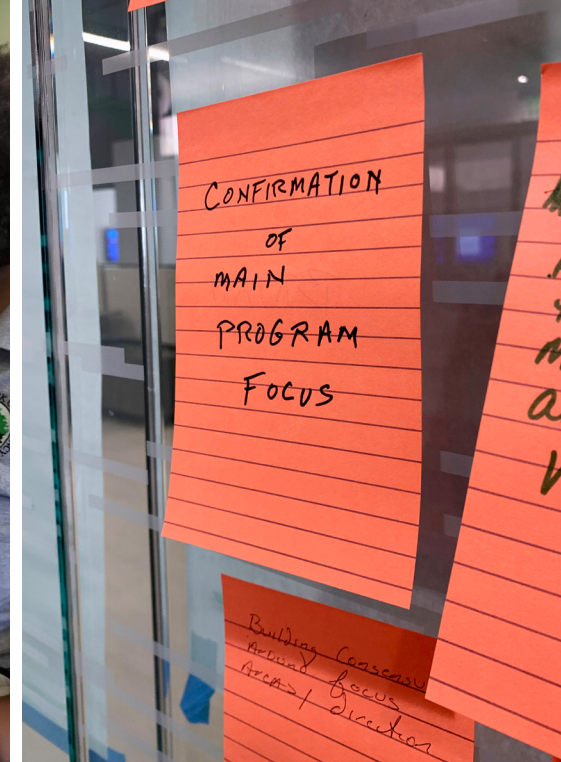




Greater Newark Conservancy 2025-2028 Strategic Plan



Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful to all who have contributed to the development of Greater Newark Conservancy's 2025–2028 Strategic Plan. Together, we are building a future where every Newark resident has access to fresh food, clean air, green spaces, and the power to shape the future.

This vision reflects the passion, insight, and commitment of many. Our Board of Directors and Strategic Planning Committee provided essential leadership and oversight. Our leadership team offered thoughtful perspectives that grounded our vision in everyday impact. Community members, school partners, coalition members, volunteers, funders, and donors shared their experiences and insights to help shape our direction. All of your voices kept this plan rooted in the realities and hopes of the City we love.

With this plan and your continued partnership, we can move forward with clarity, conviction, and a shared commitment to a healthier future in Newark.

“ Together, we are building a future where every Newark resident has access to fresh food, clean air, green spaces, and the power to shape the future. ”



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Board of Directors



The background is a solid dark green. On the left side, there is a large, light green silhouette of a tree with a thick trunk and a full, rounded canopy. Behind the tree and extending across the bottom of the image is a dark green silhouette of a city skyline, featuring several rectangular buildings of varying heights and a small flag on top of one of the taller buildings. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a focus on nature and urban development.

Our Mission

Our mission is to expand access to healthy food, environmental, and green spaces. We provide hands-on community programs that cultivate sustainability, inspire action, and celebrate the power to heal and uplift.



Wilson Cano, Executive Director



Suzanne R. Dyer, Board Chair



Dear all,

Greater Newark Conservancy has developed a three-year Strategic Plan, envisioning a bold direction for the organization. The planning process included a customized survey inviting Board members, senior administration, community partners, volunteers, and residents to provide ideas and perspectives about the current state of the Conservancy and offer viewpoints for improvement and growth.

The plan identifies four major organizational priorities: deepening community collaboration, strengthening organizational alignment, building long-term sustainability, and investing in supportive infrastructure. The plan is dynamic and will be reviewed regularly and adjusted as new opportunities and ideas emerge. Included in the review process will

be quantifiable metrics such as number of visitors to the Conservancy, number of attendees in school programs, number of Plot-It-Fresh members, as well as philanthropic activity, board composition, and staff and volunteer attraction and retention. A Strategic Planning Implementation Committee will monitor progress against the three-year timeframe.

This strategic plan will also be central to conversations with major donors and funding organizations as it presents a well-defined business plan. Our commitment to Newark and its residents has never been stronger. This plan is grounded in a shared vision of a healthy city where everyone has access to fresh food, green spaces, and environmental learning.

We are grateful for the energy, time, and dedication provided to produce this ambitious roadmap for the future. On behalf of the entire Board, administrative team, and staff, we extend our sincere appreciation to all those who contributed to the planning process. We look forward to the next three years, implementing this strategic plan as we navigate the challenges of the future.

Wilson Cano
Executive Director

Suzanne R. Dyer
Board Chair



The background of the slide features a stylized, monochromatic illustration in shades of green. It depicts a city skyline with several buildings of varying heights. Two large, leafy trees are prominent in the foreground, their canopies overlapping the city. The overall style is clean and modern, with a focus on natural elements integrated with urban architecture.

Executive Summary



Our Vision

Greater Newark Conservancy envisions a Newark where every resident, regardless of their zip code, has access to fresh, locally grown food, clean air, and green spaces.

Our Mission

Our mission is to expand access to healthy food, environmental, and green spaces. We provide hands-on community programs that cultivate sustainability, inspire action, and celebrate the power to heal and uplift.

Our History and Heritage

Since 1987, Greater Newark Conservancy has provided opportunities for Newark residents to engage in urban agricultural activities, including

gardening, farming, and other programs that promote access to fresh food, such as farmers' markets. In addition, we offer environmental education for families and children to experience and learn about the benefits of nature and green spaces, and to build community.

Challenges for Today

The New Jersey Economic Development Authority identified all five Newark Wards as among the State's top ten food deserts.

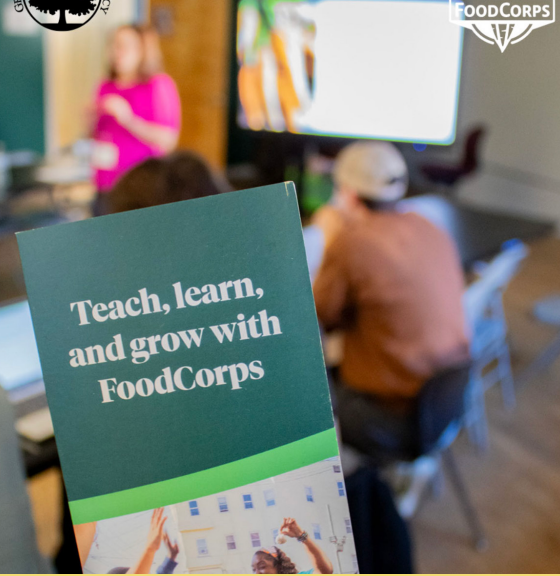
Food deserts are areas with limited access to nutritious, affordable food. Food deserts are strongly influenced by historical factors, such as economic discrimination and racial segregation, creating patterns of inequality that disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities. This has led

to the absence of supermarkets and healthy food options.

Factors such as poverty and limited public transportation options further exacerbate these issues, as does the lack of open green spaces for gardening and farming, as well as inadequate environmental education.

“ Since 1987, Greater Newark Conservancy has provided opportunities for Newark residents to engage in urban agricultural activities. ”





Our Programs

Conservancy programs offer access to fresh produce, green spaces, and environmental education, positively impacting the health and well-being of all Newark residents.

➤ YOUTH AND FAMILY EDUCATION

Hands-on, inquiry-based, environmentally-themed programs

- **Healthy eating:** Programs to support a healthy diet
- **Environmental education field trips:** Science programs for school children

➤ FARM TO SCHOOL

- **FoodCorps:** Food education to support public school efforts to ensure kids receive the nourishment they need to thrive
- **Nutritious Newark:** A Conservancy grant-making program in support of school-based gardens and education programs; grant awards are between \$500 and \$1500
- **Seeds of Change:** A Conservancy grant-making program to help develop and support school and community-based gardening programs

➤ URBAN AGRICULTURE

- **Hydroponic greenhouse** at Branch Brook Park
- **Plot-It-Fresh:** A community garden program for Newark residents
- **Farm stand program:** Mobile farm stand that travels throughout Newark to connect residents with fresh produce

➤ COALITION FOR HEALTHY FOOD IN NEWARK SCHOOLS

A collective-impact initiative supporting cross-sector collaboration to achieve significant and measurable change at a population or systems level

- **Student-led Nutrition Advisory Councils** are spearheaded by the district's wellness policy
- **Sub-granter of community partners** engaged with the program's mission
- **Convener of community stakeholders** to share resources and opportunities for growth and advocacy





Our Strategy Going Forward

At the end of 2024, we began to map out our future with a new Strategic Plan. The Conservancy's strategic planning and discovery process was rooted in the Board's desire to build on the organization's legacy while taking the opportunity to reimagine the future of the organization in a way that is responsive to the needs of Newark residents.

Guided by five foundational questions, we surveyed board members, staff, FoodCorps members, community residents, partners, collaborators, funders, and donors. We conducted one-on-one interviews with key informants within the Conservancy network, reviewed agency documentation and infrastructure, and conducted a landscape scan of the ecosystem's needs and best practices.

Our Five Guiding Questions

➤ PLACE IN THE ECOSYSTEM

- Where does the Conservancy fit in Newark's environmental and food access ecosystem?

➤ COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

- Which stakeholders should the Conservancy be in a relationship with to achieve our vision for Newark's environmental and food access ecosystem?

➤ IMPACT

- Where is the Conservancy's greatest impact and opportunity for impact?

➤ FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

- How can the Conservancy diversify and strengthen funding for the organization's sustainability?

➤ LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

- How can the Conservancy ensure strong Board support, oversight, and accountability?

Our planning process identified four organizational priorities that became the pillars of our **2025–2028 Strategic Plan**

Pillar 1 Deepen Community Collaboration

Pillar 2 Strengthen Organizational Alignment

Pillar 3 Build Long-term Sustainability

Pillar 4 Develop Supportive Infrastructure



The background is a solid green color with a stylized, darker green silhouette of a city skyline and trees. The skyline includes several rectangular buildings of varying heights and a bridge. The trees are large and leafy, framing the central text.

2025-2028 Strategic Plan



PILLAR 1 Deepen Community Collaboration

GOAL: Community needs and wants drive the development of programming

➤ **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

- Strengthen community relationships, deepen trust, and build networks for greater inclusivity and collaboration between the Conservancy, Newark residents, and other community partners
- Incorporate community needs, wants, and definitions of success to deepen community involvement in program development and implementation
- Implement programs to increase the engagement of as many Newark residents as possible



GOAL: Strengthen alignment of vision, mission, values, principles, culture, and programming

➤ **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

- Revisit and refine the Conservancy's vision and mission
- Enhance Board governance capacity
- Strengthen the Conservancy's culture by developing organizational values, principles, practices, and norms
- Develop and articulate the Conservancy's role in the Newark ecosystem
- Strengthen the Conservancy's brand in the community

PILLAR 2 Strengthen Organizational Alignment



PILLAR 3 Build Long-term Sustainability

GOAL: Increase and diversify funding sources and partnerships to support sustainable programming

➤ KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Create financial and development plans that diversify funding, respond to headwinds (scenario planning), and promote resilience
- Complete the capital campaign
- Secure space, land, and partnerships for urban agriculture
- Establish public, non-profit, and for-profit partnerships that are aligned with the Conservancy's programs and provide long-term funding and collaboration



PILLAR 4 Develop Supportive Infrastructure

GOAL: Strengthen and build the infrastructure needed for organizational sustainability

➤ KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Expand the Development Department to build the capacity of the organization as a multifaceted fundraiser
- Ensure adequate staffing for organizational success
- Develop property and facilities to better serve the community
- Establish systems of data collection and management
- Acquire, use, and upgrade technology, and train staff to streamline functions and gain operational efficiencies

The background features a stylized illustration of a city skyline in shades of green. Two large, leafy trees are prominent in the foreground, with their canopies overlapping. Behind the trees, several rectangular buildings of varying heights are visible. A thin, curved line, possibly representing a path or a bridge, arches over the lower right portion of the scene. The entire image has a monochromatic green color scheme.

Addendum

Discovery Process, Methods, and Data

Our discovery process engaged the Conservancy Board, staff, FoodCorps volunteers, grantees, funders, partners, collaborators, and community peers. The process was rooted in the Board's desire to build on the organization's legacy while taking the opportunity to reimagine the future of the organization in a way that is responsive to the needs of Newark residents. At the core of the Strategic Planning Committee's (SPC) concerns and aspirations was a desire to deepen the Conservancy's connections to and relationships with Newark's residents. SPC members had questions about residents' awareness and perceptions of, as well as experiences with, the Conservancy. Underlying this curiosity was an overarching belief that more could and should be done to engage community residents in shaping the Conservancy's priorities, programs, and future. Also tabled as areas of concern were the organization's governance and financial sustainability.

The Conservancy's origins and strengths evolved from a long-term Executive Director with a vision, program ideas, and several benefactors willing to fund her vision. With her retirement, these same factors became both vulnerabilities and opportunities. Most significantly, the Executive Director's retirement contributed to the attrition of Board members and individual donors. However, the

attrition of Board members led to a shift in board composition, aimed at refreshing the board and strengthening its connections to Newark.

The Board's search for an Executive Director led to several changes in leadership and a shift in the Board's functioning from a governance board to an operational board. Ultimately, several months before the launch of this strategic planning process, the Board hired a new Executive Director with a proven track record of success and confidence. However, the extended period without a stable executive director has contributed to a challenging operational state of the organization, which requires cross-departmental alignment, coordination, and effective messaging. While staff skillfully steward their projects with great success and inspiration, we discovered that most stakeholders had an incomplete picture of what the Conservancy does.

The chief financial issues facing the Conservancy are the loss of individual donors and a development strategy that is heavily weighted towards securing grants. There is a need for a unifying and strategic development plan.

From this set of conditions and concerns, the SPC provided five guiding questions as the foundation for our discovery activities.

Five Guiding Questions

› PLACE IN THE ECOSYSTEM

- Where does the Conservancy fit in Newark's environmental and food access ecosystem?

› COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

- Which stakeholders should the Conservancy be in a relationship with to achieve our vision for Newark's environmental and food access ecosystem?

› IMPACT

- Where is the Conservancy's greatest impact and opportunity for impact?

› FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

- How can the Conservancy diversify and strengthen funding for the organization's sustainability?

› LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

- How can the Conservancy ensure strong Board support, oversight, and accountability?



Discovery Process, Methods, and Data

Discovery Activities Included:

- A survey was sent to 142 stakeholders, yielding an overall response rate of 40%
- Interviews with 13 Board members, four of six staff leaders, and two external stakeholders
- A review of 18 organizational documents
- A digital footprint search encompassing the Conservancy's website, select funder postings and websites, Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, Pinterest, Glassdoor, Indeed, Charity Navigator, GuideStar, and Google and Safari search by name, image, and news
- An environmental scan of the nonprofit food and environmental education space, including Newark community data, trends, models, best practices, philanthropic priorities and initiatives, and emerging policy and funding factors

► FINDINGS

We employed both a traditional SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) and an appreciative inquiry SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) approach to analyze our discovery data.

Discovery findings repeatedly demonstrated that the Conservancy is recognized as a food access organization, with its work most notable for its urban farming, food access efforts, school gardening, and nutrition education. This legacy remains relevant to everyone with whom we spoke and surveyed.

Stakeholders envision the organization as a vital community anchor—expanding its impact, deepening its roots, and advancing sustainability, and resilience in Newark. The goal: to unite the community around healthy food, environmental stewardship, and shared empowerment. The vision is to engage all sectors in the organization's mission.

The following areas consistently emerged as key findings for suggested focus and growth.

- **Communications and Narrative:** Enhance the clarity and coherence of vision, mission, focus, and goals to minimize internal and external uncertainty. Drive a shared narrative that connects food, environmental education, and community well-being.

- **Community Engagement:** Foster stronger community engagement and partnerships to ensure place-based planning and program implementation (e.g., surveys, Community Advisory Boards, neighborhood listening sessions, etc.).
- **Operational Coordination:** Establish cross-departmental alignments, coordination, and messaging to achieve a more significant impact across Newark communities. Invest in technical capacity building with staff to support new programs (e.g., community composting)
- **Measured Impact:** Strengthen evaluation methods, data collection, and reporting; Increase transparency internally and externally (e.g., produce an annual report). Include storytelling. Data without a story can be challenging to interpret, and stories without data can lack credibility and fail to resonate with an audience.



Discovery Process, Methods, and Data

Summary of Discovery Activities

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP DATA	SURVEYS SENT	RESPONSE RATE
Board	14	11 (79%)
Staff	20	16 (80%)
FoodCorps Volunteers	9	3 (33%)
Grantees	22	4 (18%)
External Stakeholders (Funders, Partners, Collaborators, and Peers)	77	22 (29%)
Total	142	56 (40%)

DOCUMENT REVIEW DATA	SURVEYS SENT	RESPONSE RATE
Board	14	13 (93%)
Staff Leadership check-in	6	5 (83%)
Staff Leadership interviews	6	4 (67%)
External Stakeholders	7	2 (29%)
Staff Focus Group	15	3 (20%)
Total	48	27 (56%)

A “good” strategic planning survey response rate generally falls within the range of 20–30%, with a response rate above 50% considered excellent.

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED (18)

Program description one-pager	Organizational assessment	Board roster and committee assignments
Website	2024 Board books (4)	Board orientation checklist
Employee manual	2024 financials	Board responsibilities (2020)
Theory of change	2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 990's	Board Bylaws 2022
Bard NYC Lab Greater Newark Conservancy Strategic Plan	2024 audit report	Board calendar (2025)
	Digital footprint	



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Project Ready

Thank You

With funding support from Victoria Foundation and Prudential,
our 2025–2028 Strategic Plan was made possible.

To the Dodge Foundation for generously providing office space.

To Pursue Your Excellence, whose strategic planning expertise helped shape
our path forward.

And to all the community members, the Conservancy team, Board of Trustees
and everyone that helped bring this vision to life.

