

Canopy

Strategic Plan for January 2014 through June 2017

Approved January 9, 2014 – Updated July 2015()*

Executive Summary

Founded in 1996 to support the City of Palo Alto's urban forestry programs and to educate residents about trees' importance and proper care, Canopy has become a sector leader in promoting environmental equity, sustainability and education through its programming in three areas: tree planting and stewardship, youth and adult environmental education, and community outreach and advocacy.

In 2011, Canopy leveraged its established role as advocate for the planting and care of community trees to pilot a large-scale, highly successful program called Healthy Trees, Healthy Kids! (HT,HK!) Through HT,HK!, Canopy has planted more than 1,000 drought-tolerant shade and fruit trees on school campuses and open space areas in underserved, tree-poor communities neighboring Palo Alto.

This Plan outlines Canopy's strategy for replicating and scaling HT,HK!, combining tree plantings and stewardship with a customized, school-based environmental education curriculum, in order to achieve two mission-critical impacts: increasing canopy coverage, and training the next generation of local environmental stewards.

The Plan also presents Canopy's strategic and programmatic priorities for community outreach and advocacy.

Lastly, the Plan identifies organizational capacity requirements to support the proposed expansion of program activities, to prepare the organization for the future, and to help make Canopy as effective as possible in a changing environment.

To those ends, the Plan outlines goals for an organizational and management plan that addresses all aspects of leadership and continuity, employee development and advancement, and board expertise and governance; and presents business strategy goals that include a process for identifying potential projects, staffing criteria based on project impact and profitability, and a budgeting strategy that ensures adequate, sustainable funding to support effective implementation of current Canopy projects without jeopardizing the organization's long-term financial sustainability. This document will address each of Canopy's major strategic goals in some detail.

Introduction

Canopy is an environmental organization that shows its commitment to the environment through its tree planting, tree stewardship, and environmental education programs. Canopy facilitates and inspires youth and the community to be better stewards of the environment. This Strategic Plan covers the period from January 2014 to June 2017, a three-and-a-half year period during which Canopy aims to build on its past success in tree planting, education, and advocacy, strengthen the organization, and increase its impact.

Tree planting will continue to be a major activity for the organization as it strives to increase tree canopy coverage in the area it serves. Because of contractual obligations and the needs of some communities in which Canopy plants, stewardship, or the care of young Canopy-planted trees, will become a larger part of Canopy's programs during this Strategic Plan period. Growing Canopy's well-regarded education programs will strengthen Canopy's leadership position in providing education about trees and the urban forest and their benefits.

Canopy began the development of this Strategic Plan by listing the big questions about Canopy's future direction that were on the minds of Canopy Board members and staff. Chief among them have been questions about growing the organization – both in the geographical area served and in the number and scope of programs delivered. As the plan developed, it became clear that the theme of this Strategic Plan is strengthening operations, programming, the Board, and the staff. This strengthening is necessary because of the growth of the organization in recent years and to prepare the organization to grow into a regional organization with additional programs.

Mission Statement

Canopy plants and cares for trees where people need them the most.
We bring the life-giving benefits of trees to the schools, neighborhoods, and public spaces
of the San Francisco Mid-Peninsula.

Tagline

Healthy Trees, Healthy Communities

Vision

We envision a day when every resident of the San Francisco Mid-Peninsula can step outside and walk, play, and thrive under the shade of healthy trees.

- a. Palo Alto and neighboring communities have a continually replenished, climate-adapted, sustainable, healthy urban forest that brings nature to the urban environment.
- b. Canopy makes a significant contribution to maintaining and enhancing local urban forests through advocacy, advisory roles with local organizations, and hands-on efforts.
- c. Concepts of outdoor equity and environmental justice are applied to community planting efforts with Canopy's goal being equity in canopy cover within communities and between neighboring communities.
- d. Canopy has a rich environmental education program that reaches many students and provides in-depth education about trees and tree care to its Teen Urban Foresters.
- e. Canopy fully cooperates with the City of Palo Alto to achieve the goals and implement the programs described in its Urban Forest Master Plan.
- f. Canopy involves community members in tree planting and tree care to build community, to engage the public to care about trees, and to educate and encourage residents to appreciate and support tree-related activities.
- g. Canopy is recognized as the leading local organization that provides information and education on tree-related topics and the urban forest in person and using the internet.

Strategic Initiatives

Over the next three-and-a-half years, January 2011 to June 2017, Canopy will pursue critical strategies to strengthen the organization in four areas: Tree Planting and Stewardship, Youth Environmental Education, Community Engagement, and Organizational Capacity.

Strategic Initiative Area #1 Tree Planting and Stewardship

To enhance local urban forests, Canopy will continue to plant trees along streets, in parks, and at schools. A new campaign will encourage residents to plant drought-tolerant trees in their yards. Stewardship, also known as young tree care, will play an increasingly important role in Canopy's future as Canopy takes responsibility for providing care for three years to many of the trees it plants.

Strategy #1.1 Develop tree planting programs that help the City of Palo Alto achieve its canopy coverage goals as described in the Palo Alto Urban Forest Master Plan and address the tree planting needs of the Palo Alto Unified School District.

Long Term Goal: With Canopy's help, the City of Palo Alto attains the canopy coverage goals described in the Palo Alto Urban Forest Plan.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Canopy has participated in the completion of the Urban Forest Master Plan.
- b. Canopy has identified and completed plantings in neighborhoods that have significantly less canopy cover.
- c. Canopy has maintained a relationship with the City of Palo Alto that continues to identify planting opportunities at Palo Alto parks, streets, and other public areas and has resulted in additional tree plantings.
- d. Canopy has systematically visited and assessed the trees at all Palo Alto Unified School District schools, presented recommendations to District officials, implemented tree plantings at at least two schools, and worked with the District to achieve significant implementation of its Tree Policy.
- e. Canopy has a program that promotes and supports residents planting street trees in their yards.
- f. Canopy has considered working with the City to decrease the distance from utilities that street tree planting requires and been successful in this effort if Canopy has decided to go ahead.

Strategy #1.2 Continue to plant shade and fruit trees in East Palo Alto to narrow the canopy coverage gap.

Long Term Goal: Canopy plays an active role in planting street trees and trees at schools and parks in East Palo Alto.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. The Healthy Trees, Healthy Kids! initiative has been successfully completed.
- b. Sites for trees at parks have been identified and planted.
- c. Canopy has maintained effective and productive relationships with the City of East Palo Alto and Ravenswood School District personnel.
- d. Canopy has a Memorandum of Understanding in place with the city of East Palo Alto, has used the opportunity of the Comprehensive Plan to get involved, and is working with East Palo Alto on an Urban Forest Master Plan.

Strategy #1.3 Expand Canopy's tree planting program to a nearby community or a portion of a nearby community with a big initiative.

Long Term Goal: Canopy increases the impact of its programs by expanding into adjacent communities.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Canopy is working in at least one of these areas: eastern Menlo Park, Menlo Park in general, Redwood City, Los Altos, or Mountain View.

- b. Canopy's donor base is increased by new individual donors, corporations and foundations who are inspired by the work in the new community.
- c. The visibility and influence of Canopy is increased geographically.

Strategy #1.4 Promote the planting of trees on private property with a campaign called Trees to Plant Now.

Long Term Goal: As opportunities for planting in public places become more limited, encourage residents to plant trees in their yards to increase canopy cover.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Canopy has published a list of 20-25 species of shade, fruit, and native trees, with an emphasis on oaks, that are highly recommended for planting in yards.
- b. Canopy has established a partnership with at least one nursery that has agreed to have 90% of the species in stock at all times.
- c. Canopy has published brochures and instructions on its website on how to plant a tree and how to care for a young tree, including pruning instructions.
- d. Canopy has received press coverage of its campaign.

Strategy #1.5 Develop and implement a cost-effective approach and plan for maintaining all Canopy-planted trees.

Long Term Goal: Have a documented Tree Care Plan for maintaining Canopy-planted trees, taking into account potentially different maintenance requirements associated with each planting and implement the plan.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. The scope of "tree care" in the context of Canopy's maintenance responsibilities is defined within a Tree Care Plan. The scope may vary according to where the trees are planted and the various agencies involved.
- b. A schedule of tree care tasks that will cover the period of Canopy's maintenance responsibilities is documented and implemented.
- c. Decisions regarding who (staff, volunteers, contractors or some combination thereof) will perform the tree care tasks will be made.
- d. A system for dealing with non-scheduled maintenance tasks in between scheduled visits is in place.
- e. A system for reporting and tracking tree health and tree care actions is developed.
- f. A program for transitioning maintenance responsibilities from Canopy to the tree-owners (e.g., the City of East Palo Alto, the Ravenswood School District) is defined.
- g. Canopy's role in providing tree care beyond the contractually required tree care period is clarified and reflected in the Tree Care Plan.

- h. A preferred method of tagging and mapping each Canopy-planted tree is established and in use.
- i. Canopy has access to a pickup truck to facilitate tree care activities.

Strategic Initiative Area #2 Youth Environmental Education

To create the next generation of environmental stewards, Canopy will provide more youth education programs and increase the breadth and depth of its Teen Urban Foresters program. Using the trees Canopy plants at schools in the programs will be a priority.

Strategy #2.1 Design and implement a youth environmental education program with an emphasis on delivering modules at schools where Canopy plants trees.

Long Term Goal: Canopy has an active youth environmental education program that capitalizes on Canopy's strengths and fits within Canopy's staff, volunteer, and financial resources.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Canopy has created a list of goals for a youth environmental education program.
- b. Canopy has answered critical questions about its youth environmental education program:
 - o What are the goals?
 - o Does Canopy collaborate with other organizations?
 - o Who is the audience, for example, students at a particular school, students in particular grades, after-school programs, or participants in community programs such as city libraries, Palo Alto's Enjoy catalog programs, and the Junior Museum and Zoo?
 - o How should the program be delivered, for example by staff, by volunteers, and/or by other organizations?
 - o What are the funding sources for the program?
- c. Canopy has identified reliable funding sources for its youth environmental education program and put them in place.
- d. The youth environmental education program is meeting its goals.
- e. The Teen Urban Forester curriculum has been formalized.

Strategy #2.2 Increase the benefits of the Teen Urban Foresters program to Canopy and to more students by increasing the number of Teen Urban Foresters and adding leadership skill-building to the program.

Long Term Goal: Have a Teen Urban Forester program of six to eight members during the school year and summer sessions who perform tree stewardship activities, assist at tree plantings, become educated about trees, and develop their leadership skills.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Canopy has talked about whether to employ students from more than one school and made a decision.
- b. Canopy employs six to eight Teen Urban Foresters.
- c. Activities that develop leadership skills have been selected and are part of the program.
- d. Most participants are with Canopy for two years, and there is a mix of juniors and seniors each year.
- e. Teen Urban Foresters are able to help with activities for young children such as tabling and after school programs.
- f. Teen Urban Foresters are effective ambassadors for Canopy during Canopy events.
- g. Canopy has a van that accommodates all Teen Urban Foresters plus a driver and has some cargo space, too.
- h. Additional funding has been obtained to pay Teen Urban Foresters salaries and fund the program's operations.

Strategic Initiative Area #3 Community Engagement

Community engagement continues to be a large part of Canopy's work as it educates, inspires, and engages residents, schools, businesses, and government agencies to protect and enhance local urban forests. In the next three-and-a-half years Canopy will expand its education and training programs to provide additional education resources and training programs for the public, landscape and tree care professionals, and Canopy volunteers. It will also broaden and deepen its advocacy activities.

Strategy #3.1 Continue to offer, and update as needed, adult education programs for the general public: Tree Walks, the Tree Library, the Tree Hotline, and the Canopy website.

Long Term Goal: Continue to offer core Canopy programs that position Canopy as a resource for learning about and enjoying trees and the urban forest. With its education programs, Canopy helps the public understand the value of the urban forest and how individuals acting in concert can improve the environment.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. The existing 14 Tree Walks have been updated in print and online. They are available as self-guided tours on mobile devices.
- b. The Tree Library has been expanded to:
 - o include all species of trees planted by Canopy
 - o include all species of fruit trees that grow locally and at least two highly recommended cultivars of trees with many cultivars
 - o include at least 400 species
 - o contain full descriptions of at least 300 species
 - o contain photographs of local examples of at least 250 species
- c. The Tree Library has a communications plan directed at landscape professionals as well as the public.
- d. The Technical Support needs of the Tree Library are minimal and easily served by staff and volunteers.
- e. For easy inclusion into email, a database of standard Tree Hotline replies has been created for the 25 most frequently asked questions and the Tree Hotline standard replies have been added to the website as Frequently Asked Questions.
- f. Canopy has identified and implemented improvements to the scientific information presented in its website including adding Catherine's white paper.
- g. A plan has been created for the content and timing of the next major update of the Canopy website.

Strategy #3.2 Formalize a workshop series for the general public that focuses on local tree issues and create at least two how-to videos.

Long Term Goal: Canopy has a formalized workshop program for the general public and several how-to videos. Canopy is seen by people in the community as a resource for learning about choosing, planting and caring for trees.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. A Canopy video and a Canopy brochure on how to plant a tree are available.
- b. Canopy has produced at least one more how-to video on a tree planting or tree care topic or on how to use the Tree Library.
- c. Canopy has formalized a worthwhile workshop series that educates the public and attracts volunteers. It is offered on a set schedule.

Strategy #3.3 Continue to formalize and refine the annual Planting Leader Training and Tree Care Leader Training for Canopy volunteers.

Long Term Goal: Canopy builds and replenishes its brigade of planting leaders by offering a formalized Planting Leader training program each September. Similarly, a regular, formalized program for Tree Care Leaders is offered each year.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Planting Leader and Tree Care Leader workshops are given on a regular schedule, with a defined format and content.
- b. Canopy has at least 60 Planting and Tree Care Leaders total, many of whom are qualified as both Planting and Tree Care Leaders.
- c. Canopy has added a Senior Planting Leader Training program and increased the number of senior planting leaders.

Strategy #3.4 Research, choose, and implement additional adult education as resources permit.

Long Term Goal: Canopy continues to innovate in providing tree, urban forestry, and environmental education. New ways to reach the community such as mobile apps, a newspaper column, a blog, and adult education classes are explored as volunteer, staff, and funding opportunities become available.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Canopy has considered and made decisions about offering classes through Palo Alto Adult Education or a similar organization.
- b. A Citizen Forester program has been considered and a decision on whether or not to implement has been made.
- c. Canopy has considered and made decisions about other possible educational programs including, a newspaper column.
- d. Canopy is monitoring the latest research on Sudden Oak Death and providing information to residents through some combination of web page, newsletter articles, and workshops.
- e. Canopy has implemented an education campaign on water conservation and trees.

Strategy #3.5 Broaden and deepen Canopy's advocacy with local, state, and national governments and with the community.

Long Term Goal: Canopy has an effective and consistent communications method of dealing with advocacy issues within local communities and at all levels of government. Increased and effective advocacy results in healthier urban forests and increased funding for urban forestry projects.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. For advocacy with the community, the 3-year outcome is that Canopy has developed a dynamic message about trees and the urban forest that is used in a variety of ways: a brochure, on its website, in the local media, and in interactive social media.
- b. Canopy has re-infused tree and gardening tips into the newsletter and other communications.
- c. For advocacy with the City of Palo Alto, the 3-year outcomes are:
 - o Canopy has ensured that its six primary goals are included in the Urban Forest Master Plan (UFMP):
 - Work toward reducing canopy disparities among neighborhoods.
 - Strike a balance between water conservation and the preservation and growth of the urban forest.
 - Create a roadmap toward a less thirsty forest.
 - Ensure sustainable funding for the City's tree programs.
 - Recognize the value of the benefits the trees provide the City day after day.
 - Address the issue that this city asset is the only one without citizen oversight.
 - o Canopy has promoted UFMP goals.
 - o The City's communication with residents on tree issues is improved.
 - o The public finds every process related to trees that involves the City easier.
 - o We've answered the question: Does Canopy have a specific quantitative goal for Canopy cover for Palo Alto?
- d. For advocacy with East Palo Alto, the 3-year outcomes are:
 - o Canopy has a Memorandum of Understanding with East Palo Alto.
 - o Canopy has helped East Palo Alto communicate on tree issues with residents better.
 - o Canopy has helped East Palo Alto create a promotional program with residents.
- e. For advocacy with PAUSD, the 3-year outcomes are:
 - o Canopy has increased its advocacy presence with the PAUSD, including presenting the tree recommendations created in Strategy #1.1.
 - o Canopy has created an agreement with PAUSD that Canopy input is regularly considered by bond measure planning committees and in reviews of landscaping changes and decisions.
 - o PAUSD has solicited specific Canopy advice on tree issues, for example, on watering oaks at Gunn.
- f. For advocacy with other jurisdictions (counties, state, federal, and PG&E), the 3-year outcomes is that Canopy has participated in advocacy actions recommended by state and national urban forestry organizations.

Strategic Initiative Area #4 Organizational Capacity

Canopy's leadership and staff will ensure that there is capacity on all levels – Board, staff, facilities, financial resources, and the systems that support the organization – to effectively execute Canopy's mission now and in the future.

Strategy #4.1 Ensure that Canopy continues to be a financially sustainable organization as programs and funding sources evolve over time.

Long Term Goal: Canopy strives for financial sustainability with the current number of staff members or more. While its financial reserves give it the flexibility and option to access reserves on a short term basis or to fund unforeseen strategic opportunities, new significant programs or projects have funding specifically identified for those programs. New smaller programs that have community benefit won't necessarily have identified funding.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Canopy has a written financial and fundraising plan.
- b. Canopy has a definition of "reserves" and a policy that defines cash management and investment practices to be used by Canopy.
- c. Canopy's funding continues to come from diverse sources with more emphasis on large individual donations.
- d. Canopy has a Development Director to implement the fundraising goals established by the Finance committee.
- e. Canopy's Communications activities support fundraising in a dynamic way.
- f. Funding for tree care (stewardship) receives more emphasis in the Annual Appeal and other communications to donors.
- g. Board members have increased their fundraising skills and are engaged in fundraising.
- h. As part of the fundraising plan, a tree-planting initiative has been identified to be launched at Canopy's 20th Anniversary in 2016. It could be an external goal, such as a goal of the community planting and registering 1000 trees.
- i. Canopy has considered various services that it can provide for a fee, such as memorial tree plantings, tree care work as part of a school-sponsored community service activity, and classroom education programs, and has created a price list for those services.

Strategy #4.2 Develop and implement systematic approaches to recruiting Canopy Board members and to setting and achieving goals for the Board.

Long Term Goal: Have a Board composed of people who bring skills, connections, and other characteristics that can benefit Canopy and lead it as the organization grows and evolves. They work well together and are dynamically involved with the organization. The Board sets and achieves goals for itself and the organization.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. The Board has a definition of an ideal Board including skills, characteristics, and number of members. This definition of an ideal Board calls for people who are equipped and skilled to bring Canopy's Strategic Plan to fruition.
- b. The Board has a documented, systematic approach to identifying Board member candidates and recruiting them. Board members are identified, recruited, and oriented according to this plan.
- c. There is a documented Board education plan that includes orientation for new Board members, education on what Board members do and opportunities to deepen Board members' understanding of Canopy programs. Board education activities are held as defined by the plan.
- d. On an annual basis, the Board has defined three top priorities or projects for Board, which has been used to drive Board recruitment and Board activities.

Strategy #4.3 Create a Technical Advisory Board.

Long Term Goal: Canopy has a Technical Advisory Board composed of arborists, nursery people, landscape architects, landscape contractors, policy makers, and stakeholders who advise Canopy in their areas of expertise, increase the scope of Canopy's influence, and work on special projects for Canopy.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Technical expertise has been moved from the Board of Directors to the Technical Advisory Board.
- b. Canopy has stronger partnerships with local arborists, landscape professionals, and nurseries and benefits from their expertise.
- c. The Technical Advisory Board meets once or twice a year to exchange ideas and engage members to work on special projects such as the City of Palo Alto's Urban Forest Master Plan and a "Trees to Plant Now" campaign for Canopy.

Strategy #4.4 Create an Event committee with a volunteer Chair.

Long Term Goal: The amount of staff time required to plan, organize, and execute events is reduced by an Event committee consisting of volunteers who take responsibility for a majority of the effort required for each event.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Canopy has an Event committee that is responsible for planning and executing events for Canopy including tabling events, the Canopy's Mayor's Planting and Annual Party in January, Arbor Day in March, major donor cultivation events, and Canopy's gala fundraiser events.

- b. The Event committee is composed primarily of volunteers who take active roles in the planning and execution of each event.
- c. Each Event has a binder that contains details and timelines for the Event.

Strategy #4.5 Formalize volunteer recruitment, training, management, and retention programs to create a large corps of reliable, experienced volunteers.

Long Term Goal: Fulfill Canopy's needs for planting, tree care, event, and office help volunteers with trained volunteers who work with Canopy regularly and with volunteers who approach Canopy through the website, through online newsletters, or as part of an organized group.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Implement the Planting Leader and Tree Care Training Programs described in Strategy #3.3.
- b. Canopy's Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator has a volunteer management plan and the systems and tools in place to manage all aspects of volunteer recruitment, calls for volunteers, and Canopy's relationship with each volunteer.
- c. Canopy has a successful Planting Leader retention program in place.

Strategy #4.6 Obtain and use program cost information to make cost-effective decisions about the use of Canopy staff, subcontractors, and volunteers for Canopy operations.

Long Term Goal: For every program, including fundraising activities, and for every function performed by staff, Canopy has evaluated the cost of implementing the program or function and made a thoughtful decision about whether to implement the program using staff, volunteers, subcontracting the activity, or a combination.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Canopy is in the habit of considering the costs and the benefits of performing every activity by staff, by volunteers, by hiring people or firms to perform the activity, and by a combination of staff, volunteers, and service providers and makes a choice about which path to follow to obtain the desired result in a cost-effective and mission-appropriate manner.
- b. Canopy has a process in place with a defined set of criteria to evaluate the appropriateness of using contractors to plant some or all trees versus doing all-volunteer projects.
- c. Canopy has evaluated whether to implement irrigation management and tree care most effectively by subcontracting, using staff, or using volunteers.
- d. Canopy has evaluated using staff versus volunteers for volunteer management and providing education programs.

Strategy #4.7 Enhance record keeping for better impact measurement.

Long Term Goal: Canopy is able to calculate and communicate its impact on the community using models for funding social enterprises and by creating and using tools for collecting metrics that enable Canopy to quantify its impact.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Canopy has selected metrics that measure the overall progress and impact of Canopy. These might include the number of trees planted, the number of trees slated for removal for which Canopy has taken an active role in discussions of preservation or mitigation, and other landmark accomplishments.
- b. Canopy is collecting data for the metrics that enable it to express its impact on the community and Canopy has the information it needs to describe its impact for grant applications.
- c. A volunteer has mined historical data for core metrics that we want to collect for Canopy's 20th anniversary.

Strategy #4.8 Hardwire excellence in processes and systems.

Long Term Goal: Create processes and systems for the staff that enable them to strengthen operations, to make work more efficient and easier, to scale operations, and to apply technology to gain leverage.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Communication within Canopy is improved.
- b. Processes are created and documented for each activity.
- c. Manuals are created for each function: ED, Programs (including Education), Development, and Admin.
- d. Cross-training among the staff is implemented.
- e. New IT hardware, software, and cloud tools are created to supplement existing tools.
- f. New project planning tools are created to supplement existing tools.
- g. Staff turnover is minimal and the organization is resilient when key staff members leave the organization.

Strategy #4.9 Create a succession plan for current Canopy staff and a roadmap for staffing in the future.

Long Term Goal: Canopy has a written plan for staff replacement and for increasing the number of staff members and what their responsibilities would be.

3-year Outcomes:

- a. Canopy has plans for temporary replacement of key staff in case of departure or prolonged absence and for replacing the Executive Director when the need arises.

- b. Canopy has a roadmap for increasing the size of staff: when the size of the staff should be increased and what positions will be added.
- c. In considering all increased staffing needs, Canopy explores hiring subcontractors to supplement staff.