



STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2028

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND SPECIAL THANKS

Allegheny CleanWays' 2025-2028 Strategic Plan marks an exciting new chapter for our organization. This document outlines our vision, goals, and strategies for the upcoming years, designed to guide our work toward a cleaner and safer for Allegheny County and its residents.

Our strategic planning process for Allegheny CleanWays was guided by consulting services from Susan Loucks Consulting, and this final document was thoughtfully designed by Brady Lanzendorfer. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the many participants whose contributions helped shape this plan, including our dedicated community stakeholders, staff members, volunteers, and all others who provided invaluable insights throughout this process. We also wish to thank the Allegheny CleanWays Board of Directors for their support and guidance during this process:

Rachel Nawrocki, President
Jack Rearick, Vice President
Patrick Cornell, Treasurer
Jeff Pepper, Secretary
Marcia Brissett
Chelsea Cramer
Emily Embrey

Lloyd Hedlund
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Craig McCloud
Julia Saintz
Steve Wood
Laura Zurowski

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Caily Grube, Executive Director
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ABOUT ALLEGHENY CLEANWAYS

Allegheny CleanWays (ACW) is dedicated to engaging and empowering communities to eliminate illegal dumping and litter throughout Allegheny County. Our goal is to reduce the environmental and health impacts of litter and dumpsites by removing them from land and water, ensuring a cleaner, safer, and more beautiful county for all residents. Through our efforts, we aim to enhance the physical and mental wellbeing of the community, creating a lasting and positive impact for both people and the environment.

OUR APPROACH

We accomplish this with the support of expert staff and hundreds of volunteers who attend over 200 cleanups annually. We address upstream and downstream implications of litter and illegal dumping through a combination of hands-on programs, education, and advocacy efforts:



LAND CLEANUP

DumpBusters remove trash from illegal dumpsites across Allegheny County.

Litter Walks invite volunteers to clean up litter from neighborhoods along a walking route.

StepKeepers enables residents to become stewards of outdoor urban stairways and commit to keeping them litter free through regular maintenance.



RIVER CLEANUP

The Tireless Program cleans riverfront debris on the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers, using our fleet of boats.

GrateKeepers enables residents to become stewards of local storm drains, removing litter debris that impacts local watershed quality, enables flood mitigation as well as helps preserve critical infrastructure.

Stream and Creek Cleanups target local tributaries for cleanup for litter and debris.



EDUCATION

Our education program provides lessons and service-learning experiences on the impact of litter and illegal dumping for all ages as well as understanding local waste systems.



RESEARCH

We use data collection, research, and experience to drive systemic change. ACW regularly conducts surveys of illegal dumpsites as well as audits of the trash collected from cleanup events. Our 2019 Litter Audit supported the enactment of the City of Pittsburgh Plastic Bag Ban.



HISTORY OF ALLEGHENY CLEANWAYS

ACW was established in 2000 by a dedicated group of individuals who envisioned a cleaner, safer, and healthier environment for Allegheny County. Originally established as PA CleanWays of Allegheny County, the organization operated as a local chapter of the statewide PA CleanWays (now known as Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful), guided by an advisory board. Early on, ACW provided essential assessments of illegal dumpsites within the City of Pittsburgh, publishing its first report in 2002, followed by updates in 2005 and 2009. This research laid the foundation for the organization's specialization in illegal dumpsite remediation, primarily relying on volunteer labor.

In 2005, following a reorganization of PA CleanWays, our local chapter gained independent 501(c)(3) status and was incorporated as PA CleanWays of Allegheny County, Inc. The name "Allegheny CleanWays" was adopted in the fall of 2007 to clarify the organization's identity, reflecting our growing expertise and reputation throughout the county. PA CleanWays merged with and began doing business as Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful in 2009. ACW remains an Affiliate of Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful today.

For 25 years, ACW has collaborated with community groups and together they have been instrumental in cleaning up and restoring neglected spaces, including vacant lots, greenways, streets, and riverbanks. Each year, hundreds of dedicated volunteers join us in the monumental task of removing tons of debris, transforming our landscapes for the better. Our efforts not only beautify the environment but also help prevent pollution, enhance public health, reduce health risks, and foster safer communities.

As public awareness of litter and illegal dumping has increased, our focus has evolved. We have transitioned from primarily conducting illegal dump assessments to organizing regular cleanups, providing community education, and actively working upstream on litter prevention. We continue to partner with an expanding network of organizations, united in our commitment to collective stewardship and community empowerment.



In 2025, Allegheny CleanWays celebrates its 25th Anniversary! As we mark this important milestone, we are excited to embark on a new chapter with the launch of this strategic plan. Building on 25 years of dedicated work to eliminate litter and illegal dumping, our updated plan will guide us in expanding our impact, deepening community engagement, and advancing innovative solutions for a cleaner, safer Allegheny County. We look forward to the next 25 years!

RECENT IMPACT

FY24 DATA

254 TONS OF TRASH

4,033 TIRES



211 SITE VISITS

1,590 VOLUNTEER HOURS

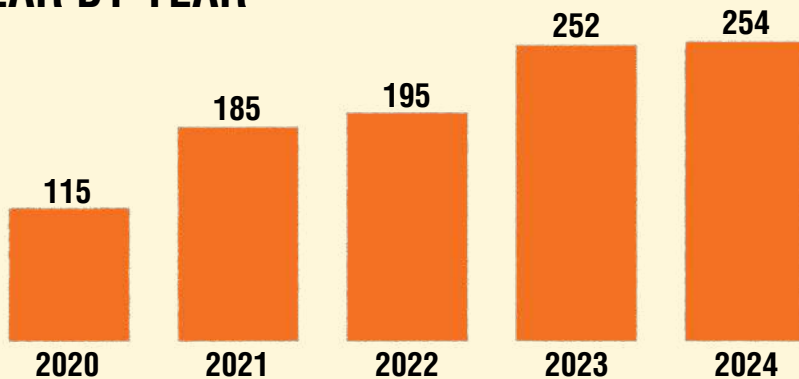


621 VOLUNTEERS



47 OUTREACH EVENTS

GROWTH OF TONS REMOVED, YEAR BY YEAR



**OVER
7 MILLION
POUNDS OF
TRASH REMOVED
SINCE 2000!**



THE CONTEXT FOR A STRATEGIC PLAN

Allegheny CleanWays is at a pivotal moment, poised to deepen commitment to the environment, community, and strategic action as we look toward the future. At the close of 2024, we celebrate a successful inaugural year under our new executive director, marked by our efforts in strengthening a newly established senior staff and enhanced operational efficiencies from staff. During this period of growth and transformation, we have achieved program targets, built essential systems, and strengthened our overall capacity. Yet there is still more to do. This strategic planning process was critical in charting the course for what very much feels like the organization moving to the next stage of life cycle development.

The planning process has provided valuable insights and data about both Allegheny CleanWays, Allegheny County, and the broader context of litter and illegal dumping, allowing us to identify high-impact areas for growth and attention. We believe that the selected strategic areas represent the most promising pathways towards advancing our mission, to engage and empower people to eliminate litter and illegal dumping, in the next three years. We will be actively experimenting, leveraging strengths, testing new approaches, and refining our strategies based on what we learn.

STRATEGIC PLAN METHODOLOGY

The strategic planning process took place between July and November 2024, starting with two key meetings. The first, held in July, focused on exploring existing and desired learning systems with the ACW staff. The second meeting, a Project Launch in August, was primarily for board members to build shared ownership of the process, set goals, and ask key questions to inform a two-month period of assessment and understanding. These insights aided the consultant and staff to collect existing data and generate the latest information on the organization's current state. Between August and September, the data we collected included:

INTERNAL DATA

- ✓ Financial trends analysis
- ✓ HR audit results and recommendations
- ✓ Staff perspectives (gathered via focus group)
- ✓ Equity assessment for internal operations
- ✓ Program assessment
- ✓ Board self-assessment results and summary

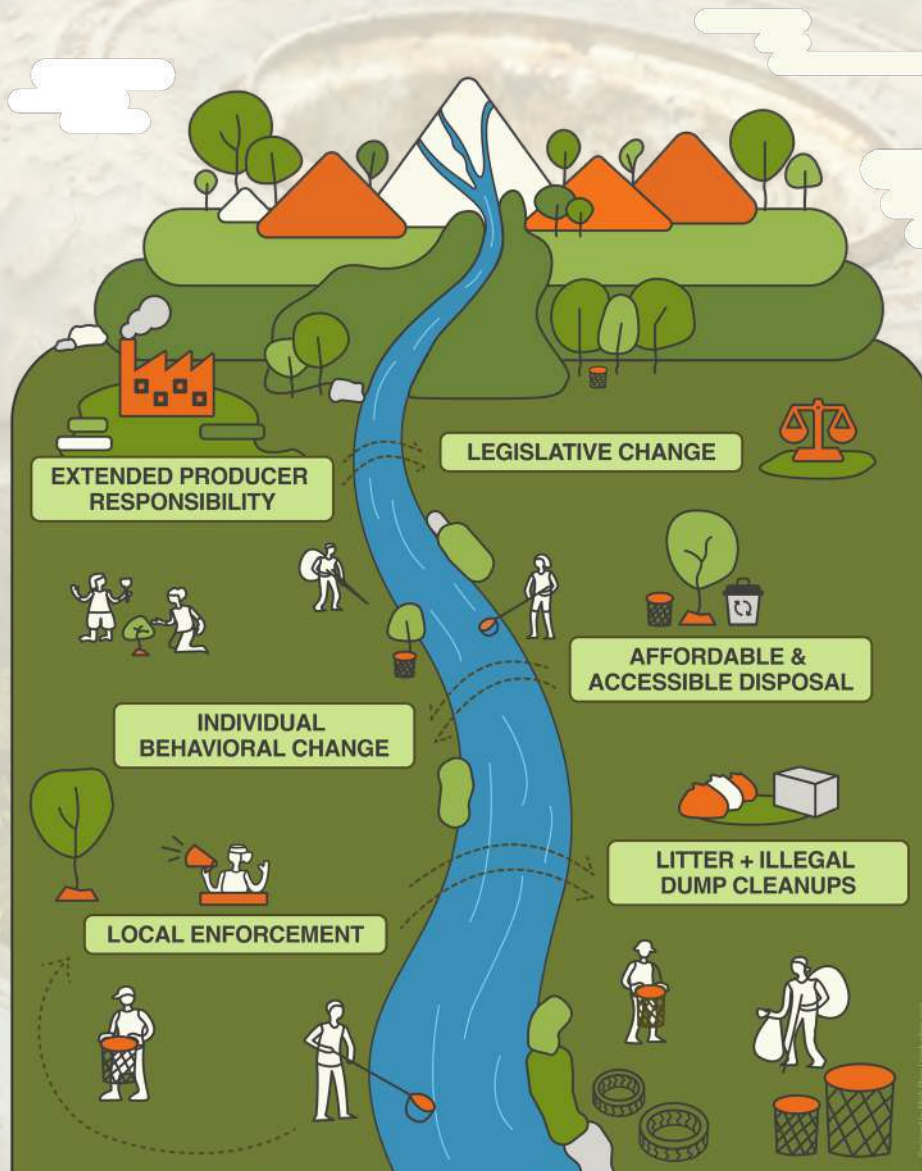
EXTERNAL DATA

- ✓ Notes from interviews with five priority stakeholders
- ✓ Volunteer survey results and summary

Documentation and summaries from this research were captured in the separately compiled Assessment Report. In October 2024, board members and staff met to synthesize this information into focus areas. Drawing on insights from the assessment, they identified four strategic areas of focus, along with one overarching intention. Those follow below.



OVERARCHING INTENTION: HOLISTIC LIFE-CYCLE



ADDRESSING LITTER AND ILLEGAL DUMPING FROM UPSTREAM TO DOWNSTREAM

ACW is known for the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of our work, the skills and dedication of our staff, and the engaging spirit we bring to every initiative. However, while our litter pick-ups and illegal dump site projects are vital, they are not sufficient to address the broader issues of litter and waste in our environment.

Over the next three years, we are challenging ourselves to leverage these strengths by developing programs and strategies that embody a holistic life-cycle management approach to litter and illegal dumping further “upstream”. At the same time, we will be enhancing “downstream” interventions with landfill diversion, repurposing trash with artists, and finding more circular homes for dumped trash and litter. This approach will enable us to work toward larger-scale changes that create new systems to protect the environment, community health, and safety.

STRATEGIC GOAL 1: COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACHES



The need to build relationships was a consistent theme throughout this entire planning process, and easily surfaced as a focus area. Conversations with staff, board, and partners all raised the importance of relationships to ACW's future. Each group mentioned the need to grow relationships with many distinct categories of stakeholders.

“[Cleanups alone are] never going to meet the mission.

Engaging community groups, companies – that’s where you’re opening eyes, educating, and getting buy-in to change behaviors. That’s where they’re meeting their mission.

Community engagement around the mission.”

“The relationships are where they will have success!”

**“Even though I’m not part of CleanWays,
when we’re up there together, I’m a part of it.”**

Historically, ACW has only worked in communities where we are invited. While municipalities have been a key target for relationship building, we recognize the significance of developing stronger ties with communities, residents, and community-based organizations (CBOs). ACW expertise combined with the expertise of community leaders (both formal and informal) can effectively address hyperlocal litter and dumping issues. We are dedicated to deepening and expanding these connections in this strategic plan period.

Building relationships will take time, requiring consistency and staff commitment. Allegheny County has numerous opportunities for deeper community connections. We understand increased staff capacity is needed to drive meaningful progress to invest in and develop relationships. With the right resources, ACW can forge those relationships.

As we strengthen our partnerships, community ties, and work within Environmental Justice communities, we are committed to embedding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles into our efforts. During our research period, our consultant conducted an equity assessment that underscored the critical need to add diverse voices to the organization. The assessment identified opportunities to enhance representation from diverse racial backgrounds as well as more rural municipalities within our county, ensuring that our staff and board reflect the rich diversity of the communities we serve. Equity at ACW means actively understanding and addressing systemic inequities in litter and illegal dumping and ensuring our programming is accessible and inclusive. We envision an Allegheny County that is clean, beautiful, and safe for all. We recognize that this requires incorporating diverse perspectives and voices into many levels of our work.



COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACHES, IN THREE YEARS: We have established strong reciprocal relationships with mission-adjacent organizations, environmental justice community groups, residents, corporations, and municipalities, as well as internal systems that continually cultivate those connections. These relationships are yielding more formalized partnerships, resulting in increased efficiency and impact. The voices within ACW reflect the community we serve.

POSSIBLE TACTICS: While staff will translate focus areas into specific operations, some potential strategies identified during planning include:

- Establish mentorship opportunities for community groups launching their own cleanups, offering guidance and support to enhance their effectiveness.
- Deepen relationships with community organizations in impacted areas by actively seeking their input, understanding their needs, and increasing their participation in ACW initiatives.
- Create a resource council composed of community leaders and representatives to provide ongoing feedback and insights, ensuring that ACW's initiatives align with community needs and aspirations.
- Join and participate in regional collaboratives to strengthen partnerships, share resources, and collectively address community challenges related to litter and dumping.
- Establish memorandums of Understanding with regular programmatic partners. with regular programmatic partners.
- Create a Board committee focused on programmatic relationships within community.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2: ORGANIZATIONAL MATURITY



In 2025, ACW celebrates 25 years of operating in Allegheny County. During this period, ACW has moved from a volunteer-led chapter of Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, to a grassroots independent 501c3, to a mid-sized environmental nonprofit organization. Investments in our staff--like our Land Coordinator receiving a United States Coast Guard Captain's License--and programming have enabled us to make significant progress in meeting our mission. Despite this, the internal systems have lagged programmatic performance. It is time to further professionalize. This fact resonated throughout staff and board focus groups where effective internal systems were consistently prioritized.

To go further in understanding our internal systems, ACW underwent a few assessments, summarized below:

- ✓ An in-depth Human Resources Audit found areas for improvement, which include revising organizational core values, updating the handbook policies and procedures, and developing robust HR systems. This initiative has already begun with the establishment of core organizational values that will inform other key projects that emerged from this audit.
- ✓ The 2024 ACW Volunteer Survey provided a wealth of information not just about existing volunteer commitment and satisfaction, but also ways to improve recruitment, streamline technology, incentivize data-gathering, and communicate event details effectively.
- ✓ The MacMillian Program Matrix is a screening tool for nonprofits to assess programs. This tool allowed our directors to review existing programs, ensuring they maintain a strong mission fit as well as a good strategic investment. The assessment pointed to enhancing several key programs that are high on mission value yet need structural enhancement (Dumpbusters, GateKeepers, and StepKeepers). Additionally, the tool guided us toward continuing collaborations with partner organizations.
- ✓ The 2023 Board Assessment highlighted areas of great success and those requiring attention. The top priorities emerging from the assessment include improving organizational practices, ensuring adherence to board policies, conducting an annual review of the Executive Director, and enhancing its diversity.

These assessments along with stakeholder insights clarify that the organization has grown beyond its previous operational capacity on many fronts. Staff and board are ready to meet its current moment by professionalizing its internal systems from HR to volunteer program delivery as well as board governance. Effective organizations require space. In response to recent growth, staff need adequate office, parking, and docking facilities. Recently, the organization experienced an incident of auto theft due to inadequate lot security. Given these challenges, ACW needs accommodations for our professional staff with increased secure storage for our vehicles along with other program assets.



The challenges identified in this section indicate we are currently in the “storming” phase following a period of growth and leadership transition. As we move through this phase, we are realigning our strategies, clarifying roles, and strengthening systems.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATURITY, IN THREE YEARS: Staff and Board will experience smoother and more efficient processes in all areas of human resources, including onboarding, ongoing support and supervision, and annual performance reviews. New systems are created to enhance a frictionless ACW volunteer experience. We have built Continual Cycles of Improvement (CCIs), using data-informed systems for real-time measurements.

POSSIBLE TACTICS: While staff will translate focus areas into specific operations, some potential strategies identified during planning include:

- Explore options for securing facilities that accommodate not only office space but also adequate storage for vehicles and boats, ensuring all spatial needs are met.
- Transition to ArcGIS for a more efficient and comprehensive database management system.
- Segment volunteers by geographic location for more effective cleanup notifications and strategic engagement.
- Develop Standard Operating Procedures for each program to ensure consistency and clarity in operations from cleanups to offboarding.
- Revise employee handbook to reflect updated policies and best practices.
- Integrate organizational values into practices and processes of both board and staff.
- Enhance communication systems between board members, committees, and staff to improve collaboration and information sharing.

STRATEGIC GOAL 3: FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

ACW successfully maintained financial viability through recent organizational growth, moving from five to ten staff members. An analysis of trends over the past three years shows that, even accounting for anomalies such as an overlap between the departing and incoming executive director and a significant wage equity initiative, the personnel cost ratio remained stable between fiscal years 2023 and 2024. Financial benchmarks are making significant progress and ACW is focusing on funds held in reserves.



Looking ahead to the next three years, ACW aims to transition from stability to long-term financial sustainability. This will require growing existing sources of income and identifying new ones. Several interviewees highlighted increased funding from municipalities as a vital area for financial development. While some staff and interviewees proposed innovative ideas for raising operating funds through business relationships, others cautioned against overreliance on corporate dollars. We understand that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, but we are committed to exploring a diverse array of appropriate funding opportunities.

To achieve our goals, we are dedicated to enhancing our financial outlook through cash flow projections, multi-year planning, and strategic investments. We are equally committed to maintaining a balance between growth and sustainability, ensuring that our organization is well-equipped to meet both current and future challenges.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY, IN THREE YEARS: The organization is growing in alignment with its financial resources, maintaining appropriately sized capital and operating reserves that include designated resources for longevity. Our income streams are increasingly diverse.

POSSIBLE TACTICS: While staff will translate focus areas into specific operations, some potential strategies identified during planning include:

- Demonstrate and monetize ACW's impact to clearly illustrate its value.
- Develop fee-based activities that generate revenue while fostering meaningful engagement with our mission.
- Continue to build and enhance our operational reserves to ensure financial stability and support future growth initiatives.
- Enhance and expand our individual giving strategy.
- Utilize government funding for Environmental Justice and climate initiatives, if available.

STRATEGIC GOAL 4: ISSUE ADVOCACY

We recognize that ACW possesses a unique capacity for hands-on dumpsite remediation, and that our cleanups connect volunteers to their neighborhoods and to a sense of accomplishment and purpose. However, feedback from the staff focus group, the volunteer survey, and board conversation illustrates a shared desire to channel this energy into longer-lasting and preventative solutions. Our primary beneficiaries—impacted communities—want clean, safe spaces far more than the cleanups themselves. To meet our mission, it is clear that ACW needs to focus more energy on upstream solutions.



Some elements of this work are already clear, such as ACW’s desired role. Staff envision ACW not as an outside agitator, but as a collaborative presence at the decision-making table, bringing valuable experience and data from our cleanup efforts into relevant discussions. A notable example is how ACW’s waste audit directly informed policy changes regarding the City of Pittsburgh’s Plastic Bag Ban. Other aspects still need to be defined, such as identifying the specific data that will enhance our storytelling and determining optimal partnership opportunities.

“[We want to create] policy change within the city, county, or State to allow more access to trash disposal, recycling, and cost sensitive options. Accountability on the manufacturer, not the consumer.”

“Advocating for different things and partnering can be impactful if you do it well. Takes time but creates policy change, regulation, and enforcement as a result.”

“We need to shift to prevention.”

ISSUE ADVOCACY, IN THREE YEARS: We effectively leverage data and relationships from program activity towards upstream solutions to prevent dumping and littering.

POSSIBLE TACTICS: While staff will translate focus areas into specific operations, some potential strategies identified during planning include:

- Establish areas for thought leadership at ACW to lead discussions and initiatives.
- Collaborate with community groups, fellow nonprofit environmental organizations, and local government to create action plans for specific dumping sites.
- Perform regular audits of the trash we collect to track trends and changes over time, with a particular focus on plastic waste, providing data that informs policy changes and community education efforts.

IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING

This strategic plan is the launching point for an implementation plan, a critical component of operationalizing this process. Board and staff will work together to translate these strategic goals into a first-year work plan, detailing responsibilities and timelines.



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