



Amplifying Our Impact

Strategic Plan | 2024-2028

Message from the Executive Director



I had my first overnight camp experience at a very early age. Immediately, I was hooked.

For me, camp was more than a place to run in the woods by day and sing silly songs around a fire by night. It was where I could let loose and be myself. I could make friends, find encouragement, and let my personality shine. And unlike school, there were no grades or competition making anyone feel more or less than their peers. Camp was my happy place.

When I aged out, I had a moment of panic that my days at camp were over. However, I quickly realized that I could still be part of camp as a member of the staff team. That's where my career journey began.

My passion became helping kids have the same amazing camp experience I had as a child, especially those who otherwise might not have access. For sixteen years I was a day camp professional, and when the Executive Director role at Happy Hollow opened, it felt like the stars aligned. I jumped at the opportunity—and every day, the passion of our staff, campers, and supporters reminds me that I made the best decision.

Our history makes Happy Hollow a special place. From Lilly Endowment's original investment in 1951 to create our camp through today where we serve hundreds of youth every summer, we've been on an exciting journey. We have an amazing facility, and as we add new programs and opportunities, we'll strengthen the rich and fulfilling experiences that help campers leave more empowered than when they arrived.

Every child deserves a camp experience, and I'm eternally grateful for all the campers, families, staff, board, and others who helped shape our Strategic Plan. Whoever you are, and however you're involved, I look forward to advancing this plan in partnership with you.

Sara Noyed

Sara Noyed
Executive Director, Happy Hollow Children's Camp



Plan Context

A Changed Industry.

There are countless experiences that youth have during their formative years. But there's a reason adults will talk on and on about the time they spent at camp and the impact it had on their life. High-quality summer camp experiences are packed with lessons of self-discovery and esteem building. They help kids make enduring social connections and expand their skills far beyond what they thought possible. And research shows an undeniable link between summer experiences and improved youth behavior and school outcomes—especially overnight camps that teach independence, problem-solving, resilience, and an understanding of diversity.

With all these benefits, every kid must be at camp, right? Not exactly. National reports estimate that only about a quarter of U.S. youth attend summer camps, and even less attend overnight camps—9 percent. Youth from diverse and underserved backgrounds are particularly underrepresented in national camp participation rates as only 25% of all U.S. youth campers coming from low-income backgrounds. Additionally, less than 10% of Black, Latino, and Asian youth are engaged in overnight camps. Other groups facing access barriers include male youth, who attend camps at a lower rate than their female counterparts, and children with special needs and children with specific health and development needs.

Sadly, COVID-19 only made things worse. In the summer of 2020, 62% of U.S. youth summer camps closed – including more than 40% of all-day camps and 82% of overnight camps – which created more than a \$16B loss for the industry. Today, there is unprecedented demand from families for summer and overnight camp experiences, but programs have struggled to maximize the opportunity due to thin operating margins, rising inflation costs, and an historic labor shortage. Additionally, a growing youth mental health crisis has forced programs to rethink how they support the rapidly changing needs of their campers.

More than ever, however, camps like Happy Hollow Children's Camp are committed to making a bigger difference for today's youth. Between operational strengthening and diversified enrollment models to increased quality efforts, and expanded youth mental health supports, we're evolving and adapting to meet youth right where they are—and grow the impact of camp for generations to come.



Organizational Perspective

75 Years of Overnight Success.

For nearly 75 years, Happy Hollow Children's Camp has been a leading provider of overnight camp experiences to youth in our state, providing specialized programming on our 900-acre property in Brown County, Indiana. We emphasize authentic camp experiences—the kind that immerse youth in engaging and educational environments and support them in building critical skills useful for a lifetime.

Unlike the wider industry which has struggled to engage a diverse population of youth, we have a rich and distinguished history of partnering across our community to deliver accessible and inclusive overnight camp experiences. From providing scholarships and transportation services to ensuring our staffing and programs reflect those we serve; we break down barriers to ensure all youth can experience camp. As of 2023, Happy Hollow Children's Camp has served more than 40,000 youth, 80% of whom received nearly full scholarships thanks to the generosity of our funders and partners.

The COVID-19 pandemic didn't just challenge us. It changed us. The pandemic illuminated critical vulnerabilities in our operations. And at the same time, the children we serve were among the hardest hit by COVID, facing economic instability and stress at home. Despite all the uncertainty, we emerged from these challenges as a fundamentally different organization, due largely to the tenacity and commitment of the staff and board, and the continued support of our funders and partners.

Today's realities challenge us to reimagine our work, fortify the sustainability of our organization, and deepen the experiences and supports we provide to youth. Just like the youth we serve, Happy Hollow Children's Camp is learning, developing and transforming for the future.

Taking all this into consideration, we developed a plan and roadmap to solidify Happy Hollow Children's Camp as a strong and recognized leader in the youth overnight camp space. Informed by a comprehensive landscape review and stakeholder engagement, our plan leverages our current strengths while challenging us to deepen our work in focused ways. The plan will be implemented in phases over the next five years. And we can't wait to get started—because we know what the impact will mean for the next generation of youth.



Mission, Vision and Values



Strategic Focus Areas

Happy Hollow Children's Camp's strategic plan establishes three focus areas to guide our direction and focus for the coming years. Supporting goals and strategies for each are outlined on the following pages.



Build a thriving and sustainable organization.



Increase awareness and support for our work.



Expand and deepen camp experiences.





Strategies and Tactics

Goal 1: Build a thriving and sustainable organization.

Supporting Strategies and Tactics:

1. Enhance organizational structure and culture.

- a. Recruit, retain and develop a talented and diverse team and board of directors to guide our work.
- b. Redefine board and staff roles and responsibilities to create clear structures of accountability and ensure the highest and best use of human capital.
- c. Continually align staffing structures and financial resources to support strategic objectives.
- d. Foster a vibrant and inclusive culture that values diversity, equity and belonging and embraces these principles as essential to our work and long-term success.
- e. Strengthen internal communications and transparency, including with and between board and staff, regarding operational health, strategic initiatives and organizational planning.

2. Grow financial health and sustainability.

- a. Grow and diversify revenue sources to establish a more self-sustaining financial model. This includes introducing a new tiered pricing model, establishing structured shoulder season (i.e., spring and fall) offerings and generating additional income from camp land/facilities.
- b. Significantly increase fundraising efforts in support of strategic and operational priorities. Ensure appropriate support and return on investment for staffing and related activities.
- c. Develop, grow, and strengthen passive income sources including but not limited to endowments, investments and strategic partnerships (e.g., nature and conservancy groups, environmental studies, etc.)
- d. Strengthen our financial management capabilities and related reporting, systems and processes.

3. Strengthen facility and land management.

- a. Through a multi-year approach, establish and fund a master facilities plan aligned to the organization's broader strategic plan. Ensure the plan incorporates both strategic capital investments and ongoing depreciation and maintenance needs.
- b. Build the capacity and efficiencies of our facility and maintenance function through increased staffing, strategic outsourcing and/or partnerships.
- c. Prioritize facility and land management needs in organizational planning, budgeting and fundraising. Institute internal reviews and/or auditing process for all capital projects to ensure the long-term cost of upkeep is appropriately evaluated and planned for.

4. Modernize our operations.

- a. Conduct a review of our current internal capacity and operations and address opportunities for modernization/efficiencies through technology, role alignment and updated processes. Prioritize operational investments in finance, enrollment, marketing and fundraising.
- b. Strengthen internal data capabilities to track, monitor and drive organizational performance, inform continuous improvement efforts and demonstrate impact.
- c. Institute systems and process for managing institutional knowledge to support succession planning and sustainability.





Supporting Strategies and Tactics:

1. Build an engaging and relevant brand.

- a. Refresh Happy Hollow Children's Camp's brand identity and re-introduce across audiences through existing and new channels. This includes but is not limited to the website, blogs, email marketing, social media channels, search engine marketing, assets/materials, and presentations.
- b. Develop and implement a marketing and communications plan to raise awareness for the impact of overnight camp experiences and build awareness for Happy Hollow and its work.
- c. Leverage high-impact marketing campaigns to build audience awareness, interest and engagement in camp opportunities including but not limited to summer camp enrollment (family audience), shoulder season offerings (institutional audience), seasonal staff positions (workforce audience) and partnerships (funder audience).

2. Develop a diverse network of engaged partners and stakeholders.

- a. Deploy targeted outreach to school districts, community centers and other youth-serving organizations throughout Central Indiana, prioritizing those that serve diverse and underserved youth audiences.
- b. Forge meaningful and sustainable relationships with funders and other community-based partners to support enrollment marketing, fundraising and other strategic partnerships.

3. Grow fundraising efforts.

- a. Establish and advance an aggressive fundraising strategy to support strategic and operational goals. Build return on investment by increasing focus on major gifts and planned giving and becoming more strategic in the evaluation of grants and events.
- b. Enhance partner and funder stewardship and engagement efforts, positioning the CEO, board and executive team as appropriate.
- c. Leverage board involvement in fundraising efforts. Incorporate board members in planning events and key requests by evaluating and utilizing personal networks. Promote fundraising engagements with board participation and support.
- d. Increase data and technology capabilities to support effectiveness and decision-making.

4. Deepen alumni engagement.

- a. Enhance alumni outreach and communications, ensuring campers and families stay abreast of camp happenings and are engaged in celebrating Happy Hollow's rich history.
- b. Build alumni engagement in camp staffing, fundraising and through other special events.





Supporting Strategies and Tactics:

1. Deliver an accessible, inclusive camp experience.

- a. Continue to grow interest and engagement among diverse youth populations, prioritizing those most underrepresented in today's camp demographics.
- b. Proactively address barriers to youth and family participation through new and continued experience improvements, financial assistance, accessible practices/policies and other supports.
- c. Ensure those interacting with youth and families, including full-time staff, counselors and board members, receive training and support to foster a culture of diversity, equity and belonging.
- d. Enhance family engagement through improved communications, new technologies and other practices that promote and foster a sense of trust and partnership.

2. Develop a high-performing and well-supported workforce.

- a. Redefine and expand our staffing model to support organizational growth and the scaling of Happy Hollow programming. In the new model, provide for added growth and professional development opportunities including, but not limited to, establishing junior counselor opportunities, entry-level camp counselor positions and team lead roles to support training and enhanced day-to-day support. Fundraise to support the implementation of the new model.
- b. Recruit and retain an ethnically and racially diverse team of full-time and seasonal staff that mirrors the youth we serve.
- c. Establish partnerships with higher education institutions and workforce development entities to develop counselor opportunities that qualify for internship or course credit/certificate.
- d. Strengthen and formalize the training that full-time and seasonal staff receive, ensuring their ability to deliver a consistent camp experience and effectively support growing youth needs.
- e. Continue to grow, monitor, and adjust compensation and formal/informal benefits for our camp workforce to ensure our competitiveness and that we are attracting the best and brightest staff.

3. Establish an engaging continuum of year-round camp experiences.

- a. Design and implement a multi-track summer program that engages an increased number of youth across age groups via a continuum of camping experiences. Sequence implementation.
- b. Establish structured shoulder season offerings for youth-serving organizations (e.g., school districts, nonprofit community organizations) that serve a similar youth population to that of Happy Hollow's summer program. Offerings should be aligned, where possible, to existing programming and include daily and overnight engagements. Ensure packaging, pricing and operations are aligned to an institutional audience and account for a different staffing model.
- c. Formalize programming and implement a standardized approach for measuring and demonstrating program impact on youth.

4. Deepen the supports we provide for today's growing mental health needs.

- a. Explore opportunities to integrate youth-led/youth-driven mental health training and supports into program design and curriculum.
- b. Strengthen the training and supports provided to camp staff to identify and support the unique and changing mental health needs of youth.
- c. Partner to provide staff training and supplemental support for identified youth needs.



**Turns out success actually
can happen overnight.**



Learn more and get engaged
at HappyHollowCamp.net