



## **Children's Museum of Oak Ridge Strategic Plan, 2023-2026**

### **Our Planning Process**

This four year strategic plan follows a three year plan that covered the years 2019-21 and was extended for one year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This plan is a thoughtful update of that work, which was a completely transformed plan built on input from a variety of stakeholders.

In the summer of 2022, the Museum's Executive Director began work on the new plan. She formed an *ad hoc* committee of interested museum board members who provided input early in the process to help inform other information gathering activities and gave feedback as needed. The Executive Director researched post-pandemic strategic planning and trends. A survey about the museum and its future was included in the October 2022 member's e-newsletter and a separate member's e-blast, providing input from that stakeholder group. A broader stakeholder workshop, facilitated by Laura Hammons of Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU), was held on October 15. The workshop gathered input for the museum's first set of core values and included a SOAR exercise (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results) to inform the new strategic plan. A group of 12 people – including museum members, board members, advisory board members, staff, and community members – met for three hours to work through the two activities, providing valuable input to the planning process. A draft set of core values and a draft strategic plan that incorporated stakeholder input were written by the Executive Director and distributed to workshop participants, museum staff, and the Board of Directors for review. The 2023–2026 strategic plan, including the core values, was approved by the Board of Directors on November 17, 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. It was started as a service project by members of Girl Scout Troop 69 with a \$500 grant from the Reader's Digest Foundation. The Museum has come a long way since then, adding exhibits, programs, and partnerships while continuing to serve the surrounding communities. 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 Directors, August 2017).

## **Our Vision**

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

## **Our Core Values**

These are guiding principles that represent our highest priorities, deeply held beliefs, and fundamental driving forces. They are the heart of what CMOR stands for in the world.

1. To conduct our operations with integrity, adhering to the highest ethical standards.
2. To work with, serve, and learn from people with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and abilities, showing respect and compassion for all.
3. To be stewards of our community's unique history, preserving it for future generations.
4. To provide excellent educational experiences – through exhibitions and programs – that are innovative, impactful, engaging, and inspirational.
5. To be of service to our community and to provide a safe place for people to learn, have fun, and spend quality time with each other.

## **Our Strategic Goals**

The strategic planning process yielded seven broad organizational goals that support the Museum's mission, vision and core values. Each goal is presented with objectives that are shorter term (within 1-2 years) and longer term (within 3-4 years). The strategic plan will be implemented by the Museum's Board of Directors, board committees, Executive Director, staff, and volunteers. Work plans will be developed that align with the plan's goals and objectives, define needed resources, and offer realistic timelines for completion. The Board of Directors and the Executive Director will assess progress throughout the 4 years, with the board regrouping at least annually to look at the bigger picture and recommend changes to the plan if needed.

### **1. MONEY: Continue on the path of financial stability**

**Background:** Over the last four years CMOR has moved from a position of chronic financial instability to one of stability. All backlogged bills have been paid, bills are now paid on time, and the museum is in a position to invest in its future. This forward growth will only be possible, though, with aggressive fundraising.

**Lead Parties:** Finance Committee, Fundraising Committee, Board of Directors, Executive Director, and Development Staff

#### **Objectives:**

##### **Shorter Term**

- 1.1 Grow the Museum's fundraising team by hiring a full-time Development Coordinator.
- 1.2 Plan and implement new revenue streams including (but not limited to) planned giving, naming rights, and a corporate giving campaign.

- 1.3 Create a rainy day fund that will eventually cover 6 months of operating expenses (\$275,000).
- 1.4 Begin to explore a Capital Campaign to fund a major facility upgrade project as presented in the CMOR Master Facility Plan. It is expected that outside expertise will be needed for this task.

#### Longer Term

- 1.5 Continue to grow the museum's endowment (managed by the East Tennessee Foundation).
- 1.6 Cultivate current and new donors with a goal of major gifts.
- 1.7 If the preliminary work determines it to be feasible, plan and implement the Capital Campaign. If not, then remediate issues for the campaign to become feasible.

## **2. MARKETING: Effectively market CMOR to local and regional audiences**

**Background:** Progress has been made on e-newsletters and social media, but CMOR still needs a marketing plan. CMOR continues to have brand confusion and identity issues, so a major piece of this plan must be branding. It is expected that outside expertise will be needed for this task.

**Lead Parties:** Marketing Committee, Education Committee, Board of Directors, and Executive Director

#### **Objectives:**

##### Shorter Term

- 2.1 Create a marketing plan that addresses CMOR's branding issues and effectively uses traditional and social media to promote the museum and its programs.
- 2.2 Promote CMOR as a field trip destination for pre-K and elementary school and youth groups.
- 2.3 Better leverage our relationship with the National Park Service (Manhattan Project National Historical Park) for more effective marketing.

##### Longer Term

- 2.4 Implement the new marketing plan.
- 2.5 Increase CMOR's public relations and marketing capacity by hiring a Marketing Director.

## **3. TECHNOLOGY: Build a robust technology infrastructure for CMOR**

**Background:** As the Museum and its programs grow, its technology infrastructure needs to keep up. CMOR is hampered by email problems, and by connectivity issues in the facility. The Museum also needs to modernize its ticketing and other front of house operations by utilizing systems designed for those purposes.

**Lead Parties:** Education Committee, Facility Committee, Board of Directors, and Executive Director

#### **Objectives:**

##### Shorter Term

- 3.1 With our partner Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU), build a new CMOR website that is user-friendly and easy for staff to update.
- 3.2 Research and solve CMOR's email problems.
- 3.3 Ensure that all areas of the museum used for meetings, events, and programs have robust and reliable Internet access.
- 3.4 Research systems for CMOR's tour and program scheduling, ticketing, and gift shop purchases.

#### Longer Term

3.5 Implement new system(s) for tour and program scheduling, ticketing, and gift shop purchases.

### **4. PEOPLE: Provide a respectful and welcoming place to visit, work, volunteer, partner, and belong**

**Background:** This goal is about people, partnerships, and relationships—which continue to be CMOR’s greatest resources. We need to increase our audience diversity (ethnically, socioeconomically, and visitors with disabilities). We have made progress in staff compensation, but it is difficult for CMOR to attract employees in the current job market. Our teen volunteer program is strong, but the pandemic decimated the adult volunteer program. Internship programs, also impacted by the pandemic, need to be explored after the adult volunteer program is revitalized. CMOR also needs to keep its members satisfied and engaged.

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

#### **Objectives:**

##### Shorter Term

- 4.1 Continue to improve staff salary compensation.
- 4.2 Identify facility and other projects that can be completed by volunteers, including service groups (fraternities, alumni groups, leadership programs, corporate volunteer teams, etc.).
- 4.3 Recruit and retain more volunteers, with a focus on adult volunteers.
- 4.4 Explore online volunteer management systems.
- 4.5 Survey CMOR’s membership to assess what benefits and programs are of interest to them.
- 4.6 Cultivate partnerships with organizations and communities to better serve new and more diverse audiences.

##### Longer Term

- 4.7 Implement an online volunteer management system.
- 4.8 Research and implement a college internship program.
- 4.9 Enhance and grow CMOR’s membership program by offering more benefits and programs informed by the member’s survey.

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

**Background:** CMOR is housed in a 79 year old historic elementary school that was constructed for the children of Manhattan Project workers. The 54,000 ft<sup>2</sup> building sits on an 8 acre parcel and includes over 20 indoor and outdoor exhibits. While the building is in better condition than it was at the start of the 2019 strategic plan, there are still many items – large and small – that need to be addressed.

**Lead Parties:** Facility Committee, Finance Committee, Fundraising Committee, and Executive Director

#### **Objectives:**

### Shorter Term

5.1 Complete the three pending ramp projects: gym lobby, train area, and access to the Flattop House compound from the museum.

5.2 Complete projects on the prioritized list of interior and exterior maintenance projects created by the Facility Committee.

### Longer Term

5.3 Fund and implement a part-time maintenance position.

5.4 Prioritize and obtain bids for larger projects from the 2017 Master Facility Plan, in order to plan and launch a Capital Campaign.

## **6. PROGRAMS: Provide exhibits, programs, and experiences that are of value and interest to our audiences**

**Background:** The Children’s Museum has served as a community anchor in the Highland View neighborhood since 1974. The Museum 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 National Park Service visitors. Many of CMOR’s exhibits are old and do not address current learning styles or visitor expectations. CMOR needs to offer new and fresh experiences for its visitors.

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

### **Objectives:**

#### Shorter Term

6.1 Complete the renovation of the historic Flattop House and open it to visitors.

6.2 Build the Weinberg Corner exhibit to provide a public presence for the Alvin Weinberg Papers digital archive.

6.3 Begin to plan and secure funding for a larger Weinberg STEAM exhibition to serve as the capstone of the Weinberg Papers Archive Project.

6.4 Assess the condition of CMOR’s exhibitions, and develop a prioritized plan for their maintenance or replacement.

6.5 Assess what programs CMOR currently offers, identify which audiences are missing, and define which missing audiences to pursue/serve.

6.6 Survey visitors to assess their interest in (and help CMOR prioritize) other possible exhibit projects and programs

6.7 Survey teachers to assess their interest in new school programs.

#### Longer Term

6.8 Build the Weinberg STEAM exhibition.

6.9 Implement the exhibition maintenance program in priority order.

6.10 Prioritize and implement new exhibits and programs based on visitor survey results.

6.11 Prioritize and implement new school programs based on teacher survey results.

6.12 Secure funding to continue the Gallery Coordinator position after the TN Arts Commission grant ends.

## **7. COLLECTIONS: Professionalize our collections management program**

**Background:** Unlike most children’s museums, CMOR has collections, with over 20,000 objects, and an archive that includes the personal papers of a renowned nuclear physicist, Dr. Alvin Weinberg. While the Weinberg papers have been professionally archived and digitized, the museum’s collections and other archival materials are in need of attention.

**Lead Parties:** Fundraising Committee, Executive Director, and Collections Assistant

#### Shorter Term

7.1 Secure funding to change the Collections Assistant position to full-time, provide that position with additional training, and provide other needed materials and supplies.

#### Longer Term

7.2 Create additional space within the museum for collections storage.

7.3 Identify items to be deaccessioned to better align the museum’s collections with its mission.

### **Summary**

The Children’s Museum of Oak Ridge has been an important resource for East Tennessee since 1973.

This 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@childrensmuseumofOakRidge.org](mailto:bshea@childrensmuseumofOakRidge.org).