Children’s Museum of Oak Ridge  
Strategic Plan, 2019-2021

Because of the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various aspects of this strategic plan, the Board of Directors approved at its July 22, 2021 meeting a one year extension. This strategic plan will now conclude at the end of 2022.

Our History

The Children’s Museum of Oak Ridge (CMOR) is a hands-on museum of history, art, science, and culture for all ages—children, teens, and adults. Since 1973, CMOR has served people from East Tennessee and beyond with innovative exhibits, classes, camps, special events, and outreach programs. The Museum has grassroots beginnings as a service project launched by members of Girl Scout Troup 69 with a grant for $500 from the Reader’s Digest Foundation. The Museum has come a long way since then, adding new exhibits, programs, and partnerships over the years while continuing to serve the surrounding communities. In January, 2018 CMOR became the site of the National Park Service’s Manhattan Project National Historical Site Visitor Center, and in October 2018 it became the new home of the historic Flattop House previously on display at the American Museum of Science and Energy. Through hands-on learning and play, CMOR offers experiences that spark the imagination, promote a healthy lifestyle, and encourage life-long learning.

Our Mission

The mission of CMOR is to provide fun and diverse educational programs and exhibits emphasizing play and hands-on learning for all ages in arts, science, history, culture, and healthy living, while collecting and preserving objects in a historic Manhattan Project Community (approved by the CMOR Board of Trustees, August 2017).

Our Vision

CMOR provides the ultimate fun learning experience for children, families, and Manhattan Project visitors (approved by the CMOR Board of Trustees, August 2017).

Our Planning Process

This three year strategic plan (2019-21) follows a six year plan that covered the years 2013-18. That plan was developed by the Museum’s Board of Trustees and the former Executive Director (who retired in December 2015).

In the spring of 2018, the Museum’s Executive Director began gathering and studying examples of strategic plans from other museums and guidelines from the American Alliance of Museums. She recommended a shorter (3 year) plan and a process that involved a variety of stakeholders. Because of
CMOR’s small staff and tight budget the process had to be very focused and inexpensive. The Executive Director then invited the Board’s Vice President to help with the process, and asked the Board of Trustees for recommendations for an experienced facilitator who would donate his or her time. Laura Hammons of Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU) was recommended. Her employer, ORAU, contributed report writing time for Ms. Hammons, along with workshop materials and supplies. Ms. Hammons brought her children to CMOR when they were younger and she is a museum supporter. The Executive Director provided her with extensive background materials about the Museum, they met, and Ms. Hammons produced an agenda/outline for a stakeholder’s workshop entitled “Planning Our Future.” The Executive Director drafted a list of 64 potential participants including staff, trustees, advisory board members, museum members, volunteers, community leaders, and friends of the Museum. An Evite was sent, 16 people signed up to attend, and a total of 13 participated. The workshop was held on September 29 from 8:30 am – 1:30 pm. At the workshop, the Executive Director welcomed the participants then stepped back to observe. The goal of the workshop was to solicit a broad range of input from the stakeholders, including the “What, Why, Where, Who, and How” for the priority discussion topics.

After the workshop, Ms. Hammons compiled and analyzed the notes from the day and drafted a 23 page comprehensive report. The Executive Director compiled her own thoughts on the Museum’s future, including a prioritized needs assessment. She carefully reviewed the workshop report, highlighting the stakeholder’s thoughts about CMOR and its future. The Executive Director then blended the stakeholder ideas she felt were feasible with her own thoughts to create a draft strategic plan. The draft was circulated to the workshop participants for their review, plus others (Trustees, staff, and invitees) who couldn’t attend but wanted to comment. Their collective input was used by the Executive Director to finalize the plan, which was unanimously approved by the CMOR Board of Trustees on November 13, 2018.

Our Strategic Goals

The strategic planning process yielded five broad organizational goals that support the Museum’s Mission and Vision. Each goal is presented with objectives that are shorter term (within 1 year) and longer term (within 2-3 years). The Strategic Plan will be implemented by the Museum’s Board committees, Executive Director, and staff. Work plans will be developed that align with the plan’s goals and objectives, define needed resources, and offer realistic timelines for completion. The Committees and Executive Director will assess progress throughout the 3 years, with the Board regrouping at least annually to look at the bigger picture and recommend changes to the plan if needed.

1. MONEY: Achieve short-term and long-term financial stability

   **Background:** This must be CMOR’s top priority. CMOR has struggled financially for much of its 45 year history. Financial instability is a continual threat to CMOR, hampering its ability to grow, take risks, and plan for the future. Outstanding bills are often held until CMOR is able to pay. CMOR’s Form 990 (Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax) is impacted negatively because of high depreciation numbers for its building and land. More help is needed with fundraising in order to set CMOR on a healthier financial path, and this includes making sure Trustees understand their role and responsibilities in this process.

   **Lead Parties:** Finance Committee, Fundraising Committees, Board of Trustees, and Executive Director

   **Objectives:**

   **Shorter Term**
   - Split the Fundraising and Marketing Committees, returning them to their original (separate) entities, and recruit skilled board and committee members to help with fundraising.
• Hire a half-time Development Associate effective January 2019.
• Continue to refine and develop CMOR’s overall fundraising plan, including the launch of the new Corporate Sponsor Program.
• Explore and create new sources of revenue, including a naming rights program for CMOR and its exhibits and offering the CMOR garden as a venue for small weddings.

• Research and price a cultural management system (e.g. Altru) to keep records and data for admissions, membership, fundraising, merchandise, marketing, programs, and volunteers in one system.
• Pay off backlogged bills (excluding the HVAC project, which is financed with a low interest loan).

Longer Term
• Fund and implement a cultural management system (e.g. Altru) to keep records and data for admissions, membership, fundraising, merchandise, marketing, programs, and volunteers in one system.
• Create and fund a budget expense line item for depreciation.
• Begin to plan a Capital Campaign to fund a major facility upgrade project as presented in the CMOR Master Facility Plan.

2. MARKETING: Showcase and effectively market the Children’s Museum of Oak Ridge to local and regional audiences

Background: CMOR’s current marketing efforts are a series of uncoordinated messages using a variety of media. In the spring of 2017, a team of UT-Knoxville MBA students conducted a study of CMOR with a focus on how to help the Museum gain a more regional presence. While a few of their recommendations have been implemented, most have not.

Lead Parties: Marketing Committee, Education Committee, and Executive Director

Objectives:

Shorter Term
• Create a marketing plan that addresses recommendations in the 2017 UT-MBA student report and the relevant recommendations from the strategic planning workshop. This includes branding, logo, social media, and website (including website improvements). The marketing plan will integrate and coordinate CMOR’s messaging across different platforms (traditional media, social media, and website) for maximum efficiency and reach.

Longer Term
• Promote CMOR as a top field trip destination for pre-K and elementary classes and youth groups.
• Promote CMOR as a destination for adult tour groups.
• Cultivate relationships with and better utilize resources at tourism agencies at the local (Explore Oak Ridge), county (Anderson Country Tourism Council) and state (TN Department of Tourist Development) levels.
• Build a new CMOR website that is user-friendly and easy for staff to update.
3. **PEOPLE: Make CMOR a great place to work, partner, and belong**

**Background:** This goal is about people, partnerships, and relationships—these are CMOR’s greatest resources. We have a small but devoted staff, and we need to take better care of them. CMOR also needs more people-power to help it reach its goals. Growing the volunteer and internship programs is a logical and cost-effective way to gain more help. We need to continue to cultivate partnerships that are mutually beneficial and increase community engagement and support. CMOR also needs to keep its members satisfied and engaged.

**Lead Parties:** Human Resources Committee, Membership Committee, Education Committee, Board of Trustees, and Executive Director

**Objectives:**

**Shorter Term**
- Implement annual Cost of Living increases for CMOR’s paid staff.
- Define projects and tasks that would be appropriate for interns, and connect with the University of Tennessee, Roane State Community College, and other schools for intern recruitment.
- Recruit more volunteers, with a focus on college-age and adult volunteers.
- Restructure the CMOR Advisory Board, with new strategies to better engage this group of stakeholders.

**Longer Term**
- Explore ways to utilize volunteers (for example, as docents) to improve the visitor experience.
- Maximize and nurture CMOR’s existing partnerships with other organizations (e.g. Knoxville Area Model Railroaders, Girl Scouts, National Park Service, Oak Ridge Amateur Radio Club, etc.) and create new partnerships as warranted.
- Survey CMOR’s membership to assess what benefits and programs are of interest to them.
- Review CMOR’s membership levels, revising or adding categories (like teachers or a “Kids Club”) as needed.

4. **FACILITY: Maintain and improve CMOR’s historic Manhattan Project-era building and grounds**

**Background:** CMOR is housed in a 75 year old historic elementary school that was constructed for the children of Manhattan Project workers. The 54,000 ft$^2$ building sits on an 8 acre parcel and includes over 20 indoor and outdoor exhibits.

**Lead Parties:** Facility Committee and Executive Director

**Objectives:**
Shorter Term
- Review the 2017 Master Facility Plan produced by the East TN Community Design Center and determine the best way to proceed, while prioritizing issues of health and safety (e.g. ramps and restrooms).
- Develop a prioritized list of exhibit maintenance projects (such as the TVA Waterworks floor and the need for new appliances in Charlotte’s Kitchen) and a plan for implementation.
- Specify and prioritize exterior building and grounds maintenance projects (e.g. parking lot sealcoating and restriping, tree removal, mulching, exterior building cleaning, etc.)

Longer Term
- To begin implementation of the highest priority projects from the review of the Master Facility Plan, pending funding.

5. PROGRAMS: Serve as an essential resource for the people of the Highland View neighborhood, city of Oak Ridge, and East Tennessee region, with exhibits, programs, and experiences that are of value and interest to our different audiences

Background: The Children’s Museum has served as a community anchor in the Highland View neighborhood since 1974. The Museum now serves over 50,000 visitors a year from East Tennessee and beyond. Our audiences include school and other student/youth groups, families with children, and solo adult visitors. Adult groups are a new potential audience to serve. CMOR needs to offer new and fresh experiences for its visitors.

Lead Parties: Education Committee, Weinberg Papers Archive Project Committee, and Executive Director

Objectives:

Shorter Term
- Renovate and furnish the Flattop House, and create and implement an interpretive program for visitors.

Longer Term
- Develop an exhibition about Alvin Weinberg as the capstone of the Weinberg Papers Archive Project.
- Survey visitors to assess their interest in (and help CMOR prioritize) other possible exhibit projects (e.g. complete the Dinosaur Room, revamp the Native American exhibit) along with their interest in old fashioned play, hands-on learning, and technology in our exhibits.
- Survey teachers to assess their interest in new school programs on topics that support the Museum’s mission, and create new programs using that feedback.
- Survey visitors to assess their interest in new public programs and events on topics that support the Museum’s mission, and create new programs and events using that feedback.

Summary
The Children’s Museum of Oak Ridge has been an important resource for East Tennessee since 1973.
This three year strategic plan is designed to ensure that the Museum remains a healthy, vibrant resource for generations to come. For more information regarding this plan or to get involved with the Museum, please contact the Executive Director at (865) 482-1074 or bshea@childrensmuseumfoakridge.org.