1. **Philosophy**

The Governance Philosophy of the Ecology Learning Center’s board is strategic, ambitious, and deliberative, and focused on productivity and results.  The board adds value and wisdom to the work of the head of school, teachers, and staff, leading change and making strategic decisions without micromanaging.

The governing board will:

* Operate in awareness of its trusteeship obligation to its charter and stakeholders.
* Acquire the skills and knowledge that make for board excellence, and strive for continuous improvement through annual evaluations, and record-keeping of board activity.
* Lead the organization with broad policies focused developing a school that accomplishes its mission. These policies will be informed by 1) clear goals, 2) strategic steps toward those goals.
* Accept collective responsibility for excellence in governance, while using trustees’ individual expertise to advise school leaders.
* Seek input on board policies from key stakeholders.
* Make decisions by majority vote, and support decisions made.

**Key stakeholders** include students, teachers, parents, and community members.  The Center believes in the potency of collaboration between stakeholders and the governing board. Stakeholders will have an opportunity to engage in decision-making. They may propose policy changes by submitting proposals in writing to the board.  The board will solicit input to ensure policy decisions are informed by those who are directly impacted by them, especially those teaching and learning at the school.

Key stakeholders will participate in decision-making through the following advisory groups:

* **Student Advisory**: Students will construct a governance body that will formally participate in policy-making. Faculty facilitation of this body will ensure fair representation of grade levels and cohorts, and establish clear protocols for decision-making and communication. As stated in our mission, we aim to “cultivate compassionate and resilient leaders.”  Student governance will be critical in achieving this mission.
* **Teacher-Leader Advisory**: Teachers will assume various leadership roles at the school.  Roland Barth, founder of the Principals’ Center at Harvard University writes in his book *Improving Schools from Within*: “When teachers are enlisted and empowered as school leaders, everyone can win...The principal gains influence and demonstrates leadership by entrusting some of it to others. Being accorded leadership generates new leadership.” (p. 128). Teacher leadership at the Center will be a model for students, showing that everyone is both learner and leader.  During weekly staff meetings, teacher-leaders will give updates, and request support and feedback. Teacher-leaders will suggest policy changes to the board. Teachers will lead in the areas of professional development, school safety, curriculum & assessment, and more areas identified by the staff.
* **Parent-Community Advisory**: Parents and community members contribute specific skills and perspectives to decision-making at the school. The school will facilitate the creation of a parent-community advisory body by providing space and time for meetings, and by offering to distribute  information and announcements through official school channels. Communication between this body and the governing board will be ongoing and informal, and structured by a minimum of two annual gatherings with the governing board.

2. **Structure: Powers and Duties**

The Center is governed by the board of directors, with management delegated to the head of school. Board members each have a personal fiduciary duty to look out for the long-term well being of the school. The board is responsible for:

* setting the school’s general policies and overall curriculum policies
* approving and monitoring the annual budget and financial procedures
* fundraising
* hiring and evaluating the head of school
* approving personnel policies, and monitoring their implementation by the head of school
* assuring that the charter school fulfills its charter contract
* strategic planning.

In addition to the head of school, the governing board will hire a consultant with district superintendent experience to interface with the Charter Commission and keep the school legally compliant.  Currently the Center’s Board of Directors is receiving guidance from Mike Tracy, licensed superintendent of Carrabec, RSU 74.  Superintendent Tracy will continue this role pro-bono until the school is authorized and receiving funds for operation, at which time he will continue providing consulting services for a discounted fee.

The board operates through committees, including an executive committee. The board is not involved in the day-to-day details of running the school and implementing the board’s policies. Consistent with the best practices of nonprofit corporation management, the board delegates these responsibilities to the head of school, with support from the contracted consultant.

**Size:** The Center’s by-laws require a minimum of five board members and a maximum of twenty-one.  There are currently ten board members from a diverse cross-section of the school community, and the community-at-large.

**Composition:** The current board composition represents exceptional expertise in education, including higher education, special education, public district and charter schools, private schools, and non-traditional educational programs including outdoor, science-based and expeditionary learning.  Current board members also represent skills in nonprofit leadership, school facilities (construction and maintenance of school buildings), and bookkeeping. The board continually seeks additional members, particularly those with expertise in finance and law.

The Center has fostered relations with nearly a dozen constituencies who enthusiastically support the Center’s mission, including Unity College, the University of Maine Hutchinson Center, and Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA).  One of our current board members is a staff member at Unity College. The Center plans to have board representation from all three of these major constituencies.

While employees of the school will not be on the board, the head of school will attend monthly board meetings, and key stakeholders will be invited and encouraged to attend as well. Every board meeting will include time to hear from the student, teacher, and parent-community advisory bodies described above.

3. **Structure: Ensuring Success**

This governance structure and composition will ensure that:

1. The school will be an educational, financial and operational success by establishing clear roles and responsibilities for each area of governance. The diverse skills, knowledge and experience of current and proposed board members will ensure that committees responsible for curriculum, for financial oversight, and for management and operations will be composed of those individual members with the expertise to develop thoughtful     policies to guide the school to the successful manifestation of its mission. The board will lead the school’s strategic planning; work with the head of school to strengthen programs and services; ensure adequate financial resources, provide protection for school assets, and provide financial oversight; monitor charter contract compliance; and ensure that the school maintains legal and ethical integrity, and good standing in the community.
2. The board will evaluate success annually by measuring evidence that the school is meeting its mission-guided Educational Program Terms: Place-Based, Reflective & Empowering, Performance-Based, and Dedicated to Health & Well-Being.  The board will conduct a formal evaluation of the head of school twice annually. Consistent with the Educational Program Term of being self-reflective, the board will evaluate itself annually in order to recognize its achievements and identify areas that need improvement.
3. There will be active representation of key stakeholders through the participation of the Parent-Community Advisory Board, student government, and teacher leadership. The board will maintain consistent communication with these stakeholder groups, provide space on the agenda at monthly meetings for reports from each, and respond to stakeholders’ written proposals for policy changes.
4. The school will be culturally responsive by actively soliciting participation from community members and volunteers. The current and projected composition of the board reflects diverse cultural views, socio-economic levels, and age. The board has been inclusive and collaborative from its inception, inviting dozens of community members to brainstorm the mission and vision for the school, and giving students the honor of finalizing the mission statement.

4.  **Membership**

The current board members are interested in and qualified to serve on the school’s board due to their deep and broad experience in the fields of education and community development. The officers of the board are as follows:

**Ian Collins (Chair)** has over a decade of experience in K-12 education and professional development. He has served as the Lead Teacher and Director at the Wayfinder School, an alternative residential high school. Ian currently teaches middle school science at the Edna Drinkwater school. Additionally, he served as the Open Air Classroom Director at U-Maine's Tanglewood 4H Camp and Learning Center. Ian attended the BEETLES Leadership Institute in August of 2018. This professional development offering lead by University of California focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies and pedagogies in the outdoor science community.

**Kelly Carey (Vice Chair)** currently serves as the administrative coordinator for United Midcoast Charities whose mission is to energize nonprofit agencies through finance and guidance in the areas of food, housing, health and safety, and economic security. Kelly is a parent of four who co-founded a homeschool learning cooperative in Waldo County in 2011. She's deeply interested in relational learning environments, humanistic education, and fostering a deep respect for children's ability for nuanced learning.

**Solomon Heifets (Secretary)** is an English teacher and teacher-leader at the Maine Academy of Natural Sciences. He holds a Master's degree in Education from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and lives on a diversified organic farm in South China, where he operates small farm enterprises.

**Elizabeth Alma (Treasurer, non-voting)** has resided in Waldo County for 16 years, and has worked as a bookkeeper, administrative assistant, and tax preparer for several businesses and community service nonprofits. She has been the Treasurer, and taught classes in the Belfast Area HomeSchoolers parent co-op. As a motivated homeschooling parent, advocating for a child with a developmental disability, she has partnered with RSU 3 Special Education team, creating a unique homeschool/middle school blend with the primary focus on maximizing inclusion. Her Bachelor of Science Degree *summa cum laude* from Penn State University was in Environmental Resource Management, and she did graduate study at the Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.  She homesteads with her family at Still Roving Farm in Unity.

Additionally, the board currently has six other members who bring decades of experience in Special Education, energy efficient school facilities design, expeditionary learning, and educational leadership. Their full bios, resumes and disclosure forms can be found in Attachment 13.

5. **Background Certification**

An initial background certification check has been initiated through TransUnion for all ten board members and the school leader.  See Attachment 14.

6. **Selection**

Board members have been and will be selected based on the need for a well-balanced skill set, and their ability to fulfill board obligations.  The Center seeks board members who demonstrate at least two of the following three characteristics:

**Work**: time and energy to further the interests of the school

**Wealth**: access to appropriate funds to ensure the school’s financial stability

**Wisdom**: intelligence and experience as visionary leaders to guide strategic

planning.

A current board member must recommend a prospective member to the executive committee for consideration. The board will review the prospective member’s resume, and vote to approve or deny membership. The whole board meets on a monthly basis. There is an executive committee, facilities committee, marketing and outreach committee, and a charter application committee. The board plans to form finance, dispute resolution, and school development committees.

7. **Capacity**

The governing board plans to increase its capacity by seeking additional members with expertise in finance, law and development, and by requiring board members to increase their own capacity through training and development. The board will add a finance committee, a school development committee (replacing the application writing committee), and a dispute resolution committee. Members will be recruited from a growing list of professionals recommended by current board, start-up team members, and key stakeholders. Each new board member will receive a digital copy of the Center’s updated contact information for current board members, minutes from past meetings, and the complete charter application (including by-laws).  Board members will be asked to complete ongoing training:

1. **Timetable**:

Month 1 - complete orientation

Month 6 - complete a course in Cultural Competence

Month 12 - attend at least one training workshop sponsored by the Maine School Management Association (MSMA), Starboard Leadership Consulting in Bangor or a related organization

1. **Topics to be addressed**:

Cultural competence

Charter school laws and regulations

Improving student achievement

School finance

Community relations

School operations

Effective governance

1. Participation requirements: all board members will be required to participate in at least one training workshop in Cultural Competence, and one general training workshop
2. Cultural Competence: all board members will be required to attend at least one workshop in Cultural Competency. Examples of organizations who offer training are EqualityMaine, the Maine Behavioral Health Workforce Development Collaborative, and the Maine Environmental Education Association.

8.  **Transition to Formal Board**

**N/A**: The current applicant team *does* include the formal school governing board.  The board of directors has been formally meeting every month to found a charter school since September 2018, and informally since February 2018.

9. **Existing Nonprofits**

**N/A**: This application is being submitted by the Ecology Learning Center nonprofit, founded with the core mission to operate a charter school.

10.  **Ethics**

The board desires to operate in the most ethical and conscientious manner possible. To that end, the board has adopted a Code of Ethics (see Attachment 15a) and a Conflict of Interest Policy (see Attachment 15b).

11.  **Existing Relationships / Conflicts**

There are no relationships that pose conflicts if the application is approved.