the Amazon Conservation Team

30 years

Strategic Plan

2026-2030

The Amazon Conservation Team

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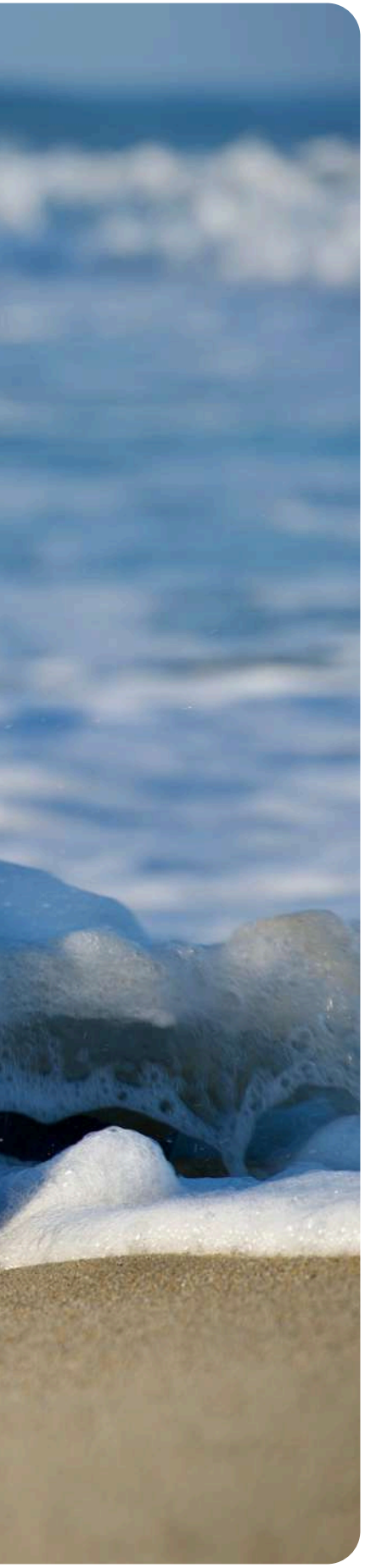

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Foreword

One Story, Many Pathways

This strategic plan tells the story of a shift: from individually focused programs to shared strategies; from acting in isolation to weaving alliances across scales.

The Amazon Conservation Team (ACT) will deliver tangible results: stronger rights, healthier ecosystems, resilient livelihoods, and revitalized cultures. But beyond that, it will help redefine what conservation means: community-led, culturally grounded, woven together with civil society organizations, and articulated with governments, academia, and global allies.

By 2030, ACT's collective work will demonstrate that when Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant peoples, and local communities take the lead, together with the broader networks of partners, conservation is enduring.

Our Moment of Evolution

The territories where ACT works are at a turning point. From the Amazon and the Andes to the Caribbean, the Pacific, the Gran Chaco, and Mesoamerica's coastal and marine systems, ecosystems and cultures face accelerating pressures: deforestation, extractive frontiers, climate disruption, digital exclusion, and weakening governance. Equally urgent is the regression of hard-won rights—territorial, cultural, and democratic—that threatens the integrity of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities.

At the same time, never has there been such global recognition that Indigenous leadership and community stewardship are essential to solutions.

ACT enters 2026 ready to meet this moment. Rooted in 30 years of partnership with local communities, ACT brings a track record of trust, innovation, and measurable impact. Our next five years will be defined by scaling rights-based conservation across interconnected biomes, defending and expanding collective rights, strengthening dignified livelihoods on land and sea, revitalizing governance and culture, and integrating new tools—technological, intercultural[1], and managerial—as we always have: in service of communities and territories.

Refining ACT's Growth Language: "Rooting and Consolidation"

Rather than pursuing growth through expansion, ACT's next phase emphasizes rooting and consolidation, deepening presence, relationships, and capacity within the ecosystems and territories where it already works.

Growth for ACT means greater coherence, trust, and integration, not just scale. It is about rooting deeper, not spreading thinner.

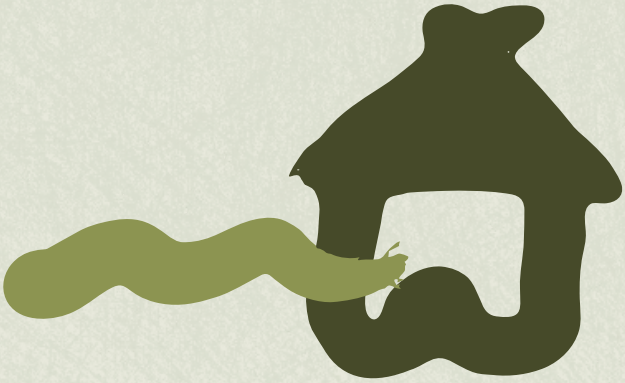
This approach values strengthening local partnerships, institutional resilience, and biocultural[2] integrity over geographic proliferation. ACT's goal is to consolidate a durable, interconnected network capable of sustaining collective impact across regions.

A Note on Ancestral Knowledge: Listening Before Naming

This strategic plan does not aim to translate ancestral knowledge into technical language. Its purpose is both simpler and more demanding: to listen before naming.

The knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant communities, and local communities are not mere heritage to be preserved. They represent comprehensive frameworks, within which tools and words, science and spirituality, technique and philosophy converge to safeguard what is visible and invisible: forests, water, bodies, memory, and spirit.

Addressing these cultural systems requires acknowledging that any attempt to translate them risks diminishing their essence. Therefore, rather than speaking about them, this document seeks to engage in dialogue with them. The strategic plan is grounded in this ethic, as an act of reciprocity among diverse forms of intelligence, committed to sustaining life in all its dimensions.



[1] Taking place between cultures, or derived from different cultures. Here, the focus is on the integration of disparate cultural practices to improve outcomes.

[2] At the most basic level, “biocultural” refers to the interactions between humans and their environment. In ACT’s context, it more specifically refers to simultaneous conservation of ecosystems and cultural lifeways, both for their intrinsic value and because of an understanding of their mutually supporting nature in the case of Indigenous peoples and other cultures with longstanding close ties to their territory.

Our Organization

Our Mission

The Amazon Conservation Team partners with indigenous and other local communities to protect tropical forests and strengthen traditional culture.

For 30 years, ACT has partnered with local communities to protect interconnected ecosystems, strengthen cultures and governance, and co-create dignified livelihoods, integrating traditional knowledge and new tools in defense of life and territory.

Our Values

Autonomy and Leadership

Communities define and defend their futures.

Biocultural Integrity

Conservation sustains both ecosystems and cultural lifeways.

Collective Rights and Justice

Protecting territories and cultures requires advancing and defending rights without regression.

Long-term Trust

Relationships built over decades are the foundation of durable impact.

Innovation Rooted in Ancestral Wisdom

New ideas gain strength when they draw on traditional knowledge.

Intergenerational Stewardship

Youth and elders share responsibility for continuity and care.

Transparency and Accountability

Integrity guides our work at every level.

Where We Work

ACT's work extends across interconnected biocultural systems rather than political borders. Our presence is rooted in South America and Mesoamerica. We operate directly in Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, Costa Rica, Panama, and Mexico, supporting Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant peoples, and local communities to safeguard their territories. Through regional[3] collaboration and cross-border initiatives, our reach also extends to Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

This geographic scope connects the Amazon, the Andes, the Gran Chaco, the Caribbean, the Orinoco, the Pacific, and Mesoamerican coastal and marine systems. By working across these interlinked biomes, ACT contributes to continental-scale conservation while strengthening the cultural and political continuity of the peoples who sustain them.

[3] Refers to programs or operational structures that span multiple countries within ACT's scope. Regional efforts adapt ACT's strategies to local contexts while maintaining alignment with organizational priorities.

Our Strategic Pillars

30 years ago, ACT was founded on the concept that the knowledge and wisdom of indigenous and local peoples of the Amazon are key to saving the Amazon rainforest. As a result, our work has since been guided by our local partners. So much has changed over the last three decades. However, one thing remains the same: our belief that all conservation work must prioritize the rights and well-being of the peoples and territories of the Amazon, and of the interconnected biocultural systems across Latin America that sustain life beyond it.

Our Vision and Theory of Change[4]

Biocultural territories from the Amazon and the Andes to Mesoamerica and the Caribbean are thriving, safeguarded by Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities living in balance with their lands and waters, and exercising their collective rights for future generations.

To bring our vision into reality, we apply a theory of change (TOC) that has achieved demonstrable successes across the Amazon. It is briefly summarized as follows:

"When our partner communities have (1) effective control and environmental stewardship over their territories, backed by sound local, national and regional policies geared towards the protection of territories and biodiversity, (2) essential resources met and sustainable economies, (3) strong governance systems to exercise their rights and self-determination, and (4) living cultural practices and knowledge, including strong traditional healthcare systems, THEN the forest and coastal ecosystems will be healthy and flourish, with communities and ecosystems mutually supporting and protecting each other."

ACT's theory of change is based on a fundamental principle: humans and nature are inseparable. The well-being of Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant peoples, and local communities is mutually sustained with the health of forests. There can be no conservation without communities thriving, and no thriving communities without living territories.

We execute our TOC through initiatives guided by three mutually dependent strategies: Territory and Biodiversity, Livelihoods, and Governance and Culture, which emerge from this understanding. These strategies are not parallel paths or isolated compartments; rather, they are integrated within a unified framework for action. The porous boundaries between strategies reflect the recognition that in biocultural territories—where ecological, social, and spiritual dimensions are interconnected—solutions require multidimensional approaches. Protecting a forest also means caring for the water and soil that nourish communities, the language through which knowledge is transmitted, and the practices that sustain collective life. Likewise, the well-being of peoples and communities depends on the vitality of their ecosystems: when a territory loses its balance, not only is biodiversity degraded, but so are the social and cultural networks that keep it alive.

Territory and Biodiversity

Purpose: Ensure the protection, stewardship, and restoration of priority ecosystems (both ecologically and culturally significant) and resources by local peoples, to ensure the long-term health of their territory.

Our territory and biodiversity initiatives respond to the following objectives:

- **Territorial Rights:** Advancing collective land rights by facilitating the designation, expansion, and acquisition (for conservation and recognition of collective territorial rights) of protected lands

- **Territorial Management:** Supporting local communities in developing and implementing culturally appropriate sustainable land-use and environmental management plans, territorial zoning, and land-use protocols

- **Sustainable Monitoring:** Fostering community-led ecological monitoring and territorial vigilance systems, including geospatial mapping, alert systems, and early warning platforms

- **Ecosystem Restoration:** Promoting the development of community-led reforestation and regeneration of damaged ecosystems to increase biodiversity and forest cover

[4] A framework that outlines how and why a desired change is expected to occur in a specific context, linking activities to outcomes and impacts.

Livelihoods & Community Well-Being

Purpose: Ensure collective access to necessary resources and services and promote sustainable local economies and income-generation systems, to support physical well-being and permanence of the local communities in their territories.

Our livelihoods initiatives contribute to the following:

- **Climate Resilient Food Systems**: Fostering community-led food systems initiatives aligned with sustainable and environmentally friendly production or harvesting models

- **Community Infrastructure:** Ensuring access to basic services and culturally appropriate infrastructure, including clean energy, water to support resilience and autonomy

- **Healthcare:** Advancing intercultural health initiatives, integrating Western and traditional medicine

- **Local Economies:** Implementing sustainable and environmentally friendly local economies and income-generation systems

Governance & Culture

Purpose: Increase the self-determination of our partner communities to best govern themselves and their territory, exercise their rights, and support their living cultural heritage, practices, and knowledge.

Our governance initiatives respond to the following objectives:

- **Local Leadership:** Improving the strength and effectiveness of community self-governance by training and mentoring local and Indigenous organizations, youth and elders in governance, negotiation, and administrative capacity; and by promoting the role of women as key leaders, knowledge holders, and intergenerational bridge-builders in governance, cultural revitalization, and territorial stewardship

- **Cultural Strengthening:** Preserving and revitalizing oral histories, traditional medicinal knowledge / healthcare systems, and ancestral management knowledge and practices through cultural transmission projects, the participatory development of community Life Plans; and improving access to intercultural education and ethno-education

- **Advocacy and Institutional Support:** Strengthening community members' voice and influence in multilevel governance spaces, including regional, national, and international policy forums (e.g., COP, GTI-PIACI) while promoting respect for and the expansion of the rights of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities; providing capacity building and technical support to relevant government agencies, the private sector, and other external actors

Organizational Capacity and Growth

While not part of ACT's Theory of Change, the inclusion of Organizational Capacity and Growth as a fourth strategy reflects a critical evolution in ACT's approach. As ACT has grown in scale, complexity, and geographic reach, it has become clear that the success of our core strategies depends on the strength and resilience of the organization itself.

→ How We Execute Our Theory of Change Strategies

We ask our partners what they need, what they want, and what they envision for their future. Together, we next identify the priorities for their territories and communities, and the tools and conditions that they need to support and safeguard them. We in turn co-create initiatives that lead us toward our shared goals. All community members are included in these processes: men and women, youth and elders. We engage communities both the village level and through their regional and national representative bodies. We also work with the government at all levels, national parks, academia, and other allied organizations. In this way, we build layers of support that strengthen community-led initiatives through direct action, as well as supportive policies and regulations.

Strategic Shifts for Impact

ACT's strategic approach is both integrative and adaptive, anchored in a unified vision while remaining responsive to the diverse realities across countries. This balance ensures that strategies are aligned with the organization overarching goals and deeply reflective of each region's ecological, cultural, and political context. Our strategic plan fosters agility and relevance on the ground, strengthening ACT's collective impact through locally informed and context-sensitive pathways.

Territory and Biodiversity

ACT will accompany [5] and assist Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant peoples, and local communities in defending and expanding territorial rights, revitalizing governance systems, and restoring balance where ecosystems have been damaged. Local governance will employ both ancestral knowledge and contemporary tools, helping to ensure that decisions about care and protection remain in the hands of the communities themselves.

By 2030, more than 27 million hectares will be protected or under improved governance across interconnected systems:

- Within the Caquetá and Putumayo river basins, ACT will strengthen biocultural corridors and watershed governance, linking territories inside Colombia with Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil.
- In the Guiana Shield, Indigenous and Maroon communities will extend governance across 30 million hectares, while advancing long-overdue recognition of collective rights in Suriname and Guyana.
- Across Mesoamerican coasts, ACT will strengthen community-led protection of coastal and marine ecosystems through sea turtle conservation, mangrove restoration, and the recognition of customary marine tenure systems—combining ancestral knowledge and new technologies to advance biocultural governance models that connect coastal Indigenous peoples from Mexico to Colombia and the Guianas, setting new precedents for Indigenous-led ocean stewardship.

Why it matters

Protecting territories is inseparable from protecting rights. From the Amazon and the Gran Chaco to the Guiana Shield and the Mesoamerican coasts, ACT works as one organization alongside Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities to sustain continuous biocultural corridors across borders and watersheds. This unity resists fragmentation of ecosystems and of cultures and affirms that conservation endures only with strong governance and secure rights.

[5] Here, “accompany” takes the Latin American sense of providing support as requested while also offering recommendations as needed. Generally, this entails ACT having an ongoing in-person presence in the communities, or at least availability as needed.

Livelihoods & Community Well-Being

Sustaining life with dignity, resilience, and culture.

At ACT, livelihoods are the essential threads that sustain life across territories. These threads include access to food and water, systems of care and health, vibrant local economies, shared knowledge and skills, mobility, and reciprocal networks. Together with Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities, we will continue to weave these elements into systems that are climate-resilient, culturally grounded, and economically viable.

This means reinforcing food sovereignty[6] and agrobiodiversity, expanding intercultural health systems, and consolidating local markets that allow communities to generate dignified income while maintaining cultural practices. It also requires investing in culturally appropriate infrastructure and equipment: water and energy systems, community-managed health posts, boats and radios for mobility, schools rooted in local culture, seed banks, and spaces for cultural and ceremonial life.

By 2030, more than 17,000 people across South and Central America will strengthen their well-being and resilience. Families will sustain food and health systems that are aligned with community culture, women and youth will be leaders in community enterprises, and territories will have the material and cultural conditions to withstand climate disruption and secure their futures.

Why it matters

Livelihoods are where culture, rights, and ecosystems converge. By supporting food, health, economies, and infrastructure that are culturally grounded, ACT helps to ensure that adaptation to climate change is not imposed from outside but built from within territories. This is how conservation becomes daily life, and how daily life safeguards conservation.

[6] The right of people to define their own food systems, which includes the production, distribution, and consumption of food.

Governance & Culture

Strong governance, living cultures, collective futures.

Self-determination and cultural continuity are foundations of biocultural conservation, but they cannot stand alone. The challenge is enormous and requires building and coordinating networks: Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities in alliance with governments, civil society, academia, and other key stakeholders. ACT supports these processes by strengthening self-governance, advancing intercultural education, and revitalizing cultures and languages.

This also includes the recognition and strengthening of traditional health systems as an essential part of territorial governance and the health of peoples. Caring for the body, the spirit, and the territory is inseparable from and forms a pillar of cultural continuity.

By 2030, at least 75 communities, representing over 70 living languages across South America and Mesoamerica, will have reinforced their self-determination and governance systems. Community organizations will directly manage resources; cultural and linguistic revitalization will sustain identity and memory; regional networks will connect communities and authorities across borders; and the voices of youth will be active in decision-making, education, and territorial care.

Why it matters

Governance and culture are not side elements of conservation—they are central to its success. Without living languages, the transmission of knowledge across generations, and the healing practices of traditional medicine, the continuity of care for ecosystems cannot be sustained. And without strong, inclusive alliances—among communities, governments, and civil society—we cannot build the scale needed to address the climate and human rights crises. Strengthening governance and cultural practices also promotes environmental and linguistic justice, safeguarding territories and languages that are under threat from extraction and erasure. ACT supports this diverse and dynamic landscape, protects territories, and shapes collective futures.

[6] The right of people to define their own food systems, which includes the production, distribution, and consumption of food.

Our Impact Through Our Signature Programs

ACT's Signature Programs are crosscutting, strategic priorities that bundle related work under a unifying theme to holistically integrate all three strategies and maximize ACT's impact.

Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact (PIACI)

In the Amazon and the Gran Chaco, ACT and Indigenous partners will safeguard around 18 million hectares of territories for Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact (PIACI), while advancing a regional agenda through the International Working Group for PIACI (GTI-PIACI), supporting 21 Indigenous and allied organizations in Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, and Paraguay.

One Health: Communities & Forests

ACT will strengthen intercultural health systems in partnership with 19 communities and train more than 400 local health promoters across the Amazon.

Rights-Based Conservation

ACT will strengthen territorial rights and legal protections for more than 7 million hectares of prioritized territories in Brazil, Colombia and Peru, while advancing national collective land rights legislation in Suriname.

Organizational Capacity and Growth

One ACT: strong, coherent, and prepared for the future.

To walk alongside communities, ACT itself must be strong, agile, and connected. Over the next five years we will deepen internal coherence and invest in systems, leadership evolution, and organizational sustainability, ensuring that our presence in territories can endure for decades.

- **Financing and dynamism:** By 2030, ACT will reach $25 million in annual revenue, closing the unrestricted funding gap and growing program funding by $2–3 million annually. Unrestricted resources, guided by principles of coherence and justice, will not remain idle: they will be executed with transparency and directed with maximum levels of direct investment toward the urgent levers of change needed in territories today.

- **Positioning and equity:** In a philanthropic landscape shifting toward direct Indigenous and Afro-descendant funding, ACT will provide fiscal sponsorship to at least five local organizations, positioning ACT as a technical and financial ally to the communities and ensuring that frontline groups are equipped to effectively manage direct funding.

- **Communication and influence:** Communication will go beyond branding: it will seek to deeply inform. ACT will reach broader publics, including children and youth, not to convince, but to connect with data and relevant information communicated from territories in diverse ways. This approach can draw in those who may not yet see caring for the earth as urgent, helping to form a critical mass that sustains cultural, political, and economic change.

- **Governance and leadership:** A Collective Leadership [7] Committee (CLC) will consolidate leadership and coherence across regions, deepening practices of shared decision-making and distributed authority that reflect ACT's "One ACT" ethos. ACT will invest in mentoring, coaching, and cross-office collaboration to reinforce adaptive leadership and operational excellence, while advancing intergenerational succession by cultivating emerging leaders, especially from within local communities, to ensure continuity of values, knowledge, and governance over time.

- **People:** ACT's organizational capacity is defined by its people, culture, and leadership model. Priority will be given to staff well-being, diversity, and growth, with clear rules, gender equity, and recognition of diverse knowledge

[7] Collective leadership is a model of shared management and accountability where authority is distributed, decisions are made collaboratively, and learning is continuous. It balances inclusivity with clarity of responsibility.

and life trajectories. Beyond leadership, the next stage of human resource enhancement will focus on developing horizontal, non-hierarchic relationships across the organization, with reconfigurable teams capable of responding to rapid transformations in context. Cross-learning and professional development will ensure generational continuity and mutual care across the staff.

- **Operations:** ACT will strengthen financial planning and compliance, foster collaboration through integrated systems, and standardize IT infrastructure.

By 2030, ACT will be financially resilient, globally visible, and organizationally coherent: one organization with integrity and with a team sustained over time.

Why it matters

Strengthening ACT is not about accumulating resources: it is about putting them in motion with coherence and fairness. An ACT that invests with excellence, communicates from territories, and governs through horizontal, adaptive networks is better prepared to face the challenges of our time, embracing diversity, and sustaining the trust that gives meaning to our work.

Our 2030 Collective Impact

27M+ hectares

of forests, rivers, and coasts protected or better managed

200K+ people

benefiting from stronger, healthier, and protected territories

75+ communities

with stronger governance and self-determination, and revitalized cultures

Territories: ACT's work will directly strengthen at least 27 million hectares of forests, rivers, coasts, and seas, with an indirect influence on more than 40 million hectares across South America through territorial recognition, biocultural corridors, PIACI protection, and policy impact.

People: More than 200,000 people will benefit including families in legalized collective territories, communities with access to intercultural health services, households benefiting from clean water and renewable energy, and participants in community markets and enterprises.

Cultures and Peoples: ACT will accompany and support at least 75 communities across more than 70 living languages, strengthening self-determination, cultural revitalization, and intergenerational stewardship.

Fundraising Strategy

ACT's development strategy responds to an urgent moment. Ecosystems and cultures across the Amazon, Andes, Caribbean, Pacific, Gran Chaco, and Mesoamerica are approaching ecological tipping points. At the same time, philanthropy is shifting toward Indigenous leadership, equity, and measurable impact. This creates both opportunity and pressure for ACT to evolve how it funds and sustains its work.

To meet this moment, ACT will focus on four core approaches:

Strengthen core fundraising capacity and systems

ACT will invest in its development, communications, finance, and PMEL teams to support disciplined, proactive fundraising. Shared tools, clear processes, and aligned planning across offices will improve prospecting, proposal development, reporting, and donor stewardship, enabling ACT to scale responsibly while maintaining accountability.

Rebalance and grow unrestricted revenue

ACT will expand its major gifts and board engagement strategies, prioritize multiyear operating support, and consistently maximize overhead recovery in restricted grants. This approach will reduce reliance on a small number of funders and ensure that core organizational costs are sustainably covered.

Diversify and globalize the donor base

ACT will deepen partnerships in the United States and Europe while expanding engagement with new types of funders, including institutions, corporates, grassroots donors, and unconventional allies in health, food systems, and climate resilience. This diversification will reduce financial risk and unlock new opportunities for program growth.

Position ACT as a technical and financial ally to Indigenous led funding

As more funders support Indigenous organizations directly, ACT will play a complementary role by providing fiscal sponsorship, compliance support, co developed proposals, and financial management where requested. This positions ACT as a trusted bridge between donors and frontline leadership while advancing equity and local control.

By 2030, ACT will reach $25 million in annual revenue, reflecting the planned strategic growth alongside a deliberate focus on long-term organizational sustainability. Revenue growth will be structured to achieve a healthy 70:30 restricted to unrestricted funding balance, and to intentionally build financial reserves that support long-term stability. Progress will be guided by deeper donor engagement, aligned narrative and communications, and a clear focus on long term resilience.

Success will be measured not only in dollars raised, but in stronger partnerships, protected territories, and thriving Indigenous, Afro descendent, and local communities whose leadership sustains ecosystems critical to global climate stability and justice.

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