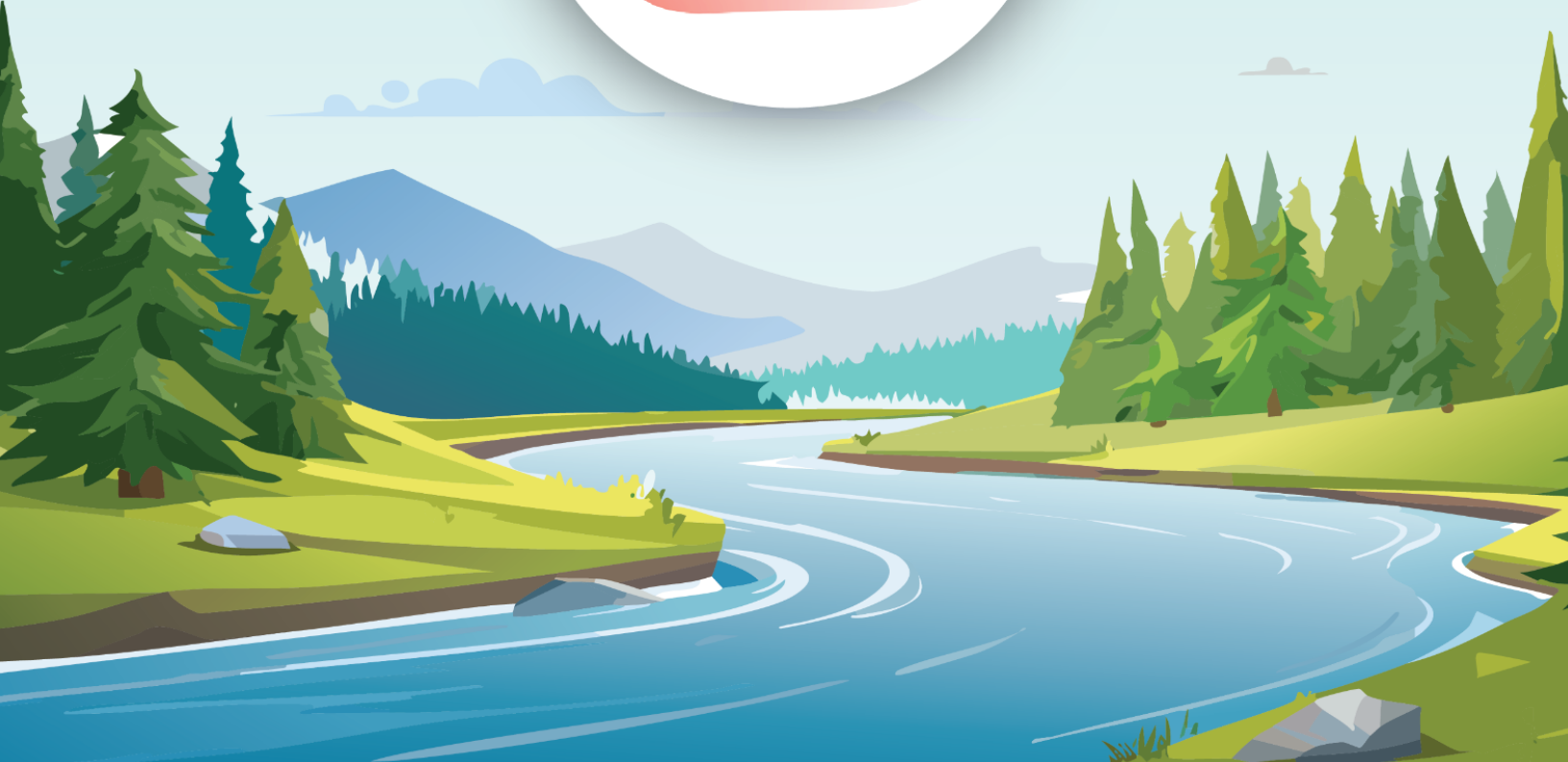


Ākālā Outdoor Education Society

2025-2035 Strategic Plan

August 2025



Ak̕ala Outdoor Education Society 2025-2035 Strategic Plan

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Glossary

<u>A</u>wi’nagwis	Land and waters
<u>A</u>wi’nakola	Our territory
G̓algap̓ola	Pulling together
May̓a’x̓ala	This word does not have an English language counterpart, but it is akin to concepts of respect and reciprocity.
Mu’la	To be grateful
’N̓amwiyut	We are of one family. This includes brothers, sisters, cousins, and any member of the extended family unit of the same generation as oneself.
Sinat	To follow in the purpose, plans, and reasons our ancestors set forth.
Łaxw̓ala	Love
Łok’wimas	Strength



1. Introduction

We, the Ākālā Outdoor Education Society (Ākālā), are a Musgamakw Dzawadā'enuxw-led¹ organization dedicated to providing land-based education that nurtures the mental, physical, cultural, and emotional wellness of our people. Ākālā creates inclusive, culturally grounded spaces for K̓wikw̓sutinux̌-Hax̌'wamis, Gwawa'enuxw, and Dzawadā'enuxw citizens to connect with ̓wi'nakola. We recognize that not all Musgamakw Dzawadā'enuxw have equal access to resources and knowledge, and we are committed to bridging these gaps through programs that honour culture, connection, and intergenerational learning.

In the Spring of 2025, our staff and Board of Directors came together to begin developing the *Ākālā Outdoor Education Society 2025-2035 Strategic Plan* (Strategic Plan). This Strategic Plan represents our collective vision and outlines a holistic, comprehensive, and coordinated approach to achieving our shared aspirations.



¹ The Musgamagw Dzawadā'enuxw represent a longstanding traditional alliance among four Nations: Gwawa'enuxw (Hopetown), Kwickwasut'inuxw (Gilford), Haxwa'mis (Wakeman) and Dzawadā'enuxw (Kingcome).



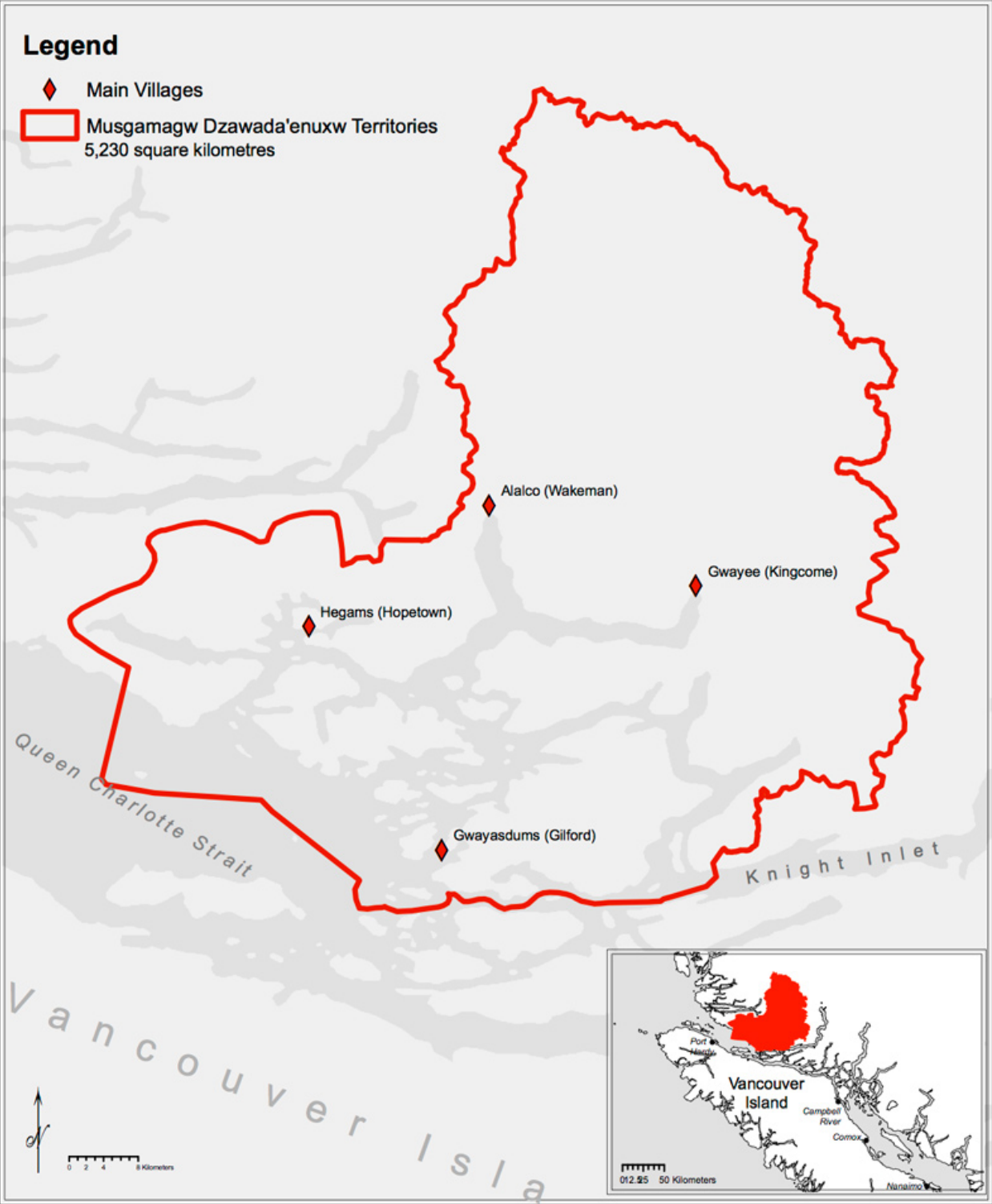


Figure 1: Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw Traditional Territory (Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw Tribal Council, n.d.)



1.1. Purpose of This Plan

This Strategic Plan underscores our unwavering commitment to supporting Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw in outdoor education and connection to a̓wi'nakola. It is a comprehensive framework that will guide the development and delivery of educational programs for Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw. This plan ensures that our actions align with our core values and vision for the future, propelling us toward our desired outcome. It empowers Ak̓ala leadership to effectively guide staff and deliver impactful programs by establishing clear and attainable goals and objectives. Adopting this proactive approach will significantly enhance accountability among our team, leadership, and collaborators. It reflects the unique needs, challenges, and goals of Ak̓ala programs and initiatives, focusing on improving connections to a̓wi'nakola, educational experiences, and outcomes for all Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw.

1.2. How We Charted the Course – Strategic Planning Process

To develop this Strategic Plan, Ak̓ala's Board of Directors and staff engaged in a collaborative planning process that included a survey and a series of virtual and in-person meetings, as outlined in Table 1. These sessions created meaningful opportunities for connection, reflection, and shared learning and were central to shaping the direction of this plan. The resulting Strategic Plan reflects the collective insights, experiences, and ideas shared throughout these discussions.

In preparation for this work, the project team reviewed a range of internal reports, policies, and meeting notes to ensure alignment with Ak̓ala's overall goals and priorities. To further inform the planning process, materials from other outdoor education organizations were also examined. Together, these background documents provided valuable context and direction for the planning process. Some of the key documents reviewed included:

- 2020-2024 Community Feedback
- 2024 Impact Report
- 2023 Impact Report
- 2020-2024 Annual General Meeting Notes
- 2020 Strategic Planning Session Notes



Table 1. Strategic planning process overview

Event	Focus
Virtual Board Meeting 1: Project Kick-off	The first meeting focused on introducing the project and team to the Board of Directors and providing an overview of what could be expected through the strategic planning project.
Virtual Board Meeting 2: Introduction to Strategic Thinking and Planning	The second meeting provided an overview of strategic planning and thinking to establish a shared foundation among participants. The group discussed the background review, previewed the upcoming in-person workshop agenda, and was introduced to the concept of a SWOT ² analysis.
SWOT Analysis Survey: Where Are We Now?	Our Board of Directors and staff were invited to complete an anonymous SWOT analysis survey to share their perspectives on the organization's current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A total of ten responses were received.
In-person Workshop: Where Are We Going?	The third meeting brought our Board of Directors and staff together for an intensive two-day in-person workshop focused on collaboratively developing our Strategic Plan. Participants worked together to update the organization's mission and create a shared vision, guiding principles, strategic goals, S.M.A.R.T. objectives, ³ and actions. The workshop was held in Bamfield, British Columbia, at the Pacific Sounds Lodge.

² A SWOT analysis focuses on identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

³ S.M.A.R.T. Objectives are: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound.



2. Laying the Groundwork

2.1. Our Journey So Far

Beginning with just two summer programs in 2019, our organization has experienced steady and meaningful growth over the past six years. In 2020, we quickly adapted to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and global lockdown, shifting our work online to continue supporting our communities. This included launching virtual gatherings and establishing a youth network that helped maintain connections and engagement during a challenging time. Since then, we have expanded our reach and deepened our impact, growing from two initial programs to offering more than ten community programs and events, which are highlighted in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Programs and events from 2019 to 2024

Year	Programs and Events Offered
2019	• Youth Leadership Paddling Program, offered in partnership with Sea to Cedar⁴ • Taxila, Creating a Path, trail building program, offered in partnership with the Nawalakw Healing Society⁵ • Community Outreach: Community Engagement Road Show
2020	• Virtual Youth Network, offered in partnership with Sea to Cedar • Virtual Community Gatherings focused on singing, beading and game nights • Virtual Stories from the Land through audio recording and augmented reality
2021	• Lilawagila Outdoor Education Program, offered in partnership with Lilawagila School⁶ • Youth Leadership Paddle Program offered in partnership with Sea to Cedar • Community Outreach: Sports Day in Ukwānalis

⁴ Sea to Cedar is an organization made up of community members and conservation scientists with coastal roots and focuses on place-based programs for healthy ecosystems and communities. More information on their organization can be found on their website at <https://www.seatocedar.org/>

⁵ Nawalakw Healing Society is an organization who is a well-rounded social venture in the Kwakwaka'wakw Territory. Envisioned as a dual-purpose, world-class eco-tourism lodge on the Hada River estuary during the summer, the project will deliver traditional healing programs and teachings in all aspects of the Kwakwaka'wakw language and culture for the balance of the year, largely sustained by profits from the Nawalakw Lodge and Healing Village to fund programming. More information on their organization can be found on their website at <https://nawalakw.com/>

⁶ The vision of Lilawagila School is to teach, model and share the traditional laws and values with their students, staff, parents and community through sound academic and cultural practices.



Year	Programs and Events Offered
	• Policy Development with Alderhill (now Sanala Planning)
2022	• Youth Leadership Paddle Program offered solely by Ākālā • Lilawagila Outdoor Education Program, offered in partnership with Lilawagila School
2023	• Women and Gender Diverse Canoe Journey • Youth Leadership Paddle Program (Thrill) • Youth Leadership Paddle Program (Chill) • Lilawagila Outdoor Education Program offered in partnership with Lilawagila School • Community Outreach: Movie Nights
2024	• Women and Gender Diverse Canoe Journey • Youth Leadership Paddle Program (Thrill) • Youth Leadership Paddle Program (Chill) • Lilawagila Outdoor Education Program offered in partnership with Lilawagila School • Skill Development and Certification: Introduction to Moving Water Canoe Skills (Paddle Canada)⁷ • Skill Development: Intermediate Big Canoe Skills (Paddle Canada) • Instructor Development and Certification: Wilderness Camping Skills & Intro Tandem Lake Canoe Skills (Paddle Canada) • Community Outreach: Paddle Reunion • Community Outreach: Walking Tree Tour Stanley Park, hosted by Talaysay⁸

⁷Paddle Canada is a not-for-profit organization and the national association for recreational paddling in Canada. It sets standards for instruction and certification in recreational canoeing, kayaking, and stand-up paddling. Paddle Canada certifications are nationally accredited and internationally recognized. More information on their organization can be found on their website at <https://paddlecanada.com/>

⁸ Founded in 2002, Talaysay Tours is owned and operated by Candace and Larry Campo, Shíshálh (Sechelt) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) Nation members. More information on their organization can be found on their website at <https://www.talaysay.com/>



2.2. Who We Are Today – A Snapshot of the Organization

Currently, Akala is guided by a volunteer Board of Directors that provides direction and oversight for the organization. The Board is supported by a manager who supervises a bookkeeper, a program coordinator, and program instructors. Figure 2 below outlines the current organizational structure, as well as anticipated future changes.

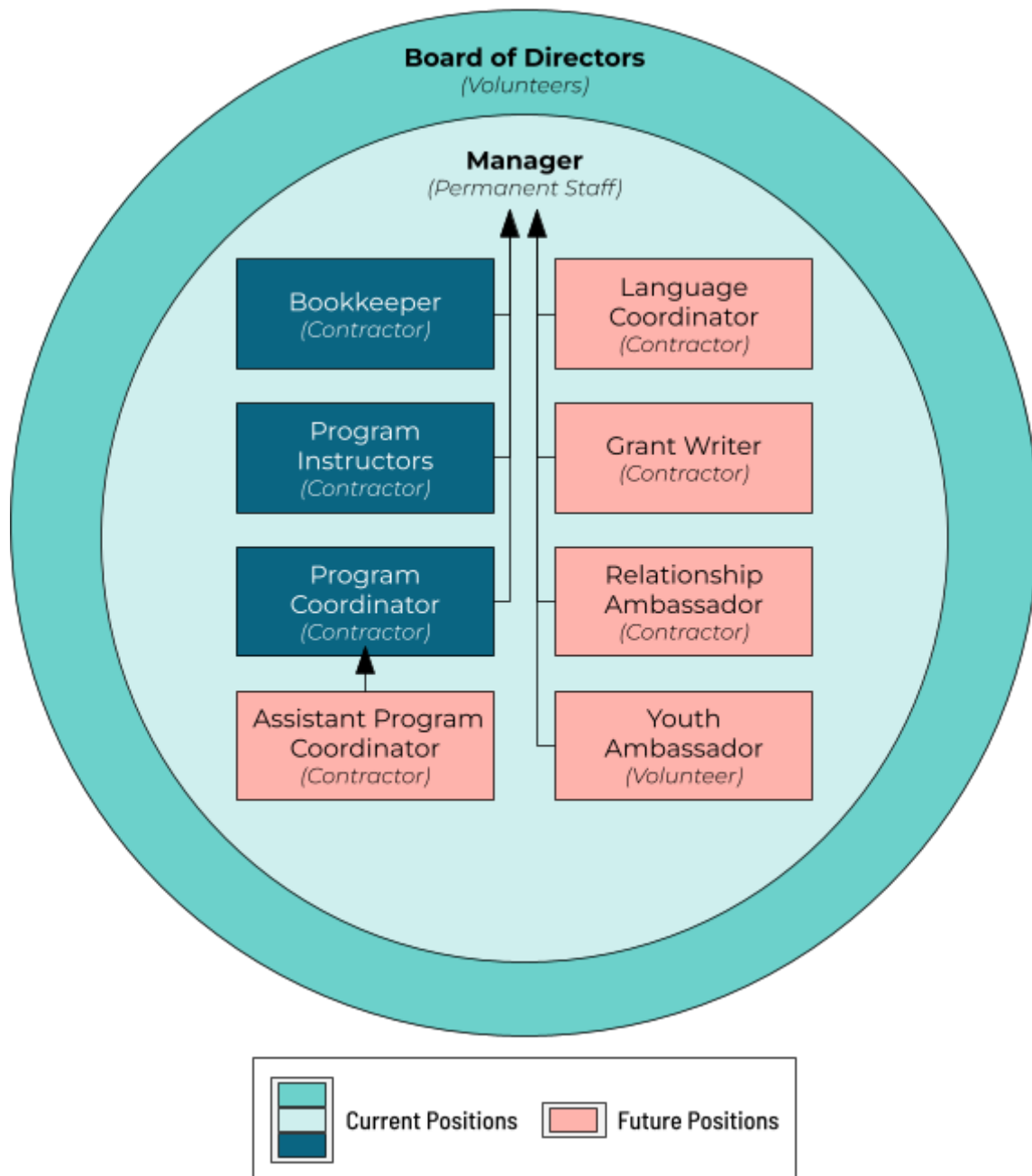


Figure 2. Current and anticipated organizational structure



In 2025, Akqala has focused on offering seven programs and events, including:

- Women and Gender Diverse Canoe Journey
- Youth Leadership Paddle Program (Thrill)
- Youth Leadership Paddle Program (Chill)
- Skill Development and Certification: Introduction to Moving Water Canoe Skills (Paddle Canada)
- Instructor Development and Certification: Lakewater Instructor (Paddle Canada)
- Instructor Development and Certification: Advanced Coastal Canoe Skills (Paddle Canada)
- Community Engagement: Film premiere

2.3. Facing the Winds of Change – Our SWOT and SOAR Analysis

As part of the strategic planning process, our Board of Directors and staff were asked to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the organization through an anonymous SWOT analysis survey (as noted in Table 1). This process helped us better understand what we should continue doing, potential opportunities for the future, and the areas that need improvement and greater focus.

A SWOT analysis is a tool that helps us reflect on both internal and external factors that impact our work. This analysis focuses on:

- **Internal factors** (things we have control over):
 - **Strengths** – areas the organization excels or is already performing well (e.g., strong cultural foundations)
 - **Weaknesses** – areas where the organization could improve (e.g., limited staff capacity)
- **External factors** (things outside our direct control but may be influenced):
 - **Opportunities** – trends or events that could benefit or be leveraged by the organization (e.g., new funding sources)
 - **Threats** – trends or events that could harm or hinder the organization (e.g., global warming and environmental changes)



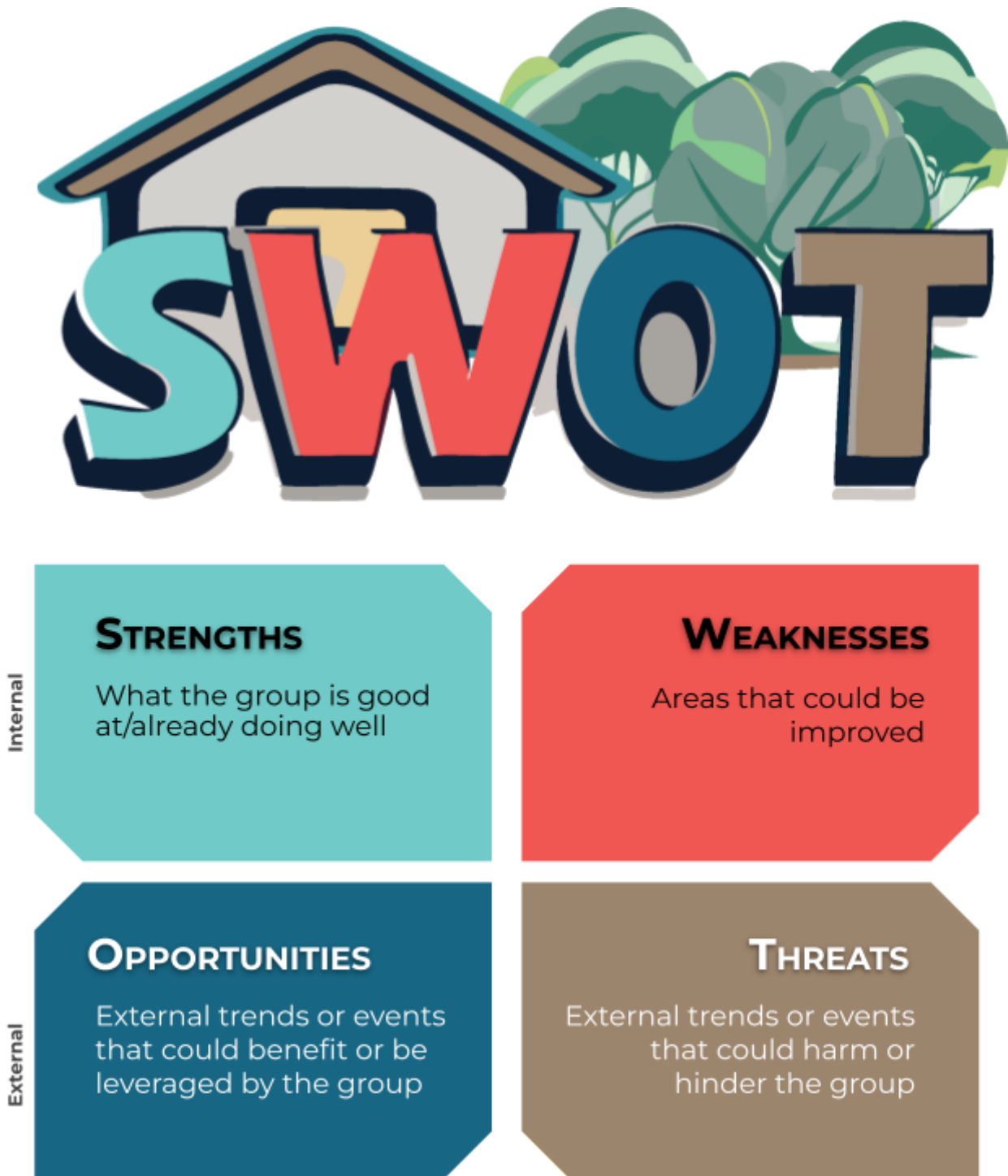


Figure 3: SWOT analysis overview

Tables 3-6 below summarize the discussion for each area of the SWOT analysis, organized by theme.



Table 3: Strengths identified through the 2025 strategic planning process

STRENGTHS	
Theme	Descriptions
Programs and Impact	• We offer diverse, inclusive, and culturally relevant youth programs. • We deliver impactful, meaningful outdoor education and healing experiences. • Our programs prioritize land and water connection, identity development, and leadership training. • Our long canoe expeditions and intergenerational trips create unique leadership and bonding opportunities. • We teach practical skills (e.g. paddling, knots, navigation). • We provide training and certifications (e.g. wilderness first aid, canoeing). • Our rain-or-shine approach builds resilience and self-confidence. • We provide real-life challenges that foster growth. • Our initiatives, like the Canoe Reunion and intergenerational programs, demonstrate ongoing innovation. • We help participants build tangible connections to land and culture. • We bring people back to awi'nakola, often for the first time. • We create safe, welcoming, and fun spaces for youth to be themselves. • Our programs inspire pride, healing, and a sense of belonging.



STRENGTHS	
Theme	Descriptions
Cultural Strengths	• We have a strong cultural foundation rooted in Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw identity. • We incorporate language teaching into our programs, including the inclusion of Bakwānla language teachers on trips. • We create a connection to traditional territories, lands, and waters. • We build cultural pride and connection in participants. • We are Indigenous-run and values-based. • We have Elder involvement in programs and on the Board of Directors.
People and Leadership	• We have committed, passionate, and skilled staff and instructors. • Our staff bring more than just outdoor education; they also bring life experiences, language, and culture. • The manager's leadership is recognized for its deep care for both staff and participants. • We have a strong, caring, and dedicated Board of Directors. • Our former youth participants have gone on to become instructors. • We are responsive to community needs and input. • We focus on empowering youth and providing leadership training.



STRENGTHS	
Theme	Descriptions
Community and Relationships	• We have strong relationships with Dzawada'enuxw First Nation, Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis, Nawalakw, and other organizations. • We have an open, inclusive, and forward-thinking approach. • We include all Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw people. • We focus on community unity and reducing barriers to participation. • Our outreach extends beyond Ɂwi'nakola (e.g., Vancouver events). • We are trusted by parents, youth, and community partners.
Resources and Infrastructure	• We own high-quality, seasonal gear and equipment. • We provide transportation, food, and camping items to participants in our programs. • We have minimal staff but high output. We are efficient and not administration-heavy. • We have access to a large and diverse Ɂwi'nakola. • We are knowledgeable about the history of each place we visit. • Apprenticeship opportunities support the sustainability of our programs.
Recognition and Results	• We support a noticeable increase in youth self-esteem and leadership. • Our participants return year after year. • Our programs deliver immediate and visible impact. • We are recognized as one of the few organizations in the region that focuses on youth and outdoor healing. • Our community is proud of the growth and increasing demand for Akala's offerings.



Table 4: Weaknesses/challenges identified through the 2025 strategic planning process

WEAKNESSES / CHALLENGES	
Theme	Descriptions
Leadership and Organizational Structure	• Our manager lacks formal training or experience in management. • Without improved management skills and structure, the organization risks stunted growth. • We lack formalized and consistent Board training. • We lack clarity around Board member roles (e.g., the role of the president, vice president, etc.). • New Board members can feel unsure or underprepared when stepping into the role. • There can be difficulty scheduling Board meetings that work for all members. • We do not have established human resources policies, financial policies, organizational policies, employer guidelines, contracts, or waivers in place. • The organization is still learning how to function as a society, which creates vulnerability. • There is a challenge in developing future leadership internally. We require more inclusion of participants as potential future staff.



WEAKNESSES / CHALLENGES	
Theme	Descriptions
Staffing and Capacity	• We have a heavy reliance on the manager. There are concerns about sustainability if she were to step away. • We lack clear staffing succession or contingency planning. • At times, there is insufficient administrative support and unclear staff roles. • A heavy workload and last-minute tasks can cause stress among staff, leading to limited capacity and an ongoing risk of burnout. Our team is stretched thin, and we handle a lot. • We are facing difficulty in finding a new coordinator. • We require a more structured onboarding and training approach to attract new and aspiring youth leaders.
Funding and Financial Sustainability	• We need to actively pursue grants and strengthen our grant-writing capacity. • There are general concerns about financial sustainability and compensation for team members.
Program Gaps and Expansion	• We currently offer no men-specific programming. • There is no structured training pathway for youth to become guides and lead programs. • We require a language and culture teacher to be present on all trips. • We need to incorporate cultural and traditional knowledge more effectively into existing programming. • We have gaps in our boat knowledge; we need experienced local captains to teach navigation and weather safety.



WEAKNESSES / CHALLENGES	
Theme	Descriptions
Community Relationships and Engagement	• Maintaining thorough, ongoing community engagement can be time-consuming and challenging to schedule. • Some community members are unaware or under-informed about Akala's goals and activities. • We need stronger partnerships with our communities and the Chief and Councils.
Governance and Decision-Making	• We face difficulty making decisions during Board meetings due to information overload or a lack of time to prepare. • Some Board members lack the time or capacity to fully review materials. • New Board members often face a general governance learning curve, as many are new to society operations. • We must balance cultural values with colonial and administrative requirements.
Operations and Logistics	• We need improved logistics for transporting canoes and gear. • We face equipment management concerns with the lack of centralized gear storage. • Gear maintenance is an ongoing challenge. • We face limited internal technical capacity and awareness (e.g., challenges with Zoom and other digital communication methods). • Registrations and participant changes often occur at the last minute, inhibiting us from adequate planning or filling open spots in programs. • We lack permanent infrastructure, such as an office or staff hub. • Remote program locations add logistical complexity and increased costs to program delivery. • We lack risk management policies.



WEAKNESSES / CHALLENGES	
Theme	Descriptions
Communication and Visibility	• We need to improve our internal communication and ensure timely responses to emails. • We need to strengthen communication with community members and leadership, and those beyond ąwi'nakola. • We need to improve our social media presence and general self-promotion. • We need to increase the clarity and timeliness of materials shared with the Board. • We have had difficulty connecting with similar organizations to learn from and collaborate with.
Strategic Planning and Vision	• We currently lack planning for organizational growth (programming and staffing). • We have an interest in exploring new ideas, but we face limited time, staff capacity, and a structure that hinders our ability to do so.



Table 5: Opportunities identified through the 2025 strategic planning process

OPPORTUNITIES	
Theme	Descriptions
Cultural Revitalization and Traditional Knowledge	• We can look to host culture camps focused on heritage, everyday living, and traditional practices (e.g., jarring and barbecuing salmon). • We can prioritize teaching land and history knowledge through immersive programming (e.g., archeological trips to former village sites). • We can incorporate more language immersion into our trips through further integration of Bakwāṇla into our programming, as well as training for the Board, staff, and contractors. • We can increase access to territories like Holden, Charles, Belle Isle, and 'Heqams. • We can develop food sovereignty programs, including traditional food preparation and harvesting, which will enhance self-sufficiency. • We can support the need for more traditional knowledge-focused programming. • We can incorporate traditional knowledge sessions into our current programs (e.g., discussing clan systems, ceremonies, etc.). • We can offer land and water-based healing as a therapeutic and cultural approach. • We can develop focused Elder and intergenerational activities. • We can involve Elders who may not have had these experiences before. • We can build “little big houses” or simple structures in frequently used territories.



OPPORTUNITIES	
Theme	Descriptions
Youth Development and Leadership	• We can create a Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw youth council in partnership with other Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw communities. • We can support leadership training for the next generation. • We can provide guidance for youth interested in marine biology and environmental stewardship careers. • We can develop mentorship and guidance pathways for youth interested in becoming Ak̓ala program instructors.
Programming Expansion and Innovation	• We can provide day programming and outdoor day trips (such as sports clubs and hiking) for those living in the community. • We can create mental health-focused initiatives that combine cultural teachings and land connection. • We can develop canoe summer camps, canoe lending or rental opportunities, and canoe exchanges with other Nations. • We can look to use campsites with better accessibility to reduce barriers. • We can meet the demand for year-round activities by adding more programs specifically for the winter season.



OPPORTUNITIES	
Theme	Descriptions
Strategic Growth and Revenue Generation	• We can build staffing capacity before expanding programming to avoid burnout. • We can review the feasibility of applying for charity status to access new funding streams and increase stability. • We can explore paid trips for non-Musgamagw Dzawadā'enuxw people to help fund Musgamagw Dzawadā'enuxw-specific programming. • We can expand into guardianship training or employment pathways through stewardship-focused programs. • We can leverage growing awareness and demand for Ākālā programs to increase funding and partnerships. • We can apply for specific funds, such as the Warrior Fund and those dedicated to mental health. • We can pursue professional development and ongoing training for Ākālā's manager. • We can consider creating an Executive Director role. • We can consider monetizing or leveraging current programs for longer-term job creation (e.g. creating guardianship roles). • We can restructure Board meetings to be more successful by ensuring that information is received at one meeting and decisions are made at the next.



OPPORTUNITIES	
Theme	Descriptions
Partnerships and Collaborations	• We can look to strengthen or initiate partnerships with: ○ Dzawada'enuxw First Nation, Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis, Gitga'at First Nation, Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw Tribal Council, Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw Fisheries Group ○ Nawalakw Culture Project and Nawalakw Society ○ Nanwakola Culture Society ○ Community school in Kingcome ○ Urban youth and LGBTQ2S+ groups ○ Environmental organizations such as the Canadian Whale Institute and the Marine Education and Research Society, among others. ○ Indigenous rights organizations ○ Other sea-based training and adventure groups to develop best practices ○ Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council ○ One Drop ○ North Island College Adventure Guiding Certification Program ○ Nuu-chah-nulth clam garden initiatives • We can pursue partnerships with other Nations for cross-cultural exchanges, such as with Māori youth.



OPPORTUNITIES	
Theme	Descriptions
Community Infrastructure and Access	• We can investigate acquiring a set of gear and equipment in each community for regular access and local use. • We can build a centralized gear storage infrastructure. • We need to improve transportation logistics (e.g., gear and canoe transport). • We need to improve campsite accessibility to ensure inclusive access to āwi'nakola. • We need to invest in capital assets to support future sustainability.
Digital Presence and Outreach	• We need to strengthen our online presence, outreach, and engagement, such as on social media and our website. • We need to participate in conferences and networks to increase visibility and partnership opportunities. • We need to expand outreach to more communities and youth who may not be aware of Ākālā yet.
Emerging Trends and Shifts	• We can increase momentum in language revitalization. • We can build on the growing recognition of land-based healing and cultural connection as essential to wellness. • We can build on the rising community interest in youth leadership development. • We can build on the global trends in Indigenous-to-Indigenous knowledge exchange (e.g., pursue Māori partnerships). • We can build on the heightened public interest in supporting cultural, environmental, and Indigenous youth initiatives.



Table 6: Threats identified through the 2025 strategic planning process

THREATS	
Theme	Descriptions
Funding and Financial Sustainability	• We face unpredictable and insecure long-term funding. • We face a general lack of funding and ongoing financial limitations. • We have a heavy reliance on external funding and sponsorships. • We could see increasing cost of equipment and operations (e.g., water taxis). • We are vulnerable to political shifts that affect funding priorities (e.g., BC government changes and shifting priorities). • We could see a potential reduction in philanthropic or government support.
Political and Community Dynamics	• Band Council elections could shift priorities and affect support for our organization. • We have weak or non-existent relationships with some community leadership. • We see that a general disconnection among the four communities creates difficulty in collaboration. • Political squabbles between nations may disrupt collaboration. • Others may not see the value of our work with youth. • We are vulnerable to external politics and colonial systems that do not align with our values.



THREATS	
Theme	Descriptions
Climate, Environment, and Geography	• We may face changing weather patterns due to climate change, including unpredictable and unstable conditions. • The climate crisis can affect our ability to run safe outdoor programs (especially during La Niña years). • We face a limited weather window for safe programming. • The remoteness of program areas adds logistical complexity and cost. • Environmental impacts and stewardship issues may increase logistical or regulatory hurdles.
Youth and Participant Engagement	• We face the risk of youth losing interest in participating if programs don't evolve or feel repetitive. • We encounter challenges in our outreach efforts, particularly when it comes to connecting with away-from-home members and urban youth. • Competing interests or commitments among youth may lead to a decline in participation over time.
External Competition and Market Risks	• Other companies (e.g., sea kayaking tours) working in the area may create territorial or economic conflict. • We may face potential competition for funding and program space with other organizations. • Transportation costs are high (e.g., boats and water taxis).
Structural and Policy Vulnerabilities	• The future of current instructors is uncertain, as changes in their lives may lead them to leave their positions.



In addition to the SWOT analysis, we conducted a SOAR⁹ analysis with our Board of Directors and staff during the in-person strategic planning workshop. While SWOT has a focus on identifying challenges and risks, SOAR takes a strengths-based approach, encouraging us to envision a preferred future by focusing on what we do well and what is possible.

A SOAR analysis helps guide future planning by identifying strategic priorities based on:

- **Strengths** – areas the organization excels or is already performing well in (e.g., strong cultural foundations)
- **Opportunities** – trends or events that could benefit or be leveraged by the organization (e.g., new funding sources)
- **Aspirations** – what we care deeply about and hope to achieve in the future (e.g., intergenerational learning)
- **Results** – what achieving identified aspirations will look like in practical terms (e.g., increased program reach and community well-being)



Figure 4. SOAR analysis overview

⁹ A SOAR analysis focuses on identifying strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results.



In this exercise, we began by reviewing the strengths and opportunities identified earlier in the strategic planning process (as noted in Tables 3 and 5), and then focused our in-person discussion on defining our aspirations and desired results. Many of the aspirations shared during this session informed the development of not only our vision but also our strategic objectives and actions. This approach invited participants to dream big while grounding ideas in the organization's existing strengths and values. Table 7 below highlights some of the key aspirations and results discussed during the session.

Table 7. Aspirations and results identified through the 2025 strategic planning process

ASPIRATIONS	RESULTS
We offer programs for people not in community and invite them to feel welcome and attend regularly. We bring people home and show them where to start.	Many more Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw feel comfortable being out on the land.
We train youth to know and build on awi'nakola, bringing them home.	We inspire the next generation, offer more programming, and see more youth connected and engaged.
We can host a program fully in our language.	Our people know our language fluently.
Akala's outdoor education becomes part of the school system.	We begin to decolonize education systems, and our kids start learning at a younger age, supporting them to know their role.
Akala offers equipment for rent, allowing Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw to undertake their own trips while having guides available for instruction.	Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw have more opportunities to go home and engage with awi'nakola at their own time and pace.
Akala works collaboratively with other organizations to ensure a holistic approach to caring for awi'nakola and people.	Our organizations are not competing for resources, funding or time, and our people have more access to the services they need.
Our organization has clear governance roles and responsibilities.	Everyone has a role and knows it, enabling them to feel successful and supported.
We equip people with the necessary skills, and in fifty years, we will no longer be needed.	People will actively spend time in the awi'nakola, feeling comfortable and safe.



3. Guiding Our Future: Vision, Mission, Values and Guiding Principles

Our vision, mission, values, and guiding principles are the foundational elements that guide our organization's direction and decision-making. Our vision articulates the future we strive to create, while our mission defines our core purpose and the work we do to achieve that future. Our values reflect the principles we uphold in all aspects of our work, and our guiding principles translate those values into action, shaping how we operate and engage with others. Together, these statements provide a shared compass for our team, partners, and those we serve.

3.1. Our Vision

To develop our vision statement, we began by imagining the future we hope to create over the next ten to twenty years. Through a collaborative process, we identified keywords and themes that captured our collective aspirations. From these insights, we crafted a statement that reflects who we are and where we are headed.

Our vision serves as a source of inspiration, articulating the long-term impact we strive to achieve and the future we are working toward together.

The Ākālā vision statement is as follows:

Ākālā cultivates spaces for all Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw to empower a deep sense of belonging, identity, and connection. Through immersive programs, we clear the path set out by our ancestors, grounded in our values, laws, roles, and teachings. We aim to provide everyone with the freedom to belong, contribute, and thrive in joyful abundance.



3.2. Our Mission

To develop our mission statement, we began by reflecting on our previous version, considering what had changed since its creation and identifying areas for improvement. Through thoughtful discussion, we clarified our department's core purpose and the actions we are committed to taking in pursuit of that purpose.

Our mission defines what we do and why we do it, serving as a practical guide for how we work toward our vision. It is rooted in our values, designed to inform our decisions, set priorities, and provide a benchmark for progress. Above all, a strong mission brings clarity and unity, helping our team move forward with a shared sense of direction and purpose.

The Ak̓ala mission statement is as follows:

In all we do, we embrace the joy of being Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw—creating spaces where cultural expression is not only safe, but celebrated. We facilitate holistic, culturally informed programming, leadership training and certifications in outdoor education and safety. Our sinat guides our work to support connection to land, each other, and self through a'wi'nagwis-based learning on our ancestral territories.



3.3. Our Values

While our work has evolved over time, our values have remained a steady anchor, grounding our decisions, informing our engagement, and guiding the way we approach challenges and opportunities. Our values are the foundation of everything we do. They express the core beliefs that guide our actions, shape our organizational culture, and reflect what matters most to us.

The Ākālā value statement is as follows:

Ākālā Outdoor Education Society is guided by the Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw law of maya'xāla, a word that does not have an English language counterpart, but is akin to respect and reciprocity. Within maya'xāla are values of gratitude and spirituality. We continue to learn how to weave maya'xāla into our lives and programs, and understand that this will be a lifelong journey. No matter where you are in your understanding and practice of maya'xāla, you are welcome to join the Ākālā 'namyut.



3.4. Our Guiding Principles

To establish our guiding principles, we started by reflecting on our value statement and examining how it is embodied in our organization's actions and operations. Through thoughtful discussion, we identified six key principles that clearly define how we will align our day-to-day practices with our core values.

Our guiding principles are actionable statements or commitments that translate our organization's values into expected behaviours and decision-making practices.

The Ākālā guiding principles are as follows:



Sinat (*Our purpose*)

We will follow in the purpose set forth by our ancestors, showing the way to our youth and all Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw.



Mu'la (*To be grateful*)

We recognize the abundance that surrounds us—our lands, waters, ancestors, and relationships—and carry deep appreciation for all that sustains us. We show gratitude by caring for the land, for one another, and future generations. We leave places as we found them, honour those who came before us, and introduce ourselves with humility to the places we enter. Through practices like sharing circles and teachings with youth, we nurture gratitude as a way of being—one that sees the oneness in all things and reinforces our connection to everything around us.



Łok'wimas (*Strength*)

We are strong in mind, body, spirit, and culture. Our strength comes not only from perseverance and determination, but also from our ability to be vulnerable, courageous, and accountable. We honour the strength of our ancestors and the power of our culture, language, and teachings. We support one another through challenges, embracing discomfort as part of the growth process, and strive to be respectful and resilient in everything we do.





'Namwiyut (*We are of one family*)

We are all connected. Our relationships—to each other, to the land, and our ancestors—are inseparable. We are committed to creating space for belonging, identity, and connection. We honour the self-determination of our people, reject colonial divisions, and include everyone regardless of membership. By strengthening relationships and helping others see their place within the whole, we reclaim our unity and restore the deep relationality that has always been part of our ways of knowing and being.



Laxwala (*Love*)

Love is expressed through care, patience, and respect. We support and encourage one another, recognize each other's strengths and limitations, and meet people where they are. We check in, lift each other up, and hold space with compassion and understanding. Love guides us to be accommodating and inclusive, especially when navigating differences. It teaches us to walk gently with each other and to create environments where everyone feels seen, valued, and supported.



Galgapola (*Pulling together*)

We acknowledge we are stronger when we pull together. Each of us brings unique gifts, experiences, and knowledge to the work, and through collaboration, we amplify our collective impact. We listen, support, and build relationships rooted in respect and trust. We commit to meaningful engagement, ensuring access for people of all ages and abilities, and creating opportunities for individuals to reconnect with *awi'nakola* and culture. By pulling together, we honour our responsibilities and move forward in unity to meet the needs of our people and lands.



4. Mapping Our Journey Ahead: Strategic Goals, Objectives and Actions

Goals, objectives and actions can be defined as follows:

- **Goals set the direction.** They define where our organization wants to go in the long run and guide our work over the coming years.
- **Objectives provide the roadmap.** They break down the goals into specific, measurable, and achievable targets.
- **Actions are the steps taken.** They detail the tasks and activities we can complete to achieve our objectives, effectively leading to the accomplishment of our broader goals.

Our Strategic Plan outlines four goals, each supported by objectives and actions that align with and reinforce the overarching vision, mission, values, and guiding principles of Ak̓ala Outdoor Education Society. Our four goals include:

Goal #1: Embody Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw worldview in all the work we do.

Goal #2: Promote safety, leadership, and outdoor education skill development opportunities for Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw.

Goal #3: Uplift Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw youth through our programs.

Goal #4: Create opportunities for Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw participants to connect with one another and a'wi'nakola.

The sections that follow provide an overview of each goal, along with corresponding objectives and actions that are nested underneath.



4.1. Goal #1: Embody Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw worldview in all the work we do.

Table 8. Goal 1 objectives and actions

OBJECTIVE	ACTION
1.1. Establish strategic partnerships to collaboratively design and implement a comprehensive language program within the next five years. [Supports Goal 1, Objective 1.4] [Supports Goal 2, Objective 2.2]	A. Identify partnership interests and opportunities for joint program delivery.
	B. Identify available funding options to support program development and delivery.
	C. Once available, all Board of Directors, staff members, and contractors will complete the Ākālā language program at least once. [Supports Goals 1, Objective 1.4]
1.2. Continue to incorporate and respect cultural practices and protocols in all the work we do	A. Provide Board of Directors, staff members, and contractors with an on-the-land cultural learning opportunity annually.
	B. Review and update our code of ethics yearly to ensure it reflects our values. [Supports Goals 4, Objective 4.4]
	C. Review and update policy documents through the lens of respect for cultural practices and protocols. This could include providing a definition for what we consider “family” to mean, as well as developing a policy regarding the respect for mourning days within our communities. [Supports Goals 4, Objective 4.4]
	D. Identify and invite a speaker to deliver an informative presentation on culture and/or language to the Board of Directors annually.



OBJECTIVE	ACTION
	E. Bring the Board of Directors together every two years (opposite of the Board of Directors retreat) to participate in an on-the-land activity. [Related to Goal 2, Action 2.3.F]
1.4. Implement the use of Bak'wamk'ala throughout the organization within four years.	A. Dedicate time at each Board of Directors meeting to share a new word to increase knowledge and use.
	B. Developed a comprehensive list of language learning opportunities to be updated annually.
	C. Develop flashcards or a booklet of words to be used throughout program delivery over the next two to three years. This could include a QR code that allows participants to access an audio recording.
	D. Investigate the opportunity to include at least one language lesson within each of our programs.
	E. Share 12 social media posts per year focused on sharing language (e.g., word of the month)
	F. Update the Ākālā website to include a language page to share words and pronunciation within the next two to three years.
	G. Investigate the opportunity to host quarterly Zoom meetings focused on language for Ākālā's Board of Directors, staff members, contractors, and community members.
	H. Investigate the feasibility of hiring an Ākālā language coordinator.
	I. Investigate the feasibility of hiring a summer student to mentor under the language coordinator to increase community knowledge. This objective is contingent on Goal 1, Action 1.4.G. [Supports Goal 3, Objective 3.3]



4.2. Goal #2: Promote safety, leadership, and outdoor education skill development opportunities for Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw.

Table 9. Goal 2 objectives and action

OBJECTIVE	ACTION
2.1. Continue to enhance and promote safety throughout ąwi'nakola by weaving essential safety practices into every aspect of our work.	A. Develop a Risk Management policy within one year. [Supports Goal 4 Objective 4.4]
	B. Continue holding safety pre-meetings before each program starts, providing handouts and FAQs to ensure all participants share the same foundational knowledge.
	C. Identify gaps in participants' skills and knowledge related to safety on ąwi'nakola through community engagement events. [Connects with Goal 4, Objective 4.1]
	D. Create an annual list of twelve safety topics to address each month throughout the year. Share information on these topics to emphasize the importance of safety in ąwi'nakola through social media.
	Within one year, develop a system to track staff and contractor safety certification requirements and renewal dates, ensuring timely updates and that the budget is allocated annually to cover associated costs.
	Coordinate the delivery of five safety-focused programs each year—such as Wilderness First Aid, Paddle Canada certifications, navigation, weather safety, and survival skills training—over the next five years to strengthen participant and instructor preparedness. [Supports Goal 2, Objective 2.2]
	E. Investigate the opportunity to offer a yearly swimming lesson program. [Supports Goal 2, Objective 2.2]



OBJECTIVE	ACTION
2.2. Continue to build outdoor education skills within participants by offering ten new programs over the next ten years. [Supports Goal 4 Objective 4.2]	A. Engage the community to identify their wants and needs to support the development of programming specifically targeted at Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw men within the next 2-3 years. [Connects with Goal 4, Objective 4.1]
	B. Offer the Women and Gender Diverse Canoe Journey twice a year to accommodate more participants.
	C. Offer the Youth Leadership Paddle Program (Chill) twice a year to accommodate more participants.
	D. Assess community interest in a hiking and cedar bark harvesting program, then develop and pilot the program based on the input received.
	E. Assess community interest in a winter hunting and trapping program, then develop and pilot the program based on the input received.
2.3. Continue to promote leadership skills within the organization.	A. Outline and document a progression path from participant to program leader within one year. This will ensure individuals understand the necessary steps for growth and increase the overall capacity of the organization.
	B. Identify the available budget to support staff and contractor access to professional development opportunities within the next year.
	C. Support the Ākālā manager in identifying and pursuing management training opportunities at least once per year.
	D. Identify participant roles and responsibilities related to leadership skill building that can be implemented within program delivery over the next two years.
	E. Offer an instructor development course annually within the first quarter of every year.



OBJECTIVE	ACTION
	F. Host a Board of Directors retreat every two years focused on a specific topic (e.g., strategic planning, policy review, etc.)
	G. Investigate the interests and feasibility of developing a Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw Youth council to influence organizational processes, inform programming, and increase community engagement.
	H. Develop and implement a Board of Directors onboarding process within the next two years.



4.3. Goal #3: Uplift Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw youth through our programs.

Table 10. Goal 3 objectives and action

OBJECTIVE	ACTION
3.1. Identify youth interests for future support and programming on an annual basis.	A. Identify a platform or software to house, organize, and analyze feedback and data collected.
	B. Host sharing circles at the conclusion of each event or program to collect participants' feedback and understand their needs.
	C. Collaborate with partners to gather feedback and input to avoid engagement fatigue. [Connects with Goal 4, Objective 4.3]
	D. Host a youth-specific engagement event to gather specific input [Connects with Goal 4, Objective 4.1]
	E. Organize a program introduction weekend to connect with youth, share information about available programs, answer questions, and learn about their interests.
3.2. Host an Ākālā Youth Conference within the next eight years.	A. Identify a clear purpose and goal for the conference.
	B. Identify patterns and vendors to collaborate on the delivery of this event (e.g., Musgamakw Dzawada'enuxw Tribal Council). [Connects with Goal 4, Objective 4.3]
	C. Identify the activities for the event, determine the location, and outline the necessary staffing and support requirements.
	D. Secure funding to facilitate the successful execution of the event.



OBJECTIVE	ACTION
3.3. Establish a mentorship and apprenticeship program aimed at supporting youth skill development over the next five years. [Supports Goal 2, Objective 2.2]	A. Identify youth interest in mentorship and apprenticeship opportunities.
	B. Investigate and evaluate external mentorship program examples to inform the development of the program.
	C. Explore traditional knowledge transfer methods to support program delivery.
	D. Develop a comprehensive outline of the program's goals, topics, and roles for both the mentor and mentee.
	E. Identify and apply for funding to support program development and delivery.
	F. Develop a list of Knowledge Holders and Elders interested in participating in the program as mentors.



4.4. Goal #4: Create opportunities for Musgamakw Dzawaḏ'enuxw participants to connect with one another and ̱wi'nakola.

Table 11. Goal 4 objectives and actions

OBJECTIVE	ACTION
4.1. Host community engagement events three to five times per year	A. Continue to host the Annual General Meeting as a platform to share organizational updates, success stories, participant feedback, future plans, and other key information with community members, fostering transparency and engagement.
	B. Host an annual community gathering to foster connection, celebrate shared experiences, and strengthen relationships with families, community members, and the organization (e.g., the Paddle Reunion).
	C. Host an annual away-from-home outreach event.
	D. Ensure two to three Board members are present at each community engagement event.
	E. Plan and execute an Ākālā film road show to premiere our video in Gilford, Kingcome, and other away-from-home locations such as Alert Bay, Port Hardy, Campbell River, Victoria, and Vancouver, within the next year.
4.2. Expand our programs to meet the community's growing demand for year-round outdoor education for all generations over the next ten years. [Supports Goal 2, Objective 2.2]	A. Develop a seasonal harvesting program open to all ages to be offered on an annual basis. [Supports Goal 2, Objective 2.2]
	B. Identify a list of knowledge holders and community experts who could support program development and implementation.
	C. Identify funding opportunities, such as grants, community clubs and organizations, philanthropists, and others, that can be accessed to support program development and delivery.



OBJECTIVE	ACTION
	D. Explore and secure funding opportunities to reduce barriers to participation, such as travel costs, in order to improve accessibility to programs.
	E. Develop a phased staffing plan to gradually increase capacity for expanded program delivery, aligned with community demand and available funding, while actively seeking resources to support future hires.
	F. Identify equipment needed to enhance and expand future program delivery, and assess the feasibility of acquiring it by evaluating associated requirements such as budget, storage facilities, and staff capacity. Use this analysis to inform a realistic acquisition plan aligned with Ākālā's growth objectives.
	G. Explore the resources and capacity needed for Ākālā to rent out our equipment when it is not in use, in order to generate additional revenue for program development and delivery.
4.3. Develop collaborative partnerships with four entities within the next eight years.	A. Identify and participate in two networking events annually (e.g., present at the Indigenous Youth Conference).
	B. Connect with Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis, Dzawadā'enuxw First Nation, and MDTC to be added to their Chief and Council and Annual General Meeting agendas to present this strategic plan.
	C. Identify and prioritize potential partner Nations and organizations to support program delivery and strengthen collaborative relationships aligned with shared goals.
	D. Identify funding opportunities to support collaboration.
	E. Explore the feasibility of sharing a grant writer with other organization partners to increase access to funding.
	F. Identify a list of current and future projects that would benefit from collaboration.



OBJECTIVE	ACTION
4.4 Strengthen the organization's capacity to deliver programming through the development of comprehensive and values-aligned operational policies within the next five years.	A. Develop and implement a financial policy.
	B. Develop a human resources policy manual that reflects organizational values.
	C. Develop and implement a travel policy that will be reviewed and updated annually.
	D. Develop an equipment management policy.
	E. Develop and implement a contractor policy.



5. Stepping Into the Future

Moving forward, this Strategic Plan will serve as a guiding framework to align our organization's direction, decisions, and actions over the coming years. It will inform the development and delivery of programs that reflect our priorities, values, and vision, ensuring our efforts are both responsive and intentional. As we implement this plan, it will shape future work planning by providing clear objectives and shared focus for our team, helping us allocate resources effectively and measure progress over time. Through this continued alignment, we are committed to advancing our mission and strengthening our impact.



Figure 5. Images from the 2025 strategic planning workshop



References

Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw Tribal Council. *Territory*. n.d. Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw Tribal Council website. Accessed June 27, 2025. <https://mdtc.ca/territory>.

