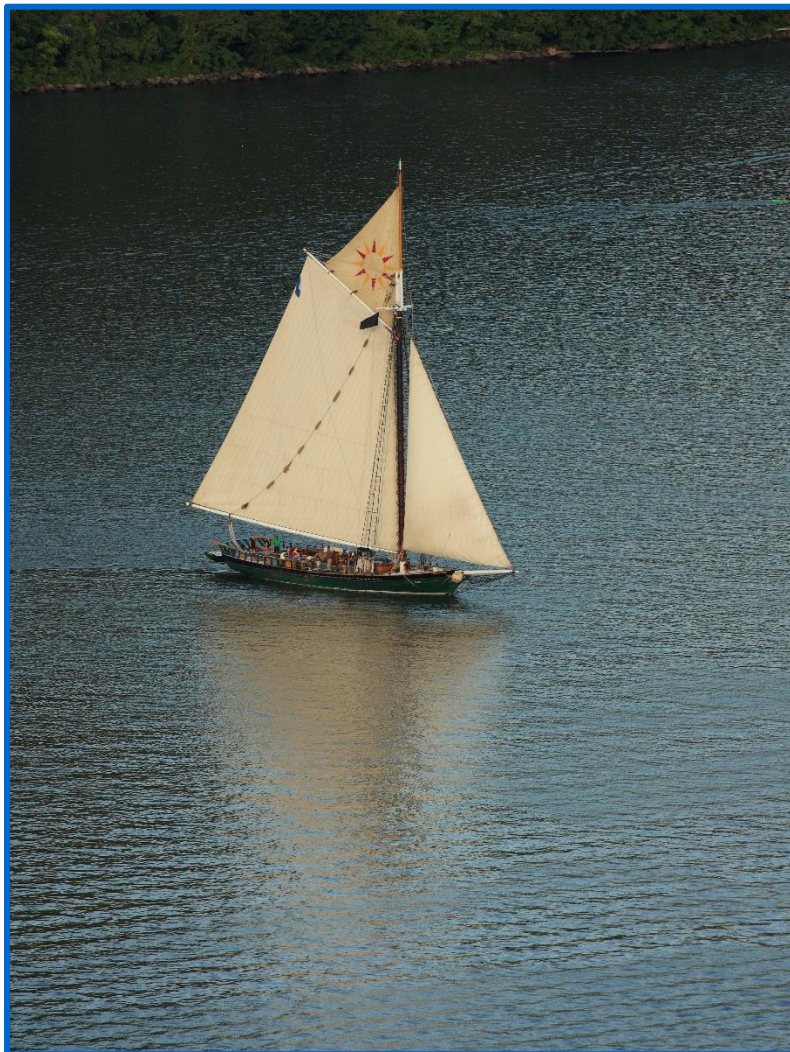


# **Hudson River Sloop Clearwater**

## **STRATEGIC PLAN**

**Adopted December 8, 2021**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over fifty years ago, a beautiful new boat arrived on the Hudson, a piece of river history come back to life – the Hudson River sloop *Clearwater*. Thousands came down to the waterfront to greet the new vessel, confirming the wisdom of founder Pete Seeger’s strategy: Build a lovely boat to draw people to the river and remind them that the Hudson was once beautiful too, and should be restored to its historical magnificence.

Since then, *Clearwater* has become the flagship of the environmental movement, a unique environmental education platform, and a model for such programs aboard other tall ships across the country. It is now a National Historic Landmark and the rare traditional sailing vessel that has been maintained by its original ownership throughout the entirety of its history.

But *Clearwater* has struggled in recent years, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, with Pete Seeger’s passing, leadership changes, factionalism, fund-raising, and fiscal management issues. In addition, an expanded array of institutions and organizations now work on the Hudson. Given this external context and limits to our internal resources, it is more important than ever that *Clearwater* establish priorities and not stray beyond them.

In spring 2020, an ad hoc advisory committee of staff, board, members and environmental leaders set out to examine such issues, gather concrete feedback regarding *Clearwater*’s role in Hudson River environmentalism, clarify and update the organization’s vision for the 21st century, and lay out a strategic plan to achieve that vision and promote our evolution into a more sustainable organization. With help from the Hudson River Foundation and the Support Center for Nonprofit Management, the planning effort identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to be considered in working towards that outcome.

The committee developed a set of critical questions to be answered during development of the plan and solicited input via a community survey, a carefully curated roster of interviews, retreats, and an organizational assessment tool. Data gathered was both quantitative and qualitative, including information on member demographics, entry points and ongoing participation.

Findings confirmed the sloop as the organization’s core strength, education and advocacy as the most important and successful of our programs, and music as a unique and central means of promoting our mission and engaging our members and Hudson Valley communities. In the main these and other findings were not surprising, but they clarified and made credible beliefs held intuitively within the organization and suggested a path forward and guideposts for that path.

Based on the findings, the committee identified seven priorities necessary to bringing *Clearwater* stability, maintaining its relevancy and fulfilling its mission to the highest potential. They are divided into program and management groups in order to clarify where major responsibility for addressing each lies. However, efforts to do so require collaboration and should not be siloed.

**Priority A (Program):** Emphasize and bolster the sloop and our education programs, *Clearwater*’s main assets and sources of strategic strength. This will optimize our capability to

achieve our mission and realize our goals i.e., to inspire and educate the environmental leaders of tomorrow.

**Priority B (Program):** Focus and strengthen our environmental advocacy platform, working in concert with our sloop and education programs to foster environmental stewardship.

**Priority C (Program):** Integrate music into our work in sustainable ways that draw people to the Clearwater community and carry forward both our mission and our heritage.

**Priority D (Program):** Provide and promote opportunities for members of the Clearwater community and residents of the Hudson Valley (and beyond) to actively participate in our mission-driven work, programs, and events.

**Priority E (Management):** Secure the resources Clearwater needs to become and remain fiscally stable, and thus alleviate concerns about both our viability and our fiscal management.

**Priority F (Management):** Exhibit professionalism and discipline in rigorously adhering to management processes that promote organizational stability and accountability.

**Priority G (Management):** Establish effective messaging of Clearwater mission and programs to the outside world.

Each priority includes goals aimed at fulfilling the priorities and specific action items needed to achieve them over a three year period. Actions deemed to need immediate attention – some that have already been implemented and are ongoing or will be part of program or management planning through early 2022 – are listed in the main body of the plan. Additional actions – those that can be implemented when more immediate goals are met and some stability is realized – are included in an appendix. They are divided into near-term actions to be taken on from spring 2022 on into 2023 and longer-term items to be addressed further out in the future.

These priorities, goals, and actions constitute a strategic plan intended to establish a path to stability and sustainability for Clearwater over the next three years. It must not be put on a shelf or sequestered in a digital document folder rarely opened.

Approval of the plan by Clearwater's board of directors would not make it a policy but would signify agreement with the direction, focus and expectations set out in the plan. At that point the plan would become a measuring stick against which performance of staff, board, and Clearwater programs, development, and governance would be evaluated.

This strategic plan calls for the organization to focus and then act, all the while operating in adherence to the goals and management practices we have set for ourselves. Otherwise, we risk maintaining the status quo of being spread too thin, and doing many things shoddily instead of a few things with excellence. If we can do this, Clearwater will not only survive but prosper in years to come.



# INTRODUCTION

## Looking Back: Clearwater's Heritage

*Hey looka yonder, hey looka yonder, what's that I see coming this way?*

*It's the Clearwater, it's the Clearwater, with her sails fluttering so gay!*

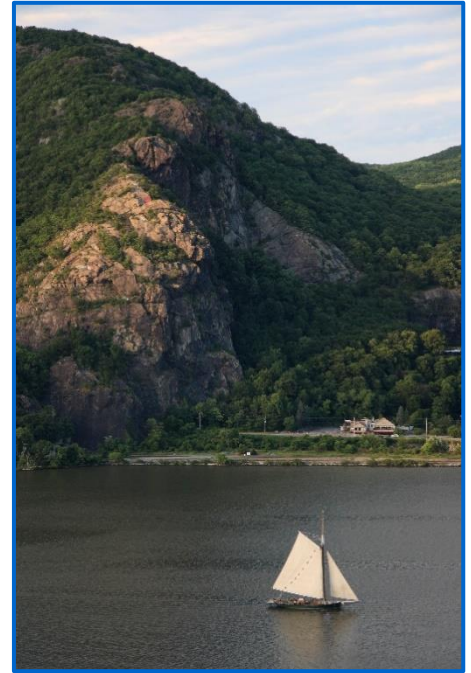
Over fifty years ago, a simple song by Tom Winslow celebrated the arrival of a beautiful new boat on the Hudson, a piece of river history come back to life – the Hudson River sloop *Clearwater*. Its 4,000 square feet of sail caught the attention of thousands who came down to the waterfront to greet the sloop. In doing so, they proved the effectiveness of Clearwater founder Pete Seeger's strategy: Build a lovely boat to draw people to the river and remind them that the Hudson was once beautiful too, and should be restored to its historical magnificence.

Inherent in the sloop's name was a mission, defined in the organization's By-Laws:

*To defend and restore the Hudson River, one of the great and historic rivers of this nation; to investigate and conduct research into any cause or sources of contamination and destruction of this river, its tributaries and similar river systems; to inform the public of such dangers and to assist the public in taking such measures as to stop such contamination; to educate the general populace as to the importance of preserving the Hudson River, its tributaries and similar river systems; to foster the historic and cultural heritage of the Hudson River Valley from the mountains to the sea; to concern itself with the well-being of those individuals who dwell along its banks and related areas; to protect and restore other great waterways; and to conduct other actions including, but not limited to, litigation that will enhance and improve the environment of the Hudson River Valley and related areas.*

Since its launch, *Clearwater* has become the flagship of the environmental movement. It sailed to Washington to spearhead a campaign to pass the Clean Water Act and to New Hampshire to protest construction of the Seabrook nuclear power station. The Clearwater organization played critical roles in the defeat of the Westway proposal, in documenting consumption of PCB-contaminated fish by subsistence anglers, in fighting to remove those PCBs from the Hudson, and in pressing for safe and thorough decommissioning of Indian Point.

*Clearwater* has also become a unique environmental education platform, taking over half a million people sailing and engaging them with hands-on lessons in history, ecology, and stewardship of the estuary. Eager schoolkids, their faces determined, raise 3,000 pounds of sail and spar... "Way, haul away, we'll haul away, Joe"... and focus intently as they steer the sloop... "Ready about! Full right on the tiller!" They are amazed at the life revealed as the trawl net comes out of muddy river water-- "A crab! An eel! A STURGEON!!-- and incredulous when



they hear of the abuse of a river that cradles such life. Our Sailing Classroom has been the inspiration and model for environmental education programs aboard other tall ships from Long Island Sound to the Chesapeake Bay and out to the Great Lakes and the West Coast.

Just as we cannot imagine the Hudson without the Palisades, we cannot imagine the Hudson without the sloop *Clearwater*.

## **Clearwater's Vision**

Clearwater's mission as set forth in its bylaws is broad, but it has focus that should guide our recommitment to the founders' vision. Our lodestar is the Hudson River, but not the river environment alone. Our mission of defense and restoration extends from New York City north through the Hudson Valley, including the people and communities within this region and its historic and cultural heritage. It should encompass tributaries and the entire ecosystem, and take into account local impacts of worldwide threats like climate change.

Yet clearly this organization cannot, in a time of financial difficulty, do everything encompassed by our expansive and idealistic charter. We must select those things that we do best, those things that no other organization can do, those things on which we can have the greatest impact.

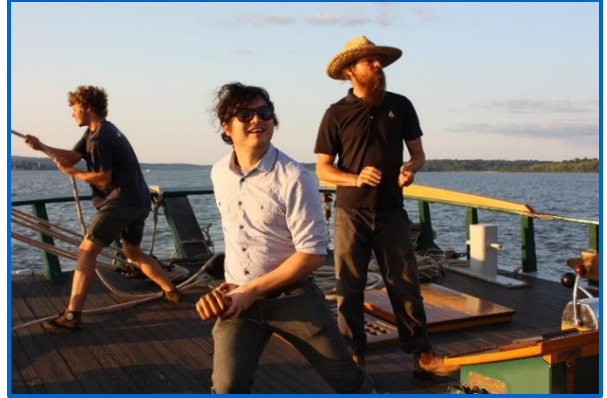
The sloop *Clearwater* is itself our greatest, most beloved, and most recognizable asset. Preservation of the sloop as the flagship of the Hudson should be our highest priority. To that end we must guarantee the funds necessary to keep the sloop in good repair and operation, including the establishment of a permanent fund for the sloop. Our education programs centering on the sloop must be emphasized and bolstered. It is there that we educate the environmental leaders and activists of the future, and make them true stewards of the Hudson.

Our education and environmental action efforts must be closely aligned. The sloop must be not only the point of education of environmental stewards, but a symbol of environmental action. Our sloop crew and educators must be environmentalists, and our environmental activists must also be teachers.

Clearwater's other great distinction is in our concept of community. Clearwater's membership, brought together by the sloop, music and celebration, is a vital asset that must be strengthened in order for the organization to accomplish its lofty goals. But in keeping with our founder's legacy, we can and must reach out to all the communities of the Hudson Valley including New York City, the great metropolis at the Hudson's mouth. We should bring them to the river, advocate for their concerns, help them to find their voice, and work with them to achieve true environmental and social justice. We must expand our efforts to engage historically marginalized groups as members of the Clearwater community and program participants, making diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) goals an ongoing part of our work.

## Looking Ahead: Planning for the Future

Fulfilling our mission and maintaining Clearwater's past record of achievement will necessitate adaptation, constant effort, careful management, and financial stability. Like many non-profit groups, Clearwater has struggled with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the organization was already dealing with internal challenges before the virus took hold.



Pete Seeger's passing in 2014 only made these issues more apparent. Without Pete to voice our message, provide continuity through leadership changes, smooth over occasional factionalism, and assist with raising money, problems in these areas have further disrupted Clearwater's operations. It is time to address them.

In addition, there are many more institutions and organizations now working on the Hudson's behalf. Given this external context and limits to our internal resources, we cannot take on every task nor address every problem and issue. It is more important than ever that Clearwater clearly establish its priorities, grounded in close examination and – as necessary – refinement of our mission statement, adhering to its central theme of defending and restoring the Hudson River.

In spring 2020, an advisory committee of Clearwater board and staff set out to develop a strategic plan that would foster effective pursuit of our mission and promote our evolution into a fiscally stronger, better-managed organization with a well-defined niche among Hudson River environmental groups. We aimed to engage both members and wise, experienced, imaginative leaders in the Hudson River community external to Clearwater. Embarking on this effort would reassure supporters and the wider community that we were addressing our challenges.

To assist with the planning effort, Clearwater engaged the Support Center for Nonprofit Management. In collaboration with Center consultants, we set out to revisit and clarify Clearwater's mission, examine our role within the contemporary Hudson River environmental movement, understand how we are viewed by the communities in which we operate, and identify changes that will strengthen our programs and make the organization more sustainable. This effort was funded in large part thanks to a grant from the Hudson River Foundation.

A small coordinating committee of staff and board members assembled two working groups, one comprised of Clearwater insiders (former staff and board as well as active members) and the other of individuals who know Clearwater well but work outside our organization in fields relevant to our mission. These groups developed a set of questions critical to shaping a plan:

- What are Clearwater's mission (what we do), vision (how we do it) and values (why we do it)?
- What does Clearwater do that is unique? How can that be preserved?
- What do we think we do well? What do our peers and broader community think we do well?

- Are we clear about the community we serve? Do we reach that community? What would we like "the Clearwater Community" to look like in the future?
- Is our current "three-legged stool" model (environment, education, celebration) sustainable or viable? Does it align with our mission and the community we aim to serve?
- How can we establish a firm financial foundation so that we can accomplish our mission?
- Is our current structure viable and sustainable? What changes should we make?

## **Gathering the Information Needed to Plan Wisely**

In addressing these questions, the working groups conducted a community survey that gathered input from 469 respondents, interviewed 22 people, held retreats with current board and staff, and administered a standardized organizational assessment tool to another 17 individuals.

### **Findings from the community survey**

An invitation to contribute to the community survey was distributed via email to an extensive roster of members, lapsed members, former staff, crew and board. Topics included demographic data, membership status, the nature of respondents' interactions with the organization and their perceptions of our mission, our strengths and our weaknesses.

Of the respondents, 57% were members and 27% former members; 16% had never been members. Of those who identified as members, 77% were age 50+ and 84% identified as White or Caucasian. Asked about how they first encountered Clearwater, 21% cited Revival, 19% Pete Seeger, 16% the sloop or education programs, 11% a friend, and 9% environmental action.

Education and advocacy are the two areas participants feel are most important to Clearwater's programming model and the two areas in which the organization is most successful. 84% agreed that our stated mission aligns "extremely" or "very" well with their opinion of what we should be doing. They cited climate change, fish and wildlife conservation, drinking water protection, sewage and bacterial pollution, and PCBs/legacy pollutants as the top five issues to be addressed.

The sloop was commonly cited as Clearwater's core strength, given its importance as a symbol, as a vehicle for education and advocacy, and as a platform to connect people to the river and nature. While the boat was cited much more frequently than Revival, 61% of respondents had attended the festival in one or more of the last four years.

### **Findings from interviews**

We interviewed 22 individuals with varied ties to Clearwater: past crew members, festival volunteers, current and past staff and board members, staff at other environmental organizations, educators who have taken their students on the sloop, public officials and more. While the interviewees were diverse, there were numerous points of agreement overall. These were summarized and assigned to the categories of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Strengths:

- The sloop Clearwater itself



- Educational programs
- Celebration
- Bringing people to the River
- Recognition as one of the oldest environmental institutions
- Pete Seeger's name and legacy
- Manna Jo Greene's network
- The Clearwater community

#### Weaknesses:

- Finances
- Inability to retain Executive Directors
- Financial risk of the festival
- Lack of focus clarity in mission and operation
- Need to reach out for diversity
- Inability to attract large gifts

#### Opportunities

- Past sloop students (and their parents) and passengers
- Renewables
- Community organizing
- Create an endowment for sloop maintenance
- Partnerships with Hudson River Maritime Museum, Pace Environmental Clinic, other educational institutions, artists
- Virtual learning
- Separate corporation to run festival
- COVID + BLM = Opportunity to reinvent

#### Threats

- Aging membership
- Disengaged Board
- Inability to get Board members aligned with each other and staff

### **Findings from retreats**

While the board and staff retreats identified strengths and weaknesses similar to those highlighted in the survey and interviews, the interactive format involving multiple participants allowed differences of opinion to become apparent. Among them:

- Some stakeholders believe Clearwater should be more geographically expansive in its mission and vision and become a leader beyond the Hudson River community and traditional environmental issues. Others thought we should center on the Hudson River and focus on environmental awareness, activism and education.
- While the Seegers' values were seen as foundational and an important legacy, there was debate about how much to adhere to and express the broad range of their engagement.
- Though music is integral to Clearwater, there was debate about Revival's role and how to move forward with the festival in a financially responsible and more collaborative manner.

## CHARTING A COURSE

Based on the findings, the committee identified seven priorities to be addressed in order to bring Clearwater stability, maintain its relevancy and carry out its mission to the highest potential. They should guide the organization's decision-making.

Accompanying each is a set of goals aimed at fulfilling that priority, along with specific actions that will help achieve the goals. These were developed with a three year time horizon in mind. Actions deemed to need immediate attention – some that have already been implemented and are ongoing or will be part of program or management planning through early 2022 – are listed in the main body of the plan.

Additional actions are included in an appendix. These are items that can be implemented when more immediate goals are met and some stability is realized. They are divided into near-term actions to be taken on from spring 2022 on into 2023 and longer-term items to be addressed further out in the future.



The seven priorities are divided into two groups. Priorities A through D deal with program focus, design, and implementation, Priorities E through G with fiscal and management matters that underlie and should interlace all that Clearwater does. This categorization has the advantage of clarifying assignment of the action items, but it does not imply that work on these items should be siloed. Those responsible for programs need to follow management protocols, support fund-raising initiatives, and communicate their work effectively, while those responsible for fiscal management and fund-raising must respond to program priorities.



### ***Priority A (Program):***

***Emphasize and bolster the sloop and our education programs, Clearwater's main assets and sources of strategic strength. This will optimize our capability to achieve our mission and realize our goals i.e., to inspire and educate the environmental leaders of tomorrow.***

The sloop *Clearwater* is the best known and most valuable asset of the organization. The sloop and the educational program centered on it are Clearwater's unique contribution to the Hudson River community. As such, they must be the sources of the organization's strategic strength, and the focal point on which Clearwater's future must be based. That focus and definition will enable Clearwater to optimize its capability to achieve our mission, and to realize our goals of inspiring and educating the environmental leaders of tomorrow. Our programs should also reinforce river stewardship by citizens, elected officials, and decision-makers. Thus, bolstering and emphasizing the sloop and our education efforts shall be a primary area of emphasis for Clearwater.

### **Toward those ends we shall commit to these goals:**

1. Clearwater should review the content, design, and types of its programs to ensure they align with Clearwater's mission statement, reflect current environmental education best practices, and are equitable, inclusive, and relevant to all communities we serve.
2. Analyze our mix of educational programs to balance and blend the established effectiveness and appeal of in-person offerings with the expanded outreach potential of virtual programs.
3. Education staff should work with development staff to increase financial support for sail programs so that their costs do not prevent schools serving less wealthy communities from taking part in these programs.
4. Education and environmental action staff should build bridges and promote synchronicity between their programs and goals.
5. Extend engagement with students beyond their sails. Students who sail on Clearwater often consider it a life-changing experience. The organization needs to leverage that experience

and engage those students—and their families—as participants in Clearwater’s activities on an ongoing basis.

### **Immediate actions necessary to achieve these goals:**

1. Emphasize learner-centered, inquiry-based, hands-on programming that enables students to connect to their own lived experiences.
2. In concert with adjustments in programs, program marketing must be evaluated and updated as needed, with input from classroom teachers. Promotional materials should be posted on our website, reflecting current offerings and highlighting the “draws”: new science standards, learner-centered, inquiry-based, etc.
3. Align programs to new NYS science standards in accordance with the state timeline for implementation, making instructional shifts as necessary.
4. To promote consistent quality of education sail programs, attention to program development, and collaboration with fundraising efforts, Clearwater should return to its past practice of having two on board educators, one of whom would be employed full-time and year-round.



### ***Priority B (Program):***

***Focus and strengthen our environmental advocacy platform, working in concert with our sloop and education programs to foster environmental stewardship.***

Clearwater’s environmental action and advocacy platform should be more sharply focused, in order to strengthen the organization’s purpose of environmental stewardship of the Hudson River Valley. Our goal is to make the Hudson and its communities as clean and sustainable as possible, and for the organization to be a leader in that effort.

Clearwater’s mission statement begins with the phrase “to defend and restore the Hudson River.” In a time of limited resources, when focus and definition of the organization’s activities are required for survival, that phrase must guide our efforts. We will concentrate on activities that bear a direct relation to the Hudson. While global in its extent, climate change is probably the

single biggest challenge facing the Hudson River, and addressing this issue must be a central part of Clearwater's environmental advocacy efforts.

We must also emphasize the disproportionate impact of environmental harms on disadvantaged communities. It is critical that we work with those communities to give them a powerful voice in identifying and addressing those impacts, and help them identify and implement solutions.

Clearwater's environmental advocacy program must work hand in hand with its education and sailing program. The sloop must be not merely the symbol of Clearwater, but a working, functioning part of Clearwater's efforts to address problems affecting the Hudson and the people living in its Valley. The students who sail and learn on the sloop are the environmental leaders of the future, and we must impart to them a strong message of environmental stewardship.

In support of all of these efforts the Board must be more informed and involved in the specific environmental issues on which the organization is focused.

### **Toward those ends we shall commit to these goals:**

1. Clearwater's advocacy messages shall clearly and directly connect to the Hudson River, the Hudson River Valley, and the people who live within its watershed.
2. Education and environmental advocacy staff shall collaborate routinely to shape program themes, content, and audiences, identifying specific issues and ways to address them. Such issues might include climate change, flooding, legacy and emerging contaminants, invasive species, transition from fossil fuels to renewable resources, and promoting ecosystem health. We should educate, but still work towards concrete solutions.
3. Clearwater should build and enhance relationships with other organizations involved in climate and environmental justice issues.
4. Clearwater shall give a high priority to issues affecting the communities of the Hudson River Valley, recognizing the organization's historical success in dealing with such issues and working directly with affected communities. We should engage community members in such activities as identification of problems and solutions, voter registration, involvement in issues and participation in administrative and legislative matters relating to their communities.
5. Along with educating and engaging citizens, Clearwater should enhance its presentation of accurate factual analysis and reasoned legal authority blended into good policy through more engagement of expert legal, scientific, and economic advisors to assist our advocacy staff.
6. The Board should be more informed and involved with regard to environmental projects.

### **Immediate actions necessary to achieve these goals:**

1. Regularly review environmental projects to determine if they are aligned to our mission and goals, river-focused, and effective, and establish a process to determine which initiatives to undertake in the future.
2. In cooperation with communications and marketing staff, work to build public recognition of Clearwater's environmental advocacy efforts and achievements.



3. In developing projects to address issues impacting the Hudson River and its watershed, directors of education and environmental action shall ensure that educational staff, including crew, have up to date knowledge of Clearwater's environmental advocacy projects.
4. In addition to seeking funds for experts to reinforce our advocacy staff, Clearwater should take advantage of offers to engage with law school environmental clinics and explore the potential of assistance from scientists and other specialists among our membership.



### ***Priority C (Program):***

***Integrate music into our work in sustainable ways that draw people to the Clearwater community and speak to our mission and our heritage.***

Given Pete Seeger's role in founding Clearwater, it is not surprising that music is part of all that the organization does, an attribute unique among Hudson River environmental groups. Our first fund-raiser was a concert. The sloop's first crew was largely made up of musicians, singing is still a part of every sail, and a song begins each board meeting. Clearwater's Great Hudson River Revival typically draws thousands to the riverfront. And Seeger and other songwriters have created an impressive repertoire of music celebrating the sloop and the Hudson; it binds the Clearwater community together.

Vital as this tradition is, Clearwater needs to examine how music can best be employed to strengthen the organization. Does a repertoire built largely on Pete's songs and folk styles engage a diverse audience – young as well as old? Inclusive of Black, indigenous, and people of color? Urban and rural? Should we have a prominent musician as a leading spokesperson, or might there be many musicians speaking for us at different times depending on the event, program goals, or mission connection?

There is no way to replace Pete in Clearwater's narrative or the larger story of music and activism. Pete lives on in musicians, environmentalists, storytellers, farmers, artists, and sailors...all sorts of people who carry the seed of his work with them through their lives. Recognizing this reality can create more opportunities for aligning music with programming goals; Clearwater should be intentional in doing so.

Regarding Revival, the festival in its current virtual form is low risk and has many upsides, but this model is not sustainable in the long term. As the pandemic winds down, demand for live in-person experience is growing. Other brands/events/festivals will re-emerge from 2020-21 with vigor. If Clearwater doesn't stay in the market, there is the potential to lose whatever core audience base we still have, and whatever brand recognition and status we've earned over the years will be lost.

Returning to a live Revival raises critical questions. Do the possibilities of inclement weather, a history of management issues, rising costs, and competition from other festivals make Revival's traditional format too risky financially? Do the thousands of people whose initial or most frequent contact with Clearwater happens at Revival become ongoing supporters of our mission? And how should the event more effectively speak to and reinforce our goals?

### **Toward those ends we shall commit to these goals:**

1. Rethink the Great Hudson River Revival to make it financially sustainable and less risky, fully realize its potential to draw people into Clearwater, and assure coherent presentation of our mission and programs.
2. Clearwater must nurture existing relationships with musicians and strive to build more, especially with performers who appeal to younger and more diverse audiences.
3. Looking to the model of historic Pumpkin Sail events, rebuild an annual schedule of small-scale centered on music and sloop visits that build visibility in diverse Hudson River communities and reinforce engagement with members in those communities.

### **Immediate actions necessary to achieve these goals:**

1. Clearwater's board should authorize creation of a taskforce including board members, staff, Revival Planning Committee members, and outside experts in festival production to come together in a good faith effort, built upon clear and regular communication, to design a sustainable Great Hudson River Revival, with a proposal for Revival 2023 to be submitted to the board by spring 2022.
2. Acceptance and commitment to move ahead with a propose Revival must be accompanied by commitment to raise necessary funds in advance of ticket sales.
3. Plan, promote, and produce concerts and smaller festivals throughout the Hudson Valley to raise funds, increase visibility, and engage members in the work. The events could celebrate – among other occasions - Pete Seeger's birthday, Earth Day, and the anniversary of Clearwater's launching. This is a task which might well engage Sloop Clubs, learning from the experience of Walkabout Clearwater and the Beacon Sloop Club.



### ***Priority D (Program):***

***Provide and promote opportunities for members of the Clearwater community and residents of the Hudson River Watershed (and beyond) to actively participate in our mission-driven work, programs, and events.***

According to Clearwater's bylaws, "The membership of the Corporation shall consist of persons who are interested in advancing the purpose of the Corporation and who pay minimum annual dues...The membership shall control the Corporation through the annual election of Directors." Members may place candidates directly on the ballot, adding to the slate prepared by the board's Nominating Committee. Proposed bylaw changes must be approved by the membership.

Day to day, members participate in programs and volunteer for diverse tasks that help the organization function: teaching and sailing aboard the sloop as volunteer crew, providing rides to local grocery stores and showers for the regular crew at ports all along the Hudson, picking up litter at festivals, submitting comments to agencies making critical environmental decisions, and helping to maintain the sloop and our office facilities. Underlying all of this, members provide critical financial support; individual donations are the largest category of funding for Clearwater.

The size of our membership has varied greatly over the organization's history, declining from a high of approximately 12,000 in the 1990s to our current membership of approximately 3,500. It is urgent that Clearwater develop strategies for increasing membership.

Quantity is not the only concern. Community survey data indicated that our membership is becoming older and less reflective of the communities we serve: 70% of our members are over 50 years of age, only 15% of respondents had joined in the last five years, 83% self-identified as white or Caucasian. Can we increase representation of historically marginalized groups in among our membership by prioritizing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) objectives in programming, community and media outreach, and staff/volunteer training?

Those involved with the organization often cite the "Clearwater Community" as a reason for their engagement. This community is usually taken to be members, supporters, staff, crew,

board, volunteers, and schools and other groups who regularly sail with us. We need to evaluate who have been or are the existing stakeholders in this community and whether they are representative in part or in full of the areas we serve.

Why we are able to get 4-H clubs from rural areas in Albany County down to the Albany dock, but not local schools or community service organizations in the city centers of Albany and Rensselaer? We must acknowledge that social inequities hinder participation in our programs and strive to make our offerings available and welcoming to all who reside along the Hudson.

The diversity of the Hudson Valley's population should be mirrored in our leadership, staff, and membership. We must ensure that the Clearwater community's existing culture – intentionally or not – does not keep us from responding to the shifting demographics of the region. We must serve and attract all communities, and that effort must begin with message and marketing.

We should develop partnerships with community groups, service organizations, school clubs, and other associations to recruit the volunteer assistance Clearwater needs. In the big picture, such partnerships could build financial support, program engagement, and membership.

### **Toward those ends we shall commit to these goals:**

1. In order to create a forward-thinking and sustainable membership program, define and evaluate the role of various constituents (participants, members, volunteers, etc.) within the organization and the reasons people do and do not engage beyond their entry point.
2. Design a membership recruitment and stewardship strategy in order to maintain relationships with Clearwater's most engaged supporters. These should aim to promote engagement of members and local groups in rewarding volunteer tasks.
3. Increase the diversity of our membership.
4. Frame community outreach efforts and programs to foster participation that promotes DEI objectives, engaging and serving the wide array of groups that make up the population of the Hudson River watershed.
5. Link these efforts in a continuum of community and member participation that includes entry point, activities, volunteering, fundraising and outreach. Consider membership as a pipeline to board participation.

### **Immediate actions necessary to achieve these goals:**

1. Define and clarify the various entry points to Clearwater.
2. Characterize the variety of activities/actions offered to members, supporters, community members with casual contact, and to those hearing of us for the first time, and develop outreach strategies for each of the four groups.
3. Establish goals for increasing and diversifying demographic representation, particularly among younger people and people of color.
4. Establish annual numerical goals for increasing membership, retention rates for Clearwater activities, and inter-organizational participation.





### ***Priority E (Management):***

***Secure the resources Clearwater needs to become and remain fiscally stable, and thus alleviate concerns about both our viability and our fiscal management.***

The sloop *Clearwater* is our chief asset but maintaining a large wooden vessel is an expensive proposition. Upcoming restoration work in winter 2021-2022 is expected to cost more than \$600,000 – this after an \$850,000 project was completed only five years ago. Such expenses are in addition to standard organizational operating costs.

Income earned from sail programs cannot cover such expenses while at the same time making those offerings affordable for schools, youth groups, and other audiences which we wish to engage. Fund-raising events and grants help, but our most significant source of support is individual gifts. This mandates having an effective development staff with expertise in donor cultivation, marketing, grant-writing/management, and data tracking, working in concert with an energetic board development committee. The financial support realized must be wisely deployed to sustain the organization and carefully accounted for to meet legal standards and earn strong ratings from charitable giving evaluators.

Clearwater has seldom had a cushion of financial reserves, and often seems to be operating from crisis to crisis. While the reasons are complex, and cause can be hard to separate from effect, staff turnover, a lack of fund-raising energy from the board, risky bets on Revival, and lack of attention to donor cultivation are among the culprits. This reflects poor fiscal management practices and the external perception of this – both anecdotally and per official ratings organizations – creates challenges in fundraising.

Clearwater must rectify current financial concerns, lay a foundation for future stability, and give board and staff more tools for maintaining our financial health. Goals for doing so are dispersed among this plan's priorities, but the following specifically address fundraising and fiscal affairs.

### **Toward those ends we shall commit to these goals:**

1. Create a culture in which financial best practices are central and adhere to management processes that promote organizational stability and accountability (see Priority F).



2. Clearwater must bolster its financial management and development staff to better manage its finances, prove itself a better steward of donated funds, and secure and maintain reliable, long-term funding for sloop maintenance.
3. Explore additional strategies for solving the conundrum of making education sails affordable while covering the expense of maintaining and operating a large wooden vessel – underwriting with long-term foundation support, a separate fund for sail scholarships, etc.
4. Create a board culture in which participation in fund-raising is expected of and facilitated for all directors.

### **Immediate actions necessary to achieve these goals:**

1. Prioritize fund-raising and financial management skills in hiring an executive director and set expectations for relevant goals in supervising the executive director.
2. Build up donor stewardship skills and coordinate donor cultivation efforts of executive director, development director, and development committee.
3. At board level, maintain well-chosen Development committee roster and task this committee with finding appropriate ways to involve all board members in Development goals, learning from peer organizations and other resources.
  - Prioritize fund-raising and financial management education/understanding/training in board operations; include appropriate content in new board member orientation and ongoing training sessions.
  - Focus less on minimum giving amount and more on culture of financial responsibility and support for board members' development participation.
  - Development staff/committee provides bi-annual reporting to President/Development chair/Executive Committee on participation rates of each board member.
  - Near-term: finish 2021 fiscal with 100% participation from board. (Review/enhance guidance on what constitutes "participation.")
4. Establish an annual schedule for fund-raising and fiscal management tasks and regular review of performance.
  - Fall – plan calendar for December to November fiscal year including creating annual budget, conducting audit and completing 990, scheduling fund-raising events and appeals, listing grant application and fulfillment deadlines, and carrying out reviews of performance comparing actuals to projections/budget.
  - Winter/spring – Board and its committees strategize and align big picture approach/goals with regards to long term financial goals (1, 3, & 5 year goals; i.e. reserves, restoration fund, etc.), sloop maintenance needs, and program goals/evolution.
  - Revival (see Priority C). If continued at a scale similar to the past, then it needs its own annual workplan including budget, marketing and sponsorship plan, and fundraising benchmarks.
  - Financial management/fundraising calendar will be communicated to staff and board and outcomes reported on at least a quarterly basis.



### ***Priority F (Management):***

***Exhibit professionalism and discipline in rigorously adhering to management processes that promote organizational stability and accountability.***

In order to survive and accomplish all of the goals described above, Clearwater must become more professional and disciplined in its approach to management. This should include educating board and staff on their respective roles in managing and advancing the organization.

The organization does not lack fiscal and operational protocols and procedures. While some may need updating, a good start would be to commit to following through on existing procedures and revising as might be appropriate based on the outcomes.

As part of this commitment, Clearwater needs to implement the actions recommended in this strategic plan. Its adoption will not make the plan a formal policy per se but will signify agreement with the direction, focus and expectations laid out here. It will create expectations against which performance of staff and board, our programs, development efforts, and governance will be evaluated.

### **Toward those ends we shall commit to these goals:**

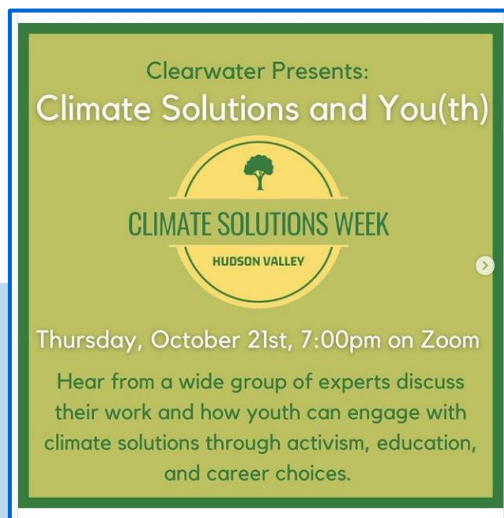
1. Follow management practices that promote organizational stability and accountability, and adhere to them rigorously.
2. Clarify the respective roles of board (and its committees), staff, and other elements of Clearwater in managing the organization and carrying out its mission.

### **Immediate actions necessary to achieve these goals:**

1. Execute operations as specified in processes already in bylaws, policies and employee handbook (including but not limited to: Executive Director and each permanent staff member

receiving proper orientation and an annual performance evaluation; ensuring appropriate board and staff interaction; adapting to changes in applicable laws).

2. Structure board committees to have a specific charge, work plan and timely reporting schedule and to include appropriate staff.
3. In particular, a clear policy shall be developed and enforced on financial reporting and disclosure, specifying formats for reporting to the Board and criteria for confidential discussions in private sessions, and clearly identifying reporting responsibilities and chain of command.
4. Establish methods of assessing adherence to mission and to each strategic plan goal, measuring current status, progress, and achievement (for example, have a dashboard or checklist for quick reference, or a calendar-based status chart).
5. Timelines shall be established annually for every one of Clearwater's functions, including development, finance, sloop, events, and environmental advocacy. (See Priority E.) Timeline: immediate and ongoing.
  - Timelines should specify decision-making thresholds and planning time as well as dates of implementation.
  - Where appropriate and strategic, timelines should extend ahead for several years.
  - Timelines shall be coordinated among all operations for consistency in planning assumptions.



### ***Priority G (Management):***

***Establish effective messaging of Clearwater mission and programs to the outside world.***

Clearwater has an opportunity to take bold steps forward with our communications but these will succeed only when we clarify what the message is and how best to convey it to others whether old friends or new.

Our interviews reveal a lack of public understanding of what Clearwater stands for and what is its core purpose. As Clearwater clarifies its mission and goals through this strategic plan, we

must also improve our efforts to communicate our purpose and our work to audiences in the Hudson River Watershed and beyond.

While the Board accepts responsibility for defining and prioritizing Clearwater's official communications initiatives, the work will be go forward as a collaborative effort between the Board and the staff.

### **Toward those ends we shall commit to these goals:**

1. Both responsive and proactive communications should be delivered through social media as well as traditional platforms including newsletters and press outlets.
2. Communication initiatives will be implemented in coordination with the development committee as well as any other pertinent standing or ad hoc committees.
3. A coherent communications strategy shall be developed, and a system of quality control established.
4. Clearwater's communications team will work to develop and maintain a rapport with members of the press in order to cultivate open communication and more frequent press coverage.

### **Immediate actions necessary to achieve these goals:**

1. Each member of the community should craft a personal "elevator speech" that incorporates the following details. Board members should regularly be expected to practice, refine, and deliver their individual speeches.

*Clearwater is an environmental education and advocacy organization focused on the preservation of the Hudson River. Our members own and sail a historic tall ship called Clearwater, launched in 1969 thanks largely to the efforts of founding member and folk musician Pete Seeger. We offer field trips that teach students about the river and cultivate a love for and passion to protect it. Through grassroots activism, education and music, Clearwater empowers future generations of environmental leaders.*

2. Assure that board, staff, and other members of Clearwater community are consistent in communicating Clearwater messaging.
3. To promote branding of Clearwater's messaging initiatives, those working on communications projects in any platform will draw upon a standardized portfolio of design elements that includes typestyles, logos, and colors.

## WHAT COMES NEXT?

These priorities, goals, and actions constitute a strategic plan intended to establish a path to stability and sustainability for Clearwater over the next three years. This plan must not be put on a shelf or sequestered in a digital folder rarely opened. Progress towards its goals should be reviewed annually as part of the winter/spring planning proposed in the goals for Priority F.

Approval of the plan by Clearwater's board of directors would not make it a policy but would signify agreement with the direction, focus and expectations set out in the plan. A strategic plan doesn't establish policies in and of itself. However, it would be a measuring stick against which performance of staff and board members as well as Clearwater programs, development, and governance would be evaluated.

This plan is strategic, not tactical. It includes actions with varying degrees of specificity, but implementation will in most cases require creation of more detailed work plans. The process is likely to entail re-examining historic assumptions and sometime difficult decision-making regarding whether past and current practices further the plan's goals. Division of the priorities into program and management categories suggests how these tasks might be assigned.

Clearwater program staff will have the primary responsibility for meeting education and environmental action goals, though board committees – Environmental Action for example – may engage with staff in the process. Dedicated and skilled volunteers from our membership might also be involved. Development, marketing, and executive/administrative staff will have major roles in management initiatives, working with board committees such as Finance on these efforts. But these divisions of responsibility should not become silos. Being responsive to the priorities will demand communication and collaboration between all involved.

The plan's expectations of the board of directors chiefly relate to management priorities. These include raising funds, defining and improving the functioning of committees, and communicating Clearwater's mission, among other goals. The board is also assigned the responsibility of monitoring overall adherence to the strategic plan.

The executive director and president should play key roles in overseeing and evaluating the plan's implementation at the staff and board levels respectively. Effective communication and coordination between them will be critical to engaging with and accomplishing the plan's goal across the organization.

This strategic plan calls for Clearwater to focus and then act, all the while operating in adherence to the goals and management practices we have set for ourselves. We must avoid being spread too thin and doing many things shoddily instead of fewer things with excellence. If we can stay true to the plan, then Clearwater will not only survive but prosper in years to come.



## **APPENDIX: Additional Near and Long-term Action Items**

### ***Priority A (Program):***

***Emphasize and bolster the sloop and our education programs, Clearwater's main assets and sources of strategic strength...***

1. Train Clearwater and educators and crew to adapt programs for various audiences adjust our programming to serve adult learners). Timeline: near-term.
2. Consider expanding and marketing our teacher training offerings; schools have money for this and the new standards state that "Science is for all students." Timeline: long-term.
3. To engage participants beyond their sail on the sloop, the following ideas should be explored (Timeline: near-term):
  - a. Take-home cards;
  - b. Follow up contacts with schools and families;
  - c. Open boats for students' families after sails;
  - d. Tracking Youth Empowerment Program participants after they complete their programs and offering them avenues of continued engagement with Clearwater that are relevant to them;
  - e. Leveraging intern, volunteer crew, and guest sail slots to build connections to communities and organizations.
4. Improve qualitative and quantitative post-trip evaluations from program participants in order to ensure delivery of high quality programming. Timeline: near-term.
5. Collect anecdotal stories of how the Clearwater experience meaningfully shaped individuals' lives. A substantial collection of such stories would document its positive impacts and assist in fund-raising. Timeline: near-term.

### ***Priority B (Program):***

***Focus and strengthen our environmental advocacy platform, working in concert with our sloop and education programs to foster environmental stewardship.***

1. Evaluate the environmental action portion of the website to determine if our messaging is consistent and aligned with our mission. Timeline: near-term.
2. The Nominating Committee of the Board should specifically recruit new directors with background in environmental issues and advocacy. Timeline: near-term.
3. There should be a regular (annual?) forum or training session to update the Board on environmental matters and specific Clearwater environmental projects. Timeline: near-term.

***Priority C (Program):***

***Integrate music into our work in sustainable ways that draw people to the Clearwater community and speak to our mission and our heritage.***

1. Examine whether the fund-raising potential of events built around music performance can justify adding a special events/festival director to staff, as has been the case in the past. Having such a staff member helped to ensure that Revival's goals were in line with Clearwater's, facilitated communication between the board, staff, and Revival Planning Committee, and provided in-house capacity for producing other events. Timeline: if feasible, this staff member should be in place by fall 2022 to plan 2023 Revival.

***Priority D (Program):***

***Provide and promote opportunities for members of the Clearwater community and residents of the Hudson River Watershed (and beyond) to actively participate in our mission-driven work, programs, and events.***

1. Clean up email lists and clarify existing constituents' interests; create segmented email lists based on interests. Timeline: near-term.
2. Address barriers and opportunities in technical operations; including website design and content, outreach via text/QR/segmented email lists and customized landing pages and email/text. Timeline: near-term.
3. Increase the organization's visibility by designing and producing events for the virtual realm and to coordinate with sloop visits (Hudson River Troubadour concerts at docks, smaller-scale versions of Pumpkin Sail or Revival, free participation in webinars, discounts on merchandise and sails). Timeline: near-term.
4. Given the centrality of the sloop to our programs, promote and assist community efforts to expand the number of docks available to Clearwater and the general public. Timeline: near-term.
5. Address staffing requirements to implement outreach in all the above ways in a timely, segmented, and energetic way. Timeline: near-term.

***Priority E (Management):***

***Secure the resources Clearwater needs to become and remain fiscally stable, and thus alleviate concerns about both our viability and our fiscal management.***

1. Complete winter overhaul with \$250k remaining in Clearwater Century Fund, all or some portion of which to go into a 6-month operating reserve fund. Timeline: near-term.
2. Exit 2021-2022 fiscal year with 3-month reserve (\$250-\$300k including the Century Fund) in place to help restore Charity Navigator rating. Timeline: near-term
3. The Planning and Governance committee will work with the appropriate staff members to create a readily accessible institutional archive of relevant management documents current and past. Timeline: near-term.

4. Determine what configuration of financial management staff best fits Clearwater's situation – bookkeeper; in-house controller or CFO; additional development staff to manage grants or institute planned giving program, etc. Timeline: near-term.
5. Prospect, apply and foster grants for unrestricted educational funding for underwriting purposes. Timeline: near-term.
6. Increase number of professional curriculum charters at higher fees, task Program and Development department with outreach to potential clients. Timeline: near-term.

***Priority F (Management):***

***Exhibit professionalism and discipline in rigorously adhering to management processes that promote organizational stability and accountability.***

1. Construct a board and recruit board members with relevant and specific expertise; cultivate the needed skills (for example: fiduciary responsibility, program expertise, familiarity with environmental policy; access to donors). Timeline: near-term.

***Priority G (Management):***

***Establish effective messaging of Clearwater mission and programs to the outside world.***

1. Address staffing requirements to implement our communication strategy. Timeline: near-term.