



## Thomas Edison National Historical Park



### Five Year Strategic Action Plan

2020-2025

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## Background

### About Thomas Edison National Historical Park

Thomas Edison National Historical Park (EDIS) is a unit of the National Park Service located in West Orange, New Jersey. It was established to commemorate the outstanding achievements of the great American inventor, Thomas Alva Edison. The site was conveyed to the National Park Service through a series of legal agreements between the government and Thomas A. Edison, Inc. (later McGraw Edison Company) between 1955 and 1962.

Containing 21.25 acres, the park preserves Thomas Alva Edison's laboratory, his estate Glenmont, and collections in perpetuity and makes this valuable part of America's heritage available to over 60,000 visitors each year for their enjoyment, understanding, and appreciation.

### Need for a Strategic Action Plan

In recent history and like other agency units, the park has been challenged to balance management and operations of the park with unpredictable resources and disruption of operations. The park is affected by slow agency-wide hiring norms and facing a significant threat with 35% of its non-seasonal employees reaching retirement eligibility by 2025. While the impending loss of institutional knowledge coupled with hiring constraints creates challenges, it also provides the opportunity to organize operations to meet present-day and future needs of the park.

The proximity of Thomas Edison NHP to other national parks creates an opportunity to find ways to collaborate, support, and share resources to operate and manage the parks. For example, Thomas Edison NHP shares staff with both Morristown NHP and Patterson Great Falls NHP.

Another contributing factor impacting the park is increased operational complexity while maintaining a flat budget. A few examples of this include:

- **Flat Budget:** \$2.96M for FY19; **10 years ago** (FY10) the park budget was \$2.96M resulting in reduced public hours of visitor facilities and increased furlough periods of employees. Other cost reducing actions have resulted from eroding base of funds over the past 10 years
- **Major facility rehabilitation:** through the efforts of the NPS, Save America's Treasures Grant and the Edison Innovation Foundation, more than \$15M was spent in renovations and upgrades to both the Glenmont Estate and Laboratory Complex 2003-2009. New mechanical systems, elevator, HVAC and fire protection have increased operational costs.
- **FTE:** 25 (decreasing staff and increased responsibility)
- **VIPs:** 92 Volunteers gave over 5,971 hours of service (volunteer program has grown)
- **Educational Programs:** 118 classes serving 3,638 students (75 Skype sessions serving 2,866 students)
- **Deferred Maintenance:** \$8.4M; park has undertaken a variety of projects:
  - Structures at the site
  - Rehabilitating historic rooms at Glenmont
  - Roads and pathways at Glenmont
  - Significant conservation work in the Glenmont Garage (EIF and FOTE)
  - Upgrading storage facilities and processing and cataloging of collections
- **Recreational Fees:** \$202,000 (highest revenue ever @ \$15/pp)

The combination of expected staffing changes due to potential retirements, projected ongoing flat budgets, and increased operational and project complexities has created a need for a strategic plan.

### **About the Strategic Planning Workshop**

The multi-park workshop for Thomas Edison NHP and Morristown NHP was held in April 2019. The purpose of the workshop was to help understand the issues and challenges facing the parks and identify key opportunities in order to determine a guiding vision that the entire staff supports and advocates for. For each park, the intended outcomes of the workshop included 1) a shared vision for the future of the park, 2) an actionable, comprehensive strategic action plan, and 3) increased understanding and collaboration among partners and the park.

All staff members of both parks were invited and most were able to attend at least some portion of the workshop. Representatives from many of the parks' partner organizations joined. In total, forty-five people participated.

## Planning Model Used

The park utilized the model below, developed and taught by New Line Consulting, to develop “building blocks” of its strategic action plan. This document will follow a similar format.

# STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN



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## Enduring: Core Purpose and Values

*The strategic action plan should articulate a park's core purpose and values in order to remind those executing the plan what matters to the park and why it exists so that future decisions and direction are aligned with these essentials that remain constant.*

### **Purpose** (“what we do + why we do it”)

Thomas Edison National Historical Park explores the global impact of the life and achievements of the prolific American inventor and his colleagues through the preservation and interpretation of his West Orange, New Jersey, research and development complex, the family's estate, Glenmont, and their vast collections, and serves as a center for study and exchange of ideas about innovation in history and culture.

### **Core Values** (“what matters to us”)

*Core Values are enduring principles that the park stands for and which cannot be compromised without compromising the basic identity of the park. The core values adopted by park staff are:*

- **Authenticity:** We believe in the power of being truthful and accurate in the information we share, for the integrity and completeness of the park.
- **Creativity:** We use the park's resources to interpret and inspire creativity.
- **Collaboration:** We engage our colleagues, partners, and community to fulfill our park mission.

### *National Park Service Mission Statement*

The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.



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## Vision for Change for Thomas Edison National Historical Park

*The vision for change is a proclamation of the desired future state of preservation and visitor experience. It will provide guidance to NPS staff and partners in decision making related to the site. This tells staff and partners **WHERE** they are leading the park in the future.*

**In 2025, Thomas Edison National Historical Park is known as an innovative, creative hub, utilizing the authentic resources of the park to serve a diverse, multi-generational audience.**

**How did we develop this vision statement?** The description of the desired future state was developed by reflecting on the major components of an effective vision for change: it must be aligned with the park's identity, it must account for what is unique to this moment in history, and it must address the realities facing the park. Participants identified the following components that were relevant to Thomas Edison NHP's vision for change:

*Aligned with Identity* (mission, purpose, values; what we do, why we do it, what we believe in)

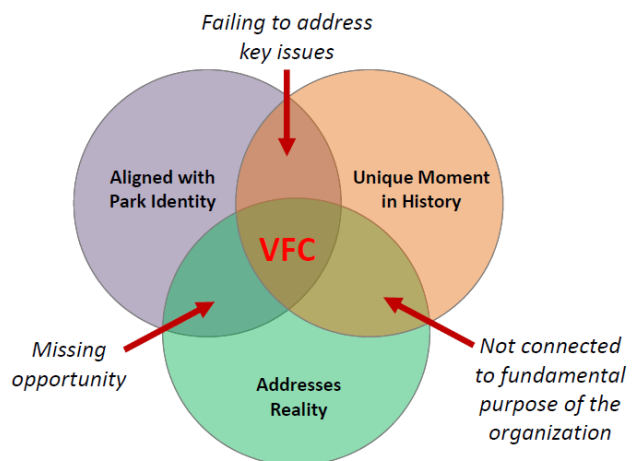
- Innovation
- "Edison ++" (more than a man; collections; Brand)
- Authenticity of the place

*Unique Moment in History*

- Changing view of Edison in popular culture
- Changing view of/interaction with history
- Technology and spread of info/changing way of information sharing

*Address Reality*

- Staffing/retirements/staff changes
- Flat budget
- Low morale
- Aging existing audience + generational challenges
- Project management + structure maintenance



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## Park-Wide 5-Year Goal

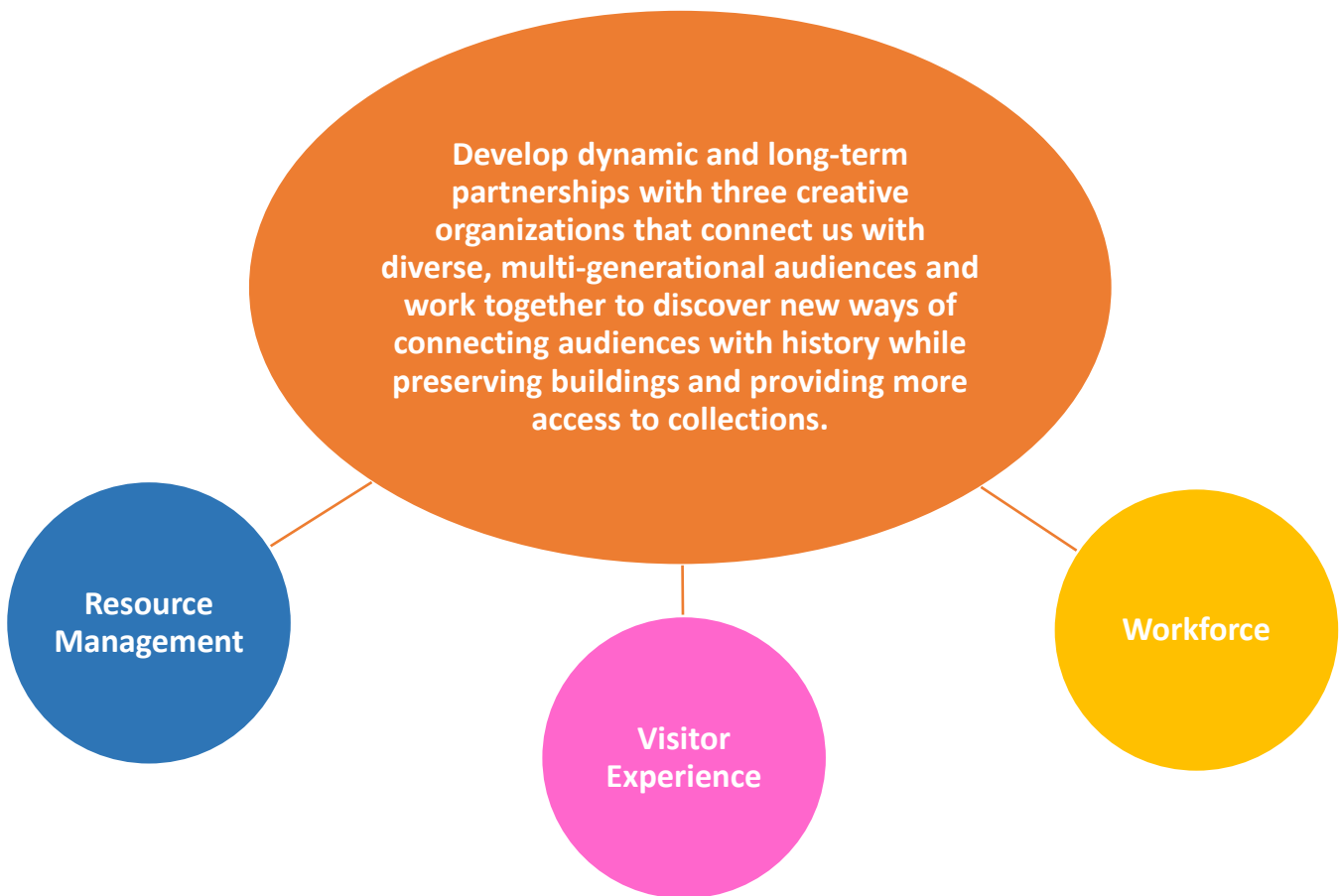
The 5-year goal is a specific, measurable goal that, should we achieve it as a park, we believe we will realize our vision for change. This tells staff and partners **WHAT** they are going to do.

**Develop dynamic and long-term partnerships with three creative organizations that connect us with diverse, multi-generational audiences and work together to discover new ways of connecting audiences with history while preserving buildings and providing more access to collections.**

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## Strategic Focus Areas

Strategic focus areas are categories of work that park staff and partners will invest time and resources over the next five years in order to achieve the park-wide goal. These can be thought of as the “battles we must win in order to win the war.” This tells staff and partners **HOW** to create the desired future.



## Strategic Focus Areas Breakdown

*The following is a breakdown of how each strategic focus area will contribute to reaching the park-wide 5-year goal and realizing the vision.*

**Visitor Experience:** *A new way of thinking about visitor experience will create opportunities that draw diverse, multi-generational audiences.*

- ▶ Primary Objective: We will have enhanced and new accessible exhibits and programs to serve new and multigenerational audiences. Plugged and unplugged diverse, multigenerational engagement will be achieved.

**Resource Management:** *We will systematically attend to the resource.*

- ▶ Primary Objective: All of the park's historic structures, landscapes, systems, and collections will be in fair to good condition.

**Work Force:** *We will proactively and strategically navigate a period of staffing uncertainty.*

- ▶ Primary Objective: (1) Prepare for and manage retirements; (2) conduct intentional recruiting and streamline hiring; (3) take care of people.

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## Broad Strategies

*Broad strategies are overall methods or regular practices that support park staff in achieving the goals.*

### Utilize Diversity Expertise

Seek out and utilize expertise in diversity, inclusion, and related topics for increasing engagement, changing the visitor experience, and staffing.

### Strive for Smart Partnerships

*Prioritize partners who:*

- Understand and are aligned with our mission, vision, and goals
- Help us diversify audience
- Assist in better balancing workload and capacity

*Focus Partners on:*

- Doing things we CAN'T do
- Doing things we choose not to do
- Doing things that are better products because of collaboration

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## How to Use this Document

### Focus on Capacity

The park is operating in a time of complex change and limited resources. Recognize that park staff need clear, achievable priorities. Commit to continuously assessing actual capacity and let go of projects, programs, and activities that are not essential to the mission and long-term goals; those that meet the following criteria should be prioritized:

Does the project, program, or activity:

- ✓ Achieve the fundamentals outlined in our enabling legislation
- ✓ Align with the park purpose and complement our core values
- ✓ **Align with and support the Vision for Change**
- ✓ **Support accomplishing the goals of the plan**
- ✓ Consume manageable amounts of time, energy, and money
- ✓ Have a champion who has the time and attention required to manage it

### Make This a Living Document

Review this document regularly (quarterly is recommended). Annually, meet with the park team (consider including partners) to check on progress, alignment, and to update the document to reflect current needs and conditions.

### Definitions

Under Visitor Experience the terms “plugged” and “unplugged” are used to describe visitor experiences, programs, activities, etc. For the purposes of this document, they can be defined as the following:

**Plugged:** a technology based experience.

**Unplugged:** a non-technology based experience.



## Supporting Priorities Yearly Breakdown

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>Resource Management</b>	<i>We will systematically attend to the resource needs.</i>	<b>Primary Objective:</b> All of the park's historic structures, landscapes, systems, and collections are in fair to good condition. All collections are properly documented, stored, and exhibited, and access is improved.				
<b>Storage Conditions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve storage conditions: reduce number of collections in sub-standard storage conditions; upgrade storage for more efficient use of space.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eliminate two sub-standard collection storage areas; continue to upgrade storage for more efficient use of space.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify artifacts to be stored off-site. Seek funding for more efficient space utilization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify potential off-site storage locations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install compact shelving in Archival storage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No collections will be stored in buildings without Automatic Fire Protections Systems.</li> </ul>
<b>Catalog Backlog</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce catalog backlog of history objects by 3% or 4,320 objects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce catalog backlog of history objects by 3% or 4,320 objects.</li> <li>Complete cataloging of EDIS Resource Management Records.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce catalog backlog of history objects by 3% or 4,320 objects.</li> <li>Complete backlog cataloging of recorded sound collection.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce catalog backlog of history objects by 3% or 4,320 objects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce catalog backlog of history objects by 3% or 4,320 objects.</li> <li>Complete cataloging of Archives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce catalog backlog of history objects by 18% or 21,600 objects by 2025.</li> </ul>
<b>Digitization Projects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with T.A. Edison Papers Project to complete digital edition (1920-1931).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digitize priority sound recordings.</li> <li>Continue Edison papers digital edition (1920-1931).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digitize priority sound recording and begin NPS online digital storage migration.</li> <li>Continue Edison papers digital edition (1920-1931).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finish Edison papers digital edition (1920-1931)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Launch public-access library of historic audio on EDIS website. Develop archives-wide resource guide.</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Collection Surveys</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepare for overarching survey of all collections to prioritize conservation</li> <li>Identify all sub-standard collections storage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct overarching collection condition survey of lab collections.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct overarching collection condition survey of Glenmont collections.</li> <li>Seek funding for lab collections condition surveys and conservation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct overarching collection condition survey of archives collections.</li> <li>Seek funding for Glenmont collections condition surveys and conservation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produce prioritized list to conserve all park collections (overarching).</li> <li>Seek funding for archives collections condition surveys and conservation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce the number of collections in poor condition.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cultural Resource Formulated Facility Projects (sampling)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contingent on funding and contracting, repair rotted walls and windows at Glenmont; and conserve walls and ceilings in Dining room and reception room at Glenmont.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contingent on funding and contracting, repair/replace/upgrade mechanicals (HVAC, electrical, fire detection) in Glenmont Garage and replace the roof on the Glenmont Mansion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contingent on funding and contracting, rehabilitate the exterior of the Glenmont Garage, Potting Shed, Barn and Vault 8 and greenhouse and repair Laboratory roof systems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contingent on funding and contracting, repair the Stair Tower on Building 6.</li> </ul>		

<p><b>Visitor Experience</b></p>	<p><i>A new way of thinking about visitor experience will create opportunities that draw diverse, multi-generational audiences.</i></p>	<p><b>Primary Objective:</b> We will have enhanced and new accessible exhibits and programs to serve new and multigenerational audiences.</p> <p>Plugged and unplugged diverse, multigenerational engagement will be achieved.</p>				
<p><b>Programming</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Determine: what is plugged? What stories/themes will benefit from technology? Where is tech best used? Bldg. 5? Smaller scale? Hand held? New tech?</li> <li>▪ Determine: what is unplugged?</li> <li>▪ “Pop-Up” Programming concept planning (Plugged and unplugged)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Plugged/Un-plugged, (Overarching) collaborate with groups for engaging experience (Lofts / Latino / Indian Arts District)</li> <li>▪ Park Mobile app (NPS)</li> <li>▪ Begin research on one idea from the 2020 unplugged question.</li> <li>▪ Design pilot - Creative writing with historic Edison letters.</li> <li>▪ Begin planning for artist/innovator in residence with a partner organization.</li> <li>▪ Pilot test a pop-up idea such as escape room or murder mystery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Design pilot- Virtual tour of Glenmont; partner with realtor in W.O.</li> <li>▪ Seek partners, grants and funding for plugged determined in 2020.</li> <li>▪ Develop/seek funding for new unplugged idea.</li> <li>▪ Music Lessons in park (Edison Fest)</li> <li>▪ Establish an artist in residence or innovator in residence.</li> <li>▪ Seek partners, grants and funding for plugged.</li> <li>▪ Pilot test a Glenmont pop-up on lawn (photos, iPad with movie of inside, access)</li> <li>▪ Try a pop-up with a community partner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Courtyard experience (plugged)- augmented reality glasses; historic courtyard experience (iPhone or concession), begin research and development of experience.</li> <li>▪ Pilot new unplugged idea.</li> <li>▪ Sound recording series; music room; music artists come in for Edison unplugged sessions (music room series)</li> <li>▪ Pilot a temporary “art installation” project for the Laboratory courtyard.</li> <li>▪ Develop a plan/calendar for pop-ups done by park staff and community for the following year.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review and update Website and Park Mobile</li> <li>▪ Research/work with hyper- local schools and underserved communities to determine what type of plugged program is needed.</li> <li>▪ Review and revise new unplugged idea.</li> <li>▪ Implement art installation in courtyard in successive years.</li> <li>▪ Implement pop-up calendar from 2023 (review throughout the year).</li> <li>▪ Develop a pop-up of out buildings at Glenmont to focus on those buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop plugged programs from 2024 research from Hyper-local schools; underserved communities.</li> <li>▪ Implement art installation in courtyard in successive years.</li> <li>▪ Full-run pop-up experience based on the plan.</li> </ul>

<b>Understanding Audience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review current park statistics to see what we can learn and/or what we need to change.</li> <li>Research and plan for visitor study.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contract an audience / visitor study (know your own bone-YouTube)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use the results of the survey to assist in guiding new plugged and unplugged programming decisions.</li> </ul>			
<b>Exhibits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In house exploration of retrofitting exhibit panel in Building 5.</li> <li>Review/revise current hands on activities throughout laboratory complex.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make interim repairs to exhibit panels in Building 5.</li> <li>PMIS project – upgrade / revise exhibit and kiosk at lab complex “plan”.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convene focus groups to get an understanding of what visitors would like to see in new exhibits.</li> </ul>			
<b>Ethnography/Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethnographic study PMIS request</li> <li>Identify potential partners in the community to help with connecting to immigrant story around park (WO Town Historian, library, social organizations, etc.).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Glenmont and labs immigrant story; research Edison archives</li> <li>Make connections with local community (Lofts, Latino, Indian, Arts District).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share research and information on immigrant’s stories and social history on park’s website.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contract ethnographic study.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethnographic study results used to develop content for new interpretation, exhibits, programming, and engage the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On-going community engagement.</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Re-establish SKYPE Education program.</li> <li>Review education pages on website, develop plan for revisions.</li> <li>Continue improvements to Glenmont Garage as location for Innovation Education Center.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update SKYPE equipment, develop SOP and program outline for a general SKYPE program.</li> <li>Review educational programs, choose one to measure against latest educational scholarship.</li> <li>Get involved with Parks for Every Classroom (PEC).</li> <li>Provide education training for staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop classroom materials to coordinate with SKYPE program.</li> <li>Begin development and prototyping for education program revision.</li> <li>Continue involvement with PEC.</li> <li>Ongoing: provide education training for staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot test revisions to education programs and evaluate.</li> <li>Develop curriculum materials for posting to website.</li> <li>Continue involvement with PEC.</li> <li>Ongoing: provide education training for staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update SKYPE equipment.</li> <li>Review educational programs, choose another one to measure against latest educational scholarship.</li> <li>Continue involvement with PEC.</li> <li>Ongoing: provide education training for staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin development and prototyping for education program revision.</li> <li>Continue involvement with PEC.</li> <li>Ongoing: provide education training for staff.</li> </ul>

*Glenmont  
Historic House  
Museum (HHM)  
Pilot Project:  
Year 2*

- Review Glenmont signage and begin purchasing new signs.
- Time management-ensure time for team to meet and continue work on program.

- Continue work on program- pilot testing work done in FY20.
- Finalize tour of Glenmont grounds based on work.

- Research latest scholarship on self-guided programming.
- Attend training as necessary.

- Develop a self-guided version of HHM program.
- Pilot test program and/or activities from program.
- Purchase materials and supplies for new program.

- Launch self-guided program.
- Review and revise at the end of the season.

<b>Work Force</b>	<i>We will proactively and strategically navigate a period of staffing uncertainty.</i>	<b>Primary Objective:</b> (1) Prepare for and manage retirements; (2) conduct intentional recruiting and streamline hiring; (3) take care of people.				
<b>Workforce/Morale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Determine park tasks and needs (let go, keep, reorganize)</li> <li>▪ Yearly PD review (identify and prioritize)</li> <li>▪ Reevaluate org chart</li> <li>▪ Hire; Develop interview questions related to core values (authenticity, collaboration, creativity)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assess retirement and vacancies and reevaluate org chart.</li> <li>▪ Taking Care: Determine what positions need desk reviews</li> <li>▪ Update priority PDs as needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assess retirement and vacancies and reevaluate org chart.</li> <li>▪ Taking Care: complete desk reviews</li> <li>▪ Ongoing review of PDs and needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assess retirement and vacancies and reevaluate org chart.</li> <li>▪ Ongoing review of PDs and needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assess retirement and vacancies and reevaluate org chart.</li> <li>▪ Ongoing review of PDs and needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assess retirement and vacancies and reevaluate org chart.</li> <li>▪ Ongoing review of PDs and needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Volunteers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify the areas we need to recruit volunteers into.</li> <li>▪ Hold at least one VIP training session.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ (Ongoing) increase communicating mission goals to public at large; use website to increase qualified volunteers.</li> <li>▪ Review VIP orientation, review as needed.</li> <li>▪ Hold at least one VIP training session.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Determine places to recruit for VIPs, upload to new sites.</li> <li>▪ Recruit highly qualified volunteers specific to immediate need.</li> <li>▪ Review and revise VIP manual.</li> <li>▪ Hold at least one VIP training session.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Review VIP needs for park. Recruit as necessary.</li> <li>▪ Hold at least one VIP training session.</li> <li>▪</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hold at least one VIP training session.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hold at least one VIP training session.</li> </ul>
<b>Training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taking Care: Determine what training is wanted; prioritize and develop a 5-year plan</li> <li>▪ Provide refresher on Individual Development Plans (IDP)</li> <li>▪ Utilize staff chats for employee development opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taking Care: 10% of prioritized training from plan completed</li> <li>▪ Ensure all staff have an IDP in place.</li> <li>▪ Formal workforce improvement training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taking Care: 25% of priority training from plan completed</li> <li>▪ Ensure all staff have an IDP in place.</li> <li>▪ Formal workforce improvement training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taking Care: 50% of priority training from plan completed</li> <li>▪ Ensure all staff have an IDP in place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taking Care: 75% of priority training from plan completed</li> <li>▪ Ensure all staff have an IDP in place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taking Care: 100% of priority training from plan completed</li> <li>▪ Ensure all staff have an IDP in place.</li> </ul>