

LEWIS GINTER BOTANICAL GARDEN

STRATEGIC PLAN
2024 - 2029



PREPARED BY:  **canopy**
STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Photo Credit: Caroline Martin

BOLD.

BRAVE.

BEAUTIFUL.



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STRATEGIC PLAN | PRESIDENT’S LETTER

Bold, Brave, Beautiful

One thing that’s true about both plants and organizations is that it’s much easier to grow them if you begin with a well-tended foundation. At Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, we’re fortunate to have such a foundation, created by the hard work and dedication of our team—staff, volunteers, members, patrons, board members and community members—who have given their time, passion, and expertise over the past four decades and established one of the foremost public gardens in the country.

On the eve of the Garden’s 40th anniversary, we honor the work that has come before, celebrate where we are now, and look forward to transformational changes coming very soon. With the Conservatory expansion on the horizon and the recent real estate acquisition of adjoining property, we knew it was time to create a road map for the future. The result? A Strategic Plan that is bold, brave, and beautiful.

The Strategic Plan was formed via a year-long approach of thoughtfully incorporating as many voices as possible. Working with Canopy Strategic Partners, we tapped into the diverse perspectives of internal and external stakeholders to understand where the Garden is now—and where we want to be.

The work was extensive, including surveying all staff and volunteers and holding a series of listening sessions with volunteers, members, and board members. Our Advisory Council offered invaluable input from community leaders and from partner organizations throughout the region. A Blue Ribbon Panel comprised of regional and national subject-matter experts provided even broader perspectives.



Photo Credit: Tom Hennessy

The many diverse voices were united in one goal: to share this Garden with everyone and to be accessible to our community. I am excited to share the remarkable work done by so many in this Strategic Plan. It is a living, breathing document that reaffirms many of the Garden’s long-held values and guides us to a future as a Virginia garden of international significance leading in horticultural and education excellence.

I’m so grateful to each person who helped create this plan. The Garden truly has a special community at its core and, with our new plan in place, I’m confident Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden will continue its mission of connecting people to plants by inspiring communities to explore and conserve nature for many, many more decades to come.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Brian Trader', written over a light blue, textured background.

Brian Trader, Ph.D.
President & CEO





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OUR MISSION

We connect people to plants by inspiring communities to explore and conserve nature.

OUR VISION

We are a Virginia garden of international significance leading in horticultural and educational excellence.

We cultivate experiences that enhance each person's relationship with the natural world.





OUR VALUES



INSPIRATION

Provide an accessible, memorable, and transformational botanical garden experience through a beautiful environment that engages guests, connects them to the plant world, and encourages them to learn, share, and model our horticultural practices.



HOSPITALITY

Invite, welcome, and celebrate individuals from diverse communities as visitors, members, partners, volunteers, and staff.



INTEGRITY

Do professional work that is straightforward, honest, trustworthy, fair and legal at all times. Steadfastly honor community partners who help the Garden engage with the region and volunteers and staff who carry the Garden and its mission in their hands.



RESPONSIBILITY

Educate the community on the interdependence of human and plant life and the importance of environmental stewardship. Allocate resources of time, material, and money when proposed programs or projects are considered effective, efficient, and sustainable.



INNOVATION

Inspire guests with evolving garden design, new and creative displays, stimulating programs, and singular events. Expand the influence of the Garden and Reserve through community partnerships and imaginative projects.

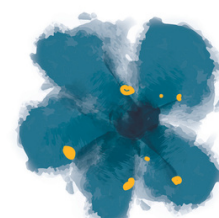


OUR COMMITMENTS



ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

We commit to ensuring the Garden's successful future. Our responsible management and supportive culture assure the Garden and team reach their full potential.



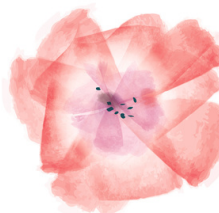
COLLABORATING AND GATHERING

We commit to collaborative partnerships and relationships that support our communities. We bring diverse cultures together for meaningful moments in nature.



ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCY

We commit to implementing environmental best practices in our organization. Our gardens, partnerships, and programs demonstrate how we can adapt and thrive in a changing world.



SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

We commit to innovative approaches and bold actions that make our Garden more inclusive and accessible to all.



COMMITMENTS & OBJECTIVES

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ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

We commit to ensuring the Garden's successful future. Our responsible management and supportive culture assure the Garden and team reach their full potential.

OBJECTIVES:

Create departmental succession plans so the Garden can easily transition through periods of change.

Commit to practices and values that increase staff retention and elevate the Garden as a top Richmond employer.

Implement policies and protocols that contribute to a culture of safety.

Responsibly maintain and expand Garden facilities and infrastructure through a known period of growth.

Offer innovative, mission-driven revenue generators that support the Garden's financial stability.



ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCY

We commit to implementing environmental best practices in our organization. Our gardens, partnerships, and programs demonstrate how we can adapt and thrive in a changing world.

OBJECTIVES:

Implement and maintain systems that ensure the organization's future facilities, infrastructures, and programs meet or exceed environmental best practices.

Allocate funding and staff resources to improving current infrastructure so they meet environmental best practices.

Advance our collections by focusing on intentional planting that teaches guests about adaptive gardening, sustainable and organic practices, and responsible land use.

Advance our collections by focusing on plants with botanical or conservation significance.

Act as regional convener for organizations and government agencies with environmental missions or programs.





COLLABORATING AND GATHERING

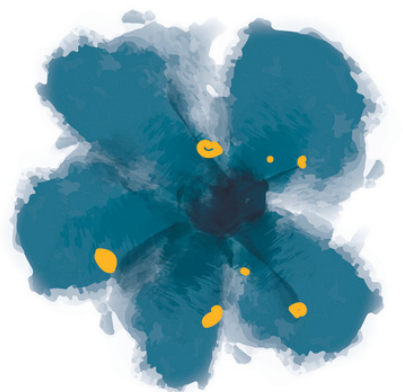
We commit to collaborative partnerships and relationships that support our communities. We bring diverse cultures together for meaningful moments in nature.

OBJECTIVES:

Strategically establish community partnerships that advance the Garden's mission, with an initial focus on regional organizations supporting people with disabilities.

Intentionally create exhibits, programs, events, gardens and displays that encourage learning and foster a sense of belonging.

Advance collaborations that emphasize identifying, supporting, and educating the next generation of horticultural professionals.



SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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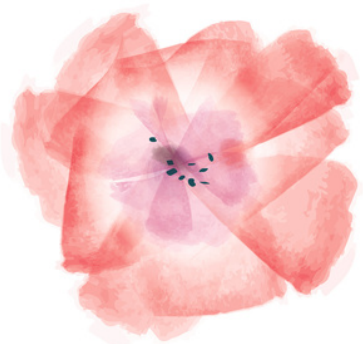
OBJECTIVES:

Improve accessibility to and within the Garden.

Prioritize community wellness by supporting individual and/or community mental health and well-being programs and partnerships for people living in central Virginia.

Use rigorous decision-making processes that ensure an equitable approach to programming beyond the Garden's walls.

Tell the history of the Garden, its land and the Reserve with transparency.



OUR FUTURE



This strategic plan sets out the high-level commitments and objectives that the Garden will hold itself accountable for over the next five years. Success will be achieved by acting on the commitments.

With a capital campaign underway and the master plan soon to launch, there will be new gardens and learning spaces, an expanded footprint and the addition of the Lewis Ginter Nature Reserve. These projects will elevate Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden and will deliver on its mission to connect people to plants by inspiring communities to explore and conserve nature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Photo Credit: Graham Copeland

Thank you to the staff, volunteers, Board of Directors, Board of Associates, and members for their dedication to Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. We appreciate our partners who contributed their time and expertise to this project. We are grateful for our community's support.

Andreas Addison, City of Richmond

Jack Berry, Richmond Region Tourism

Anedra Bourne, Venture Richmond

Judy Braus, North American Association of Environmental Educators

Christopher Frelke, Richmond Department of Parks, Recreation, & Community Facilities

Greg Gallop, Community Foundation for Greater Richmond

Roy Hoagland, Virginia Environmental Endowment

Dianne Jewell, Sheltering Arms Rehabilitation Center

Philip Klaus, Emeriti Council Member

Travis Massey, Pascal Medical Corporation

Michael Powell, Richmond Public Schools

Angie Renner, Walt Disney World Parks and Resorts (retired)

Robert Rose, Ph.D., Institute for Integrative Conservation at William & Mary College

Monica Smith-Callahan, Henrico County

Adam Thalhimer, Thompson Davis & Co.

Myra Thayer, Virginia Department of Education

Kathryn Thompson, CultureWorks

Mary Beth Walsh, Thrive Birth to Five

Michel Zajur, Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

*Canopy Strategic Partners was honored to facilitate this process with
Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.*



**LEWIS
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LEWIS GINTER BOTANICAL GARDEN

STRATEGIC PLAN APPENDIX



PREPARED BY:  **canopy**
STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Photo Credit: Tom Hennessy



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PROCESS

From November 2022 to October 2023, the strategic planning process was a major effort and investment of resources and time. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden leadership and staff were dedicated to creating an open, inclusive process that elevated as many staff, volunteer and Board voices as possible. Leadership placed a strong emphasis on community voices, inviting members, supporters, peer organizations and partner collaborators to provide input. The work was accomplished over four distinct phases, each building on the work and findings of the previous phase.



PROCESS | PHASE BY PHASE

Photo Credit: Beth Monroe



1: DISCOVERY *Where are we?*

November 2022 - February 2023

In this learning phase, we dug deep into the organization, looking at internal and external data to help us quantitatively and qualitatively understand the Garden. This process included a staff survey, staff and volunteer interviews, and market and audience analysis.



2: OPPORTUNITIES *Where can we go?*

March - May 2023

Based on our findings, we started to dream big. First, we worked to define the Garden's identity through an updated mission and vision and reaffirmed its existing values. Then, we identified key themes to address in the plan and brainstormed specific initiatives to support them.



3: REALITY *What will we do?*

June - July 2023

Using our brainstorming work and data as the foundation and our mission, vision, and values as decision-making filters, we drafted priorities (commitments) and determined what specifically we could and wanted to accomplish (objectives).



4: ACTION *How will we do it?*

August - September 2023

Finally, the team turned our objectives into detailed action plans, identifying the tasks, timelines, resources and people needed to reach our ambitious goals. These become our roadmap for the next five years.

PROCESS | ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE



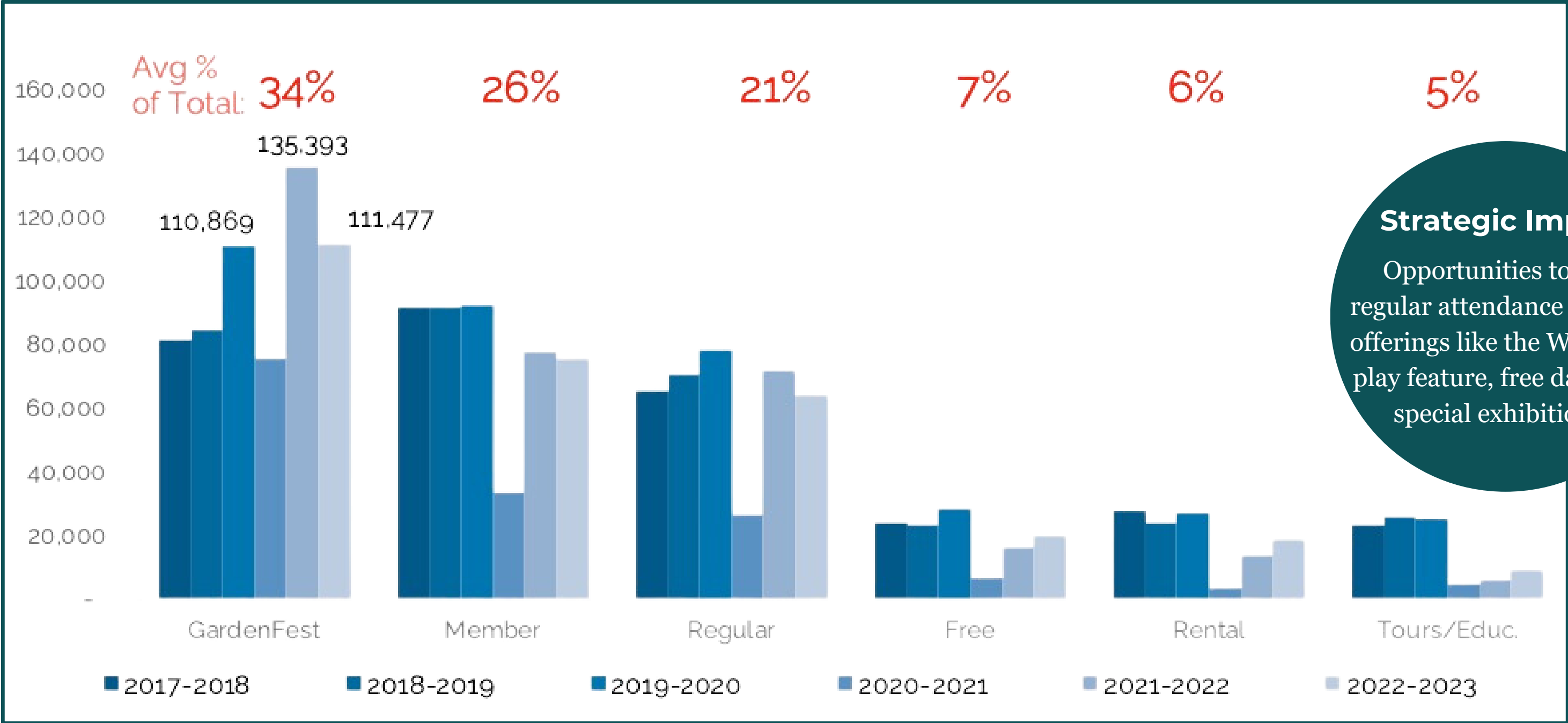
The Organizational Profile provided a high-level overview and analysis of five years of operations and visitation including organizational data, visitor data and demographic data at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. This included benchmarking a competitive set of comparisons with organizations from across the country that have a similar drivetime population. This analysis enabled us to develop a profile of the regional market landscape and document the organization's current business model and future opportunities in the market.

The subsequent Deep Dive provided data to specific questions posed by the Garden, including:

- Can Canopy tell how many of our guests are families?
- Can the data get as granular as to identify which neighborhoods our guests live in?
- Can we compare where guests to Norfolk Botanical Garden are coming from to where our guests are coming from?
- Can we compare Dominion Energy GardenFest of Lights visits to “regular” visits (i.e. visits during non-GardenFest times)?

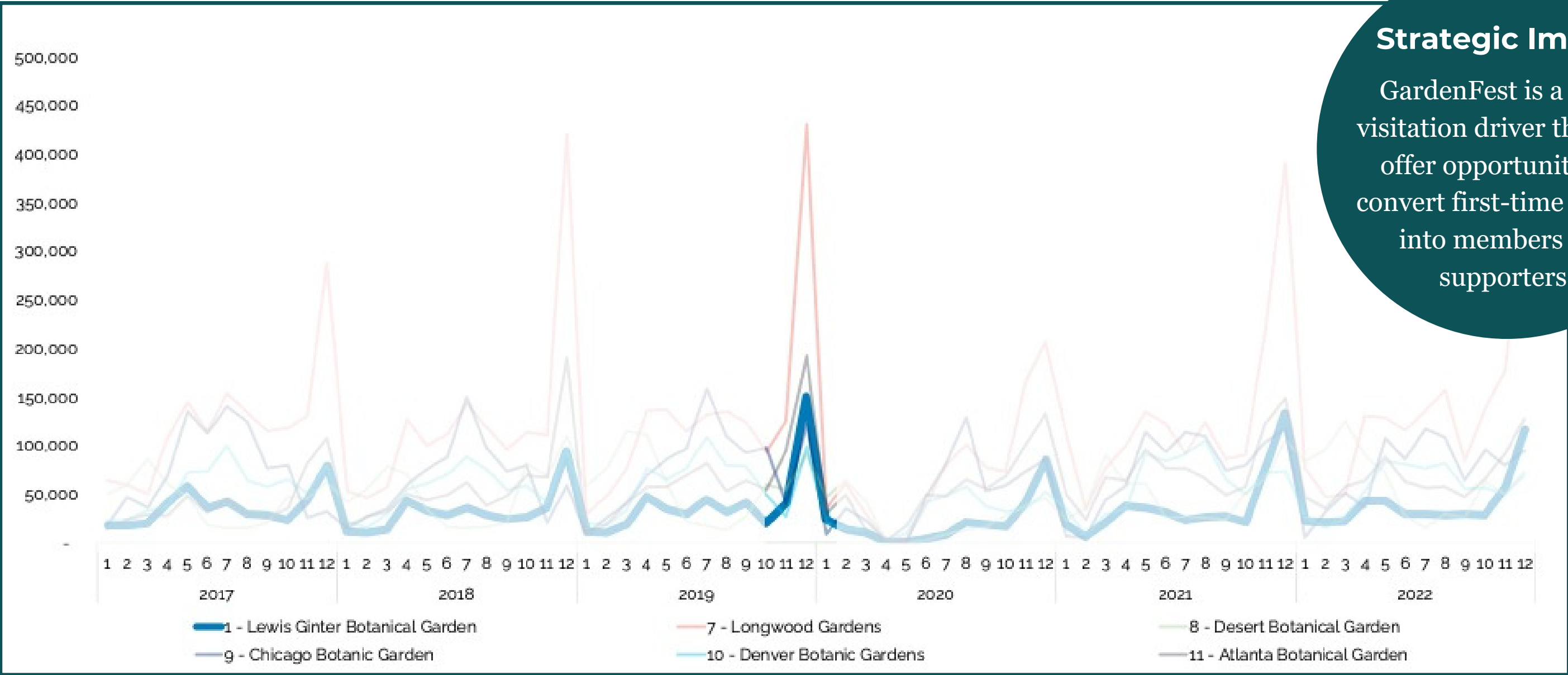
Average Attendance Composition

GardenFest has become more important in recent years, as member and regular attendance are decreasing.



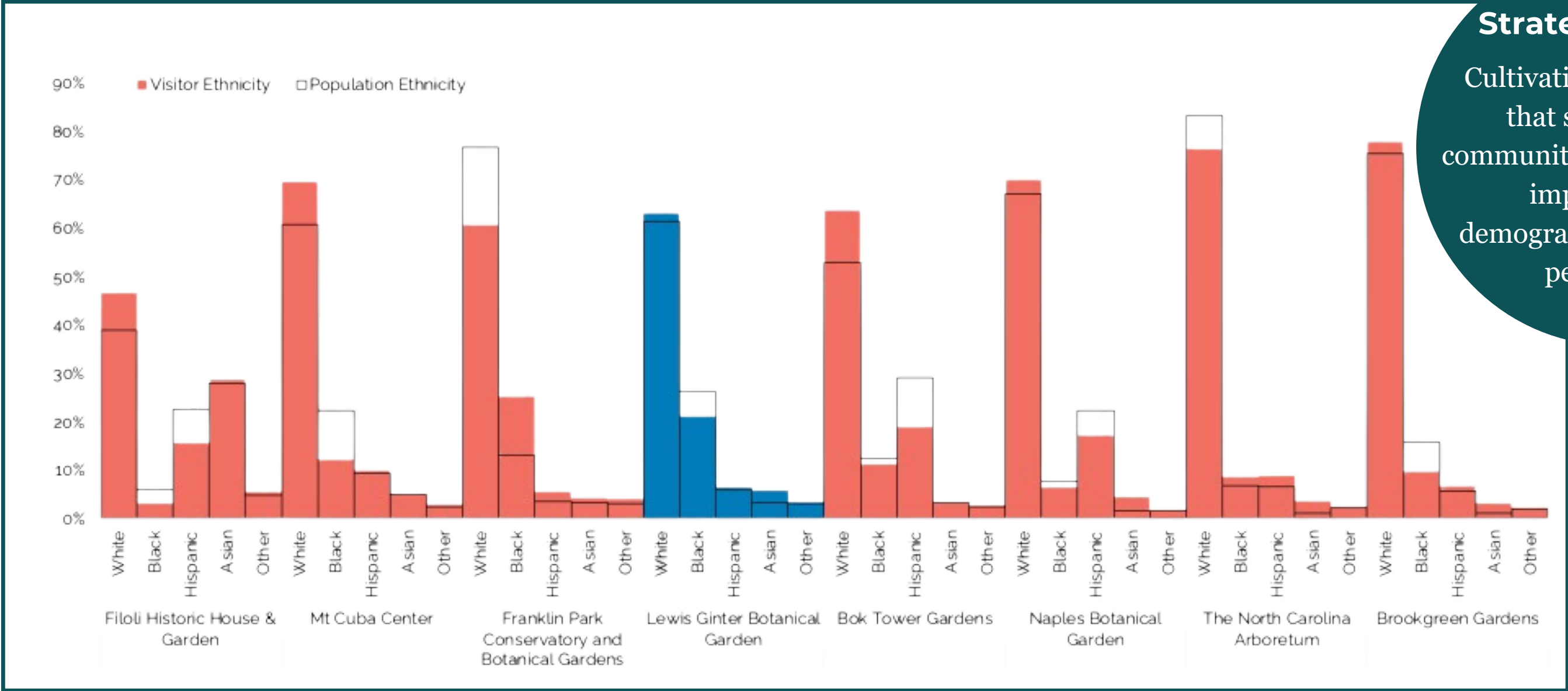
Aspirational Benchmarks: Visits by Month

GardenFest draws significant visitation, comparable to other botanical gardens with larger overall annual attendances. The Garden had the same level of visitation as Denver, Chicago, and Desert Botanical Gardens in December 2019.



Comparative Benchmarks: Visits by Ethnicity

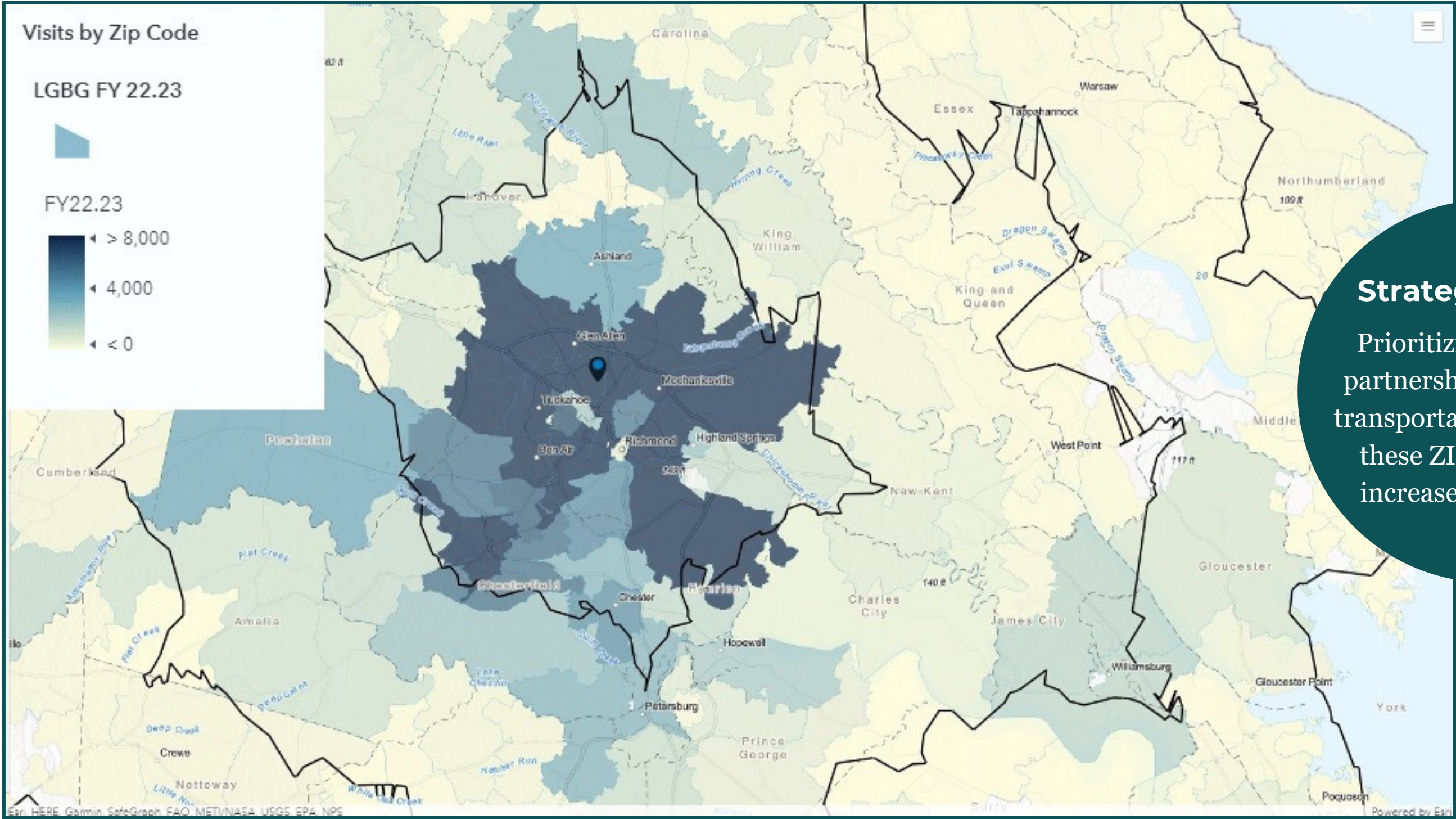
While most minority groups’ visitation percentages match or exceed their regional population percentages, the Black community is underrepresented. Researching Franklin Park Botanical Gardens programs may generate ideas for engaging with Black communities



Strategic Impact
Cultivating partnerships that serve diverse communities may positively impact visitor demographics and public perception.

Visits by ZIP Code: FY 2022-2023

Visits grew from ZIP codes on Richmond’s south side between 18-19 and 19-20. Attendance then dipped but rebounded in 22-23. Fewer visitors come to the Garden from these ZIP codes than others, but modest attendance gains have occurred.

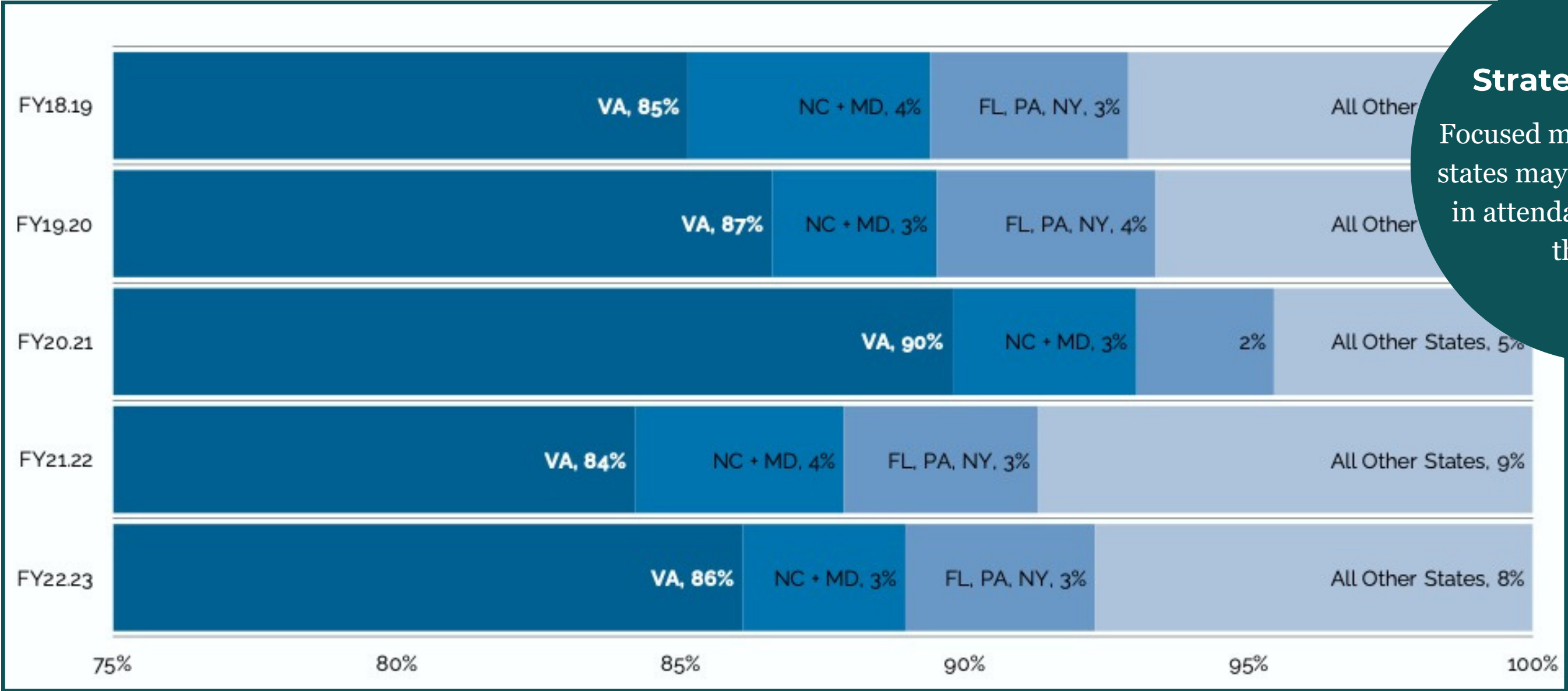


Strategic Impact

Prioritizing programs, partnerships, and public transportation options for these ZIP codes could increase engagement.

Visits by ZIP Code: Outside of Virginia

ZIP code analysis shows that North Carolina, Maryland, Florida, Pennsylvania and New York provide the most visits.



Strategic Impact
Focused marketing to these states may yield an increase in attendance throughout the year.

PROCESS | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community is at the heart of Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden’s strategic plan. To ensure broad community buy-in and support, Canopy Strategic Partners and the strategic planning team crafted diverse methods of information gathering including an electronic survey, small group staff or volunteer listening sessions, staff and volunteer meetings, focus groups, workshops, and expert panels. In all, this process included nearly 500 touch points with people from the internal and external community, representing nearly every staff and board member as well as volunteers, Garden members, donors, community representatives and supporters, and collaborative partners.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS

1 Pathfinder and Innovator Team

19 staff, 3 board members

1 Staff, Volunteer, and Board Survey

197 respondents

9 Community Stakeholder Interviews

5 Staff and Volunteer Listening Sessions

50 participants

2 “Garden Gathering” All-Staff Meetings

120 participants

2 Volunteer Meetings

45 participants

2 Member Focus Groups

14 participants

2 Blue Ribbon Panels

6 panelists

1 Community Needs Assessment Workshop

7 participants

1 Board of Associates Happy Hour Focus Group

7 participants

PROCESS | STAFF SURVEY TAKEAWAYS

During the Discovery Phase, 197 staff, volunteers, and board members participated in a survey examining the team’s perspectives on the Garden’s strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities for change or growth. The survey also captured people’s input on its mission, vision, and values.



EXISTING STRENGTHS

- Education/programs
- Gardens/facilities
- Events/special exhibits
- Community engagement
- Team and culture



AREAS TO IMPROVE

- Improve gardens, collections, interpretation
- Increase/diversify learning programs
- Increase accessibility and affordability
- Improve guest experience (including food, parking)
- Staff support, engagement, retention



LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL

- Lifelong learning and community education
- Community engagement/development
- Environmental stewardship and sustainability
- Connecting people to nature, inspiration, wellbeing
- Regional/national recognition and reputation

“The garden has always been a special place for me to go when I don't want to be alone, AND I want to be alone. I can feel safe there, it is beautiful, very calm, friendly. More people could benefit from the experience that is Lewis Ginter.”

- Survey comment

PROCESS | COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP



Photo Credit: Beth Monroe

The Community Needs Assessment Workshop engaged with the Garden's Advisory Council to discuss trends they see within their communities, the needs of their constituents and areas the Garden is best positioned to address through the strategic plan.

COMMUNITY TRENDS AND PARTNER NEEDS

Community Development: Safety, affordability (housing, childhood, food health), transportation, accessibility (food, childcare, resources), green spaces

Arts and Culture: Multicultural and multigenerational engagement, access by underserved communities, including disabled individuals, funding, small business opportunities, spaces for creativity

Education: Immersive and experiential learning, differentiated curriculum for all learners, access to lesson plans and adapted content, professional development for educators and administrators, family learning opportunities

Environment: Accessible and adaptive green spaces, community science volunteers to translate and teach about agriculture, horticulture, climate change, solutions to urban blight, coordinated art and environment

PROCESS | COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP

GARDEN OPPORTUNITIES

“Connective tissue” for organizations in the same space, with shared missions

Adaptable Green Spaces that can support different activities and places to play in a variety of ways

Workforce Development: Increase green jobs and talent, skill building, continuing education units and professional development

Education: Provide sustained experiential programs, Virginia standards of learning curriculum, career exploration

Community: Meet people where they are, bring the Garden to the community

Multicultural/Multigenerational Engagement: Offer programs, events and exhibits that celebrate diversity and togetherness

Access By and For Underserved Communities: Increase access to and within the Garden, co-design programs with community partners



PROCESS | BLUE RIBBON PANELS



Two Blue Ribbon Panels - one in-person and one virtual - were held to imagine the Garden's future with six thought leaders in community engagement, education, environmental sustainability, and organizational development. The goals of the panels were to challenge the status quo, provide a fresh perspective on the work of the Garden, and identify "best in class" examples in each commitment area.

“
Make connections with people who don't come to the Garden. It has relevance to every person, from connections to nature, to the food we eat, to our mental health.
”

“
Create immersive experiences with strong storylines.
”

“
Focus on nature-based solutions. The Garden has an opportunity to lead research, making Richmond a resilient, green city.
”

“
Be *bold*.
Be *brave*.
”

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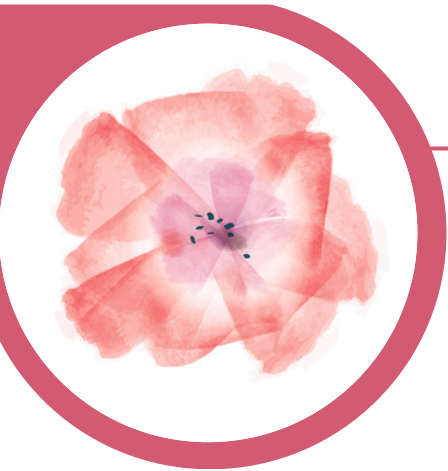


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OUR VALUES: INSPIRATION • HOSPITALITY • INTEGRITY • RESPONSIBILITY • INNOVATION



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