

COTTONWOOD GULCH EXPEDITIONS

STRATEGIC PLAN
2022-2026



cottonwoodgulch.org



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Coming to life in a grove of cottonwoods off a dusty road outside Thoreau, New Mexico, Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions (The Gulch) recently turned 95 years of age. Over this period, thousands of trekkers and staff forged strong traditions - respect for nature, appreciation of diverse cultures, individual resilience partnered with teamwork. As we embark upon our next 100 years, The Gulch realizes that the compelling needs of the next century require us to focus on new, dynamic ways to engage with the world while staying true to our core strengths. Through this new strategic plan, we have cleared a path toward a revitalized future for our trekkers, staff, alumni, and the land we cherish.

With the assistance of a consultant, Building Beloved Communities, the board of directors worked for over a year alongside a strategic planning team, our partners in education, our indigenous neighbors, alumni, donors, trekkers, and many other stakeholders to craft this plan, which is summarized on the following pages. Based on their input, we affirmed our Mission - who we are; our Vision - the ultimate aim of our efforts; eleven values - how we act; and four strategic directions - what we will do to achieve our mission. We share it with you with the hope that you'll join us as we approach our 100th anniversary in 2026

JORDAN STONE

Executive Director
March 2022

OUR MISSION

Cottonwood Gulch creates outdoor learning adventures for youth from all backgrounds that foster personal growth, strengthen community, and inspire stewardship of the natural world.



OUR VISION

Cottonwood Gulch envisions a global community grounded in reverence for the Southwestern U.S., and respect for the lands, waters, and human cultures of the world.



OUR VALUES

Cottonwood Gulch commits to a set of guiding values: Live in community, steward the environment, expand access, celebrate diversity & inclusivity, embrace challenges, manage risk, instill a spirit of adventure, honor native and indigenous communities, educate through immersive and place-based learning, nurture partnerships, and foster personal responsibility.



We welcome the opportunity to confront the challenges of a rapidly changing world with The Gulch's "see a job and do it" spirit. Our overarching focus will be on helping trekkers build knowledge, skills, and inspiration to creatively tackle some of the world's biggest challenges: climate change, intercultural understanding, omnipresent technology, land stewardship, food, everyday social-emotional skills, and more.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION #1: IMMERSIVE LEARNING FOR A CHANGING WORLD

The vision: Our goal is to transform lives. Should trekkers become artists, scientists, educators, or CEOs, their experience with us deepens their understanding of the world around them, molds their character, and sparks a life of meaningful service. Our programs instill agency in our trekkers and pride in New Mexico by showing them that this is a spectacular place to call home, both geographically and culturally.

Strategic Priorities

Give trekkers life-changing immersive educational experiences through extended outdoor learning adventures. Explore natural and cultural features with itineraries unique to the localities through which they travel, led by a team of year-round staff, seasonal staff, and visiting scholars with expertise in environmental science, culture, adventure, and safe outdoor learning. Invest in long-form programs and projects that captivate trekkers and provide tools to navigate pressing environmental and cultural questions.

Deliver consistent programming from school to school, from one child to the next. Trekkers gain a deeper understanding of the cultural diversity in the American Southwest, and build bridges between cultures in the process. They connect with nature and are inspired to be environmental stewards. They build individual resilience, value teamwork, develop a healthy relationship with technology, and gain a deep respect for New Mexico's history and culture.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION #2: STRENGTHEN AND DIVERSIFY THE GULCH COMMUNITY

The vision: The Gulch becomes a diverse community where trekkers and staff from different backgrounds learn alongside and from each other. The embrace of inclusivity is a welcomed part of our culture with a shared language and understanding of its value. We serve local youth in New Mexico and a broader, national audience with instructors that exude joy in learning and a willingness to wrestle with challenging questions. Through professional and personal growth and a connection to our mission, staff and the broader Gulch community know this is a great place to work.

Strategic Priorities

Examine our organizational culture to honestly assess the diversity and inclusion conditions of The Gulch and help guide future actions. Establish a cultural advisory group to assist with decision-making around diversity and cultural issues. Deepen relationships with communities in western New Mexico, particularly in the vicinity of Basecamp.

Partner with schools in low-income areas as a top priority. Increase scholarship support through ongoing fundraising and a new push for planned gifts to the CGE endowment. Recruit and retain staff and board members who are representative of the multiple cultures and races of the Southwest. Invest in staff through regular training and professional development. Assess compensation and benefits and adjust to recruit experienced staff and encourage retention.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION #3: MODEL ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

The vision: our commitment to environmental stewardship is evident in how we manage our property, conduct education, and operate as an organization. Our partners, alumni, students, and donors recognize The Gulch as a model of environmental awareness and responsibility.

Strategic Priorities

Create - in consultation with indigenous communities, scientific experts, cultural experts, and Gulch alumni - a comprehensive, science-based land management plan that addresses cultural sites, restoration goals, trails, buildings, water, risk management, and educational opportunities at Basecamp.

Organizationally, we commit to reducing our environmental impact while working toward a carbon-neutral future. We already practice Leave No Trace, and we do a fine job of it, but the hidden impacts of our treks remain significant.

Collectively, we are proactive in stewarding the environment. Large swaths of the Four Corners area are in need of restoration, including Basecamp, and active stewardship becomes a larger part of our programs.

Individually, it's easy to feel helpless in the face of environmental challenges. Through environmental stewardship, restoration, and a dose of awe-inducing beauty, we create a sense of agency in our trekkers so they can return home (or return to us) and make a positive impact in their communities.

Finally, we make explicit connections between environmental problems & underserved communities. New Mexico, unfortunately, is rife with examples, from uranium pollution around Mount Taylor to groundwater pollution in Albuquerque. We cannot fully understand a place without acknowledging ongoing challenges & asking what we can do about them.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION #4: INVEST IN OUR OPERATIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE



The vision: to ensure the success of our mission, we will invest in the tangible and cultural components of our organization – facilities management, finance, development, communications, gear, and human resources. Our culture is defined as mission-based, values-driven, professional, youth-focused, and joyful.

Strategic Priorities

Elevate the sense of community and cohesiveness among all Gulch alumni. Invest in marketing and communications to share our values and the benefits that youth gain from being part of the Gulch.

Update and improve organizational systems, policies, and procedures. Create and implement a long-term capital improvement plan and an annual capital improvement budget that addresses the needs of Basecamp facilities, vehicles, and the Albuquerque office. Create more volunteer opportunities for Gulch alumni and friends.

Plan and implement a successful 100th anniversary celebration in 2026.





Our work on this new strategic plan has just begun, and we could not be more enthusiastic about the future. This process has invigorated our board and staff by reminding us of all the people who care deeply about our organization and mission. You are invited to learn more about the new strategic plan and be engaged in its promise as a donor, volunteer, educator, organizational partner, or friend. Contact Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions at our website: cottonwoodgulch.org, email Jordan at jordan@cottonwoodgulch.org, or give us a call, (505)-248-0563.

