



Strategic Plan

2026-2028

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HORIZONS ATLANTA

LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

2026–2028 Strategic Plan

For much of the past decade, Horizons Atlanta's story has been one of growth with new sites, new partnerships, and a steadily larger circle of children given a stronger shot at their school year. That growth is something the entire Horizons Atlanta community can be proud of, and it's the foundation this next chapter is built on.

That kind of growth naturally asks a lot of an organization, and Horizons Atlanta is being thoughtful about meeting that moment well. Our financial model, operating capacity, and fundraising infrastructure are being strengthened to match the scale we've grown into, and we're already taking action: this year, Horizons Atlanta approved a regional fundraising strategy with clear growth targets, moved our partner sites to a fixed and predictable funding model in place of open-ended cost sharing, and is working thoughtfully and in good faith with our site partners to address past financial commitments. The [2026–2028 Strategic Plan](#) sets the roadmap for the rest, organized around a simple discipline — Stabilize. Strengthen. Sustain. — a right-sized program model, disciplined budgeting, and a Board that leads by example in philanthropy and governance.

Our mission hasn't changed, and neither has our track record. In the summer of 2025, Horizons Atlanta served 1,301 K-8 scholars across 11 sites, backed by 312 dedicated staff members, with our scholars posting an average of 7 to 8 weeks of academic progress in literacy and math against the usual summer slide. That is the kind of outcome Horizons Atlanta intends to keep delivering, not for one more good summer, but for decades of them.

This plan is not a retrenchment. It is stewardship — choosing discipline now so that growth, when it comes back, is durable rather than borrowed against tomorrow. Every child in Atlanta, regardless of background, deserves the same chance at a high-quality, tuition-free summer experience that sparks the joy of learning, builds the skills for success, and inspires the confidence to realize their dreams, and that belief hasn't moved an inch. What's changed is our discipline about how we get there.

This is where our community comes in. Every family, partner, and supporter who has believed in Horizons Atlanta has helped make that impact possible, and that



partnership is exactly what will carry it forward. We look forward to continuing to deliver for the scholars and families who count on us this summer and for many summers to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Bernstein".

Scott Bernstein

Board Chair, Horizons Atlanta



Horizons Atlanta Strategic Plan 2026–2028

Stabilize. Strengthen. Sustain.

Executive Summary

Horizons Atlanta enters 2026 at a critical inflection point.

Over the past several years, Horizons Atlanta responded courageously to unprecedented need. Enrollment expanded rapidly, new sites and cohorts were added, and programming scaled to serve many more children. This expansion delivered meaningful impact-but it also stretched the organization's financial model, operating capacity, fundraising infrastructure, and role clarity beyond what was sustainable.

This three-year strategy represents a deliberate reset.

The 2026–2028 Strategic Plan shifts Horizons Atlanta from an expansion-first posture to a sustainability-first operating model. The plan is designed to stabilize finances, strengthen site and regional capacity, restore operational discipline, and rebuild confidence among site leaders, staff, donors, and governance partners. Growth is not abandoned; it is earned back intentionally once foundations are secure.

By 2028, Horizons Atlanta will operate from a position of strength:

- Financially predictable and disciplined, with reduced reliance on public and federal funding
- Clear on roles and responsibilities across regional and site levels
- Delivering high-quality, right-sized summer programs aligned to site readiness
- Building reserves rather than drawing them down
- Supported by a strong, fundraising-oriented Board
- Positioned for selective, mission-aligned growth

This is not a retrenchment strategy. It is a **stewardship strategy**-ensuring Horizons Atlanta can deliver high-quality, equitable summer learning for decades to come.



Organizational History

Horizons Atlanta was established in 2013 as part of Horizons National's expansion initiative and strategic investment in metro Atlanta. Organized as an independent 501(c)(3), Horizons Atlanta is an affiliate of Horizons National and operates with its own Board of Directors, professional staff, and a network of host institutions.

Over the past decade, Horizons Atlanta has grown into one of the largest regional affiliates in the Horizons network, serving scholars across multiple host institutions and delivering tuition-free summer learning focused on literacy, mathematics, enrichment, and social-emotional development.

The organization's growth and impact have been shaped by strong partnerships with schools, universities, and philanthropic supporters. This strategic plan builds on that legacy while responding to new realities in funding, operations, and scale.

Methodology

The 2026–2028 Strategic Plan was developed through a multi-phase process led by Horizons Atlanta's Board and leadership team, with input from regional staff, site leaders, and external advisors.

The process included:

- Review of financial performance, operating data, and prior strategic plans
- Interviews with regional leadership and site directors
- Assessment of current roles, responsibilities, and operating processes
- Benchmarking against peer education nonprofits and Horizons affiliates
- Board discussions focused on sustainability, fundraising, program quality, and risk management

Insights from this process informed the identification of key themes, strategic priorities, and phased implementation approaches reflected in this plan.

Findings and Key Themes

Several themes emerged consistently throughout the strategic planning process:

1. Program quality remains a core strength. Horizons Atlanta is widely recognized for delivering high-quality academic and enrichment programming.



2. The operating model requires recalibration. Growth outpaced the systems, staffing, and funding structures needed to support it sustainably.
3. Financial discipline and diversified fundraising are essential to mission durability. Predictable funding, cost control, and reduced reliance on public and federal sources are prerequisites for long-term impact.
4. Sites vary in capacity and readiness. A differentiated approach is required to support equity and sustainability across sites.
5. Role clarity and governance strength improve effectiveness. Clear accountability and a strong, engaged Board reduce rework, burnout, and organizational risk.

These themes informed the strategic priorities outlined below.

Strategic Priorities

Strategic Priority 1: Program Quality & Right-Sized Design

Goal

Deliver a consistently high-quality, academically rigorous, and holistic summer learning experience through a four- to five-week program model, with a standardized baseline and the ability to rescale program length over time where site readiness, staffing capacity, funding stability, and operational performance demonstrate the ability to support an expanded experience.

In the near term, a minimum of a four week program establishes a sustainable and consistent baseline across the network. Over time, select sites may operate five-week programs when clear readiness criteria are met, ensuring any expansion enhances-rather than dilutes-scholar experience and equity.

Strategies and Actions

- Establish a standardized four-week baseline program model beginning in 2026
- Define required academic, enrichment, and student well-being components to ensure program wholeness within the baseline model
- Develop objective criteria for rescaling to a five-week program, including fundraising capacity, staffing stability, and operational performance
- Pilot program rescaling only at sites that meet defined readiness thresholds
- Conduct a post-summer outcomes and financial review beginning Fall 2026 to assess impact, sustainability, and readiness for any program expansion

Accountability Measures



- Four-week baseline program model finalized and communicated by May 1, 2026
- Required program components and quality standards documented by May 1, 2026
- All sites operating within the new baseline model for Summer 2026
- Site readiness criteria finalized by Q4 2026
- Annual program quality and readiness reviews beginning Q2 2027

Strategic Priority 2: Financial Sustainability & Stewardship

Goal

Ensure current and future financial sustainability by operating within clearly defined financial guardrails, aligning program commitments to predictable revenue, and stewarding resources responsibly across regional and site levels, and reducing outstanding organizational investment in scholars and their families to partner sites in a structured and time-bound manner.

Sustainability is not an abstract aspiration—it is a set of concrete operating practices that guide disciplined decision-making year over year.

Strategies and Actions

- Implement fixed, predictable regional contributions per scholar and eliminate open-ended cost sharing
- Standardize budgeting, forecasting, and monthly financial tracking across all sites
- Introduce early decision points for enrollment, staffing, and program design to reduce financial risk
- Operate within budget annually and rebuild reserves once stabilization benchmarks are met
- Incorporate a defined repayment-mitigation plan, including timelines, policy clarity, and measurable reduction targets

Accountability Measures

- Fixed contribution model embedded in site agreements by May 1, 2026
- Standardized budget templates and reporting cadence implemented by Q4 2026
- Elimination of reconciliation backlog by Q4 2027



- Reserve rebuilding initiated in FY2028, subject to Board approval
- Repayment-reduction targets and policy approved and communicated by Q2 2026

Strategic Priority 3: Regional Fundraising & Site Sustainability

Goal

Reduce reliance on public and federal funding by building a robust regional fundraising engine while strengthening site-level fundraising capacity as a core operating responsibility.

This priority recognizes that long-term sustainability requires both regional leadership in philanthropy and shared financial ownership across the network.

Strategies and Actions

- Develop a regional fundraising strategy with clear year-over-year private revenue growth targets
- Prioritize individual giving and major gifts as the primary growth levers, supported by Board engagement and select corporate partnerships
- Clarify the division of labor between regional fundraising (major gifts, foundations, corporate) and site-based fundraising
- Establish site fundraising expectations scaled to site maturity and context
- Provide fundraising toolkits, training, shared calendars, and coaching to site leaders

Accountability Measures

- Regional fundraising strategy and growth targets approved by the Board by Q1 2026
- Site fundraising benchmarks established by May 1, 2026
- Fundraising enablement resources launched by Q2 2026
- Annual review of site and regional fundraising performance beginning Q4 2026

Strategic Priority 4: Board Building & Governance

Goal

Build a strong, engaged, fundraising-oriented Board that advances Horizons Atlanta's mission and long-term financial sustainability.



Board building is a top organizational priority and a critical enabler of this strategic plan.

The Board will play a central role in strategic-plan execution through active committee oversight, fundraising leadership, and regular review of milestone progress.

Board Nomination Criteria

- **Fund Development & Philanthropic Networks:** Access to corporate funding opportunities or personal and professional networks that can unlock philanthropic support; willingness to make Horizons Atlanta a top philanthropic priority and model generous giving.
- **Commitment to Mission:** Demonstrated passion for Horizons Atlanta's mission and alignment with its goals.
- **Leadership & Influence:** Proven leadership and community influence that can advance the organization's reach and credibility.
- **Board Experience & Governance Capacity:** Prior board or committee service preferred but not required; fundraising, finance, or governance experience highly valued.
- **Collaborative Spirit & Advocacy:** Ability to collaborate, engage actively, and serve as an ambassador for Horizons Atlanta.

Accountability Measures

- Board recruitment priorities aligned to fundraising needs by Q2 2027
- Governance and committee structure review completed by Q4 2026
- Evaluate board composition, including roles and responsibilities of associate board members by Q2 2027
- Board giving and engagement metrics reviewed annually
- Strategic-plan progress dashboard reviewed at least quarterly

Strategic Priority 5: Organizational Capacity, Role Clarity & Change Management

Goal

Build a clear, right-sized organizational structure that enables effective execution, reduces operational friction, and strengthens trust across the network.

Strategies and Actions



- Establish and implement a clear RACI across regional, site, and national functions
- Align roles and staffing structures to the future-state operating model
- Communicate consistently and transparently about progress, decisions, and trade-offs
- Establish regular site touchpoints focused on alignment and problem-solving
- Designate a strategic-plan lead responsible for milestone tracking, reporting cadence, and cross-functional coordination

Accountability Measures

- RACI finalized and socialized by Q1 2027
- Core operational processes standardized by Q2 2027
- Staffing alignment review completed by Q4 2026
- Annual progress updates shared with the Board and stakeholders beginning Q1 2027

Strategic Priority 6: Leadership Continuity & Succession Planning

Goal

Ensure long-term organizational stability and donor confidence through proactive key leadership succession planning.

Horizons Atlanta's sustainability depends not only on financial and operational strength, but also on leadership continuity. A clear and Board-approved succession plan reduces organizational risk, strengthens governance maturity, and signals institutional stability to funders and partners.

Strategies and Actions

- Develop and approve a formal succession plan for regional leadership positions, including emergency and long-term scenarios
- Clarify Board roles and responsibilities in succession oversight

Accountability Measures

- Succession plan approved by the Board by Q2 2027
- Annual succession readiness review conducted beginning Q2 2028



Concluding Steps

Horizons Atlanta leadership and staff will review and refine this strategic plan annually. Progress against strategic priorities will be monitored regularly by the Board of Directors and its committees. Implementation of this plan begins in 2026, with a clear focus on stabilization first, followed by strengthening and long-term sustainability.

This Strategic Plan reflects leadership feedback and serves as the guiding framework for Horizons Atlanta's decisions and investments from 2026–2028.