



ANCA BLUE RIBBON REPORT

**The following report has been taken from Andrew
Revelle's Project Report, *The Future of Nature Centers:
A View from the Profession***

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to explore what leaders in the nature center profession view as the societal and economic future of nature centers over the next 25 years. The project identified significant trends and developments in regards to staffing, fundraising, physical property, programs and services, organizational governance, and community role of nature centers. The most recent research on the state of American nature centers was conducted in 1989 by the Natural Science for Youth Foundation. This project followed-up on many of the same concepts from that study, but in a modern context. Recent literature indicates that the 2008 economic recession has had a continued impact on the non-profit community. Thus, this study also examined how the recession will be affecting nature center development. This study used a two-part research methodology: a descriptive survey and in-depth interviews. The survey of nature center professions established a broad base of knowledge about the future of nature centers. The interviews of seasoned and emerging leaders in the profession discovered a wide variety of trends and predictions for how nature centers will change. The leaders in the profession emphasized that nature centers must continue to be relevant in an increasingly nature-disconnected society. They also foresee changes to fundraising, an evolution of programming, increasing professionalism, and a strengthening of nature center properties. This research commemorates the 25th anniversary of the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA) by looking ahead to the next 25 years. It also provides recommendations for how ANCA can continue to support the growth of nature centers in the future.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Sources of Data

The ANCA Blue Ribbon project gathered data from two sources: (1) nature center professionals and (2) leaders in the nature center profession. The study sampled both groups from the ANCA membership of 559 nature center professionals. ANCA is the largest and most prominent organization specifically focused on the nature center profession. Thus, the ANCA membership is the population most representative of the nature center profession as a whole. In sampling from the ANCA membership, the Blue Ribbon project was able to capture data generalizable and applicable to the greater nature center profession.

Research Methodology

The ANCA Blue Ribbon project employed grounded theory methodology. The trends, conclusions, and recommendations discussed in this report were generated inductively from the data (O’Leary, 2010). The researchers created a methodological protocol, collected data, coded and analyzed the data, and synthesized findings into conclusions about how leaders in the nature center profession perceive the future of nature centers.

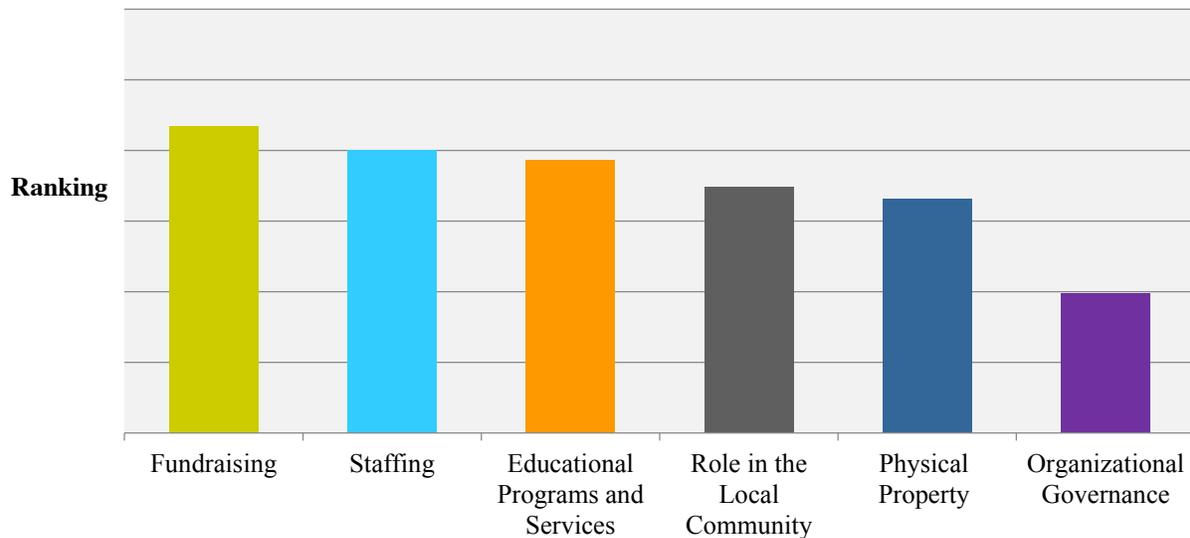
The methodology was created from a question-driven perspective: the project adopted the strategies most likely to capture the credible data needed to answer the research question regardless of paradigm (O’Leary, 2010). In order to understand the perceptions about the future from the leaders in the profession, it was necessary to also establish a foundation of the greater

nature center professional community's perceptions. A mixed quantitative and qualitative approach was selected to draw data from both sources. As O'Leary writes, mixed methodology allows researchers to "capitalize on the best of both traditions" and "develop research protocols in stages" (O'Leary, 2010, p. 127-128). The ANCA Blue Ribbon project capitalized on the advantages of a mixed approach by gathering data in two phases: (1) a quantitative survey of the ANCA membership and (2) in-depth semi-structured interviews of leaders in the nature center profession.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Figure 1
Areas Percieved to Undergo the
Most Change over the Next 25 years



Role in the local community, physical property, organizational governance were ranked as the three areas undergoing the least change respectively. As an environmental non-profit profession, it is not surprising that the nature center field foresees significant change in fundraising operations. Concerns over funding and new funding sources were also expressed by the respondents to the NSYF study 26 years ago (Simmons & Widmar, 1989b). However, as shown in Table 1 below, responses to specific fundraising questions reveal more detail.

Table 1

Perceived Changes to Fundraising

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Your organization will increase the energy and resources it invests in raising funds over the next 25 years.	47.6%	42.2%	7.8%	2.4%
Your organization will raise funds from new sources over the next 25 years.	46.4%	50%	2.4%	1.2%
The effects of the recent economic recession will impact the way your organization raises funds over the next 7 years.	17.7%	62.2%	16.5%	3.7%

A total of 89.8% of respondents indicated that their organizations will increase the energy and resources they invest in raising funds over the next 25 years. 47.6% of respondents strongly agreed and 42.2% agreed. An even higher 96.4% of respondents indicated that their organizations would be raising funds from new sources with 46.4% strongly agreeing and 50% agreeing. Clearly, ANCA members perceive their organizations investing more resources into fundraising and are keeping their eyes open to tap new sources of funding. In the short term, these fundraising developments may be motivated by the 2008 economic recession. 17.7% of respondents strongly agreed and 62.2% of respondents agreed that the effects of the recent economic recession will impact the way their organizations will raise funds over the next 7 years. A total of only 20.2% indicated that the recession will not impact fundraising (16.5% disagreed and 3.7% strongly disagreed).

Respondents ranked staffing as the second area undergoing the most change over the next 25 years (see Figure 1). On the questions specifically related to staffing, respondents indicated a trend towards growth over the next 7 years. See Table 2 below:

Table 2

Perceived Staffing Changes over the next 7 years

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Your organization's education staff positions will increase.	35.5%	38%	22.3%	4.2%
Your organization's public relations staff positions will increase.	16.3%	36.1%	39.2%	8.4%
Your organization's fundraising staff positions will increase.	27.1%	35.5%	29.5%	7.8%
The role of the director in your organization will be different.	30.1%	47%	20.5%	2.4%
The effects of the recent economic recession will impact your organization's staffing.	16.5%	47%	31.1%	5.5%

A total of 73.5% of respondents indicated that their organizations' education staff positions will increase (35.5% strongly agreed and 38% agreed). However, 22.3% of respondents disagreed and 4.2% strongly disagreed. ANCA members are nearly split on whether their organizations' public relations staff positions will increase. A small majority of 52.4% indicated these positions will increase (16.3% strongly agreed and 36.1% agreed) while 47.6% responded that they will not (39.2% disagreed and 8.4% strongly disagreed). A slightly larger majority of respondents, 62.6%, indicated that their organizations will be increasing their fundraising staff positions (27.1% strongly agreed and 35.5% agreed). 37.4% of respondents indicated these positions would not increase (29.5% disagreed and 7.8% strongly disagreed). A total of 77.1% of respondents also indicated that the role of the director in their organization will be different (30.1% strongly agreed and 47% agreed). Almost two thirds of respondents, 63.5%, indicated that the effects of the recent economic recession would impact their staffing (16.5% strongly agreed and 47% agreed).

ANCA members ranked educational programs and services as the third area undergoing the most change (see Figure 1). Respondents to the programs and services questions generally indicated that program volume will increase. Some indicated that their numbers of programs will remain constant and few indicated they would decrease. See Table 3 below:

Table 3
Perceived Program Changes over the next 7 years

Statement	Increase	Remain Constant	Decrease
Your number of onsite school programs will	52.4%	35.5%	12%
Your number of offsite outreach programs will	77.1%	19.3%	3.6%

52.4% of respondents indicated that their numbers of onsite school programs will increase. Over a third, 35.5%, responded that their number of onsite school programs will remain constant while 12% indicated they will decrease. A larger majority, 77.1%, responded that their offsite outreach programs will increase. 19.3% responded that outreach programs will remain constant and only 3.6% indicated they will decrease. The survey also explored whether nature center programming will target different audiences in the near future. Respondents were nearly evenly split on whether their organizations will change the target audiences for their programs. See Table 4 below:

Table 4

Perceived Change in Audience over the next 7 years

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Your organization will change the target audiences for its programs.	17.5%	39.7%	39.2%	3.6%

A total of 57.2% of respondents indicated their organizations would change the target audiences for their programs (17.5% strongly agreed and 39.7% agreed) and a total of 42.8% indicated they would not (39.2% disagreed and 3.6% strongly disagreed). Both sides were concentrated around the more moderate “agree” or “disagree” responses: 39.7% agreed and 39.2% disagreed.

While not highly ranked in terms of future change, the questions related to the role of nature centers in the local community provided meaningful data. ANCA members largely responded that their organizations’ roles in their local communities and relationships with local school districts will change over the next 7 years. See Table 5 below:

Table 5

Perceived Change in Role in Local Community over the next 7 years

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Your organization's role in the local community will change.	27.7%	48.8%	23.5%	0%
Your organization's relationship with school districts will change.	18.7%	57.8%	19.3%	4.22%

A total of 76.5% of respondents indicated that their organizations' roles in the local community will change. 27.7% strongly agreed and 48.8% agreed while 23.5% disagreed and no respondents strongly disagreed. The responses regarding relationships with local school districts were very similar. A total of 76.5% of respondents indicated that their organizations' relationships with school districts will change (18.7% strongly agreed and 57.8% agreed). A total of 23.5% indicated their relationship will not change (19.3% disagreed and 4.22% strongly disagreed).

Physical property was ranked second to last in terms of change over the next 25 years. As shown in Table 6 below, responses to questions about planned change to the physical property of nature centers were mixed.

Table 6

Perceived Change in Physical Property over the next 7 years

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Your organization is planning to acquire new land.	12.7%	24.1%	31.3%	31.9%
Your organization is planning to construct new buildings.	27.1%	28.3%	27.1%	17.47%
Your organization will focus on retrofitting its buildings to become more sustainable.	23.5%	54.2%	16.9%	5.4%

Respondents whose organizations are planning to acquire new land over the next 7 years were in the minority. A total of 36.8% of respondents indicated their organizations are planning to do so (12.7% strongly agreed and 24.1% agreed) while a total of 63.2% of respondents indicated that their organizations are not (31.3% disagreed and 31.9% strongly disagreed). Responses to whether their organizations are planning to construct new buildings were nearly evenly distributed across the Likert scale: 27.1% strongly agreed, 28.3% agreed, 27.1% disagreed, and 17.47% strongly disagreed. There was a clearer majority of responses regarding whether respondent organizations are focusing on retrofitting current buildings. A total of 78.7% indicated that they will be focusing on retrofitting (23.5% strongly agreed and 54.2% agreed) while 22.3% indicated that they will not be (16.9% disagreed and 5.4% strongly disagreed).

The survey also asked respondents about their current and future relationships with friends groups. Respondents were asked to select all statements regarding their relationships with friends groups over the next 7 years with which they agreed. Table 7 below displays the rates of agreement of the respondents:

Table 7

Perceived Relationship with Friends Groups over the next 7 Years

Statement	Agree
A relationship with a friends group currently exists with your organization.	42.2%
Your organization plans to create a relationship with a friends group.	4.2%
Your friends group will become a larger source of income for your organization.	32.5%
Your friends group will become a smaller source of income for your organization.	2.4%

42.2% of respondents indicated that their organization currently has a relationship with a friends group. Only 4.2% of respondents indicated that their organizations plan to create such a relationship over the next 7 years. 32.5% responded that their friends group will become a larger source of income while only 2.4% responded it will become a smaller source of income over the next 7 years.

As discussed in the literature review, the ANCA Blue Ribbon project identified the 2008 economic recession as a potential factor impacting the future of nature centers. Thus, the survey also asked Likert questions regarding the perceived effect of the recession on future development. Tables 1 and 2 above display responses to questions regarding the future impact of the recession on fundraising and staffing. Table 8 below shows response to questions relating to the impact of the recession on strategic planning and vision.

Table 8

Perceived Effect of the Recent Economic Recession over the next 7 years

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The effects of the recent economic recession will impact the strategic direction for your organization.	17.1%	52.4%	26.8%	3.7%
The effects of the recent economic recession have impacted your organization's vision.	11.6%	34.1%	44.5%	9.8%

Responses regarding the future impact of the recession on strategic planning were very similar to those regarding the recession's impact on fundraising and staffing. Like for fundraising and staffing, the majority of respondents indicated that the recession will have an impact: 17.1% strongly agreed and 52.4% agreed. However, nearly a third of respondents indicated the recession will not have an impact on strategic planning: 26.8% disagreed and 3.7% strongly disagreed. Responses regarding the recession's impact on organizational vision were nearly evenly split. A total of 45.7% of respondents indicated the effects of the recession will have an impact on organizational vision over the next 7 years while a total of 54.3% indicated it will not. Both sides were concentrated around the more moderate "agree" and "disagree" responses: 34.1% agreed while only 11.6% strongly agreed and 44.5% disagreed while only 9.8% strongly disagreed.

The Pearson product moment correlation test was applied to the survey data to test for any moderate or strong correlations between responses. The tables below display all correlations in the data with r-values greater than 0.50 and less than -0.50. R-values from 0.50 to 0.69 and from -0.50 to -0.69 represented moderate correlations. R-values greater than 0.70 and less than -

0.70 represented strong correlations. Tables 9, 10, and 11 below display all correlations within that range of r-values regarding fundraising, staffing, and impacts of the recession respectively. The statements have been abbreviated within these tables for readability.

Table 9

Correlations between Survey Responses regarding Fundraising

Statement 1	Statement 2	r-value
Increase energy and resources invested in raising funds over the next 25 years	Fundraising staff positions will increase over the next 7 years	0.67
Increase energy and resources invested in raising funds over the next 25 years	Raise funds from new sources over the next 25 years	0.66

The data displayed positive moderate correlations between increased investment in fundraising over the next 25 years and an increase in fundraising staff positions over the next 7 years ($r = 0.67$) as well as raising funds from new sources over the next 25 years ($r = 0.66$).

Table 10

Correlations between Survey Responses regarding Staffing

Statement 1	Statement 2	r-value
Education staff positions will increase over the next 7 years	Public relations staff positions will increase over the next 7 years	0.59
Education staff positions will increase over the next 7 years	Fundraising staff positions will increase over the next 7 years	0.52
Public relations staff positions will increase over the next 7 years	Fundraising staff positions will increase over the next 7 years	0.67

There were also positive moderate correlations between an increase in education staff positions and an increase in both public relations ($r = 0.59$) and fundraising positions ($r = 0.52$) over the

next 7 years. A slightly stronger positive correlation existed between an increase in public relations staff positions and an increase in fundraising positions ($r = 0.67$).

Table 11

Correlations between Survey Responses regarding the Recession

Statement 1	Statement 2	r-value
Recession will impact strategic planning over the next 7 years	Recession will impact fundraising over the next 7 years	0.67
Recession will impact strategic planning over the next 7 years	Recession will impact staffing over the next 7 years	0.63
Recession will impact strategic planning over the next 7 years	Recession will impact organizational vision over the next 7 years	0.58
Recession will impact organizational vision over the next 7 years	Recession will impact staffing over the next 7 years	0.57

Positive moderate correlations existed between the recession impacting strategic planning over the next 7 years and the other recession-related variables investigated. Responses indicating the recession's impact on strategic planning showed positive correlations to the recession impacting fundraising ($r = 0.67$), staffing ($r = 0.63$), and organizational vision ($r = 0.58$). The recession impacting organizational mission over the next 7 years only had a correlation with the recession impacting staffing ($r = 0.57$).

Table 12

Comparison between Emerging and Seasoned Leader Responses

Sub-category	Emerging Leader Response Rate	Seasoned Leader Response Rate
Staying on the cusp of technology	50%	21.4%
Incorporate climate change into programming	50%	14.3%
Collaborate with other non-profits in the community	83.3%	7.1%
Create a consortium of nature centers	66.7%	0%
Promote the value of nature centers	50%	21.4%
Expand beyond school programming	83.3%	21.4%
Target all ages	66.7%	28.6%
Adult programming	83.3%	21.4%
Connect authentic field research with education program	50%	7.1%
Citizen science	50%	7.1%
More issue based programming	50%	28.6%
Need to build more or have larger facilities	63%	7.1%
Volunteer effort into rehabbing the environment	50%	0%

For all propositions which at least 50% of the emerging leaders discussed, emerging leaders had a larger response rate than seasoned leaders. The difference in response rates was at least 21.6% for all of these propositions. The average difference in response rates for these propositions was 47%. The largest difference in response rates was 76.3% regarding the proposition “collaborated with other non-profits in the community.” 83.3% of emerging leaders discussed this proposition while only 7.1% of seasoned leaders did. The smallest difference in response rates was 21.6% regarding the proposition “more issue based programming.” 50% of emerging leaders and 28.6% of seasoned leaders discussed this proposition.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of the ANCA Blue Ribbon study was to learn what leaders in the nature center profession view as the societal and economic future of nature centers over the next 25 years. This section of the ANCA Blue Ribbon report presents the conclusions of the research. The conclusions are organized into the five themes which emerged from the qualitative data. It then provides recommendations for ANCA based on the conclusions regarding how the organization can further support the growth of the nature center profession over the next 25 years. Chapter V then discusses differences between how the emerging leaders and the seasoned leaders perceive the future. It also compares the conclusions of this report to those of the 1989 NSYF study, explores observations about the research process, and proposes topics for further research.

Conclusions

Theme 1: Nature centers will need to establish relevancy in an increasingly nature disconnected society.

Relevancy is the overarching concept driving how the leaders in the profession perceive the future of nature centers over the next 25 years. Nature centers are public institutions for their communities. Since the inception of the modern nature center with Bear Mountain Park in 1926, nature centers have been places for the community to learn about and connect with the natural

world. Executive directors continue to see this as the primary role of nature centers. They perceive changes in economics, programming, partnerships, staff, leadership, governance, and property. But everything the leaders in the profession strive to accomplish with their centers over the next 25 years will be built upon relevancy with their communities and with the natural world.

Executive directors are aware of extraordinary changes emerging in the environment. They are sensitive to environmental shifts affecting local, regional, national, and global communities. The leaders in the profession are positioning their centers to act. Much like other organisms, nature centers are adapting. Many will be emphasizing conservation and restoration ethics in the future. Leaders see nature centers focusing on conservation and restoration through their education programming, messaging, land management, and partnerships. Some foresee nature centers truly becoming leaders for conservation and restoration guiding their communities towards holistic relationships with the land.

The leaders in the profession foresee climate change as an increasing concern for nature centers over the next 25 years. They perceive the effects of climate change intensifying and beginning to impact the land and the lives of the people in their communities. These leaders predict nature centers will serve in their traditional role as places for education. They see centers becoming community resources for information and understanding of the impacts of climate change. But executive directors are unsure of how to accomplish this at their centers. They are contemplating how to best provide education to support resiliency in their communities. Leaders in the profession are also questioning nature centers' traditional aversion to advocacy. They are considering whether, in this time of crisis, nature centers should advocate for action to respond to climate change.

This question of whether nature centers should go beyond education to become advocates strikes at the heart of how nature centers perceive themselves. Most centers stand firm that they educate; they do not advocate. Yet leaders in the profession are questioning this paradigm. It is not easy for nature centers to consider this change. However, executive directors have indicated that it is a conversation the field must have in order to remain relevant to the extraordinary change in the environment.

The leaders in the profession are also clear that nature centers must continue to grow their relevancy in their communities over the next 25 years. Directors foresee nature centers working towards this by being more creative with messaging to promote their value to the public. They will also be focusing on how to better serve their constituencies. They emphasize building reciprocity: reacting to the community's wants and needs. An aspect of reciprocity is becoming more welcoming and accommodating to diverse audiences. The leaders in the profession will be seeking the input of multi-cultural audiences to help shape their centers in the future.

The leaders in the profession expect technology to become an increasingly important aspect of the nature center business. While the nature center field has historically been conflicted over embracing technology, the leaders in the profession have started to embrace social media and mobile technology. They are contemplating how to leverage this technology to enhance their programming, public relations, and marketing. They see the nature centers of the future appealing to the new generations of digital natives who have grown up integrating mobile devices into their everyday lives.

Theme 2: Nature centers will adapt funding for day to day operations and long-term sustainability.

Fundraising and generating income has always been a challenge for nature centers. The leaders in the profession perceive the economic landscape of the future to be equally dynamic. The directors expressed a variety of ways in which nature centers must adapt their business and fundraising models to continue to thrive into the next 25 years. However, the leaders are overwhelming saying that nature centers cannot get comfortable. They must be nimble and quick to react to changes in the local, regional, and national economic landscapes.

It is clear that the profession perceives the 2008 economic recession continuing to affect nature centers into the future. The survey discovered that the majority of nature center professionals see the recession impacting the strategic direction and fundraising of their centers over the next 7 years. The leaders in the profession confirmed this trend in the interviews. They discussed how the recession has and will continue to put pressure on funding sources. They described a tightening of resources from private philanthropy, government sources, and foundations as well as earned income.

However, not all nature centers were adversely affected by the recession. Some leaders indicated that stability in their local and regional economies sheltered their centers from the storm. Whether or not the recession is impacting centers, the leaders in the profession foresee increasing income and fundraising as challenges in the future. Leaders see nature centers adapting in one of two ways: streamlining or diversifying. Some leaders foresee nature centers retracting to their core principles and their most effective programs. These leaders have found success streamlining their centers to become as lean and as efficient as possible. But the majority

of the leaders in the profession are emphasizing diversification of program offerings and income sources. They are hedging their bets against a perceived persistent decline in school programs by increasing programs for adults, families, and the community. They also foresee an increase in facility rentals, private events, and professional development programs for teachers.

The survey discovered that nature centers will be increasing their investment in fundraising. The leaders in the profession anticipate that this investment of energy and resources will pay off with increased individual donations. They are especially focusing on providing their constituents opportunities to leave an environmental legacy through planned giving. However, they highlighted that nature centers must be better at promoting their value in order to truly reap the benefits of investing in fundraising. The leaders in the profession are calling for more research evaluating nature center programs and identifying their true outcomes. But they expressed that few if any executive directors have the time to conduct this research on their own.

Another future trend in fundraising is collaboration. The leaders in the profession emphasized that nature centers must work together with other organizations to increase the scale of their impact. They explained that collaboration will be key to winning larger grants from foundations who are increasingly looking to fund programs with more ambitious outcomes for the community. Some leaders took this concept further and discussed the possibility of nature center consortiums or coalitions. They envision nature centers banding together to not only collaboratively raise funds, but also work together to affect legislation and public policy. The leaders largely see this as a concept that will take time to develop. However, they are passionate about the potential of authentic partnerships to expand the influence and impact of nature centers.

Theme 3: Nature center programming will evolve.

The leaders in the profession foresee nature center programming evolving over the next 25 years. The changes they perceive to programming are interconnected with relevancy as well as economic changes. A major way the leaders already see programming developing is with a commitment to lifelong learning. The leaders in the profession are enhancing their programming to reach all ages in their community. They are working to create suites of programs to reach students at all stages of their lives from preschool through college and into adulthood. These leaders are motivated by a desire for nature centers to have multiple contacts with students throughout their lives rather than being a field trip that students only experience once. The leaders identified that some levels of programming, specifically high school and college, require a lot of work to develop into polished products. But they only see this trend growing over the next 25 years.

The leaders in the profession perceive nature preschools as the entry way to lifelong learning at their centers. Some leaders already operate fully functioning preschools. They see nature preschools as a wave that will catch more and more nature centers in the near future.

The leaders in the profession also expect the nature center programs of the future to be more authentic. Both donors and executive directors are concentrated on providing authentic programs that truly teach students skills to address environmental issues. The leaders in the field see field research and citizen science playing a role in developing authentic programs in the future. Many of the leaders desire to develop programming that engages students in issues analysis. They seek to elevate programming to the higher level goals of environmental education and create real champions for the environment.

Connected to this emphasis on authenticity is the desire of leaders in the profession to expand beyond school programming. Leaders expressed that school programs, the traditional backbone of nature centers, have become stagnant. They see little change in their structure since their creation. For many leaders, economic pressure has urged them to look at school programs with a more critical eye. They are examining the impact school programs have on students. The leaders in the profession are not planning to dissolve their current school programs. But for many, school programs are not a priority for the future either.

The leaders in the profession do not currently have answers for what lies beyond the school programs model. They do not yet know what the next authentic, impactful, and economically viable model will be. But they are looking to the horizon for innovation.

Theme 4: Nature center professionals will develop modern skill sets.

The leaders in the profession foresee the nature center staff and board positions of the future becoming increasingly sharpened and skilled. They predict that nature center staffs will continue to take on new responsibilities as centers diversify their programming to become more adaptable and nimble. The leaders are anticipating that increased staff training and professional development will be needed to equip staff members with the skills and knowledge necessary to make nature centers thrive. The leaders in the field also foresee a generational shift occurring within nature centers. As long-time staff begin to retire, nature centers will have to integrate a new generation of educators and professionals into their organizations.

The governing boards of nature centers are varied in structure and function. As one respondent stated, “If you’ve seen one board, you’ve seen one board. They’re all unique.” The directors who participated in interviews work with boards that are at various stages of

development. However, the leaders in the profession agreed that the nature center boards of the future will become more financially skilled and reflective of their communities. The leaders are striving to add board members who can marshal resources. If nature centers are to grow in the future, boards must have greater fundraising skills and connections to donor. The leaders in the profession also emphasized that nature center boards must become more representative of their communities. In order to better serve communities, boards must have members who understand their communities. The leaders will be working to recruit culturally and socioeconomically diverse board members who can represent the community.

Similarly, the leaders in the profession perceive that the executive directors of the future will need to have stronger business abilities. The leaders foresee executive directors having an even greater role in maintaining financial stability for centers. With an ever-changing economic landscape, the leaders emphasized that future directors must also possess entrepreneurial skills to quickly adapt. They predict the next generation of directors may be hired from outside the profession. However, the leaders maintained that executive directors will always need to have passion about the environmental missions of the nature centers they lead. In fact, the leaders in the profession assert that executive directors should become stronger voices for the environment in the future. They are calling for directors to be more outspoken about environmental issues and involved in community planning. The leaders in the profession believe that the growth of nature centers depends upon the passionate voice of executive directors.

Theme 5: Nature centers will strengthen their properties.

Similar to boards, nature center properties are in different situations depending on their community. Therefore, the perceptions from the leaders in the profession about how they will

change were also diverse. In general, the leaders foresee nature centers strengthening their facilities and land.

Only a third of the leaders plan to construct new buildings over the next 25 years. These leaders have their sights set on new visitor centers and educational facilities in the next couple decades. Some are planning simpler, more resilient structures that are lighter on the land.

The leaders in the profession were split on whether their centers will be acquiring more land over the next 25 years. The survey showed that a third of nature center professionals thought their centers will. The leaders who are looking to acquire land, plan to do so opportunistically as it becomes available. They are motivated to prevent further urban development of land in their communities.

Several leaders foresee the increasing advancement of urban and suburban sprawl changing the role of nature centers in their communities. In some places, centers are becoming islands of nature within sprawl rather than the gateways to the natural world outside cities that they once were. This is the changing the way that some communities perceive their nature centers. The leaders forecast that this shift may even present opportunities for the creation of new nature centers as the spaces between sprawl shrink.

Differences in Emerging and Seasoned Leader Perceptions of the Future

The ANCA Blue Ribbon project sought to understand the perceptions about the future from the seasoned leaders who have been the backbone of the profession for decades as well as the emerging leaders who will be carrying the mantle of nature centers into the next 25 years. This project discovered that there are significant differences in how emerging leaders are contemplating and planning for the future (see Table 12). The emerging leaders more often

emphasized trends that marked a departure from traditional nature center paradigms. They more frequently discussed the need for nature centers to address climate change and to consider the role of advocacy. They were much more vocal about innovative changes to programming including expanding to reach all ages, incorporating issues analysis, and integrating authentic field research. Nearly all emerging leaders discussed the desire to expand beyond school programming while less than a quarter of the seasoned leaders responded with this ethic. The emerging leaders in the profession clearly have a different vision for certain aspects of nature centers. They seem to be more oriented towards innovation of traditional nature center paradigms. This research does not suggest that the seasoned leaders in the profession are inflexible or obstinate to such changes. However, they did not discuss fundamental changes in these areas as often as the emerging leaders.

Comparisons with the 1989 NSYF Study

The ANCA Blue Ribbon project echoed several of the same sentiments that the NSYF study identified in 1989. Fundraising is still a major point of emphasis. The NSYF study highlighted fundraising as the most pressing concern for the survival and growth of nature centers. The leaders in the profession are still acutely focused on fundraising today. It is not surprising that nature centers have not yet found the silver bullet for fundraising. As environmental education non-profits, nature centers will likely always grapple with fundraising. Nature centers are still working to strengthen their connections to their local communities. The NYSF study showed that nature centers were concerned about garnering the support of their constituents and promoting their value to the community. Nature centers are clearly still contemplating and working on these areas. Nature centers are also still focused on increasing the business skills of their staffs and boards 25 years after the NSYF study identified the same trend. Several of the larger trends and concerns from the NSYF study persist today. But the ANCA Blue Ribbon study identified many modern trends and concepts that mark the significant advancement of the field since 1989.

ANCA Recommendations

The ANCA Blue Ribbon project identified many trends in how nature centers will grow and change over the next 25 years. Some of these trends express clear ways nature centers will evolve and tackle challenges in the future. However, many of these trends articulated concepts which the leaders in the profession are contemplating how to address in the future. Some identify specific needs of nature centers. This section presents recommendations for how ANCA can lead the exploration of these unresolved trends and address specific needs. Recommendations are listed numerically with brief explanations.

1. Support the development of nature centers into conservation and restoration leaders.

Champion nature centers which have successfully integrated conservation and/or restoration ethics into their organizations. Develop best practices for nature centers supporting conservation and restoration in their communities.

2. Lead the conversation about education and advocacy concerning climate change.

Investigate how nature centers in currently impacted regions are beginning to address climate change. Provide spaces for directors to discuss how centers can and should react.

3. Develop best practices for integrating technology into programming and business models.

Champion nature centers which have integrated technology in significant ways. Due to the fast pace of innovation, focus on ways to leverage social media and mobile technology rather than specific devices such as iPads.

4. Develop best practices for resiliency to future economic downturns.

Identify lessons learned from nature centers that were affected by the recession.

5. Support the promotion of the value of nature centers.

Conduct evaluation and outcome research on nature centers. Develop best practices for promoting the value of nature centers in the community.

6. Be a catalyst for collaboration.

Champion nature centers which have successfully collaborated with other organizations to increase the scale of their impact. Develop best practices for collaborating to win larger foundation grants. Facilitate discussions on the potential for nature center consortiums and coalitions.

7. Promote innovative programming.

Champion nature centers which have created successful programs for high schoolers, college students, and adults. Champion programs which have successfully integrated issues analysis, field research, and citizen science.

8. Explore the horizon beyond school programming.

Facilitate discussions of the value of traditional school programs. Provide spaces for directors to discuss new models of programming.

9. Promote boards reflective of their communities.

Champion nature centers which have benefited from diverse, reflective boards.

Topics for Further Research

The ANCA Blue Ribbon project discovered specific trends in how nature centers will change. But it also uncovered more questions for further research to address. The nature center field needs research into the impacts of their programming on school students and the public. Most nature centers do not have the time or the resources to conduct such outcome research on their own. Comprehensive evaluation research of programming would help nature centers both improve their programs and better promote their value to the community. Similarly, research into the effectiveness of integrating mobile technology is needed to keep nature centers on the cutting edge. The field needs to learn how to best imbue this technology into their centers in ways that help meet their missions and draw the community inward.