STRATEGIC PLAN
2019-2022

Ohio Environmental Council
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) adopted its strategic plan in 2016. The five-year plan was developed through a robust process that included staff and board collaboration, stakeholder engagement, an analysis of our strengths and weaknesses, and an evaluation of our issues and the tools with which we engage them. The resulting 2016-2020 strategic plan set forth a path for the organization to take environmental protection to the next level.

Over the last three years, we have accomplished many of the goals laid out within the plan. The OEC’s bipartisan engagement helped secure strong lead standards for drinking water aimed at protecting children and families from Sebring to Cincinnati. We worked in coalition to secure a state commitment to reduce agricultural runoff by 40% in the fight against toxic algae in Lake Erie. With community partners, the OEC sued and won permanent protection of the Sawmill Wetlands in Columbus. Our investment in communications and campaign capacities has enabled us to engage more than a million Ohioans on key environmental issues online, over the phone, through the mail, and over the airwaves.

Our organization has grown stronger in numerous ways since 2016 and the world around us has also changed. We are now updating our plan to account for our growth and adapt to changing needs and environmental priorities.

Since 2016, a new urgency has arisen to tackle the threat of climate change head-on. Emerging science paints an even grimmer picture of likely impacts, as well as even shorter timeframes for enacting change. There is now greater public awareness of the need for sweeping action, and a new crop of elected leaders has made tackling this threat a top priority. The impacts of a warming climate are more present in Ohioans’ day-to-day experiences, and experts agree we have a mere 12 years to get carbon pollution under control in order to avoid the deadliest consequences of climate change. At the same time, the 2016 and 2018 elections changed the national and state political landscapes, creating both opportunities and challenges for the environment and progress on greenhouse gas reductions. Polarizing politics coupled with real setbacks to environmental regulations have intensified the need to confront the structural and institutional racism that has historically left marginalized communities behind. We simply cannot expect to make progress in the long-term without the voices and perspectives of those most harmed by poor air and water quality. Big issues like these demand a big movement that is active in communities throughout the state. We are therefore working to build an environmental movement that is more inclusive, diverse, and full of leaders at the local, state, and federal levels. And, many of the goals set in the original plan have been met. We have also developed new tools that stand ready to help us tackle Ohio’s most challenging environmental problems.

For these reasons, the OEC is updating its 2016-2021 Strategic Plan to outline our direction and plans for the 2019-2022 timeframe. With these pressing issues in the forefronts of our minds, we push ever forward toward our vision of “a clean, beautiful Ohio where diverse people, innovation, and all of our natural treasures thrive.”
OEC WINS SINCE 2016

2016
- Led the charge to commit Ohio to reduce algae-causing pollution by 40% by 2025
- Identified 1.3 million Ohioans who are alarmed by climate change

2017
- Worked with AEP to make Ohio's electric grid more modern and efficient
- Shut down costly bailouts for dirty coal plants
- Restored Ohio's clean energy standards and kept new attacks at bay
- Launched Ohio Clinicians for Climate Action
- Encouraged the U.S. Senate to vote against delaying the BLM methane rule

2018
- Secured $10 million in electric vehicle infrastructure development in AEP territory
- Secured a more transparent, bipartisan process for drawing Ohio's congressional districts
- Permanently protected the Sawmill Wetlands from development
- Advocated for the state's acquisition of public land resulting in the Jesse Owens State Park and Wildlife Area
Start with the Why: The Next 50 Years

Scientists increasingly predicted a warming climate caused by the burning of fossil fuels within a few short years of the Ohio Environmental Council’s founding in 1969. In the ensuing decades, evidence of the impending impacts of climate change caused alarm and concern for many. It is now clear that the effects of climate change will devastate industries that Ohioans rely on to feed our families, alter the landscapes that make our state special and unique, and threaten public health on multiple fronts.

We can no longer afford to kick this can down the road. Unfortunately, if Ohio fails to reduce its carbon emissions, it is almost impossible for the United States to meet carbon reduction goals to stem the tide. We must place climate action at the center of our combined efforts, use all our available tools while growing new capacities, and fight on all fronts to mitigate root causes and threatened impacts. Our success hinges on the OEC being just one part of a larger, much more diverse, active, and inclusive movement putting pressure on decision makers to take bold action at all levels of government.

The threats of climate impacts are not theoretical or far-off possibilities. Ohio is experiencing impacts today, and over the next 50 years these impacts will cause even bigger stressors and challenges for our most vulnerable and marginalized neighbors. We cannot succeed in our mission to ensure clean air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home without addressing climate change.
Issue Priorities: Energy, Water, Land, and Democracy

It is clear that if we fail to make climate action the center of our work, then we fail to make progress on the majority of Ohio’s most pressing environmental concerns. Outlined below are the OEC’s priorities for policy changes within its key issue areas of Energy, Water, Land, and Democracy.

Community-Focused Climate Solutions That Will Bring Positive Change

Climate change will increase the number of days per year with high temperatures, which will lead to higher risks for serious health conditions such as heat stroke. Similarly, climate change will cause greater weather conditions that contribute to poor air quality. People who suffer from asthma and other cardiovascular conditions will have more days per year where it is unhealthy to step outside their house. Fortunately, we can mitigate many of these issues if we eliminate the most common sources of harmful air pollution. In doing so, we can decrease health risks while also fighting climate change.

The OEC Energy Program’s 2019-2022 goals focus more acutely on decarbonizing the electric system by calling for more investments in and options for renewables and efficiency made by utilities and local governments. We will also work to increase energy democracy for all Ohioans by securing better rules and regulations that encourage Ohioans to take more control over how they get their electricity, such as installing solar arrays at their home or business, or taking advantage of efficient and innovative solutions. The OEC will continue to work towards reducing methane pollution coming from oil and gas operations by advocating for strong state standards and organizing affected citizens. And because communities can encourage electric vehicle (EV) usage as a way to improve air quality and take action on climate change, the OEC will focus on engaging electric utilities to incentivize adoption of electric vehicles as well as advocating for a more robust network of EV charging stations throughout urban and rural areas.

Safe Drinking Water Ohio Families Can Depend On

Warmer winters and drastically changing precipitation patterns exacerbate toxic algal blooms and place an increased burden on antiquated water infrastructure and treatment facilities, threatening our drinking water from source to tap. We’re already experiencing the early signs of this shift. Since 1994, Ohio has experienced well over the average number of precipitation events per year with more than two inches of rain. This places extraordinary pressure on infrastructure and degrades the quality of drinking water sources.

Public water systems are chronically underfunded, widening the gap between poorer communities and more affluent areas when it comes to shouldering the financial burden of clean and safe drinking water. This problem becomes compounded when cities must deal with existing persistent issues like toxic algae and emerging threats — such as newly-identified contaminants like perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) — in drinking water sources. With billions of dollars wrapped up in water treatment already, creative solutions led by affected communities are
critical before they become too severe and too costly to counteract in large urban cores such as Toledo, Lima, Cincinnati, and Cleveland, and equally in rural areas such as Meigs and Hancock Counties.

The OEC Water Program’s 2019-2022 goals aim to ensure all Ohio families have clean and safe drinking water, secure more stable and reliable funding for restoring Ohio’s lakes, rivers and streams, and work in coalition to reduce algae-causing pollution coming from farm field runoff by twenty percent.

Enlisting Ohio’s Land to Combat Climate Change

Climate change has the potential to devastate forests across the Midwest, and Ohio does not escape these risks. Under the most dangerous climate scenario, the economic value of timber across the region could decrease by up to $788 billion. Increased precipitation and more frost-free months will amplify the ravages of agricultural pests and the degradation of forests wrought by invasive plants and insects.

Southeastern Ohio and the forests of Appalachia will serve as essential migration corridors for wildlife fleeing increasingly inhospitable southern climates. And, emerging science shows that preserving intact, mature forest is essential for ecosystem resiliency during climatic shifts. Perhaps most importantly, our forests — especially our public forests — are our best natural weapons in the fight against climate change. If we protect them, our public forests can realize their fullest potential as atmospheric carbon filters and storage sinks, as reservoirs of biodiversity, and as havens and escapes for the human spirit.

The OEC Land Program’s 2019-2022 goals aim to persuade Ohio decision makers to manage Ohio’s forests for carbon storage and climate resiliency in the long-term, to defend our public lands from the degradations of mineral extraction, pipeline construction, and extensive clearcutting, and to expand public access to and acreage of high quality green space in communities across the state.

A Healthy Democracy Leads to a Healthy Environment

The OEC must be active in not only ensuring our air, land, and water are safe and healthy, but also in ensuring that the rights of Ohio’s communities are safe and healthy. The OEC does not merely advocate for a cleaner Ohio just for the sake of good policy. We advocate for our environment to protect and improve the lives of Ohioans. Furthermore, key institutions upholding Ohioans’ right to a fair and democratic system, such as voting access and competitive electoral districts, require constant stewardship by attorneys and community activists. Without a functioning and fair democracy, Ohio runs the risk of perpetuating environmental injustice, and allowing environmental protection to become a politically polarizing issue rather than a foundation in both major political parties. Thus, it only makes sense that we equally advocate for the protection and improvement of our democracy.
The OEC Democracy Program’s 2019-2022 goals aim to protect and expand voting rights to ensure every voice in Ohio is heard and to make sure that the upcoming census counts represent all Ohioans fairly. The program will also monitor and participate when redistricting takes place in 2021.
The How: Effective Tools for Climate Action

The OEC will help secure positive impacts for all Ohioans by bringing all of its tools and capacities to bear on its priority issue areas. We will activate our members and activists, meaningfully engage marginalized communities, deploy legal actions, and work in coalition with partners and community leaders to address climate change and its most significant threats to Ohioans.

Fighting Climate Change In The Courts

New safeguards for Ohioans, whether they be to protect our air, land, water, or democratic institutions, cannot succeed without consistent enforcement of the law. In the same vein, nor can communities craft creative solutions to environmental problems without legal expertise in policy and regulations. As environmental and human health implications confront Ohio, our courts stand as the final backstop against the actions, inaction, and injustices that affect all who call Ohio home. Paving the way toward a clean energy future will require defending energy efficiency and renewable energy projects before the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and the Ohio Supreme Court. Mitigating the effects of climate change will require appealing permits that look to handcuff Ohio to decades more of fossil fuels, degrade the water we drink, and scar our public lands. Addressing pollution and pollutants at the local level, especially in underserved communities, will require traditional and non-traditional partnerships with local governments, community groups, legal experts, and a new generation of public interest lawyers. In this endeavor, OEC’s Law Center and its lawyers will play a vital role.

The OEC Law Center’s 2019-2022 goals will pursue legal strategies to compel state action on climate change and hold polluters accountable to human health and safety, elevate environmental justice in leadership development efforts centered on students and legal professionals, and support local governmental actions that strengthen environmental safeguards.

Engaging Ohioans on the Issues that Matter

Change cannot take root without empowered leaders in every corner of Ohio, just as citizens cannot take action if climate change and environmental harm is not communicated in a relevant and compelling way. The OEC relies on research and testing not only to craft policy, but also to ensure we are strategically and deliberately engaging Ohioans so that their voices can be heard in the chambers of a city hall or the hearing rooms of the Statehouse.

The OEC Campaign and Communications Center’s 2019-2022 goals will develop true champions for the environment among local decision makers in order to deepen the bench of pro-environment leaders across the political spectrum, and work constructively with decision makers at all levels of government in a bipartisan way. The OEC will use tested tactics and messages to reach a wide range of Ohioans engaging in online platforms, and thoughtfully build Ohio’s environmental movement to be much bigger, more inclusive, and diverse. Additionally, the OEC will advocate for the most equitable environmental solutions through the development of regionally-based coalitions comprised of citizens and community leaders that are living the experience of environmental problems.
Going Local

Our communities and the people who live there will see irreparable harm to Ohio’s air, land, and water if we don’t address climate change. While state-level policy is critical, much of Ohio’s potential to advance large-scale environmental protections is at the local level. In fact, most of our climate action victories over the past several years have occurred in cities and counties where pragmatism and practical solutions have eclipsed partisan politics.

The OEC has built and deepened regional capacity through staff and partnerships over the past three years. We will double down on these investments by building and training local activist networks, supporting and cultivating relationships with existing local environmental champions and community leaders, and by passing policies at the local level that reduce carbon and make people’s lives better.

This local approach to organizing can lead to profound policy impacts while building up authentic, on-the-ground networks that call upon local decision makers to deliver big on protecting the environment and the health of all those who live here. Sustained and strategic organizing in each region will allow us to build large networks capable of influencing and compelling action among decision makers at all levels of government.

The OEC believes one of the best ways to make progress to address climate change and environmental problems is at the local level where leaders are less partisan and are more prone to listen to constituents who are asking for more sustainable, livable communities with permanent, clean economies.
Effective Leadership That Sustains Us

Ohio’s modern environmental movement has enjoyed a fairly successful 50 years. Landmark wins such as the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund continue to deliver better outcomes for air and water quality and land conservation. And, environmental initiatives taken on by cities and businesses have resulted in positive impacts for people and wildlife alike. But, in recent decades, policy and regulatory changes needed from decision makers to accelerate action on climate change and environmental harm have been slowed or even thwarted by hyper-partisan ideologies and unduly influential special interests.

In order to secure more permanent change, we must confront the homogeneity of Ohio’s environmental movement, its unsuccessful attempts to end environmental racism, its disconnection with historically marginalized communities, and its status as politically and electorally peripheral. This begins with a commitment to helping bring about a more “leaderfull” movement.

Leaderfull means leadership begins with people with the lived experience of the problems we seek to solve, focuses on coalitions comprised of both like-minded allies and unusual suspects, and enables the tools and roadmaps to success rather than commanding the path that must be followed. Genuine relationships that spur action require deliberate thought and cultivation. They require trust, grace, and mutual opportunity to thrive when groups of diverse interests are working respectfully with a shared goal.

The OEC has demonstrated strength as a coordinator and convenor of broad-based coalitions, and in the coming years, we will seek to amplify this capacity. While this role has allowed us to bring people together for a shared purpose to accomplish something measurable, we will focus our efforts to ensure all voices are brought to the table. The environment in Ohio will not be protected unless the unique passions and perspectives of many diverse individuals and organizations are authentically working together. And we must be intentional in building Ohio’s environmental movement to be comprised of leaders that are younger, people of color, politically diverse, and those representing a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds and skill sets.

Creating A More Leaderful Movement

A meaningful movement is not led by one person or organization. A movement radiates throughout many communities and organizations and only exists when many are leading towards societal change. Ohio’s environmental movement has many prominent people, but few leading toward big change. Over the next several years, the OEC is dedicated to developing, supporting, and making room for leaders while helping to coordinate the broadly agreed upon change we want to see in our state.
OEC’s Engagement Principles

Starting with this plan and moving into our next 50 years, the OEC will strive to create genuine relationships with our partners by adopting the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing to:

- Be inclusive;
- Emphasize bottom-up organizing;
- Let people speak for themselves;
- Work together in solidarity and mutuality;
- Build just relationships among ourselves; and
- Commit to self-transformation.

The OEC will prioritize working with partners for a shared purpose with an objective to accomplish something measurable. However, the organization also recognizes that space must be made when goals are more nebulous and results are more long-term. We will actively support staff to create space for those activities and aim to be a value-add to organizations working within and with Ohio’s environmental leaders on the ground and in coalition.

JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion)

The OEC’s mission is to protect the environment for all who call Ohio home, and one of our values is to remedy environmental injustice and meaningfully involve community stakeholders. This means everyone in our state, not just those with the most power or the loudest voices. We recognize that historically, the OEC, and the environmental movement in general, has held, and exercised, power in a way that perpetuates systemic inequality including racism and classism. As we begin our next 50 years, the OEC is making a concerted effort to reverse these trends.

The OEC is committed to working toward a just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive environmental movement, and to ensuring the OEC considers the JEDI values in all of our work moving forward — not just because it makes us stronger — but because our mission is to make sure that all Ohioans can thrive here. We are committed to building partnerships with underserved communities and underconnected organizations across the state to find new ways to exchange knowledge and share power.
This kind of change will not happen overnight, and not without significant effort. That’s why we are taking a variety of approaches to more fully incorporate a JEDI lens into our work. The OEC’s 2019-2022 goals to advance JEDI are to ensure 100% of our staff and board receive at least one training a year, offer outside trainings to the movement and partners, establish a permanent internal committee to infuse our values into every aspect of the organization and guide our work, and to establish a fund to support environmental justice organizations working to advance environmental protections in communities.

Emerging Leaders To Power The Next Generation

The OEC Emerging Leaders program was created to fulfill a need in the Central Ohio community: a place for the next generation of environmental champions to come together to connect, learn, and grow as leaders in the movement. In less than a year, the program’s email list grew to 200 people, and now approaches 300 subscribers. Emerging Leaders have engaged digitally, donated and held Facebook fundraisers, learned advocacy skills, and connected with like-minded peers and OEC staff with concrete results. This type of engagement is working to make complex environmental issues more tangible, and provides resources for members who want to create change in their everyday lives.

Currently, the Emerging Leaders are preparing to induct their first cohort of the Emerging Leaders Council. This leadership program will help to make the movement truly sustainable by preparing future leaders in the present, expanding access to the environmental movement, and providing space for members to learn and grow — all under the umbrella of the OEC’s mission. This program will help to ensure that there is a diverse, knowledgeable, skilled bench of environmental champions who are prepared to train the next generation for years to come.

The Emerging Leaders 2019-2022 goals include increasing engagement and expanding the network of young professionals in Central Ohio participating in Emerging Leaders, launching an Emerging Leaders Council to train and equip a cohort to help lead the program, and preparing and mobilizing the next generation of environmental champions to demand action to reduce carbon pollution.

Internship program

The OEC will continue its robust internship program to partner with bright individuals to help them learn more about the environmental movement and what the OEC is doing to protect our planet. These individuals work alongside OEC staff on various tasks ranging from database entry to research to environmental best practices. We invest in and train these young leaders not only on how to engage in the environmental movement, but how to embody our values of pragmatism, transparency, and justice. Our ultimate goal is to lay the foundation for these leaders to take on career paths where they can carry on these values. The OEC will endeavor to live into our values by seeking funding to financially support interns working with the organization to protect the environment. This will help ensure that a diverse pool of candidates has opportunities to participate in this high quality program regardless of financial status.
Conclusion

As part of this Strategic Plan Update, the OEC staff and Board engaged in conversations to reconfirm and update, if needed, its Mission, vision, values (Appendix A) statement.

For more information on the OEC’s programmatic objectives and to better understand how the OEC will measure its progress towards achieving its environmental goals, please see our organizational Logic Models (Appendix B - available upon request) for Energy, Natural Resources, Law Center, Campaigns and Communications, Emerging Leaders and Democracy initiatives.

Communities, business sectors, and people are already experiencing the impacts of climate change in Ohio. In recent years, updated scientific studies have brought these impacts into greater focus. Because of the urgency to address this global problem, we make the Case for Making Climate Change the Center (Appendix C) of our work here in Ohio.