

Kubota Garden Foundation

2027 – 2030 Strategic Plan

August 2026

*Strategic planning support provided by
Annie von Essen, Vessel Strategy & Consulting*

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Acknowledgements

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STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Name	Affiliation / Role
Ellen Phillips Angeles	KGF Board Member
Sophia Eichholz	KGF Program Manager
Marjorie Lamarre	KGF Board Member
Christine Mahler	KGF Executive Director
Beth Purcell	KGF Capital Project Manager
Joy Shigaki	KGF Board Member

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Name	Affiliation / Role
Ron Angeles	Rainier Beach resident; active community volunteer
Gregory Davis	Rainier Beach Action Coalition
Sue Ikai	KGF volunteer
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Giles Morrish	Senior Gardener, Kubota Garden
Glenn Nelson	Founder, The Trail Posse; Rainier Beach resident
Charissa Pomrehn	Community participant
Pat Reh	Horticulture expert
Asia Tail	Executive Director, yəhaw Indigenous Creatives Collective
Rebecca Zapeta	Executive Director, Skyway Coalition; Skyway resident

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATIONS AND INPUT

Name / Group	Affiliation / Role
Allan Kubota	KGF Board Member; grandson of Fujitaro Kubota
Joy Okazaki	KGF Board President
Andy Sheffer	Seattle Parks and Recreation Deputy Superintendent
Christine Mahler	KGF Executive Director

PLANNING SUPPORT AND FUNDING

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Kubota Garden Foundation

2027 – 2030 Strategic Plan

Introduction

Kubota Garden is a 20-acre public Japanese garden in Seattle's Rainier Beach neighborhood, a rare living work of art and one of the city's most treasured cultural landscapes. The Garden belongs to the public: it is owned by the City of Seattle and cared for through a longstanding partnership between Seattle Parks and Recreation and Kubota Garden Foundation. The Foundation is the nonprofit that exists to support, enhance, and preserve the Garden in the spirit and vision of Fujitaro Kubota. This is a plan for the Foundation as an organization, but it begins where everything begins, with the Garden itself: the land, stones, water, pathways, plant communities, and the quiet sense of care that visitors feel the moment they enter.

Fujitaro Kubota began the Garden in 1927. A Japanese immigrant and self-taught garden designer, he blended Japanese garden principles and techniques with the plants, climate, stone, and light of the Pacific Northwest, creating a place unlike any other. His spirit and vision, that fusion of two landscapes, and his example of perseverance, artistry, and welcome through decades that included incarceration during World War II, still shape the Garden today.

As Kubota Garden approaches its 100th year, it carries the story of the Kubota family, of Japanese American resilience, and of the generations who have found beauty, respite, and meaning along its paths.

"My grandfather came from Japan as a young man with no real means and through his hard work and his vision and his persistence he was able to create something that people are enjoying today."

Linda Kubota Byrd,
Granddaughter of Fujitaro
Kubota

The Foundation exists because the community understood that protecting Kubota Garden as a public park was only the beginning. Mr. Kubota envisioned his Garden becoming a public garden, a place of respite for people to relax from the hustle and bustle of daily life. When the City declined to purchase the Garden in the early 1970s and the Kubota family later considered selling the land to developers in the 1980s, neighbors organized and pressed the City to buy it. Several of those advocates went on to form the Foundation, recognizing that the community's role in the Garden was far from over. For more than 35 years since, the Foundation has worked alongside Seattle Parks and Recreation, the Kubota family, gardeners, volunteers, and neighbors to steward the Garden, provide inclusive programming to help people engage with the Garden, and keep this extraordinary place free and welcoming to all.

“Dad always wanted the Garden to become a city park.”

Tom Kubota, son of Fujitaro Kubota

Today the Foundation's greatest strengths flow directly from that history: a stable and passionate base of more than 400 volunteers who make so much possible, a nimble and resourceful team that does a great deal with modest means, a culture of welcome where everyone has a place at the table, and deep, trusted relationships with Seattle Parks, the Kubota family, garden institutions, and a growing circle of community and business partners.

The Garden in Its Community

Kubota Garden sits within one of the most culturally rich and resilient parts of Seattle. Rainier Beach, Skyway, and South Seattle are home to deep immigrant, Black, Asian, Latino, Indigenous, and Pacific Islander communities, multilingual households, and neighborhood institutions. Several, like the Garden itself, are approaching a century of service. This is a community with profound assets, and one that has too often experienced underinvestment in public space and infrastructure. In Rainier Beach, an estimated 31% of residents are immigrants, 42% speak a language other than English at home, 75% are people of color, and 25% live in poverty.¹ Neighboring Skyway is similarly diverse: roughly 71% of residents are people of color, with a median

¹ City of Seattle, Rainier Beach Neighborhood Snapshot, 2023

household income of about \$93,800². Together, these communities, the Garden's closest neighbors, are among the most ethnically and economically diverse in Washington state.

The future of Kubota Garden depends on holding four commitments together:

- Free public access*
- The Garden's Japanese American history and identity*
- The Kubota family legacy*
- A genuine sense of belonging³ for all*

These are not in competition.

The Foundation's responsibility is to actively welcome the communities around the Garden rather than waiting for people to find their way in, connecting shared histories of resilience and struggle, and the common human needs for peace, respite, nature, and community that the Garden has always answered. Community members, board, staff, and partners returned to this point repeatedly throughout the planning process.

Stewardship, Partnership, and the Master Plan

The Foundation's stewardship happens through its enduring partnership with the City of Seattle and Seattle Parks and Recreation. That partnership has carried Kubota Garden from a beloved private family landscape to a treasured public garden, and it remains essential to the Garden's preservation, maintenance, capital improvements, visitor experience, and future development. As the Garden grows in visibility and use, strengthening this partnership, and making it durable through changes in City and Parks leadership, is central to the Foundation's next chapter.

² U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023, ZIP Code 98178, via CensusReporter.org

³ Our definition of belonging is: All individuals feel safe, valued, and welcome in the Garden. All people experience mental, physical, cultural, and emotional well-being at Kubota Garden and are invited into its care.

The 2019 Master Plan Update⁴ provides an important framework for that future. Developed through a collaborative process involving the Foundation, Seattle Parks and Recreation, garden experts, neighborhood organizations, city staff, and community members, the Master Plan Update sets long-term priorities for preserving the Garden's character while improving access, interpretation, infrastructure, and visitor experience. This strategic plan does

"What I have tried to make is equivalent to a painter's painting a landscape - everything is in miniature. Every rock and every key plan have a meaning."

Fujitaro Kubota, on Kubota Garden

not replace that vision. Rather, it is the Foundation's roadmap for building the organizational capacity, public support, financial sustainability, and partnership structures needed to help carry that work forward.

Above all, this plan reflects a commitment that extends beyond any single planning period: to protect and carry forward Kubota

Garden's identity as a distinctive Pacific Northwest Japanese garden, faithful to the spirit and vision of Fujitaro Kubota, while welcoming new generations into relationship with the Garden. As Kubota Garden nears its centennial, the Foundation will continue to steward this living work of art with care, for the land, the plants, and the water, for the story it holds, and for the communities and generations who will inherit it.

Kubota Garden Foundation Today

The Foundation is a small organization carrying a growing load. In 2026, it operates on roughly a \$464,400 budget with 3.5 full-time staff and more than 400 volunteers, all in support of a free public Garden that welcomed over 150,000 visitors in 2025, a number likely to climb again this year.

That work looks very different than it did even a few years ago. Alongside its traditional programs and volunteer coordination, the Foundation now carries community partnerships, grant development, capital planning, visitor experience improvements, and long-term advocacy for the Garden. Hiring a full-time Program Manager in 2024 and the Foundation's first Executive

⁴ The 2019 Master Plan Update can be found here:
https://www.kubotagarden.org/_files/ugd/8ef86d_fefabede3855408b9b01c45c98a948ed.pdf

Director in 2025 were turning points, the beginning of a shift from an all-volunteer organization to one with the staff to match its ambitions.

The challenge now is to grow without losing what has made the Foundation strong. The welcoming culture, committed volunteers, and long-held relationships that got the Foundation here are real assets. What the next few years require is the staffing, funding, and shared leadership to protect those strengths as the Garden's visibility and demands keep rising.

Major Themes, Challenges, and Questions

Throughout the planning process, several consistent themes surfaced across committee meetings, Board and staff strategic planning sessions, a community focus group, and one-on-one conversations with Andy Sheffer, Seattle Parks and Recreation Deputy Superintendent; Board President Joy Okazaki; Allan Kubota, KGF Board Member and Fujitaro Kubota's Grandson; and Executive Director Christine Mahler.

Two identity-based considerations rose to the top, and neither displaces the other:

- The need for the Foundation to actively engage the diverse communities surrounding the Garden, rather than waiting for them to find their way in.
- The need to honor and sustain the Garden's Japanese heritage and the Kubota family's legacy of garden design and stewardship as that broader community reach grows.

Financial sustainability and organizational capacity emerged as the throughline connecting nearly every other challenge, from staffing to the pace of growth to the resources the Foundation's vision for a Visitor Center and capital campaign will require. Rising visitation is already straining parking, pathways,

Planning Committee:

Ellen Phillips Angeles
Sophia Eichholz
Marjorie Lamarre
Christine Mahler
Beth Purcell
Joy Shigaki
Annie von Essen (consultant)

Community Focus Group Participants:

Ron Angeles
Gregory Davis
Sue Ikai
Jeni Kimura
Giles Morrish
Glenn Nelson
Charissa Pomrehn
Pat Reh
Asia Tail
Rebecca Zapeta

and the Garden itself, even as the Foundation's own programs and presence remain under-recognized. At the same time, the Garden's 100th anniversary in 2027, deeper ties with Rainier Beach, Skyway, and South Seattle, and a future Visitor Center, the Garden's front door and gathering place, are real openings to raise the Foundation's profile and widen the circle of people who feel a sense of ownership and investment in the Garden's future.

Key questions carried into this plan:

- How do we actively engage the diverse communities surrounding the Garden, rather than waiting for them to find us?
- How does a Visitor Center, as envisioned in the Master Plan and Master Plan Update, further the priorities of the Foundation and the Garden?
- How do we honor and sustain the Garden's Japanese heritage and the Kubota family's legacy?
- How do we secure the financial sustainability and organizational capacity our vision requires, including support for a capital campaign and Visitor Center?
- How do we protect free access and physical accessibility as the Garden grows in popularity?
- How do we balance growing engagement and visitation with the Garden's physical carrying capacity, protecting the tranquility, pathways, and plant health that make it special even as demand rises?
- How do we grow the Foundation's own visibility, so people's connection is to the organization and not only to individuals?
- How do we sustain a long-term, mutually beneficial partnership with Seattle Parks and Recreation?

Audience

This plan serves two purposes and two audiences at once. First and foremost, it is a working guide for the Foundation's staff and board, the document we return to when setting priorities, making decisions, and measuring our progress over the next several years. But it is also a way to share more openly about where the Garden is headed and why. We hope our members, volunteers, community partners, and colleagues at the City and Seattle Parks and Recreation will read it and see both the care behind our choices and the

many ways there are to be part of the work ahead. Because it will be read beyond our own walls, we have tried throughout to write plainly and honestly, in language that welcomes people in rather than assuming they already know the Garden the way we do.

Timing

This strategic plan is intended to guide Kubota Garden Foundation's work through 2030, a timeframe that deliberately splits the difference between a traditional three-year and five-year plan. The timeline reflects the Foundation's current reality: an organization in transition, carrying ongoing stewardship and community engagement responsibilities while also preparing for significant opportunities ahead, including the Garden's centennial, Visitor Center planning, and future capital campaign efforts.

“While we are here, we do what we can. Then the next generation comes along and does what they can. There is more to do and, if we strive for it, we will get it done.”

Tom Kubota, son of Fujitaro Kubota

Rather than treating these as separate phases, this plan recognizes that much of the work is already underway. 2026 will be a year of groundwork, relationship-building, and capacity development, while 2027 and the years that follow focus on implementation and growth. The priorities outlined here are intended to provide consistent direction across both ongoing and emerging work, while allowing the Board and staff flexibility to adjust sequencing, pace, and tactics as opportunities, resources, and community needs evolve.

What This Plan Does and Does Not Cover

This plan focuses primarily on where the Foundation is headed rather than documenting everything it already does. Many essential functions of the organization, from volunteer engagement and community programming to membership, fundraising, stewardship, and support for the Garden's ongoing care, are already part of the Foundation's daily work and will continue throughout the planning period. Their limited presence in this document does not reflect their importance; quite the opposite. The plan assumes these efforts remain central to the Foundation's mission while recognizing that they

may evolve over time to better support the priorities, opportunities, and organizational growth described in the pages that follow.

Direction Setting

Mission: Kubota Garden Foundation supports, enhances, and preserves Kubota Garden in the spirit and vision of Fujitaro Kubota.

Vision: The Garden is a place of respite and beauty for everyone to enjoy.

Values: Community, Equity, Growth

What Is the Future Direction We Hope For?

Kubota Garden and the future Visitor Center become a regional place of resilience, respite, beauty, and belonging for the surrounding communities of Rainier Beach, Skyway, and South Seattle, as well as for visitors from near and far. Kubota Garden Foundation will maintain the legacy of the Kubota family and Japanese American culture and stories in the Pacific Northwest.

What Is Our Guiding Principle?

Belonging and Legacy: *Kubota Garden is a thriving place of belonging, beauty, and respite, free and open to all, where the spirit and legacy of Fujitaro Kubota continue to inspire connection across generations, ethnicities, and communities.*

Strategic Priorities

The following four priorities guide Kubota Garden Foundation's work through 2030. They are designed to reinforce one another, each strengthening the Foundation's ability to carry out the others.



Priority 1: A Place of Belonging Across Generations and Communities

Deepen the Foundation's work to make Kubota Garden a place of active belonging across generations and diverse ethnic and racial communities. More people should be able to know, enjoy, and help care for the Garden through free access, welcoming programs, improved accessibility, and expanded spaces for gathering and connection.

STRATEGIES

1. Advance Visitor Center planning as a cornerstone of active belonging.

Envisioned as the Garden's front door and gathering place, the Visitor Center will provide a home for sharing the Garden's history and legacy, an anchor for expanded all-season programming, and a welcoming space for neighbors, partners, and visitors.

2. Improve physical accessibility across the Garden.

Address the slopes, paths, parking constraints, and limited accessible routes that create barriers for visitors with limited mobility.

3. Using community engagement results, develop plan for adapting and/or expanding programming, marketing, and communications to better engage and serve the immediate geographic community.

Explore a local community partnership structure that supports sustained, two-way engagement and collaboration with organized groups and neighbors.

Priority 2: The Legacy and Stories of the Garden

Capture and share the many stories of the Garden: the Kubota family legacy, Japanese American history and culture, and the experiences of people who continue to find refuge and belonging at the Garden. Use these stories to build bridges across cultures, drawing out the resilience and beauty they hold in common.

STRATEGIES

1. Use the 2027 Centennial to build visibility, partnerships, and support.

A milestone rooted in stories of shared resilience and perseverance, especially within immigrant communities. Carry the energy of this landmark year into greater visibility, stronger partnerships, deeper public support, and increased fundraising.

2. Strengthen partnerships that help steward and interpret the Garden's Japanese American legacy for future generations.

Build relationships with individuals and organizations whose expertise can help ensure that the Garden's history, the Kubota family legacy, and the broader story of Japanese American experience remain central to interpretation, storytelling, programming, and future Visitor Center planning. (e.g. Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial, Friends of Minidoka)

3. Elevate the profile of both the Foundation and Garden with public, elected, and community leaders.

Make the case that Kubota Garden is not just another city park, but a singular cultural and historical treasure with distinct needs. Position it to attract greater investment, advocacy, and long-term protection.

4. Preserve, document, and share the stories of the Garden.

Preserve and share the many stories that make up the Garden's legacy, from the Kubota family and Japanese American experience to the voices of volunteers, visitors, neighbors, and community partners today. Draw from the archives while continuing to gather new stories, weaving them into communications, fundraising, interpretation, events, and future Visitor Center planning.

Priority 3: Organizational Capacity and Financial Sustainability

Build the Foundation's capacity, fundraising strength, and financial footing so it can meet growing demand, support a maturing board and staff, and safeguard the Garden's wellbeing.

STRATEGIES

1. Conduct preparatory work, capital campaign planning, and donor engagement necessary to establish the foundation for the Visitor Center capital campaign.

2. Grow staff capacity, especially in fundraising, to match the Garden's growing needs.

Capacity can be developed through additional staff, stronger systems and technology, and more intentional use of volunteer leadership.

3. Diversify and strengthen funding streams including through expanded major donor stewardship, corporate partnerships, fundraising events, and dependable government support.

4. Grow membership as a pathway to belonging, stewardship, and recurring support.

Priority 4: Partnership with Seattle Parks and Recreation and the City of Seattle

Strengthen and formalize the Foundation's partnership with the City of Seattle and Seattle Parks and Recreation so it can endure turnover at the City, make room for a larger Foundation role in stewardship, and advance the long-term priorities identified in the 2019 Master Plan Update.

STRATEGIES

1. Formalize the Foundation's partnership with the City and Seattle Parks and Recreation.

Negotiate agreements that address current operations, future capital development, and eventual Visitor Center operations, supporting the Garden to not only survive, but flourish despite constant budget challenges and changes in mayors, council members, and department heads.

2. Advocate for and increase improvements and maintenance in line with the 2019 Master Plan Update.

Ensure the Garden is well maintained and able to absorb growing visitation pressure without compromising its character or tranquility.

Appendix A: Strategy Details

Full metrics, ownership, and timing for every strategy, organized by priority. Baselines below are condensed to their core concepts; the complete baseline narrative appears in Appendix B.

Priority 1: A Place of Belonging Across Generations and Communities

Baseline

- Free, year-round; 150,000+ visitors in 2025
- Garden Greeters: strong welcome, volunteer recruitment gaps
- Programming operating at or near capacity
- 1,000+ members and 400+ volunteers
- Community engagement study underway
- Quarterly visitor surveys since 2015
- Uneven physical access, especially for limited mobility
- “Active belonging” not yet formally defined

Strategy 1: Advance Visitor Center planning as a cornerstone of active belonging.

Envisioned as the Garden's front door and gathering place, the Visitor Center will provide a home for sharing the Garden's history and legacy, an anchor for expanded all-season programming, and a welcoming space for neighbors, partners, and visitors.

LEAD

Executive Director

SUPPORTING

Board President; Garden Committee

Timing

2026

Define active belonging and connect community

2027

Complete programming vision and incorporate

2026-2030

Advance design, fundraising case-building, campaign

engagement findings to Visitor Center planning.	Centennial storytelling themes.	readiness, and implementation planning as funding allows.
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Metrics

- Visitor Center planning reaches 60% design.
- A Visitor Center programming vision is completed, showing how the building will support history, storytelling, community gathering, respite, and expanded all-season programming.
- “Active belonging” is defined by the Foundation and incorporated into Visitor Center planning principles.
- Community engagement findings are explicitly incorporated into the Visitor Center programming vision, design priorities, and visitor experience plan.

Where to start

Define what “active belonging” means in practice for the Foundation, then translate that definition into Visitor Center planning principles. Use community engagement findings, Garden Committee input, and emerging programming needs to show how the Visitor Center can become the Garden's front door and gathering place: a home for history, storytelling, respite, community connection, and year-round engagement.

Strategy 2: Improve physical accessibility across the Garden.

Address the slopes, paths, parking constraints, and limited accessible routes that create barriers for visitors with limited mobility.

LEAD Executive Director	SUPPORTING Garden Committee
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Timing

2027 Review Master Plan accessible trail recommendations, identify priority	2028 Pilot regularly scheduled limited-	2028 Begin phased implementation of highest-priority access	2029-2030 Continue phased route improvements and integrate accessibility
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gaps, and secure cost estimates.	mobility tours.	improvements as funding allows.	into Master Plan update work.
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Metrics

- Accessible route priorities are confirmed, costed, and phased.
- At least one accessibility expert reviews current recommendations and priority routes.
- A regular limited-mobility tour schedule (in addition to current upon-request tours) is launched.
- Accessibility criteria are incorporated into Visitor Center, parking, wayfinding, and future capital project planning.

Where to start

Revisit the Master Plan's accessible trail recommendations through a current accessibility lens. Conduct a site walk with Seattle Parks and Recreation, Garden Committee members, staff, and accessibility expertise to identify priority routes, barriers, cost estimates, and phasing opportunities, especially as they relate to Visitor Center, parking, and wayfinding planning.

Strategy 3: Using community engagement results, develop plan for adapting and/or expanding programming, marketing, and communications to better engage and serve the immediate geographic community.

Explore a local community partnership structure that supports sustained, two-way engagement and collaboration with organized groups and neighbors.

LEAD Program Manager	SUPPORTING Executive Director, Marketing Committee
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Timing

2027 Complete engagement analysis and develop implementation plan. Integrate initial learnings into	2028 Pilot new programming ideas. Expand successful outreach and communications	2029-2030 Refine programs and partnerships based on evaluation, participation, and community feedback.
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communications and 100th Anniversary events.

pilots and formalize community partnership structure.

Metrics

- Community engagement findings are summarized and translated into specific programming, marketing, and communications recommendations.
- A phased community engagement implementation plan is created by 2027.
- At least five local organizations or organized groups are identified for outreach or partnership pilots.
- At least three new or adapted programs are piloted in response to community input.

Where to start

Translate community engagement findings into a practical action plan. Identify what the Foundation heard, what it means for programming and communications, and which responses can begin quickly through existing partnerships, organized groups, or adapted programs. Share this plan with those who participated in crafting it, creating deeper relationships, ownership, and trust.

Priority 2: The Legacy and Stories of the Garden

Baseline

- 2027 Centennial: a defining storytelling moment
- Storytelling rich but not yet systematized
- Japanese American history central to identity
- History lives with people, not yet the site
- Volunteer docents lead monthly tours, as well as schedule tours for private groups upon request.
- Teacher's guide, documentary, and "Spirited Stone" available
- Foundation's stewardship role less visible than the Garden

Strategy 1: Use the 2027 Centennial to build visibility, partnerships, and support.

A milestone rooted in stories of shared resilience and perseverance, especially within immigrant communities. Carry the energy of this landmark year into greater visibility, stronger partnerships, deeper public support, and increased fundraising.

LEAD

Executive Director

SUPPORTING

Program Manager; 100th Anniversary Committee

Timing

2026

Finalize theme, calendar, partner list, fundraising approach, and leadership structure.

2027

Implement Centennial programming, communications, civic engagement, and fundraising.

2028

Evaluate impact and carry forward relationships, stories, donors, and partner structures into ongoing work.

Metrics

- Centennial theme is visible across all major Centennial events and communications.
- A Centennial communications and engagement plan is completed and implemented. This plan includes baselines and goals for metrics such as press coverage, website visits, and email signups.
- Each district representative from the city, county, and state level attend at least one Centennial event, tour, or meeting at the Garden.
- Centennial events generate at least 20-25 qualified major donor, sponsor, or capital campaign prospects.
- At least one Centennial program is co-created or co-hosted with a community, cultural, or heritage partner.

Where to start

Develop a Centennial strategy brief that connects theme, programming, civic visibility, fundraising, and partnerships. Use it to align the 100th Anniversary

Committee, staff, Board, and key partners around what the Centennial should accomplish for the Garden and the Foundation beyond the anniversary year.

Strategy 2: Strengthen partnerships that help steward and interpret the Garden's Japanese American legacy for future generations.

Build relationships with individuals and organizations whose expertise can help ensure that the Garden's history, the Kubota family legacy, and the broader story of Japanese American experience remain central to interpretation, storytelling, programming, and future Visitor Center planning. Potential partners include the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial, Friends of Minidoka, and other aligned cultural and historical organizations and individuals.

LEAD Program Manager	SUPPORTING Executive Director
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Timing

2026 Identify priority partners and initiate or renew relationships.	2027 Activate partnerships through Centennial programming or shared storytelling.	2028 At least one new joint program, tour, talk, exhibit, or storytelling collaboration.	2028-2030 Maintain select partnerships and integrate them into ongoing education, interpretation, and advocacy work.
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Metrics

- Priority Japanese American history, heritage, and cultural partners are identified.
- Evaluate and, if appropriate, establish a Heritage and Community Advisory Council or equivalent partner network that brings together organizations connected to Japanese American history, local communities, and cultural stewardship to inform storytelling, interpretation, and the Garden's ongoing evolution as a place of belonging.
- At least two joint programs, tours, talks, exhibits, or storytelling collaborations conducted with heritage partners.

- Heritage partnerships contribute to at least three enduring interpretive, educational, or storytelling assets that informs future Visitor Center planning, visitor experience, or public understanding of the Garden's history.

Where to start

Create a partner map of organizations connected to Japanese American history, immigration, incarceration, cultural memory, garden design, and resilience. Identify which relationships already exist, which should be deepened, and which could support Centennial programming or future Visitor Center interpretation. Evaluate the interest and opportunities in creating a Heritage and Community Advisory Council that brings together Japanese American cultural organizations, community partners, educators, historians, artists, and neighborhood representatives for ongoing dialogue and collaboration.

Strategy 3: Elevate the profile of both the Foundation and Garden with public, elected, and community leaders.

Make the case that Kubota Garden is not just another city park, but a singular cultural and historical treasure with distinct needs. Position it to attract greater investment, advocacy, and long-term protection.

LEAD Executive Director	SUPPORTING Board of Directors
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Timing

2026 Build outreach list and draft case statement.	2027 Use Centennial as the primary invitation moment for civic and community leaders.	2028-2030 Continue annual leader engagement tied to Visitor Center, Master Plan, maintenance, accessibility, and capital needs.
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Metrics

- A civic and community leader outreach list is created and updated annually.

- At least six public, elected, or community leaders (from above list) visit the Garden each year through tours, meetings, or events.
- A concise “case for the Garden” briefing document is created for leaders, funders, and civic partners.
- At least one advocacy, funding, planning, or partnership opportunity emerges from civic relationship-building each year.

Where to start

Prepare a concise “case for the Garden” briefing for elected officials, City staff, funders, and community leaders. The piece should explain why the Garden is exceptional, what pressures it faces, what investments are needed, and how public and philanthropic partners can help protect its future.

Strategy 4: Preserve, document, and share the stories of the Garden.

Preserve and share the many stories that make up the Garden's legacy, from the Kubota family and Japanese American experience to the voices of volunteers, visitors, neighbors, and community partners today. Draw from the archives while continuing to gather new stories, weaving them into communications, fundraising, interpretation, events, and future Visitor Center planning.

LEAD Archivist	SUPPORTING Program Manager; History Committee
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Timing

2026 Develop story collection framework and identify early stories from archives, volunteers, members, and community engagement.	2027 Use Centennial to collect and share stories more publicly.	2028-2030 Continue story collection as an ongoing communications, fundraising, education, and interpretation practice.
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Metrics

- A story collection framework is developed, including priority themes, permissions, formats, and storage needs.

- At least 6 stories per year are collected, shared, or prepared for future use.
- Stories are incorporated into at least four communications, fundraising, or event moments each year.
- Storytelling priorities are incorporated into Visitor Center interpretation planning.

Where to start

Create a framework for gathering, documenting, preserving, and sharing stories connected to the Garden. Begin with existing archives and historical resources, then expand outward by inviting stories from volunteers, visitors, neighbors, community partners, and others whose lives have intersected with the Garden. Rather than focusing on a predetermined set of themes, seek to understand the full range of experiences, perspectives, and meanings people associate with this place. Use those stories to strengthen interpretation, communications, fundraising, community engagement, and future Visitor Center planning.

Priority 3: Organizational Capacity and Financial Sustainability

Baseline

- Expanded staff capacity: Program Manager (2024), Executive Director (2025)
- Board and staff roles evolving
- 2026 operating budget: roughly \$464,400
- 400+ volunteers form the backbone
- Membership, HUG campaign, and grants underway
- 1,044 members, \$330,760 raised, 72% retention (June 2026)
- Fundraising systems still developing
- Corporate giving a largely untapped opportunity
- Deep relationships, room to share ownership more broadly
- No dedicated on-site facility

Strategy 1: Conduct preparatory work, capital campaign planning, and donor engagement necessary to establish the foundation for the Visitor Center capital campaign.

LEAD Executive Director	SUPPORTING Revenue & Resource Committee; Board of Directors
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Timing

2026 Complete business planning inputs, development audit, and donor/prospect mapping.	2027 Use Centennial visibility to cultivate donors and test campaign language.	2028 Determine campaign launch readiness and leadership structure. Conduct capital campaign feasibility study.	2029-2030 Move into campaign implementation if readiness, design, City alignment, and funding conditions are met.
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Metrics

- Development audit is conducted to determine internal readiness and provide recommendations for necessary improvements.
- Preliminary campaign case statement is drafted and tested with key donors and stakeholders.
- Major donors and prospects are actively stewarded by staff and board members.
- Visitor Center campaign readiness assessment or feasibility study is completed.

Where to start

Begin with an internal development audit to assess staffing, systems, donor data, stewardship, prospect pipeline, and Board readiness. Use the findings to determine what must be strengthened before moving into campaign feasibility or quiet-phase cultivation.

Strategy 2: Grow staff capacity, especially in fundraising, to match the Garden's growing needs.

Capacity can be developed through additional staff, stronger systems and technology, and more intentional use of volunteer leadership.

LEAD	SUPPORTING
Executive Director	Board of Directors

Timing

2026	2027	2028	2029-2030
Assess capacity gaps and define staff/volunteer/technology needs.	Make first priority capacity investments tied to Centennial and fundraising growth.	Add or restructure capacity based on revenue growth and campaign readiness.	Continue scaling team structure to match Visitor Center, capital campaign, and programming demands.

Metrics

- Three-year budget and staffing plan is developed, including fundraising, communications, administration, volunteer support, and Visitor Center/campaign needs.
- Fundraising capacity needs are assessed against current revenue goals and future campaign expectations.
- At least one fundraising, development, or communications capacity investment (e.g. staff, systems, technology) is made by 2027.
- Core operational systems are documented or improved, including donor stewardship, volunteer coordination, and communications calendar.

Where to start

Map current staff, Board, and volunteer responsibilities against the Foundation's growing body of work. Identify the places where capacity is most strained, where volunteer support can be better structured, and where paid staff or technology investment would most strengthen fundraising and operations.

Strategy 3: Diversify and strengthen funding streams including through expanded major donor stewardship, corporate partnerships, fundraising events, and dependable government support.

LEAD Executive Director/Fundraising Staff	SUPPORTING Revenue & Resources Committee; Board of Directors
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Timing

2026 Build fundraising plan, define tracking categories, and improve donor/membership data.	2026-2027 Launch Centennial sponsorship and membership growth efforts.	2028 Expand corporate, major donor, and recurring giving programs.	2029-2030 Continue diversifying revenue in preparation for capital campaign and Visitor Center operations.
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Metrics

- Corporate sponsorship packages are developed and tested with prospects.
- Major donor stewardship plan is created for donors above a defined giving threshold.
- Launch annual fundraising event (e.g. luncheon, gala, etc.)
- In-Garden donation appeals are improved and tracked for effectiveness.
- Opportunities and requirements for inclusion in King County Parks Levy mapped out and strategy developed.

Where to start

Create a revenue growth dashboard that shows current performance and opportunity by funding stream. Use it to prioritize membership branding, donor stewardship, corporate sponsorship, government and foundation grants, and improved in-Garden donation appeals.

Strategy 4: Grow membership as a pathway to belonging, stewardship, and recurring support.

LEAD

Executive Director/Fundraising Staff

SUPPORTING

Revenue & Resources Committee;
Board of Directors

Timing

2026

Establish baseline data and refresh membership framing.

2027

Use Centennial to grow membership and invite broader community participation.

2028-2030

Build membership into a recurring revenue and belonging strategy with clearer renewals, stewardship, and communications.

Metrics

- Membership identity, benefits, and messaging are refreshed.
- Membership acquisition, retention, and renewal goals are set and tracked annually.
- Membership stewardship plan and metrics is established, implemented, and continually refined.

Where to start

Establish current membership data, then refresh membership messaging so it feels like an invitation into shared stewardship, not only a transaction. Clarify what members are joining, why it matters, and how membership helps keep the Garden free, welcoming, and cared for.

Priority 4: Partnership with Seattle Parks and Recreation and the City of Seattle

Baseline

- Garden Committee leads decisions
- Parks handles day-to-day horticulture
- Rising visitation pressures parking and access

- Partnership relies on informal relationships
- Specialized stewardship needs beyond a typical park
- 2019 Master Plan guides priorities
- Implementation ongoing
- Strong track record on capital projects

Strategy 1: Formalize the Foundation's partnership with the City and Seattle Parks and Recreation.

Negotiate agreements that address current operations, future capital development, and eventual Visitor Center operations, supporting the Garden to not only survive, but flourish despite constant budget challenges and changes in mayors, council members, and department heads.

LEAD

Board President

SUPPORTING

Executive Director; Garden Committee

Timing

2026

Define Foundation priorities and concerns. Sign operating agreement for current partnership structure.

2027

Begin structured conversations with Seattle Parks and Recreation and City partners for evolving partnership towards more expansive MOU for the development and operating of the Visitor Center.

2028-2030

Complete formal development agreement and substantially progress in the agreements for operating the Visitor Center once completed.

Metrics

- Foundation priorities for formal agreements are defined.
- Set expectations and timeline for overall City Parks and Foundation agreement by 2027.
- Operating agreement for the current partnership is completed and signed.
- Framework for future Visitor Center development and operations agreements is drafted.

- Roles, responsibilities, decision-making pathways, communications expectations, and project coordination processes are clarified.
- Board President intentionally briefs staff and board members on the city partnership history, complexities, and priorities on regular basis, expanding relationships more deeply within the Foundation.

Where to start

Develop an internal MOU priorities memo that clarifies what the Foundation needs a formal agreement to accomplish. Use the memo to organize conversations with Seattle Parks and Recreation around roles, decision-making, capital projects, maintenance, communications, fundraising, and long-term stewardship.

Strategy 2: Advocate for and increase improvements and maintenance in line with the 2019 Master Plan Update.

To ensure the Garden is well maintained and able to absorb growing visitation pressure without compromising its character or tranquility.

LEAD Garden Committee Chair	SUPPORTING Executive Director; Garden Committee
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Timing

2026 Develop prioritized list of near-term needs and pressure points.	2027 Use Centennial visibility to advocate for investment and maintenance support.	2028-2030 Continue annual prioritization, funding, and implementation work tied to Master Plan and visitor capacity needs.
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Metrics

- Priority maintenance and improvement needs are identified annually with Seattle Parks and Recreation and the Garden Committee.
- A shared list of Master Plan-aligned capital and maintenance priorities is maintained.

- At least one priority improvement is advanced each year through planning, funding, advocacy, design, or implementation.
- Visitor pressure issues such as parking, wayfinding, accessibility, pathways, restrooms, and plant protection are monitored and elevated.
- Foundation advocacy and partnership efforts result in increased public, private, or partner investment in Garden improvements.

Where to start

Establish an annual Garden needs review with Seattle Parks and Recreation, Garden Committee members, gardeners, and Foundation staff. Use it to identify priority maintenance and improvement needs, connect them to the Master Plan, and determine which require advocacy, fundraising, City support, or partnership action.

Appendix B: Baseline in Detail

The full baseline behind each priority, reproduced in full below.

Priority 1: A Place of Belonging Across Generations and Communities

Current Baseline

- Free and open to all, presenting no economic barriers to entry. The Garden is free year-round and drew more than 150,000 visitors in 2025 and is on track to exceed that number in 2026.
- Garden Greeters. Volunteer greeters turn a park visit into a personal welcome — a signature strength of the Foundation, however, recruitment of volunteers for this role is occasionally challenging.
- Programming demand exceeds current capacity. Existing free programs are well received and frequently operate at or near capacity, suggesting both strong community interest and the need for expanded staffing, facilities, partnerships, and program models.
- A community already built. An existing membership program [add data on # and growth] and a base of over 400 volunteers form a community to strengthen and grow.
- Community engagement study underway. A proactive listening effort is gathering input from surrounding communities to learn what they need and want from the Garden, directly informing this plan.
- KGF has conducted quarterly visitor surveys since 2015, gathering significant information about who currently visits, how they experience the Garden, and where gaps in belonging and access remain.
- Physical access remains uneven. The Garden's slopes, paths, parking constraints, and limited accessible routes create barriers for some visitors, especially people with limited mobility.
- Active belonging needs shared definition. The Foundation has a strong culture of welcome, but has not yet fully defined what active belonging

means in practice across programming, communications, partnerships, accessibility, volunteer engagement, and future facilities.

Priority 2: The Legacy and Stories of the Garden

Current Baseline

- The Centennial creates a defining storytelling moment. The Garden's 100th anniversary in 2027 offers a once-in-a-century opportunity to share the Garden's history, deepen public understanding, strengthen partnerships, and build support for the future.
- Storytelling is not yet fully systematized. The Foundation has rich archival, family, volunteer, community, and visitor stories, but does not yet have a coordinated framework for collecting, organizing, and using those stories across communications, fundraising, events, interpretation, and future Visitor Center planning.
- Japanese American history is central to the Garden's identity. The Kubota family legacy, Fujitaro Kubota's immigrant story, Japanese garden design, and Japanese American resilience are not separate from the Garden's broader community story; they are the foundation from which broader connection and belonging can grow.
- History lives with people, not yet the site. Most drop-in visitors do not encounter the Garden's history today, as there is little on-site interpretation.
- Free, volunteer docents share the history via scheduled tours (monthly, and upon request). Docents are trained via an extensive Tour Guide Manual.
- A free teacher's guide along with “Fujitaro and his Garden” documentary and discussion guide available for free on KGF website.
- *Spirited Stone: Lessons from Kubota's Garden* is a collection of poems, essays, and stories inspired by the Garden, available for purchase at Chin Music Press.
- Foundation visibility remains uneven. Many visitors experience the Garden primarily as a public park and may not yet understand the Foundation's role in stewardship, programming, advocacy, fundraising, and long-term planning.

Priority 3: Organizational Capacity and Financial Sustainability

Current Baseline

- The organization is professionalizing. The Foundation added a full-time Program Manager in 2024 and hired its first Executive Director in January 2025, marking a shift toward greater staff capacity, clearer systems, and more durable organizational infrastructure.
- Board and staff roles are evolving. As staff capacity grows, the Board has an opportunity to move from primarily hands-on implementation toward greater focus on governance, ambassadorship, fundraising, strategic oversight, and relationship-building.
- Growing operating budget. The Foundation operates on a roughly \$464,400 annual budget in 2026, up meaningfully from prior years.
- Volunteers are the backbone. A dedicated base of over 400 volunteers makes much of the Foundation's work possible.
- Multiple fundraising streams underway. Core fundraising includes membership, the annual “Help Us Grow” (HUG) campaign launched in 2024, and foundation and government grants; membership remains largely organic with room to grow.
- Membership baseline. As of June 2026, the Foundation has 1044 members, generating approximately \$330,760 annually, with 72% retention and 291 new members added in the past year. (All donors over \$25 are considered members).
- Fundraising systems are evolving. The Foundation has active donor, member, grant, and campaign activity, but will need stronger systems for segmentation, stewardship, prospect tracking, reporting, and campaign readiness as fundraising goals grow.
- Corporate support is a major untapped opportunity. Corporate giving is not yet a developed revenue stream and represents significant growth potential.
- Deep community and partner connections are one of the Foundation's greatest strengths, with Board President Joy Okazaki serving as a cornerstone connector. The natural next step is to extend shared ownership

of these relationships across more staff, board, and volunteers to build resilience and continuity while preserving the welcoming, personal warmth that makes them a core asset.

- No dedicated on-site facilities. The Foundation works from an aging off-site building and relies on space shared by Seattle Parks and Recreation staff, limiting programming and event capacity.

Priority 4: Partnership with Seattle Parks and Recreation and the City

Current Baseline

- The Garden Committee leads decisions. Its members include Kubota family members, KGF staff and board, Seattle Parks and Recreation staff, and community members.
- Parks carries day-to-day horticulture. Everyday gardening work is performed by Seattle Parks and Recreation staff and volunteers.
- Growing visitation is increasing pressure on parking, pathways, restrooms, wayfinding, accessibility, and the Garden's quiet character, making capacity management a central stewardship issue.
- Informal partnership structures create vulnerability. The current relationship is strong, but much of it depends on individual relationships, shared goodwill, and current staff knowledge rather than a durable written framework that can withstand leadership changes.
- The Garden has specialized stewardship needs. As a historic Japanese garden and living cultural landscape, Kubota Garden requires care, planning, materials, horticultural knowledge, visitor management, and interpretation beyond what is typical for a neighborhood park.
- A shared Master Plan. The 2019 Master Plan Update, created jointly by the Foundation and Seattle Parks and Recreation, guides Garden priorities.
- The Master Plan remains a guiding document, but implementation is ongoing. Key priorities related to accessibility, visitor experience, interpretation, parking, facilities, and long-term stewardship still require planning, funding, and coordinated implementation.

- A track record of leadership. The Foundation plays an active role in directing Garden preservation and has played a leadership role in nearly every capital improvement since the Garden became a city park in 1987, including the exterior ornamental wall to the Terrace Overlook, the Ishigaki dry-laid stone wall, and the restroom facilities. That momentum continues today through the Visitor Experience and wayfinding/interpretive signage initiative, planning for the parking lot expansion and future Visitor Center, and adjacent community projects including parking, stormwater and pedestrian safety improvements on adjacent streets.