



HILL COUNTRY ALLIANCE STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2026

A Collaborative Approach to Conservation

The Hill Country Alliance (HCA) was founded in 2004 by a group of neighbors concerned about the quickly accelerating rate of growth in the unincorporated areas of Western Travis County. Since the early living room conversations that inspired the creation of HCA, the organization has grown into a regional nonprofit and thought leader that champions a vision for conservation, growth, and planning that protects the most critical features of the Texas Hill Country for future generations.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Hill Country Alliance is to bring together a diverse coalition of partners to preserve the open spaces, starry night skies, clean and abundant waters, and unique character of the Texas Hill Country.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Hill Country Alliance (HCA) is dedicated to ensuring for future generations an opportunity to benefit from the unique features of the Texas Hill Country region, including the countless spring-fed streams, its agricultural heritage, wildlife, and spectacular scenic beauty. The following principles guide HCA’s strategic approach, programs, and activities:

- HCA recognizes the importance of bringing together **diverse people and perspectives** to tackle difficult challenges our region faces. We are conveners, bridge builders, and connectors. The actions needed to sustain the Hill Country vary across the region, and we inspire both locally-driven solutions as well as a regional vision that puts conservation at the forefront.
- HCA recognizes that **growth in the Hill Country, if it happens in a thoughtful way**, can protect and even enhance the natural and economic resources of our region. A key to the future of our region is promoting economic development that is centered in conservation. We work with partners to inspire good development patterns, incentivize conservation, and think outside the box about creative alternatives to business-as-usual development.
- HCA believes **information sharing, leadership building, and education** are key to our work in building the foundation for the long-term change that we need. We work to create more

opportunities for people to be inspired by the incredible natural beauty of the Hill Country, to make honest and fair information readily available, and to empower and connect community leaders who will be forces for good in the region.

- HCA accomplishes much of our work **by supporting partner organizations and entities**. We bring people together to work more strategically, to identify and fill gaps in existing efforts, and to convert thoughtful conversation to meaningful action. Our mission cannot be accomplished without including the full diversity of our region, and we work proactively to elevate new ideas, bring marginalized voices into the conversation, and challenge ourselves and others to think and work inclusively.

WHERE HCA WORKS

HCA focuses its work on the Texas Hill Country, which includes the region from Austin south along the I-35 corridor to San Antonio, west past Uvalde and Junction and north to Llano. This area encompasses more than 11 million acres in 17 counties, including Bandera, Bexar, Blanco, Burnet, Comal, Edwards, Gillespie, Hays, Kendall, Kerr, Kimble, Llano, Mason, Medina, Real, Travis and Uvalde. While we commonly refer to our 17-county focal area, we recognize that natural boundaries (ecoregions, river basins, geologic features, etc.) as well as metro regions and human-created infrastructure (transportation corridors, population centers, pipelines, etc.) intrinsically tie us to the counties around us and beyond. Our work acknowledges, is shaped by, and seeks to shape those connections. In establishing programs and focused outreach efforts, HCA identifies priority sub-sections of this geography based on partnership opportunities, emergent threats, perceived strategic benefit, and overall need.



THE CHALLENGE

The Hill Country is a region facing **immense and growing** pressures. Three of the five fastest-growing counties in the US are located here, and the rate of land fragmentation is accelerating. New development leads to higher demands on limited water resources, threatening spring flow and lowering water tables. Pristine creeks and rivers are increasingly the receiving bodies for nutrient-laden wastewater discharge, impairing waterways and threatening the defining features of this incredible part of Texas. We are losing our view of the night skies as light pollution clouds the darkness. Economic growth is felt unequally across our region and often comes at the expense of natural resources. Lack of county authority to manage and plan for growth, regulatory disconnects between surface and groundwater management, and an overall policy framework that does not acknowledge the rapidly changing realities in our region leaves us vulnerable to an uncertain future.

At the same time, the Hill Country stands to serve as a model for how to “get it right” when balancing growth and natural resource conservation. New residents are drawn to our region by the quality of life, economic vitality, and its unique natural features. New funding opportunities present a chance to invest in a new way of doing business. Leaders are emerging who sense the urgency of the call for conservation and who are willing to boldly champion new ideas. The conservation community is more unified than ever before. Now is the time to scale our ambition and lay out a vision for the Hill Country we want to hand on to future generations.

A VISION FOR THE HILL COUNTRY

HCA envisions a Hill Country in which our lands and waters are managed for long-term resilience, our view of the night sky is protected from light pollution, and our communities are vibrant, healthy, and thriving. In this future Hill Country:

- Communities are designed and built with conservation and enhancement of natural resources at their core.
- Economic growth benefits all people (current and future) and does not come at the expense of environmental resilience, public health, and quality of life.
- Communities actively invest in the conservation of private land resources and the creation of new publicly accessible parklands.
- The preservation of our view of the night sky is built into codes and building best practices.
- Groundwater is managed to ensure continued spring flow, and all new construction seeks to minimize impacts on limited and fragile water resources.
- Landowners are informed, empowered, and compensated for their work to protect soil health, watershed function, and habitat.
- The business, landowner, governmental and NGO community work together to maximize the long-term prosperity and ecological health of our region.
- All community voices are heard in community planning conversations, permitting decisions, and regional forums.
- The Hill Country is recognized at the national level for its innovative approach to landscape-scale conservation efforts, and significant investment is made in the creation of resilient natural and traditional infrastructure systems.

HOW HCA WORKS

HCA cannot accomplish our work without close coordination and collaboration with partners. We have a broad geographical scope to foster big-picture, regional thinking. We host conversations in all shapes and sizes to foster education and understanding between people of different interests, values, and perspectives. We are adaptive and responsive to the ever-changing needs and issues of our region. We are a lean and frugal organization, full of passion, spiritual energy, and joyful optimism. We are brokers of ideas and agents for change. We accomplish our work through four main types of activities:

- **Education and Outreach:** We raise awareness of key issues, galvanize response to developing threats, bridge common divides, and build conversation around difficult challenges. We work to build an ever-expanding base of engaged and informed stakeholders.
- **Thoughtful Advocacy:** We connect with decision makers to respond to natural resource issues at the local, regional and state level. We convey our messages through participation in key policy conversations, by submitting public comments, and responding to new permit applications that may cause environmental degradation. We communicate regularly with elected officials and staff and convene partners to identify policy opportunities.
- **Capacity Building:** We build the ability of our own organization, but also our partner organizations, to be more successful in achieving our missions. We compile information and resources to inform better decision making. We seek opportunities to share resources, amplify the work of our partners, and streamline efforts across the region.
- **Developing Partnerships and Networks:** We maintain a leadership role in building a network of collaborative, strategic partners. We find opportunities to engage nontraditional partners and thoughtfully grow the network of collaborators interested in the long-term health of the Hill Country. We look for ways to scale up our impact.

2022-2026 Strategic Goals

The Hill Country Alliance fulfills its mission through programs and activities across four key program areas: **land, water, night sky,** and **community**. HCA works with local communities, partner organizations, and others to execute these programs and activities. The next five years offers a window of opportunity to dramatically scale our conservation impact in this region. This plan lays the groundwork to build the visionary leadership, significant financial investment, and bold re-imagining of our infrastructure, local economies, and understanding of resilience in order to meet the challenges of the next 50 years.

The strategic goals outlined below are designed to guide the organization's priority work over the five-year period from 2022-2026. HCA will conduct an annual review of these goals to ensure activities are well-aligned with operational realities, needs, and opportunities.

1. LAND: ADVANCE STRATEGIC PRIVATE LAND STEWARDSHIP AND CONSERVATION

Grow conserved and stewarded acres by 35,000 acres and increase funding for land conservation and stewardship by \$150 million by 2025.

HCA's Land Program seeks to increase private land stewardship and permanent land conservation across the Texas Hill Country. Ninety-five percent of our region is privately owned, and there is great opportunity to work with willing private land partners to elevate sound stewardship practices. Thoughtful land stewardship provides rippling benefits, not only for the landowner, but for society and future generations. Good land stewardship may enhance water quality and quantity, mitigate floods and drought, support agricultural productivity, and improve wildlife habitat.

As our region develops, it is critical that we reserve some acres for conservation in perpetuity. Permanent land conservation protects open spaces and scenic vistas, agricultural heritage, and wildlife habitat; these open spaces act as natural infrastructure to absorb rainfall through soil, supporting the aquifers as well as spring-fed creeks and rivers of the Hill Country. HCA's efforts to advance permanent land conservation will focus on creating a strong enabling environment that supports and enhances work by land trusts and other partners to permanently protect both private and public lands in the Hill Country. Priority activities are anticipated to include:

1.1 Enhance private land stewardship through outreach, education, and coordinating support.

Program activities are anticipated to include hosting landowner events focused on riparian and hillside stewardship, creating and distributing educational materials, as well as providing technical and coordinating support to several landowner groups. Prioritization will be focused on the Pedernales River Basin, as well as portions of the San Antonio, Medina, and Guadalupe River Basins encompassed by the Camp Bullis Sentinel Landscape.

1.2 Grow funding for land conservation by working with partners to explore local, regional, state, and federal strategies to support land conservation and open space protection. Specifically, work with receptive local government partners to lay the groundwork for conservation bond measures in Kendall, Comal, and Burnet Counties; with water providers to create a replicable source water protection fund in the Pedernales River Basin; and with the Camp Bullis Sentinel Landscape Consortium to secure state and federal funds for land conservation in the Southern Hill Country.

1.3 Scale thoughtful land stewardship and permanent land conservation through convening of partners across the region. By convening partners through team meetings, HCA will support sharing of lessons learned, strengthening capacity and coordination, and fostering collective impact through implementation of prioritized projects. Current teams engage dozens of partners and focus on land conservation, watershed health, regenerative grazing, and the Pedernales River Basin.

1.4 Provide sustained leadership to fill key gaps and catalyze on-the-ground change. As a regional player, HCA maintains a high-level view of gaps, needs, and opportunities. HCA will continue to identify and lead efforts like the Camp Bullis Sentinel Landscape Consortium, the Headwaters Alliance landowner group, and the Pedernales Team. HCA will drive collaborative decision-making to support healthy landscapes across the Hill Country.

2. WATER: EXPAND COMMUNITY INFLUENCE IN HILL COUNTRY WATER PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT AND GROW SUPPORT FOR ONE WATER PRACTICES

Grow a network of at least 5 new or better-connected partner groups capable of championing water issues across the region; secure \$30 million from state and federal funds to support innovative water projects that build resilience in rural communities in the Texas Hill Country, and; secure resolutions or ordinances from at least three governmental entities establishing that new publicly funded buildings larger than 10,000 square feet will be One Water / water neutral by 2026.

The Hill Country is a water-limited region. We simply do not have an endless supply of water to sustain our springs, creeks and rivers, particularly as population growth adds pressure to those limited resources. As more residents move to our region, we must grow in ways that dramatically shrink our footprint on water resources. HCA's Water Program focuses on raising effective public engagement in water planning and management processes. Water is a shared resource upon which all life, economic prosperity, and resilience depends. HCA works with partners to advocate for water policies that recognize the connection between groundwater and surface water, to promote water infrastructure alternatives that wisely steward critical water resources, and to protect our water quality in the face of land use change. Priority strategies will include:

2.1 Develop and assist local grassroots groups and stakeholder coalitions that are effective advocates for water stewardship in their communities. HCA will also facilitate collaboration among local groups to achieve regional and statewide policy and the culture of water management, planning, and conservation. This tactic will involve identifying and cultivating community leaders, ensuring diverse and traditionally under-represented perspectives are included in community conversations, and serving as a hub for water advocacy organizations who come to HCA for resources, ideas, and connections.

2.2 Elevate the voices of traditionally underserved communities in water planning and management processes at state, regional and local levels. In addition to our existing network of close relationships with landowners and community leaders, we will listen to and lift up the voices of traditionally overlooked, underserved, and underrepresented communities in our region. HCA will take its lead from those most impacted by water inequities. By ensuring that these voices are heard in community planning efforts, we can ensure the deepest, broadest, and longest-lasting influence of our work.

2.3 Champion One-Water development strategies with key influencers. HCA will continue to educate local governments, school boards, and private corporate developers on One Water approaches and their benefits, while advocating for Texas policies and funding programs that support One-Water strategies. In partnership with the Texas Living Waters Project and others, we will lift up inspirational models and prove the effectiveness of new and novel approaches to sustainable water infrastructure.

2.4 Advocate for state and local policies, programs, and projects that protect surface water and groundwater quality and quantity. Examples include the expansion of the TWDB's ability to utilize SWIFT funding in support of water conservation projects and activities, and the TCEQ's adoption of more stringent rules around wastewater discharge into ecologically sensitive waterways.

3. LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY: CULTIVATE LOCAL LEADERS FOR CONSERVATION, THOUGHTFUL GROWTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Establish a Hill Country Leadership Center and enroll our first cohort of local leaders in its programming by 2023; support rural Hill Country communities in the adoption or implementation of 50 local and regional policies (region-wide) that align with an HCA catalog of model ordinances and best practices.

The Hill Country contains a broad diversity of communities, each with their own unique challenges, opportunities, character, and strengths. HCA's Community Program seeks to build the capacity of rural leaders and their communities to address the issues associated with the region's rapid growth rates (e.g., land use, infrastructure, economic growth). We understand that scaling conservation and thoughtful development will require work at different levels—from grassroots community engagement to visionary regional leadership—and involve diverse actors—including government, private sector, philanthropy, and NGOs. We recognize that economic drivers can often feel at odds with natural resource conservation. We also believe that with visioning, stakeholder engagement, and both a local and regional approach, we can grow as a region while protecting our lands, waters, and night skies resources. Individual leaders, motivated community groups, and persistent volunteers can have an outsized positive impact on the future of the region. Priority strategies will include:

3.1 Build local leadership capacity, connectedness, and awareness of conservation issues in the region.

Develop a Hill Country Leadership Center to proactively support effective, diverse, and visionary local leadership in rural Hill Country communities. Additionally, continue to program conversations and workshops within and between communities to address specific local issues when they arise, and when requested by local leaders.

3.2 Support local governance by developing a catalog of model or example ordinances and best practices on a variety of local planning and development issues.

Finalize the existing drafts of model ordinances and best practices guides and continue to work towards their adoption with local elected officials and local advocates in rural communities around the region.

3.3 Foster regional collaboration for economic development and conservation funding.

Convene conversations and collaborative projects to advance healthy economic development in the region and urban-rural partnerships that reinvest a portion of the urban corridor's economic growth into the rural areas that provide the resources and amenities that are imperative to that growth.

3.4 Address the impacts of expanding industrial activities in the Hill Country, particularly aggregate and concrete operations.

Advocate for legislative and regulatory changes necessary for the effective protection of Hill Country communities and natural resources from unnecessary negative impacts of quarries, gravel and sand mines, and concrete and cement plants. Support local groups in their efforts to protect their communities from aggregate operations.

3.5 Create a preliminary assessment and action plan to guide HCA's engagement with each of the 17 Hill Country counties.

Prioritizing those counties within which significant momentum is growing (e.g. Comal, Kendall, Burnet), work with partners to map key constituencies, opportunities, and challenges. Create a roadmap for building staff capacity through a geographically-focused lens to accelerate positive change.

4. NIGHT SKY: EXPAND AWARENESS AND ACTION TO PROTECT AND RESTORE NIGHT SKIES ACROSS THE HILL COUNTRY

Support a robust network of at least 15 active Friends of the Night Sky groups; secure 10 new or updated night sky ordinances; achieve 5 new designated International Dark-Sky Places, and; ensure that 50% percent of the Hill Country maintains “Excellent” night skies, according to the New World Atlas of Artificial Night Sky Brightness.

As commercial, industrial, and residential development increases in urban and rural areas, communities are losing their treasured night skies as the glow from improper lighting dims the visibility of the stars. HCA’s Night Sky Program began in 2010 as a response to a request from the city of Junction to help them address this concern. HCA has emerged as a “go-to” resource on this issue in Central Texas and aims to expand awareness and action across the Hill Country over the next four years to protect and restore night sky views. The Night Sky Program has proven successful as an entry point for engaging communities on a broader array of conservation issues. Anticipated priority strategies include:

4.1 Develop and support county-based Night Sky Friends groups within the Hill Country. HCA will work with volunteers and organizations to establish a network of night sky advocates, preservation practices, resources, and a database of sky quality readings. A secondary goal of this work would be to produce a replicable model for adoption by other regions within the state of Texas and beyond.

4.2 Support interested communities in establishing ordinances and programs addressing outdoor lighting. HCA will support local organizations with information and technical assistance to advance local ordinances and programs that protect night skies. HCA will work directly with city officials, stakeholder organizations, and volunteers to promote such efforts. Where local friends groups exist, HCA will look to put them in the driver seat, strengthening their capacity while reserving HCA capacity to work elsewhere.

4.3 Grow public awareness about night sky issues and opportunities in the Hill Country. Coupling local ordinances with a culture of appreciation for the night skies and responsible outdoor lighting is imperative. HCA will work with partners to grow public awareness through outreach and education events, business recognition programs, and conferences. HCA will also develop alliances that pursue regional action, youth outreach, and regional marketing that emphasize our night sky as a valuable tourism resource and point of regional pride. Hill Country Night Sky Month, a regional festival coordinated by HCA, will be a central focus of this work.

4.4 Establish more IDA-recognized dark-sky places. HCA will assist local places including but not limited to cities, towns, and state parks, in their applications for designation by the International Dark-Sky Association as International Dark-Sky Places. This includes work with communities and partners around Enchanted Rock to establish a Night Sky Reserve and to expand its area after it is established.

5. TEXAS HILL COUNTRY CONSERVATION NETWORK: ADVANCE THE STATE OF PRACTICE IN THE HILL COUNTRY BY SERVING AS BACKBONE ORGANIZATION

Grow the Network by formalizing participation and securing a minimum of 30 partner entities; affirm regional metrics and align partner efforts toward moving the needle on those metrics, and; secure \$5 million in new grant funding for Texas conservation efforts from outside the state.

Since its inception, HCA has played a leadership role in bringing together and connecting diverse organizations working to advance land and water conservation across the Hill Country. Increasingly, partners are working to strengthen coordination and collaboration efforts on areas of shared interest. As the backbone organization of the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network (THCCN), HCA works to tell the story of collaboration across the Hill Country and to build partnerships that support bolder action toward long-term preservation of the region. HCA will continue to play a leadership role in advancing collaborative efforts. Priority strategies to be supported by HCA are anticipated to include:

5.1 Enhance collaborative efforts by stewarding the THCCN strategic plan and streamlining communications among partners.

HCA will lead efforts to ensure that partners understand their role in achieving shared measurable goals to reach our broader vision of a protected and thriving Hill Country. HCA will also lead efforts to align both internal and external communications for Network partners to help scale collaboration and impact.

5.2 Tap new sources of funding for conservation in the Texas Hill Country. HCA will help lead the THCCN as it transitions from early fundraising successes to continue the Texas Hill Country's elevation to a national stage and continue scaling investment in conservation across the Hill Country landscape.

5.3 Track and monitor trends relevant to the development and well-being of the Texas Hill Country by supporting the rollout of the "State of the Hill Country" report and leading subsequent updates.

HCA will work with partners in the THCCN to report on a set of key conservation and growth metrics for the Hill Country. These metrics are designed to provide a useful framework for communicating on key conservation topics, setting measurable goals, and monitoring the progress of planning efforts, programs, and projects in the region. HCA will support the update of this report every 2-3 years.

5.5 Support and steward development and implementation of broader strategic campaigns for the Hill Country.

Working with the THCCN Steering Committee and other partners, HCA will work to catalyze interest among organizations, local governments, businesses, philanthropy, and other partners and constituencies to amplify messages, awareness, and action among the public and key constituencies who can advance conservation and stewardship in the Hill Country. Such campaign efforts may also explore opportunities to develop the Hill Country Endowment concept and/or other strategies (including but not limited to an Economic Case for the Hill Country or Hill Country Business Council) to address and manage Hill Country growth and development challenges of the next few decades in thoughtful ways.

5.6 Continue to grow a culture of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice in THCCN. HCA will ensure that the Network is including and supporting organizations and communities historically excluded from conservation work and will ensure that the Network is addressing issues that are important to the full diversity of our region.

6. STORYTELLING AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: INSPIRE, EDUCATE, AND ENGAGE HILL COUNTRY STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT THE URGENT NEED FOR CONSERVATION.

Double HCA’s online reach; launch two creative new storytelling projects that better engage a new audience demographic, and; tell clear and concise stories of HCA’s success across the region.

As we tell our collective story of the Hill Country, HCA aims to acknowledge challenges while shifting the focus to developing and sharing regional solutions in a manner that inspires. HCA is in a position to create a clear vision for how growth, economic development, and natural resource preservation can be achieved in the Hill Country. We cannot succeed in protecting the lands, waters, night skies, and communities of the Hill Country if we are not engaging with the full diversity of the communities we aim to serve. We take pride in our ability to bridge traditional divides, find common interests, and lead efforts toward a shared vision for this amazing place and the people who call it home.

6.1 Streamline internal communication planning processes in order to be more proactive and strategic, rather than reactive and opportunistic. Develop a communications plan, standardize internal procedures for outreach, and create clear branding guidance for staff use. Develop accessible templates for presentations, easy-to-update educational materials, and evergreen key messaging. Create and update guidance documents for staff use. Identify and pursue ways to better utilize existing communication resources and platforms, and track outreach and engagement metrics.

6.2 Continue to create and tailor outreach programming, materials, and social media presence that maintains HCA as a thought leader in the region. HCA will continue to create materials including the Hill Country Calendar, Neighbor-to-Neighbor email newsletter, issue papers, Leadership Summit, and digital content that expand reach throughout the region. HCA will continue to identify unique messaging tools including video and interactive content and seek opportunities to elevate messaging beyond Texas.

6.3 Deepen engagement regionally and with currently absent or underrepresented groups. Engage more rural partners as well as communities of color, non-native English speakers, and younger audiences. Connect with and amplify messaging from existing and new partners. Create a pathway for engagement with young adults and students through internal education and outreach internship opportunities, with our network of partners, and through university-connected opportunities.

6.4 Incorporate strategic communications planning to the launch of any HCA-sponsored research, event, or work. Ensure that programmatic work (creation of reports, original research, conservation success stories, etc.) are maximally leveraged to reach strategic audiences. Devise new, inspirational campaigns to engage diverse audiences. Focus on “telling the story” of the impacts of big picture problems, such as the lack of county authority on development outcomes in the Hill Country.

6.5 Share and coordinate the distribution of resources to support grassroots efforts that enact change in communities across the Hill Country. Assist HCA program managers with creating toolkits and outreach resources to better coordinate and spread messaging on HCA focus areas.

7. DEVELOPMENT: ENHANCE FUNDRAISING EFFORTS TO ENSURE THAT HCA CAN SUSTAIN AND GROW PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS STRATEGIC PLAN.

Create a clear roadmap for fully funding HCA's endowment at \$1 million and grow HCA's annual fund to \$1.2 million.

HCA will work to expand and diversify its focus on fundraising to sustain and grow its programs and support for the THCCN. Priority activities are anticipated to include:

7.1 Continue to cultivate philanthropic support for HCA programs and operations, as well as for THCCN coordination activities. HCA will work to grow and diversify grant support from foundations and individuals over the next four years. Identify two new foundation partners. Develop innovative way for individuals to give to the organization through planned giving, gifts of stocks, and gifts of real estate.

7.2 Develop other fundraising activities by leveraging efforts by the HCA Board of Directors. HCA will continue to work with its board of directors development committee to develop and implement fundraising activities that strengthen brand awareness and generate revenue for the organization. HCA will continue to depend on 100% participation from board members in donating to the organization annually. HCA recognizes that it will be important to ensure that activities selected for implementation promise strong value for the level of time and investment required, focusing on both small and large donors. HCA will explore and experiment with opportunities to support development and fundraising activities by HCA board members and volunteers.

7.3 Examine and establish a plan for the HCA Endowment. HCA has an endowment that was set up to support operational expenses for the organization. HCA will work with its board of directors to secure sufficient resources to fund the endowment to the level needed to begin utilizing interest payments as a source of revenue for the organization.

7.4 Grow HCA's Annual Fund to \$1.2 million per year. Increase participation in HCA's Sustaining Neighbor program, increasing our retention and reactivation rates and growing our Mid-level donor program (donors at approximately \$500 per year or less) to include a more diverse and extensive network of donors throughout the rural and urban Hill Country.

7.5 Solidify revenue-generating activities for HCA's signature events including but not limited to the Leadership Summit. Implement new fundraising events for major donors. HCA will work with the board of directors to establish new fundraising events to recruit new donors including but not limited to small in-home gatherings, online events, and new sponsorship opportunities.

8. INTERNAL CAPACITY: REVIEW AND STRENGTHEN HCA'S INTERNAL OPERATIONS AND CAPACITY.

Launch a pilot “micro-local” strategy by hiring two geographically-based staff to focus on moving the needle on HCA issues; deepen staff support through additional capacity and technical resources, and; ensure 25% of HCA’s Board of Directors reflect the racial diversity of the region.

HCA has grown tremendously in recent years, allowing the provision of a broader diversity of services in the region. This new phase provides an important opportunity to continue to professionalize the organization, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of internal operations, retain and attract talented staff, and ensure that the organization is well-positioned for success into the future. Priority activities are anticipated to include:

8.1 Retain and attract talented and experienced staff by reviewing and working to strengthen employee benefits. Periodically review and benchmark employee compensation and benefits packages to ensure that HCA is positioned to retain and attract talented staff.

8.2 Identify additional staffing and technical, software, and resource support needed to allow for maximizing staff productivity. Identify current technical support needs to allow for all staff to thrive, both at the office and when working from home.

8.3 Plan for staff transitions by creating robust job descriptions, operations manuals, contact lists and work plans that are updated annually. Ensure that accounting protocols, communications distribution lists, and fundraising relationships are documented in a clear and replicable way.

8.5 Evaluate and update HCA team lists, advisory committees, advisory board, business council, and volunteer lists to more effectively implement programs and engage a diverse audience. Deepen the bench of supporters advancing HCA’s mission. Reinvigorate existing volunteer structures. Create a strategy to engage key partners in active participation in HCA’s work.

8.6 Seek dedicated board members to complement existing board expertise and bring fresh energy and diversity to the Board of Directors. Update existing board matrices and create a board expectations document to more clearly outline board member responsibilities and duties. Ensure the board reflects the diversity of the region, including rural and urban members, landowners, natural resource professionals, business owners, and elected officials. Recruit a minimum 25% board members who add racial diversity to the board.

8.7 Embed diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) in every aspect of our work. Create a standalone DEIJ Strategic Action Plan for HCA that clearly states the value of DEIJ in our work and establishes goals and a roadmap for implementation. Utilize DEIJ best practices in all hiring, board member recruitment, and community engagement to address biases, create clear and transparent processes, and enhance our work.