2015 – 2020 Strategic Plan:
Growing into a Sustainable Future
We are pleased to share with you the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota’s first five-year strategic plan as an open museum. When the founders started planning the Children’s Museum in 2005, little did they know it would be 2015 before the Grand Opening. Ten years may sound like a long time, but it feels like they flew by in the blink of an eye. We thank everyone who has joined us on this journey, whether ten years ago or just yesterday. Together, we have learned and achieved so much.

From the very start, we tried to find ways to make our Museum a catalyst for helping all children of our region share in a bright future. Thanks to three prototype sites and years of research and evaluation, we learned that pursuing authenticity in all that we create, centering our actions around children and their learning families, involving all corners of our community, and—perhaps most importantly—understanding that play equals possibilities could help us reach our goal. Today, we know that the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota’s distinctive value is in offering an awe-inspiring environment full of place-based exhibits, with rich programming animated by people dedicated to play and to children. The Museum’s new strategic plan offers a roadmap to making our region a place where all children share in a bright future of opportunity and well-being.

When Dr. Brenda Flannery, Dean of the Minnesota State University School of Business and longtime Museum board officer, started us on the strategic planning process nine months ago, we realized a new plan would be needed once the Museum opened. We needed fresh answers to new questions, and we needed to learn how to be purposeful as the Museum transforms from a startup organization to a fully operational institution. After many meetings, workshops, a full board and staff retreat, and many versions and edits, we have reached a consensus around three powerful strategic priorities: to develop staff excellence, engage and enrich our community, and operate with financial sustainability. As we strive toward our organizational goal of establishing sustainable operations and growing our audience and impact, all our work over the next five years will be structured around these priorities with clear metrics for staff and board members.

Sustaining and growing the Museum will take all of us. Everyone who believes in the Museum and who has helped turn this dream into reality is needed more than ever. You have done so much to open the Museum’s doors; now, please continue contributing as donors, volunteers, advocates, and connectors. In small ways and big, please keep the Museum at the center of our community so that more children can share a better tomorrow.

Lastly, we would like to thank you for allowing both of us the opportunity to be part of the Museum’s growth. It has been a joy, a struggle, a blessing, and a life-changing experience. We thank you for trusting us, believing in the vision, and making it happen. Our deepest gratitude goes to all of our board members, volunteers, and staff who work so passionately every day. Please enjoy the new Museum, keep it in your thoughts and actions, and continue to make our region a great place to call home.

Sincerely,

Peter Olson, Executive Director

Linda Frost, Co-Founder and Board Chair

May 2015
HISTORY

Inspired by every child’s enormous promise and readiness to learn, a group of educators, business leaders, and community members envisioned opening a Children’s Museum for families across the region. In 2006, the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota was granted official 501 (c)(3) nonprofit status and began forging ahead with mission. The Museum’s clear vision—to provide a safe and inviting place for children to play, learn, and grow—allowed it to provide museum experiences in three temporary locations over the past several years. At the same time, dedicated community members remained devoted to making their vision of a permanent museum a reality. Thanks to the support of generous individuals, businesses, local civic organizations, and families, the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota found a permanent home in the City of Mankato’s former Mass Transit Building. It made its amazing transformation into an awe-inspiring children’s museum over the course of many exciting months from the summer of 2014 to May 1st, 2015.

VISION STATEMENT

The Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota is the catalyst for building a stronger, more vibrant community around play so that all children in our region share in a bright future of opportunity and well-being.

MISSION STATEMENT

Ignite the natural curiosity of every child through the power of play in a dynamic, awe-inspiring environment.

ORGANIZATIONAL GOAL

Over the next five years, we will establish sustainable operations and grow the new Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota’s audience and impact.
The glimmering Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota that exists today builds upon the hard-won successes of its past. At its prior locations, the Museum’s exhibit prototypes and hands-on activities attracted over 50,000 visitors from 53 Minnesota counties and 25 states, and hosted over 100 field trips and group visits. The Museum Access Program’s efforts helped enrich the lives of over 1,800 children who would have otherwise been challenged by one or more barriers to participation. Regular programming offered at the interim sites covered a variety of topics, from the agriculture of Southern Minnesota to the physics of rockets. The Museum also provided a playful presence at many off-site events, such as Arts by the River, Songs on the Lawn, and the Mankato Marathon.

The Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota looks forward with great anticipation to welcoming the public to its new, permanent home. The new site features place-based exhibits and dynamic hands-on programming, all designed to stimulate inquiry, spark curiosity, and reveal the wonders of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), agriculture, and arts, while also calling attention to Southern Minnesota heritage and Dakota culture.

**HISTORICAL TIMELINE**

- **2005** – Co-Founders, Linda Frost and Mary Jo Hensel, begin initial planning and research
- **2006** – First board meeting; establishment of the Museum’s non-profit status
- **2009 – 2014** – Operating three successive prototype spaces
- **2012** – State of Minnesota awards the first installment of Legacy Funding
- **2014** – Beginning of building renovations and exhibit fabrications
- **May 1 & 2, 2015** – Grand Opening of the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota
AUDIENCE

To help all children in our region share in a bright future, the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota strives to be broadly accessible across a range of audience demographics. Organizing potential audiences primarily by age benefits exhibit and program development and helps the Museum be intentional and focused. Intended end users, who the Museum must serve to accomplish its mission and vision, are children and their learning families in Southern Minnesota.

**Primary audiences, served most fully and continuously:**
- All children 9 years and under
- Family groups
- Regions: Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet county

**Secondary audiences, served well and episodically:**
- Children 9 – 12 years old
- School and community groups
- Parents, teachers, caregivers
- Regions: Southern Minnesota

**Emerging audiences – served well and through targeted offerings:**
- Children 12 – 15 years old
- Children and families underserved by play opportunities
- Regions: Minnesota and Northern Iowa

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE: 2015-2020

After a decade-long planning period and the success of its capital campaign, the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota is primed to pursue sustainable growth and operational excellence. In September of 2014, the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota staff and board of directors began planning the course of action for the next five years. The following three strategic priorities will guide the Museum on its pathway to sustainability and growth.

**1. DEVELOP STAFF EXCELLENCE.**

Human capital provides the cornerstone that supports all success of the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota.

The Museum will recruit and retain a diverse and dynamic staff of highly committed, motivated, and satisfied people who carry out the functions of their jobs effectively and provide exceptional service. Staff members will be well-rounded and well-informed through ongoing professional development opportunities, and they will participate as active members of local, regional, and national professional networks. The Museum will be equipped with the staff and resources it needs perform successfully. Volunteers will be engaged to assist and support Museum staff across all departments. A diverse board of directors will provide vision, governance, and oversight of the organization by guiding, supporting, and strengthening staff efforts.
2. ENGAGE AND ENRICH OUR COMMUNITY.

All of the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota’s activities and efforts will continue to be grounded in the Museum’s commitment to ensure that all children and families have the opportunity to experience the joy of learning through the power of play at the Museum, in a setting that aims to understand, respect, and preserve our world’s resources for present and future generations.

The diverse communities of our region will be represented and engaged through visitorship, membership, and collaboration. The Museum will offer engaging, high-quality environments and experiences. Stakeholders will report high levels of satisfaction with the Museum’s efforts to represent their interests through exhibits and programming. The Museum will be recognized as the leading child-centered destination in the community and will be experienced as a gathering place that is safe, accessible, and welcoming to all of its visitors. Visitors will feel satisfied and connected to the Museum, will return for multiple visits, and will take advantage of a full range of Museum opportunities, such as birthday parties, family reunions, weddings, or corporate events. The Museum’s attendance figures will reflect high interest and demand for services by diverse families, group visitors, and community partners and stakeholders from our region. Community partners and stakeholders will be engaged in action-oriented and sustained partnerships to help expand the Museum’s impact. The Museum will implement environmentally respectful policies and practices, serving as a community resource that models and promotes best practices for green, sustainable living.
3. OPERATE WITH FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY.

As the Children’s Museum of Southern Minnesota’s financial model transitions from being structured around a capital campaign to an operational model focused on long-term sustainability and growth, the Museum’s board of directors and staff are poised to move forward with renewed commitment to fulfilling the Museum’s mission. They will deploy revenue and spending strategies that are fact-based, results-oriented, and that serve to contribute to the Museum’s prosperity.

Museum operating expenses will be supported with an appropriate combination of earned income and support coming from donors, sponsors, and special events. Current donors will feel appreciated and they will continue to support the Museum. New donors will be cultivated and kept informed of Museum progress and impact. The Minnesota Legacy Fund will continue to support further development of the Museum’s exhibits and its access efforts. Grant funding will augment the Museum’s revenue goals by providing support for new projects, programs, equipment, materials, and professional development of staff members. Museum spending will align with the Museum’s strategic priorities and short-term and long-term goals. Spending decisions will be based on an organizational, annually-developed budget, with input from staff, leadership, and Board Finance Committee. Relationships with individuals, businesses, and other Museum stakeholders will be sustained and cultivated to maximize in-kind donations and to build a robust volunteer program that adds a tremendous value to all Museum efforts.
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BRIAN BENSHOOF, CEO, MRCI Worksource
LAURA BOWMAN, Director of Community Relations and Development at Mayo Clinic Health System
DR. BRENDA FLANNERY, Dean, College of Business, Minnesota State University, Mankato
LINDA FROST, Retired Early Childhood Parent Educator, ECFE
KAAREN GRABIANOWSKI, Sales & Events Manager, Country Inn & Suites Mankato
MARY JO HENSEL, Retired Early Childhood Coordinator, Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial
NICK HINZ, President, Frandsen Bank and Trust
LYLE JACOBSON, Former Owner, Katolight
BARB KAUS, President, Greater Mankato Area United Way
LINDA KILANDER, Retired Principal, Mankato Area Public Schools
KIM KLEVEN, Early Childhood Coordinator, Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial
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NAOMI MORTENSEN, Marketing Director, Environmental Tillage Systems
TIM NEWELL, Director of Solutions Business Management, Kato Engineering/Emerson
JEAN PETERSON, Retired Director, Children’s House, Minnesota State University, Mankato
CHRISTINE POWERS, Partner, Abdo Eick & Meyers
TOM RILEY, Telecommunications Operations Executive, Greater Mankato Growth
BETH SERRILL, Attorney, Blethen Gage & Krause
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DR. KATIE SMENTEK, Pediatrician, Mankato Clinic
SARA STEINBACH, Regional Manager, Public Affairs & Marketing, Mayo Clinic Health System
KEITH STOVER, Retired President, South Central College
VANCE STUEHRENBERG, County Commissioner, Blue Earth County, MN
ANNA THILL, President, Visit Mankato
KAREN WAHLSTROM, Retired Early Childhood Specialist, ECFE
PAM WILLARD, Director, Golden Heart

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MEGAN FLOD JOHNSON, Program Manager
MIA FORSLUND, Program and Special Events Coordinator
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JACKIE MANN, Administrative and Database Assistant
SCOTT NAGEL, Accountant
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