



Strategic Plan 2026-2031

Mission Statement

In partnership with caregivers, communities, and policy makers, ECHO transforms early childhood settings and systems to ensure that every young child has opportunities to thrive in healthy outdoor environments every day.

By combining our expertise in landscape architecture and early childhood education, we provide customized design solutions and professional development opportunities to support caregivers in engaging young children in the benefits and wonder of time spent outdoors.

We use our national platform to elevate the needs of young children and their caregivers and to advocate for policies and resources that support the fundamental right for all children to benefit from time outdoors from birth.

Vision Statement

We envision a future where every young child has rich and engaging daily opportunities to play and learn in high-quality outdoor environments that support healthy development and lifelong connections to the natural world. **A future where:**

- Adults who care for young children are empowered with the skills and resources they need to confidently engage infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in developmentally supportive activities outdoors.
- Young children experience the wonders of the natural world beginning from birth, inspiring lifelong environmental stewardship.
- Ecological systems, including the air, water, soil, plants and animals, on which young children depend, are healthy and thriving.
- The early childhood systems and policies that shape the lived experiences of young children and their caregivers actively support the fundamental right for all children to play, learn, and thrive in healthy outdoor environments every day.

Core Values

Health and Well-Being

We value:

- The physical, mental and social-emotional health and well-being of young children and the adults who care for them.
- The health of our planet and the ecological systems on which all living things depend.
- The well-being of our team members, recognizing that we must nurture ourselves to sustain our capacity to help others.

Collaboration and Co-Creation

We value:

- The deep expertise and lived experiences of the adults who care for young children every day.
- Community-driven solutions that prioritize bridging opportunity gaps for young children and families.
- The insights of our partners and collaborators in early childhood education, environmental health, and conservation.
- The unique approaches that arise from inter-weaving our team's expertise in early childhood education, landscape architecture and design, adult learning and professional development, communications, policy, and advocacy.

Play and Learning

We value:

- Daily outdoor play and learning and believe that these experiences are essential to healthy child development.
- Creativity, innovation, and opportunities to learn and evolve our work based on diverse perspectives and lived experiences.
- Balance between professional and personal life as we invite joy, love, fun, and play into our work.

Strategic Priorities

PRIORITY 1: Lead the transformation of early childhood settings and systems to ensure that every young child has opportunities to thrive in healthy outdoor environments every day.

GOAL: Establish ECHO as a recognized leader in early childhood outdoor environments while influencing policies, practices, and funding streams that support children's access to healthy outdoor environments.

- Strategy 1.1 - Advance the Adoption of Best-Practices Through Policy Influence, Regulatory Guidance, and Capacity-Building

- Strategy 1.2 - Leverage Position Within PLAE, Inc. Through Strategic Positioning, Cross-Program Integration, and Greater Visibility
- Strategy 1.3 - Expand Professional Development Through Resource Development and Professional Learning Opportunities
- Strategy 1.4 - Support Young Children Outside of Licensed Early Childhood Spaces Through Resource Development and Partnerships

PRIORITY 2: Deepen Climate Resilience and Environmental Justice Focus

GOAL: Position outdoor learning environments as essential components of climate adaptation while centering environmental justice in all aspects of ECHO's work.

- Strategy 2.1 - Integrate Climate Resilience in Design, Education, Advocacy and Planning
- Strategy 2.2 - Center Environmental Justice Through Partnerships and Systems Development Guided by an Advisory Council
- Strategy 2.3 - Strengthen Tribal Partnerships Through Relationship Building and Staff Development
- Strategy 2.4 - Develop Context-Specific Resources and Support Systems

PRIORITY 3: Balance Depth and Breadth of Impact

GOAL: Create strategic approaches for geographic reach and program growth that maintain quality while reaching more young children, particularly those with the most barriers to accessing high-quality outdoor spaces.

- Strategy 3.1 - Establish Process for Deciding on Project Growth
- Strategy 3.2 - Center Trust in New Partnerships Through Relationship Building and Community-Centered Approaches
- Strategy 3.3 - Leverage Localized Expertise for National Impact Through Knowledge Sharing and Model Development
- Strategy 3.4 - Enhance Family Engagement Through Resource Expansion, Engagement Opportunities, Evaluation Design, and Capacity Building

PRIORITY 4: Expand Support for Design Implementation and Adoption of Best Practices

GOAL: Bridge the gap between design and implementation by developing adaptable, accessible models that empower communities to create and maintain high-quality outdoor environments.

- Strategy 4.1 - Develop Tiered Implementation Systems Through Resource Development and Implementation Support Structure
- Strategy 4.2 - Streamline Design Processes Through Design Accessibility and Process Efficiency
- Strategy 4.3 - Enhance Cross-Team Collaboration

- Strategy 4.4 - Develop Risk Management and Liability Support Through Advocacy, Education, and Practical Tools

PRIORITY 5: Strengthen Organizational Sustainability and Impact

GOAL: Create a resilient organization that balances deep local impact with broader systems influence while ensuring staff well-being and programmatic excellence.

- Strategy 5.1 - Develop Sustainable Funding Approaches
- Strategy 5.2 - Optimize Organizational Structure Strategy
- Strategy 5.3 - Strengthen Communications
- Strategy 5.4 - Expand Evaluation and Impact Measurement