)
- IV. [Goals, Strategies, and Outcomes](#)
  - A. [Goal #1](#): Reduce barriers and expand access for all people to explore and enjoy nature
  - B. [Goal #2](#): Integrate outings and outdoor activities into Sierra Club culture, campaigns, programs, and activities at the national and local levels
  - C. [Goal #3](#): Establish clear pathways for engagement between outings and advocacy
- V. [Conclusion](#)

## I. Vision

The Sierra Club envisions a just, equitable, and sustainable future where all people benefit from a healthy, thriving planet and a direct connection to nature. In this world, all people breathe fresh air, drink clean water, and regularly spend time outdoors, whether playing in their neighborhood park or trekking through untouched wilderness. Public health professionals champion time in nature to improve health and wellness. Children are encouraged to explore, play, and learn outdoors. People have access to a wide diversity of outdoor experiences, allowing them to find community, peace, and internal strength through personally fulfilling connections to nature. Public shared spaces outdoors help strengthen our families and communities. The physical, social, and mental health of our society is on the rise. This direct connection to nature forms the foundation of a broad, diverse, and powerful grassroots movement, from which a new generation of leaders is inspired to protect and restore our lands, waters, and wildlife while prioritizing communities most negatively impacted by climate change and a lack of access to nature and the outdoors.

## II. Introduction

Today, far too many communities suffer from polluted air, contaminated water, and a lack of access to open spaces. Fewer than half of all people in the United States live within walking distance of a park. The greatest disparities in access are found in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color as a result of a long history of discriminatory policies and practices regarding control and use of land. For those without cars or reliable public transportation, access to parks and open spaces is even further limited.

At the same time, an entire generation is growing up indoors with little to no connection to nature, with serious health effects resulting from these increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Youth spend more than fifty hours a week on electronic media and just minutes a day playing outside. When asked about the barriers to spending time outdoors, America's youth cite lack of nearby access and lack of transportation as some of the [top reasons](#).

Furthermore, our country's long history of racism and exclusion prevents many people of color from feeling welcomed or safe outdoors. For example, the origin story of our national parks, often considered "America's best idea," includes the near-genocide and forced removal of Native Americans from their lands to ultimately create natural playgrounds for white and wealthier Americans. During the era of Jim Crow, our national parks were racially segregated, with only the lowest quality facilities made available to African Americans. Today, the legacy of racism and exclusion lives on, and a lack of diversity among park rangers and visitors to our national parks and public lands makes for a less than welcoming environment for many people of color.

For many years, the Sierra Club upheld these systems of oppression - first intentionally and later implicitly - and conceived of the wilderness as spaces reserved primarily for wealthy white men. We advocated for federal protection of wild lands to the direct harm of Native communities who had been living on the land for years, and for much of our history, prioritized protecting the Earth over its people. We have not done nearly enough to make our outings accessible and welcoming to those outside our historically upper-class, white demographic, and we have spent many years focused on introducing communities of color to our narrow definition of nature, without taking the time to build authentic relationships and recognize the ways communities already experience or would like to experience nature in their own lives.

Many incredible organizations have formed out of necessity to address these disparities over the last few decades, to affirm and encourage participation in the outdoors among marginalized communities and break down the barriers that prevent all people from feeling welcomed in our national parks and on all of our public lands. Organizations and programs serving people of color, women, the LGBTQIA+ community, veterans, people who are disabled, immigrants, refugees, the elderly, youth, and more have formed to increase opportunities for all communities to experience nature in culturally relevant ways. Today, Sierra Club is making earnest strides to utilize the Jemez Principles as a guide to working collaboratively and in deeper solidarity with those who strive to ensure all people feel safe, welcomed, valued, and at home in our parks and public lands. We are committed to being part of the solution.

Sierra Club believes that access to nature, such as public parks and open spaces, should be respected as a basic human right. Spending time in nature can lower stress, strengthen health, build self-esteem, improve academic performance, and build community ties. Our parks, public lands, waters, and wildlife are public assets and are not a luxury, but are vital to our individual and collective well-being. To experience outdoors space is to rediscover our shared humanity.

For more than 100 years, the Sierra Club has been guided by a simple and timeless principle: explore, enjoy, and protect the planet. Throughout our history, Sierra Club has led outings that bring people together to play and experience the outdoors, inspiring conservation ethics and action. These outings have not been as inclusive as they should be - both in who participates and what programming is offered, and we are committed now to expanding both. Over time, we have gained the wisdom to know that simply protecting public land, water, and wildlife is not enough. Now, more than ever, we need to work just as hard to ensure that all can share the benefits of public lands - from the wild landscapes of our national parks to the community gatherings at city parks and open spaces. Ensuring everyone can engage with nature helps us transform awe and wonder into a deep sense of responsibility that stewards and protects our shared public land, water, and wildlife. In short, connecting people with nature is for the benefit of both.

Sierra Club is dedicated to a robust 21st-century environmental movement, one that must connect more people to the outdoors and foster transformational experiences that inspire a new generation of leaders. We strive to bring back an individual connection with and appreciation for nature. We strive to provide opportunities for all people to connect with nature, to each other, to themselves and to improve their mental and physical health through that connection. This obligation means acknowledging and disrupting systems of oppression that prevent all people from benefiting from time outdoors and a safe, livable environment. To ensure everyone has the opportunity to develop their own unique and meaningful relationship to nature, we must practice values of equity, justice, and inclusion and promote advocacy and movement building in outdoor activities. Sierra Club is committed to first transforming ourselves so that we can contribute to a just, equitable, and inclusive movement that demands access to the outdoors for all people.

Our outdoors campaigns and programs are incredible assets that have operated independently of each other for far too long. To effectively leverage the strength of our programs, leaders, and hundreds of thousands of outings participants, it is time to unify our work around a common theory of change. The Outdoors for All Theory of Change charts a path toward a just, healthy, and thriving planet where all people can breathe fresh air, drink clean water, and benefit from a direct connection to the natural world. If we are successful, we will have dramatically increased the impact of our outdoors work within the Sierra Club and externally.

### **III. Values**

1. We understand access to public lands to be a human right, honor the myriad benefits being outside provides for individuals and communities, and work to break down social and economic barriers that prevent all people from enjoying outdoor opportunities
2. We value and honor the varied ways in which individuals and communities define, enjoy, explore, and protect our public lands, waters, and wildlife, including marginalized communities and others who have been left out of the mainstream environmental movement
3. We proactively engage marginalized communities and reach across economic lines and cultures to explore, enjoy, and protect the environment

4. We recognize marginalized communities as leaders in shaping the movement, value them as decision-makers, and center our work on their lived experience
5. We foster a culture of mentorship and engagement to support the next generation of leaders who reflect the diversity of our communities, thus building a broader and more diverse movement
6. We value the transformational over the transactional and strive to develop long-term partnerships that share decision-making, resources, and power
7. We value multiple social justice movements, building an outdoors-for-all movement in solidarity with and as part of the movement to create a just society
8. We practice the Jemez Principles at all levels of our organization: 1) be inclusive; 2) emphasis on bottom-up organizing; 3) let people speak for themselves; 4) work together in solidarity and mutuality; 5) build just relationships among ourselves; 6) commitment to self-transformation.

#### **IV. Goals, Strategies, and Outcomes**

1. Reduce barriers and expand access for all people to explore and enjoy nature
2. Integrate outings and outdoor activities into Sierra Club culture, campaigns, programs, and activities at the national and local levels
3. Establish clear pathways for engagement between outings and advocacy

##### ***Goal 1: Reduce barriers and expand access for all people to explore and enjoy nature.***

Sierra Club believes that access to nature, such as public parks and open spaces, should be respected as a basic human right. Barriers to entry are extensive and must be overcome by expanding just and equitable access to nature. We can do this by increasing close-to-home access to nature; ensuring clean public transportation to parks and open spaces; reducing the burden of expensive gear or programming; supporting schools and out-of-school-time providers to bring nature into the lives of our children; ensuring our public land management agencies demonstrate a commitment to equity and inclusion; promoting the benefits of time outdoors for all communities; supporting partners at the forefront of relevancy, equity and inclusion in the outdoors; and providing our outings leaders with the tools they need to acknowledge their privilege and utilize it to work with and support marginalized groups who have been excluded from mainstream conservation and outdoors movements.

*Strategy 1: Expand just and equitable public access to the outdoors for all by protecting, restoring, and establishing nearby public natural areas; increasing connectivity through clean public transportation options; raising resources to address outdoor equipment access; and advocating to ensure national parks and other public lands are accessible, welcoming, inclusive, and relevant for all people.*

*Strategy 2: Secure policies and funding for young people to experience outdoor and environmental education at school and out of school by advancing policies that ensure universal access to our public lands, waters, and learning opportunities; support and strengthen the work of the Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK); support and strengthen chapters and Inspiring*

*Connections Outdoors; and develop and support regional, state, and local efforts to get children, youth, and families outdoors.*

*Strategy 3: Sierra Club and our partners advance a just, equitable, and inclusive national movement to ensure access to the outdoors for all through strategic communications; lifting and supporting partners and the voices of marginalized communities; elevating success stories; and sharing what we learn from our own organizational transformation with our partners in the outdoor industry and broader environmental movement.*

*Strategy 4: Partner with all communities, especially those who have been marginalized and are often excluded in the outdoors, to improve access to nature; build and strengthen relationships with community based organizations and leaders; support existing Sierra Club outings programs; identify new programmatic focus areas; and expand efforts to provide culturally relevant experiences in the outdoors.*

*Strategy 5: Ensure outings leaders from all communities, particularly marginalized communities, are supported and have access to resources to lead and thrive in the Sierra Club by identifying and addressing cultural, structural, and institutional barriers; redesigning trainings to embody Sierra Club's equity, justice, and inclusion values; supporting staff and volunteer outings leaders with tools, resources, and coaching in order to drive progress on the equity goals identified in Sierra Club's strategic plan, Multi-Year Equity Plan, Movement goals, and Partnership, Equity, and Justice work; and recruiting and training leaders from the communities in which we work, particularly where we are engaging youth and veterans.*

#### Goal 1: Outcomes

- Increased number of nearby natural areas protected or established at the local level
- Increased number of schools have green schoolyards, gardens, and other natural spaces
- Increased public financing of clean public transportation to parks (i.e. "transit to trails") at the federal, state, municipal, and county levels
- Increased public programming to encourage youth to get outdoors through school and out-of-school-time activities (i.e. environmental education and outdoor classrooms, Every Kid in a Park program, etc.) at the federal, state, and municipal levels
- Increased number of public policies supporting equity and inclusion in the outdoors for communities of color, women, the LGBTQIA+ community, people who are disabled, veterans, elderly, youth, and others
- Increased partnerships and campaign planning with tribal nations and communities of color
- Increased partnerships and campaign planning with public health, education, social justice, faith-based, outdoor industry, veterans-serving, and youth-serving organizations
- Increased quality, quantity, and activation of partners through the Sierra Club founded and supported Outdoors Alliance for Kids (OAK)

- Increased frequency of local (state, municipal, county, etc.) actions to support access to nature
- Percentage of population living within walking distance of a park or open space increases (as measured by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or Trust for Public Land ParkScore)
- Increased media coverage of Sierra Club and our partners advancing a narrative of nature as a human right and equity in the outdoors
- Increased frequency of online actions in support of equity and inclusion in the outdoors
- Increased number of locally-led campaigns in support of access to the outdoors for all
- Increase total outings by 5% every year
- Resume bank established for 2020 to ensure we can quickly reverse damage to lands protection, access, and equity with the next administration
- All outings leaders complete workshops focused on equity in the outdoors and building an inclusive outdoors movement
- Outings Leader Trainings and certification process reflects Jemez Principles; equity, inclusion, and justice; and movement-building
- Outings leadership training is offered to all staff and volunteers across Sierra Club; Every orientation or training includes a module about outings work and opportunities to get involved.
- Increase in the number, diversity, and retention rate of Sierra Club Outings leaders.
- Increased number of Chapter and Group teams advancing equity, justice, and inclusion practices and principles
- Outings Leader Trainings and certification process reflects Jemez Principles; equity, inclusion, and justice; Partnerships and movement-building
- Continuing education materials developed and offered to so that all outing leaders have professional and personal opportunities for growth that support the Sierra Club values, goals and practices.
- Increased training opportunities for chapter staff and outings leaders (skill-based, issues-based, etc.) that lead to a better understanding of everyone's roles and ultimately greater collaboration.
- Centralized web-based portal hosts training opportunities for the new leader as well as to provide continuing education.

***Goal 2: Integrate outings and outdoor activities into Sierra Club culture, campaigns, programs, and activities at the national and local levels.***

In order to achieve our ambitious goals, the Sierra Club must work to build inclusiveness and collaboration into our own organization. We need to encourage integration between our campaigns, chapters and outings work nationally and locally. We will need to find common ground, develop shared strategies and work together to achieve mutual goals. We can do this by collaborating as we train and engage new staff, leaders, members, and supporters, highlighting the incredible work of our outings leaders (staff and volunteer), and providing support and education to demonstrate our collective vision and impact. By better integrating our work, we will become greater than the sum of our parts, improving people's lives through

increased outdoor access, and inspiring a broader and more diverse movement of environmental leaders.

*Strategy 1: Develop and support opportunities for Sierra Club staff, volunteers and their families to feel the restorative power of nature, enjoy the places they are fighting to protect, recharge their spirits, and strengthen relationships through regular events and HR policies, onboarding materials, and staff benefits reflect the importance and benefit of outdoor experiences.*

*Strategy 2: Ensure that outings are integrated into all aspects of the organization: making outings leadership accessible to all national Sierra Club volunteers and staff through integrated training programs, communications that share outdoors work as a value in itself, as well as a tactic to leverage in support of conservation outcomes; and structures and supports who can support and encourage the incorporation of outings at the department, campaign, or programmatic levels.*

*Strategy 3: Increase support for Sierra Club chapters, sections and groups to make it easier to connect outings and advocacy work through gatherings and training opportunities that help deepen relationships and foster dialogue between local conservation and outings leaders so that more outings participants are linked with advocacy opportunities and vice versa.*

*Strategy 4: Provide greater support to Sierra Club Chapters, Groups, and Sections to share stories about work being done on the ground and lift up the voices of Sierra Club outings leaders, partners and participants to a national audience.*

*Strategy 5: Use existing and develop new digital tools that support integration and understanding of the impact and effectiveness of our outings and to learn how outings participants engage and want to engage across Sierra Club work.*

## **Goal 2: Outcomes**

- Baseline numbers established of participants and their engagement with the Sierra Club.
- Segmented data lists created that ensure proper outreach and communication with front-line communities, veterans, and other communities who may benefit from a different approach to advocacy
- HR policies, onboarding materials, and staff benefits reflect the importance and benefit of outdoor experiences.
- Member benefits and volunteer orientation reflects the importance and benefit of outings
- 100% of staff receive a short module on outings as a part of onboarding and outings leadership training is required for anyone who plans outdoor events as part of their work
- Bylaws, processes and policies are updated to help ensure that outings leaders are reflected in volunteer leadership and decision-making
- Increased financial (and other) resources for chapters and outings leaders to conduct this work

***Goal 3: Establish clear pathways for engagement between outings and advocacy***

Sierra Club outings were conceived back in 1901 as a tool for mobilizing Sierra Club members to protect our nation's natural places. And in 1904, local outings were created as a way to provide members and activists with a way to build community in the spaces they were trying to protect. But the reality is that our outdoors and conservation programs currently operate in silos, dramatically limiting the impact of both. We believe it's necessary to reunite these programs by establishing a common vision and creating clear opportunities for staff and volunteers to learn, share resources, and collaborate at the local and national levels. In doing so, we hope to do a better job of 1) exposing outings participants to the local and national issues we're working on and engaging them on advocacy opportunities on an ongoing basis, and 2) encouraging conservation staff and volunteers to deepen their relationships with the places they're working to protect, the people they work with and become champions of the cause to increase access to the outdoors for all.

***Strategy 1: Develop and maintain regular communication with chapter staff and outings leaders about Sierra Club campaigns and other advocacy and conservation efforts.***

- Work with Chapter, Group, and Outings volunteer leadership to help elevate the contributions of outings leaders and support their engagement as a critical part of the volunteer community
- Develop and host regular webinars and/or conference calls for outings leaders from national campaign, program and local groups and chapters to share campaigns and priorities and explore collaborative opportunities.
- Develop and maintain comprehensive lists of internal points of contacts to ensure all outings leaders are able to connect with the appropriate leadership teams, grassroots teams, staff or volunteers overseeing campaign activity
- Support local leaders develop outings teams, committees, and community outings programs instead of focusing on individual outings leaders
- Provide guidance and workshops to help existing volunteers support new and existing outings leaders, including best practices for compliance, budgeting, and outreach.

***Strategy 2: Actively encourage staff and volunteers to participate in outings in order to further connect advocacy and conservation work with outings***

- Encourage communication between chapters, national campaigns and national programs to understand local issues, local practices, land agency policies, conservation issues and compliance issues when traveling to another state.

***Strategy 3: Build the movement through outings where people find community, peace, and internal strength through a connection to nature by offering outdoor activities at leadership meetings, as an alternative to political work for members and as a way to develop deeper relationships with partners and donors.***

*Strategy 4: Encourage Outings leaders to carry an intentional message to participants for conservation and protection of natural spaces close to home and far away by providing resources to get involved with the Sierra Club in addition to outings.*

*Strategy 5: Build outings that raise the visibility of and support for the solutions advocated by Sierra Club campaigns*

*Strategy 6: Maintain regular communication with outings participants about local and national Sierra Club opportunities*

### Goal 3: Outcomes

- 100% of (non-outings) volunteer leaders spend time in nature with the Sierra Club
- Increase total outings by 5% every year
- Increased training opportunities for local staff and leaders (skill-based, issues-based, etc.) that lead to a better understanding of everyone's roles and ultimately greater collaboration
- Increased number of outings that incorporate advocacy, activism, and/or stewardship
- Centralized online information provides resources, tools and strategies to help leaders engage participants in campaign action opportunities and learn about the campaigns their local chapters or national are working on.
- Increased communication with outings participants to create an optional pathway for advocacy involvement
- Increased communication with non outings participants to create and optional pathway for outings involvement
- Establish a clear channel of communication between local outings leaders and local group/chapter
- Regular schedule of webinars and/or conference calls established hosted by national program leads to identify and explain campaigns and priorities.

## **V. Conclusion**

Our nation is on the cusp of an historic transformation - we will either unite to share power and create a future where all people benefit from a healthy, thriving planet and a direct connection to nature, or we will succumb to climate chaos and further oppression of people living in the margins. The Sierra Club has long believed in the power of nature to heal, but we cannot do things as we have in the past. We must start with an internal transformation, grappling with and dismantling the many ways the conservation movement has been exclusionary and even dangerous to marginalized communities. We must build a new 21st-century environmental movement that recognizes a healthy planet is only possible when all its people feel safe, respected, and heard.

This movement requires us to develop a new operating system within the Sierra Club - outings, campaigns, chapters, groups, and programs will need to collaborate much more deeply. We will need to work together to transform ourselves and the way we work and make decisions. We will

practice values of equity, justice, and inclusion and promote advocacy and movement building in outdoor activities. We will facilitate outings, develop leadership trainings, and work toward policy outcomes that foster respect and inclusivity of all people. We will take responsibility for each other and be accountable to our partners and participants.

We will need to broaden our work so that our outcomes increase our partners' ability to meet their goals and grow their power. We will also need to support leaders and policies that advance shared priorities in communities in which we work. Together we can secure policies that increase close-to-home access to nature and ensure public transportation to parks and open spaces. We will work in solidarity and collaboratively to ensure all people feel safe, welcomed, valued, and at home in our parks and public lands. We will develop opportunities for future generations to connect to their history and culture in parks and public lands. We will provide opportunities for all people to connect with nature, to each other, to themselves and to improve their mental and physical health through those connections. By uniting together, not only can we successfully defend the people and places we care deeply about, but that in building this more equitable movement, we build the power and grassroots energy that can propel us forward for many decades to come, so that we can achieve our vision of a just, equitable, and sustainable outdoors for all.