

Voyageur Trail Association (VTA)

2017-2022 Strategic Plan

DRAFT

10 September 2017

Final Draft

Background

The VTA received its Provincial Charter in 1974 as a non-profit citizen's group dedicated to developing and maintaining a continuous hiking trail for public use across Northern Ontario. Through the cooperation of private landowners and Indigenous communities, and by utilizing sections of Crown land, the trail route is intended to eventually run continuously from Thunder Bay, around the top of Lake Superior through Sault Ste. Marie and along the north shore of Lake Huron towards Sudbury – a total distance of ~ 1100 kilometres.

For a number of years, the VTA Coordinating Council and a Strategic Planning Committee have worked to gather feedback on the vision, mission, and future direction of the VTA. A series of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) exercises was completed with a number of VTA clubs, including the Saulteaux, Coureurs de Bois, and Casques Isles. In addition, the Ontario Trails Council (OTC) assisted in administering an online survey to trail users, members, and the Coordinating Council. In total, feedback was gathered from approximately 41 individuals who filled out surveys and 40 individuals who participated in a SWOT exercise.

On March 5, 2017, a group of six VTA members with representation from Thunder Bay, Elliot Lake, and Sault Ste. Marie gathered for a full day workshop to carefully review the feedback and formulate a first draft of a new Strategic Plan. This document is the result of that workshop, and articulates a potential vision, mission, strategic objectives, and priorities for the VTA over the next five years. This plan is a living plan and will be regularly reevaluated to ensure its goals remain relevant and achievable.

Vision

The vision describes where we see the VTA in five years' time:

In five years, the VTA will have a series of high-quality well-marked and well-maintained trail systems between Thunder Bay and Sudbury. Through the development of strategic partnerships and trail users, these non-motorized trail systems will be vibrant, sustainable, and well-used by outdoor enthusiasts of all ages, and in particular youth, contributing to the health, well-being, and environmental integrity of northern communities.

Mission

The mission describes the VTA's core function and reason for existence:

The VTA, through partnerships, promotes, maintains, and develops a public system of hiking trails between Thunder Bay and Sudbury. Through the provision of expertise, environmental stewardship, and recreational opportunities, the VTA is a significant contributor to the health and well-being of the communities its trails traverse.

Strategic Objectives

The seven strategic objectives are the major areas of focus that enable the VTA to meet its five-year vision and are based on the surveys, SWOT feedback, and discussion at the Strategic Planning Workshop. Each objective is accompanied by a series of action items listed in priority order .

Strategic Objective 1: Increase Promotional Activities

The VTA will leverage strategic partnerships and a range of promotional activities to increase trail usage in a sustainable manner.

Actions:

- Revamp VTA website and related communication tools (including social media and newsletter).
 - Create oversight committee.
 - Facilitate work of members.
 - Mobile friendly (e.g., develop app with maps users can download for free).
 - Keep websites that promote volunteer opportunities up to date.

Strategic Objective 2: Increase Land Trail Usage

The VTA will increase land trail activities by 25% in five years' time.

Actions:

- Increase trail usage by 25%.
 - Need to establish a baseline – what is trail usage now?
 - Identify a sustainable method of tracking trail usage.
 - Target specific trails to increase usage and activities.
 - Conduct an inventory of trail usage each year.
 - Increase number of organized hikes.
 - Monitor low impact movement.
- Create 12 standard trailheads and place in strategic locations.
 - Consistent colours based on input from clubs.
 - Include trail user code.
- Facilitate opportunities for clubs to increase number of hike leaders by 25%.
- Facilitate opportunities for clubs to increase membership by 25% and retain existing membership base.

Strategic Objective 3: Build and Leverage Strategic Partnerships

The VTA will build and leverage strategic partnerships to further its vision and mission.

Actions:

- Complete a gap analysis to determine if there are new partners the VTA should be working with (e.g., educational partners).
 - Establish baseline and document.
 - Inventory VTAs social capital and key partners.
 - Engage First Nation communities as partners.

- Reach out and establish new partners.
- Formalize agreements with trail maintenance partners where applicable.
 - Continue partnership with Parks Canada for marketing, trail development, and interpretation.
 - Continue to have VTA clubs on MNRF distribution list for forest management plans.

Strategic Objective 4: Engage Youth as Trail Users

The VTA will actively seek to engage youth as trail users, not necessarily as club members.

Actions:

- Engage youth in the Coordinating Council.
- Develop one education program in partnership with a school in each hub to drive membership and youth engagement.
 - Use curriculum resources from Hike Ontario.
- Provide resources to facilitate each club offering up to two youth-focused events per year.
 - Host specific events that target exposing youth to trails.
- Create a list of projects ready to go for post-secondary institutions.

Strategic Objective 5: Enhance Trail Maintenance and Restoration

The VTA will build and leverage its expertise and partnerships to enhance its capacity for trail maintenance and restoration.

Actions:

- Develop a trail maintenance and restoration plan that includes VTA standards for maintenance and restoration.
- Trail audit¹ completed by post-secondary students as field work.
- Recognize and address areas where restoration is needed.
 - Identify hot spots (e.g., Robertson Lake Cliffs Trail).
- Educate clubs on restoration (share expertise).
- Facilitate sharing of the yellow book (maintenance guide).

Strategic Objective 6: Develop Volunteers and Expertise

The VTA will build organizational capacity and sustainability through volunteer development and engagement.

Actions:

- Support capacity building in trail building and management amongst club members.
 - Trail building and management course as a part of the annual Trailhead North conference.
 - Chainsaw training.
 - Encourage participation in IMBA workshops.

¹ A trail audit is a comprehensive assessment of trail conditions and potential risks and hazards that is a core part of a strong risk management plan.

- Emphasize social connections amongst members to improve volunteer engagement.
 - Bring hike leaders together once per year.
- Develop central repository with connections to other resources.
- Emphasize clear communication to prospective volunteers.

Strategic Objective 7: Promote Environmental Stewardship

The VTA will strengthen its leadership role in environmental stewardship in all its activities.

Actions:

- Reinforce environmental etiquette from the trail users' code at outings and other events and activities.
 - Host garbage free meetings.
 - Promote system wide leadership on invasive species.
 - Highlight environmental stewardship in newsletter and on website.
 - Reinforce environmental stewardship in information letter sent to members.