



STRATEGIC PLAN  
**NGNE**  **XT**

LEGENDARY LEGACY. BOUNDLESS FUTURE.

JUNE 2021

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY



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# LETTER FROM THE CEO

JILL TIEFENTHALER, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

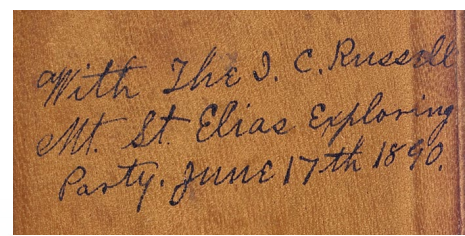
“So majestic was St. Elias, with the halo of the sunset about his brow, that other magnificent peaks...scarcely received a second glance.”

— Israel C. Russell

Deep within the National Geographic Society’s archives, beyond the books and magazines shelved in the library, is the Rare Book Room. The temperature and humidity are carefully controlled to preserve the room’s collection of assorted treasures, among which sits a humble, leather-bound diary. It is one of the oldest artifacts from the Society’s early years. Inside the front cover, this inscription is penned in black ink: “With the I.C. Russell Mt. St. Elias Exploring Party. June 17th 1890.”



William Lindsley, a member of the 1890 expedition party, documented the team’s findings with copious notes, sketches, and photographs, including their harrowing attempts to summit Mount St. Elias.



When expedition leader and geologist Israel Cook Russell—flanked by nine men and two dogs, Bud and Tweed—set out to survey the Alaskan wilderness, he and his team were on their way to making National Geographic history. In June 1890, they embarked on a grueling journey to map the St. Elias Mountains region, which spans hundreds of miles across Canada and the United States. The area was a maze of mountains and glaciers. The environment was harsh and hostile. Their most daunting charge was to climb Mount St. Elias, one of the highest peaks in North America at more than 18,000 feet.



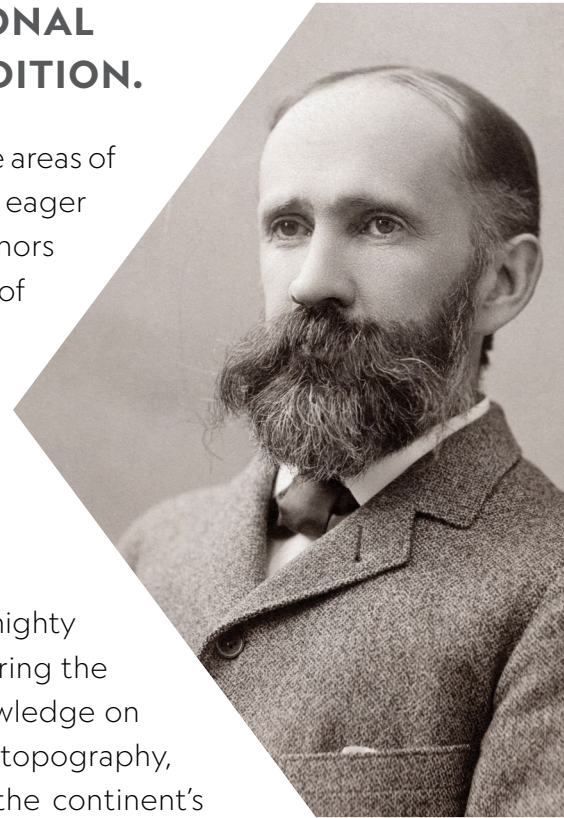
## THIS AMBITIOUS UNDERTAKING WAS THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY'S FIRST SCIENTIFIC EXPEDITION.

Barely two years after the Society's inception, during a time when large areas of the globe were still uncharted, National Geographic's members were eager to increase and diffuse geographic knowledge. Twenty-seven donors contributed to the Mount St. Elias expedition, including a handful of figures crucial to our founding: the Society's first president Gardiner Greene Hubbard, explorer John Wesley Powell, financier Charles Bell, inventor Alexander Graham Bell, and Russell himself. The trek was co-sponsored by the U.S. Geological Survey, and the U.S. Navy pledged a ship to transport them during the last leg of their ocean journey.

Despite several attempts, the team never reached the summit of the mighty mountain; snowstorms and avalanches thwarted their pursuit. But during the three-month expedition, they amassed and advanced scientific knowledge on a tremendous scale—extensively mapping the region's geography, topography, geology, and glaciers, and providing an incredible lens on one of the continent's

most isolated terrains. The following year, *National Geographic* magazine published a first-person narrative of the journey, authored by Russell. His account comprised nearly the entire May 29, 1891, issue, which was circulated to roughly 400 members.

And so began our legacy of dauntless exploration—the first of thousands of intrepid Explorers funded by the National Geographic Society (NGS) who were driven by a determination to advance new knowledge about the world. In the century that followed Russell's expedition, quests that once focused on geography, mapping, and geology gave way to Alexander Graham Bell's expansive view that the Society would cover “the world and all that is in it.”



Israel C. Russell



Explorer and expedition leader Israel Russell leads his team through Alaska.



## EXPLORATION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY >

Today, the Society invests in a diverse, global community of National Geographic Explorers who are leading a new age of exploration in support of our mission: to illuminate and protect the wonder of our world through science, exploration, education, and storytelling. These bold individuals represent more than 140 countries and their vast array of backgrounds, perspectives, and fields bring us to the far reaches of the globe.

In the depths of the ocean, Explorers reveal underwater worlds that sustain life on Earth. In subterranean caves, they investigate our ancient past and the very roots of humanity. At the edge of extinction, they courageously work to end wildlife trafficking and protect species at risk. On the frontlines of conservation, they help safeguard fragile ecosystems for future generations. Through their words and images, they document the great mysteries, triumphs, despair, and complexities of our time. With breakthrough technology, they open up unimaginable possibilities. And in classrooms and communities all over the world, educators immerse young people in the work of our Explorers, equipping them with the same critical-thinking skills to analyze and investigate real-world challenges. These learning experiences empower the next generation of Explorers, leaders, and solution seekers.



Explorers John Craighead, Barbara Washburn, Willi Unsoeld and Thomas F. Hornbein, Thandiwe Mweetwa, and KM Reyes are pictured left to right.

As our Explorers venture into the unknown, National Geographic serves as a portal to their world. And what began with a few grainy, black-and-white images in *National Geographic* magazine expanded into an unparalleled portfolio of global media: photographs, films, in-depth reporting, immersive media experiences, and so much more.



## OUR ORGANIZATIONAL EVOLUTION >

National Geographic has long told the story of our human journey, and that must include shining a light on our own past. This means facing up to our history of colonialism, racism, and sexism—including who was allowed to be an Explorer, who was able to tell stories, and whose stories were told. For much of our past, we primarily funded white American men who set out to “discover” the world. These parts of our own history are incredibly painful, but it’s critical that we reckon with our past to more effectively and equitably launch into the future.

We took it upon ourselves to look inwardly and intentionally improve how we live our core values to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is woven into everything we do. Today, nearly half of our Explorers are women and 65 percent have conducted fieldwork in their home countries and across all seven continents. We’ve also accelerated our efforts to identify, support, and elevate the work and voices of Explorers who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPoC).

To give two examples, we launched the Second Assistant Program in 2017 to increase access and learning opportunities for promising photographers from underrepresented groups. In 2020, we announced the selection of four Black storytelling fellows, whose projects elevate stories of resilience, power, and injustice among Black Americans. We enlisted the help of C. Daniel Dawson, an adjunct professor at Columbia University, to curate and elevate these important—and necessary—stories so that we can advance meaningful change within our organization and among the communities we support.

As a global organization, we not only have the opportunity to drive systemic change at National Geographic, we have a responsibility to do it. When I joined the Society in 2020, I made a commitment to advance the organization’s work around DEI. This commitment was grounded in our core values: We believe we can only achieve our mission to illuminate and protect the wonder of our world when people of every race, identity, experience, and ability have a role in our work.

My appointment as the first woman to serve as CEO in the Society’s 133-year history signals where we’re headed—and that’s toward a more inclusive and accountable workplace and community. Although we have much more work to do, the Society has made strides to achieve and maintain equity. Society staff is currently 63 percent women and 31 percent BIPoC. Today, our executive team is 64 percent women and 36 percent BIPoC, including a Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer to ensure we have the organizational expertise to drive our DEI work forward. We will continue to learn from our past, examine our present, and build a better, more inclusive future in support of our mission.

*How do you change the story?*  
**You change the storyteller.**

— Explorer and storyteller Noel Kok



## NG NEXT >

Well over a century after our founding, National Geographic continues to reach and resonate with millions of people worldwide. How has our organization stood the test of time? We've stayed true to our original mission to pursue and celebrate exploration, scientific excellence, education, and unforgettable storytelling while simultaneously evolving with nimbleness and fortitude in a rapidly changing world. We embraced innovation and intentionally adapted, thoughtfully expanding our business model, global reach, and DEI efforts. In doing so, we have remained a vibrant, relevant, world-class brand at the forefront of exploration and knowledge.

**The National Geographic Society's Strategic Plan, NG Next, celebrates our legendary legacy and takes the next step forward by charting a dynamic, five-year plan that strengthens our foundation, builds on our momentum, embeds DEI into every aspect of our work, and sets a clear vision for the future to drive significant impact.**

NG Next is the culmination of 10 months of extensive work, reflecting the passion, dedication, creativity, and collective feedback of hundreds of individuals in our global community. Explorers, staff, donors, partners, members of our Board of Trustees, and many others directly informed the priorities outlined in this plan, which will guide our work and accelerate our progress. Our vision also underscores the important and distinctive role we play in the world. We have the people, the tenacity, and the organization to advance new knowledge, protect the planet, tell stories that build awareness and spur action, and educate and equip a new generation to pursue positive change. Grounded in the best science, exploration, education, and storytelling, and fueled by an enduring spirit of innovation, we are poised to build a **boundless future**.

It has been invigorating to work with our global community toward this common goal. I am tremendously grateful to all those who contributed to this important effort. Thank you for your engagement and partnership. I feel exceptionally fortunate to work alongside you as we continue to shape the Society's future and deliver on **NG Next**.



**JILL TIEFENTHALER**  
Chief Executive Officer  
National Geographic Society



*“Thanks to generations of curious, daring, intrepid explorers of the past, we may know enough, soon enough, to chart safe passage for ourselves far into the future.”*

– Explorer at Large and oceanographer Sylvia A. Earle



**>** A freediver swims with an oceanic whitetip shark off the Bahamas.





# OUR MISSION

**The National Geographic Society uses the power of science, exploration, education, and storytelling to illuminate and protect the wonder of our world.**

Before we could map our future, we had to define what we wanted to achieve. During the strategic planning process, hundreds of constituents shared their aspirations for the Society, sparking rich and robust conversations. First and foremost, there was strong affirmation of our mission, which has never been more urgent or important. Our community saw the enormous potential to harness the collective power of our strengths, which are the core of our DNA: science, exploration, education, and storytelling, infused with the spirit of innovation. By weaving our interdisciplinary work throughout the fabric of our initiatives, we create the conditions to cultivate understanding, encourage empathy, and inspire the change we want to see in the world.

There was also consensus that we should focus our impact on one of our most valuable assets: our Explorers. They exemplify our mission and form the heart and soul of National Geographic. Collectively, these insights helped crystallize our vision for the future:

# OUR VISION

**By 2030, the National Geographic Society will be known globally for its bold and impactful Explorer-led programs that spark curiosity in hundreds of millions of people, inspiring them to learn about, care for, and protect our world.**



*“We are all in this together... This is about us all joining together across cultures, races, and classes to change the way our global system works.”*

– Explorer and Waorani Leader Nemonte Nenquimo

Explorer Nemonte Nenquimo (center) and other participants pose for a photo at a 2019 National Geographic Society Women in Conservation gathering at the Inkaterra Research Station in Madre de Dios, Peru.



# WHAT SETS THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY APART?

Throughout the strategic planning process, hundreds of individuals shared their passion for and personal connections to National Geographic, and they cited similarly defining reasons why. Collectively, their stories and feedback underscored the Society's greatest **strengths**.

Our **Explorers** are the beating heart of our organization—the inspirational changemakers who receive funding from the Society. Constituents praised their efforts and overall star power as experts in their fields, role models, and change agents.

Our community also regularly discussed the strength of our **brand**, the importance and urgency of our **mission**, and the hallmarks that have grounded our organization since our earliest years. Through cutting-edge science and innovation, conservation, education, and storytelling, we have the unparalleled ability to advance knowledge and create sustainable impact.



There was also overwhelming recognition of the **talented and dedicated individuals**—Explorers, staff, trustees, donors, partners, and others—who are part of National Geographic’s global community, the magic that happens when we work together in support of our mission, and the incredible **convening power** we can leverage when we bring our community together. The Society’s “mission moments” and signature events, including Explorers Festival, Storytellers Summit, Education Summit, and other marquee events, connect people, inspire creativity, open doors, catalyze partnerships, and so much more.

The Society also has an **innovative business model**, which enables us to invest every philanthropic dollar—100 percent of donations—directly to our Explorers and programs.

Our constituents resoundingly expressed the enormous potential to drive significant impact through our joint-venture **partnership with The Walt Disney Company**. Disney is one of the most recognized brands in the world and shares our legacy of innovation, inspiration, and storytelling. Disney also brings a wealth of knowledge in businesses that are critical to our future success, such as travel, consumer products, and experiences. With its business expertise, brand power, and global footprint, Disney has the unique ability to broadcast the Society’s mission to millions more people who are endlessly curious and share our passion for exploration.



*“Everyone is an explorer. How could you possibly live your life looking at a door and not go open it?”*

– Explorer at Large and oceanographer Bob Ballard



# WHO ARE OUR EXPLORERS?

Since our founding in 1888, the National Geographic Society has awarded more than 14,000 grants to Explorers across all seven continents. Explorers are extraordinary individuals who receive funding from the Society to illuminate and protect our world through science, innovation, conservation, education, and storytelling. They are driven by something bigger than themselves. They see the difference between the world as it is and as it could be, and they make a choice to do something about it with courage and conviction.

Their journey often starts with curiosity—a vital or vexing question, a stirring idea, or a pervasive problem that is unresolved. In search of the truth, our Explorers investigate, test hypotheses, innovate, stretch their creativity, and push the boundaries of traditional thinking in ways that fundamentally change our world and enrich our lives. They uncover Earth’s complexities and illuminate our human journey. They advance knowledge, drive progress, protect our planet, and pass the torch to future generations who will follow in their footsteps.

## **Our Explorers represent a global mosaic of people and places that spans continents and cultures.**

We are proud to support our Explorers and celebrate their stories in our commitment to build a more equitable and inclusive world. Although we have more work to do to achieve equity, the Society has made important strides. We have reached gender parity, with nearly half of our grants going to women. Plus, more than 60 percent of grants are awarded to non-U.S. citizens conducting work around the world.



*Explorers Nigel Golden, Jeannie Raharimampionona, and Callie Veelenturf are pictured left to right.*



# THE EXPLORER MINDSET

While our Explorers represent diverse backgrounds and fields of work, they are united by shared values and commitments. National Geographic Explorers...

- Are leaders.
- Are problem solvers.
- Observe, document, and engage with the world around them.
- Tell stories that inspire others.
- Are informed, curious, and capable individuals who are committed to making the world a better place.
- Have a sense of responsibility and respect for other people, cultures, and the natural world.
- Are empowered to make a difference, pursue bold ideas, and persist in the face of challenges.
- Create and foster a global community committed to a sustainable future.
- Are committed to supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion in their respective fields.



*Explorers Rae Wynn-Grant and Sandesh Kadur are pictured left to right.*

Wherever their paths take them—in the lab, behind the lens, in the classroom, or in the field—Explorers make profound contributions that help to realize our mission and vision.



“We cannot get to the best possible exploration, whether it’s on this planet or beyond, if we don’t have **the totality of people in the room to contribute to the conversation.**”

– Explorer and astrophysicist Jedidah Isler



➤ Chief Storytelling Officer Kaitlin Yarnall joins a panel discussion with Explorers Dominic Bracco II, Tara Roberts, and Walé Oyéjidé (left to right) during the 2019 National Geographic Storytellers Summit.







# PROCESS

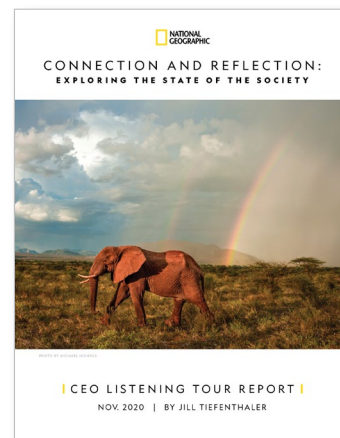
## OVERVIEW

The Society's strategic planning process was an extensive, organization-wide effort that meaningfully engaged hundreds of members of our global community and thoughtfully synthesized their feedback. The multiphase process spanned 10 months, from August 2020 to May 2021. The dynamic process was grounded in our guiding principles, including collaboration; ingenuity; transparency; a focus on the long term; and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

For two fundamental reasons, this process was also unprecedented. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire process was conducted virtually. During a time of tremendous disruption, more than 400 constituents participated, including donors, partners, Explorers, NGS staff, NGS trustees, Disney and NGP staff, and the Committee for Research and Exploration. It reiterated our community's adaptability, resilience, and collective dedication to shaping the Society's future. In addition, unlike previous strategic planning efforts, this one was broader in scope and scale and was meticulously developed and managed entirely in-house. A core Strategic Planning Team was formed to guide the collective work of the planning process, working in tandem with CEO Jill Tiefenthaler.

## CEO LISTENING TOUR

In August 2020, Jill began her role at the Society and immediately imbued some of the core values at the center of her leadership philosophy—listening and inclusion. She embarked on a three-month Listening Tour to gain a deeper understanding of National Geographic and the people who bring its mission to life. Her listening sessions consisted of one-on-one meetings with constituents around the world, as well as cross-functional groups of approximately 10 employees at a time. They explored the organization's strengths, challenges, opportunities, and aspirations for the future.



After more than 80 listening sessions with over 400 members of the National Geographic community, Jill developed a final Listening Tour report, "*Connection and Reflection: Exploring the State of the Society*." In addition to compiling the key themes that surfaced from her Listening Tour, the report crystallized the Society's four strategic priorities, three strategic throughlines, and vision for the future.



## STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Listening Tour report set the foundation for the Society’s strategic planning process, which began in earnest in November 2020. The Strategic Planning Team developed an extensive framework to facilitate the development of our strategic priorities and throughlines with support from across the organization. The team established seven cross-functional planning committees, each tasked with a specific charge to collectively draft the objectives, tactics, metrics, and milestones over the course of several months.

The Strategic Planning Team worked diligently to encourage shared ownership of the process and plan by consistently inviting conversation and generating opportunities for creative thinking and consultative feedback loops. They gathered and incorporated input from staff and trustees on an ongoing basis through cross-divisional brainstorming sessions, virtual break-out rooms, digital whiteboards, working groups, calls for volunteers, and other engagement opportunities. The team then synthesized all of this information to inform each step of the process.

Throughout this iterative process, the team shared frequent updates and consistently engaged the National Geographic community via weekly emails, anonymous surveys, staff meetings, and more to gather input and ensure awareness and understanding. We also developed a Listening Tour and Strategic Planning hub, hosted on the Society’s intranet platform, which was visited more than 800 times. At various points along the way, Jill also engaged the Society’s Board of Trustees, who approved the plan’s strategic direction in March 2021 and the final strategic plan in May 2021.

**400+**

**TOTAL PARTICIPATING  
CONSTITUENTS**

**280+**

**TOTAL STRATEGIC  
PLANNING MEETINGS**



“ I have to do more than tell them what it was like for me to go be an Explorer – I needed to make space for the students to become Explorers themselves.”

– Explorer and educator Jennifer Chavez-Miller





# STRATEGIC THROUGHLINES

Our planning process included three strategic throughlines that were thoughtfully considered and will be woven throughout all of our work: the Society's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion; our reimagined Base Camp; and alignment and collaboration with Disney and National Geographic Partners (NGP). A cross-functional team of staff and leadership developed these throughlines with guidance from trustees.



*National Geographic Explorers pose for a photo at the 2019 Explorers Festival in Washington, D.C.*



## **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**

We can only achieve our mission when people of every race, identity, experience, and ability have a role in our work. We believe it is our differences that make the National Geographic Society a better place. It is why we take great care to foster a culture where everyone feels welcome, safe, included, and respected. Throughout the strategic planning process, the DEI Throughline team assessed the Society's organizational framework and created guiding principles to ensure that our values informed every aspect of the implementation of NG Next—from our funding strategy to our mission programs, hiring practices, partners, and everything in between. An innovative, exciting, and dynamic workplace must be diverse, inclusive, equitable, and accessible.

## **OUR BASE CAMP**

Our global headquarters encompasses three buildings totaling nearly 900,000 square feet in the heart of Washington, D.C. The Base Camp Throughline team was charged with fully exploring the potential of our reimagined physical campus, as well as our virtual spaces, to bring people together with transformative and uniquely National Geographic experiences that showcase our mission. The team built on the Society's commitments to ramp up our convening power, explore new partnerships and collaborations, and strengthen our business model through new revenue and fundraising opportunities. The Base Camp Throughline group delivered on this commitment by informing the work of other cross-divisional teams engaged in the strategic planning process.

## **ALIGNMENT AND COLLABORATION WITH DISNEY AND NGP**

The National Geographic Society has a joint-venture partnership, NGP, with The Walt Disney Company. The Alignment and Collaboration Throughline team ensured that our partnership with Disney and our work through NGP were thoughtfully integrated into the development and execution of NG Next. In doing so, we leveraged our unique business model and amplification opportunities in support of our vision. The team delivered on this commitment by bringing the right expertise, including our NGP colleagues, to the table to evaluate the plan.





# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

“*At our core is curiosity, the chance for us to ask the question, ‘What if we could start from the very beginning? How would we changemakers create the world that we actually want to be a part of?’ We need to start today.. Be brave enough to start taking action today.*”

– Young Explorer and activist Melati Wijsen





## FOCUS: FEWER, BIGGER, BETTER

Our community resoundingly expressed that they wanted fewer programs, which meant giving up some initiatives in the interest of achieving far greater impact. In order to make our work bigger and better, we had to start with fewer. To focus our mission-driven efforts, identify and build long-lasting relationships with our Explorers, and drive impact globally, we are...

- Strategically narrowing the Society's focus to five key areas that best align with our mission: **Ocean, Land, Wildlife, Human History and Cultures, and Human Ingenuity.**
- Reducing the number of grants we award each year, but increasing our investment in each Explorer—not only through funding, but also through expanded professional development, training, leadership and speaking opportunities, community building, and connections.
- Identifying and scaling a small number of signature, Explorer-led programs that can have outsize impact by combining the core elements of our vision.





# FOCUS AREAS



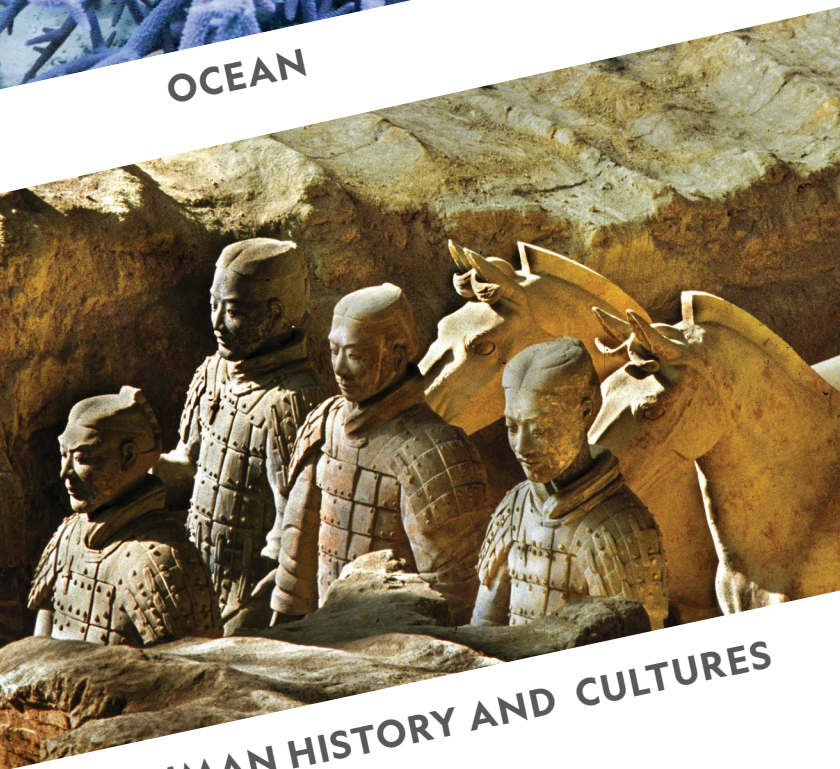
OCEAN



WILDLIFE



LAND



HUMAN HISTORY AND CULTURES



HUMAN INGENUITY





# WHAT ABOUT SPACE EXPLORATION?

“One other memento which we were privileged to take along with us on our trip was the flag that has accompanied every major recent expedition, *the flag of the National Geographic Society.*” – Apollo 11 astronaut and Hubbard Medal recipient Neil Armstrong

Space exploration has long been a part of National Geographic’s history. We have documented many courageous missions to space in an unrelenting quest for answers about the unknown. We’ve also bestowed the Society’s highest honor, the Hubbard Medal, upon astronaut John Glenn; NASA mathematician Katherine Johnson; and crew members of Apollo 8, Apollo 11, and the inaugural mission of the space shuttle Columbia. So, how does space exploration fit into our new focus? It’s woven throughout.

Space brings science to bear in fascinating and inventive ways to identify patterns about life on our planet, accelerate conservation, and even learn more about ourselves. By leveraging satellite imagery, we gain incredible scientific perspectives about our **Ocean, Land, and Wildlife**, including unprecedented data on...

- The many biotic and abiotic cycles of the ocean, such as thermal imaging of warming seas or swirling blooms of phytoplankton, which keep carbon dioxide levels in check.
- The growth, death, and deforestation of the world’s forests. Satellite imagery captures the effects of massive wildfires and deforestation, as well as the revegetation of areas when they are given time to recover.
- Wildlife migrations and their numbers, providing ecologists and conservationists with invaluable and much-needed data.

NASA’s Mars rover Curiosity explores the red planet.



Space observation and exploration are also deeply interwoven into **Human Ingenuity**. Today's space programs are driving cutting-edge technology that pushes the limits of what is possible: interplanetary travel, generating oxygen on other planets, and searching for evidence of life.

Space also shapes **Human History and Cultures**. Throughout time, humans have responded to the sky; The stars have guided our lives in countless ways. They've been the map for generations of explorers. They've inspired religions, mythology, art, music, and beyond. In fact, in 2016, we awarded the Hubbard Medal to Nainoa Thompson for reviving the ancient practice of wayfinding—ocean navigation using stars and other natural elements as guides.

**For these reasons and more, space exploration ignites the human spirit, advances innovation, and drives exponential growth in our understanding of the planet and our own impact on it.**

➤ *Astronaut Barry Wilmore performs work during a spacewalk with fellow astronaut Terry Virts.*





# DRIVE IMPACT THROUGH COLLABORATION

To leverage National Geographic’s world-class reputation, unlock the wealth of expertise in our ecosystem, ensure our work remains relevant and cutting edge, and expand our global impact, we are looking to...

- Leverage our convening power and National Geographic “mission moments.”
- Strategically partner and collaborate to strengthen our organization.
- Share our in-house expertise globally.
- Reimagine our Base Camp to truly reflect the magic of our mission.

*Ratama Tshwenyego, Explorer Adjany Costa, Mia Maestro, and Tumeletso “Water” Setlabosha (left to right) pull a mokoro as part of the Okavango Wilderness Project in 2018.*






## CREATE A MORE INNOVATIVE WORKPLACE

Our constituents see immense value in embracing innovation and thoughtful change to strengthen our global community, campus, and organization. To build an internal culture and workplace that's as innovative and dynamic as our mission, we must embrace the ingenuity that we're known for—at all levels of our organization. Collectively, we are focusing on how to...

- Foster a culture of risk-taking.
- Encourage flexibility.
- Expand pathways for professional growth and empowerment.
- Increase our operational transparency and cross functionality.



Explorer and forensic scientist Frankie West hopes to recover DNA from this piece of wood encased in ice, taken from the shipwreck Clotida.





# BUILD A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

Our business model changed dramatically in 2015 with our joint-venture partnership that created NGP. It is critical to think about how we want it to evolve in the next 5 to 10 years and beyond. As industry landscapes continue to evolve—in media, science, and education—what creative, innovative adjustments can we make to set ourselves up for the strongest possible financial future? We are focusing our efforts in four key areas to...

- Strengthen our partnership with Disney.
- Build the Society's endowment.
- Create a culture of philanthropy.
- Identify new revenue-producing programs that advance our mission.



“When people turn off their lights and phones and look up at the sky, they are looking up at the same sky I see each night, **reminding all of us of our duty to protect the planet.**”

– Explorer and conservation biologist Shivani Bhalla



# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

## FOCUS: FEWER, BIGGER, BETTER

“ Our job as Explorers is *to be the eyes for the rest of the world* and connect future generations and adults with our work. ”

– Explorer and marine biologist Gustavo Hinojosa-Arango



➤ Indira Mateta, an Okavango Wilderness Project logistics coordinator, takes a photo near the Cuando River in Angola.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1



# FOCUS: FEWER, BIGGER, BETTER

### OBJECTIVE 1.1

**NGS will identify, cultivate, and support a streamlined portfolio of diverse, Explorer-led programs within our five focus areas, driving impact, recognition, and fulfillment of our mission.**

### TACTICS

- We will identify and build a portfolio of **eight Explorer-led program types**—named in recognition of our navigational legacy—that span our five focus areas:
  - A small number of **Explorers at Large**, our luminaries who serve as mentors to the next generation of Explorers
  - A select few **Zenith Programs**, which mark the height of our efforts to illuminate and protect the wonder of our world
  - A select few **Polaris Programs**, which take ambitious approaches to addressing critical issues
  - Numerous **Azimuth Projects**, which are scalable projects that catalyze ideas for illumination and protection
  - A small number of **Wayfinder Awards**, which recognize breakthrough leaders (previously known as the Emerging Explorer award)
  - Numerous **Meridian Projects**, which empower collaboration among the Explorer community
  - A robust pool of Explorers funded through our **National Geographic Grants** program, which provides seed funding to early career Explorers, as well as those more advanced in their careers
  - Numerous **Young Explorers**, who are focused on collective action or scaled solutions for our planet

(Continued on next page)





## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

### FOCUS: FEWER, BIGGER, BETTER

#### OBJECTIVE 1.1

**NGS will identify, cultivate, and support a streamlined portfolio of diverse, Explorer-led programs within our five focus areas, driving impact, recognition, and fulfillment of our mission.**

#### TACTICS (CONTINUED)

- Intentionally curate and support each portfolio of programs and engage Explorers and staff around each focus area and Explorer group.
- Align existing educational content and offerings to support and highlight the Explorer-led programs within the focus areas; ensure investment in new opportunities meet these criteria.
- Leverage the reach of Disney and other partners to amplify the work of our Explorers, deepen engagement with existing external constituents, and share our story with an expanded, more diverse audience.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1



# FOCUS: FEWER, BIGGER, BETTER

### OBJECTIVE 1.2

**NGS will attract and empower a diverse network of Explorers by providing funding, cutting-edge tools, and opportunities to supercharge their impact.**

### TACTICS

- Transparently, equitably, and creatively recruit and cultivate Explorers with the diverse ideas, talent, backgrounds, and expertise necessary to enact, infuse, and augment our programmatic portfolio.
- Create a suite of capacity-development resources and opportunities for Explorers that help them grow and expand their impact.
- Strengthen Explorer connections with the Society and each other.
- Activate the expertise and influence of our Explorers and their networks to engage and empower a global community of solution-seekers to amplify actions to protect our world.



# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

## DRIVE IMPACT THROUGH COLLABORATION

*“It’s about people. We have to create inclusive solutions if we are going to make a difference.”*

– Explorer and marine biologist  
Heather Koldewey



Sea to Source: Ganges expedition team member Aditi Dev (left) meets with a group of local women in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, India.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2




# DRIVE IMPACT THROUGH COLLABORATION

### OBJECTIVE 2.1

**NGS will better leverage our relationship with Disney and attract aspirational collaborators and partners to build a global ecosystem of strategic alliances that advance high-impact initiatives and reach diverse audiences.**

### TACTICS

- Strengthen our partnership with Disney and leverage National Geographic's platforms to amplify our Explorers and mission programs.
- Create a higher education partnership program to engage faculty and students in our work.
- Build mutually beneficial alliances with science, conservation, academic, and other organizations (each bringing their own unique strengths and assets) to magnify impact in support of mission-aligned goals.
- Develop a small number of strategic partnerships that will help us, as a U.S.-based organization, extend our global reach.
- Together with Disney, develop enterprise-wide alliances with corporations to secure transformational funding and strategic capabilities that enable NGS to scale our impact programs.



Sea to Source: Ganges expedition team members perform work in Bangladesh's Bhola District.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2



# DRIVE IMPACT THROUGH COLLABORATION

### OBJECTIVE 2.2

**NGS will supercharge our power to convene, mobilizing diverse people and groups to learn, find common ground, spark innovation, seek solutions, and achieve impact.**

### TACTICS

- Recharge our three signature tentpole events—Storytellers Summit, Explorers Festival, and Educators Summit—by leveraging what we learned from hosting virtual events to engage a broader audience and achieve measurable outcomes.
- Intentionally and strategically host one or two key convenings annually, and a number of smaller (one-day) convenings, to engage thought leaders, industry experts, and other target audiences to catalyze timely conversations, innovate, and activate solutions in mission-aligned areas.
- Thoughtfully activate our staff and Explorers to represent the Society at critical convenings and systematically share learnings, relationships, and opportunities across the organization.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2



# DRIVE IMPACT THROUGH COLLABORATION

### OBJECTIVE 2.3

NGS will leverage its unique strengths to generate new opportunities that enhance our brand, expand our impact, and increase our global recognition.

### TACTICS

- Build an innovation incubator to test new programmatic and business ideas that meet these criteria. Share appropriate ideas with Disney and NGP and implement others ourselves.
- Capitalize on the newly-focused alignment around our programmatic focus areas to enliven and revitalize the story of National Geographic Society.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2



# DRIVE IMPACT THROUGH COLLABORATION

### OBJECTIVE 2.4

NGS will attract and engage people of all backgrounds with immersive public spaces and experiences, both physical and virtual, that embody our mission and values, share our history, and connect with and unleash the Explorer in everyone.

### TACTICS

- Design a state-of-the-art sustainable space that provides a range of inclusive opportunities and inspires our audiences to commit to and share our mission.
- Develop an outreach and engagement strategy that showcases public experiences, attracting our target audiences to our physical and virtual spaces.



# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

## CREATE A MORE INNOVATIVE WORKPLACE

*“Have the guts to try new, unproven things and the rigor to continue experimenting. Risk-taking is not a blind leap off a cliff but a lengthy process of trial and error.”*

– Chair of the National Geographic Society Board of Trustees Jean Case



*A technician sets up an acoustic camera in Boyd Deep Canyon Desert Research Center, California.*





## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3



# CREATE A MORE INNOVATIVE WORKPLACE

### OBJECTIVE 3.1

**NGS will attract, empower, and retain a talented and diverse staff, achieving excellence by providing transparent, equitable, and consistent access to opportunities for growth, flexibility, and recognition.**

### TACTICS

- Cultivate a pipeline of diverse candidates, providing an efficient and transparent process for current and potential staff.
- Revise the compensation structure and performance evaluation system to be more equitable and transparent, creating a culture of timely recognition that rewards individual and team excellence.
- Advance a range of compelling professional development offerings, providing all staff with relevant learning and growth opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3



# CREATE A MORE INNOVATIVE WORKPLACE

### OBJECTIVE 3.2

NGS will foster inclusion, collaboration, and adaptability throughout the organization, creating an environment where all staff and stakeholders connect to the mission and contribute meaningfully to our shared success.

### TACTICS

- Create and promote an environment that embraces cross-functional collaboration to collectively deliver on our mission and goals.
- Provide pathways for all staff to understand and engage with our mission-focused work, unlocking the potential for each individual to creatively contribute to our shared purpose.
- Reimagine our policies to realize the benefits of diverse work styles, ensuring staff have the tools, methods, and techniques to be productive, collaborative, and effective.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3



# CREATE A MORE INNOVATIVE WORKPLACE

### OBJECTIVE 3.3

**NGS will foster a culture that celebrates experimentation, resilience, and learning as pathways to innovative breakthroughs and maximum impact.**

### TACTICS

- Create spaces and promote practices that nurture trust, creativity, and critical self-reflection as springboards for innovation.
- Streamline internal operations to unlock resources and energy for risk-taking and experimentation.
- Celebrate and reward those who challenge assumptions and develop innovative solutions.
- Pursue intentional innovation and staff learning by incorporating global perspectives and industry best practices.
- Advance and model cutting-edge sustainability practices to fulfill our mission.



# STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4

## BUILD A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

“When you realize the value of all life, you dwell less on what is the past and concentrate more on the **preservation of the future.**”

– Explorer and primatologist Dian Fossey



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4



# BUILD A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

### OBJECTIVE 4.1

NGS will bolster our financial health and amplify our mission by optimizing our relationship with Disney and leveraging its incredible global reach and influence.

### TACTICS

- Reimagine our partnership with Disney to align with their organizational structure, optimize and safeguard the National Geographic brand, and provide a reliable and growing revenue stream.
- Leverage our access to Disney platforms to amplify the work of our global network of Explorers and extend our fundraising messaging to broader audiences.



▶ Explorer Cameron Kruse photographs two of his team members with the National Geographic flag in Ladakh, part of the Kashmir region.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4



# BUILD A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

### OBJECTIVE 4.2

NGS will secure our future through strategic stewardship of our endowment that is grounded in our mission and values.

### TACTICS

- Transition responsibility for endowment management from an outsourced chief investment officer (OCIO) to an internal CIO in accordance with a revised Investment Committee governance model.
- Grow the endowment by adding to the corpus through fundraising and exceeding benchmark returns.
- Align investments with National Geographic's core mission and values.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4



# BUILD A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

### OBJECTIVE 4.3

**NGS will collectively build a culture of philanthropy by embracing best practices and creatively and intentionally galvanizing donor, Explorer, and partner engagement.**

### TACTICS

- Invest in the Advancement operation and adopt best practices in fundraising and stewardship across the organization.
- Engage staff, leadership, trustees, and partners as global ambassadors of the Society's brand and stewards of our financial future.
- Sharpen NGS's unique value proposition to improve our positioning in the marketplace.
- Leverage our partnership with Disney to engage new audiences and expand our reach.



## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4



# BUILD A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

### OBJECTIVE 4.4

NGS will diversify and strengthen our financial position by identifying innovative, revenue-generating opportunities that advance our mission.

### TACTICS

- Set up an innovation incubator to test and grow revenue-generating programs that build on our existing successes and infrastructure.
- Capitalize on our Base Camp real estate and our convening power to generate new revenue streams that also enhance our reputation and reach.





“ I really believe that, as human beings, **we have an innate need to explore**, to see what’s around the corner. ”

– Explorer and storyteller Jimmy Chin



▶ Pasang Lhamu Sherpa Akita climbs a rock route in Hattiban, Nepal.



# OUR INNOVATIVE BUSINESS MODEL

## 2015 > BREAKING NEW GROUND

One of the most powerful ways we've built on our legacy and accelerated our impact work is through an innovative business model. November 2015 marked the beginning of a transformative new chapter in our history, when the Society entered into an expanded partnership with 21st Century Fox to create a new joint venture: National Geographic Partners (NGP), a for-profit, global media company.

Under the terms of the joint venture, NGP reorganized National Geographic's publishing operations, media properties, and consumer-oriented assets—including the National Geographic television channels, *National Geographic* magazine, digital and social media platforms, and ancillary activities—to scale our international audience and impact and increase revenue.

Through this unique structure, NGP distributes a portion of its annual profits back to the Society, which funds our mission-driven work. In doing so, the joint venture significantly increased our endowment, strengthening the Society's foundation and mission focus.



## 2019 > PARTNERSHIP WITH DISNEY

In March 2019, The Walt Disney Company acquired 21st Century Fox and assumed the company's joint venture share in NGP—creating a new partnership between the Society and Disney, one of the most beloved brands in the world. Disney shares our legacy of innovation, inspiration, and storytelling, and brings a wealth of knowledge in businesses that are critical to our future success. They include global media, experiences, consumer products, and direct to-consumer offerings like Disney+. With its business expertise, matching brand prowess, and global footprint, Disney provides an even larger platform to expand National Geographic's reach with a broader and multigenerational audience.

The annual draw from the Society's endowment, which has grown to over \$1.4 billion today, combined with the annual revenue received from NGP, enable the Society to guarantee that 100 percent of donations from our supporters and philanthropic partners go directly to our Explorers and mission programs.

When you buy *National Geographic* magazines, watch National Geographic channels, shop or travel with National Geographic, you further the work of the Society's Explorers and programs around the world. As a result of the joint venture, National Geographic has the unusual ability to fully leverage the power of science, exploration, education, and storytelling to illuminate and protect the wonder of our world.

*“National Geographic is another tremendous brand built on quality, one that has global reach and cross-generational appeal. We also like that its values are vital and relevant to a planet facing environmental challenge... Our goal is to support Nat Geo's expansion around the world.”*

– The Walt Disney Company's Executive Chairman Bob Iger





# OUR THEORY OF IMPACT

*“If you want to protect nature, you first have to love it. And if you want to love it, you first have to understand it. And if you want to understand it, you first have to see it.”*

– Explorer and photographer David Doubilet

At the National Geographic Society, we often say science and exploration are our foundation, and storytelling and education are our superpowers. We deeply value the importance of planetary stewardship and the urgent need to protect our planet. Of equal importance is our belief that when people understand our world and have an emotional connection to its natural and cultural wonders, they’ll take action to support and protect them. So, how exactly do we illuminate and protect the wonder of our world?

## PROTECTION

We view **protection** and the **advancement of knowledge** as direct, quantifiable impact in support of our mission. This often results from the work of our Explorers who are leading **scientific research** and **conservation programs** with measurable and outsize impact. Examples include describing species that are new to science, protecting land, establishing new marine-protected areas, and making discoveries in archaeology that fill in the gaps of our human evolution.





## ILLUMINATION

We view illumination as both **storytelling** and **education** about the wonder of our world, its beauty, the peril it faces, and solutions to its problems. **Storytelling** and **education are valuable in their own right**, as they inform, spark curiosity, and connect us across cultures and species, even across history and time. But at its best, **illumination leads to protection, informing and inspiring people to care and act** on behalf of our planet and its people.

Consider the masterful storytellers who document the important stories of our time, or educators who lead immersive learning experiences about complex topics. These stories and experiences have the power to cultivate understanding, touch hearts and minds, inspire empathy, and invoke positive change. We know because we've seen the change firsthand: An exposé on wildlife trafficking led to the increased protection of at-risk animals. And a classroom exercise about the climate crisis inspired students to launch their own youth-led movement to reduce our carbon footprint.





# MAGNIFYING OUR IMPACT

*So how do we put our theory into practice? Implementing NG Next is designed to magnify our impact, as shown in the following conceptual model.*



# NGNEXT

**OPTIMIZE NGS OPERATIONS**  
Streamline and strengthen Explorer-centered programs and work

Innovative workplace

Sustainable financial model

THROUGHLINE  
**Our Base Camp**

THROUGHLINE  
**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

THROUGHLINE  
**Alignment and Collaboration with Disney and NGP**

Strategically recruit, train, fund, and activate the world's most dynamic Explorers—the heart of our work

Significantly increase Explorers' contributions to advancing knowledge and protection

Inspire educators, youth, and future Explorers with high-impact potential to become part of NGS

Increase donations and successful partnerships

Broaden reach and amplification of Explorers and NGS work

NGS's work and mission become better known

KEY OUTCOME

**PROTECTION:** We help protect the wonder of our world and advance scientific knowledge.

KEY OUTCOME

**ILLUMINATION:** We help more people learn about, care for, and want to protect the wonder of our world.



How do we achieve our ambitious vision by 2030? It starts with a high-functioning organization that has an innovative and inclusive workplace, a talented and diverse staff, and a sustainable business model. Strategic Priorities 3 and 4 (**Create a More Innovative Workplace** and **Build a Sustainable Business Model**, respectively) and our **DEI Throughline** are designed to create the organizational health that is essential to optimizing our work and achieving our mission and vision. Internally, we are focused on increasing the well-being and efficacy of our organization, as well as aligning our work to better support our Explorer-led programs.

With a stronger organization, and the focus, increased support, and commitment to diversity outlined in Strategic Priority 1 (**Focus: Fewer, Bigger, Better**) and our DEI Throughline, we will be well positioned to recruit, fund, and support the very best talent and, in turn, scale our Explorer programs. These programs, and the strategic partnerships and activations imagined in Strategic Priority 2 (**Drive Impact Through Collaboration**), will deliver enhanced impact through protection and advancement of knowledge and increased reach through storytelling and education. In addition, by bolstering our education efforts, we will reach even more educators and young people worldwide with cutting-edge resources anchored by our Explorer-led work. We will further amplify our influence through the work outlined in our two additional **Strategic Throughlines**, our reimagined **Base Camp** and stronger **Alignment and collaboration with Disney and NGP**. All together, we will magnify our impact and deliver on our mission to illuminate and protect the wonder of our world.

Success breeds success. As the Society becomes better known for our Explorers' work, more people will care about and want to protect the wonder of our world. Delivering on our mission, along with building the culture of philanthropy as outlined in Strategic Priority 4 (**Build a Sustainable Business Model**), will inspire more people to financially support our work, which then fuels our organizational health and again magnifies impact. Success also propels the system forward by building the pipeline of talent for the future.





“ At the end of your lives, in your declining hours, when you look in the mirror, what are you going to see? **Are you going to see someone who did everything they could to protect life on Earth?** ”

– Explorer and founder of the National Geographic Photo Ark Joel Sartore

➤ Explorer and photographer Joel Sartore smiles at a young penguin on Danco Island, Antarctica.





# MEASURING OUR PROGRESS

To monitor our progress and assess which initiatives are most effectively driving success, we have grounded our work in data and metrics. The Society's Measurement, Evaluation, and Research team led a cross-functional discussion to define and select a set of key metrics and milestones to gauge our progress over time. The final list includes more than 100 metrics to measure our progress, which will help answer our guiding questions.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS TO MEASURE OUR PROGRESS >

- Are we delivering on the NG Next strategic priorities, throughlines, and tactics?
- Is the implementation of the strategy creating a stronger organization?
- Are we reaching and engaging our intended audiences?
- Are we sparking illumination, advancing knowledge, and contributing to protection?
- Are our illumination programs having the intended effects? Do they lead to results outlined in our Theory of Impact?

First, we will collect data to ensure that new programs and changes to our programs are implemented as outlined in our phased approach. For example, we will carefully monitor the number of investments in Explorers across our programs and focus areas, Explorer demographic characteristics, Explorer participation in capacity development opportunities, and the establishment of new partnerships and convenings. We will also monitor the implementation of changes to the way we work, including the establishment of a revised reward and incentive structure, new professional development opportunities, inclusive hiring policies, an internal chief investment officer, and flexible workplace policies.

Second, we will gather data to assess whether the implementation of the plan is delivering the organizational health that will fuel our progress. Key metrics to gauge include staff retention, well-being, and demographics; the number of donors and philanthropic revenue; endowment value and returns; sustainability measures, such as energy use and waste; and new revenue streams and innovations.



We believe that by implementing NG Next, we will expand the Society's reach and impact. Our vision is that our nonprofit work will reach hundreds of millions by 2030. How will we measure our reach? By collecting key audience metrics, such as the number of people exposed to Explorer-led work through Disney and NGP (including Disney+, National Geographic channels, magazines, events, social and digital media, and travel) and other platforms; visitors to the National Geographic Base Camp and traveling exhibitions; users of the Society's education resources and tools; the number of educators and youth in our networks; attendance at our events and convenings; and faculty and students engaged in our higher education partnerships.

In addition to educating and engaging audiences, when we magnify our illumination of the wonder of our world, we will inspire some to take action to protect it. That action can come in many forms, such as donating, behavior changes, advocacy, activism, inspiring and educating others, and more. Given the synergistic relationship between illumination and protection, we will measure the effects of our illumination efforts through surveys and focus group conversations with samples of our target audiences at appropriate intervals in the coming years. This work will allow us to estimate how our illumination efforts fuel protection.

Finally, and importantly, we will carefully monitor the Society's impact in advancing scientific knowledge and direct conservation. For instance, we will measure the number of scientific publications and species new to science resulting from Society funding, square kilometers of land and ocean protected by Explorer-led programs, and discoveries in archaeology that fill in the gaps of our knowledge about human evolution.





# IMPLEMENTATION

“*Look beyond the horizon, upward at the skies and forward to tomorrow.*”

– Former Society President and *National Geographic* Editor Melville Bell Grosvenor

NG Next is a living, dynamic strategy, and its implementation is designed to be incremental, engaging, and iterative. We developed a thoughtful and intentional approach to implement the tactics of the plan in three phases over the next five years. Each phase includes a budget and specific work plan to ensure we prioritize accordingly and allocate the necessary resources to support our goals.

We will continue to transparently communicate with our community and keep them up to date on any changes to the plan, our implementation progress, key metrics, and milestones.





# CONCLUSION

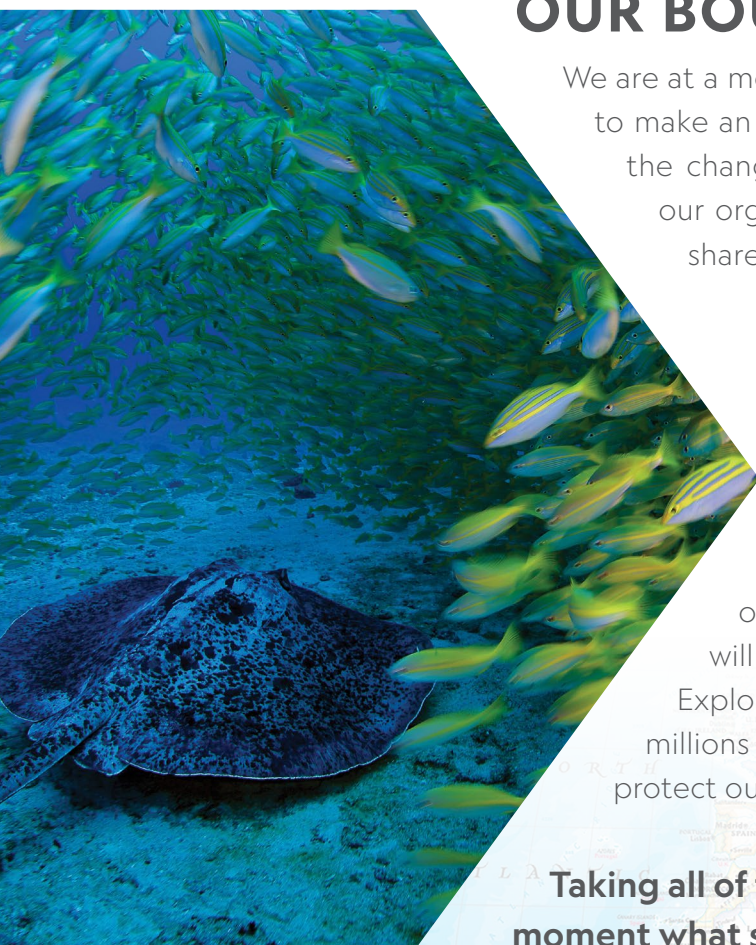
“ We humans are very smart. We can create many things, but we cannot create nature. If we start right now, today, changing our behavior, **we can leave a better planet for all future generations.** ”

– Explorer and marine biologist  
Suchana Apple Chavanich

## OUR BOUNDLESS FUTURE

We are at a moment in time when we have tremendous opportunities to make an impact on the world. The choices we make today—and the change we are working to inspire—will shape the future of our organization, our planet, and the great diversity of life we share it with.

NGNext is the roadmap to guide our choices and lead us to continued success by harnessing the combined power of science, exploration, education, storytelling, and a spirit of innovation. It brings together passionate and talented individuals with diverse perspectives and dynamic approaches across our focus areas to make our vision a reality. Within the next decade, the Society will be known around the world for its bold and impactful Explorer-led programs that spark curiosity in hundreds of millions of people, inspiring them to learn about, care for, and protect our planet.



**Taking all of this into consideration, let’s imagine for a moment what success looks like. By dreaming of our future, we can see the many possibilities of NG Next.**



**Let's imagine it's 2030.** The world looks strikingly different from the one Israel Russell lived in when he led the Society's first scientific expedition nearly a century and a half earlier.

The cover of *National Geographic* magazine is awash in shades of blue from an enchanting underwater image teeming with life beneath the sea. The cover announces, "For all of the challenges we face, nature has a solution." The lead story celebrates a breakthrough technology launched by one of the Society's signature programs, Bio Blueprint. Led by Explorer and marine biologist Kaia Alama, the interdisciplinary Bio Blueprint team has advanced the future of technology by taking inspiration from tiny sea creatures. The team studies biomimicry—learning and applying design principles of the natural world to create human-designed innovations and solutions.

The depth and breadth of Bio Blueprint spans 16 countries, three of the Society's focus areas—Ocean, Wildlife, and Human Ingenuity—and a constellation of experts and voices. In all, five National Geographic Explorers support the program. They range in age from 19 to 58 and hail from places all over the globe. Kaia grew up in Hawaii, and her team includes a bio-engineer from El Salvador, an underwater filmmaker from India, a marine ecologist from South Africa, and a Young Explorer and ocean advocate from Sweden.

The team splits their time between the lab and the ocean. To unlock new mysteries, they use autonomous underwater vehicles and advanced imaging tools—technology sponsored by our partners, some of which was developed by our Lab.

To expand Bio Blueprint's efforts globally, the expedition team also collaborates with Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and international partners.

While out in the field, Kaia's team documents their many underwater journeys. Afterward, they share what they've learned with our Education team, which in turn, creates compelling content, resources, and tools for students and educators around the world. And if the Wi-Fi holds, Kaia and her team engage with a live audience of hundreds of thousands of students in the Society's Explorer Classroom.





Kaia began her journey at National Geographic as an Explorer in 2022 and, with Society support, training, and leadership opportunities, her career has continued to grow. Our rich support framework has fueled a vibrant exchange of ideas and connections among other Explorers in the pipeline. Through cross-pollination, they brainstormed new approaches, traded on each other's strengths, and laid the groundwork for future collaborations. It was during one of these Explorer meet-and-greets that Kaia met Vidur Madan, an Indian filmmaker, and they forged a new idea: Bio Blueprint.

The success of the program led to its global amplification across National Geographic and Disney's platforms. Kaia and her team were featured in an array of articles, they participated in social-media takeovers, and took center stage at National Geographic events. Over time, their breakthrough technology became the subject of a new exhibition at our National Geographic Museum, "Innovation Designed by Nature," which was followed by a Disney+ show of the same name. In some form or another through these platforms, we reached more than 205 million people around the world. Along the way, a Fortune 500 company executive, who shares our commitment to a

sustainable future, followed the coverage, which set into motion a robust partnership. He joined thousands of other crowd-sourced individual donors investing in Kaia and the team and expanding their impact.

As Bio Blueprint grew into a signature program, it inspired countless others, not only within the Explorer community, but also across disciplines, time zones, and fields. Along the way, they established new partnerships with other nonprofit institutions and inspired generations of young people to pursue their own passion for biodiversity, technology, wildlife, and beyond.

Bio Blueprint did something remarkable: The project leveraged evolutionary trial and error to advance knowledge and solve real-world problems. But the project's impact went beyond its direct outcomes, causing ripples that reached far and wide. The team of Explorers behind Bio Blueprint influenced other programs that followed suit, eventually reaching hundreds of millions of people around the globe. They raised people's awareness about the National Geographic Society—and not just about the dusty, yellow-bordered magazines stacked in their grandparents' houses, but about the vital work we're doing. People are more familiar with the Society and its work because it is relevant in their lives. The culmination of these efforts is the realization of our vision.



This conceptual example highlights the impact we can have by supporting big, Explorer-led programs. We are eager to identify and elevate bold ideas that are strategically aligned with the Society's priorities and represent a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, to ensure that our Explorers and signature programs truly reflect our world.

NG Next is the connective tissue between Explorers, programs, partners, donors, and all those who share a spirit of exploration and wonder about our world. When brought together, their efforts unlock inventive solutions to unknown questions and intractable challenges. As audiences learn more about the natural and cultural worlds, they also learn more about their own role in them. By supporting our work and joining our cause, they are helping create a powerful new paradigm for transformative change.

Whether it's through scientific advancement, storytelling, education, innovation, or all of the above, our Explorers are sharing brilliant flashes of light. With each piece of knowledge uncovered, National Geographic passes the light forward from Explorer to Explorer, from Israel Russell to Jacques Cousteau to Dereck and Beverly Joubert, Arati Kumar-Rao, Rae Wynn-Grant, Pablo Borboroglu, Kavita Gupta, Dwayne Reed, Zoë Jenkins, Celestine Wenardy, Paul Salopek, Anthony Obayomi, and hundreds more.

**Exploration is not an age or a stage; it is a mindset—a fierce and unwavering determination to push the boundaries of knowledge, uncover the mysteries of the natural world, and strengthen our human connection to it and one another. Across cultures, countries, history, and time, National Geographic resonates because it ignites curiosity and wonder; it appeals to the Explorer in all of us.**

**So, like all intrepid Explorers, the question we must continue to ask ourselves is, "WHAT'S NEXT?"**

# NG NEXT IS OUR ROADMAP AND GUIDE.





*“What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”*

– Explorer and ethologist Jane Goodall



**>** Hugo van Lawick and Jane Goodall observe chimpanzees in Gombe Stream National Park, Tanzania.





# PHOTO CREDITS

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