



SPLASH DELAWARE RIVER  
FLOATING CLASSROOM

# Strategic Plan

2023-2026



# SPLASH History

**SPLASH (Students Participating in Learning Aquatic Science and History) started with humble beginnings, stemming from an idea our founder Dr. Hoebel had. Dr. Hoebel (1939–2011), a Princeton University professor, fell in love with a steamboat in Ohio named the Shawnee Princess and with the idea of a steamboat classroom.**

Dr. Hoebel jumped at the opportunity and purchased the Shawnee Princess to bring back to New Jersey. Dr. Hoebel, using his own resources, had the Shawnee Princess shipped via flatbed truck to C&M metalworks in Hillsborough, NJ, where extensive refurbishing of the vessel took place.

With the Shawnee Princess undergoing refurbishing, Dr. Hoebel continued to move “full steam ahead” in creating a steamboat classroom through the establishment of the Delaware River Steamboat Floating Classroom, Inc.

In the early years, the non-profit operated from Dr. Hoebel’s home in Princeton, and had Dr. Hoebel as President; his wife Cindy as secretary; and his daughter Valerie served as treasurer. After four long years of refurbishment and planning, the Shawnee Princess was christened SPLASH on her maiden voyage at our initial Gala event on May 8, 2004.

Upon the passing of Dr. Hoebel in 2011 SPLASH was left in uncharted waters, uncertain on how to continue without Dr. Hoebel, who provided energy, leadership, and friendship for many who worked with SPLASH.

Eric Clark felt deeply that the non-profit should continue. In 2012, with Eric’s leadership, the SPLASH Transition Team was formed with dedicated volunteers Bob Schuster, Eric Clark, Pete Burns, Jeremy Pollack, Kris Hallinger, and Vic Tenaglia. The Transition Team developed a management plan for boat maintenance, safety procedures, and funding, which led to a very successful and creative operation for the next 8 years.

In the eight years after Dr. Hoebel’s passing SPLASH the Delaware River Floating Classroom delighted students of all ages on the deck of our steamboat. With fun, engaging educational programs the SPLASH steamboat delighted school age and adult groups with 1.5 hour sails on the beautiful Delaware River. Additional programs were taught on land in the adjacent D&R Canal State Park. In 2020, the organization made another difficult decision to sell the beloved steamboat and start the process of purchasing a pontoon boat.

**Going forward**, we forecast serving over 1,500 people annually, increases of 43% over the steamboat-period averages. We anticipate about 33% of our students coming from underserved communities, such as in Trenton.



# Our story

## Mission

To educate and inspire through accessible aquatic-based experiential learning and citizen science on the Delaware River and its shores.

## Values

At the core of our operation is our value and commitment to the Delaware River, source of drinking water for 15 million area residents:

- **Education:** inclusively drives our educational model. Regardless of any challenges students are able to benefit from the SPLASH experience.
- **Knowledge:** shared data creates collaboration and connection. Our citizen science collected data is disseminated to local, state and national organizations, and in our classes.
- **Respect:** kindness to nature, and others, guides our teachers. Our organization hold the Delaware River, and it's tributaries, and all organisms in high esteem.

## Purpose

Since our inception, SPLASH has sought to educate students (irrespective of age or socioeconomic background) to understand their environment and to be better stewards. With the increasing threat of climate change, pollution in our waterways, and the loss of natural habitat, SPLASH's purpose has become more important to provide our students a meaningful connection to the natural environment. Through our hands-on STEM programming within the Delaware River watershed, we create and nurture environmentalists.



*SPLASH educators presented a workshop "Phytoplankton: Jewels of the River" – and the feedback from the students and parents was phenomenal. Attendees thoroughly enjoyed the experience of learning about phytoplankton while looking at them under a microscope. Students also had the opportunity to learn about the many microscopic organisms housed in the Delaware River that play a major role in their ecosystem and how their ecosystem affects the lives of the humans living nearby.*

*-Debra Lawrey Boys & Girls Clubs of Mercer County*

# Strategic Goals 2023 - 2026

## 1

### Conservation & Historical Education Program

With the acquisition of a new, modern Floating Classroom, increasing the number of students served with STEM education by 20%.

Increasing the number of students from underserved communities from 33% to 50%- specifically in Trenton, NJ.

Continuing to help create watershed stewards of the future by creating history and STEM focused, such as climate change, classroom offerings.

## 2

### Citizen Science & River Health Program

Continue to expand our Citizen Science program to include additional data collection and contribution to ongoing studies in the Delaware River watershed.

Our participation in these studies will enhance our educational offerings, build strategic partnerships with like-minded organizations, and expand SPLASH's expertise in the environmental field.



# Conservation & Historical Educational Program

For eighteen years, SPLASH the Delaware River Floating Classroom has delighted school-age and adult groups with educational sails on the beautiful Delaware River in Lambertville, with classes on-land at the adjacent D&R Canal State Park.

Our rigorous and diverse educational program includes:

- Watershed Ecology
- River Chemistry
- Shad Migration & Environmental History of the Delaware River
- Macroinvertebrates
- History of the Delaware & Raritan Canal
- Birding
- Phytoplankton

Participants leave with a sense of awe and connection to the Delaware River. This connection is deepened with real-world applications to keep our natural resources viable for wildlife and humans.

## Why we are focusing on communities that have limited or no access to resources:

- Resources should not limit a student's access to environmental education. Every student deserves the opportunity to sail the Delaware River.
- Students living in disadvantaged areas are more likely to be exposed to excess pollution and limited natural resources. Interacting with phytoplankton, macroinvertebrates, and water ecology provides a sense of wonder and intrigue.

## Your contribution will:

1. Provide our organization with the necessary funding to continue to provide innovative educational offerings to students along the Delaware River and beyond.
2. Provide additional SPLASH staff that will be instrumental in supporting and executing our expansion into underserved communities.

GOAL	ACTION	OUTCOME
Improve awareness of Delaware River watershed ecological health by 20%.	Implement a survey to compare knowledge and attitude as a measure of program effectiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Student's change in awareness of river health indicators and river history.</li><li>• <i>Measured:</i> Positive change in Pre- &amp; Post-class survey.</li></ul>
Increase under-served community classes from 33% to 50%.	Identify inner city partnerships, increase marketing & presence in Trenton.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Influx and retention of classes from targeted markets.</li><li>• <i>Measured:</i> Expansion of classes from underserved communities.</li></ul>

# Citizen Science & River Health Program

In 2018 our organization expanded stewardship to include a volunteer Citizen Science program to monitor four sites in Lambertville on two tributaries and the main stem of the Delaware River. The water quality parameters collected: water & air temperature, phosphates, nitrates, pH, turbidity and dissolved oxygen.

The SPLASH Citizen Scientists are now participating in the New Jersey Watershed Institute StreamWatch Program, affording us with new methodology, updated technology, and more monitoring sites in the Central Delaware River Watershed. Thanks to the tireless efforts by our Citizen Scientists, the Lambertville river and stream water quality data are now available on an interactive NJ State map.

Citizen Science provides a paramount connection to the local environment. We provide our local residents with interaction in their watershed in a meaningful manner.

## Why our organization is expanding our program's research:

- Road salt can have an enduring impact to local watersheds. Excess and unnecessary salting creates adverse affects to the organisms supported by the Delaware River.
- Water chemistry testing provides one layer of water quality monitoring. Biological testing via macroinvertebrates provides a more complete picture of watershed water quality.

## Your contribution will

- 1.Support our efforts to increase knowledge surrounding the water quality and river health of the Delaware River and it's tributaries.
- 2.Support the addition of new volunteers, interns, and staff needed to collection, analyze, and present new data sets.

GOAL	ACTION	OUTCOME
Increase road salt data collection from seasonally to yearly.	Increase volunteer base and increase road salt sampling frequency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year-round data sets for road salt data at testing sites.</li> <li>• <i>Future Goal &amp; Action: Public educational awareness and decrease of NaCl in any "hot spot" waterways.</i></li> </ul>
Addition of new quarterly Biological Monitoring.	Create further training opportunities for staff & volunteers to perform testing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Auxiliary water quality knowledge.</li> <li>• <i>Future Goal &amp; Action: Identification of impaired testing sites and remediation projects to decrease run-off.</i></li> </ul>

# We thank you for your ongoing support of our program

## Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank the following for their contribution to our Strategic Plan 2023-2026:

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**Stephen Harris** pictures throughout the Strategic Plan

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2023 Board of Trustees:

Loretta Pregartner, President  
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Hongwei Chen, Secretary  
Deborah Wall, Trustee

SPLASH Staff:

Eric Clark, Executive Director  
Dr. Allison Brown, Science Director

**The local partners** that have reviewed and provided invaluable feedback to our Strategic Plan.

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