



Strategic Plan 2026 - 2031

Building Life Champions



Washington Tennis & Education Foundation 2026-2031 Strategic Plan

Introduction

For 70 years, the Washington Tennis & Education Foundation (WTEF) has been changing lives at the intersection of tennis, education, and opportunity. What started as a bold belief—that access, discipline, and consistent support can reshape a young person’s future—has grown into a powerful engine for student development across Washington, DC. Thousands of students have come through WTEF’s programs. Doors have opened. Trajectories have shifted. And over time, WTEF has earned deep trust within the communities it serves.

And still, this moment asks more of us.

WTEF is at an inflection point. The needs of young people are changing. Expectations from families, funders, partners, and the broader community are rising. The organization itself has grown in scale, complexity, and ambition. Most importantly, too many young people in DC have yet to benefit from the high-quality sports-based youth development WTEF provides. Expanding that access is central to the organization’s vision for our next five years.

As WTEF nears its 75th anniversary, our north star is to reach more young people with our high-quality programming that builds life champions.

By 2031, we believe we can significantly expand our impact to serve over 1,000 students annually from historically underserved communities by expanding the Arthur Ashe Children’s Program (AACP), continuing to grow in Wards 7 and 8, and launching new programming in the areas proximate to the Rock Creek Tennis Center. Achieving this goal will require disciplined focus on financial sustainability, the mobilization of our community through partnerships and mission-driven communication, and the continuous improvement of new and existing programs.

This plan is a commitment to our students, families, partners, and the DC community, now and for generations to come. The work ahead is ambitious, demanding investment and courage, but our path ahead is clear: reach more students through our signature combination of tennis, enrichment, and life-skills development and position WTEF as the gold standard in DC and beyond.



How to Read this Plan

This strategic plan is meant to be practical and action-focused, not full of theory or vague dreams. Each section builds on the last, moving from purpose to results. It is coupled with clear benchmarks, an implementation timeline, and a realistic plan for the resources and budget required over time.

It starts with our vision, mission, and definition of "life champions"— the students we serve and the impact we seek.

Our track record and current footprint grounds us in our strengths and opportunities as we launch a new decade of impact.

Next, our theory of change maps *how* our unique blend of tennis, enrichment, and life-skills creates real change for students and communities.

At the heart of our plan are our three strategic priorities: **elevate our programs and operations, grow our reach**, and **engage our community**. Each priority sets a vision of success with clear goals and actionable strategies where we will focus our time, energy, and resources over the next five years.

We will use this plan as a living blueprint: revisiting it often, letting it guide decisions and organizational trade-offs, and refining it as we learn, adapt, and rise to meet our community's evolving needs.



Our Theory of Change





WTEF by 75: Our Strategic Priorities

To advance our mission and vision over the next five years, we will focus on the following strategic priorities.

1. **ELEVATE Our Programs & Operations**

For 70 years, WTEF has been a trusted leader in Washington, DC, equipping young people from historically underserved communities with the confidence, resilience, and opportunity to succeed through tennis, academic enrichment, and life skills development. Our programs demonstrate clear proof of concept across the youth development continuum—from early learning through college, career, and community engagement. Yet, we know that many more students could significantly benefit from WTEF's programs.

Over the next five years, WTEF will strengthen our foundation to expand impact, deepen partnerships, and secure the financial future to serve students for generations to come. Programmatically, we will align our full range of services into an integrated life champion pathway that defines the student journey from early learning to college and career readiness, with enhanced support at pivotal transition points that influence retention and long-term success. Organizationally, we will invest in the systems, culture, and people that make this growth possible—diversifying revenue streams, strengthening performance management and professional development, and improving data, measurement, and communications to drive continual improvement.

Together, these priorities will position WTEF as a model of consistent, high-quality sports-based youth development, and ensure our mission continues to benefit the DC community for generations to come.

A. Develop and implement a cohesive life champion pathway spanning early-childhood to post-secondary engagement, with measurable outcomes and compelling retention opportunities at each stage.

- i. Define key outcomes and competencies by age group, aligned with WTEF's Theory of Change, and establish measurable indicators by stage (e.g., attendance, academic progress, character development, tennis proficiency).
- ii. Leverage data across programs (Tots, CFE, AACCP, etc.), reviewing progress quarterly by age group, to identify gaps and accelerate student growth.



- iii. Evaluate current program offerings at each stage to determine whether the right supports and services are being offered at the right stages, and identify where gaps exist.

B. Enhance program offerings, with a deeper focus on middle- and high-school programming.

- i. Define and deliver a menu of post-secondary readiness experiences (e.g., career exposure, SAT/ACT prep, college visits, job/trade preparation, financial literacy), providing each student with the opportunity to participate in at least three varied activities per year, including planning, skills development, and experiential learning.
- ii. Develop and launch three or more new programs or partnerships, such as a mentorship program, to ease key transitions and boost student retention.
- iii. Ensure all students have a clear path for tennis skill development, from beginner instruction through competitive play, and explore a dedicated high-performance track for a small subset of advanced, ready students.

C. Build organizational and programmatic excellence at a scale our staff, funding, and systems can reliably support.

- i. Develop a talent and growth strategy that emphasizes leadership readiness and staff retention.
 - 1. Implement a performance management system, aligning and training 100% of full-time staff on cascading goals.
 - 2. Create a high-quality coaching and staff development pipeline, establishing clear progression milestones and ensuring every staff member has access to at least one professional development or stretch opportunity per year.
 - 3. Design a compensation framework informed by market benchmarks, with clear pay practices, performance-based incentives, and annual reviews aligned with organizational goals and individual contributions.
- ii. Achieve and maintain a balanced budget, with multi-year revenue growth in alignment with strategic expansion.
 - 1. Define and pursue WTEF's growth potential by evaluating the scale and pace of expansion the organization can sustain, determining when and where capital investment may be required, and maximizing investment returns and program revenue to fuel continued growth.
 - 2. Identify and refine the right revenue mix (earned, contributed, investment) to fund expansion and achieve a balanced budget, while maintaining a healthy reserve to sustain future innovation.
 - 3. Reduce reliance on Board-driven funding by growing and



diversifying our base of individual, corporate, and foundation support, including reassessing the role of our gala as a fundraising vehicle.

- iii. Optimize systems and facilities for efficient operations.
 - 1. Complete a systems audit and migrate back-end operations to a centralized platform (e.g., Salesforce), and boost analytic, evaluative, and relationship management capabilities with scalable tools.
 - 2. Keep existing facilities fully operational through quarterly audits and purposeful partnerships, maximizing facility performance, minimizing program disruptions annually, and ensuring our infrastructure keeps pace with program growth.
 - 3. Ensure that our East Campus is primed for ongoing year-round performance as it enters its 15th year, implementing a comprehensive maintenance plan and outlining phased facility improvements supported through aligned grants, targeted sponsorships, and/or a focused, measured capital initiative.

2. GROW Our Reach

WTEF currently serves more than 700 students and alumni through tuition-free programs, primarily in Wards 7 and 8 near our East Campus. Over the next five years, we plan to significantly expand our impact by reaching underserved students near Rock Creek Tennis Center, particularly those in Ward 4, where 75% of DCPS elementary schools enroll communities with high concentrations of students designated as at-risk and every middle and high school serves a majority of students who stand to benefit most from expanded opportunity. At the same time, we will grow our broader community engagement, welcoming more adults and juniors to help sustain our reduced and tuition-free programs. Our goal is to make WTEF the home of affordable, high-quality tennis throughout Washington, DC.

Maintaining our high-quality programming while expanding will require substantial investments in staff, infrastructure, and student resources. To ensure success, WTEF will maintain our current enrollment while pursuing a phased expansion: starting with a smaller number of new students in years 1 and 2, followed by accelerated growth in years 3–5 as conditions allow.

- A. Expand access for priority communities by 50% (to over 1,000 served annually) through tuition-free core programming, while piloting sustainable revenue models to broaden reach.**



- i. Pursue a Center for Excellence West by strategically identifying partnered facilities in the area proximate to the Rock Creek Tennis Center that can support a full youth pathway, from Tots through competitive junior development.
- ii. Expand the Arthur Ashe Children's Program, prioritizing Wards 4–8, strengthening its role as an early entry point into our tennis and education pathway.
- iii. Explore high-school tennis partnerships across the DMV that aspire to excellence in player development, align with our student experience journey (see Priority 1, Strategy A), and allow for strategic expansion into priority and underserved wards.

B. Establish WTEF as a community hub, growing the total number of youth and adults participating in our programming.

- i. Grow fee-based adult and junior tennis programming to fund mission-based programming while expanding our mutually-supportive player and advocate network.
- ii. Establish a regular cadence of events that convene partner organizations and a diverse community of tennis players.
- iii. Grow competitive tennis access by expanding WTEF-hosted tournament opportunities, bringing more adults and juniors into our community.

C. Pilot different program formats, including how often and how long students participate each week alongside new funding models, with the goal of reaching more students, maintaining quality, and prioritizing those who need us most.

- i. Evaluate and pressure-test tuition-free, reduced-tuition, scholarship, and sliding-scale options for long-term sustainability.
- ii. Pilot varied dosage models to better serve current students and expand our offerings to new students.
- iii. Explore efficiencies in the per-student cost across programs at scale to allow for responsible expansion.

3. ENGAGE Our Community

For 70 years, WTEF has earned deep respect by those who know us best. Still, despite our growing reach and our role as the nonprofit beneficiary of the DC Open, we remain under the radar in many spaces. Over the next five years, WTEF will grow our base of donors, advocates, and partners, broadening the base of support that makes our expansion possible and positioning WTEF as DC's most recognized tennis-based youth-development organization. To fuel that growth, we will mobilize the broader



community around the life-changing benefits of our proven model—combining tennis, the healthiest sport, with academic enrichment and life skills that develop healthy, confident, and well-rounded adults. This awareness will attract the scale of advocates, volunteers, and resources needed to bring our programs to more young people across Washington, DC and keep high-quality sports-based youth development programming in the spotlight.

A. Strengthen ties with our existing community.

- i. Build leadership and advocacy opportunities for students and alumni via a student council, junior board, and/or near-peer mentorship pathway.
- ii. Formalize and develop a volunteer program that offers meaningful ways for community members to contribute their time and skills to WTEF's events, operations, and programs.
- iii. Ensure all facility visitors, program participants, donors, and prospective donors receive clear, consistent communication about WTEF's mission, programs, impact, and ways to engage, strengthening community connection, deepening understanding of how program fees support the mission, and cultivating a pipeline of future supporters.

B. Grow partnerships and advocacy to boost awareness, collaboration, and resources for our programs.

- i. Leverage the DC Open to showcase WTEF's impact through student and alumni stories in programming, marketing, and media channels, while engaging ambassadors (on-court, events, media) to inspire audiences and grow visibility year-over-year.
- ii. Formalize at least 3 new cross-sector partnerships (e.g., health, education, youth, tennis brands) and ally with college and pro tennis talent as ambassadors to unlock new resources, engage youth players, and boost visibility.
- iii. Partner with city and community representatives to showcase WTEF's proven approach and align support for policies and resources that advance our mission, vision, and theory of change.

C. Expand our base of support by telling our story.

- i. Design and implement a comprehensive marketing and communications plan unifying WTEF's brand and messaging across all



materials and training 100% of staff and board for consistent delivery, with clear annual benchmarks established in year one to drive measurable growth in donor retention and new supporter engagement.

- ii. Invest in critical staffing and infrastructure to consistently deliver high-quality communications and promote WTEF.
- iii. Build and amplify a compelling campaign for WTEF's sports-based youth development through tennis, highlighting tennis as a uniquely healthy lifelong sport associated with increased physical activity and a significant gain in life expectancy.



Strategic Guardrails

The strategic planning process required honest reflection. It asked where WTEF is creating the greatest value today, where new opportunities are emerging, and where sharper focus is needed. With every strategic plan comes trade-offs, and the acknowledgement that we cannot do everything and do it well. By prioritizing key areas, we are intentionally stepping back or not pursuing others.

- **No major capital campaign for a new facility.** While we may invest in existing spaces, a ground-up construction campaign is not the right use of our time, energy, and capital at this stage.
- **Deep before wide.** Our growth will be rooted in Washington, DC, where unmet need across existing and new Wards and schools gives us the greatest opportunity to deepen our impact.
- **Grow with intention.** We will grow gradually, especially in the early years of this plan, to ensure that our program continues to be high-quality.
- **Balanced player development.** Elite tennis training demands heavy staffing, dollars, and time that could dilute our mission. We will pilot a focused high-performance track for advanced, ready students, balancing individual advancement with our broader mission and addressing middle- and high-school attrition without overextending our staff or resources.
- **Building toward national impact.** Our geographic focus remains within Washington, DC for the duration of this plan. We will, however, pursue the systems, documentation, and outcomes data that position WTEF as a national model for excellence in sports-based youth development, building the foundation for broader influence once the goals of this plan are met.

There are also a number of additional considerations we will weigh as we work to bring this plan to life.

- **Measured endowment use.** We're open to leveraging a limited portion of our endowment for the right expansion opportunity, but recognize this will decrease the amount of interest/dividend revenue and capital gains that we will generate. We believe it is important to preserve a significant reserve fund to both protect the organization and allow us to consider opportunities down the line.
- **Exploration of new tuition models.** We will grapple with the question of whether our programs should remain completely tuition-free, have a sliding scale based on income, or move to a scholarship model. We remain committed to centering students who have been historically underserved, and ensuring cost is not a barrier to any student who wants to participate in our programs.
- **Enabling conditions.** We will not accelerate expansion without an achievable pathway to a balanced budget. This will require weighing when and to what extent we use our endowment, where we need to increase revenue-bearing programming, and more ways to grow our income streams.



Closing Note from WTEF's CEO

To our staff, board, partners, and the WTEF community,

Thank you for your ongoing support and belief in the mission and promise of WTEF. As CEO, I am steadfast in my belief that seven decades in, we are just getting started, and that when tennis and education combine forces, we expand what opportunity can look like for the students we serve.

Five years from now, success means WTEF's mission is thriving and evolving, reaching more young people and deepening its impact at every stage of their development across Washington, DC. It means steadily increasing our presence in Wards 7 and 8, returning to the neighborhoods where our story began, and serving Pre-K, elementary, middle, and high school students with our unique blend of excellence-focused tennis, enrichment, and life skills. Thriving also means we have a strong community rallying behind our vision, with robust internal operations built to be flexible as we grow.

The work ahead will be challenging, and it will require significant investment. But expanding access to our powerful youth development model is worthy of our collective time and resources. With our community's support, I am committed to growing our impact and positioning WTEF as the region's premier tennis and education organization.

This strategic plan is our shared roadmap for that journey. It will guide how we set goals, allocate resources, track progress, and make decisions over the next five years to achieve our vision. Strategy is a living practice, and we will revisit this plan regularly to measure progress and adapt as we learn. What will remain constant is our commitment to leading with purpose, integrity, and accountability as we steward WTEF into its next chapter.

Together, we can ensure every young person in DC has access to the lifelong benefits of tennis, academic enrichment, and the life skills they need to thrive. Expanding that access begins with each of us, and I am asking for your active partnership in making it real, whether through philanthropy, collaboration, or championing our work in the community. I hope you join me in bringing this vision to life for the young people of Washington, DC.

With gratitude and excitement,

Candace