

DISCOVERY MUSEUM

science. nature. play.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2025–2027



OCTOBER 2024

Museum Questions
Change starts with asking good questions

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DISCOVERY MUSEUM
Strategic Plan 2025-2027

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Bottom row, left to right: Discovery Museum, Jessica Vultaggio*

Strategic Plan 2025-2027

The Planning Context

Discovery Museum is a remarkable organization. It is a recognized innovator in outdoor play and nature-based learning, and much loved for its 42-year history of fostering family fun and the joy of learning together, nurturing natural curiosity and creativity, and being a fully inclusive place where all kids and families are welcome.

The Discovery Museum was founded in 1982 by a local teacher and naturalist, Don Verger. Don opened the museum in a three-story Victorian house, the Children's Discovery Museum, with the 1987 addition of a second, Science Discovery Museum building. From the beginning, the museum was committed to the low-tech, hands-on, content-rich experiences for which it is still known and recognized. The museum was also an early adopter of a STEM focus and a commitment to using play as a vehicle to build STEM confidence and problem solving abilities, goals which have become more universally adopted in children's museums everywhere.

In 2009, when Neil Gordon stepped into the position of CEO, the museum began a period of growth, repair, restoration, and stability. Under Neil's tenure, the museum grew its space, programming, visitorship, and commitment to sustainability and Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI). Discovery Woods, an inclusive nature playscape with, as its centerpiece, a 550-square-foot, physically accessible treehouse, opened in 2016. In 2018, Discovery Museum opened a new 16,000 square foot, fully accessible building housing its exhibits and programs. In 2021 the museum created a plan for environmental sustainability, followed quickly by the installation of solar panels which fully power the museum and support solar energy distribution to community partners. The museum launched a DEAI framework in 2022. In 2024, its impact on children, families, and its communities was recognized with the nation's highest honor for museums, the Institute of Museum and Library Services National Medal for Museum Service.

The visitor experience at Discovery Museum is radically different in 2024 than in 2009, when this era of growth began. Visitors today park in a lot shaded by solar panels. They enter a fully-accessible building filled with exhibits, some of which are brand new, and some of which parents remember enjoying when they were children. The museum's inclusive approach to programming and pricing has earned a loyal following from ability-diverse families and those who benefit from low- or no-cost visitation. Weekend, school vacation, and summertime visitors might find it very crowded; the museum has had nearly 6 million visitors since it opened, and now serves about 200,000 visitors each year. The 31-year-old Traveling Science Workshops school outreach program now reaches 2,800 classrooms and more than 60,000 schoolchildren a year. And the 2020 Covid pandemic barely slowed down this rapid growth. After just a few months of closure, the museum began a progressive rebuilding followed by its largest year of onsite and outreach service ever in 2023.

This era of rapid growth has been good for Discovery Museum and its expansive service region. The museum has served more children, families, and schools than ever before, and is a treasured asset to the community. In our stakeholder interviews and focus groups, we repeatedly heard how much the community values the museum; when asked what the museum could improve, we often heard answers like, “We love it the way it is now,” and, “Stay open and continue to do great work.” One community member told us that the museum, “provides a place that you can be confident that you will be welcome and your uniqueness will be not just accommodated but also VALUED.”

The smooth transition of leadership is a testament to the museum’s stability: In January 2024, after 14 years under the leadership of Neil Gordon, Marie Beam, a 10-year veteran at the museum, was elevated to the role of Chief Executive Officer. A natural and thoughtful transition in Board leadership to new President, Xuan Kong, has been similarly fluid. This time of change has brought an energy and space for fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, grounded in commitment to the essential qualities that both staff and audience cherish about Discovery Museum.

The 2013-2018 Strategic Plan is known, internally, as the “bigger is better” plan: it included a vision for a reimagined campus that included Discovery Woods and the new museum building and an ability to better meet the demands of a growing audience. The 2019-2023 Strategic Plan is the “better is better” plan. This plan included the development of an “ambitious, achievable business plan” that grew earned and contributed revenue, and attendance. It inspired an institution-wide commitment to advocacy on matters of importance to children, families, and the environment, and better collection and presentation of organizational performance data. It also made possible improvements in staff compensation, and the creation of the DEAI and Sustainability plans as underpinnings of all aspects of internal and external work. While all of the quantitative measures of success for the plan were met in 2023, the museum paused in 2024 to complete earlier strategic initiatives already underway, allow for the change in leadership, and thoughtfully consider its next steps.

This new plan is the result of extraordinarily thoughtful conversations around where the museum is, where it might be in another decade, and what it needs right now. These conversations included not only the voices of leadership staff and Board members, but a wide range of stakeholders including staff members at all levels, community members, donors, accessibility advocates, school teachers, and more. We found that community members love the Discovery Museum and want them to “keep doing what they are doing.” Those on the inside of the museum—staff and Board—have ambitious ideas about growth, but also articulated a critical need to better understand current impact, find ways to adjust workload, upgrade and maintain physical resources, and rethink inclusive support for this work in order to create a space in which new ideas can be strategically chosen and implemented well.

With this in mind, this strategic plan can be seen as the “stronger is better” plan. It envisions a near future in which a connected, high-performing, and diverse team operating in a well-cared for, supportive environment, has a deep understanding of the museum’s impact and is able to focus efforts accordingly. It increases energy for off-campus and outreach work, and acknowledges the demands on

the physical campus of a decade-and-a-half of growth in visitation. And it emphasizes a reconsideration of what children and families need most from Discovery Museum now. This assertive strategic plan will strengthen the Museum at its core, with new leadership and a renewed sense of purpose, and position it for its next strategic plan in 2028 that will guide the Museum's work through to its 50th anniversary in 2032.

Strategic Plan 2025-2027

Mission, Vision, Values

MISSION

Sparking joyful discovery through play to instill STEM confidence, deepen relationships with the natural world, and empower children and their caregivers.

VISION

Each child will feel eager and excited to explore their world and be ready to powerfully embrace the challenges and opportunities of the future.

VALUES

COMMUNITY: We believe that community is defined by mutually beneficial connection, and is built and maintained through integrity, transparency, intentionality, and authenticity.

Discovery Museum is part of a rich and vibrant ecosystem of people and partners with common goals for the well-being of children and families. We are accountable to those shared community goals and take our responsibility to this work seriously.

CAREGIVERS: We believe that healthy happy caregivers raise healthy happy children, and that we are uniquely positioned to serve and support the adults in our community as we do their children.

Better centering the mental health and well-being of parents and caregivers at a time when the need is acute nationally reinforces our core commitment to the strength and success of families.

ACCESS: We believe that everyone should have equal access to engage in play, regardless of their background and abilities.

Presenting fun, enriching experiences in ways that override inequity benefits everyone and supports our founding belief that play is an essential right of childhood and the best tool for learning.

ENDURING SKILLS: We believe in the power of creativity, curiosity, confidence, and adaptability, and work to foster these essential skills in our own team and those we serve.

Our grounding in Science, Nature, and Play is the context through which we nurture children's natural and enduring habits of mind—pathways to lifetime learning both within and outside our key content areas.

STEWARDSHIP: We believe in the importance of empowering children to be good citizens and stewards of the natural world and their communities.

Today's children face a responsibility to conceive and advance ideas that repair systemic environmental and social injustices; Discovery Museum believes children can and will solve important problems and improve our world.

Strategic Plan 2025-2027
Strategic Themes and Goals

Theme #1: DEEPEN, UNDERSTAND, AND COMMUNICATE MEANINGFUL IMPACT

After a period of great growth, we need to ensure we are making a real difference for those we serve.

- Define impact that we can effectively deliver by finding work that falls at the intersection of our expertise and identified needs; identify and prioritize areas of impact that align with existing resources and drive revenue
- Enhance the highest-impact parts of our work and step away from less impactful work
- Create a comprehensive communication and marketing strategy that broadcasts our strategy, impact, and strength
- Generate an ongoing and iterative plan to better evaluate, reflect, and deepen impact

The Outcome: We understand our impact more deeply and communicate it more effectively; we focus our efforts and talents where we are best positioned to serve meaningfully and sustainably.

Theme #2: EXPAND OUTREACH

Reaching more children and families means looking outward, to our high-impact work with schools and rich partnerships with community experts.

- Focus community outreach on mutually beneficial partnerships that meet our definition of impact
- Leverage community and school outreach in service to the Museum’s diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion objectives
- Research and assess outreach modes to bring Museum experiences into communities to broaden access and drive revenue
- Experiment with approaches to increasing the number of students reached through Traveling Science Workshops

The Outcome: Coordinated, focused outreach efforts that extend our service, generate revenue for the future, and acknowledge the barriers that keep children from Discovery Museum experiences.

Theme #3: INVEST IN OUR TEAM

Our Discovery Museum team is our greatest asset, and in order to take on ambitious goals, we must invest in an equitable, fair, satisfying, and inspiring working environment—and bring our organizational values to the forefront for our staff and volunteers as we do for all we serve.

- Define and implement an equitable compensation and benefits strategy
- Nourish, celebrate, and enhance all the diversity of our workforce
- Build a culture of organizational and individual continuous and collaborative learning
- Invest in the tools staff need to be efficient, productive, collaborative, and connected
- Invest in the innovation and creativity of our team

The Outcome: A connected, high-performing, and diverse team, empowered by a unified vision for the future and ready to make it happen.

Theme #4: PRESERVE AND IMPROVE OUR CAMPUS

Great investment in the development of our Acton, Massachusetts, campus has supported the last ten years of Discovery Museum growth; now, we must consider how best to preserve that investment and address remaining needs in our physical plant, while maintaining our commitment to development that supports environmental sustainability and models our values.

- Plan and prepare to create an Administration Building that is accessible, functional, and scaled to the needs of our staff
- Revitalize Discovery Woods as a beautiful, whimsical, and accessible space for outdoor education, play, and immersion in nature
- Develop an exhibit repair, rebuilding, and replacement plan
- Experiment with ways to leverage the Museum campus more fully in support of our impact goals and for revenue generation

The Outcome: A sustainable, stable capital infrastructure that supports and enhances our work, and a plan to steward and maintain it.

Strategic Plan 2025-2027 Planning Process Overview

With work on Discovery Museum’s 2019-2024 Strategic Plan coming to a successful close, museum leadership initiated a new strategic planning process in Winter 2024, seeking the support of an outside consultant to facilitate the eight-month-long undertaking. We—Rebecca Shulman of Museum Questions Consulting and Elisabeth Nevins of Seed Education Consulting—were selected for this role through a comprehensive RFP and vetting process led by museum Board and staff.

The Discovery Museum Board of Directors and senior staff adopted the following statements for the strategic planning process:

Scope of Work: The Discovery Museum Board and leadership seeks an inclusive and generative process that explores the very best use of the Museum's expertise, assets, and influence in service to children and families. This process should leverage our unique advantages, differentiated offerings, and position of strength among peer museums, and call in voices old and new from across our audience segments, Board, staff, donors, partners, and friends in pursuit of identifying opportunities to strengthen and deepen our impact.

Goal: A mission, vision, values, and strategic goals for Discovery Museum that anticipate the changing landscape for museums and other cultural institutions; recognize the forces affecting the daily lives and well-being of children and families; and honor the strength and diversity of the communities we strive to serve.

PHASE ONE: Getting to know you

The inclusive and generative planning process began in April 2024. Discovery Museum CEO Marie Beam and Director of Special Projects Karen Kerns served as the internal project leads, working closely with us and meeting on a weekly basis throughout the planning process. Early work focused on sharing key documents and information about Discovery Museum with us to ground planning in the museum’s current operational reality. Simultaneously, our core team identified an inclusive and representative group of Board and staff members to serve on the Strategic Planning Team (SPT):

Marie Beam, Chief Executive Officer
Tobey Fossey, Director of Development
James Grosjean, Explorer
Jill Foster, Director of School and Group Programs
Xuan Kong, Board of Directors President
Samira Lawande, Board of Directors
Andrew Magee, Board of Directors
Brindha Muniappan, Senior Director of the Museum Experience
Kellie Roche, Programs Educator
Umair Zia, Board of Directors

This group represented the perspectives and interests of the Board and staff in the planning process by:

- supporting the development of the museum’s new Mission, Vision, and Values statements;
- serving as a sounding board throughout the stakeholder engagement work we facilitated; and
- helping to focus and refine the strategic priorities that surfaced through the planning process into actionable goals that will advance the mission-guided work of the museum in the years ahead.

Strategic Planning Team activities included:

Friday May 3	SPT launch meeting, in-person <i>Team building; visioning activity; strengths and weaknesses activity; discussion of measures of success</i>
Thursday, May 23	SPT meeting, virtual <i>Planning process timeline; review insights from May 3-4 planning launch activities; begin mission/vision/values work</i>
Monday, June 24	SPT meeting, virtual <i>Continue mission/vision/values work; prepare for external stakeholder engagement work (focus groups, surveys)</i>
Monday, August 5	SPT meeting, virtual <i>Review focus group findings; discuss preliminary strategic themes</i>
mid/late-August	SPT asynchronous work <i>Review of survey findings; comment on revised strategic themes; share final thoughts on mission/vision/values statements</i>
Saturday, September 14	SPT planning retreat, in-person <i>Brainstorm and discussion of strategic themes; small group goal setting for themes; full group sharing and discussion</i>
late-September	SPT asynchronous work <i>Review and comment on final draft of strategic themes and goals</i>

PHASE TWO: Digging in

In order to include the perspectives and insights of a wide variety of Discovery Museum stakeholders in the strategic planning process, we worked closely with Marie, Karen, and the SPT during the late spring and summer 2024 to develop and facilitate an engagement process that would help inform the strategic issues the plan would focus on. This work included consultation with internal stakeholders—staff, Board, and former Board members—and with external stakeholders—members and visitors of all ages, educators, accessibility advocates, community and corporate partners, and other regional

non-profit organizations. Input was solicited using a variety of tools including focus groups, interviews, web-based surveys, and in-gallery activities.

Stakeholder engagement activities included:

With internal stakeholders

Wednesday, April 24	All-staff meeting, virtual
Friday, May 3	Staff drop-in conversations, in-person
Saturday, May 4	Board retreat workshop, in-person
Monday, July 8	Former Board member focus group, virtual
Tuesday, July 16	Board and Committee member focus group, virtual
Wednesday, July 24	Staff focus group, virtual
Tuesday, October 15	Board final Strategic Plan drop-in Q&A, virtual

Additionally, an online form and email address were provided for staff to submit input at any point during the planning process.

With external stakeholders

Focus groups

Monday, July 8	Local community organizations focus group, virtual
Wednesday, July 10	Regional non-profit leaders focus group, virtual
Wednesday, July 10	Members and visitors focus group, virtual
Friday, July 12	Accessibility advocates and partners focus group, virtual
Monday, July 15	Community partners focus group, virtual
Tuesday, July 16	Corporate partners focus group, virtual
Wednesday, July 17	Local educators focus group, virtual

Those invited to participate in a focus group (both internal and external) who were unable to attend were given the opportunity to share their responses to the questions the group discussed using an online form that was emailed to them.

Surveys

Discovery Museum Visitor Survey

Two additional questions specific to the strategic planning process were included in the July 1 and July 16 emailing of the standard survey sent to the Discovery Museum visitors in the weeks after their visit.

Strategic Planning Survey

This survey was developed specifically to inform the strategic planning process. The 21-question web-based survey was shared with the museum’s full email list of 81,134 addresses on Monday, July 29 and stayed open until Monday, August 12. The survey was offered in multiple languages.

Those who completed the survey could opt into a drawing for one of two \$50 gift cards. Otherwise the survey responses were anonymized.

The first section of the survey gathered basic audience information; the second section of the survey focused on understanding why people visit Discovery Museum, and what benefits they feel it confers; and the third section of the survey focused on educational resources, other than Discovery Museum, in the community.

505 stakeholders responded, with 82% completing the full survey.

In-Gallery Activities

In an effort to generate input from the young people who visit the museum, facilitated activities with prompts to respond to were offered in the galleries on select occasions.

Tuesday, August 6	Teen STEM Night
First week of August	Youth Gallery Drawing Activity

Interviews

A limited number of interviews were conducted with select stakeholders who Discovery Museum leaders wanted to engage in the process but who couldn't attend a focus group.

Wednesday, July 17	Carl Kilmer, active donor and former Board member
Friday, July 26	Bill Ryan and Lee Stuntz, former education leaders and Board Presidents

Stakeholder input was collected through these various means through July and early August 2024.

While we facilitated the stakeholder engagement work, with Karen's truly essential planning support, the full SPT focused their efforts on updating Discovery Museum's mission, vision, and values statements. This involved reviewing the purpose and use of mission, vision, and values statements, revisiting the existing statements, and discussing how they might evolve to better reflect the work and aspirations of Discovery Museum.

Working closely with Marie, we used this input to draft revised statements which the SPT then reviewed and commented on. The statements went through a series of revisions and review throughout the summer, with Marie taking the lead in crafting their language, before the new mission, vision, and values statements were presented to the SPT at the September 14 planning retreat.

In early August, we presented the SPT with findings from the stakeholder input collected to date, most notably the ten focus groups that had been conducted. They highlighted key issues that had come to the forefront through these conversations and shared proposed themes—broad areas in which the museum would commit to strategic change—that would anchor the new strategic plan.

The Strategic Planning survey closed in mid-August having collected feedback from over 500 external stakeholders. Findings from this data set were shared with the SPT later in August who then submitted their thoughts to us via email. After discussion with Marie and consideration of input from the SPT, the themes were revised to reflect new insights in preparation for the September strategic planning retreat. These are the themes that serve as the heart of this strategic plan.

PHASE THREE: Focus & refine

During an intensive, day-long planning retreat on September 14, the SPT collaborated to develop goals for each of the four themes—specific things Discovery Museum would commit to accomplish. The group first discussed and clarified the intent of the strategic themes before breaking into small groups to identify the goals that would serve as stepping stones to advancing the museum’s work on each strategic theme over the next three years.

Having engaged in this essential defining and aligning of goals with the themes, we worked with Marie to further refine these ideas. A final draft of the strategic themes and goals was shared with the SPT via email for comment in late September. Minor changes were made before the core elements of the new 2025–27 strategic plan were shared with the full Discovery Museum Board—the new Mission, Vision, and Values statements and the Strategic Themes and Goals. We hosted a virtual, drop-in Q&A session for Board members on Tuesday, October 15 to respond to questions about the process from which the plan resulted.

Additionally, the Discovery Museum leadership team launched their fiscal 2025 budgeting and planning process on Monday, October 7. We worked with the group to begin operationalizing the strategic plan by helping them translate goals into specific action items—precise, measurable, time-based actions that support the achievement of the goals.

Strategic Plan 2025-2027

Appendices

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Strategic Plan Contributors

Board of Directors

We are grateful to all members of the Discovery Museum Board of Directors who shared their input and feedback on key questions and topics throughout the strategic planning process.

Ruth Agbaji
Cheryl Beaudoin
Paula Bentinck-Smith
David Cote
Anthony DiBona
Lisa Giglio
Jeffrey Glidden
Scott Harris
Harry Hollenberg

Henry Houh
Xuan Kong
Samira Lawande
Andrew Magee
J. Kevin Nugent
Sahana Purohit
Margaret A. Ramsey
Shelly Shaw
Umair Zia

Staff & Volunteers

We are grateful to the Discovery Museum staff who participated in the staff focus group on July 24, 2024.

Owen Carter
Kristina Casella
Kiersten Dittrich
Sarah Donovan
Liz Dorsey
Paul Fenton
Jill Foster
Kimsoo Gopnik
Susan Heilman
Bette Hess
Mac Hill
Martha Hull
Jill Jacques

Lindsey Kolenda
Liz Leahey
Cheryl Mamalis
Alisha Mulvaney
Emily Reinl
Heather Rosenzweig
Gigi Row
Wendy Schaad
Mike Sidorov
Robin Sultan
Kathie Watt
Ally Wood
Jennie Yoo

Additionally, we are appreciative of all staff and volunteers who shared their ideas for the future of Discovery Museum in staff meetings and via email to strategicplan@discoveryacton.org.

External Contributors

We are grateful to these individuals who participated in key stakeholder focus groups July 8 – July 17, 2024, or provided their feedback via focus group follow-up surveys.

Local Community Members:

Robert Carter, Acton Memorial Library
Katie Gorczyca, Danny's Place Youth Services
Mark Malcolm, Maynard Library
Katie Neville, Acton Boxborough United Way
Cheryl Serpe, Enterprise Bank, Acton branch

Former Discovery Museum Board Members:

Tom Beaudoin, Board Member 2008-2018
Bob Ferrara, Board Member 2013-2022
Pam Gannon, Board Member 2016-2023
Justin Kliger, Board Member 2017-2023
Bruce Osterling, Board Member 2013-2023
Carolyn Platt, Board Member 1982-1992 and 2014-2019
Anthony Rao, Board Member 2016-2022
Tom Witkin, Board Member 2006-2014

Regional Non-profit Leaders:

Kalyn King, Massachusetts Cultural Council
Jim Klocke, Massachusetts Nonprofit Network
Jay Linnehan, Greater Lowell Community Foundation
Leah Parker-Moldover, MetroWest Nonprofit Network
Sonia Shaw, Sudbury Foundation

Discovery Museum Members and Visitors:

Margot Haas
Leslie and Alex Rikleem
Debasri Roy

Accessibility Advocates, Partners, and User Experts:

Terrell Clark, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program, Boston Children's Hospital
Pamela McKillop, Autism Alliance
Rachel Vega, Museum member and participant of Especially for Me programs
Charlie Washburn, Open Door Arts (retired)

Community Partners:

Ellie DiMauro, Concord Prison Outreach
Jamie Eldridge, Massachusetts State Senator
Kacy Hughes, Countdown to Kindergarten
Kevin Richards, MCI-Concord BRAVE Unit
Sunanda Sahay, local Indian community groups
Ellie Springer, First Connections
Josette Williams, Countdown to Kindergarten

Corporate Partners:

Caitlin Brosnihan, Mathworks
Alison Burns, Enterprise Bank
Christina Dervin, Analog Devices
Brad Schoonmaker, Insulet
Meredith Tierney, Sanofi

Educators:

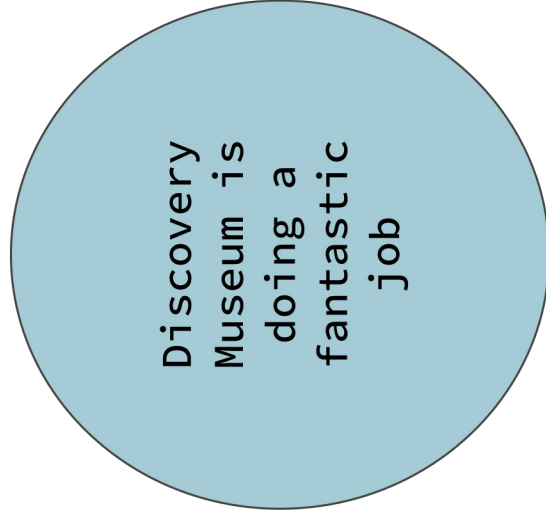
Laura Adams, Teacher, Worcester Public Schools
Sara Boudreau, Science Teacher, Waltham Public Schools
Karen McCarthy, K-5 Science Curriculum Coordinator, Lexington Public Schools
Joanne Mills, 2nd Grade Teacher, Acton-Boxborough Regional School District
Stephanie Jones, 4th Grade Teacher, Lowell Public School District

Discovery Museum Strategic Planning Process											
	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	Notes			
PHASE ONE: Getting to know you											
Document Review											
Internal Stakeholder Engagement								5/3-4			
Identify Emerging Issues											
PHASE TWO: Digging in											
External Stakeholder Engagement											
Surveys											
Refine & finalize lists; develop surveys											
Send out surveys; reminders; review data & make adjustments as needed								Sent out 7/29; closed 8/12			
Focus groups & interviews											
Refine & finalize lists; develop protocol; send invitations											
Conduct focus groups								7/8, 10, 12, 15, 16, 17, 24			
Conduct interviews											
Conduct all staff activity											
Mission/Vision/Values Work											
Environmental Scan/Research											
Identify Evolving Issues											
Meet w/SPT											
Advance M/V/V work; review stakeholder engagement work								6/24			
Report out on initial stakeholder insights; more M/V/V work; planning for the September retreat								8/5			
PHASE THREE: Focus & refine											
Compilation and Review of Data Collected											
SPT Retreat								9/14			
Mission/Vision/Values											
Identify Pillars (3-5) & Define Success											
Refine & Review Plan											
Year One Roadmap											
Meet w/SPT											
Review/finalize plan; draft roadmap								asynchronous			

Focus Groups

Key Findings

BIG IDEAS THAT EMERGED



- “Stay the course” - doing a great job, dig into what you’re already doing
- Internal leadership consistency
- What made them feel like a partner: right amount of engagement/ responsibility, feel like they contribute, are heard and things are well-run
- Feeling really valued as a partner –co-planning from the beginning and focused on meaningful impact.
- Some amenities that should be considered (ie, food, lower sinks)

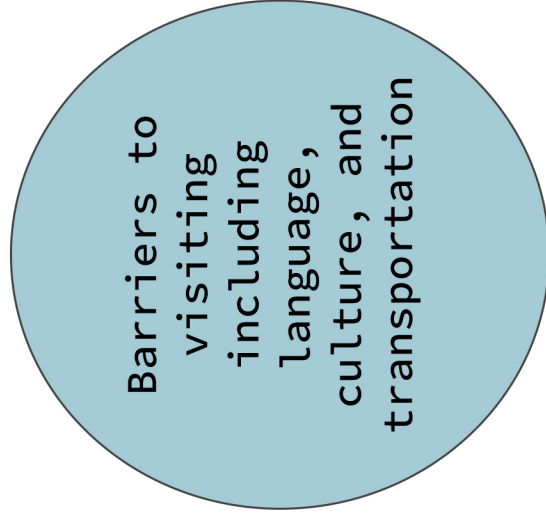
BIG IDEAS THAT EMERGED



Discovery
Museum is a
key provider
of STEM
education,
especially
for schools

- Expansion of TSW
- Professional Development for teachers
- Museum as a hub for connecting with a scientific community
- Schools need advocacy for the importance of both play and STEM
- Teachers need more information about the other things the museum does (marketing / communications)

BIG IDEAS THAT EMERGED



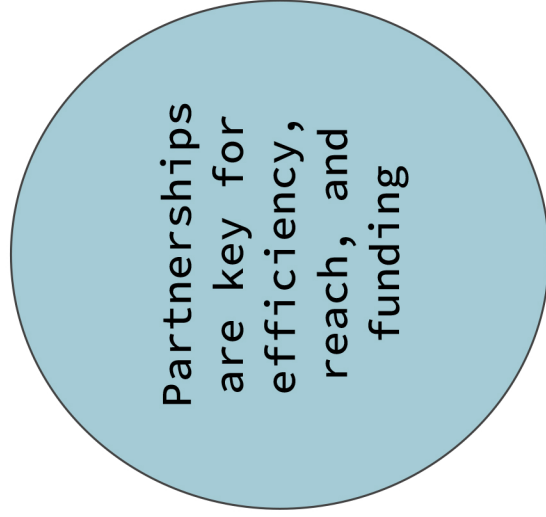
- Growing language diversity
- Recent immigrants/migrants
- Transportation to the museum
- Diversity - empathy/consideration for audiences that staff might have no personal connection to, new museum-goers.
- Facilitating experiences for diverse audiences that build community and understanding.
- How do you bring audiences with special needs from EFM into regular visiting hours?

BIG IDEAS THAT EMERGED



- Technology (kids get too much tech, not enough free time)
- Social - emotional concerns also came up a lot on post-its
- What families need: mental health
- Helping parents think about what is developmentally appropriate learning for young children, as they prepare for school

BIG IDEAS THAT EMERGED



- Partnerships and non-duplication of efforts
- Nonprofit partnerships are key for efficiency and reach

As Discovery Museum considers how it might best serve the community and region, what should we be thinking about?

Asked of 8 of the 10 groups

Many of the answers fell into the following three categories:

- Audience expansion
 - Expand to new or more diverse markets (17); expand up in age (9).
Some concern about crowds in the museum (5).
- Communication
 - Mostly concerns about sharing program / accessibility information (16); some about how to better share impact (3)
 - Note: I would guess that ALL museums would always hear this feedback
- Program growth
 - 50% of this is about TSW expansion

If Discovery Museum could make one thing happen in 5 years, what should it be?

Asked of all 10 groups

Top answers:

- Program growth – biggest sub-category is TSW expansion
- Reaching beyond the museum campus – a lot of interest in satellite museums and traveling experiences
- Infrastructure – building updates or renovations; space; systems; pay

Welcome!

Discovery Museum is in the process of developing a new strategic plan that will inspire and guide our work for the next 3 to 5 years. We have created a survey for museum members, visitors, and caregivers of young children which will help inform our decision making.

We would be very grateful if you would complete our survey which should take about 10 minutes of your time. As a thanks, if you complete the survey by Monday, August 12, 2024 you can opt in to a drawing for one of two \$50 Visa gift cards.

If you are not a museum visitor or caregiver, we still welcome your thoughts about the future of the Museum; you can email us at strategicplan@discoveryacton.org to share your ideas.

About You (7 questions)

1. What is your relationship with the Discovery Museum?

- I have visited 1-2 times, and am not a member.
- I have visited more than 2 times, but am not a member.
- I recently joined as a member (since Summer 2023).
- I am a member, and have been a member for at least a year.
- I have never visited.
- Other (please specify)

2. What is your role as a caregiver?

- Parent of young child(ren)
- Grandparent of young child(ren)
- Non-related caregiver of young child(ren)
- None of the above
- Other (please specify)

3. What are the age(s) of the child(ren) you care for? *(select all that apply)*

- under 1 year old
- 1 year old
- 2 years old
- 3 years old
- 4 years old
- 5 years old
- 6 years old
- 7 years old
- 8 years old
- 9 years old
- 10 years old
- 11 years old
- 12 years old or older

4. What is your zip code?

5. If a language other than English is spoken in your home, please specify.

6. How do you get to Discovery Museum? *(select all that apply)*

- Car
- Public transportation (i.e., commuter rail, regional transportation service)
- Walking or biking
- Ride share (i.e. Uber, Lyft)
- Transportation issues prevent me from visiting
- Other (please specify)

7. What are the major challenges you are facing or anticipating as a parent or caregiver?

(select all that apply)

- Childcare needs
- Quality of school education
- Out-of-school time activities
- High levels of anxiety experienced by child(ren)
- Other mental health issues in child(ren)
- Personal stress of being a parent / caregiver
- Balancing work and family
- Safety
- The impact of societal issues on child(ren)
- Other (please specify)

- None of the above

Discovery Museum (5 questions)

8. In addition to being a fun place, which of the following, if any, are currently a benefit of visiting Discovery Museum? *(select all that apply)*

- Helping my child(ren) gain early exposure to and confidence with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) learning.
- Helping my child(ren) with social and emotional learning such as managing emotions and creating positive relationships with others.
- Helping my child(ren) by fostering a love of the outdoors and/or teaching about environmental sustainability.
- Helping my child(ren) by fostering a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Helping me by supporting parents and caregivers in the work they do caring for children.
- Helping me and my child(ren) by being an accessible, inclusive, and welcoming environment for those with disabilities.
- Other (please specify)

9. Which of the following is most important to you as part of a visit to Discovery Museum? *(select one)*

- Helping my child(ren) gain early exposure to and confidence with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) learning.
- Helping my child(ren) with social and emotional learning such as managing emotions and creating positive relationships with others.
- Helping my child(ren) by fostering a love of the outdoors and/or teaching about environmental sustainability.
- Helping my child(ren) by fostering a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Helping me by supporting parents and caregivers in the work they do caring for children.
- Helping me and my child(ren) by being an accessible, inclusive, and welcoming environment for those with disabilities.
- Other (please specify)

10. Which of the following do you believe is most important for children and families in your region? (select one)

- Helping my child(ren) gain early exposure to and confidence with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) learning.
- Helping my child(ren) with social and emotional learning such as managing emotions and creating positive relationships with others.
- Helping my child(ren) by fostering a love of the outdoors and/or teaching about environmental sustainability.
- Helping my child(ren) by fostering a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Helping me by supporting parents and caregivers in the work they do caring for children.
- Helping me and my child(ren) by being an accessible, inclusive, and welcoming environment for those with disabilities.
- Advocating for the preservation and protection of childhood.
- Other (please specify)

11. What does Discovery Museum currently provide for parents and caregivers? (select all that apply)

- Support for understanding learning and child development.
- A safe play environment in which I can relax.
- New ways to facilitate play, learning, and discovery for my child(ren).
- A community that I am a part of.
- Emotional support through interactions with staff and/or other visitors.
- Curated learning experiences that I can trust are enriching for my child(ren).
- Opportunities to spend special time together playing and learning.
- None of the above
- Other (please specify)

12. What would you most like Discovery Museum to provide / improve for parents and caregivers? (*select one*)

- Support for understanding learning and child development.
- A safe play environment in which I can relax.
- New ways to facilitate play, learning, and discovery for my child(ren).
- A community that I am a part of.
- Emotional support through interactions with staff and/or other visitors.
- Curated learning experiences that I can trust are enriching for my child(ren).
- Opportunities to spend special time together playing and learning.
- None of the above
- Other (please specify)

Access to Educational Resources in the Region (5 questions)

13. Do you have access to resources locally or regionally for engaging your child(ren)'s curiosity and creativity?

- No
- Yes (Please list the resources you use most often.)

14. Do you have access to resources locally or regionally for helping your child(ren) learn about science?

- No
- Yes (Please list the resources you use most often.)

15. Do you have access to resources locally or regionally for helping your child(ren) feel connected to nature?

- No
- Yes (Please list the resources you use most often.)

16. Do you have sufficient resources locally or regionally for supporting your child(ren)'s social and emotional growth and wellness?

- No
- Yes (Please list the resources you use most often.)

17. What does Discovery Museum do or offer that none of these other places do or offer?

Community & Belonging (3 questions)

18. How could Discovery Museum make your visit or choice to visit easier? *(select all that apply)*

- It's already easy!
- Eliminate reservations, make visits walk-in only.
- Add more evening hours / extended hours.
- Add more free-admission times.
- Offer the ability to purchase tickets online in advance.
- Have Discovery Museum experiences available in my community (i.e. at my library, community center).
- Other (please specify)

19. What does Discovery Museum do that makes you feel a sense community and/or belonging?

20. What can Discovery Museum do to support you, that we are not currently doing?

Thank You! (1 question)

Thank you for taking time to provide us with feedback and inspiration as we set the course for Discovery Museum's next 3 to 5 years. If you have the time, we would love to hear one more thing from you:

21. If Discovery Museum could make one thing happen in 5 years, what should it be?

22. If you would like to be entered into the raffle for one of two \$50 Visa gift cards, please share your name, email address, and telephone number below. This information will be kept confidential and separate from your responses to the survey. The drawing will be held on Wednesday, August 14, 2024.

Name

Email Address

Phone Number

Be sure to visit our website—www.discoveryacton.org—to learn about all the exciting events and programs we have planned for the months ahead. We look forward to seeing you soon!

Discovery Museum - Strategic Planning 2024 Survey Findings:

Survey Monkey reports:

If you would like to view all of the data collected through this survey, you can see it through the following links:

- To see the Survey Monkey report with all findings from the first 20 questions, please [use this link](#). The password is: DM2024
- To see the Survey Monkey report with Question #21 (what would you like to see DM do in the next 5 years) [please use this link](#). The password is: DM2024

Here are a few things we found from looking at the survey data:

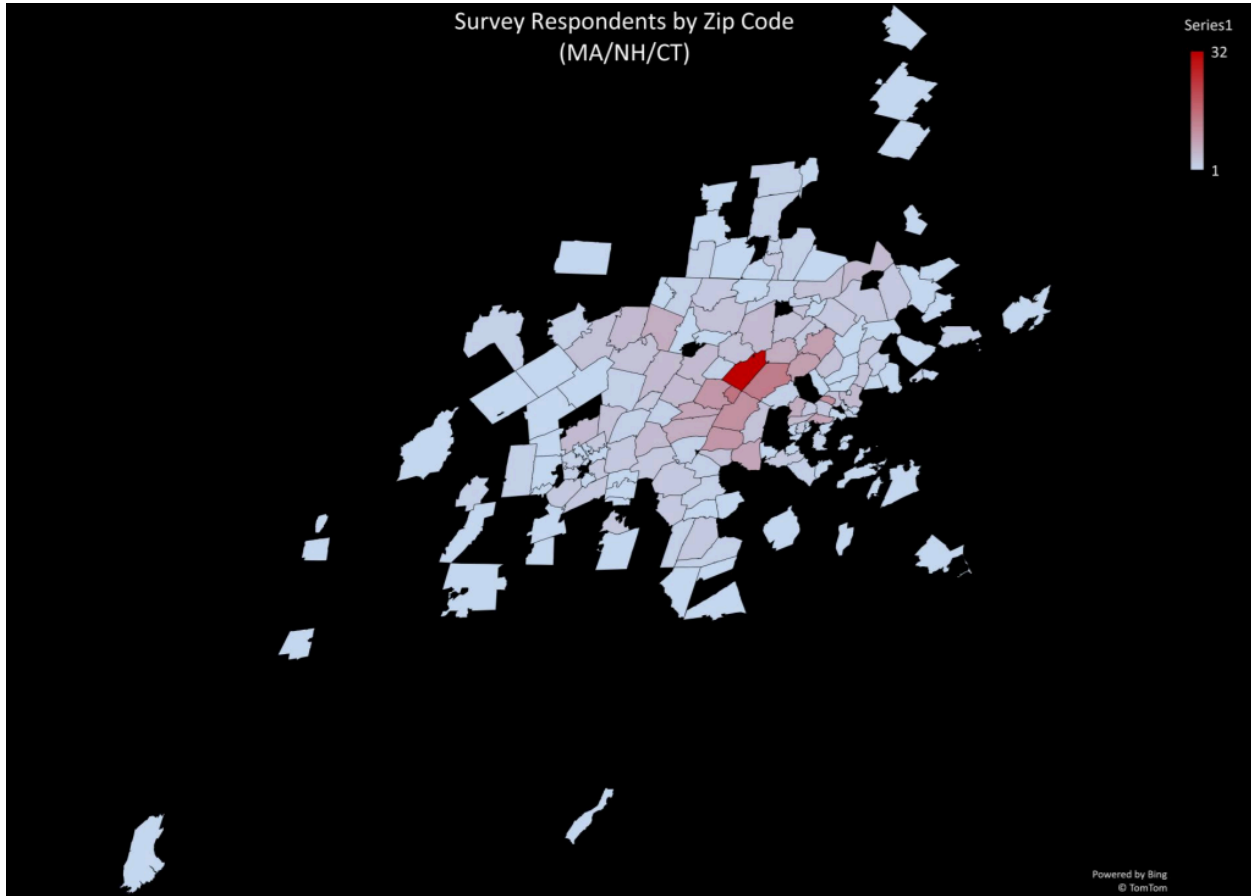
I. The first section of the survey gathered some basic audience information. Of interest:

A **comparison of members & non-members** shows that overall these groups are very similar; the only significant differences is that NON-MEMBERS are:

- Less likely to be concerned about childcare needs (29%, as opposed to 38% for members) (not significant)
- More likely to want “curated learning experiences they can trust (19%, as opposed to 14%; statistically significant)
- Less likely to have other places they go for engaging curiosity and creativity (25%, as opposed to 19%; statistically significant); answers for STEM, nature, and SEL are much closer.

Zip Code:

This is a heat map of where Discovery Museum visitors are coming from:



Languages other than English spoken at home are (number of people reporting this language is “1” unless otherwise shown):

Arabic	French - 2
Bulgarian	Hindi - 2
Dutch	Russian - 2
Greek	Turkish - 2
Luganda	Chinese - 3
Malayalam	German - 3
Punjabi	ASL - 4
Slovak	Mandarin - 6
Tamil	Portuguese - 7
Bengali - 2	Spanish - 16
	Multiple languages - 7

Transportation:

Almost everyone arrives at Discovery Museum by car. (Note: focus groups expressed concern for transportation to the museum for non-car-owning families.)

II. The second section of the survey focused on understanding why people visit Discovery Museum, and what benefits they feel it confers. Of interest:

When asked about the **benefit of Discovery Museum**, responses indicated:

- STEM education ranks significantly highest, with outdoor education coming in second. STEM also ranks significantly highest in answer to the questions “which is most important to you as part of a visit to DM.” (Q8 and Q9)
- Interestingly, when people are anticipating what might be most important for *others*, they list Social/Emotional learning almost as high as STEM. (Q10)

When asked **what Discovery Museum provides**, responses indicated:

- New ways to play, ways to spend time together, trustworthy learning experiences, safety, and reliable support for learning and child development all rank very high (Q11).
- Emotional support and community rank much lower.
- These are echoed in the answers to the question about what people WANT Discovery Museum to provide (Q12).

III. The third section of the survey focused on educational resources, other than Discovery Museum, in the community. Of interest:

77% of respondents have other resources for engaging children’s **curiosity and creativity** (Q13). These include:

- Library - 189
- Museums (general/overall) - 94 (Science Museum - 18; Ecotarium - 16; Children's Museums - 13; Zoo - 11; aquarium - 4)
- Farm - 16
- Home - 14
- Park - 24
- School - 22
- Playground - 13
- music classes - 10

63% of respondents have other resources for helping children learn about **science** (Q14).

These include:

- Museums (general/overall) - 128 (Science Museum - 50; Ecotarium - 28; “Butterfly place” - 2; Children's Museums - 11; zoo - 7; aquarium - 6)
- Library - 83
- School - 15
- Home - 13

74% of respondents have other resources for helping children feel connected to **nature** (Q15). These include:

- Parks - 83
- Trails - 59
- Farms - 40
- Playground - 19
- conservation land - 18
- Zoos - 12
- Gardens - 12
- Ecotarium - 11
- Home / yard - 11
- School - 10

54% of respondents have other resources for supporting children's **social and emotional wellness** (Q16). These include:

- School and preschool - 57
- Library - 25
- Family - 16
- Medical (pediatrician / therapist / doctor) - 14
- Museums - 14 (4 of these were Ecotarium)
- Friends - 13

IV. The final question in the survey was about what people hoped Discovery Museum might make happen in the next five years. Of interest:

When asked about their hopes for what the Discovery Museum might do in the next 5 years, answers (which were open / typed, not selected from a list) focused primarily on:

- Exhibits - 21
 - This included a few requests to improve or expand imaginative (as opposed to STEM) play areas, to expand exhibits or add changing or new exhibits, and to update or fix the building and the exhibits.
- Expansion - 20
 - Most of these were fairly general, but comments included requests for new locations and new programming.
- Outdoor improvements - 20
 - Comments included calls for more mud and for less mud, as well as more outdoor learning/activities/programs, a "trail classroom," and added exhibits.
- Amenities - 10
 - Ideas included more affordable merchandise for children so they can buy a small item on their way out, many requests for food options (cafe, food trucks, place to eat inside), and improved AC upstairs.