

Ecological Landscape Alliance Strategic Plan 2017-2022



Letter from the Board

Since its founding in 1992, the Ecological Landscape Alliance has been a leader in promoting sustainable approaches to landscape design, construction, and management. ELA's commitment to innovative ideas and evidence-based practices has made the organization both a trusted resource and a vibrant community of landscape professionals and devoted gardeners.

ELA works in partnership with local, regional, and national organizations to provide high-quality education that brings together diverse audiences united by a shared sense of purpose. ELA's members and participants include designers, horticulturalists, growers, and manufacturers; conservationists, restoration ecologists, and wetland scientists; community activists and home gardeners; and landscape stewards for public, private, and nonprofit organizations.

Twenty-five years after its founding, ELA continues to grow. Our programs now reach participants in thirty-seven states and nine other countries. In the last decade, we have collaborated with over sixty-five allied organizations, launched a popular webinar series, led in nine states, expanded our annual conference, and created new symposia in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Just as important, ELA's reach extends beyond its direct audience. By providing a platform for the dissemination and development of new techniques, ELA has helped ecological approaches move from the fringe to the mainstream.

Despite this progress, our work has never been more important. Even as climate change, invasive organisms, habitat loss, and declines among native species are presenting new challenges, advances in science are creating new frameworks for constructive action. By fostering lively exchanges of scientific information and hands-on experience, ELA can play a unique role in creating a world where every person is a forward-thinking and well-informed steward of the land and water.

ELA initiated its Strategic Planning process to help align ELA's growth with its established strengths and values, and in recognition that our ethos of sustainability must extend to the organization itself. We are proud of what we have achieved as a volunteer-driven organization with a staff of one, but our long-term resilience requires a broader structure.

The combined purpose of advancing ELA's mission and building its capabilities is reflected in the Strategic Goals that have guided this plan: to develop and expand our high-quality, evidence-based educational offerings; to build a robust and highly engaged membership, to continue expanding ELA's audience, and to build awareness of ELA's vital work.

ELA is excited to present its 2017-2022 Strategic Plan to our members, supporters, and allied organizations.

From our founding, ELA has been about choices – educated, informed choices and awareness of the impact of those choices. We offer information that is both research-based and experiential, take care in how we present the information, and expect people to decide for themselves what is useful in their work.

— Sue Storer,
ELA Founding Member

Mission

The Ecological Landscape Alliance advocates for ecological landscape practices through education, collaboration, and outreach.

Vision for the Future

Everyone who interacts with the land is a steward whose actions are informed by an understanding of and respect for natural systems.

Values

Credibility

We promote landscape practices that are ecologically sound and based in science and research.

Empowerment through Education

By educating others, we empower them to grow as professionals or garden enthusiasts and to conserve or improve the health of landscapes in our world.

Interdisciplinary Thinking

We enable shared inquiry across disciplines to deepen our audiences' understanding of the landscape's natural processes and living systems.

Collaboration

We build long-term alliances to extend our community and to amplify our impact.

Respect for Natural Systems

We believe in basing landscape practices on an ever-improving understanding of natural systems and the impacts of human actions within them.

Organizational Sustainability

To ensure that the organization's contributions will increase and endure, we act as thoughtful stewards of our financial, natural, and human resources.



Guided by their understanding of natural ecosystems, our members and others share their expertise through articles that reinforce ecological principles and help readers develop and maintain healthy landscapes.

*— Maureen Sundberg,
ELA Newsletter Editor*

Strategic Goal 1: Develop and expand on existing high-quality, evidence-based educational offerings.

OBJECTIVE 1: Develop a vibrant, engaged, well-equipped education committee.

STRATEGIES:

- Identify the resources and skill sets the Education Committee needs to continue producing high-quality educational offerings.
- Recruit additional trustees and ELA members to serve on the Education Committee.
- Explore forming subcommittees to focus on specific expansion goals such as creating regional education programs, developing online programs, and enhancing current webinars.
- Develop ways for the Education Committee to connect with and evaluate the needs and interests of ELA members.

OBJECTIVE 2: Increase educational outreach through collaborations with professional associations, nonprofit organizations, and other strategic partners.

STRATEGIES:

- Continue engaging with current partners to develop and expand educational programming in and beyond New England.
- Identify other organizations interested in developing partnerships that promote ELA's educational offerings.

OBJECTIVE 3: Expand the online educational offerings through which ELA reaches a national and international audience.

STRATEGIES:

- Continue developing the rigor, quality, innovation, and relevance of existing webinar series.
- Ensure the newsletter editor and contributors have sufficient resources to continue producing valuable, mission-driven content.
- Increase the use of social media as an educational tool.
- Explore whether and how to develop a how-to video series.





*To first, do no harm,
Knowledge of living
things is indispensable.
More important is to
acquire Wisdom that
culminates from our
experience and the
experiences of others.
Only then can our lives
mingle well with the
lives of the plants in our
care.*

*— Michael Nadeau,
Long-time ELA Member*

OBJECTIVE 4: Explore piloting online and in-person education programs for landscape workers, including bilingual content for those who speak English as a second language.

STRATEGIES:

- Develop and conduct a survey of landscape construction and maintenance companies to assess the need for and interest in bilingual programming and to identify companies that recognize the potential value of incorporating ecologically-based practices into their business models.
- Identify partners interested in developing bilingual courses offered online, in person, or both.
- Explore whether a “Certificate of Completion” is valuable and feasible and if so, determine the steps required for offering a certification program.

OBJECTIVE 5: Explore producing ecologically-based educational offerings designed to engage young people in land stewardship.

STRATEGIES:

- Develop and conduct a survey of youth organizations to assess interest in youth-oriented ecological education.
- Identify youth development programs, technical schools, community colleges, or vocational schools with which to explore collaborative opportunities and secure at least one that is interested in piloting a lecture series, course, or program aimed at youth audiences.
- Explore collaboration opportunities for programs that feature introductory ecological landscape principles.

Strategic Goal 2: Build a highly-engaged, robust membership base that actively supports ELA's mission.

OBJECTIVE 1: Deepen each member's level of engagement with ELA.

STRATEGIES:

- At each ELA event, provide unstructured opportunities for members to connect, share, and become part of the ELA community.
- Explore ways to connect members and exhibitors during ELA events (e.g., host a Lunch and Learn where exhibitors can demo products and allow for hands-on interaction and networking).
- Build on existing relationships with other organizations to host member events across regions (e.g., Host "ELA Day" with a co-sponsor, like Brooklyn Bridge Park).
- Identify the volunteer interests of every member and connect members with meaningful volunteer opportunities within the organization.
- Identify strong supporters among ELA's members, past trustees, volunteers, speakers, and exhibitors, and keep them engaged through involvement with the organization.

OBJECTIVE 2: Increase ELA's membership growth each year.

STRATEGIES:

- Create processes for managing and increasing member retention.
- Better understand why new members join ELA and why existing members renew.
- Assess past use of incentives and explore how to best use incentives to attract new members.
- Convert event attendees' and newsletter readers' interest into memberships.
- Develop and implement distinct membership strategies in regions where ELA has a presence and where ELA's presence is new and growing.



OBJECTIVE 3: Evaluate current member benefits and resources to ensure they offer sufficient value for membership.

STRATEGIES:

- Assess whether current membership tiers are sufficient to meet the diversity of members' needs and interests, and whether they are priced appropriately.
- Set member and non-member event pricing to ensure that it incentivizes membership without discouraging potential first-time participants.
- Explore enhancing the value of webinars (which are free to members) by offering recertification credits.
- Explore ways to recognize and provide unique value to members throughout the year (e.g., through the newsletter, service awards, project awards, or member-only events).



Twenty five years after the grit and determination of a small group of people created this organization, we're thrilled to begin writing the next successful chapter in ELA's history. This plan outlines an ambitious but attainable direction and an impressive vision for the future.

*— Mark Richardson
ELA Board Trustee*

Strategic Goal 3: Continue expanding ELA's reach beyond New England and beyond our current audience base.

OBJECTIVE 1: Create a model for expanding into other regions and implement this replication model as appropriate.

STRATEGIES:

- Building on recent successes, continue expanding on-site programming in New York and the Mid-Atlantic region in collaboration with partners in those areas.
- Develop clear roles for centralized and regionally-based leadership in planning, administering, and maintaining the quality of regional on-site programs, including the option of creating a paid staff position to lead and coordinate geographically-dispersed programs.
- Evaluate the expenditures and revenue potential of each geographical expansion.
- Continue developing the Board to reflect the regions where our work is focused and to provide outreach to partners in those areas.

OBJECTIVE 2: Explore opportunities for using technology to expand the reach of existing on-site ELA programming.

STRATEGIES:

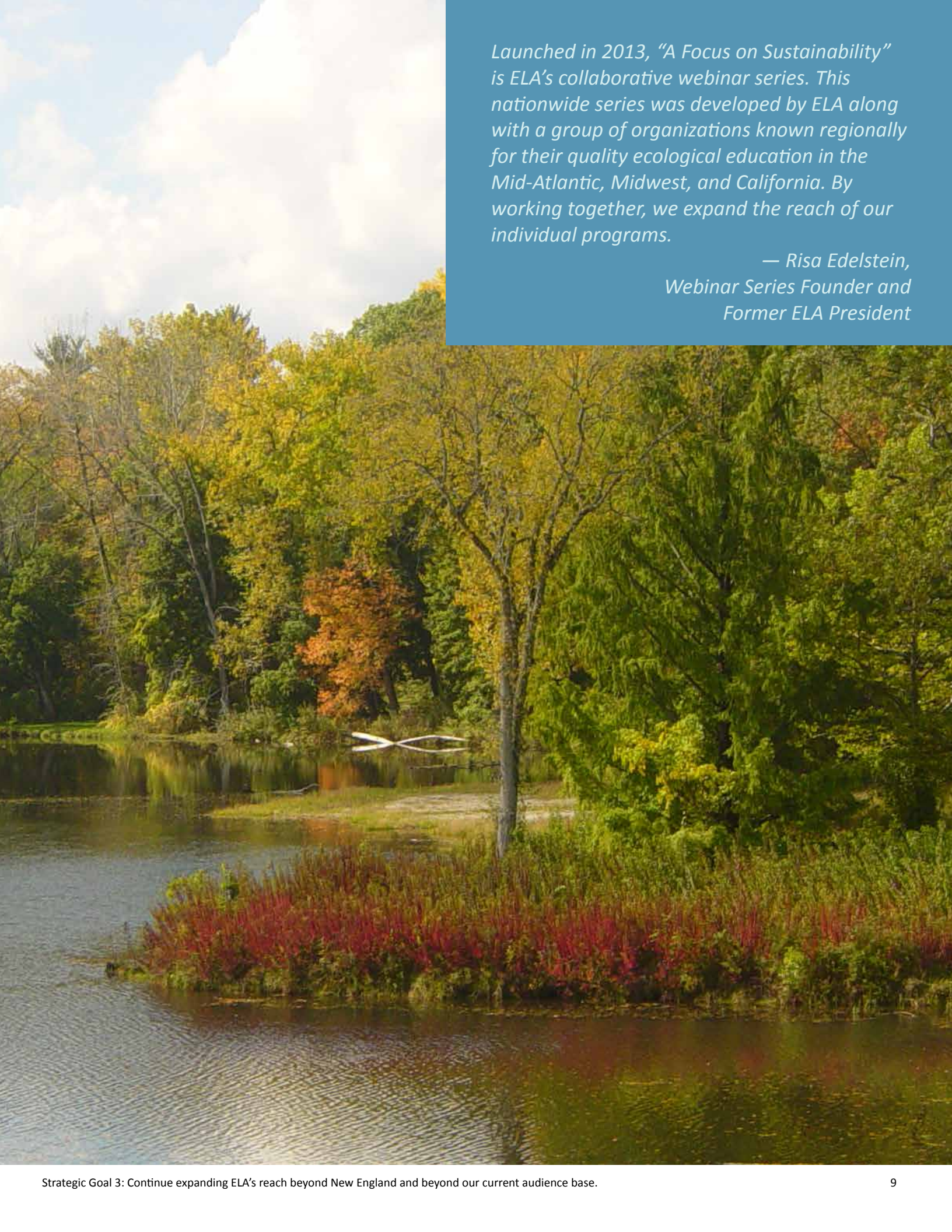
- Explore the feasibility of recording audio and video of symposia, conference presentations, and Eco-tours.
- Explore opportunities for simulcasting ELA events in California and the Midwest.



OBJECTIVE 3: Identify opportunities for diversifying ELA's audience base within New England as well as new regions.

STRATEGIES:

- Develop a detailed understanding of ELA's current audience base.
- Identify new audience groups ELA should reach out to (such as landscape contractors, municipal crews, youth or homeowners) and develop an action plan to connect with each group.
- Explore collaborating with other organizations to reach new audience groups throughout New England and beyond.
- Explore the feasibility of using outreach events to reach new audiences (e.g., host ELA speakers and information tables at events that are attended by audience groups ELA wants to reach).



Launched in 2013, “A Focus on Sustainability” is ELA’s collaborative webinar series. This nationwide series was developed by ELA along with a group of organizations known regionally for their quality ecological education in the Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, and California. By working together, we expand the reach of our individual programs.

*— Risa Edelstein,
Webinar Series Founder and
Former ELA President*

Strategic Goal 4: Ensure long-term financial solvency and organizational sustainability.

OBJECTIVE 1: Compensate staff fairly.

STRATEGIES:

- Clearly define and document the roles and responsibilities of the Executive Director and Newsletter Editor.
- Conduct an industry review of market-rate compensation for staff positions.
- Establish compensation goals to be achieved over five years for staff positions.
- Establish target revenue goals over the next five years to meet these compensation goals.
- Conduct annual performance reviews of personnel.

OBJECTIVE 2: Ensure continuity of organizational knowledge.

STRATEGIES:

- Make all existing policies, procedures, and historical documentation easily accessible to Board members and staff.
- Document core competencies, success stories and historical knowledge currently held by key staff, volunteers, and Board members.
- Build resiliency by cross-training staff and key ELA members.
- Set up systems for tracking success metrics such as number of events and registrations.





OBJECTIVE 3: Maintain a vibrant and engaged Board of Directors and Committees.

STRATEGIES:

- Develop a recruitment and orientation process for Board candidates to ensure they understand the opportunities and expectations of Board service.
- Encourage Board members to engage with a Committee that gives them a sense of ownership and accomplishment.
- Assess organizational goals and Board skills annually in order to strategically recruit new Board members.
- Provide opportunities for ELA members to assume leadership roles on Committees (or in planning individual events) as part of a broader Board recruitment and development strategy.
- Cultivate Board relationships and satisfaction through increased opportunities for social interaction or team building in addition to Board work.
- Continue to foster an atmosphere at ELA Board meetings that encourages participation and values contributions.
- Develop staff and Board member attendance guidelines for Board meetings, Committee meetings, and events.
- Determine optimal number of Committee members and fully staff all ELA standing Committees.

OBJECTIVE 4: Develop a succession plan for key staff positions.

STRATEGIES:

- Create an ELA calendar of responsibilities, activities, and events and document current policies, procedures, and operations. Identify and resolve any operational gaps.
- Define the staffing levels required to support the current scale of operations, including documented roles and responsibilities for each position.
- Determine long-term staffing requirements to support ELA's mission and achieve the organization's five-year goals and objectives.
- Where feasible, shift responsibilities and activities from the Executive Director to Committee members, Board members, and support staff, so the Executive Director can focus on financial and organizational leadership.



Strategic Goal 4: Ensure long-term financial solvency and organizational sustainability.

OBJECTIVE 5: Increase and diversify funding sources to support ELA's projected five-year goals.

STRATEGIES:

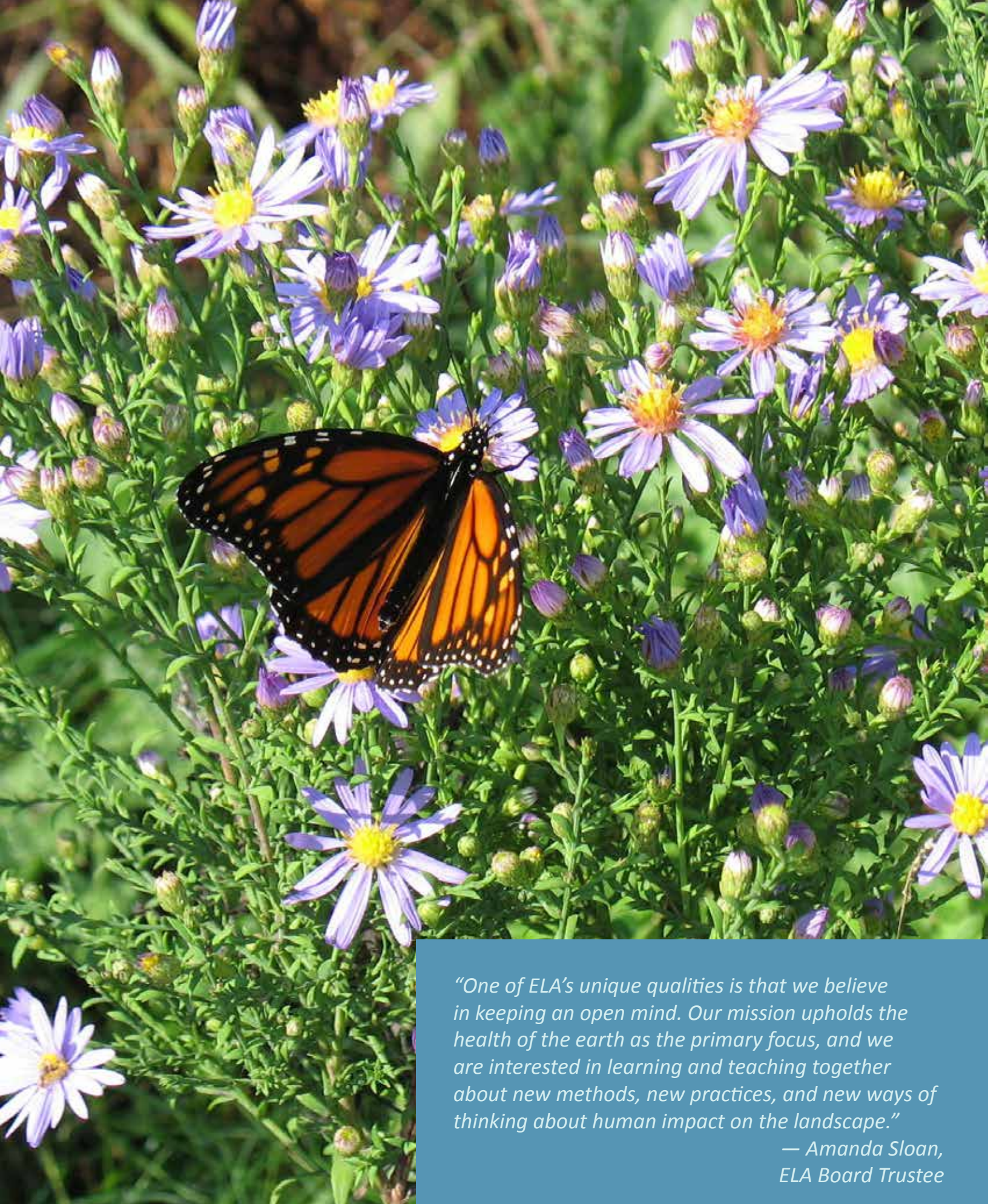
- Develop a five-year financial expansion plan that coordinates revenue with the programming planned for the next five years.
- Build relationships with individuals and organizations that are potential donors.
- Increase overall membership income each year.
- Develop additional revenue streams from our existing educational programming by leveraging online tools and existing content.
- Develop additional revenue streams through website advertising and sponsorship, increased marketing activities, crowd-sourced funding, and internet charitable-giving programs.
- Identify opportunities to increase revenue from existing programs and events by increasing enrollment, pricing, or both.
- Research the feasibility of adding grant-seeking to our funding model.
- Prioritize existing and proposed programming for which ELA's investment of time and resources yields both the greatest revenue and the greatest advancement of ELA's mission.

OBJECTIVE 6: Determine whether forming regional chapters could improve financial and organizational sustainability.

STRATEGIES:

- Review existing ELA chapter policies to ensure they are current, relevant, and beneficial to ELA's overall financial and organizational goals.
- Evaluate the costs (staffing and volunteer hours) required to set up and provide ongoing support to regional chapters against the costs of expanding regionally without establishing chapters.





"One of ELA's unique qualities is that we believe in keeping an open mind. Our mission upholds the health of the earth as the primary focus, and we are interested in learning and teaching together about new methods, new practices, and new ways of thinking about human impact on the landscape."

*— Amanda Sloan,
ELA Board Trustee*

Strategic Goal 5: Create an effective marketing and publicity plan that positions ELA as a widely-known, vibrant community of innovators and programs that help people become more effective stewards of the land.

OBJECTIVE 1: Understand our existing audiences.

STRATEGIES:

- Develop profiles of existing ELA members and program participants across all programs.
- Investigate what ELA's audiences know about ELA and its programs; how they become and stay aware of ELA's work; what factors encourage or limit their participation; how they see ELA as distinct from other organizations; and how they perceive their potential role in supporting ELA.

OBJECTIVE 2: Create marketing initiatives that support expanding ELA's audience.

STRATEGIES:

- Build the Marketing Committee and partner with marketing firms who can provide pro bono services that tie together branding and online presence with other marketing initiatives.
- Identify types of organizations and individuals who would benefit from ELA's work but are absent or underrepresented in ELA's audiences.
- Assess which audience sectors can be reached through existing communication channels and which will require new approaches.
- Prioritizing those audience sectors most important to ELA's growth and mission, develop a plan for phased introduction of new communication initiatives and well-targeted marketing campaigns.



Through education, ELA strives to preserve the integrity of existing healthy ecological systems at both the small scale (in place - one area of land), and at the very large scale over time and space (watersheds, migratory species, air quality, and the future).

*— Tara Mitchell,
Former ELA Board Trustee*



OBJECTIVE 3: Develop ELA's brand.

STRATEGIES:

- Identify the “core message” that ELA must communicate to its audiences and partners, and embed that message in ELA’s online presence and communications, both visually and verbally.
- Communicate ELA successes. Explore ways to more proactively highlight ELA accomplishments.

OBJECTIVE 4: Make ELA easier to discover, follow, and use online.

STRATEGIES:

- Use social media and search engine optimization more effectively to communicate ELA’s work, to draw people to the website (and other online resources), and to increase ELA’s audience.
- Streamline ELA’s website, so it is easy for potential participants to find the programs and resources they need.

OBJECTIVE 5: Empower ELA members to become advocates for ecological landscape practices.

STRATEGIES:

- Increase members’ sense of identification with ELA, based not only on the practical benefits the organization provides, but on the sense of ELA as a community and a movement.
- Identify and promote pathways for new and existing members to raise their levels of participation.
- Engage strong supporters among ELA’s members, past trustees, volunteers, speakers, and exhibitors as “ELA Ambassadors” to promote ecological values to individuals, communities, and organizations.
- To help ELA members and participants communicate their participation in ELA’s movement, offer ELA-branded items for purchase.

Ecological Landscape Alliance

Board of Trustees 2017

PENNY LEWIS

ELA Executive Director
Sandown, NH

THERESA SPRAGUE

President
Harwich, MA

TOBIAS WOLF

Vice President
Groton, MA

MAUREEN SUNDBERG

Secretary
Andover, MA

MICHAEL OPTON

Treasurer
Needham, MA

GEOVANI AGUILAR

Waltham, MA

KRISTIN ANDRES

Chatham, MA

THOMAS BENJAMIN

Haydenville, MA

TABITHA HARKIN

Norton, MA

MARK HIGHLAND

Modena, PA

SCOTT KLEEKAMP

Natick, MA

MARIE MACCHIAROLO

Somerville, MA

REBECCA MCMACKIN

New York, NY

KERRY O'KELLY

Andover, MA

MARK RICHARDSON

Framingham, MA

ANTHONY RUGGIERO

Boston, MA

AMANDA SLOAN

Sharon, MA

TREVOR SMITH

Arlington, MA

KEVIN STASO

Downingtown, PA

ANGELA TANNER

Falmouth, MA

BRUCE WENNING

Newton, MA



Photos courtesy of:

Penny Lewis
Maureen Sundberg
Angela Tanner
Rebecca Lindenmeyr
Dan Jaffe

