



ROCKBRIDGE OUTDOORS



Strategic Plan 2021-2025

Rockbridge Outdoors Partners

Boxerwood Nature Center & Woodland Garden
Carilion Rockbridge Community Hospital
Center of Gravity Yoga & Pilates
Central Shenandoah Health District, Virginia Department of Health
Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission
City of Buena Vista
City of Lexington
County of Rockbridge
Dabney S. Lancaster Community College
Fine Arts in Rockbridge
Friends of Brushy Hills
Friends of Natural Bridge State Park
Friends of the Chessie Trail
Heliotrope Brewery
Journey Outdoors
Kendal at Lexington
Lexington-Rockbridge Chamber of Commerce
Lime Kiln Theater
Live Healthy Rockbridge Kids
Main Street Lexington
National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway – Ridge District
Natural Bridge State Park
Red Newt Bikes
Rockbridge Area Conservation Council
Rockbridge Area Health Center
Rockbridge Area Hospice
Rockbridge Area Recreation Organization
Rockbridge Area Tourism
Rockbridge Area YMCA
Southern Virginia University
Town of Glasgow
Twin River Outfitters
USDA Rural Development
U.S. Forest Service, Glenwood and Pedlar Ranger District
Virginia Department of Forestry
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
Virginia Military Institute
Virginia Outdoors Foundation
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University – Virginia Cooperative Extension
Walkabout Outfitter
Washington and Lee University
Wilderness Canoe Company
WILD GUYde Adventures

The Rockbridge Outdoors Strategic Plan was developed with technical assistance and staff support from the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission and the National Park Service, Rivers Trails and Conservation Assistance Program.

Rockbridge Outdoors

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025

Vision: *We envision the Rockbridge Area as a place of natural beauty, rich history, and economic vitality. A place where residents and visitors value, enjoy, and benefit from its unique and beckoning landscapes, diverse communities, and scenic waterways; where land and water-based recreational opportunities are abundant, and easy to access.*

Introduction

In January 2018, the Rockbridge Area Outdoors Partnership (RAOP) was formed, made up of 30 organizations, excited about supporting a regional vision for outdoor recreation in the Rockbridge area. Motivated by the area’s outstanding recreational opportunities and distinctive mix of scenic landscapes, rivers, and historic attractions, RAOP members believed that working together was the best way to expand and market the region’s outdoor assets. A Three-Year Strategic Plan was developed to guide the first few years of the organization through December 2020.

In Fall 2020, efforts to revise the Strategic Plan were initiated, with the establishment of a Strategic Plan Committee. There were several reasons for undertaking the Plan review including: new leadership, new organization members, changes to the individuals representing partner organizations, and changes in the external environment such as impacts from the pandemic, expanded demand, and opportunity to engage new audiences. The Strategic Plan review also coincided with a re-branding of the organization, and the announcement of a new logo and name – *Rockbridge Outdoors (RO)*.



Summary Findings

The 6-month plan review process resulted in a shared vision for Rockbridge Outdoor's future, an affirmation of the organization's mission and goals, and a refinement of the organization's objectives. In addition, four major strategic decisions resulted from the review:

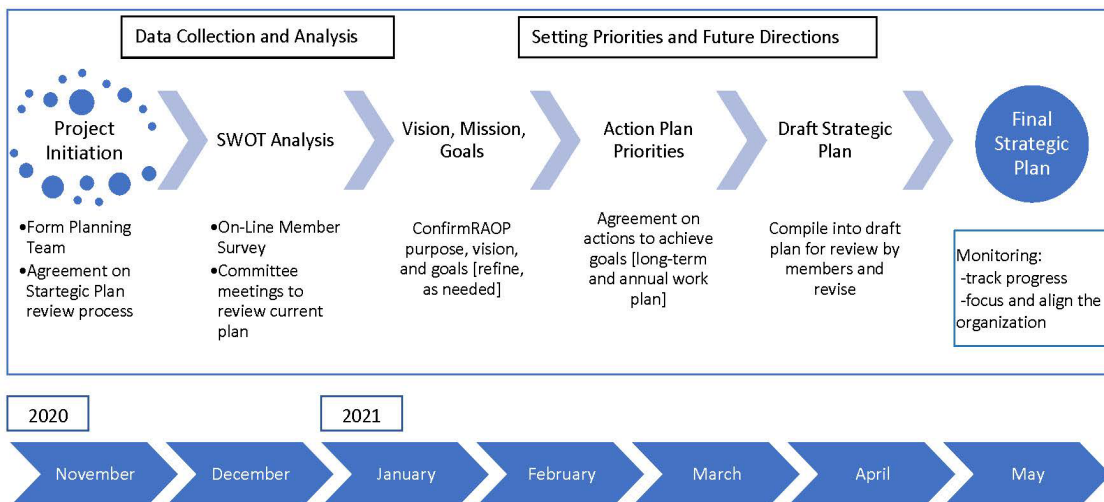
- to maintain the organization as an informal alliance utilizing a Collective Impact model rather than formalizing into a non-profit, authority, or commission
- to establish an Executive Committee made up of the chair, vice-chair and locality representatives to streamline and improve communication
- to task the new Executive Committee with Fund Development responsibilities, rather than having a separate committee (currently inactive)
- to reduce the number of project teams and reorganize them under two program areas: 1) Project Development and 2) Marketing and Outreach.

An updated organization chart was developed to illustrate the revised structure (see attached).

In addition, the Plan review process provided members with the opportunity to take stock in the organization's progress to-date, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and determine the next phase of its evolution. The internal reflections and discussion led to new insights and learning based on operations over the previous three years. The outcome was the development of a revised Five-Year Strategic Plan document, to continue to provide a roadmap for the organization, its leadership, and partner organizations. It is anticipated that Rockbridge Outdoor's cumulative impact will extend beyond the county to support outdoor recreation efforts throughout the region.

Strategic Plan Review Process

Rockbridge Outdoors met several times between January and June 2021, as a full partnership and in smaller work teams, to revise and refine the Five-Year Strategic Plan. The review process began with an internal assessment of the organization's strengths and weaknesses and a situational analysis of external opportunities and threats. Data was collected through an on-line survey to better understand members' perspectives, and twelve interviews were conducted with project leaders to better understand the strengths and shortcomings of current operations, as well as future priorities. The results were synthesized for review and discussion by the Strategic Plan Committee, and subsequently by the full membership.






In addition, seven Focus Group meetings were convened to assess the status of the current work program. Teams discussed: what’s working well, what projects should remain, be dropped, and/or added based on future trends and opportunities. The information collected was incorporated into a draft plan that was reviewed and endorsed by the Partnership in July 2021.

Operations and Plan Implementation

The revised Strategic Plan provides implementation strategies for five action-oriented Project Teams, with tasks and leads identified. The six Teams are as follows:

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|---|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
|  | Trail System Signage | Dale Brown |
|  | Maury River Water Trail | Steve Reeser |
|  | Trail Project Development | James Dick |
|  | Marketing and Spirit of Howdy | Patty Williams and Tracy Lyons |
|  | Community Wellness | Helen Laitinen and Susan Meister |

In addition, the Strategic Plan Committee will become a standing Executive Committee, with the role of overall coordination, tracking progress and fine-tuning priority tasks, with an annual review conducted each year. Overall leadership for the operation of the partnership will be provided by the Chair, Vice-Chair, and Executive Committee with administrative support provided by the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission. Meetings of the organization will continue to be on a bi-monthly basis, with the Executive Committee meeting on the intervening months. Project teams will develop their own schedules and keep RO members apprised of major milestones.

By working together to achieve the goals set out in this Strategic Plan, Rockbridge Outdoors believes that it will contribute significantly to the area’s economic vitality and community wellness, and position the region as a quality place to live, work, and play.

5-Year Strategic Mission, Goals and Objectives, 2021-2025

Mission: *The mission of the Rockbridge Outdoors is to collaboratively advance, create, and promote outdoor recreational opportunities in the Rockbridge Area.*

The Partnership will serve as a forum for coordination, catalyzing new ideas, and promoting a unified network. The Partnership will also facilitate on-the-ground efforts to build and maintain the system, and support sustainable tourism development, stewardship, and community health and wellness. RO strategic goals and objectives are as follows:

Project Development: Support the creation and maintenance of a network of sustainable pathways, water trails, and bike routes that showcase area attractions, and link visitors to nearby services.

1. Complete and implement a Rockbridge Outdoors Signage Plan that includes a logo, sign templates, and graphic design standards, to improve wayfinding and provide a consistent identity and brand for the regional trails network.
2. Complete the Maury River Water Trail Guide that updates and expands the 1992 “Maury River Float Guide” with the most current information on access, amenities, and stewardship.
3. Work with land managers, trail clubs, and volunteers to plan, initiate, and complete on-the-ground trail construction and/or maintenance projects.

Marketing and Business Relations: Work with local businesses and outdoor interests to unify Rockbridge Outdoor marketing and messaging and brand the Rockbridge area as a place that embraces the outdoors.

1. Create a central information hub with accurate and timely online media and easily accessible print guides that expands awareness of the region’s outdoor assets and opportunities.
2. Expand networks with local businesses, civic organizations, and others to promote outdoor culture, hospitality, and a “Spirit of Howdy” in the Rockbridge area.

Community Wellness: Provide opportunities, programs, and activities for people of all ages and abilities to walk, bicycle, paddle, and gain the health benefits of incorporating outdoor recreation into their daily lives.


1. Coordinate and promote walking programs to targeted audiences, especially those new to outdoor recreation or new to the area, to encourage participation for all levels, abilities, and socio-economic groups.
2. Work with local doctors and other health professionals to initiate a ParkRx/WalkingRx program in the Rockbridge area that promotes the health benefits of outdoor recreation.

Planning and Coordination: Serve as a forum for networking and coordination among agencies, non-profit, and commercial partners to explore new ideas, and identify and leverage resources that expand outdoor recreation in the Rockbridge area.

1. Convene quarterly/bi-monthly meetings and/or other methods to support information sharing, networking, communication, and collaboration among RO’s members.
2. Track on-going progress and accomplishments, including an annual review of the Strategic Plan, and revise and update, as needed.
3. Ensure there are adequate resources available to implement RO projects by providing advice, research, and partnership opportunities, through grants, fundraising, sponsorships, and in-kind contributions and donations.

Rockbridge Outdoors (RO) - Action Plans, 2021-2025

The following section provides guidance to the five Project Teams and the Executive Committee in advancing the mission of the organization. A brief description with team priorities and performance measures are listed, as well as the team lead and members. It is intended that this be a living document that is reviewed regularly and adapted as projects are completed, and new partners, ideas, and resources become available.

 Trail System Signage Team	
Lead: Dale Brown, VMI	
Performance Measure: completion of the sign plan and a process to track sign installation	
Description	The focus of this team is to complete and implement a Rockbridge Outdoors Signage Plan that includes a logo, sign templates, and graphic design standards, to improve wayfinding and provide a consistent identity and brand for the regional trails network.
2021 Priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with the Marketing Team to complete the logo and accompanying graphics standards; these would be incorporated into the signage plan. 2. Provide graphic standards to sign vendors and develop a price list for procurement of various sign types.
Future Actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete the best practices section of the signage plan and provide information to trail 'owners' to assist them with decisions related to signage options, composition and placement. 2. Develop a system for tracking signage locations, identifying gaps, and assisting with implementation, potentially through a GIS-based map program that could geo-locate signage location, owner, type, installation date, etc.




Maury River Water Trail Team

Lead: Steve Reeser, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR)

Performance Measure: completion of water trail guide and app, and installation of markers at river access sites

Description	The focus of this team is to complete the Maury River Water Trail Guide that updates and expands the 1992 “Maury River Float Guide” with the most current information on access, amenities, and stewardship.
2021 Priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Develop Maury River website with on-line map guide and downloadable pdfs of river segments and features (similar to Upper James Water Trail).2. Build a map application for river users so that they can track their location in the field.3. Have printed pdf available for distribution at visitor centers or other area outlets.4. Track and provide information on VA Dept of Wildlife Resources (DWR) regulatory and permit requirements for river use so that the most current information is available to the public. (On-going)5. Track on-going river access projects such as the Jordan’s Point Redevelopment Plan to ensure river access is included in plans. (On-going)
Future Actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Research and secure funding needed for signage (which may include funding kiosk information, i.e. a large format map and/or regulatory information). This is a task for 2022 (Upper James Watershed Grant due Feb 2022; project to be completed by Dec 2022).2. Develop, procure, and install signage/markers; design information kiosks for key access sites.

 Trail Project Development Team	
Lead: James Dick, Washington and Lee University	
Performance Measure: completion of at least three on-the-ground trail projects annually	
Description	The focus of this team is to work with land managers, trail clubs, and volunteers to plan, initiate, and complete on-the ground trail restoration and/or maintenance projects. The team will also serve as a clearinghouse and coordination hub to match trail manager needs with volunteers.
2021 Priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coordinate discussions between Buena Vista, US Forest Service (USFS), and local stakeholders to evaluate options and develop a trail connection from Buena Vista east (eastern segment of the Brushy Blue Trail). 2. Work with VA Dept of Forestry, the City of Lexington, and USFS to develop a trail system at Moore’s Creek State Forest, with a future connection to North Mountain and Lake Robertson trails. 3. Expand and support trail development efforts underway at Glen Maury Park. 4. Track trail project opportunities and develop a community calendar for trail workdays, to improve coordination between the various Friends groups in the area.
Future Actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Track progress of House Mountain survey, and support Virginia Outdoor Foundation efforts to expand their trail system with connections to Little House and Big House Mountain. 2. Explore opportunities for trail projects that assist USFS with maintenance of the Glenwood Horse Trail. 3. Longer term, support efforts to re-build the capacity of the Rockbridge Trail Club, which has seen less activity due to COVID limitations and the impacts of the pandemic.




Marketing and Spirit of Howdy Team

Lead: Patty Williams, Rockbridge Tourism / Tracy Lyons, Lexington-Rockbridge Chamber

Performance Measure: host an Outdoor Event Series with local businesses; upload new content to the website, and increase social media participation of RO members

Description	The focus of this team is to brand the Rockbridge area as a place that embraces the outdoors to attract and retain both residents and businesses. This will be accomplished through uniform marketing and messaging to promote the area's outdoor recreation assets; as well as working in partnership with local businesses, civic organizations, and outdoor interests to host outdoor events that promote hospitality and an outdoor culture, i.e. a "Spirit of Howdy."
2021 Priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Coordinate and promote a series of outdoor events (i.e. walk, bike, hike, yoga outdoors, etc.); coordinated by RO, and hosted by local businesses.2. Develop new outdoor content: Outdoor Series on "how to" for new participants to provide "how to get started" advice, and promote stewardship ethics, and safe use of the outdoors.3. Expand use of existing platforms through awareness and skill development training to RO partners and others (website, Facebook, other social media). <i>Could be a series of instructional and practice sessions that walk people through liking Facebook; how to request that an activity be posted on the website, etc.</i>4. Finalize new logo and graphic design package.5. Continue to expand content/trail descriptions on the website6. Coordinate with other RO Teams developing products, including Signage Team (logo and sign design) and Water Trail Team (Maury River Water Trail Map and Guide).
Future Actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide links to complementary sites, such as VA Dept of Wildlife Resources Water Trail Map, ParkRx, etc. when available2. Develop infographic or fact sheet on RO and promotional opportunities to take to area businesses.3. Develop information piece for newspapers to expand awareness of RO's mission and scope.

 Community Wellness Team	
Lead: Helen Laitinen and Susan Meister – Boxerwood/Park Rx	
Performance Measure: Help coordinate at least three walking events to encourage new participants and promote the health benefits of physical activity; initiate ParkRx/WalkingRx program in collaboration with health providers.	
Description	The focus of this team is two-fold: 1) to coordinate and promote walking programs to targeted audiences, especially those new to outdoor recreation or new to the area, to encourage participation for all levels, abilities and socio-economic groups; and 2) to develop a ParkRx/WalkingRx program in partnership with local doctors to promote the health benefits of outdoor recreation.
2021 Priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In keeping within COVID health guidelines, coordinate a series of easy/beginner walks at area venues (like Boxerwood) to encourage youth, families, seniors, and especially those that have not been physically active to "get outside" for the numerous health and wellness benefits. 2. Promote current programs to be implemented this year by RO partners related to walking and wellness. 3. Update and expand the ParkRx database of outdoor recreation opportunities in the Rockbridge-Lexington Area. 4. Develop ParkRx/WalkingRx promotional packets and distribute to pediatricians. 5. Use promotional materials from ParkRx website to reach out to and engage local businesses, non-profits, etc.; build awareness of RO, ParkRx, and the health benefits of the outdoors. 6. Work with the Marketing Team and Leadership Committee to address the need for a central information hub that shows all parks and recreation sites in the Rockbridge area and provides a platform for a community calendar.
Future Actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. After the ParkRx-Rockbridge website is built out, link it to the Rockbridge Outdoors website. 2. Develop a plan to expand ParkRx/WalkingRx to a broader community of medical professionals, i.e. doctors, physical therapists, etc., and work with area doctors to promote walking and outdoor activity through "park prescriptions." 3. Help coordinate new walking activities, i.e. guided tour, hike with the police, walk with a doctor, etc. to expand opportunities for area residents to be active outdoors.



Planning and Coordination (Executive Committee)

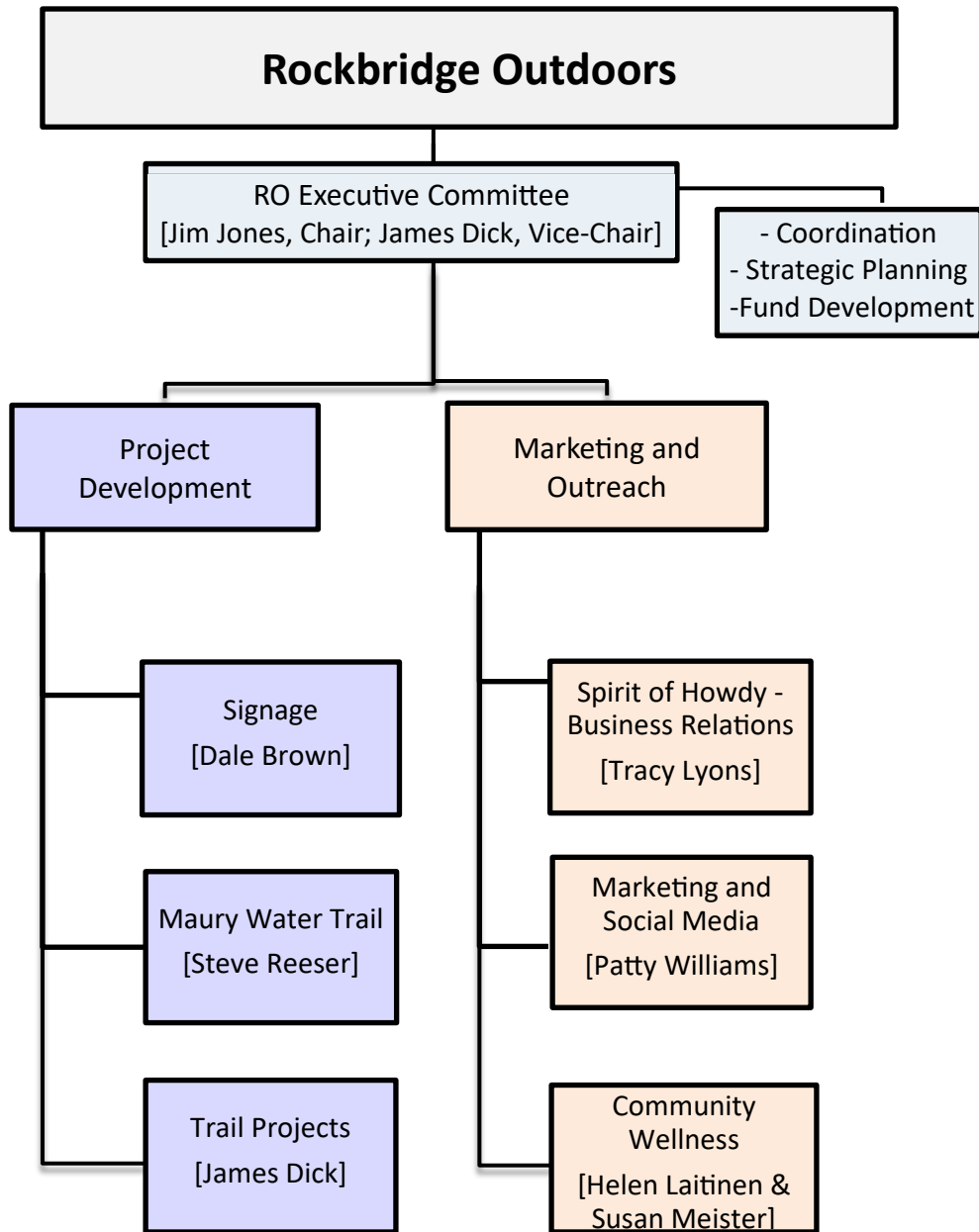
Lead: Jim Jones, James Dick (RO Chair and RO Vice-Chair)

Members of the Executive Committee include the RO Chair and Vice-Chair, and representatives from the localities: Rockbridge County, City of Buena Vista, and City of Lexington.

Performance Measure: convene bi-monthly RO meetings; track and report progress in achieving the organization's' mission

Description	The focus of this team is to facilitate RO's role as a forum for networking and coordination among agencies, non-profit, and commercial partners to explore new ideas, and identify and leverage resources that expand outdoor recreation in the Rockbridge area.
2021 Priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Convene quarterly meetings and/or other methods to support information sharing, networking, communication, and collaboration among RO's members.2. Track on-going progress and accomplishments, including an annual review of the Strategic Plan, and revise and update, as needed.3. Ensure there are adequate resources available to implement RO projects by providing advice, research, and partnership opportunities, through grants, fundraising, sponsorships, and in-kind contributions and donations.
Future Actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Track progress of the various segments of the Brushy Blue Greenway and on an annual basis, re-evaluate the need for establishing an interjurisdictional planning team.

Attachment A: Rockbridge Outdoors Organization Chart





For more information:

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Tourism and Marketing

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