



# SUSTAINABILITY HANDBOOK 2016

The policies in this handbook support Walking Mountains Science Center staff and volunteers in creating an organizational culture of sustainability and stewardship while fulfilling the criteria of the *Actively Green* business eco-certification program.

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## **Mission Statement and Business Code of Conduct:**

**Mission Statement:** The mission of Walking Mountains Science Center is to awaken a sense of wonder and inspire environmental stewardship and sustainability through natural science education.

### **Organization Values: (S.C.I.L.L.)**

**Stewardship:** We seek to understand, honor, and live in harmony with the ecological processes by which nature sustains all life, shifting our perceptions from parts to wholes and from objects to relationships. We serve as responsible role models of sustainability and stewardship in our community. Our programs are designed to foster stewardship behaviors in participants while enhancing human-nature relationships and increasing socio-ecological resilience.

**Community:** We seek to engage all people living in our community. We collaborate respectfully with all stakeholders, first listening and seeking to understand their needs, and then engaging in dialogue to find common ground and create constructive solutions. Our programs are designed to create enriching interactions and positive experiences for community members. We believe we are all connected to each other, our environment, and the greater web of life.

**Innovation:** We believe innovation and creativity are essential to envisioning and creating a sustainable future. We are passionate about developing solutions and striving towards best practices in all of our programs. We pride ourselves in valuing individual and collective innovation within our organization and also through our partnerships with stakeholders. We are leaders and social entrepreneurs in the fields of environmental science education and sustainability. We actively incubate and empower an innovative organizational culture.

**Learning:** The world is continually changing and therefore we strive to acquire and promote new knowledge, experiences and understanding. We value scientific inquiry and critical thinking and we strive to awaken a sense of wonder and curiosity in all learners. We design and facilitate learning experiences that are place-based and that draw upon the unique ecological and social attributes of our community while encouraging broader systems thinking to help solve local and global challenges. We evaluate the outcomes of our programs and projects so that we can deliberately adapt and improve.

**Leadership:** We lead our community in efforts that enhance environmental knowledge, stewardship and sustainability. We are proactive and we understand that true leadership is transformative and sometimes unpopular. Our leadership is thoughtful, patient, and constructive. We lead to change hearts and minds in ways people will understand and embrace. We follow and support the leadership of others with common goals.

## **Vision Statement:**

Walking Mountains Science Center is a national model for place-based natural science and sustainability education. The Science Center Campus in Avon, Colorado is a gathering place for environmental learning and stewardship in our community. Through program offerings and initiatives, Walking Mountains ensures that:

- People of all ages and walks of life develop a life-long connection to the natural world through participation in Walking Mountains programs and projects;
- Natural science education and environmental sustainability are priorities in our community;
- Walking Mountains is an integral part of local schools' curriculum wherein every child in the Eagle Valley participates in our programs throughout their academic career; students throughout the state and country also participate in our year-round programs.
- As a leader in training environmental and natural science educators and sustainability leaders, Walking Mountains is sought after for its internships, graduate fellowships and professional development for teachers and others;
- Walking Mountains is a role model in sustainable best practices and design, always striving to make ecologically informed decisions.

## **Strategic Plan Organizational Objectives:**

The work of Walking Mountains Board of Directors and Staff is guided by a Strategic Plan. Each year the Board of Directors update and adopt the Plan and each full-time year-round staff members creates an individual Annual Plan that is aligned with the Strategic Plan. Walking Mountains is internally organized by four organizational divisions: Youth Programs, Community Programs, Sustainability & Stewardship Programs, and Administration and Governance. The major objectives of the 2014 Strategic Plan include:

- *School Programs Objective*—To positively impact the education of Eagle County students by providing exceptional environmental education experiences that improve science literacy while fostering stewardship. Serve all K-8 and select high school students by 2018, once a year throughout their academic career.
- *Community Programs Objective*—To promote environmental knowledge and stewardship by providing exceptional informal education experiences to the residents and visitors of our community at our three integrated facilities, Science Center Campus, Nature Discovery Center, and Vail Nature Center, by 2017.
- *Sustainability & Stewardship Programs Objective*—Double the overall impact of Sustainability and Stewardship Programs from the 2013 baseline. Programs include: Energy Smart, Zero Waste, Landscape Stewardship, and Sustainability Education.
- *Organizational Greatness Objective*—To be a great non-profit organization recognized for fulfilling our mission and our highly qualified Board and staff, broad community awareness, and fiscal sustainability.

Each of the above Organizational Objectives is supported by multiple Strategies which are supported by individual staff members' Annual Plans. Please refer to the Walking Mountains Science Center 2014 Strategic Plan for additional information. Each year Walking Mountains' staff and board of directors develop an organizational financial budget that is in alignment with the organization's Strategic Plan.

**Sustainability Policy Statement:** Walking Mountains is committed to sustainability of the Eagle Valley and surrounding mountain environment. We value the ecological, economic, and cultural health of our community and our valley. Therefore we strive to engage our participants, visitors, and employees in environmental stewardship and learning about the surrounding mountain environment. We also encourage our participants, visitors, and employees to participate in local cultural and educational opportunities that enrich our community's sense of well-being. Walking Mountains uses a Sustainability Action Plan to set goals and guide our progress and we create an Annual Sustainability Report to communicate and celebrate our successes.

**Sustainability Code of Conduct Pledge:** At Walking Mountains we are committed to sustainability and the "triple bottom line" approach including: environmental sustainability, financial sustainability, and social equity. We integrate sustainability into our management and facility operations and our programming for youth and adult participants. We are a socially and environmentally responsible organization and therefore we address what we can control through our operations, and we influence what we can't control by considering the extended supply chain when we purchase from and contract with vendors. For additional information please refer to Walking Mountains' Sustainability Action Plan See Appendix A).

**Green Team Roles and Responsibilities:** Walking Mountains has a staff Green Team with a chair staff member and other staff represented from each of the organization's departments. The Green Team meets monthly and is responsible for coordinating the organization's sustainability management and initiatives and maintaining Actively Green eco-certification using the Actively Green quickbase sustainability management system.

**Specific Responsibilities:**

- Record and monitor water usage and make recommendations
- Record and monitor greenhouse gas emissions and make recommendations
- Record and monitor waste production and recycling and make recommendations
- Record and monitor energy usage and make recommendations
- Coordinate with Office and Finance Manager to record and monitor purchasing of paper, recycled paper, eco-friendly chemical and other responsible (sustainable) products and make recommendations.
- Coordinate with departments for staff volunteering opportunities and helping track staff volunteer hours and track staff fossil fuel free commuting.

**Waste Reduction Policy:** Walking Mountains Science Center is committed to limiting our environmental impact by reducing waste through recycling and composting. Staff members are familiar with recycling policies and procedures and are capable of instructing guests and visitors about how to use our recycling system.

**Recycling and Waste Monitoring Plan:** Recycling bins are accessible and well labeled in all exhibit and rental spaces and are emptied into the larger, 96 gallon recycling bins on the west side of the Field Studies Base Camp. WMSC staff will monitor the amount and type of waste in our sorted containers to track our waste and recycling production and maximize the amount of waste diverted from landfills.

The following describes how we dispose of specific types of recyclable materials:

**Cardboard:** Cardboard is broken down and tape and staples are removed before it is placed neatly in the recycling area near the staff entrance.

**Plastic Bags:** Plastic bags are collected with cardboard in the recycling area near the staff entrance. Staff is encouraged to use reusable bags when shopping for supplies.

**Single Stream:** Our single-stream recycling can include all recyclable plastic, glass, paper, paperboard and aluminum containers marked with a recycling symbol. Staff members rinse out containers to prevent both a dirty recycling stream and odor in our indoor recycling bins.

**Composting:** Some staff food waste can be composted using our worm bin. Compost is placed in the large container in the FSBC refrigerator and added to the worm bin regularly by members of the Green Team or Naturalists.

**Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Recycling:** There is a bin to collect household hazardous waste (HHW) in the breezeway at the employee entrance. All HHW produced on campus should be put in this bin, including: all batteries, CFL bulbs, chemicals, cleaners, waxes, paints, solvents, oil, antifreeze, and much more. More information about what is accepted as HHW is available in the pamphlet on the side of the bin. Incandescent light bulbs are not HHW and should be put in trash. Also, please make sure all boxes and paperwork associated with the HHW is recycled properly and not put in the HHW box.

**Water Use Policy:** The Walking Mountains core campus is a LEED platinum certified facility and the organization is dedicated to the efficient use of water, both indoors and for irrigation.

**Water Use Monitoring Plan:** A Green Team staff member tracks and records water use on a monthly basis. With a baseline established, Walking Mountains determines and enacts the best procedures to reduce water consumption.

**Energy Reduction & Renewables Policy:** Walking Mountains is dedicated to efficient use of energy resources and on-site renewable energy generation.

**Energy Reduction Monitoring Plan:** Walking Mountains tracks and records energy use and renewable generation and record on a monthly basis. WMSC will continually aim to reduce energy use thereby decreasing the non-renewable portion of energy consumption.

**Greenhouse Gas Emissions Policy:** Walking Mountains is dedicated to the accounting and reduction of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions related to operations.

**Greenhouse Gas Emissions Monitoring Plan:** Walking Mountains will total the emissions equivalent from all non-renewable energy sources, employee commuting, and company vehicle operation. Action plans are created to reduce total emissions.

**Pollution Prevention—Vehicles:** Walking Mountains reduces air pollution and vehicle traffic by encouraging our participants, visitors, and employees to carpool and use public transportation whenever possible. Our employees are rewarded for using alternative and public transportation to get to work including: carpooling, walking, biking, and using local Eco-Transit buses. Whenever possible, we choose fuel efficient vehicles to support our operations.

**Pollution Prevention—Vehicles Monitoring Plan:** Walking Mountains tracks full-time employee and fleet vehicle commuting. This information is recorded on a quarterly basis and miles employees use fossil fuel free modes of transportation are subtracted from the total.

**Chemical Use and Purchasing Policy:** Walking Mountains strives to minimize the amount of harmful chemicals it introduces into the environment by using organic and biodegradable cleaning products and employing Organic Housekeepers, an eco-friendly cleaning service, to clean its buildings.

**Chemical Use Monitoring Plan:** Most cleaning is done with a solution of white vinegar and water. Whenever chemicals are necessary, they will be documented and clearly labeled with instructions for proper use. Chemicals purchased for science programs are not tracked, but standard operating procedures are in place for use and proper disposal of these chemicals, (such as bleach, isopropyl alcohol, iodine and chromatography solvent).

**Responsible Purchasing Policy:** Walking Mountains strives to support sustainable community economic development through the support of local businesses and the purchasing of recycled, fair trade, local and organic products when possible.

**Responsible Purchasing Monitoring Plan:** Walking Mountains tracks purchasing of recycled, fair-trade, local and organic products purchased on a quarterly basis. Walking Mountains calculates the amount of eco-friendly products purchased as a percentage of the total products purchased each quarter.

**Paper Reduction Policy:** Walking Mountains pledges to reduce our paper usage. We commit to use recycled copy paper we report the amount of paper we use on a quarterly basis.

**Paper Reduction Plan Objective:** Walking Mountains purchases paper for our copier(s) and printer(s) that is, at a minimum, 30% post-consumer recycled. We have committed to reducing our use of copy paper 10% annually from the 2014 baseline.

**Community Impacts—Good Neighbor Policy:** Walking Mountains recognizes that the overall well-being of the Eagle Valley community depends upon people living in neighborhoods throughout the Valley and surrounding communities. Walking Mountains operations do not jeopardize the well-being or access to basic provisions or services of any person or neighboring community.

**Giving Back to Our Community Policy:** As a nonprofit educational organization in the Eagle Valley, Walking Mountains is engaged in “giving back” to our community on a daily basis with our mission “to awaken a sense of wonder and inspire environmental stewardship and sustainability through natural science education.”

**Giving Back to Our Community Monitoring Plan:** We provide opportunities for our employees and participants to volunteer in the Eagle Valley community to “give back” to the people in need and the natural environment. Announcements with opportunities to “give back” are posted on the copy room bulletin board and through email and social media. Walking Mountains tracks the number of volunteer hours that our staff members contribute to other non-profit organizations in the community.

**Customer Feedback Policy:** Walking Mountains is an educational organization with a mission “to awaken a sense of wonder and inspire environmental stewardship and sustainability through natural science education.” We provide over 50 types of program experiences year-round to our customers (students and other participants) at various indoor and outdoor venues and locations throughout the Eagle Valley.

Below is a summary of how we collect feedback in: 1) multi-day **youth programs**, 2) informal interpretive **community programs**, and 3) in our **sustainability and stewardship programs**.

1. **Youth Programs:** uses a grade-level and curriculum specific pre and post-test assessment forms to systematically measure the effectiveness of programs toward increasing students’ understanding and interest in sustainability and related environmental topics. Walking Mountains has Youth Programs Evaluation Plan that provides staff with guidance to conduct assessments of short and long term program outcomes, both for the purposes of refining program content and/or implementation and to validate program expansion and continued funding. In addition, program evaluation forms are collected from teachers and youth chaperones in order to understand the benefits these stakeholders perceive from participation in Walking Mountains’ programs. In addition, our instructors conduct debriefs at the end of each program and specifically address whether or not the program’s goals were met.
2. **Community Programs:** Walking Mountains collects customer feedback forms (surveys) from visitors at our Science Center campus. The data from these forms is collected and entered into a customer database on a quarterly basis. A sustainability specific survey question was added to the survey to better track whether or not the visitor’s experience made an impact on their understanding of sustainability. In addition, seasonal interns who provide many of the community programs are evaluated regularly and they also complete an evaluation at the end of their employment.
3. **Sustainability and Stewardship Programs:** There are several types of programs within the sustainability and stewardship programs department that include customer feedback: high school students participate in a 12 week paid Natural Resource Internship and they complete an evaluation at the end of the internship. Zero Waste sustainability interns gather survey data about the general public’s impressions of recycling and composting while they are working at public events. These surveys are evaluated by the intern’s supervisor. In addition, each intern completes an end-of-season evaluation form. Participants in the Actively Green sustainable business training program complete an evaluation form at the end of the training sessions to help staff continuously improve program delivery. Energy Smart participants are given a customer feedback form to rate the satisfaction of their home energy assessment experience.

**Participant & Visitor Education Regarding Sustainability Policy:** Walking Mountains promotes the principles of sustainability and stewardship to our participants and visitors in the following ways: through their interactions with our employees, our marketing and internal and external communications, our printed collateral, and our advertisements and website.

**Participant & Visitor Education—Do No Harm/Responsible Travel Policy:** Walking Mountains values and protects our surrounding mountain landscape and watershed. Our organization benefits from local ecosystem services such as clean air and water and natural open spaces for our participants, visitors, and employees to recreate and rejuvenate. We are surrounded by the 2.3 million acre White River National Forest including federally designated Wilderness Areas. Walking Mountains helps sustain local natural resources and protects the public lands around us by promoting the following sustainable behaviors in our participants, visitors, and employees: disposing of waste properly; respecting and not feeding wildlife; and preventing erosion by traveling on designated trails and obeying trail closures and special use restrictions.

**Participant and Visitor Education—Economic Development Policy:** Walking Mountains supports long-term economic vitality in the Eagle Valley by encouraging participants, visitors, and employees to purchase products and services from local vendors whenever possible.

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If you would like more information or have suggestions to help continuously improve sustainability at Walking Mountains please contact the Director of Sustainability and Stewardship Programs or the Sustainability Programs Coordinator.