

SPRING LAKE RANCH
STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2030



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Executive Summary

Spring Lake Ranch Therapeutic Community (SLR), a 700-acre nonprofit residential treatment program, has been serving individuals with mental health and substance use challenges since 1932. The 2025-2030 Spring Lake Ranch Strategic Plan outlines initiatives to expand SLR's program offerings, improve marketing outreach, and promote financial sustainability. A key focus is the development of the **Transitional Living Program (TLP)**, an innovative approach to longer-term, supportive housing for residents transitioning out of more intensive residential care.

The following objectives guide SLR's efforts over the next five years:

- **Infrastructure Upgrade and Expansion:** Invest in facility renovations, including the construction of a 12-bed Transitional Living Program (TLP), a new community center, and expanded farm facilities to better support therapeutic and sustainability initiatives.
- **Expand and Improve the Continuum of Care:** Strengthen clinical integration with work-based therapy, introduce phased treatment tracks, and enhance transition support with individualized length-of-stay options and new vocational services.
- **Increase and Stabilize Census:** Drive census growth through strategic digital marketing, referral network expansion, and partnerships with hospitals, treatment centers, and community organizations. Enhance public awareness with a comprehensive public relations strategy to position SLR as a national leader in work-based mental health recovery.
- **Expand Access through Financial Aid:** Double scholarship availability by 2030 to ensure affordability particularly for marginalized populations. Develop a comprehensive funding plan incorporating diverse funding streams and partnerships to support long-term financial stability.
- **Recruitment and Retention of Staff:** Address staffing challenges by offering competitive salaries, expanding staff housing options, fostering professional development, and enhancing staff well-being initiatives.
- **Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship:** Strengthen environmental practices by implementing energy-efficient upgrades, promoting food sustainability, and involvement of entire SLR community in eco-conscious projects which align with SLR's values.
- **Enhance Technology and Data Management:** Modernize technology to improve operational efficiency and resident outcomes through advanced data analytics, expanded telehealth capabilities, and improved electronic health records (EHR) systems.

The strategic plan initiatives and long-term financial sustainability goals will be, in part, supported by a 3-year \$18 million capital campaign. With \$14.5 million already raised in the early part of the campaign, SLR is well positioned to meet its strategic plan goals and objectives. By 2030, SLR aims to be a national leader in farm-based work-therapy programs for mental health recovery.

Introduction

Background

Spring Lake Ranch Therapeutic Community (SLR), located in Cuttingsville, Vermont, founded in 1932 by Wayne and Elizabeth Sarcka, provides a unique blend of therapeutic work programs, community engagement, and clinical care to support individuals with serious mental health and substance use challenges. At its core, SLR fosters a deep sense of community, where residents, staff, and volunteers live and work together, creating an environment of mutual support and shared experiences.

SLR operates as a nonprofit organization, generating revenue through resident fees, donations, and an endowment fund. SLR's community-centered approach emphasizes the importance of collaboration and relationships in the healing process. Daily communal activities such as shared meals, group work projects, and recreational events strengthen the bonds between residents, staff, and the surrounding community, creating a supportive atmosphere where individuals can feel valued and understood.

SLR's expansive 700-acre campus includes residential housing, a working farm, a woodshop, hiking trails, and recreational facilities. This natural setting, combined with work-based therapy and community involvement, offers residents the opportunity to reconnect with the land, engage in meaningful work, and develop a sense of belonging. Through these experiences, residents build self-confidence, responsibility, and independence, all within the nurturing framework of the therapeutic community.

This strong emphasis on community living is a cornerstone of the Ranch's philosophy, as it helps residents not only in their individual healing journeys but also in developing life skills, empathy, and connections that they can carry with them as they transition to greater independence.

Mission Statement

"Spring Lake Ranch Therapeutic Community supports and empowers people with mental health and substance use challenges by providing opportunities to grow and thrive. Through shared experience, meaningful work, and active participation in an accepting, inclusive community, we help each person develop the confidence and skills needed for recovery."

Vision Statement

Spring Lake Ranch will be the nation's leading farm-based therapeutic community, providing adults with mental health and addiction challenges with a nurturing, nature-centered environment where healing, growth, and recovery are fostered through meaningful work, clinical expertise and a compassionate, connected community.

Values

- **Community:** Community is at the core of our mission—whether in work, recreation, therapy, or shared meals. It is a foundational principle that guides every aspect of our program and culture, fostering a keen sense of belonging and mutual support.
- **Connection to Land:** Nestled in the Green Mountains of Vermont, Spring Lake Ranch is deeply rooted in its natural surroundings. Our programs and activities are centered around a meaningful relationship with the land, encouraging residents to engage in and appreciate the environment as an integral part of their healing journey.
- **Growth:** At the Ranch, both residents and staff undergo significant personal and professional growth. Residents cultivate confidence, acquire new skills, and enhance their overall well-being, while staff members are actively engaged in their own journey of professional and personal development. This mutual commitment to growth fosters a dynamic and supportive environment for all.
- **Meaningful Work:** Work is a cornerstone of life at Spring Lake Ranch. From baking bread and tending to livestock to repairing furniture, every task contributes to the daily operations of the Ranch. Residents and staff work together, facing challenges and holding one another accountable. This collaborative approach fosters a deep sense of shared purpose and accomplishment, reinforcing the value of each contribution.
- **Wellness:** Our approach to wellness is holistic, encompassing work, recreation, meaningful relationships, medical care, and therapeutic interventions. We believe that genuine healing involves addressing all aspects of life, promoting well-being in a balanced and integrated manner.
- **Kindness:** The Ranch community is grounded in compassion, empathy, and a joyful spirit. It fosters an environment of warmth, care, and authentic connection, where individuals support and inspire one another with kindness and understanding.
- **Hope:** Spring Lake Ranch is committed to the belief that every individual has the capacity for recovery, growth, and wellness. Challenges are met with perseverance, empathy, and the unwavering support of the community.
- **Acceptance:** Upon arrival at Spring Lake Ranch individuals are welcomed with warmth and unconditional acceptance. Our community is inclusive and

respectful, creating a safe and nurturing environment where everyone is valued for their authentic selves.

- **Empowerment:** At Spring Lake Ranch, individuals discover their strength, resilience, and untapped potential. Through meaningful work and supportive relationships, residents rebuild their confidence and develop a renewed sense of well-being.

Core Competencies

- **Work-Based Therapy:** Residents engage in therapeutic work programs such as farming, carpentry, and forestry, which foster responsibility, self-confidence, and skill development.
- **Holistic Healing:** SLR's serene, natural setting provides a peaceful environment for recovery, complemented by activities such as hiking, mindfulness, and yoga.
- **Continuum of Care:** With the establishment of the TLP, SLR will offer a seamless transition from intensive care to independent living, with programs tailored to meet the needs of residents at every stage of recovery.
- **Personalized Clinical Care:** Small resident-to-staff ratios allow for individualized care plans that integrate psychiatric, therapeutic, and community support.
- **Dual Diagnosis Treatment:** SLR actively addresses co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders, offering comprehensive treatment for individuals with dual diagnoses.
- **Community Living:** SLR's emphasis on shared experiences and communal activities fosters a strong sense of belonging, peer support, and social engagement that are key to recovery.

Service Description

SLR offers four core programs:

- **Ranch Program:** This is the flagship residential program offering intensive care and a structured environment for individuals with serious mental illness and substance use disorders. The program integrates therapeutic work programs (such as farming, carpentry, gardening, and forestry) with clinical care (psychiatric services, therapy, and case management). Residents engage in meaningful work that fosters personal growth, responsibility, and emotional stability.
- **Elliot House Program:** A transitional step-down program that provides reduced clinical oversight while maintaining connections to the therapeutic community. This program is designed for residents who are preparing to transition to more

independent living while still benefiting from communal support and therapeutic activities.

- **Transitional Living Program (TLP):** A planned longer-term, lower-cost transitional program providing continued support and housing for residents who have completed the Ranch Program or similar high-intensity residential treatment programs. The TLP model aims to foster independence while maintaining clinical oversight and support.
- **Independent Apartment Living (IAL):** Located in Rutland, Vermont, the IAL program offers apartment-style living for residents who have graduated from more structured programs. It provides case management and psychiatric support while allowing residents to live independently. Participants can stay connected to the Ranch community through optional work crews, shared meals, and social events.

Financial Overview

SLR's program revenue is composed of resident fee income (85%), annual donations (10%), and other income from product sales and rent (5%). Resident fees are paid directly by families, as insurance coverage is not an option due to the nature of SLR's model, the expected length of stay, and billing practices. Maintaining strong relationships with referring hospitals and professionals is critical for sustaining census. This is effectively managed by the Admissions & Outreach team, with support from the Development and Communication departments, responsible for public relations, website optimization, and social media outreach.

SLR offers scholarships to qualifying families, covering between 10% and 80% of the daily fee, typically for periods of six months or more. On average, \$600K in financial aid is granted annually, with a goal to double this amount by 2030. Scholarships are funded through endowment accounts, and annual donations. The scholarship fund has steadily increased over the last five years from \$500K to \$1million annually. This growth can be attributed to the dedicated efforts of the Development Department and enhanced strategies for donor stewardship.

SLR also runs small annual campaigns in the spring to support capital improvement projects. However, with the upcoming \$18 million capital campaign set to launch in February 2025, the Ranch is unlikely to conduct additional spring campaigns for the next several years.

The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan emphasized the need for improved fiscal management practices and long-term sustainability. Over the past five years, considerable progress has been made to achieve this, including reorganizing the Business Office, upgrading accounting software and auditing services, digitizing records, and moving financial processes to the cloud. On the expense side, a procurement policy was implemented

and budget managers received training. Departmental budgets are tracked monthly. These efforts have led to better financial control, improved staff financial literacy, and greater empowerment in decision-making within budget constraints.

SLR's financial performance has seen considerable improvement. Investment balances have increased by 25% in the past three years, from \$7.7 million to over \$9.6 million. Additionally, early contributions to the 2025 Capital Campaign have already reached \$5 million, with another \$9.5 million pledged.

Behavioral Healthcare Overview & Key Trends

The U.S. behavioral healthcare industry is expanding due to rising mental illness rates and growing awareness of mental health challenges. Valued at \$87.3 billion in 2023, the sector is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 5.1% through 2032.¹ This growth is particularly evident in treatment programs that offer dual diagnosis treatment, holistic, and integrated care models.² As families increasingly seek these options, demand for these services continues to rise.

Several key trends are shaping the industry, including the growing prevalence of serious mental health disorders, particularly among younger populations, and the reduced stigma around seeking mental health treatment. While telehealth has improved access to psychiatric care, programs like Spring Lake Ranch (SLR) must balance remote care with the in-person benefits of work-based therapy. Additionally, there is increasing demand for environmentally sustainable practices within residential programs.

Industry disruptors, which pose challenges to traditional behavioral healthcare programs, include healthcare consolidation, digital therapeutics, the rising prevalence of cannabis-induced psychosis, and the growing expectation for residential programs to offer holistic, integrative treatment models that go beyond traditional psychiatric services.

Strategic Plan Objectives (2025-2030)

1. Infrastructure Upgrade and Expansion

Over the past two years, a comprehensive assessment of all facilities at Spring Lake Ranch has been conducted, with valuable input from the SLR board and various board

¹ Precedence Research, "U.S. Behavioral Health Market Size Estimated to Reach USD 136.6 Bn By 2032," *NASDAQ OMX's News Release Distribution Channel*, 2023, New York.

² MarkWide Research. *US Mental Health and Addiction Treatment Centers Market Analysis- Industry Size, Share, Research Report, Insights, Covid-19 Impact, Statistics, Trends, Growth and Forecast 2025-2034*. Torrance, CA: MarkWide Research, January 2025. Accessed January 13, 2025. <https://markwideresearch.com/us-mental-health-and-addiction-treatment-centers-market/>.

committees, professionals, staff, residents and their families. This assessment identified the following priority projects:

Upgrades:

- **Main House:** Renovate the living room, expand the dining area, and add a new kitchen and bathroom. Build two staff apartments and a kitchen dedicated to crew use. Install a fire suppression system throughout the building and add new heat pumps.
- **Gym:** Modernize the gym to enhance usability, including the addition of a mindfulness studio, music studio, equipment storage, and a new bathroom. Reconfigure the gym layout to include a basketball court and a more spacious workout area.
- **Resident Housing:** Upgrade all housing units with heat pumps and refresh furnishings and decor.

New Construction Initiatives:

- **Community Center:** Designed as a welcoming gathering space for the entire community, this center will feature a kitchen, media center, two new offices, a bathroom, and a spacious great room. It will provide a versatile setting for activities, group meetings, and events.
- **Transitional Living Program (TLP):** A 12-bed expansion designed to bridge the gap between residential care and independent living, the TLP will offer a mix of suites and apartments. This program will meet a longstanding need by providing a lower-cost alternative to core programs, with a strong focus on vocational support and independent living skills.
- **New Farm/Barn:** The farm operations will be relocated to a more suitable area and feature a new clear-span and traditional barn along with separate outbuildings for pigs and chickens. This relocation requires additional infrastructure, including electrical and water connections and improved road access. The existing barn and surrounding area will be repurposed to accommodate much-needed storage and parking.

2. Expand and Improve SLR Continuum of Care:

SLR will focus on augmenting its existing programs through continued integration of clinical care with its work-based therapy model, phased approach to programming, enhanced length of stay options with the addition of TLP and focused attention on quality transitions and outcomes measurement.

- **Therapeutic Goal Alignment:** Aligning clinical goals with work program activities to ensure that each resident's therapeutic work is tailored to their mental health and recovery needs.
- **Phased Treatment:** Introducing structured phases within the therapeutic work programs to align with residents' progress, ensuring that the intensity of work and clinical care evolves as residents advance in their treatment.

- **Transition Support:** Increased continuity of care and transition support between phases of treatment, from the Ranch Program to Elliot House, TLP, IAL, transitions home or to another step-down program.
- **Vocational Support:** Introduction of an occupational therapist focused on strengthening job-related skills essential for a successful transition to independent living. This role will also help create pathways to meaningful employment opportunities beyond the Ranch
- **Outcomes:** Increase collection and analysis of outcome data to evaluate the effectiveness of the work-based model and make necessary adjustments to improve resident outcomes.

3. Increase and Stabilize Census

Employ a multi-faceted approach to increase and maintain census levels by increased marketing, outreach, and development of strategic partnerships through:

- **Referral Networks:** Strengthen relationships with therapeutic consultants, psychiatric hospitals, and mental health professionals across the country to increase the flow of referrals. Expand outreach to areas beyond New England and neighboring states, focusing on regions with higher demand for residential treatment.
- **Strategic Digital Marketing:** Create and disseminate digital content that highlights SLR's unique approach to work-based therapy and sustainability to attract new residents through digital marketing strategies such as search engine optimization (SEO), social media campaigns, and targeted email outreach to families, hospitals, and referrers
- **Ranch Profile Enhancement:** Implement a comprehensive public relations strategy to increase awareness of Spring Lake Ranch. Focus on building the Ranch's reputation through media outreach, partnerships with influential organizations, and targeted awareness campaigns to elevate its visibility both locally and nationally.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Build strategic partnerships with like-minded mental health providers, residential treatment programs, and community organizations. These partnerships will help expand SLR's referral base and create new opportunities for collaboration, such as joint programming or resource sharing.

4. Expand Access through the Reduction of Financial Barriers

Spring Lake Ranch is dedicated to expanding access to its programs for families in need by strengthening financial support and scholarship opportunities. The overall goal is to double the availability of financial aid by 2030, providing access to SLR services to a broader population including individuals from or underserved communities. Key strategies include:

- **Establishing Diverse Funding Streams for Long-Term Stability:**
 - **Grants:** Develop and implement a grant program to identify and apply for grants from funding sources which support program goals and align with SLR's mission, vision, and values.
 - **Planned-Giving:** Raise awareness and increase planned giving by developing clear documentation of various planned giving options. Promote planned giving using small media such as websites, newsletters, and annual reports.
 - **Intentional Stewardship of Alumni and Donors:** Establish an Alumni Advisory Committee to develop and implement a communication and engagement plan aimed at strengthening SLR's relationship with alumni, donors, and prospective donors.
- **Scholarship Marketing:** Provide information on scholarship funding to families and referring partners or providers early in the admission process and pre-admission through written materials/brochures and website. Increase access and diversity of SLR population by direct marketing to individuals or organizations that provide mental health services to underserved populations.
- **Strategic Partnerships for Financial Aid Expansion:** Build strategic partnerships with philanthropic organizations, corporate sponsors, and Vermont State agencies to create new financial aid funds and increase access to financial resources. These partnerships will help secure additional financial support and expand SLR's reach to families who may not otherwise have access to services.

5. Recruitment and Retention of Staff

Recruit and retain high-quality staff by offering professional development and improving staff well-being through workload management and support.

Key Tactics:

- **Professional Development:** Create a structured professional development plan for staff, offering opportunities for career advancement and training in leadership and management.
- **Academic Partnerships:** Establish partnerships with academic institutions offering social work, psychology, and nursing programs to create a recruitment pipeline for graduates seeking positions in residential care. Offer internship opportunities to students and postgraduates as part of this strategy.
- **Staff Retention & Wellness Programs:** Implement a program focused on reducing burnout through wellness initiatives and internal support networks. Provide

opportunities for staff to give feedback and participate in decision-making processes related to program development and work-life balance.

- **Develop Staff Housing Plan:** Develop a staff housing plan that optimizes existing housing, expands on-campus options, and explores nearby affordable solutions. Providing accessible, cost-effective housing will attract out-of-state talent and support staff retention.
- **Salary and Benefit Reviews:** Conduct annual salary and benefit reviews to ensure that compensation remains competitive within the behavioral healthcare industry. Annually quantify and summarize each employee's compensation package including health, dental, meals and housing (when applicable).

Adjust salaries and benefits packages to reflect changes in the cost of living and to maintain parity with comparable organizations.

6. Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship

To deepen its commitment to environmental responsibility, Spring Lake Ranch is implementing initiatives that prioritize sustainability to reduce its carbon footprint. These efforts focus on energy-efficient upgrades, sustainability education, and community-based projects that encourage environmental stewardship. Key actions include:

- **Annual Equipment Review and Energy-Efficient Upgrades:** Annually, conduct a review of current equipment to identify items that are outdated, inefficient, or environmentally unfriendly. Develop a practical replacement schedule that prioritizes sustainability.
- **Sustainability education:** Incorporating sustainability education into the resident work-crew experience by involving them in environmentally friendly practices such as farming, waste reduction, and energy conservation.
- **Food Sustainability:** Spring Lake Ranch will continue to reduce food waste through composting and maximizing on-site production of fresh produce and protein, creating a sustainable, closed-loop system that supports farm-to-table meals and enriches soil health and the resident experience.
- **Community-based sustainability projects:** Engaging residents, staff, and the community in projects that promote environmental stewardship, furthering SLR's commitment to sustainability.

7. Enhance Technology and Data Management

SLR will invest in technology to improve its operational efficiency, quality of care, and clinical outcomes by:

- **Enhancing the Electronic Health Records (EHR) System:** Expanding the use of EHR to streamline clinical care, gather data to track resident progress, measure outcomes and inform quality improvement efforts.
- **Expanding Telehealth and Use of Digital Health Technologies:** Utilize telehealth and other digital health technologies to complement and enhance traditional care and services beyond nutrition counseling to include specialized care, psychiatric support, and other remote consultations. This initiative aims to provide greater accessibility to personalized care options, ensuring residents receive individualized and holistic health support tailored to their needs. These innovations will provide residents with accessible, customized, and effective treatment options, fostering seamless integration into their daily lives post-discharge.

Performance Tracking and Measurement

A performance tracking and measurement system will be developed and implemented to measure progress towards 2025-2030 Strategic Plan objectives and goals. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be tracked monthly by departments. An annual review of goals and measures will be conducted by SLR the executive team, department managers, and the Board of Trustees.

Regular review of these metrics will help ensure accountability and progress toward strategic objectives while enabling timely adjustments when necessary.

- **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):** SLR will track a set of KPIs across departments, measuring progress against strategic goals monthly. Each department will be responsible for collecting data and reporting on key metrics such as:
 - **Occupancy Rates:** Tracking occupancy for all programs, including the new Transitional Living Program (TLP), to ensure census stability.
 - **Resident Progress and Outcomes:** Measuring resident progress in clinical and work-based therapy, including completion of treatment phases and successful transitions to lower levels of care.
 - **Referral Sources and Admissions:** Monitoring the number and quality of referrals, as well as the time taken to convert leads to admissions.
 - **Scholarship Distribution:** Reporting on the amount of financial aid provided and its impact on increasing access for underserved populations.
 - **Financial Performance:** Tracking revenue from resident fees, donations, and product sales, as well as expenses related to the new capital campaign and sustainability initiatives.
 - **Environmental Impact:** Tracking energy efficiency improvements, including reduced operational costs from the installation of energy star rated equipment and decreased waste production.

These KPIs will be reviewed by senior leadership and department managers monthly, ensuring that any deviations from targets are addressed quickly and effectively.

- **Annual Roadmaps:** At the beginning of each fiscal year, each department will develop an annual roadmap that outlines major milestones and deliverables aligned with strategic objectives. These roadmaps will be reviewed annually to assess overall performance, align resources, and make necessary adjustments.
- **Quarterly Reports:** Develop introspective quarterly reports for department heads and managers to track progress toward strategic objectives. Ensure the reports provide meaningful insights aligned with organizational goals while avoiding unnecessary busy work.
- **Performance Reviews:** Leadership and management will be held accountable to achieve the organization's strategic objectives, which will be integrated into their annual performance plans and reviews. Each manager's and leadership team member's performance will be evaluated based on their effectiveness in executing the strategic initiatives relevant to their department.

Board Governance

The Board of Trustees plays a critical role in implementing an organization's strategic plan. As ambassadors to the organization's mission and vision, their responsibilities include:

Setting Strategic Direction

- Approve and support the strategic plan developed by executive leadership.
- Ensure the plan aligns with the organization's mission, vision, and values.
- Provide insights and guidance to refine strategic priorities.
- Monitor the implementation of the strategic plan to ensure it progresses on schedule and meets key performance indicators (KPIs).
- Review risks associated with the plan to ensure appropriate mitigation strategies are in place.

Resource Allocation

- Approve budgets and allocate resources to support the plan's priorities.
- Ensure the organization has the financial, human, and technological resources necessary to succeed.

Performance Evaluation

- Regularly assess the organization's performance against the strategic plan.

- Adjust goals, resources, or timelines as necessary based on outcomes and feedback.
- Conduct evaluations of the executive director to ensure alignment with strategic priorities.

Fostering a Culture of Accountability

- Encourage transparency in reporting and communication regarding progress and challenges.
- Promote a culture of innovation and adaptability to effectively respond to changing circumstances.

By fulfilling these roles, the board ensures the strategic plan serves as a dynamic roadmap for organizational success.

Conclusion

Spring Lake Ranch Therapeutic Community stands at a pivotal moment in its 92-year history, poised for significant growth and expansion while remaining rooted in its core mission of providing holistic, community-based mental health care. The 2025-2030 Strategic Plan outlines concrete objectives that reflect SLR's commitment to enhancing its service offerings, improving program integration, and addressing the growing demand for transitional and long-term care.

At the heart of this plan is the development of the Transitional Living Program (TLP), which will meet the demand for extended care and support for residents transitioning from more intensive treatment. Alongside this, SLR is dedicated to improving clinical integration, increasing, and stabilizing its census through strategic marketing, outreach, and partnerships, and expanding its financial aid availability to ensure that cost is not a barrier to access for families in need.

Strategic partnerships play a vital role across multiple objectives, from expanding referral networks and financial aid to collaborating with other treatment centers and organizations to drive innovation and access to care.

As SLR continues to adapt to changes in the behavioral healthcare landscape, it remains focused on its foundational principles of community, therapeutic work, and personalized care. By investing in strategic partnerships, technology, and long-term financial sustainability, SLR is well-positioned to strengthen its role as a leader in farm-based, work-therapy programs for mental health recovery, serving a diverse and expanding population well into the future.