

VIRGINIA AIR & SPACE SCIENCE CENTER



NASA LANGLEY VISITOR CENTER



STRATEGIC PLAN

2024

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LETTER FROM DR. JEFFERY SMITH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & CEO

August 22, 2024

Dear Members of the Board of Directors,

As we present the Virginia Air and Space Science Center's strategic plan, it is important to underscore the foundational role of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in advancing not only our organizational goals but also the broader mission of serving the common good of humanity. This mission, as reflected in the NASA Langley Research Center's statement, reminds us of the vital connection between STEM innovation and the well-being of our global community.

NASA Langley's commitment to "improving the quality of life on Earth and beyond" through scientific discovery and technological advancement is a powerful testament to the potential of STEM fields to address some of the most pressing challenges of our time. Whether through exploring the frontiers of space, developing technologies that enhance our everyday lives, or contributing to the sustainability of our planet, STEM is at the heart of our shared future.

Our strategic plan has been carefully crafted with these principles in mind. It lays out a clear roadmap for leveraging our resources, talent, and partnerships to drive innovation, foster education, and support the development of solutions that benefit all of humanity. In doing so, we align our efforts with the broader vision of ensuring that our contributions extend beyond immediate goals, reaching into the lives of those we serve and the generations to come.



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As we move forward in preparing the next generation of STEM leaders, I invite each of you to consider how our work, rooted in the principles of STEM, can continue to embody the spirit of the NASA Langley mission and Joint Base Eustis Langley. Together, we have the opportunity to make a lasting impact—one that transcends our individual roles and enriches the world around us.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment and for the leadership you bring to this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Jeffery O. Smith

Jeffery O. Smith, Ed.D.

Executive Director/CEO Virginia Air and Space Science Center

OUR ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

Science is a captivating discipline because it is designed to critically examine how we acquire knowledge and to continually refine our understanding of the world as new information emerges. Science is fundamentally a process of discovery—one that involves finding, evaluating, and synthesizing knowledge through rigorous testing and verification. This approach not only fosters curiosity, critical thinking, and hands-on exploration, but also acknowledges the evolving nature of our understanding. Furthermore, it is essential that science education integrates ethical considerations, ensuring that we appreciate the responsibility that comes with the pursuit and application of scientific knowledge. By upholding ethics and integrity, we ensure that scientific advancements are used to benefit humankind and contribute positively to society.

The Virginia Air and Space Science Center seeks to further this understanding of science by providing immersive, hands-on educational experiences that emphasize the importance of curiosity, critical thinking, and ethical responsibility in scientific discovery. Through its exhibits, programs, and partnerships, the center inspires visitors to engage with the scientific process and to appreciate the role of science in advancing knowledge and benefiting society. In this way, we help ensure that future generations understand the importance of using science to improve the human condition and protect our planet, even as we explore the rest of our fascinating universe.



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ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

The Mission of the Virginia Air and Space Science Center (VASSC) is to ignite curiosity and innovation in STEM through education, discovery, and interactive experiences for explorers of all ages.

The Vision of the VASSC is to create a future where limitless curiosity and exploration in air and space drive humanity's progress, inspiring generations to innovate and discover through transformative education, groundbreaking research, and dynamic community partnerships.

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF STEM LEADERS

The historical story of VASSC: In 1985, with the advice from community leaders, the Hampton City Council and key public officials set a goal to create a major new educational and cultural center for the area residents that would also serve tourists. When the doors opened on April 5, 1992, VASSC became a reality after seven years in the making. The Virginia Air and Space Science Center serves as the visitor center for the NASA Langley Research Center.

The Virginia Air and Space Science Center is a nationally recognized, non-profit, science museum/center that seeks to preserve and interpret national achievements in air and space exploration & development and to stimulate interest in the sciences. The Center's education programs provide high quality science education to more than 20,000 students annually.

VASSC features aviation exhibits spanning 100 years of flight, more than 30 historic aircraft, a hands-on-space exploration gallery, unique space flight artifacts to include: 35

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interactive exploratory opportunities, e.g., touch table computers in the space gallery, digital airport, MaxFlight simulator, a literacy center, sonic boom, and air traffic control.

VASSC offers 40 static displays for our visitors to experience Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) to include: Sea to Stars models in the space gallery, educational signage, Gemini, and Mercury Solarium, Planetarium, and a wind tunnel.

VASSC is the home to the Apollo 12 Command Module, the Orion Pad Abort-Test Vehicle, the Mercury 14, and the Gemini Space Capsule. Apollo 12 was the sixth crewed mission in NASA's Apollo program and the second to land astronauts on the moon.

The command module for Apollo 12 was named "Yankee Clipper." The mission was launched on November 14, 1969, and it was the follow-up to the historic Apollo 11 mission that successfully landed the first humans on the moon a few months earlier. The crew of Apollo 12 consisted of three astronauts: Charles "Pete" Conrad, Jr., Alan L. Bean, and Richard "Dick" F. Gordon, Jr..

The Virginia Air and Space Science Center has the distinction of being one of only 14 NASA Visitor Centers throughout the United States. NASA Visitor Centers offer hands-on, interactive learning experiences for students, educators, and families. The Virginia Air and Space Science Center is a popular attraction, offering a range of educational and entertaining experiences to explore science, technology, engineering, and math innovations.

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Specifically, below are some significant highlights:

1. **Space Exploration:** The center has a particular focus on space exploration, with exhibits that showcase the NASA Langley Research Center's contributions to the Apollo missions and other space endeavors. Visitors can learn about the history of spaceflight and the latest developments in space science, e.g., new design for the wind tunnel, sonic boom, planned research missions to Mars.
2. **IMAX Theater:** VASSC has an IMAX theater that screens breathtaking space and aviation-related films in a larger-than-life format. This immersive experience adds an extra dimension to the educational aspect of the center.
3. **Planetarium:** The center's planetarium offers a variety of astronomy-related shows and programs. It is a fantastic way to explore the cosmos and learn about celestial objects, constellations, and more.
4. **Educational Programs:** VASSC offers a range of educational programs, including field trips, workshops, and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) activities for students and teachers. These programs make science and space-related topics accessible and engaging.
5. **Historical Aircraft:** The center features a collection of historic aircraft, including a replica of the Wright brothers' 1903 Flyer and a lunar lander prototype. These artifacts provide insight into the history of aviation and space exploration.
6. **Simulators:** For those seeking a more hands-on experience, VASSC offers flight and space simulators that allow visitors to experience the thrill of flying an aircraft or piloting a spacecraft.
7. **Special Events:** The center hosts special events throughout the year, such as astronaut appearances, space-related lectures, and themed exhibits. These events provide unique opportunities for visitors to interact with experts and enthusiasts in the field.

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8. **Gift Shop:** The on-site gift shop offers a wide range of space and aviation-related merchandise, including books, models, clothing, jewelry, and souvenirs.
9. **Educational Outreach and Research:** In addition to its on-site offerings, VASSC is involved in educational outreach and research efforts, partnering with local schools and organizations, Boy and Girl Scouts of America, as well as other educational agencies to promote STEM education and inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers.
10. **Accessibility:** The center is designed to be accessible to individuals with disabilities, ensuring that everyone can enjoy its exhibits and programs.



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VASSC BUSINESS MODEL

The fiscally responsible business model for the Virginia Air and Space Science Center includes the following strategic pillars.

VASSC BUSINESS MODEL PILLARS

- A. Annual Giving
- B. Major Funding Initiatives
- C. All Paid Educational Programs, Groups & Camps
- D. Family/Individual Memberships
- E. Paid Walkups
- F. Zero Gravity Bistro – Café
- G. Gift Store
- H. Rentals
- I. Institutional Memberships (K-12)
- J. Corporate Memberships
- K. Sponsorships
- L. Naming of Spaces
- M. Grants

STRATEGIC PLAN

A: ENHANCE GUEST EXPERIENCE AND ENGAGEMENT

Goal A.1: Design, develop, and evaluate accessible and interactive exhibits that showcase the latest advancements in aviation, space exploration, NASA research, and the contributions of the Joint Base Langley/Eustis.

- **Objective A.1.1:** Establish a cross-functional team with STEM experts to conduct research into emerging trends and key areas of interest in aviation and space exploration.
- **Objective A.1.2:** Forge partnerships with both STEM industry and museum professionals to create and ensure exhibits are scientifically accurate, engaging, hands-on, and educational.
- **Objective A.1.3:** Utilize cutting-edge technologies like VR, AR, MR, and interactive simulations to create immersive exhibits by partnering with technology companies, software developers, and creative agencies, and investing in the necessary hardware, software, and technical infrastructure.



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- **Objective A.1.4:** Ensure exhibits, programs, and educational materials reflect diverse human experiences and cultures by integrating multicultural content, stories, and historical narratives to celebrate the achievements of diverse individuals and communities in aerospace science and technology.
- **Objective A.1.5:** Ensure that existing and new exhibits contain accessibility features, when feasible, such as tactile elements, audio descriptions, and braille labels; upgrade infrastructure, lighting, and signage for better visibility, readability, and navigation.
- **Objective A.1.6:** Train staff, volunteers, and educators to assist and support all visitors (including visitors with disabilities and underserved populations), guiding them through exhibits, answering questions, and facilitating hands-on experiences with an emphasis on quality customer service..
- **Objective A.1.7:** Evaluate exhibit effectiveness through continuous visitor feedback mechanisms (i.e., digital surveys, comment cards, and feedback stations, social media, and online reviews); monitor and respond to feedback in real-time; analyze quantitative and qualitative data to identify improvement areas; and engage diverse visitor advisory boards to enhance overall visitor satisfaction and experience quality.
- **Objective A. 1.8:** Train staff and volunteers on various VASSC safety protocols (e.g., active shooter, tornado weather events) to ensure members of the team know how to proceed should certain events dictate the need for the activation of certain safety measures.

Goal A.2: Increase Virtual Engagement Across the Globe

- **Objective A.2.1:** Create online learning platforms, digital resources, and interactive multimedia experiences to engage virtual visitors and facilitate self-directed learning in STEM and STEM-related fields.
- **Objective A.2.2:** Provide virtual tours of exhibits, behind-the-scenes tours of research facilities, and interactive webinars led by scientists, engineers, and educators to engage remote audiences and promote accessibility.
- **Objective A.2.3:** Create online forums, discussion groups, and collaborative platforms where participants can share ideas, ask questions, and interact with peers and experts in STEM industries and educational organizations.
- **Objective A.2.4:** Produce educational videos, podcasts, and digital content exploring key concepts in air and space science, highlighting NASA missions and discoveries, and showcasing the center's exhibits and collections.

B: EXPAND INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Goal B.1: Offer Professional Development Workshops and Resources for Educators

- **Objective B.1.1:** Design and implement professional development workshops, seminars, and training sessions to support educators in integrating STEM concepts and NASA-related content into their teaching practices.
- **Objective B.1.2:** Create and disseminate curriculum resources, teaching materials, and lesson plans that align with state and national education standards and incorporate NASA-related content.
- **Objective B.1.3:** Provide ongoing support and professional development opportunities for educators, including online courses, webinars, and peer learning communities focused on aerospace education and NASA-related topics.

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- **Objective B.1.4:** Collaborate with school districts, educational organizations, community partners, and professional associations to promote STEM education, share resources, and build a community of practice around aerospace education and NASA outreach.
- **Objective B.1.5:** Continue to provide educators with relevant information regarding contributions and innovations made by the Joint Base Langley/Eustis.

Goal B.2: Provide Outreach Programs and Resources to Target Audiences (including underserved communities)

- **Objective B.2.1:** Identify target audiences, including underserved communities, (e.g., low-income neighborhoods, rural areas, and underrepresented minority groups, that may have limited access to STEM education and aerospace resources).
- **Objective B.2.2:** Tailor outreach programs, workshops, and resources to meet the unique needs and interests of target audiences, incorporating culturally relevant content and engaging activities, and keeping costs affordable.
- **Objective B.2.3:** Partner with local community organizations (e.g., libraries, schools, youth groups, Boy Scouts of America, Girls Scouts of the USA, and Scouting America organizations etc.) to deliver outreach programs and events in partnership with NASA Langley Research Center.
- **Objective B.2.4:** Remove barriers to access (e.g., by providing scholarships, and free or discounted admission) to ensure that all members of the community can participate in educational programs and experiences.

Goal B.3: Provide Access to Facilities and Expertise for STEM Researchers and Students

- **Objective B.3.1:** Facilitate Internship and Mentorship Programs: Develop internship and mentorship programs in partnership with NASA Langley Research Center to provide hands-on research experiences, professional development opportunities, and mentorship for students pursuing careers in STEM fields.
- **Objective B.3.2:** Encourage and support student-led research projects, capstone initiatives, and senior design challenges that address real-world problems and contribute to advancing aerospace science and technology.
- **Objective B.3.3:** Develop Co-Op Programs with NASA Langley, if feasible, for high school/college students.

Goal B.4: Host Networking and Research Events

- **Objective B.4.1:** Organize symposia, conferences, and workshops at the Virginia Air and Space Science Center featuring keynote speakers, panel discussions, and renowned experts to facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and networking among researchers, scientists, engineers, and industry professionals.
- **Objective B.4.2:** Provide opportunities for researchers and students to showcase their work, present findings, and disseminate research outcomes through poster sessions, oral presentations, and exhibitions.



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C: ENSURE FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH

Goal C.1: Diversify Revenue Streams

- **Objective C.1.1:** Conduct periodic comprehensive analyses of potential funding sources, including grants, sponsorships, donations, memberships, and earned revenue streams.
- **Objective C.1.2:** Develop strategic partnerships with corporate sponsors, industry stakeholders, city and state resources, and philanthropic organizations to secure sponsorships, grants, and in-kind donations.
- **Objective C.1.3:** Research and pursue grant opportunities from government agencies, foundations, and nonprofit organizations that support STEM education, cultural institutions, and community development initiatives.
- **Objective C.1.4:** Explore opportunities to generate revenue through admissions, ticket sales, merchandise sales, facility rentals, and special events (e.g., galas or dinner with the NASA Administrator, etc.) to supplement funding from other sources.



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Goal C.2: Implement Cost-Saving Measures

- **Objective C.2.1:** Conduct regular financial assessments and budget reviews to identify opportunities for cost savings, efficiency improvements, and resource optimization.
- **Objective C.2.2:** Ensure administrative processes, operational workflows, staffing structures, and costs improve organizational efficiency.
- **Objective C.2.3:** Adopt environmentally sustainable practices, energy-efficient technologies, and waste reduction strategies to minimize operating expenses and environmental impact.
- **Objective C.2.4:** Invest in technology solutions, software platforms, and automation tools to streamline operations, improve data management, and enhance productivity across the organization.

Goal C.3: Develop Long-Term Financial Plans

- **Objective C.3.1:** Define clear financial goals, objectives, and performance metrics to track progress and measure success over time.
- **Objective C.3.2:** Establish reserve funds, endowment funds, contingency reserves, and capital reserves to provide financial stability and safeguard against unforeseen expenses, economic downturns, and emergencies.
- **Objective C.3.3:** Allocate resources and invest in strategic initiatives, capital improvements, and program expansions that support the long-term growth and sustainability of the organization.
- **Objective C.3.4:** Engage stakeholders, including board members, staff, donors, and community partners, in strategic financial planning and decision-making processes to ensure alignment with organizational priorities and values.

D: ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY AND BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

Goal D.1: Deepen the Partnership with NASA

- **Objective D.1.1:** Sponsor exhibits or events that highlight NASA's missions, research, and technological advancements, working closely with organizations (such as Scout-supported organizations) to create special events that draw in visitors
- **Objective D.1.2:** Provide NASA-branded merchandise and materials to enhance event experiences.
- **Objective D.1.3:** Offer access to NASA's multimedia libraries, including videos, images, and interactive simulations.
- **Objective D.1.4:** Effectively display replicas or actual artifacts from space missions for display in the museum to tell a compelling story.
- **Objective D.1.5:** Facilitate access to NASA research and data for educational and exhibit purposes.
- **Objective D.1.6:** Offer internships that bring in students with a variety of interests that can elevate our facility, while providing mentorship opportunities.
- **Objective D.1.7:** Provide opportunities for museum volunteers and interns to visit NASA facilities and engage with NASA staff.
- **Objective D.1.8:** Offer the VASSC as a venue for NASA Langley to utilize for employee engagement, family nights, happy hours, etc..
- **Objective D.1.9:** Increase engagement with our regional NASA partner in Wallops Island and other NASA Visitor Centers.

Goal D.2: Develop Partnerships with STEM Industry and Education Experts

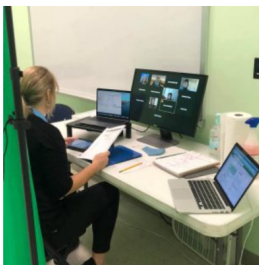
- **Objective D.2.1:** Establish and grow relationships with STEM industry and education experts including (but not limited to) other air and space science centers, scientists, engineers, astronauts, academic scholars, and industry experts.
- **Objective D.2.2:** Work with STEM industry and education experts to provide educational materials, resources, and curricula focused on space and aeronautics.
- **Objective D.2.3:** Work with STEM industry and education experts to offer virtual and in-person guest lectures by NASA scientists, engineers, and astronauts.
- **Objective D.2.4:** Work with STEM industry and education experts to develop interactive exhibits and hands-on activities related to space exploration.
- **Objective D.2.5:** Invite NASA Community outreach division to enhance the Scouting program with guest speakers, specific lesson plans that engage all ages.

Goal D.3: Develop Partnerships with Local Schools and Divisions

- **Objective D.3.1:** Develop long-range plans for providing mentorships, curriculum, and project-based learning experiences for relevant high school programs, such as: the Newport News Public Schools Aviation Academy; the Hampton City Schools (HCS) Academy of Transportation, Analytics, Information, and Logistics; the HCS Academy of Technology and Engineering; or the HCS Academy of Cybersecurity, Engineering, and Robotics
- **Objective D.3.2:** Develop educational programs in partnership with local schools and districts, including (but not limited to) curriculum development, field trips, interactive learning sessions, project-based learning, STEM camps, and teacher-training.

Goal D.4: Develop Partnerships with Institutions of Higher Education

- **Objective D.4.1:** Collaborate on research initiatives that align with both the center's and the university's interests in aerospace, astronomy, and related fields.
- **Objective D.4.2:** Pursue joint funding opportunities for collaborative projects, research, and educational programs.
- **Objective D.4.3:** Invite university faculty to give guest lectures, seminars, and workshops at the center and host visiting scholars from partner universities to engage in research and public outreach.
- **Objective D.4.4:** Collaborate on academic publications, articles, and media content that highlight the work of both the center and the university.
- **Objective D.4.5:** Develop Lifelong Learning Initiatives, such as in collaboration with community colleges or possible short course curriculum development with colleges and universities.



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Goal D.5: Develop Opportunities for Local Community Members

- **Objective D.5.1:** Collaborate with local artists and historians to create unique, engaging displays.
- **Objective D.5.2:** Develop a robust volunteer program that includes training and special recognition for volunteers.
- **Objective D.5.3:** Engage community members in oral history projects and other participatory initiatives.
- **Objective D.5.4:** Establish a community advisory board to provide ongoing feedback and suggestions.
- **Objective D.5.5:** Develop partnerships with local organizations such as Hampton Visitors and Convention Bureau (Visit Hampton), the Downtown Norfolk Development Partnership and the Virginia Tourism Corporation.
- **Objective D.5.6:** Develop partnerships with other science centers in the area, such as Nauticus, Virginia Living Museum, Virginia Aquarium, etc..

Goal D.6: Develop Partnerships with other Museums and Learning Centers

- **Objective D.6.1:** Continue programs for reciprocity for museum and learning center admission for VASSC employees, VASSC members, etc., through ASTC or other means.
- **Objective D.6.2:** Work with other museums or learning centers to create or share interactive exhibits.

E: EMBRACE THE PAST AND INSPIRE THE FUTURE

Goal E.1: Preserve and Share Historical Artifacts and Knowledge

- **Objective E.1.1:** Collect significant historical artifacts and documents related to air and space exploration.
- **Objective E.1.2:** Establish state-of-the-art conservation practices to preserve artifacts.
- **Objective E.1.3:** Curate rotating exhibits that highlight local history and contributions to air and space exploration.
- **Objective E.1.4:** Offer guided tours, lectures, and workshops focused on historical topics.
- **Objective E.1.5:** Collaborate with cultural and historical societies to broaden the museum's reach and impact.

Goal E.2: Engage with Living Historians and Experts

- **Objective E.2.1:** Host guest lectures and panel discussions featuring astronauts, engineers, pilots, and historians.
- **Objective E.2.2:** Organize meet-and-greet events and Q&A sessions with notable figures in the STEM fields.
- **Objective E.2.3:** Record and share oral histories from individuals with firsthand experience in air and space exploration.

Goal E.3: Celebrate Achievements and Anniversaries

- **Objective E.3.1:** Host special events and exhibitions to mark important anniversaries and milestones.
- **Objective E.3.2:** Publish commemorative materials, such as books, documentaries, and articles.
- **Objective E.3.3:** Collaborate with other museums and institutions to create joint celebrations and exhibits.

Goal E.4: Inspire Future Generations of Air, Space, and STEM Explorers

- **Objective E.4.1:** Host events such as hackathons, competitions, and innovation fairs to engage young minds.
- **Objective E.4.2:** Run after-school programs, weekend workshops, and camps (including, but not limited to, Summer Camps and Scout Camps) that delve into specific areas of air, space, and STEM-related fields and offer behind-the-scenes tours of the museum and partner organizations.
- **Objective E.4.3:** Develop educational apps, online games, and simulation-based games that teach concepts of aeronautics and space exploration and mimic real-world aerospace challenges.



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- **Objective E.4.4:** Offer virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) experiences that simulate space missions and flight operations.
- **Objective E.4.5:** Host science fairs and presentation competitions where students can showcase their research and projects, potentially including (but not limited to) robot competitions or astronomy clubs.
- **Objective E.4.6:** Foster creativity and holistic thinking by integrating arts and humanities into STEM education, such as space-themed art competitions, writing contests, partnerships with art museums/organizations or schools with art programs, or storytelling workshops where students can write and illustrate their own space adventures.

F: ENSURE INFORMED & SUPPORTIVE BOARD GOVERNANCE

Goal F.1: Provide Training for Board Members

- **Objective F.1.1:** Implement comprehensive onboarding programs and ongoing education for board members
- **Objective F.1.2:** Organize periodic workshops and seminars featuring experts in air, space, and STEM fields, governance, and nonprofit management to provide board members with deeper insights and updated knowledge on relevant topics.
- **Objective F.1.3:** Establish a mentorship program where experienced board members can guide new members, and create opportunities for peer learning through structured discussions, knowledge-sharing sessions, and collaborative projects.

Goal F.2: Foster Active Board Participation

- **Objective F.2.1:** Establish clear expectations and regular assessments to ensure board members are actively engaged, attending meetings, participating in committees, and contributing to strategic discussions and decision-making processes.
- **Objective F.2.2:** Establish regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and one-on-one meetings, to gather input from board members on their experiences and identify any barriers to participation; use this feedback to make continuous improvements to board processes and engagement strategies.

Goal F.3: Strengthen Governance Policies and Practices

- **Objective F.3.1:** Develop and regularly review governance policies, including conflict of interest policies, code of conduct, and bylaws, to ensure they align with best practices and support ethical, transparent decision-making.
- **Objective F.3.2:** Form a dedicated governance committee within the board tasked with the continuous review, development, and updating of governance policies and practices. This committee would also be responsible for ensuring that these policies are effectively communicated and implemented across the organization.
- **Objective F.3.2:** Develop and/or implement succession plans and procedures to ensure consistent and strong governance.

Goal F.4: Promote Board Diversity and Inclusion

- **Objective F.4.1:** Implement strategies to recruit and retain a diverse board, ensuring representation across different demographics, expertise, and perspectives to enhance decision-making and reflect the community served by the center.
- **Objective F.4.2:** Develop and implement targeted recruitment strategies that focus on reaching underrepresented groups, including partnering with community organizations, attending diversity-focused events, and using inclusive language in recruitment materials to attract a wide range of candidates.
- **Objective F.4.3:** Provide ongoing diversity and inclusion training for all board members to foster a culture of understanding and respect. These training sessions can help board members recognize and address unconscious biases, understand the value of diverse perspectives, and create an inclusive environment where all members feel valued and heard.