

OATLANDS

land - community - history

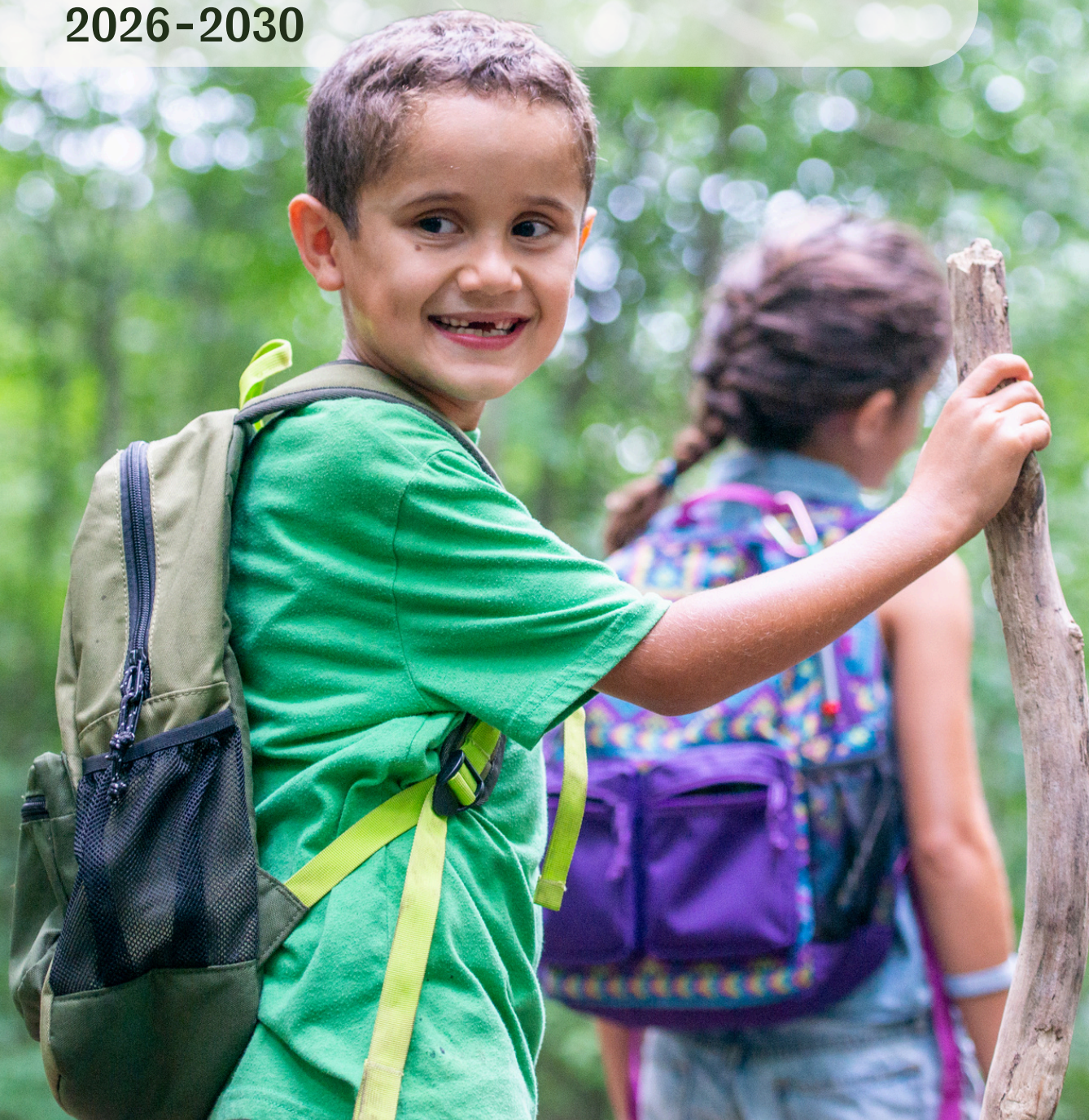


A Site of the
National Trust for
Historic Preservation

Oatlands for All

A Strategic Plan for Land, History and Community

2026-2030



Our Moment

Across the country, historic places are being called upon to play a renewed role in civic life. Communities are searching for places where people can gather, learn and reflect together. Visitors are seeking authentic experiences where history comes alive through discovery, dialogue and shared exploration.

Oatlands is uniquely positioned to meet this moment. Across 418 acres of farmland, forests, gardens and historic structures, the site preserves stories shaped by generations of people who cultivated the land, built homes and communities, endured injustice and pursued freedom. Their lives remain embedded in the landscape, and our responsibility as stewards includes honoring the ancestors whose experiences shaped this place. The opportunity before us is to ensure that more people encounter these histories and engage with the deeper questions they raise.

Our strategic plan responds to this moment with optimism and purpose. Its central objective is to imagine an **Oatlands for All**.

Imagining an **Oatlands for All** means creating a place that is welcoming, visible and deeply connected to its community. It means activating Oatlands as a living learning environment where visitors experience history firsthand and explore how generations of people shaped, and were shaped by, the pursuit of freedom. It means caring for the buildings, collections and natural resources that make this site significant while deepening relationships with descendants, partners and neighbors. It means expanding access through new membership opportunities, educational experiences and public programs that invite more people to build an ongoing relationship with the site. Together, these efforts strengthen the foundation needed to sustain Oatlands for generations to come.

This vision is grounded in a commitment to education and ethical stewardship. An ethical use policy, developed in consultation with descendants, provides a clear framework for how the property is used and interpreted, ensuring that visitors encounter the history of this place with curiosity, honesty and respect.

Descendant-centered practice is essential to this work. Descendants connected to Oatlands bring knowledge, memory, and perspective that deepen understanding of the site and its histories. Their voices help guide the institution toward a future that honors the complexity of the past while building relationships rooted in trust, accountability and shared purpose.

Imagining an **Oatlands for All** is both an aspiration and a commitment. It is an invitation to experience this place not simply as a record of the past, but as a living resource for the present and future. By learning from the land, the stories it holds, and the people connected to it, we can strengthen our sense of shared responsibility and shape a more thoughtful future together. The work ahead is to bring that vision to life.



Our Goals

Over the past several years, Oatlands has undergone a period of transition and stabilization as stewardship shifted fully to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This strategic plan responds to that new chapter by charting a path forward that strengthens the site's visibility, expands opportunities for learning and engagement, and addresses one of the defining challenges facing historic places today: connecting more people to the landscapes, stories and experiences that bring history to life.

To realize this vision of an **Oatlands for All**, the strategic plan outlines six strategic goals designed to expand access, deepen engagement and strengthen long-term sustainability. Together, they will guide Oatlands' growth and impact over the next five years.



Explore the Histories and Meanings of Freedom

Oatlands will become a leading site in the region where visitors, students, and community members explore the evolving meanings of freedom through immersive, place-based learning and dialogue.



Build the Infrastructure for Descendant Engagement

Oatlands will develop the relationships, policies, and institutional structures needed for sustained descendant partnership, working with descendants to shape long-term priorities and guide how the histories of this land are researched, interpreted and shared.



Strengthen Stewardship of Land and Collections

Oatlands will responsibly steward its landscapes, historic structures, archives, and collections to support learning, transparency, ecological sustainability and public trust.



Activate the Landscape as a Living Learning Environment

Oatlands will preserve and activate its historic core, gardens, and cultural landscape as interconnected spaces where visitors engage directly with history, environment and civic life.



Champion Preservation in Loudoun County

Oatlands will contribute to regional preservation conversations by advancing public dialogue, research, and partnerships that protect historic landscapes and community character.



Enhance Staff, Operations, and Learning

Oatlands will strengthen staffing, operational systems, and internal capacity while using evaluation, research, and sector benchmarks to guide decision-making, improve programs and strengthen the long-term impact of our work.



Develop Sustainable Resources and Governance

Oatlands will strengthen governance and diversified revenue strategies to support mission-driven growth and ensure the organization thrives for generations to come.



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Developing the **Oatlands for All** Strategic Plan

*Grounded in Community,
Guided by Strategy*



The Oatlands Strategic Plan is grounded in the organization's mission, vision and core values and reflects a shared commitment to stewarding the **land**, **histories** and **community** connections that define this place. Covering the period from 2026 through 2030, the plan establishes the priorities and goals that will guide Oatlands' work over the next five years as we strengthen our role as a place for learning, reflection, and dialogue about the histories and meanings of freedom.

This planning effort emerged during a moment of renewal for Oatlands. Following a period of institutional transition and the reactivation of public programs, the organization recognized the opportunity to chart a clear path forward. The process invited the broad Oatlands community to think boldly about how we can better serve our audiences, strengthen relationships with descendants and community partners, and ensure responsible stewardship for generations to come.

Community engagement was central to the development of the plan. Over six months, Oatlands gathered input through conversations with descendants, community partners, staff, the Advisory Council, a newly established Youth Advisory Council,

members, visitors, educators and volunteers. These discussions identified shared priorities, including strengthening descendant-centered practice, expanding educational opportunities, activating the landscape as a living, learning environment, and increasing public access and engagement.

The planning process was further informed by research and peer learning across the preservation and museum fields. Staff examined national trends affecting historic sites, conducted environmental scans, and engaged with colleagues across the National Trust for Historic Preservation and peer institutions.

Together, this engagement and research created a strong foundation for defining Oatlands' strategic priorities. The resulting plan reflects both the aspirations of the community and the realities of stewarding a nationally significant historic site. It provides a framework for decision-making, accountability, and collaboration as Oatlands continues its work to preserve the land, share its histories, and foster meaningful opportunities for learning and connection.

Mission

Oatlands is a nationally significant historic site in Loudoun County that preserves and activates the extraordinary resources of its land and history in partnership with our community.

Through responsible stewardship of 418 acres of landscapes, historic structures and collections, and through inclusive interpretation, education and public programs, Oatlands brings people into the layered histories of freedom and community that shaped this place and continue to shape civic life today. Oatlands invites all who visit to explore the past, reflect on its meaning in the present and help steward these shared resources for generations to come.

Values

Land, History, Community: These three pillars anchor all that we do. Oatlands activates its landscapes, historic core, and collections as living classrooms that connect environmental stewardship, historical understanding and civic learning. We care for the land responsibly, interpret the past with honesty and rigor, and serve the public as a cultural and educational resource for the region.

Descendant-Centered Practice: We commit to centering descendant voices and lived experiences across interpretation, education, governance and institutional policy. Through ethical engagement, inclusive storytelling and sustained relationship-building, Oatlands works to address historical silences, expand representation and shape a more complete understanding of the site's history.

Stewardship and Trust: We care for natural and cultural resources with integrity, transparency and responsibility to present and future generations. We expand access through inclusive programming, accessibility planning and multiple modes of engagement, while using evaluation and community feedback to strengthen public trust.

Excellence and Growth: We pursue thoughtful innovation, high-quality experiences and disciplined planning in service of long-term impact. Oatlands is committed to strengthening financial sustainability and organizational resilience while remaining grounded in mission and values.

Vision

We envision Oatlands as a welcoming cultural destination where people of all ages and backgrounds gather to explore the land, stories and histories of freedom that shaped this place.

Oatlands inspires curiosity, reflection and shared responsibility for the future through responsible stewardship, descendant engagement and meaningful experiences.



Ethical Stewardship Policy

During the November 2025 meeting of the Oatlands Advisory Council, members encouraged the site to articulate a clear framework for how the land, history and descendant relationships guide the use of the property going forward. In response to those discussions, and informed by conversations with descendants, Oatlands has developed an **Ethical Stewardship and Property Use Policy** establishing guiding principles for how the site is interpreted, experienced and cared for.

Oatlands reflects generations of human experiences, including the lives of African and African-descended men, women, and children who were enslaved here and whose labor shaped the land in enduring ways. As stewards of Oatlands, we carry a responsibility to preserve the property while ensuring that the humanity, resilience, and experiences of those who lived and labored here remain central to how the site is understood. In addition, Oatlands stands on the ancestral and unceded lands of the Manahoac, Piscataway and other Indigenous peoples. We are researching these Indigenous connections and aim to integrate our findings into tours and other public resources.

At the same time, Oatlands is a public history site that welcomes visitors, supports educational programs and generates the revenue necessary to sustain preservation of the site. The Ethical Stewardship Policy acknowledges this tension directly. Its goal is not to limit engagement with the property, but to ensure that every visit, program, and gathering occurs within a framework that honors the history of the land and the people connected to it. The policy establishes **four core commitments** that guide how Oatlands approaches stewardship and engagement.

History Is Always Present

Preserving and sharing the full and honest history of Oatlands remains the institution's primary responsibility. To ensure that the history remains ever-present, Oatlands is implementing interpretive elements across the property, including signage, orientation materials, and educational resources that foreground the lives of those who lived and labored here. Visitors will encounter these stories throughout the landscape, reinforcing the understanding that the beauty of this place cannot be separated from the history it holds.

Oatlands Is an Educational Space

Whether visitors come for tours, programs, walks, celebrations, or private events, they are entering a place of learning. Oatlands is committed to ensuring that every encounter with the property includes opportunities to understand the history of the land and the lives that shaped it.

Descendant Engagement Guides the Work

Descendant engagement is a central element of Oatlands' stewardship responsibilities. Ongoing conversations with descendants inform interpretation, programming and institutional policies. Their knowledge and perspectives help ensure that the stories of this place are told with honesty, dignity and care.

Respectful Use of Historic Spaces

Oatlands welcomes all those who come to celebrate, learn and gather. At the same time, the property carries meaning that must be respected. Activities that trivialize or sensationalize the site's history are not permitted. Visitors, renters and partners are expected to engage with the history of the land and to participate in stewarding it with respect and care.



Audiences & Impact

The **seven goals** that follow represent the key areas of focus necessary to advance Oatlands' mission and achieve the vision of **Oatlands for All** over the next five years. These goals are designed to serve the four audiences at the heart of Oatlands' work:

- **local families and youth,**
- **heritage tourists interested in American history,**
- **descendants connected to the histories of this land, and**
- **emerging professionals seeking meaningful cultural and learning experiences.**

Within each goal, Oatlands has identified a set of strategies and implementation priorities that will guide our work. Embedded throughout the goals are clear measures of progress (Key Performance Indicators or KPIs) that allow the organization to evaluate and monitor impact. These measures include quantitative indicators such as visitation, program participation and revenue growth, as well as qualitative indicators related to trust-building, learning outcomes, community relationships and descendant engagement. Together, these measures help ensure that our work remains aligned with Oatlands' mission and responsive to the audiences and communities we serve.

Implementation of the strategic plan will be led by Oatlands' leadership team in close collaboration with **staff at Oatlands** and the **National Trust for Historic Preservation**, the **Advisory Council** and the **Youth Advisory Council**. These groups provide expertise, help translate strategic priorities into practical action and support accountability as the plan moves forward. Progress toward the goals outlined in this plan will be reviewed regularly through evaluation, dashboards and ongoing dialogue. Updates will be shared with key stakeholders to ensure transparency and accountability.

Translating a strategic plan into action requires discipline, flexibility and sustained commitment. These goals provide the foundation for how Oatlands will prioritize resources, guide decision-making, and adapt to emerging opportunities and challenges.

Explore the Histories and Meanings of *Freedom*



Oatlands will become a leading site in the region where visitors, students, and community members explore the evolving meanings of freedom through immersive, place-based learning and dialogue.

The site's landscape and historic resources provide a powerful setting for examining how freedom has been defined, contested and expanded across generations.

Through interpretation, programming and educational initiatives, Oatlands will create opportunities for visitors to engage with these histories in ways that are thoughtful, participatory and relevant to civic life today.

Key Strategies and KPIs for Impact

-  **Integrate arts, storytelling, and experiential learning into public programs and tours, creating participatory experiences that encourage reflection and dialogue.** Launch and refine interpretive or arts-based programs each year, with at least 70% of surveyed participants reporting increased understanding of the historical themes explored.
-  **Expand school partnerships and curriculum-aligned educational experiences, connecting classroom learning with the historic landscape.** Establish partnerships with 10–15 schools and universities to serve more students annually through field trips, workshops and educational programs.
-  **Develop interpretive programs and dialogic tours that explore the evolving meanings of freedom** across Oatlands' history, increasing visitor engagement with deeper historical interpretation by 10–15% annually.
-  **Host public conversations, lectures, and community dialogues that connect historical interpretation with contemporary civic questions about freedom and democracy.** Present at least six public dialogue programs annually, engaging 400–600 participants each year, with documented audience feedback demonstrating meaningful engagement with the ideas discussed.

Build the Infrastructure for Descendant

Engagement



Oatlands will develop the relationships, policies and institutional structures needed for sustained descendant partnership. Descendants connected to the histories of this land bring knowledge, memory and perspective deepening understanding of the site.

This goal focuses on building the infrastructure necessary to support long-term collaboration, ensuring that descendant voices guide how research, interpretation and programming evolve over time.

Through sustained collaboration, Oatlands will work with descendants to ensure that the stories of their ancestors are researched, interpreted and shared with honesty, dignity and care.

Key Strategies and KPIs for Impact

- **Establish consistent descendant engagement frameworks and communication channels**, including an annual Descendants Day, listening sessions, and direct communication pathways that support sustained dialogue and relationship-building. Grow descendant participation by 30% and ensure ongoing communication with families and community members.
- **Support collaborative research initiatives and storytelling projects with descendants**, documenting family histories, genealogies and oral histories connected to Oatlands. Continue collaborative research or storytelling initiatives, increasing oral history documentation, descendant-led interpretation, or co-created public programs by 50%.
- **Develop policies and ethical guidelines that reflect descendant perspectives, ensuring that descendant input informs interpretation, institutional decision-making and use of the property.** Adopt and implement an Ethical Stewardship and Property Use Policy in 2026 and ensure that descendant perspectives are incorporated into 100% of major interpretive initiatives.
- **Create opportunities for descendants to participate in interpretation, programming and advisory conversations**, strengthening shared authority in how Oatlands' history is presented, with qualitative evaluation demonstrating increased trust, collaboration and sustained engagement over time.

Strengthen Stewardship of *Land & Collections*



Oatlands will responsibly steward its landscapes, historic structures, archives and collections to support learning, transparency, ecological sustainability and public trust.

Preservation of these resources ensures that future generations can experience the physical evidence of the lives, labor and landscapes that shaped this place.

Key Strategies and KPIs for Impact

-  **Advance best practices in collections care, archival management and preservation**, ensuring that Oatlands' historic structures, objects and archival materials are protected according to professional museum and preservation standards. Complete 100% of priority collections assessments and create cyclical maintenance and collections management plans, maintaining full compliance with National Trust preservation standards and professional collections care guidelines.
-  **Implement ecological stewardship practices across farmland, gardens, forests and natural areas**, strengthening the environmental sustainability of the site while supporting interpretation and education. Manage property under active ecological stewardship practices (such as meadow restoration, invasive species management and habitat conservation) and document measurable improvements in landscape health over the course of the strategic plan.
-  **Integrate preservation and stewardship work into interpretation and public programming**, helping visitors understand how historic landscapes, buildings, and collections are cared for and why preservation matters. Incorporate preservation topics into tours, workshops, or public programs annually and explore feasibility of archeology programming and activities.
-  **Strengthen transparency and documentation in preservation and collections management**, ensuring that stewardship decisions are well documented and accessible to staff, partners and researchers. Complete annual preservation and collections audits and ensure all major projects follow recognized preservation and museum standards.

Activate the Landscape as a

Living Learning Environment

Oatlands will preserve and activate its historic core, gardens and cultural landscape as interconnected spaces where visitors engage directly with history, environment and civic life.

The site's 418-acre landscape offers an extraordinary opportunity for experiential learning, allowing visitors to encounter history through the places where it unfolded.



Key Strategies and KPIs for Impact

A central component of this work is the **Living Learning Landscape Initiative**, a coordinated effort to expand interpretation and educational engagement across the site. Through this initiative, Oatlands will develop new exhibits in the Visitor Center, install interpretive signage and storytelling across the landscape and introduce hands-on learning experiences that invite visitors to engage directly with the site's history in new ways.

➤ **Launch the *Living Learning Landscape Initiative* across the property**, activating Oatlands' historic core, gardens and landscapes as interconnected environments for place-based learning with new interpretive installations across the landscape over the course of the strategic plan to increase visitor engagement in multiple areas of the site and encourage exploration beyond the mansion and gardens.

➤ **Install interpretive signage, storytelling elements and wayfinding across the landscape**, helping visitors navigate the property and encounter the history embedded in the land, with visitor surveys showing a measurable increase in time spent exploring the broader landscape.

➤ **Develop new interpretive exhibits and storytelling experiences in the Visitor Center**, introducing visitors to the layered histories of the landscape and preparing them to engage more deeply with the site, with visitor surveys indicating at least 75% of visitors report increased understanding of key historical themes.

➤ **Expand experiential and hands-on learning opportunities for families and students**, connecting environmental stewardship, history and civic learning through interactive activities, with participant feedback demonstrating increased engagement and learning.



Champion Preservation in Loudoun County

Oatlands will contribute to local, regional and national preservation conversations by advancing public dialogue, research and partnerships that protect historic landscapes and community character. As we strengthen our institutional capacity and community relationships, we will work toward becoming a respected voice in conversations about land stewardship, historic preservation and responsible development.

Key Strategies and KPIs for Impact

-  **Host public programs and community conversations on historic preservation and land stewardship**, creating opportunities for residents, scholars, and preservation advocates to explore how historic places contribute to civic life and community identity.
-  **Develop partnerships with local preservation organizations, cultural institutions and educational organizations**, strengthening collaboration around shared stewardship goals. Establish 10-15 active partnerships with preservation and cultural organizations in Loudoun County and the surrounding region.
-  **Share research and educational resources that highlight the value of historic landscapes**, helping the public to understand the cultural, environmental and economic importance of preservation. Publish or present two to three research-based programs, talks, or educational resources annually, reaching 500+ community members through programs, digital content and partner collaborations.
-  **Participate in regional preservation initiatives and working groups**, contributing Oatlands' expertise to broader conversations about protecting historic landscapes and community character. Maintain active participation in regional preservation organizations or working groups, with documented contributions to preservation dialogue and initiatives across the region.

Enhance Staff, Learning & Operations



Oatlands will enhance staffing, operational systems and internal capacity to support high-quality programs, responsible stewardship and sustainable organizational growth. As the organization expands tours, educational programs and public engagement initiatives, strong internal infrastructure will be essential.

Evaluation, research, and sector benchmarks will guide decision-making, improve programs and strengthen the long-term impact of Oatlands' work.

Key Strategies and KPIs for Impact

-  **Strengthen staffing structures and professional development opportunities**, ensuring that staff have the skills, resources and support necessary to deliver high-quality programs and stewardship of the site. Provide at least four professional development opportunities per staff member each year, including training, conferences, or field-based learning experiences.
-  **Expand staffing capacity in key operational areas including events, development and collections**, ensuring the organization has the expertise and personnel needed to support program growth, strengthen fundraising and responsibly steward the site's historic resources. Add staff positions or contractors in interpretation, events, development, or collections management by 2030, increasing organizational capacity to support expanded programming, revenue generation and collections stewardship.
-  **Implement evaluation tools that track program outcomes and visitor learning**, enabling Oatlands to measure impact and continuously improve programs. Establish program evaluation frameworks for 100% of major programs and educational initiatives, with annual reporting on visitor satisfaction and learning outcomes.
-  **Benchmark performance against peer institutions and sector best practices**, ensuring that Oatlands' programs, operations and visitor experiences remain aligned with leading practices in historic site management. Conduct annual benchmarking reviews with five to seven peer institutions, using findings to improve program effectiveness, visitor satisfaction and operational efficiency.

Develop Sustainable

Resources & Governance

Oatlands will strengthen governance, staffing, and diversified revenue strategies to support mission-driven growth and ensure the site thrives for generations to come.

Financial sustainability and effective governance are essential to advancing the site's mission and expanding public engagement.



Key Strategies and KPIs for Impact

A key strategy under this goal is the development of a new **Oatlands for All** membership model, designed to build a broad base of community support while encouraging repeat visitation and deeper engagement with the site.

-  **Launch a new Oatlands for All membership program designed to increase access and strengthen community relationships**, encouraging repeat visitation and deeper engagement with the site. Grow membership to 300 members by 2030, with annual membership retention rates above 65%.
-  **Strengthen governance structures and collaboration with the Oatlands Advisory Council**, ensuring strategic oversight and strong community leadership for the organization. Maintain 75% participation of Advisory Council members in annual planning conversations, and conduct at least two strategic advisory meetings per year focused on governance, fundraising and institutional growth.
-  **Expand donor engagement and philanthropic partnerships**, building relationships with individuals, foundations and corporations that support Oatlands' mission and long-term sustainability. Increase the number of major donors and philanthropic partners by 25% over the plan period, and secure two to three new foundation or corporate partnerships annually.
-  **Diversify earned and contributed revenue streams**, strengthening financial resilience through tours, programs, rentals, grants and philanthropic support. Achieve balanced revenue model (1/3 earned, 1/3 annual giving, 1/3 endowment).



Financial Projections

Achieving the goals described in the **Oatlands for All** Strategic Plan (2026-2030) will require sustained investment in staff, programs, preservation of historic resources and the infrastructure necessary to expand public engagement.

Over the next five years, Oatlands will continue to build a balanced financial model that integrates earned revenue, philanthropic support, membership growth and institutional partnerships. Investments will support the expansion of public programming, implementation of the ***Living Learning Landscape Initiative***, enhanced interpretation and educational experiences, and the operational capacity required to steward the site's landscapes, collections and historic structures.

Over the course of the strategic plan, we anticipate gradual growth in operating revenue as visitation increases, new membership initiatives strengthen community support and philanthropic partnerships expand.

Diversified Revenue

Additional resources will enable Oatlands to strengthen staffing capacity, implement the goals outlined in this strategic plan, and ensure that the organization remains financially sustainable while expanding its role as a cultural and educational resource for the region.

To sustain this work, Oatlands will focus on growing a diversified set of revenue streams:

- **Earned revenue from tours, programs, site rentals and events**
- **Membership development and community giving**
- **Contributed Revenue from annual fundraisers**
- **Individual philanthropy and major gifts**
- **Foundation and grant funding**
- **Corporate and local business partnerships**

Acknowledgements



Honoring the past. Inspiring the future.

Together, we bring the vision of Oatlands for All to life.

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A special thank you to our **Youth Advisory Council** and **volunteers** for their dedication and care.

This strategic plan reflects the contributions, insight, and care of many individuals who believe in the future of Oatlands and the importance of preserving and sharing its history. We extend our deep gratitude to the **Oatlands Advisory Council**, whose thoughtful guidance and commitment to the site helped shape the vision and priorities outlined in this plan. Their questions, expertise, and encouragement challenged us to think boldly about what Oatlands can become as a place of learning, reflection and community connection. We are especially grateful to the **descendants connected to the history of Oatlands**, whose time, trust, and perspectives continue to deepen our understanding of this landscape and the lives connected to it. Their voices are helping to guide how the history of this place is researched, interpreted and shared, and their partnership is essential to the work ahead. We also thank the members of the **Oatlands Youth Advisory Council**, whose curiosity, ideas and enthusiasm are helping to shape the future of the site. Their participation reflects Oatlands' commitment to cultivating the next generation of leaders in preservation, public history and cultural stewardship.

We thank the **National Trust for Historic Preservation**, whose stewardship of Oatlands and continued support provide the institutional foundation that allows this work to move forward. The Trust's commitment to preserving historic places and sharing their full stories strengthens Oatlands' ability to serve the public and steward this landscape responsibly. This plan also reflects the dedication of the **Oatlands staff**, whose daily work caring for the land, buildings, collections and visitors sustains the site and brings its history to life. Their professionalism, creativity and belief in the mission of Oatlands make the vision outlined in this plan possible.

Finally, we thank the **community partners, educators, volunteers, donors** and **visitors** who continue to engage with Oatlands and support its future. Historic places endure because people care for them. The shared commitment of this community ensures that Oatlands will remain a place where **land, history** and **community** come together.




For questions about our 2026 Strategic Plan or to request more information on ways to invest in our work, please contact:

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OATLANDS

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 Oatlands-National-Trust-Site

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