

# THE RUTH BANCROFT GARDEN AND NURSERY

## Strategic Plan 2026-2028

Adopted by Board of Directors: December 17, 2025

*Last Revised:*

### ***Purpose Statement:***

Founded in 1972, The Ruth Bancroft Garden (Garden) is a pioneering dry garden located in Walnut Creek, California. Our programs serve over 14,000 students annually and attract more than 70,000 visitors each year. Stakeholders include members, donors, volunteers, educators, students, general public, and public garden professionals. The Ruth Bancroft Garden houses a unique and diverse collection of cacti, succulents and drought-tolerant plants from around the world. We are a nonprofit, member supported organization nestled in the suburbs of the San Francisco East Bay. The Garden itself is the foremost example of garden design with climate-resilient plants. Consequently, it is known as one of the finest dry gardens in the world. The Garden displays an expansive collection of plants that Ruth Bancroft collected over 60 years.

### ***Key Areas of the Organization:***

The organization is governed by a Board of Directors of up to 21 members, an Executive Director, 20 full time staff, plus part time and seasonal staff. The Garden has a corp of volunteers that range from 100 to 150 people, 4,100 members, and a broad range of donors supporting the organization. Departments include Administration, Development & Membership, Garden Operations, Nursery, Volunteer & Education, Marketing, Landscape Design Services, and Events. See Appendix B for more on the organizational framework.

### ***Mission:***

***The Garden's mission is to preserve, promote, and enhance Ruth Bancroft's world-class collection of water-conserving plants displayed in her exceptionally designed garden for the education, inspiration, and enjoyment of the public.***

### ***Vision:***

The Ruth Bancroft Garden envisions a future where we are a leader in climate-resilient gardening through education, community engagement, and environmental stewardship. We aim to inspire and empower individuals through outreach, celebration, and the preservation of this historic Garden.

### ***Values:***

- We believe in the importance of preserving and developing the Ruth Bancroft Garden & Nursery as a world-renowned example of the environmental benefits of climate resilient plants and garden design.
- We believe that education is the foundation of what we deliver to members, businesses, and the public.

- We believe in environmental conservation as a public value, and we demonstrate the importance of climate resilience through all our activities.
- We believe in the importance of providing a natural and welcoming botanical sanctuary in a dense, thriving urban community of five million people.
- We believe in building a place for both private and public celebrations as well as opportunities for learning and personal respite for everyone.
- We believe in being an inclusive space that encourages equity and diversity among staff, board members, visitors, members, vendors, volunteers, and the public.

## **FOUR GOALS FOR THE 2026 – 2028 STRATEGIC PLAN:**

### **Goal #1: GARDEN**

We are dedicated to preserving and enhancing the historical garden. To maintain, promote, and enrich Ruth Bancroft’s world-class collection of water-conserving plants, we will pursue the following objectives in support of this goal.

- 1.1 Improve and redevelop specific garden beds throughout the garden consistent with The Garden Bed Renovation Plan. funded through a combination of Garden Preservation Funds, grants, and other funds.
  - 1.1.1 The Garden Committee shall review the progress of bed projects at their bimonthly meetings and recommend adjustment to the Board of Directors.
- 1.2 Bring the accessioning process of the garden current within a three-year schedule.
- 1.3 Continue development of the histories of the beds throughout the garden.
- 1.4 Complete development of Garden Management Plans within the three-year Strategic Plan.
- 1.5 Improve the infrastructure of the garden “proper” (behind the wall) and ancillary facilities.
  - 1.5.1 Perform Repairs to stabilize Ruth’s Folly.
  - 1.5.2 Perform cosmetic repairs to the east and west shade houses.
  - 1.5.3 Relocate or replace the fountain and fireplace at visitor center patio.
- 1.6 Perform infrastructure improvements through grants and donations.
  - 1.6.1 Improve the entrance areas for garden admissions and nursery facilities.

- 1.6.2 Expand existing parking lot and establish exit onto Drayton way.
- 1.6.3 Explore the feasibility of a rainwater collection system at the visitor center.
- 1.7 Develop a long-term plan to perform major infrastructure improvement under specific capital campaigns.
  - 1.7.1 Rebuild/replace Ruth's Folly consistent with historical nature of the structure.
  - 1.7.2 Rebuild/replace east and west shade houses consistent with historical nature of the structures.
- 1.8 Develop an ex-situ conservation plan for rare and endangered plants in the collection for the preservation of plants that no longer exist in their native habitat or are near extinction.

**Goal #2: PUBLIC**

At the Ruth Bancroft Garden, we ensure a welcoming and educational experience by serving a diverse audience and fostering the public's connection to the Garden.

- 2.1 Enhance the membership experience and create opportunities for membership engagement.
  - 2.1.1 Ensure membership benefits align with the value of the membership; implement feasible suggestions from member surveys.
  - 2.1.2 Offer member-only events at a variety of dates and times to a variety of member demographics.
- 2.2 Continue to establish RBG as a garden destination in the Bay Area.
  - 2.2.1 Continue to expand outreach to local civic groups and businesses, to increase visitors and volunteers at the Garden.
  - 2.2.2 Maintain and foster additional relationships with local businesses, community cultural organizations, and nonprofits through community day events at the Garden.
- 2.3 Continue to provide education to the public around dry gardens and climate resiliency.
  - 2.3.1 Expand our online presence to provide more education and information regarding plants and gardens that are climate resilient.
  - 2.3.2 Maintain education efforts geared towards children's programs and offerings.
  - 2.3.3 Create a library of past webinar classes, new webinar classes, and educational lectures that can be accessed digitally, potentially to generate revenue to help further support the Garden.

- 2.3.4 Strengthen public engagement regarding climate change and biodiversity through social media, onsite experiences, speaker series, and volunteer opportunities.
- 2.3.5 Utilize volunteers to expand educational offerings to garden guests.
- 2.4 Promote landscape design services to local businesses to increase RBG waterwise garden installations in publicly visible spaces.
- 2.5 Continue to explore partnerships with organizations working with underserved populations and develop programs that reflect and respond to a diversity of audiences.
- 2.6 Leverage our interpretive themes that strengthen our educational messaging.

### **Goal #3: FINANCE**

Create a stable financial environment by ensuring long-term financial sustainability.

- 3.1 Create reliable and stable revenue by building an engaged membership base that provides consistent growth and long-term commitment.
- 3.2 Increase awareness of the Garden's value in our community to attract new supporters, donors, and collaborators.
- 3.3 Equip board members with the knowledge, skills, and tools to actively support fundraising efforts and serve as strong financial stewards and advocates.
  - 3.3.1 Quarterly or semiannual trainings.
- 3.4 Improve systems to create efficiency and enhance revenue generation.
- 3.5 Grow membership, fundraising, corporate and foundation support, and earned income.
  - 3.5.1 Conduct three major fundraising and revenue generating events per year including Gala, Sculpture Show, and Garden of D'Lights.
  - 3.5.2 Conduct the Golden Barrel fund raising appeal each year.
- 3.6 Grow earned income through existing enterprise departments.
- 3.7 Consistently encourage financial literacy among staff regarding the organization's finances.

- 3.8 Develop an investment policy and work toward the establishment of an endowment fund that supports reserve funding and long-term financial security of the organization.

#### **Goal #4: CULTURE**

Enhance staff, board and volunteer leadership, continuity, and development for organizational stability.

- 4.1 Recruit, retain and develop staff, board members, and volunteers.
  - 4.1.1 Provide resources and opportunities for staff development.
  - 4.1.2 Provide board training in fundraising, leadership, and nonprofit governance.
  - 4.1.3 Continue training and learning opportunities for all volunteers.
  - 4.1.4 Develop succession plans for staff, board members, and volunteers.
- 4.2 Enhance the role of staff, board members, and volunteers, as ambassadors to the public, promoting awareness of the value of RBG.
- 4.3 Continue to recognize the value of donors and volunteers through collaborative participation.
- 4.4 Enhance collaboration among staff, volunteers, and board members.
  - 4.4.1 Schedule periodic social events and collaborative projects.
- 4.5 Develop a Ruth Bancroft Garden Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Plan during the three-year Strategic Plan for the Board of Directors consideration.
- 4.6 Expand leadership in climate resilient gardening.
  - 4.6.1 Seek opportunities for board members or staff to speak at community groups and public events.
  - 4.6.2 Develop a list of board members, staff, and volunteers who are comfortable with public speaking and attend events on behalf of RBG, and serve as ambassadors to the public, promoting awareness of the value of RBG.
- 4.7 The Executive Board acting as the Strategic Plan Committee shall prepare an annual status report on the Strategic Plan by the end of each calendar year and may recommend updates and changes for consideration by the Board of Directors.

## **APPENDIX A: Implementation Plan**

### **2026**

#### **Goal 1:**

- Implement year 2026 of The Garden Bed Renovation Plan.
- Bring plant accessioning process current and establish procedure for routine updating of accessioned plants.
- Implement a Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping of key plants throughout the garden.
- Complete written narrative histories of beds 1-12, Yucca Flat.
- Complete comprehensive mapping of garden irrigation systems.
- Perform repairs to stabilize Ruth's Folly.
- Rebuild garden fence along east side of the property and around the agave garden area.
- Develop ex-situ conservation plan.
- Consider Bed 12 or other Bed renovation(s) for a 2026 Stanley Smith Foundation Grant application.

#### **Goal 2:**

- Host at least 6 member events in addition to member coffees.
- Establish 3 sets of webinars online.
- Offer one mission-related nonprofit free event (per calendar year).
- Create one lecture or webinar related to biodiversity and climate change.

#### **Goal 3:**

- Establish a board training program that includes introduction to the components of the organization's financial systems and revenue streams.
- Implement our Sponsorship program.
- Develop strategies to promote the Botanical Circle.
- Establish investment policy and Endowment Fund.

#### **Goal 4:**

- Develop a joint Board-Staff-Volunteer task force to develop a DEI Plan.

### **2027**

#### **Goal 1:**

- Implement year 2027 of the Garden Bed Renovation Plan.
- Complete Written Narrative Histories of Beds A-L, Pool.
- Complete Tree Succession Plan.
- Explore funding options for the development of the entrance areas for garden admissions and nursery facilities.
- Expand existing parking lot and establish an exit onto Drayton Way.
- Perform cosmetic repairs to the East and West Shade Houses.
- Complete the Brian Kemble oral history.

- Explore the feasibility of implementing Garden Explorer app using Iris BG data.

**Goal 2:**

- Host 8 Member events in addition to member coffees.
- Establish 3 additional sets of webinars online.
- Offer one mission-related nonprofit a free event (per calendar year).
- Establish the Ruth Bancroft Garden Landscape Design Services as more than a residential landscape design service but to also include HOA's and commercial properties.

**Goal 3:**

- Secure at least 2 new sponsorships.

**Goal 4:**

- Present DEI Plan to Board of Directors to consider for adoption.

## **2028**

**Goal 1:**

- Implement year 2028 of the Garden Bed Renovation Plan.
- Complete written narrative histories of Beds M-T, EB5, South Berm.
- Replace or remodel fountain at Visitor Center Patio.
- Rebuild/Replace Ruth's Folly consistent with historical nature of the structure.
- Rebuild/Replace East and West Shade Houses consistent with historical nature of the structures.
- Conduct feasibility study for a rainwater collection system at the Visitor Center.

**Goal 2:**

- Hold 10 Member events in addition to member coffees.
- Establish 3 additional sets of webinars online.
- Offer one mission-related nonprofit a free event (per calendar year).
- Utilize either IrisBG and/or other data sources to provide public access to RBG plant information through the web or other access points.

**Goal 3:**

- Secure at least 3 new sponsorships.

**Goal 4:**

- Implement Board Adopted DEI Plan.

## **APPENDIX B: HISTORIC FRAMEWORK OF THE RUTH BANCROFT GARDEN**

*Note: The following is a brief overview of events that shaped the Ruth Bancroft Garden as a nonprofit organization and the framework that influenced its growth. It is not intended as a complete historical review of the Garden. Please consult the website and various oral histories for more complete historical information.*

### **1972-1991**

- Ruth Bancroft, with the assistance of Lester Hawkins, makes initial layout and plantings in the garden, drawing upon her extensive collection of cacti and succulents, covering approximately one-quarter of the garden's current size.
- Two shade houses and "Ruth's" Folly built of wood construction establishing significant architectural features in the garden that ultimately represent a strong branding image of the Ruth Bancroft Garden.
- Brian Kemble joins Ruth as greenhouse collections manager and begins to assist in the expansion of the garden both in size and scope of its plantings.
- Continued development of the garden's size to approximately three-quarters of its current size.

### **1992-2013**

- Ruth Bancroft Garden was established as the first Preservation Garden under the then newly created Garden Conservancy and incorporates as a non-profit public garden with a 21-member Board of Directors. Richard Turner has been appointed the first Executive Director.
- Board of Directors consists of 18 members at large, plus one member appointed by the Garden Conservancy, and two members representing the Bancroft family for up to a total of 21 members.
- Friends and other volunteers begin to assist Ruth with upkeep of her unique garden.
- Expansion of the garden includes an area for California natives growing to its current size of 3.5 acres.
- Concerts in the garden, docent-led tours, and the annual sculpture show offered to introduce a broader cross section of the gardening (and non-gardening) public to this previously secret private garden.

### **2013-2019**

- Campaign began to raise funds for a permanent Visitor's and Education Center.
- Ruth Bancroft dies at 109 years old in 2017.
- Construction of Visitor's Center, reconstruction of parking area and expansion of retail nursery operations and entrance kiosk and plaza.

- Opening of the new Coit Family Education and Visitor's Center and the initial presentation of the annual holiday Garden D'Lights event, which evolves into the Garden's largest annual revenue generating event.

## **2020-2022**

- Facilitated by the new Visitor and Education Center, the Garden enters a period of significant expansion of services including paid professional staff to support landscape design services, public and private events, wider educational offerings, children's programs, marketing, development, membership, and office management.
- Dramatic increase in visitors to the Garden and membership in response to Covid pandemic.
- Initiated development of comprehensive narrative and pictorial histories of all Garden beds as reference information concerning the preservation of the Garden.
- Reconstruction of Shade Structure and Bed 6 plantings to enhance presentation and protection of many of the most fragile plantings in the Garden.
- Instituted new point of sale (POS) system to enhance Nursery operations and data collection regarding inventory. New database management system is acquired to manage data collection for donor stewardship and membership.

## **2023-2024**

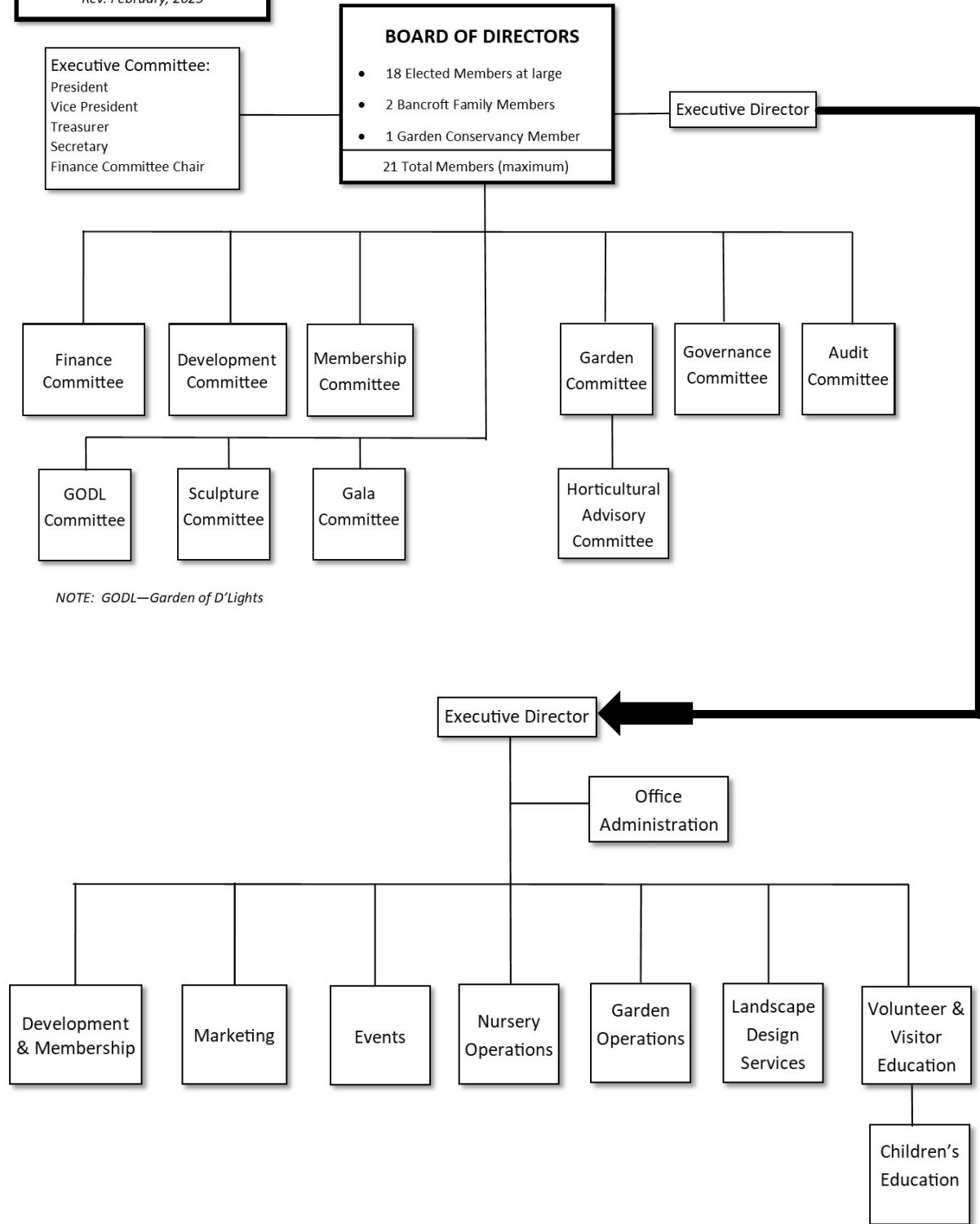
- Efforts within the Garden proper focused on enhancing the presentation of a growing palette of climate resistant plants, upgrading the Curator's greenhouse and improvements to the Garden's pathways.
- Developed a more comprehensive and robust accounting system which provides data and insight into operational profitability.
- Adjustments to scope of services offered to visitors, members and the public in response to declining admissions, members, and donors in post-pandemic environment.
- The organization restructures into a streamlined efficient and lean staffing model, clarifies Board of Director roles, and stronger administrative controls.

## **2025**

- Successfully achieved a level of financial stability and sustainability with a balance of contributed and earned income sources and operational expenses.
- Made considerable progress in reinvigorating the process of accessioning the entire collection of plants within the Garden
- Expanded advertising, marketing, and Garden website to provide improved communication with our growing community of members and supporters.

# THE RUTH BANCROFT GARDEN AND NURSERY ORGANIZATION – 2025

**The Ruth Bancroft Garden  
Organization Chart**  
*Rev. February, 2025*



## APPENDIX C: 2026-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN CHRONOLOGY

### 2025

1. **January:** Staff secured the pro-bono services of The Non-Profit Consulting Group (NPCG) to develop the initial phase of Board and staff input gathering and data review. Executive Committee of the Board of Directors is established as the Strategic Plan Committee (SPC).
2. **February:** Document collection including recent budget, organizational chart, previous strategic plan.
3. **February:** Detailed review and status report of previous 2022-2025 Strategic Plan conducted by the Executive Director and Board President for NPCG.
4. **March:** Two separate and independent surveys conducted by NPCG of the members of the board and the staff managers. Review and objective analysis of the surveys provided by NPCG.
5. **April:** Summarized data provided in separate presentations to the full board and to the staff managers.
6. **May:** Board of Directors hold off-site retreat, which includes breakout sessions to discuss eight (8) major topics generated from the March surveys.
7. **June:** Board of Directors hold follow up task force meetings to discuss additional survey major topics not covered during retreat.
8. **July:** First joint SPC and staff team meeting. Staff team includes Marketing Manager, Development and Membership Manager, Volunteer and Education Manager, and Curator. Group conducts SWOT analysis of existing conditions and groups major topics into potential goals.
9. **July:** All RBG staff managers are asked to provide comments on all eight (8) major topics of the March surveys.
10. **August:** Membership and Volunteer surveys are sent out to help inform the strategic plan development process.
11. **August:** Joint SPC and Staff Team reconvene to incorporate Board and staff comments and member/volunteer survey responses into a Draft Strategic Plan.
12. **October:** SPC issues Draft 2026-2028 Strategic Plan for review by the full Board of Directors and the full staff.
13. **December 17, 2025:** Board of Directors adopt the 2026-2028 Strategic Plan.

### SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

1. Review of 2022-25 Strategic Plan
2. Board of Directors Strategic Planning Survey Results
3. Management Staff Strategic Planning Survey Results
4. Board of Directors Breakout and Task Force Summaries of 8 Focus Topics
5. SPC and Staff SWOT Analysis and July 28 Meeting Notes
6. Management Staff Comments on 8 Focus Topics
7. Membership Survey Responses
8. Volunteer Survey Responses