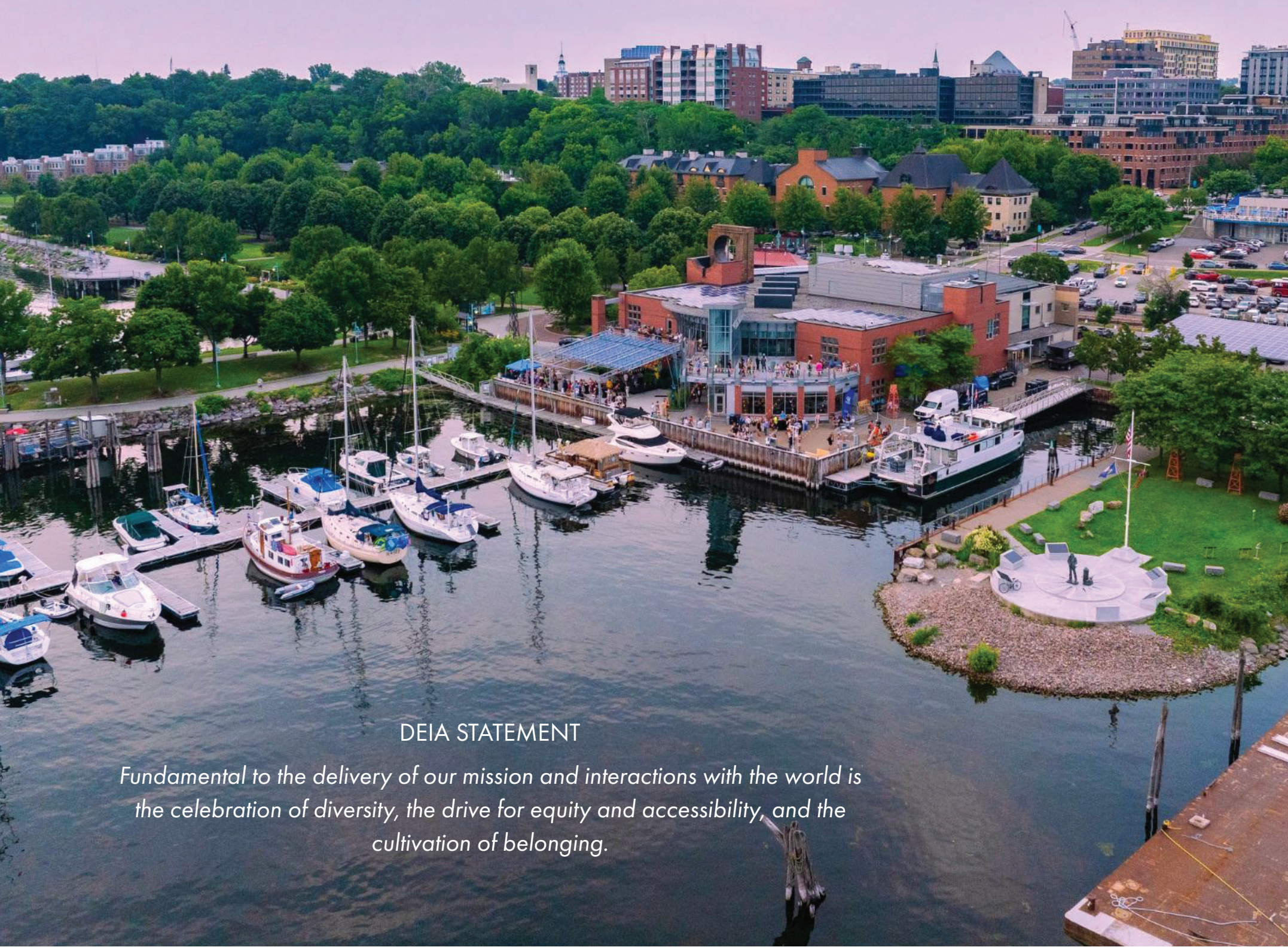




# ECHO2030

STRATEGIC PLAN

# welcome



## DEIA STATEMENT

*Fundamental to the delivery of our mission and interactions with the world is the celebration of diversity, the drive for equity and accessibility, and the cultivation of belonging.*

When you walk through ECHO's front doors, you are greeted by a familiar scene — the sounds of exuberant school children weaving their way through the museum, the woosh and whirl of dozens of interactive exhibits, the sight of parent and child sitting in awe before a lake sturgeon or spiny softshell turtle, and above all, the feel of well-loved community space. It can be hard to remember that thirty years ago, this scene was just a community dream.

In 1991, a citizen advisory committee tasked with finding the highest and best use of public land on the Burlington Waterfront envisioned a museum where all people could explore science and connect to their local ecosystem. The realization of this dream began with a small pilot museum in space borrowed from the U.S. Naval Reserve. Known then as the Lake Champlain Science Center, we opened in 1995 and welcomed more than 33,000 people that first year.

Over the next eight years, ECHO's Board, in partnership with the City of Burlington and Senator Leahy's office, went about the hard work of transforming the old Naval Reserve into the science museum and lake aquarium we know today. ECHO's new home, the Leahy Center for Lake Champlain, jubilantly opened its doors in 2003. Today, our exhibits, programs, and collection of native aquatic animals reach more than **160,000** people annually, including **16,000** members, **7,500** school group visitors, **20,000** reduced-or free-admission guests, and **10,000** students, teachers, and families through our rural outreach program.

ECHO has come a long way from our humble roots as a pop-up in the old U.S. Naval Reserve. We have engaged an incredible **3.5 million people** over our three decades, operating 360 days per year and traveling all over Vermont. And though much has grown and changed—renovated exhibits and spaces, expanded early childhood programming, an embrace of STEM, a turtle head start program, the addition of an outreach program—our foundational values remain unchanged.

We are a public place where all are welcome and belong. We are committed to environmental and institutional sustainability. And we are a non-profit that acts in partnership with and in service to our community. Guided by these values, we chart our next five years. We are delighted and honored to continue this journey with you.

# Timeline

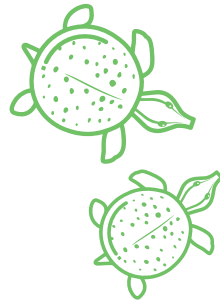


1991

We are incorporated as the Lake Champlain Science Center and our first Board of Directors is formed.

2001

The U.S. Naval Reserve is demolished and construction of a new building begins.

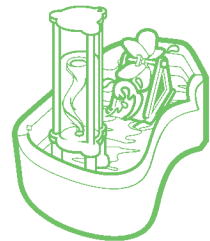


2007

We begin partnering with Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife on the Spiny Softshell Turtle Head Start Program.

2013

We launch our Early Childhood Science Initiative.

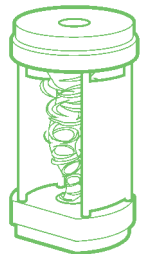


2016

We open Champ Lane, our 1,500-square-foot early childhood play space.

2019

We make significant green infrastructure upgrades, including a 9,500 square foot solar canopy and storm water gardens.



2021

We expand our interactive exhibits, opening the Awesome Forces and Engineer It galleries, and begin offering daily engineering design challenges.



2025

We will open our newly renovated Into the Lake gallery and Champ experience.

1995

A pilot science center is created in the old U.S. Naval Reserve.

2003

We reopen with the name ECHO in our new 28,000-square-foot, LEED-certified building, offering daily animal demos, walk-up education activities, and rotating, traveling exhibits.



2012

Our building footprint is expanded to include a 3,000-foot, state-of-the-art presentation and event space.



2015

We open our 3D micro theater.

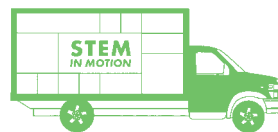


2018

We update our mission to "inspire and engage everyone in the joy of scientific discovery, wonder of nature, and care of Lake Champlain."

2019

We launch our STEM outreach program, reaching communities all over Vermont and Northeast, New York.



2022

We launch our STEM Teacher Institute.



2028

ECHO will achieve Net Zero operations through our Green Energy Project.



## ECHO'S MISSION

Inspire and engage everyone in the joy of scientific discovery, wonder of nature, and care of Lake Champlain.

## ECHO'S CORE PRINCIPLES

Science is for everyone

Science should benefit all people and is strengthened by broad and diverse participation.

Learning should be joyful.

The most impactful learning experiences are social, experiential, and personally meaningful.

Connection is the gateway to stewardship.

Appreciation for the natural world opens the door to the practice of environmental stewardship.



## ECHO'S VISION

A science-savvy community where people and nature thrive together.

# what we do



Animal Care Programs



Sensory-Friendly Sundays



Open Door Program



Intern & Volunteer Program



Special Exhibits

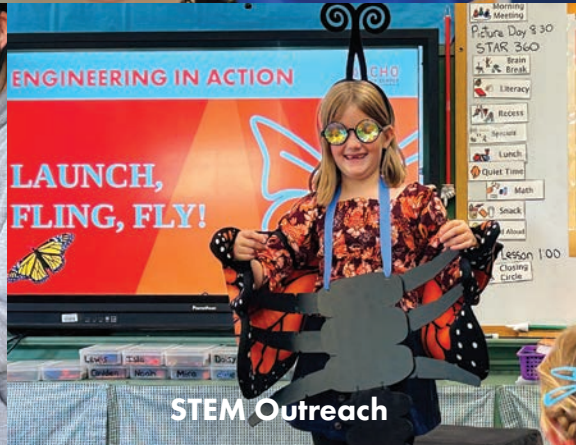
ECHO Early Learning (EEL)



Turtle Head Start Program



Masks On! Sundays



STEM Outreach



Science Exhibits



Education Public Programs



Traveling STEM Festivals



Teacher Institute



Champ Lane Exhibit



ECHO E-Team (Teen Program)

Live Animals

# where we are going

To craft ECHO 2030, we conducted interviews, focus groups, surveys, and conversations. Through that process, we gathered the insights and advice of over 400 members of the wider ECHO community, including our membership, our partners, our staff, and our Board.

We came to a deeper understanding of the experiences of those we serve, their needs, and our resiliency as an organization. As we begin our fourth decade, the strategies outlined here promise to move us to a place of stronger sustainability, connection, and impact and closer to our shared vision of a “science-savvy community where people and nature thrive together.”



## PILLAR 1

### Expanded stewardship and STEM programming deepens our impact

Fulfillment of our last strategic plan drove significant program growth in the last five years, including embracing STEM as part of our mission, opening the Awesome Forces and Engineer It exhibit galleries, and launching an extensive rural outreach program. The feedback we received through this process affirms the incredible impact of these efforts and provides a mandate to continue and create even greater audience access to them. At the same time, stakeholders recognize the ongoing importance of Lake Champlain and climate stewardship, ECHO’s unique role in engaging the public through live animals, and the educational opportunities provided by the renovation of our largest animal display and surrounding gallery, which will open in 2025.

1

## STRATEGIC GOALS

### Goal 1: Spotlight stewardship

We will amplify stewardship by delivering inspiring, accessible experiences that connect people to the Lake, its wildlife, and our shared climate.

2

### Goal 2: Reach new communities

We will expand services to new demographic and geographic audiences on- and off-site by building community relationships and investing in accessibility and inclusion.



## PILLAR 2

### The institution is supported by a strong foundation of people and place

Our community identified our caring and inspiring staff and our welcoming and engaging spaces as fundamental to our standing as a beloved community resource. Moreover, our first-in-state, Leed-certified building is now twenty years old. Foundational to any future growth in programs is ongoing care for our staff and forward-thinking building maintenance. To accomplish this, we need to invest in individual growth opportunities for staff, a restorative and rewarding work environment, and timely upgrades to our facilities.

3

## STRATEGIC GOALS

### Goal 3: Cultivate a joyful and engaged team

We will develop a culture of feedback and opportunity that allows staff to feel increased enjoyment of and commitment to their jobs.

4

### Goal 4: Reimagine facilities to support daily operations

We will improve building efficiency, enhance spaces to meet programming priorities, and provide staff with well-resourced work environments.



### PILLAR 3

#### **Our reputation generates enthusiastic, long-term supporters**

Audience members, partners, and other community stakeholders universally describe ECHO as a trusted organization. However, confusion remains about our mission, programs, and offerings. To fully leverage our trusted reputation, we will clarify our brand and ensure that audience members have new experiences to enjoy and grow into. Refreshing our programs and exhibits will mean interacting with ECHO is a rewarding experience that can last a lifetime. Strengthening understanding of our impact will allow those we engage with to become informed and steadfast supporters.



### STRATEGIC GOALS

# 5

#### **Goal 5: Continue to grow our brand and name recognition**

We will evaluate our name, brand, and communications to make our mission, programs, and impact better understood by our customers, community, and donors.

# 6

#### **Goal 6: Lengthen our relationship with audiences**

We will continually renew our core experiences to broaden our age appeal and meaningfully connect to our membership to increase retention time.



### PILLAR 4

#### **Delivery of the mission is funded by resilient revenue streams**

With incredible support from Senator Leahy and years of careful financial planning, ECHO is financially stable. However, we acknowledge we need to be responsive to changes in the funding landscape. We recognize that to continue this legacy of fiscal responsibility and serve our mission, ECHO will need to work collectively to significantly grow our community-supported Annual Fund, build a robust planned giving program, and continue to compete for federal and local grants. We also need to continue to maximize our earned revenue streams, including dollars from walk-in admission.



### STRATEGIC GOALS

# 7

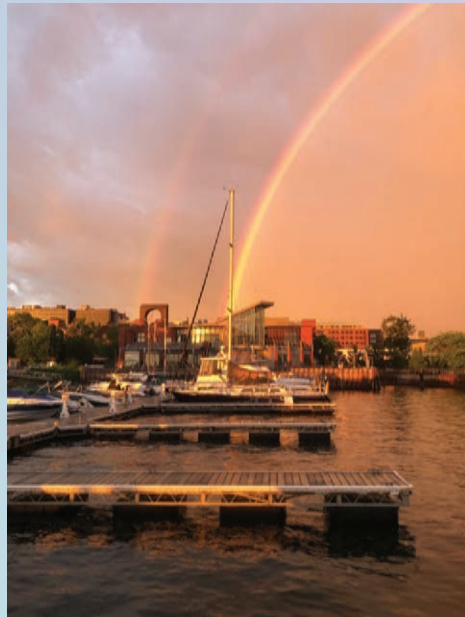
#### **Goal 7: Activate all departments in revenue generation**

We will work cross-departmentally to strengthen our financial resources by growing walk-in admission, expanding membership, exploring new earned revenue streams, increasing grant funding, and growing our annual fund.

# 8

#### **Goal 8: Become a must-do visitor experience**

We will drive tourist visitation through high-draw exhibits and program offerings, robust marketing, and an unparalleled customer service experience.



 **eCHO**<sup>®</sup>  
**LEAHY CENTER**  
FOR LAKE CHAMPLAIN

*Vermont's Science & Nature Museum  
on the Burlington Waterfront*