
**WonderTrek
Children's Museum**

**MUSEUM
STRATEGIC
MASTER
PLAN**

SEPTEMBER 2018

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WONDERTREK CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

MUSEUM STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN

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SEPTEMBER 2018

WONDERTREK CHILDREN'S MUSEUM
Museum Strategic Master Plan
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & PLANNING OVERVIEW

Background

Because every community is different, the idea of bringing a children's museum to a community is sparked in many different ways. In 1899, the Brooklyn Children's Museum, the first children's museum in the world, was started by the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences as an alternative to existing museums. One hundred years later, a family's move from New Orleans, a city that had a children's museum, was the inspiration for opening a children's museum in La Crosse, Wisconsin. In Phoenix and many other cities, family friends shared stories of visiting a children's museum on their family vacations; conversations start and the question, "why not here?"

The idea of a children's museum for Region 5 in North Central Minnesota has grown from an article in the Minnesota Precision Manufacturers Association (MPMA) trade publication in 2015. The article described a maker program at the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota (CMSM) in Mankato. Dr. Chad Coauette, President and CEO of Sourcewell in Staples, MN, came across the article. He, along with Paul Drange, Director of Regional Programs at Sourcewell, saw a connection with the many programs for children and youth offered in Region 5 that includes Cass, Crow Wing, Todd, Wadena, and Morrison Counties.

In late 2015, a group from Region 5 visited the Children's Museum in Mankato and met with the CMSM team. Impressed with the museum, its sense of place and offerings, Coauette and Drange contacted leaders in Region 5 to explore interest in the process and the potential of a children's museum for their area. A planning group started meeting in 2016. They also invited Peter Olson, Executive Director at Knock, Knock Children's Museum in Baton Rouge (LA) and former Executive Director at CMSM, to share insights into starting and opening a children's museum. During 2017, the planning group defined a broad vision for the museum, its focus, audience, and guiding principles.

To move the process forward, the group invited two Twin Cities area museum planners to facilitate a strategic master planning process. In early 2018 Jeanne Vergeront (Vergeront Museum Planning, Minneapolis) and Jim Roe (Jim Roe Museum Planning, St. Paul) engaged the planning team and community members in developing this plan.

This museum strategic master plan sets out the foundational ideas for planning and opening a museum. Starting with a vision, mission, and values and identifying the target audience, the plan summarizes relevant regional factors and influences that are likely to affect the museum. The plan also lays out a framework for the museum's learning focus and values, and exhibit concepts and program directions that will be at the heart of the

museum experience. Finally the plan proposes broad criteria for the site and facility and a set of action steps for moving forward in the next phase.

Opportunity

The region, community, or city where a museum, or any organization, is located is more than an address or destination. It is the place, the people, the past, stories, and possibilities. It is the backdrop for and a starting point for understanding, planning, serving, and benefitting an area, its residents, businesses, and communities.

Located approximately three hours from the Twin Cities, Region 5 is one of 13 economic development regions in Minnesota. It is a rural and small-town area with deep pine forests in the north, rich farmland in the south, chains of lakes in the middle, and the Mississippi River running through it. The region's population of approximately 162,000 expands by approximately 300,000 tourists annually.

Region 5, like any other area, is characterized by both promise and challenge. Together these attributes inspire and shape the opportunity the children's museum intends to pursue in serving children, families, and community well.

- Over the last decade, regional population has grown and is expected to continue. Population is expected to grow about 8% and to be increasingly ethnically diverse.
- The region enjoys a diversifying economy. The Brainerd Lakes Area is viewed as being on the cusp of positive and transformative change with multiple development initiatives.
- Families are considered vital to the growth and development of the region— apparent in housing, employment, educational, and recreational strategies.

Along with indicators of population and economic growth, the region can expect some challenges. While population is growing, it is uneven across the region; population is also older than the state average and is aging. Child poverty rates in the region are somewhat-to-significantly higher than statewide. The lakes, woodlands, and waterways of the region, critical assets to the local economy and quality of life, are also resources that are threatened. Visitors and permanent residents have access to a wide range of outdoor and recreational opportunities, yet there are relatively few out-of-school learning resources, especially during the area's long winters.

Covering a large geographic area, Region 5 holds diverse and varied landscapes, areas of wealth and poverty, urban and rural lifestyles, and a range of historical legacies. While these elements don't reveal a clear regional identity, there is evidence of certain social habits and values shared by many in the region, including: a love of the outdoors, being involved in civic life, cherished family traditions, and shared stories around events and

locations. An understanding of these factors has guided WonderTrek Children's Museum in envisioning a dynamic community asset for the region's children and families.

Response

WonderTrek Children's Museum believes it can contribute to the vitality of the region by shining a bright light on children, their potential, and their role in strengthening community life.

The museum's strategic master plan positions the museum to take an active role around valuing children, childhood, and play. It describes a place-based, informal learning setting that engages children 12 years and under, their parents, caregivers, and teachers in making connections between ideas and actions, across systems, and with others. Its focus on children and families exploring and learning together, its understanding of the value of play, and its attention to 21st century skills come together in dynamic environments, experiences, and programs that are richly layered, locally relevant, and open onto the wider world. These hands-on, informal learning environments complement and support school priorities and goals and are a resource for professional development for teachers across the region.

As a year-round family destination, the museum will be a highly valued resource for local families in the winter as well as for visiting families in the summer. Long term, the museum will be an asset as the region works to attract young families to the area. With time, the museum can expect to be an anchor in the lives of children and families, deepen regional pride, and strengthen connections across the region.

Places To Go is the overarching theme for six indoor and outdoor exhibit areas. It invites children and adults to explore places in the museum, in the region, and in the world; and to see the next challenge and get to it.

- *At the Lake* focuses on what is fascinating about the area lakes—fishing, catching the big one, sitting on the dock, and exploring water's ways.
- *From the Garden* is the museum's food hub; food-growing activities connect with eating, cooking, and occasional community gatherings around food and nutrition.
- *Into the Woods* straddles inside and out and invites exploration of several woodland-themed areas nestled together, from forest to pastures and farm fields.
- *On the Road* provides the set-up for imaginative travels, where children find familiar place names and landmarks while discovering clues about faraway places.
- *Open for Possibilities* is a changing space for changing exhibits or community projects.
- *In the Great Outdoors* is the place for big messy activities that can't happen indoors; for a year-round greenhouse, seasonal gardening, and living ecosystems.

WonderTrek Children's Museum is on track to join a small but growing number of children's museums in smaller cities, serving rural areas, and spread across large geographic areas.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK, AUDIENCE & GOALS

Strategic Framework

In museums, the strategic framework is the vision, mission, and values that give meaningful direction to the museum about where it is headed and its enduring value.

Vision

A museum's vision is a compelling image of the positive changes it believes are possible for children and families in the region over the next generation. The children's museum's vision is:

WonderTrek Children's Museum and its partners envision a more vibrant and connected region because all children enjoy the supportive relationships, expanding opportunities, and wellbeing they need to thrive.

Mission

A museum's mission expresses the distinctive ways the museum can contribute to making this happen for the community and its children. The children's museum's mission is:

The children's museum brings together the region's children and families in shared experiences that are grounded locally and open onto the wider world. Dynamic, material-rich environments, exhibits, events, and programs engage children in the joy of play and the wonder of learning.

Values

Values are the timeless beliefs that guide the museum's decision-making and behavior and what it stands for. The children's museum believes and acts in accordance with these values:

- **Childhood** as a time of opportunity for all children to grow, learn, and thrive
- **Play** as a way of learning, interacting with others and improving children's health and wellbeing
- **Access and inclusion** to welcome, serve, and involve children and families of diverse backgrounds and abilities
- **Community engagement** to involve families, groups, and partners in the lives of all children

- **Relationships** that support children and youth, strengthen families, link generations, and connect the region
- **Place** as shared experience, a source of identity, pride, and inspiration

Audience

Because a museum exists to serve its audience, defining that audience is a critical, foundational decision. The process begins with understanding who the museum must serve in order to advance its vision and mission. Many characteristics of visitors such as age, visiting groups, interests, leisure choices, etc. are salient to how these groups will engage with the museum.

The children's museum welcomes people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities living in or visiting Region 5. To achieve its mission, the children's museum must deliberately serve:

- Children 12 years and under with a high priority on children 2 through 6 years
- Multi-generational families and groups
- Early care and learning professionals, elementary and middle school educators

This audience is comprised of a Core Audience, a Secondary Audience, and an Emerging Audience group.

A core audience shares attributes with one another that are salient to what the museum offers that the audience wants and where a museum is outstanding. The children's museum's Core Audience is:

- Children 2 – 10 years
- Multi-aged and multi-generational families
- School groups
- *Living in Region 5*

A secondary audience shares attributes with one another that are relevant to what the museum offers. This group is less likely to have a high presence at the museum for various reasons: distance from the museum, more choices about how to spend time, etc. The children's museum's Secondary Audience is:

- Children, birth through 2 years
- Children and youth, 10 – 12 years
- Community and school groups
- Early care and learning professionals, elementary and middle school teachers
- *Visiting Region 5*

An emerging audience is not as likely to have a significant presence at the museum, at least initially. Serving this audience is strategically important—being useful to building community, extending regional reach, and cultivating relationships. The children’s museum’s Emerging Audience is:

- Youth 13 years and up in targeted experiences
- Low-income families
- Retirees
- Non-traditional museum audiences including the Leech Lake Band and the Amish
- *Living in counties surrounding Region 5*

Organizational Goals

Six areas indicate where the museum intends to channel its efforts and hold itself accountable. The children’s museum will be:

- A consistently rich array of play and learning experiences and environments that strengthen connections to the region and create openings to the world beyond;
- An indispensable asset in the region for families of all backgrounds to meet and engage around common interests and priorities for their children;
- A recognized regional convener that advances the larger regional agenda around children and the challenges and opportunities they face;
- An organization that connects and helps grow regional assets; people, nature, business, agriculture, and the arts;
- A disciplined organization engaged in learning for itself, children and families, and the region;
- A sustainable organization that leverages regional assets, enjoys diverse support, and monitors selected measures.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE FRAMEWORK

A learning experience framework consolidates a museum's ideas about learning and learners and the ways in which it intends to deliver learning value for its visitors in its setting. This foundational set of ideas focuses and sets priorities and begins the process of translating its understanding of learning into museum experiences.

The framework is also a guide, a resource, and a tool. It informs exhibit and experience planning and communication about the museum's learning interests to partners and stakeholders. It serves as a guide in developing, assessing, and updating programs. And it is a resource for growing internal capacity, framing research questions, and enhancing its learning value for itself and the community.

Grounded in its vision, mission, and values, the framework is an expression of a museum's long-term learning interests and serves the entire museum.

A learning experience framework for a hands-on interactive museum for children and families is not explicitly tied to school curriculum or state standards. It is, however, full of learning that complements and supplements school priorities.

Learning

View of Learning

A shared view of learning guides the museum in creating and assessing experiences for its learners regardless of age or background. In developing its own exhibits, programs, and environments or in weighing opportunities with partners, the museum should be asking questions such as, *How is this experience directed by the learner? How are the learners' senses, previous experiences, and feelings engaged? What meaningful connections are learners inclined to make? What changes in understanding do we believe this experience encourages?*

Based on an understanding of learning and its own aspirations, the museum views learning as:

An active, lifelong process directed by the learner. Motivated by curiosity and interests, learning engages the senses, emotions, and mind. Learning takes place over time through interactions with others and the physical environment, builds on experience, and creates new meaning.

Key words and phrases in the above definition help shape the Learning Experience Framework, inform the museum's offerings, and build learning value:

active; lifelong process; learner directed; motivated; curiosity; interests; senses; emotions; mind; over time; interactions; experience; new meaning.

Audience as Learners

Children's museums distinguish themselves from other museums by being for someone rather than about something, such as science, art, or history. They are for children and the people—parents, caregivers, friends, and educators—who care for and about them. Because children are born to learn—accomplishing great feats of learning very early in life—and because the museum believes learning occurs throughout life, it views its audience as learners.

The museum's audience is children 12 years and under, their parents, grandparents, caregivers, and educators living in and visiting the five-county region. This audience of children, youth, and adults share characteristics as learners that are salient to the museum's view of learning and to how it prepares and delivers learning experiences.

Although learners are diverse in many ways, learners young and experienced also share qualities with one another. Visiting the museum, exploring exhibits, meeting friends, participating in programs, are learners who are:

- Social, they engage with others, collaborate, help, and learn from and with them;
- Active, they touch, turn, lift, move, and carry, make choices, learn from climbing, crawling, and pushing;
- Curious and inquisitive, they ask questions, follow their interests, gather information, and seek answers.

Learners can also be tired or distracted, qualities that can interfere with learning and enjoyment. These can be managed and mitigated through architecture and way-finding, amenities such as seating and food service, exhibit maintenance routines, and staff preparation and customer service. These practices along with thoughtful consideration of these qualities of the learner help address the needs and expectations of the museum's learners in proactive, positive ways.

The museum recognizes adults as a valuable resource in serving all of its learners. Typically half of a children's museum's visitors are parents and caregivers. They are partners in play and learning with their children as well as a significant group of museum learners themselves. Adults listen to children, answer their questions, connect a museum experience with a previous experience, share their knowledge, read text, extend a child's exploration, and follow up at home or at the library. Whether parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nannies, baby sitters, neighbors, daycare providers, camp counselors, scout leaders, field-trip chaperones, and teachers, adults are also learners

themselves, learning about their child, learning about learning and learning about the Region's assets.

Learning Principles

With a long-term interest in children's thriving, the museum is intent on understanding how children grow, develop, and learn. Taking direction from its view of learning, the museum has identified a set of principles about learning in informal settings that are grounded in child development, learning theory, and research.

- Children are active participants in their own learning, exploring the environment, learning to communicate, and building relationships.¹
- Regardless of age or background, all children benefit from exposure to engaging and challenging experiences and places outside the home to be prepared for school and life.²
- Play contributes to the optimal development for all children and is essential to the cognitive, physical, social emotional well-being of children and youth.³
- Learning environments that draw on children's innate curiosity help a child learn through exploration and inquiry. A more diverse environment affords more diverse play and learning behaviors.⁴
- Children learn from direct experience with varied and real objects and materials. Children explore, manipulate, and elaborate using real objects in order to be able to engage in symbolic forms of learning such as reading and writing.⁵

¹ Gopnik, A., A. Meltzoff, and P. Kuhl. 1999. *The scientist in the crib: What early learning tells us about the mind*. New York: Harper Collins.

² Copple, Carol and S. Bredekamp. 2009. *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs*. Washington, D.C., National Association for the Education of Young Children.

³ American Academy of Pediatrics. 2006. *The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds*. Retrieved May 8, 2018, from: www.aap.org/pressroom/playFINAL.pdf

⁴ Alliance for Childhood, 2005. *A call to action on the education of young children*. Retrieved May 8, 2018 from: www.allianceforchildhood.net/pdf_files/background_paper.pdf

⁵ Paris, S. and S. Hapgood, 2002. *Children learning with objects in informal learning environments*. In *Perspectives on object-centered learning in museums* edited by S. Paris. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- Relationships with adults who care about learning are essential to children's learning. Children learn in relationship with others, through conversation, interaction, sharing information, and finding out together with family and peers.⁶

Four Cs / 21st Century Skills

Four skill areas, also called 21st Century Skills, are of particular significance to the museum's view of learning. Relevant across settings, to play, now and in the future, these skills highlight the nature of learning that is valued by the museum. Process oriented, they recognize the individual as an active agent in learning and the social nature of learning. Each Skill is made up of several learning practices that are evident in the behaviors of children and adults, and can be supported by design, material, and facilitation decisions.

- Critical Thinking: Ask questions; gather more precise information; reason; link actions and effects; work out possible solutions; draw conclusions
- Collaboration: Assume roles; seek and share resources; take turns; agree to a goal; use others' suggestions; help others
- Communication: Listen; share ideas; give feedback; discuss; make a suggestion; tell a story; explain how something works
- Creativity: Imagine; generate ideas; try another approach; make unusual connections; use materials in new ways; apply information to new situations

Experiences

Essential Experiences

Children who thrive and feel successful across a range of life settings and situations benefit from a variety of experiences and interactions with peers and adults. For some children, these experiences provide the foundation for a good start in life. For other children, these experiences serve as protective factors against multiple challenges and risks. But all children, regardless of their age, ability, or background, benefit from engaging with new friends and supportive adults, in interesting spaces, and with activities, objects, materials and tools, exploring ideas and possibilities, their own and others'.

⁶ Vygotsky, L. 1978. The role of play in development. In *Mind in society: Development of higher psychological processes*, edited by M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, and E. Souberman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

In developing, designing, and selecting exhibits, programs, activities, and environments, the museum intentionally incorporates building-block experiences into its exhibits, environments, and programs that foster:

- Feeling welcome and accepted
- Noticing, wondering, and exploring the world
- A growing sense of competence
- Supportive relationships
- Understanding feelings, ideas, and perspectives
- Being open to an expanding world

Essential Experiences, ones that all children should be able to enjoy, are listed below along with how they may be played out in the museum's exhibits, environments, and experiences.

When children *feel welcome and accepted* they:

- Feel recognized and valued for who they are;
- Enjoy support in new situations;
- Find attractive choices and accessible challenges;
- Succeed at an appropriate level;
- Experience the environment as safe and secure.

When children *notice, wonder, and explore the world* they:

- Engage with the world using all the senses;
- Are curious, ask questions, imagine;
- Investigate how something works and what it is made of;
- Use information-finding skills;
- Coordinate senses and actions to achieve a goal;
- Enjoy extended time playing and directing play.

When children *grow a sense of competence* they:

- Repeat and refine efforts for improved results;
- Try new tools and materials;
- Navigate novel situations successfully;
- Make choices and manage consequences;
- Assess abilities against risks;
- Fail safely and try again;
- Meet challenges and set new ones.

When children *enjoy supportive relationships* they:

- Have positive interactions with adults other than parents;
- Feel encouraged by adults to try something new;
- Observe adults reading, asking questions, and learning;
- Grow relationships and friendships;

- Share interests and ideas with others;
- Collaborate with peers and work as a team;
- Care about and help others.

When children *understand feelings, ideas, and perspectives* they:

- Express an idea, feeling, or an “ah-ha” moment;
- Listen to others with different views or ideas;
- Resolve conflicts with others;
- Express joy, delight, awe;
- Feel excited by discoveries;
- Recognize their *spark*.

When children are *open to an expanding world*, they:

- Draw on personal connections to their community;
- Connect with local cultural and seasonal traditions;
- Discover local-global connections;
- Deepen their regional roots;
- Manage uncertainty.

Experience Approaches

While valuing all of the Essential Experiences, the museum believes that it has a greater opportunity to advance some of these experiences for children, and their parents and caregivers. Five Experience Areas, drawn from across the Essential Experiences, resonate with the active, learner-directed, social, and meaning-making process that the museum values. These Approaches are where the museum intends to focus the opportunities it creates, build internal capacity, and distinguish itself from other organizations or agencies that serve a similar audience.

Important for the museum in its role on the regional learning landscape, the five Experiences Areas connect with STEM, Arts, Global Awareness, Literacy and Language, Early Childhood, and Well-being in the school curriculum. These areas also align with the 21st Century Skills described below. Finally, they point towards areas of impact where the museum hopes to make a difference.

- Exploring Together: Have, share, and test ideas; ask questions; build on others’ ideas; explore alternatives; work together towards a common goal; talk about it: STEM, Literacy and Language
- Get Moving: Be active, play; climb, dance; use your body to move, explore, build, and understand; spatial reasoning; take a risk, meet a challenge: Well-being, Early Childhood
- Making Meaningful Connections: Link actions and effects; explore connections among objects, part-and-whole relationships; build ideas and understandings; make

connections with people and ideas, across systems, the Region and the world: STEM, Cultural Awareness, Early Childhood

- Imagining Something Different: Imagine; try different roles; understand other's feelings; take another perspective: Cultural Awareness, STEM, Arts
- Expressing Yourself: Take a challenge, risk; try something new; look into the future; cultural and global connections: Arts, Language and Literacy, Cultural Awareness, Wellbeing

Engagement

Engagement Strategies

In creating learning experiences, the museum uses approaches that are associated with exploration, learning, and discovery in informal learning settings—social, object centered, and active. These strategies support the museum's view of learning and are capable of engaging a wide range of audiences in varied ways and settings, from exhibits, to programs, to studio spaces, to mobile units.

- **Play**
- **Conversation**
- Materials Exploration
- Place-based Contexts
- Digital Media

Play offers opportunities for children to explore and use found objects, materials, and toys, transforming them with their imaginations. In play, children set physical challenges for themselves. They make up stories, games and rules, negotiating and problem solving about where the story will go, finding roles for new players, and adding ideas to a story. Play:

- Takes many forms, dramatic and pretend play, constructive play, symbolic play, and games with rules;
- Engages people of all ages, all across the life span, from the solitary play of babies to the parallel and cooperative play among children, to competitive games and competitions;
- Allows children to learn something that is otherwise difficult to teach like cooperation, negotiation, risk taking; confidence; and
- Is supported by the design of spaces and places and the selection of materials that encourage, support, and extend the variety of play.

Conversation is both a process and a product, what a group talks about and what it is thinking about. Speaking and listening back-and-forth, with gestures and actions occur everyday in museums. Even babies' pointing and the directional gaze among group

members is part of conversation. Sharing ideas and thinking together out loud with family, playmates, or facilitators, visitors make meaning of the experiences they bring with them and the ones they have at the museum. Conversation:

- Is social, an exchange between people, that ebbs and flows, sometimes beginning prior to time at the museum and continuing afterwards;
- Can both satisfy curiosity and pique the interest of someone;
- Supports learning in a variety of ways, as talk-and-play, the foundation of literacy; and
- Is supported by the design of spaces, sound control, the choice of objects and materials, staff preparation, and engaging text.

Materials Exploration invites play and investigation of materials and the information they carry about the world, how it works, and how it is likely to work. Observing materials—clay, copper mesh, smooth stones, fabric—and exploring them through touch, sight, smell, and sound builds awareness, reveals their properties, and suggests how they can be used. Materials Exploration:

- Invites questions, open-ended explorations and new understandings critical to innovation;
- Is inspired with more varied materials—natural, man-made, raw and open-ended, that change with use—inviting more varied explorations, uses, and discoveries;
- Is enriched with an abundance of a material extending exploration, suggesting new possibilities; and
- Is supported by the design of spaces—the presence of loose parts and open-ended materials, workspace surfaces, accessible storage, and available tools.

Place-based Contexts are starting points for engagement, making connections, and discovery. Places matter. Natural features, iconic elements, dramatic views, related activities, old stories, and recent memories build attachment to places. They are a source of pride, identity, and connection. In a museum, Place-based Contexts also inspire, support, and contain children's play, exploration, and conversation. **Children make up their own stories, create adventures, and invent games in Place-based Contexts that are physical, sensory rich, and full of information and meaning.** Place-based Contexts:

- Cover a wide range of settings, ones that may be familiar or novel, real or imagined, natural or fantastic, miniature or gigantic;
- May be replicas or interpretations, one specific place, combinations of several places, created by an artist, or by many young artists;
- **Can connect generations and cross geographies and time zones;** and
- Are supported by the design of spaces, their features, materials, lighting, and mood.

Digital Media has a strong presence in the lives of children and adults. While it can distract from social and physical interactions, it also has great potential for creating context, extending experiences, and enhancing interactions. When digital interactions are highly integrated with a museum's built environment, the physical and the digital are blurred. Visitors can engage their senses, and technology can be a tool for creative exploration. Digital Media:

- Can all but disappear, sparking a sense of surprise and wonder;
- Brings distant places closer and helps make diverse cultural experiences accessible;
- Can capture responses and serve as a record, allow learners to revisit moments, and share with others; and
- Is supported by the design of spaces and their features.

Learning Experience Platforms

Learning Experience Platforms are large-scale learning assets that advance the museum's long-term strategic and learning interests and distinguish it from other organizations. These resources allow the museum to be attractive to and serve a diverse audience, be sustainable, and have a meaningful impact on the Region's challenges and priorities. While defined as separate platforms, distinctions between Learning Experience Platforms are not always marked. Platforms can overlap as they do when activity carts are used for a demonstration in an exhibit.

- Exhibits and Environments: Hands-on activity environments and experiences located both indoors and out including a changing gallery space that features temporary exhibits from other museums, showcases local projects, or presents an annual seasonal exhibit like Ice Shanties.
- Programs and Events: Facilitated experiences by staff and volunteers prepared to engage children and adults in active, hands-on exploration on a specific topic. Program formats vary to include drop-in programs, facilitated field trips, day camps, on site and in the community.
- Studio/Maker Spaces: High-facilitation and material-rich settings such as classrooms, multi-purpose space, and a maker space.
- Parent and Caregiver Resource Hub: Information on regional resources; digital museum guide
- Mobile Unit: A Play Mobile, Tech Mobile, or Story Mobile travels the region, reaching out to towns, schools, libraries, and parks across the Region, and gathering ideas or stories for exhibits and programs at the museum site.
- Teachers' Center for Interactive Learning: A multi-dimensional professional development resource offering workshops and training, hands-on learning materials, and classroom manipulatives serving teachers, early childhood through middle school from across the region.

- **Initiatives:** Long-term efforts focused on high profile issues and topics of interest that are delivered through exhibits and programs and often with partners.

Ways in which Learning Experience Platforms serve audience groups are highlighted below.

The museum engages learners who are <i>active, social, curious and inquisitive</i> in these groups...	... Through these Engagement Platforms ...
Children birth - 2 year (infants and toddlers) visiting with families and care groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibits and Environments • Programs and Events
Children 2 - 5 years (preschoolers) visiting with families and in care groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibits and Environments • Programs and Events
Children 5 - 8 years (kindergarteners – 2 nd graders) in groups visiting with classes or at their schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibits and Environments • Programs and Events • Studio/Maker Space • Mobile Unit
Children 8 - 10 years (2 nd – 4 th graders) in groups visiting with classes or at their schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibits and Environments • Programs and Events • Studio/Maker Space • Mobile
Youth 10 - 12 years (5 th – 6 th graders) in groups visiting with classes or at their schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs and Events • Mobile Museum • Studio/Maker Space
Caregivers: Parents, grandparents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibits and Environments • Programs and Events • Parent and Caregiver Resource Hub
Family groups: Visiting together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhibits and Environments • Programs and Events
Educators and Care Providers (infant through middle school) visiting the museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs and Events • Teachers' Center
Community members who can impact children's lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs and Events

Impact

A museum needs to do well for itself and for its community. The areas in which it hopes to make positive contributions to the lives of the children, families, and its community are where it must play an active and deliberate role, put resources, build expertise, and monitor its impact. The overlap of the five Experience Areas, 21st Century Skills, and Engagement Strategies are where the museum hopes to make positive contributions to

the following groups over a period of approximately five-to-ten years after it opens. How these pieces work together along the lines of a logic model are included in the Appendix.

The process of developing and delivering exhibits and programs will enable the museum to identify indicators to track the results of its efforts along the way. The museum intends to make a positive difference in Region 5 for:

- Children and Youth
- Families
- Educators and Care Providers
- The Museum
- The Region

Children and youth who are *thriving*:

- Are inspired and eager to play
- View themselves as competent thinkers and doers
- Enjoy strong bonds to parents and caring adults
- Feel a sense of optimism about the future and part of a larger world
- Enjoy new experiences and make new connections
- Experience improved wellbeing

Families that are *strong*:

- Connect to support networks and resources
- Recognize the family's role in supporting early experiences
- Have capacity to and interest in facilitating and extending a child's explorations
- Actively engage in varied activities, spend time together, and support their child's education
- Welcome new families, connect, and build relationships
- Experience reduced isolation

Educators and Care Providers who are *prepared and supported*:

- Build on children's strengths and capabilities
- Value play as a powerful source of learning
- Are prepared to teach a more diverse group of students
- View themselves as active learners
- Connect to other educators, care providers, professionals

A museum that is *community owned*:

- Enjoys participation and affiliation of residents from across the region

- Is recognized as a reliable resource on play and serving children and families
- Is positioned to help drive community-level change
- Has long-term partnerships that are diverse, innovative, and stable
- Builds public knowledge about children

A Region that is *connected across counties, cities, and towns*:

- Is viewed as a community center for collaboration around children
- Supports innovative, learning opportunities for children and youth
- Understands common grounds
- Celebrates shared regional commitments and distinct regional contributions
- Fosters a sense of connection to the region among its children

EXPERIENCES, ENVIRONMENTS & EXHIBITS

Experience Theme: Places to Go

This overarching theme carries the intended spirit of the museum experience. It's about places to go in the museum, in the region, and in the world. It's also about seeing the next challenge and getting to it.

Experience Goals and Criteria

Guided by its view of learning as active and directed by the learner, the museum creates interactive environments, exhibits, and programs that invite the visitor, from the youngest to the oldest, to create and shape their experiences. In immersive settings indoors and out, rich with objects and materials, at engaging activities, children and adults explore, imagine, create, play, and connect. Experiences that involve doing, thinking, sensing, and feeling are guided by a set of experience goals. The museum's exhibits and environments are where visitors:

1. **Act on** the world around them; engage with responsive environments and materials and:
 - **Observe** materials, movement, and living creatures;
 - **Navigate** unfamiliar spaces and transform them into their own.
2. Are inspired to follow their curiosity and imagination, wonder “**what if?**”, and:
 - **Take risks**—physical, social, and intellectual; set themselves up for challenges of their own making;
 - Make sense of **connections** around them; find out how one part relates to another.
3. **Work together** with friends, family, and people they don't yet know; help make something big that others can see and:
 - Discover what new things are possible by **sharing ideas**; and build on someone else's idea;
 - **Express** themselves in varied way—singing, drawing, moving, and acting.
4. Get refreshed, inspired, and engage the senses; **wake up** to and delight in the world around them and:
 - Feel the beauty and wonder of nature; call out its **qualities** and behaviors;
 - Feel the **wonder** of new perspectives and extraordinary views; feel elevated

Experience Criteria

While the museum's seven Learning Experience Platforms vary in how they engage visitors, they all express a set of shared criteria. Programs and Events, the Maker Studio, the Mobile Unit, and Exhibits and Environments share the following criteria.

- Child directed experiences allow the child agency and choice to follow interests, express preferences, pace themselves, and do "it" their way. Free play is child directed.
- Open ended, whether an activity, question, or object, allows for multiple pathways for exploring or understanding a myriad of uses and multiple outcomes.
- Loose parts are the moveable and found materials and objects that spark, enrich, and extend children's play. They include everything from sand and water to sticks, plastic crates and buckets, feathers, pinecones and seeds, hoses, and tubing. Loose parts have instrumentality and interact with other materials and media.
- Local materials, stones, logs, pinecones, and sand, are a familiar part of the local landscape, structures, and experience. They come from nearby although they may sometimes be used in unusual ways.
- Challenge and risk engage visitors and invite them to stretch. Whether a challenge is physical, social, or cognitive, it is an opportunity to assess capabilities against what is new, uncertain, or demanding.
- Connected play flows from one activity to another in contrast to start-and-stop play. In connected play, an activity can be repeated, repeated with variation or with the player assuming a new role. One activity leads to another for sustained engagement.
- Layering works at every scale, from the background and context, to experiences and activities, to materials and objects, opportunities for social interaction and conversation, interpretive strategies, media, and labels.

Exhibit Descriptions

Of the seven Learning Experience Platforms identified for WonderTrek Children's Museum, Exhibits and Environments undoubtedly will play the greatest role in engaging visitors and delivering learning value for children, parents and caregivers, and educators.

In virtually every children's museum, exhibits and environments are at the heart of the experience it offers and what distinguishes it from other settings that serve children and families, from schools, to libraries, to parks and recreation. The concepts that shape exhibits shape the museum and its identity. Even when exhibits are refreshed and upgraded over the years, there is, inevitably, something in the first round of exhibits that is remembered, cherished, and serves younger siblings and visitors.

The following exhibit and program concepts were drawn from ideas and directions generated by the planning group. They begin—from the inside out—to paint a picture of the future museum experience and will help guide further development and design of the facility.

Currently, the concepts are organized around six focus areas. In some ways, these focus areas represent specific places within the museum. In other ways, they will thread through many places and activities in the overall museum experience.

- At the Lake
- From the Garden
- Into the Woods
- On the Road
- Open for Possibilities (Changing Exhibit Gallery)
- In the Great Outdoors

At the Lake

Lakes are irresistible. We're drawn to their shores and delight in their sparkling reflections. They open up wide vistas—sometimes to the horizon—and reveal new mysteries from season to season. Whether fishing with grandma and grandpa or making sandcastles at the public beach, lakes are places for endless fun and exploration.

Lakes are part of the region's shared identity and pride. Not everyone has a lake to go to, but Kinder Lake at WonderTrek Children's Museum is a place for everyone—people and animals alike.

Nate's Bait Shop and Play Outfitter—Bait shops are filled with wonders, from live minnows and worms to fanciful lures and bobbers. Nate's is the place where all Children's Museum visitors go to get ready for a day on the Lake.

- **Giant Minnow Bucket.** There are some big minnow buckets out there, but this one is really big—almost eight feet across. Like the real thing, it's yellow and translucent, so lots of light gets in. Children can easily crawl into the bucket where lighting effects on the floor mimic sunlight through water. When they look up they'll see hundreds of scaled-up minnows schooling overhead, video of live minnows projected on a theatrical scrim.
- **Play Outfitters.** Every bait shop has a sales counter, where customers buy special supplies and a helpful outfitter passes on tips about where the fish are biting. Here's where museum visitors pick up everything they'll need at the lake: fishing poles, nets, life vests, stringer, binoculars, and more. Behind the counter is a map of Kinder Lake with images of different fish in various parts of the lake. The Play Outfitters will be a great place to just hangout and tell stories, especially for teen volunteers.



At the Lake

- **Worm Farm.** Museum visitors can lift the lid on a bin full of organic matter and earthworms. There's a fun lesson here about what worms eat and what they poop.
- **Crazy Creature Lures.** Why buy a fishing lure when you can make your own? By clipping various materials onto a base, visitors work to make the best fish-tricking lures ever made. They can test their designs by trolling with them in a clear-sided tank with moving water.
- **Catch of the Day.** On one wall is a kind of community bulletin board, where visitors post their own fish pics. Bring in your "big catch" photos and post them for everyone to see.
- **Lake Shoes.** Here's where visitors find the right footwear for their lake adventure—from flip flops to big boots and waders.
- **Little Free Library.** On the way into Nate's, museum visitors can pick up a good book to read or a fish identification guide to browse through while sitting in the boat or at the end of the dock.

Water on the Move—Even in the stillest lake, water is always on the move. It splashes and swirls when fish jump, and waves at us with ripples and whitecaps. This long stream table mimics the flow of water through natural-looking channels where visitors can play with the current, make a flood, create rapids, and redirect the flow.

- At the end of the stream, where the water settles out into a pool, boat builders can try out ideas for new boat and pontoon designs.

Near the stream table, other water activities invite play with artful elements.

- Lights aimed upward through shallow pools of water reflect ripples on the ceiling above.
- Shallow tanks filled with soapy water are all it takes to get the bubbles rolling, rising, and popping. Hands, fingers, and handheld wands are the only tools needed to produce astonishing results.

Fishing Dock—A wood platform sits just high enough off the floor so that young children can sit with their legs dangling over the edge. The surface all around the dock is carpeted in the colors of water. A few lily pads are cut into the image. A background wall mural shows trees along the opposite shore. The dock forms a "T" to give plenty of room for people to fish or just sit and read a book. Underneath the dock, an otter sticks its head up just enough to be seen by curious lake explorers.

From the Garden

Gardens, fields, and orchards are food places—where people work with natural systems to grow good things to eat. These are great places to observe seasonal cycles, from



From the Garden

spring sprouts and buds to autumn roots and seeds. And, there's always a long list of things to do, so anyone can pitch in and help grow some food and get it ready for eating.

This array of settings and activities are mostly based indoors, insuring a more easily managed, year-round offering. As architecture permits, access to an outdoor greenhouse could extend children's play with real plants, soil, and water well into winter. As a destination within the museum, The Garden can also function as a food hub, where food-growing activities connect with eating (snack time or school lunchtime), cooking, and possible community gatherings around food and nutrition. This is where you get to know your food before you eat it.

Minnesota's Longest Picnic Table—Every day is a community picnic, where there's room for everyone and everyone is welcome. This might well be the longest picnic table in all of Minnesota. Some say it's where Paul Bunyan hosted the biggest picnic the north country ever saw. While this long table may or may not be the stuff of legend, it will surely get talked about in the years ahead. Visitors will get their first glimpse of the table while entering the museum. It will curve and wind its way through several areas, even into the Great Outdoors. It will be broken into segments to assure access and allow for the movement of people through the museum. While the idea of really long picnic table is fanciful, it's also very practical. Every exhibit area will benefit from a table and seating, for special programs, calm places to sit and color, impromptu family gatherings, school group lunches, and temporary displays. Most importantly, the longest picnic table will become the signature asset of the community, providing physical and symbolic connections between all of the food-related exhibits and programs at the museum.

- Seating can be made by regional artists and craftspeople
- Each segment could be adopted by communities across Region 5
- A place for serving real and pretend meals
- In places, visitors can find picnic baskets packed with plates, silverware, etc. for setting the table and hosting picnics. Who would you like to invite to your picnic dinner? The baskets could have different themes or include menus from the cultures highlighted in the Farmer's Market and Garden Plots.

Floating Farmer's Market—Climb aboard a farmer's pontoon that just came in from across the lake with baskets of reproduction fruits, vegetables, and prepared foods. Not only does this farmer have a big garden and orchard across the lake, she also harvests good things to eat from the woods and waterways around her farm. This unusual Farmer's Market will be a great conversation starter. This food comes from a farm across the lake and from nearby woods. But where does other food come from? The dock and the nearby picnic table children can also talk about what's good to eat, compare food sources, and look at different food traditions. The main activities will be:

- Buying and selling produce,
- Serving food at the picnic table,
- Bringing in your "catch of the day" from the Lake.

Into the Woods

Woods are a familiar landscape for many of the region's children. Even if they don't live in a dense stand of tall trees, they have seen them all around in their daily travels. These familiar places, however, can hold surprising adventures and start some good conversations.

Several woodland-themed exhibit areas—each designed for particular kinds of activity and for specific audiences—are nestled together in a tall space, giving the illusion of depth and expansiveness. In a relatively small area, the woods will hold various layers of wildness and a visible transition from forest to pastures and farm fields.

Treehouse Forest—A series of trails starts on level pasturelands, like those in western Todd County, and winds up through a re-created woodland and into a pine forest, like those in northern Cass County. The trails are a combination of challenge course and three-dimensional, above-ground maze. Physical challenges start with ramps and clatter bridges, progressing to more thrilling experiences, such as walking across a rope bridge (netted) high above the ground or climbing into a lookout retreat. Spatial mapping skills will get a workout as climbers puzzle out crisscrossing routes through the trees.

- Treehouse structures will provide lookouts for wildlife.
- Adventurous climbers will eventually reach a window that looks out into a living pine forest on the other side of the glass, also with climbing trails and treehouses.
- A fire tower takes climbers up to an observation post just above the recreated forest canopy. From there, they use viewing tubes to spot birds in the treetops and storms approaching from the distance.

The Clearing—At the edge of the forest is a place where visitors can play with light coming through the trees, casting shadows from different kinds of trees and branches. This stage-like setting is outfitted with lights shining from all angles, mirrors to rotate at different angles to catch and bounce light, a few fans to move materials around in artful ways, and maybe a cloud or two that can be moved in front of the sun to cast fun shadows on the floor. This will be a rich setting for dramatic play with a few props such as scarves and fabric.

- On the trail leading up to the clearing is one of several Little Free Libraries visitors will find throughout the museum. This one holds books about plants, animals, and weather phenomena in the forest.

The HideAway—Tucked away at the edge of these woods is a special place for children four years and younger to play with and among animals living in the region—from the farm and in the wild—and with their parents and caregivers. Hills and hummocks, bridges and boardwalks, slides and stairs invite curious creepers and crawlers, cruisers and new walkers to move across the sculptural landscape where they discover and play with animals in their habitats. The HideAway features:



Into the Woods

- About 30 regional animals, both wild and domestic, large and small,
- Sculptural animals, some soft and cuddly, some not easy to find,
- Animals in their habitats, farm, woods, grasslands, aquatic,
- Sounds of places and animals at Listening Points throughout,
- Small versions of the animals, carved wooden and puppet versions, to clutch and carry,
- A Little Free Library with picture books about animals.

On the Road

Hop in the car and before you know it, you're on the road. And since one road almost always leads to another, the possibilities for *places to go* are boundless. Young children start close to home when mapping out their worlds, adding bits and pieces of farther-away places over time. This group of experience platforms will provide the set up for imaginative travels, where children find familiar place names and landmarks while discovering clues about faraway places. Supporting programs will introduce museum visitors to diverse cultures—some close to home, others from around the world.

Packing Up—Sometimes the best parts of a trip are the surprises you find along the way. For this expedition, museum staff have packed up a few surprises for each visitor heading out into the world. On one side of a four-foot wall, visitors will find an assortment of carrying bags, from backpacks, to purses, baskets, and small suitcases hanging on pegs. They can grab one and start their journey, opening it along the way to find fun and useful gear to help in their travels. If visitors want to pack their own bag, they can head around to the other side where they'll find empty bags of various sorts along with a selection of exploration tools to pack up for their big adventure, including flashlights, measuring sticks, magnifying glasses, and more.

- A Little Free Library features books about places and people.

Are We There Yet? —This cluster of settings and activities is about places, where they are and how to get there. At its center is a highly stylized, room-sized, interactive map of Region 5 filled with landmarks and geographical features. It will be a multi-dimensional map, with vertical surfaces for images and activities.

- The map is comprised of several tabletops with openings in between and places where children can crawl under and pop up into the middle of a map.
- It will feature many ways to make tracks and get from here to there, piece together roads, railroads, and snowmobile trails between the places and landmarks of Region 5.
- The map will highlight diverse destinations in Region 5, such as Leech Lake Reservation, Camp Ripley, and Amish country.

- Visitors pick up and deliver letters to mailboxes throughout the exhibits (local addresses and foreign stamps), helping to make connections between places on and off the map.
- Seasonal questions prompt visitors to locate places on the map. What's the best place to see fall colors? Where's the best snowmobile trail? Water slide?

Open for Possibilities

Families who visit frequently are on the lookout for something new, and new offerings provide an impetus to step up marketing and raise the profile of the museum. Having the space to host rental exhibits can be a challenge, since the museum may not want to schedule traveling exhibits back to back throughout the year. Rather than close the gallery doors between special exhibits, the museum could develop a set of events, programs, and exhibits that could be set up in the space for a few days up to six months. These offerings could be seasonal, such as a winter holiday exhibit, or based on activities developed from its own creative enterprise, such as In and Out of the Box (described in The Great Outdoors).

This 1,500 to 2,000 square-foot space will accommodate traveling exhibits designed for children's museums. It will be its own gallery, separated from the other exhibits and program areas and:

- Provide opportunities for change, attracting new audiences through time-limited offerings,
- Present traveling exhibits on subjects not featured in the museum's line-up,
- Present global cultures to local audiences with rentals from around the U.S.,
- Be a home base for exhibits produced by the museum

In the Great Outdoors

Being outdoors is a big part of life in Region 5. Sporting events bring people outdoors in all seasons, as do work and recreation. Families are quick to acknowledge the physical and health benefits of being outdoors too. It's while outdoors that the area's sense of place is best appreciated. Beyond the scenic beauty, the landscape abounds with evidence of people making their livings outdoors—in the woods, on the lakes, in the mines, and on the railroads.

This outdoor learning environment will be a place for big messy activities that can't happen indoors. It will also be the place for a year-round greenhouse, seasonal gardening, and living ecosystems, such as a small stand of white pine. This is where close observation is rewarded with surprising discoveries.

Greenhouse—This working greenhouse could be a separate structure completely outside the museum or a connecting space—part inside, part outside.

- It's a place where food is grown year-round.
- Facilitated activities will involve visitors in daily greenhouse activities, such as watering, pollinating, planting, and harvesting.
- An associated potting shed/bench indoors or outdoors will provide open-ended play with planting tools and materials.
- Year-round programs will show all the steps in food production, from planting to cooking.

Market Garden and Orchard—Every year visitors help plant a large garden that produces vegetables and fruits, supplying museum programs and the local food shelf. It:

- Connects to the outdoor greenhouse and indoor food prep area for facilitated cooking programs,
- Has watering cans for dip-and-pour watering activities,
- Grows pick-and-taste fruits and herbs,
- Has live chickens in a chicken tractor, eating bugs and laying eggs,
- Grows edible native plants such as June berries and blueberries,
- Has a Mud Kitchen for making meals with real utensils, sand, and mud,
- Has raised beds and a tool shed for checking out tools for gardening activities and sand play.
- Garden plots planted by cultural groups in Region 5. Plantings can be identified in different languages and associated programs could be developed around seed packets with names of the plants, growing conditions, and dishes made with each fruit or vegetable. Visitors could design their own seed packets.
- Compares food traditions between different cultures. Programs could mirror the different cultural focuses that Sprout currently showcases monthly at their indoor marketplace, such as Ojibwe, Amish, Latino, Somali, etc..

Shipping Container—Everyday children see trucks and trains moving shipping containers. But while everyone knows what a shipping container is, not many people get to go inside one. The one that sits in the museum's Great Outdoors has been modified with a door and some openings for windows. It serves as three-season program space, quirky and curiosity inspiring. For much of the summer season, the shipping container could be home for In and Out of the Box, a creative and highly social activity that starts with boxes of every sort and where:

- Participants are challenged to build on different platforms at different scales,
- Box constructions are created with straws, taping, folding,
- Visitors name their box for its designed use: tackle box, tool box, lunch box, or music box
- Visitor-made box blocks become structures.

Mine Pit—Visitors follow a set of embedded train tracks from the backdoor of the museum down to a rocky-walled, gravel-filled place for digging where they find:

- Tools and equipment for digging and hauling,
- A real, big scoop shovel to sit in, bang on, or load with sand,
- Pea gravel to scoop onto a conveyor belt that empties into a right-sized rail car,
- A lever-operated railroad signal that says ready to go, stop, or dump the ore,
- A drive-up, stand-on scale for weighing loads according to orders placed by construction companies.

Programs Areas and Opportunities

Programs & Events, one of the museum’s seven Learning Experience Platforms, plays an important role in creating a rich, dynamic experience for the museum’s audience, children, newborns through 12 years, their parents, caregivers, and teachers.

These experiences facilitated by staff and volunteers who are prepared to engage children and adults in active programs bring people together, supplement exhibits, expand topics, highlight seasonal events, and connect with community partners. Highly interactive, program presenters engage learners. They listen and answer questions, follow interests, and share special materials, and tools. They highlight local partners, artists, and community interests.

Programs offer relatively flexible experiences in different formats and schedules and serve a number of functions for a museum. They add variety and choice to each visit; serve specific audience groups based on age or interest; and focus on topics of interest and deeper exploration of content. Program fees, when charged, contribute to a museum’s earned revenue. They are generally a valued benefit for members. Museum programs:

- Are a mix of both fee based and free with museum admission,
- Serve repeat visitors with fresh experiences from one visit to the next,
- Support play and learning for a range of audiences,
- Focus on content related to special interests and topics,
- Highlight “signature” programs that are distinct to the museum,
- Draw new audiences with large-scale events.

Offered at the museum and often in the community, program formats include drop-in activities and scheduled programs; one-time programs and a program series; monthly specials and annual events. Program topics are likely to include making and tinkering;

gardening and cooking; engineering and robotics; backyard bugs and aquatic species; printing and dying with plants; music and movement.

The museum will offer programs for the audience groups listed below, introducing them based on interest, internal capacity, and available space.

- Families will be invited to family nights, holiday events, campfire programs, and autism-friendly times.
- School groups will visit the museum for field trips and participate in programs in schools.
- Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers may attend a weekly toddler time with their parents or grandparents. Their parents may attend programs for new parents.
- Children and youth can sign up for scout programs, studio programs, and day camps during school holidays in the school year and over the summer.
- Teachers and early childhood educators and caregivers can take workshops for professional development requirements, attend an annual open house, or take classes on active, hands-on learning
- Public programs invite the community to festivals, events, and concerts; to a summer picnic and a fall harvest festival, to celebrate Cinco de Mayo and Hmong New Year.

The museum may also be the location for programs offered by other organizations such as music and arts or teacher training. While not strictly programs, the museum also anticipates offering birthday parties, adult social events, and volunteer appreciation events.

MOVING FORWARD

Sizing Up the Museum

Benchmarking Overview

As reflections of their communities, children's museums vary from one another in many ways: their community population, the audiences they serve, their particular focus, their exhibits and programs, their size, and type of building.

Yet, while each museum and community is distinct, there are also factors across museums that affect its long-term sustainability and affordability. Size, being the “right size” for the community, is one of these factors and can be understood in several ways: the size of its attendance, the physical size of the facility, and the amount of exhibit square footage. If a museum is too big for its annual attendance, it can be expensive to operate and feel empty for those who do visit. If a museum is too small, it can feel crowded for those who visit and discourage them from returning.

To determine a museum's size, museum planners look to other museums that share relevant similarities with that museum. These *comparable* museums typically have similar audiences, areas of focus, are located in communities with similar size populations, and, when possible, are located in the same, broad geographic region, e.g. the Upper Midwest.

The seven comparable museums selected for WonderTrek Children's Museum are listed below. Referred to as “benchmarks,” these museums, mostly in Minnesota and Wisconsin, were selected because their area populations are comparable to the Brainerd-Baxter area; they describe themselves as regional; and they share similar climates. All but one, Fairbanks, AK, are located in the Upper Midwest. One museum, the Northwoods Children's Museum, is located in a vacation and retirement area around Eagle River, WI that shares similarities with the Brainerd Lakes and Region 5 area.

- Children's Discovery Museum, Grand Rapids, MN
- Duluth Children's Museum, Duluth, MN
- Central Wisconsin Children's Museum, Stevens Point, WI
- Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota, Mankato, MN
- Children's Museum of La Crosse, La Crosse, WI
- Northwoods Children's Museum, Eagle River, WI
- Fairbanks Children's Museum, Fairbanks, AK

Understandably, there are limitations in using data from benchmark museums that should be kept in mind when using this approach.

- Analyses of benchmark data lean heavily on medians (in some cases, averages); presumably a museum hopes to be above average.
- Data from benchmark analyses is based on past trends and is no guarantee of future performance.
- Standards for measuring space and attendance in museums do not exist.
- Museums build their museums—and detailed business plans—from the bottom up based on local specifics, staffing levels, etc.

Looking at Audience, Building Size, & Exhibit Space

A wide range of factors affects a museum's attendance—the number of people who visit the museum. Factors including the museum's location, visibility, and access to the site, parking and transportation, the size of the facility, the amount of space allocated to exhibits, and the quality of exhibits influence a museum's attendance.

In making attendance projections, a museum is also relying on a range of qualitative measures—How compelling is the experience? Are the exhibits high quality? How much is there to do? How fresh is the experience from one visit to the next? How well are the exhibits and facility maintained? How different is the experience from similar venues within the same driving radius. It is important to note that projected attendance should be reassessed if any of the variables—exhibit size, amenities, location, range and quality of offerings, etc.—changes during the course of planning.

Since no two museums are alike, and because standards for counting visitors have not yet been established, successfully projecting attendance can be very difficult. Typically, the process begins with two factors: 1) potential audience (market demographics); and 2) market capture rate (a measure of the drawing power of the museum).

Market demographics should take into account more than numbers of people in a defined geographical area. For instance, regional hubs tend to attract larger audiences than cities of similar sizes, and a larger tourist presence can also increase attendance at certain times of the year. Analysis of the museum's market area, the size and the mix of resident and visiting children and families, will likely be completed as part of the business plan. The market capture rate will be influenced the quality and scope of the museum. For instance, museums with large outdoor areas tend to draw more visitors than similar museums without that offering. Given these considerations, it is prudent to: A) use several metrics to build confidence in any single estimate; and, B) consider a numeric range for projected attendance, especially early in planning.

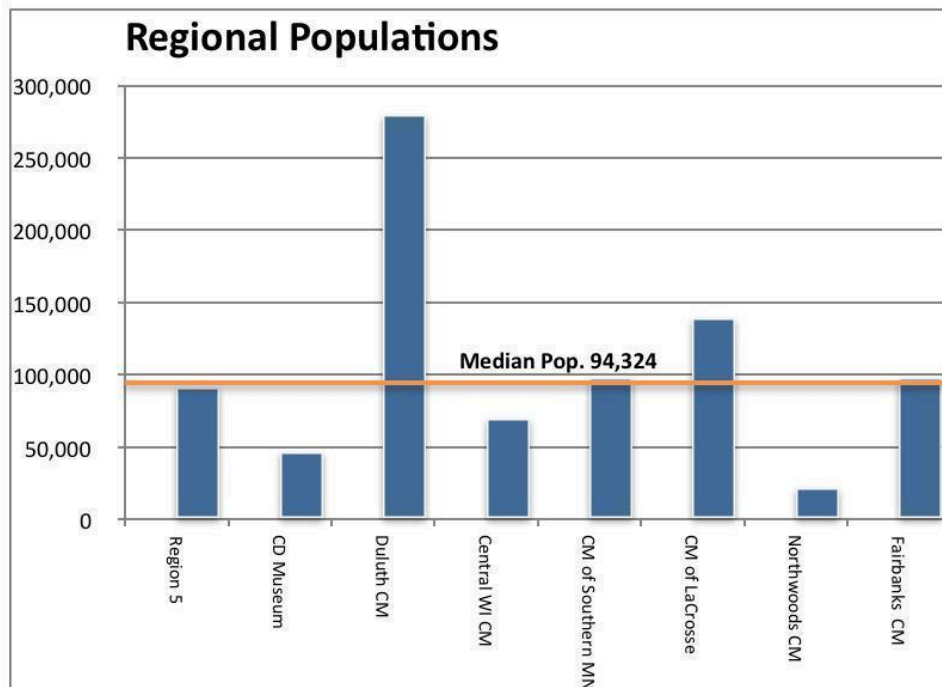
The purpose of this benchmarking analysis is to provide the planning committee for WonderTrek Children's Museum with the data it needs to make preliminary estimates of future attendance and determine the optimal size and scope for a new facility. As noted

above, these two factors, size and attendance, are corollary; one influences the other. The data gathered from the benchmark museums (see Appendix)—critical for establishing preliminary ranges for attendance, building size, and exhibit square footage—include:

- Median attendance at similar museums;
- Median audience capture rates for museums in similar population areas; and
- Attendance related to gallery, or exhibit, size.

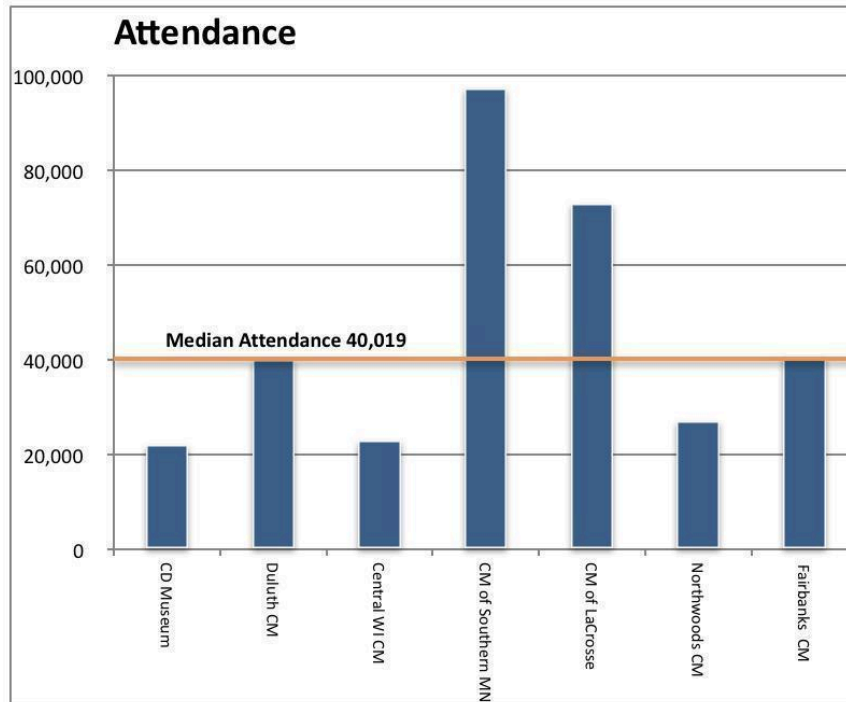
The following graphs illustrate the five sets of benchmark data used in this analysis. Given the small sample size and wide variances between benchmark museums, this analysis is reported in medians versus averages, to lessen the impact of statistical highs and lows within the set.

Where possible, this analysis has used reported regional population such as Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and Micropolitan Statistical Area data to determine the market size for each museum. Where regional populations are less dense, potential audiences are likely to travel farther to attractions such as a children’s museum. Some of these communities also experience population increase during summer months, from tourists and lake-home residents.

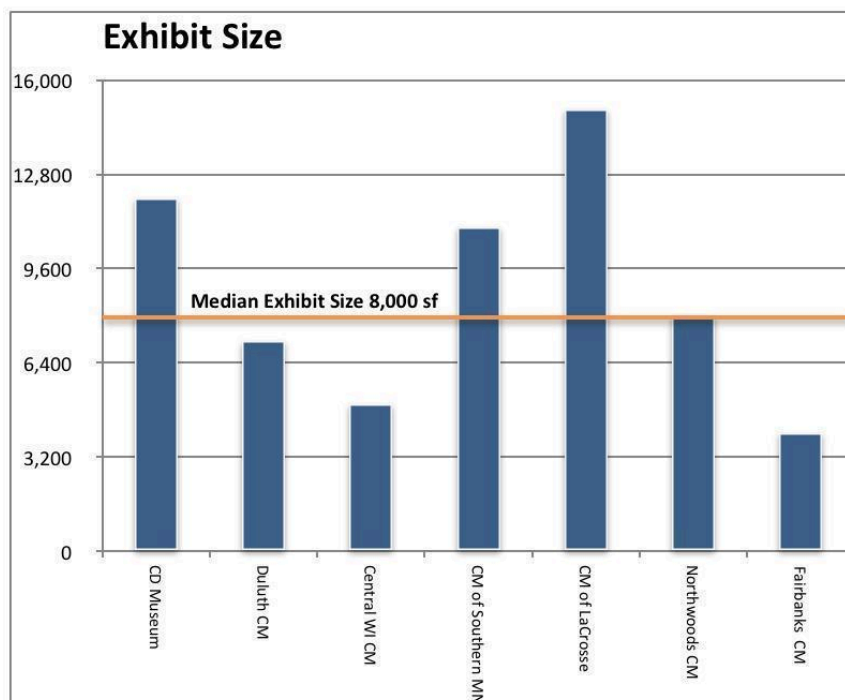


Museum attendance figures typically include every visitor coming through the door, whether it’s their only visit that year or their fifth. While there are no industry standards

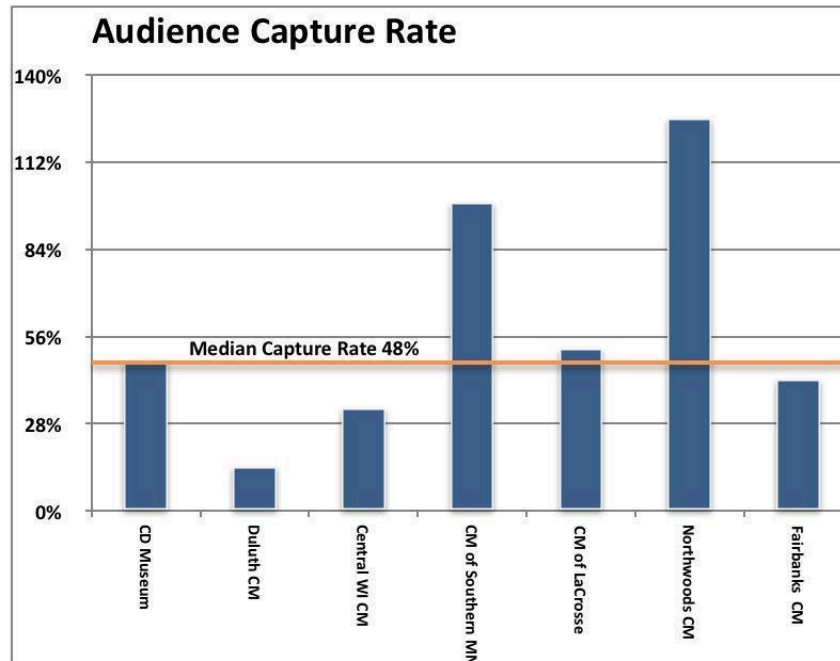
for counting visitors, annual attendance remains an important measure of a museum's drawing power and success reaching its targeted audiences.



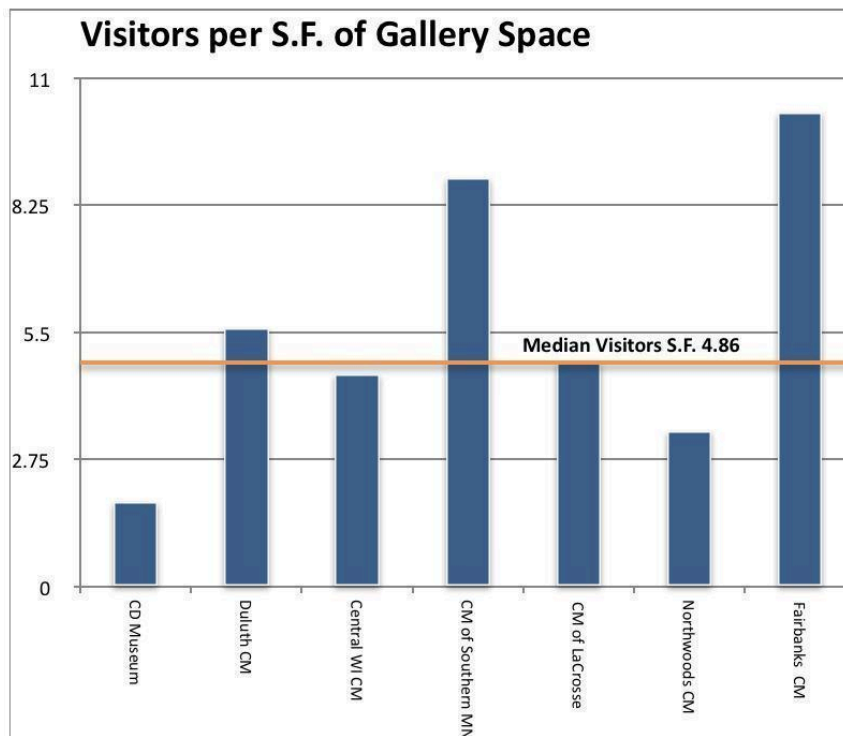
The amount of exhibit space dedicated to high quality exhibits is an important measure of what a museum has to offer its visitors. More exhibit offerings typically translate into more visits, and more visitors. Many children's museums settle into existing buildings and have to make do with very small or very large gallery spaces. The Children's Museum of La Crosse, for instance, is located in a former department store, with generous amounts of space for exhibits.



Audience capture rate reflects the percentage of the market (regional population) that visits a cultural attraction such as a children’s museum in a year. Also called market penetration rate, this number is an important indicator of a museum’s success in attracting audience. Where populations are large, or very dense, as in major cities, capture rates tend to be lower. Likewise, museums in low-density areas tend to have higher capture rates.



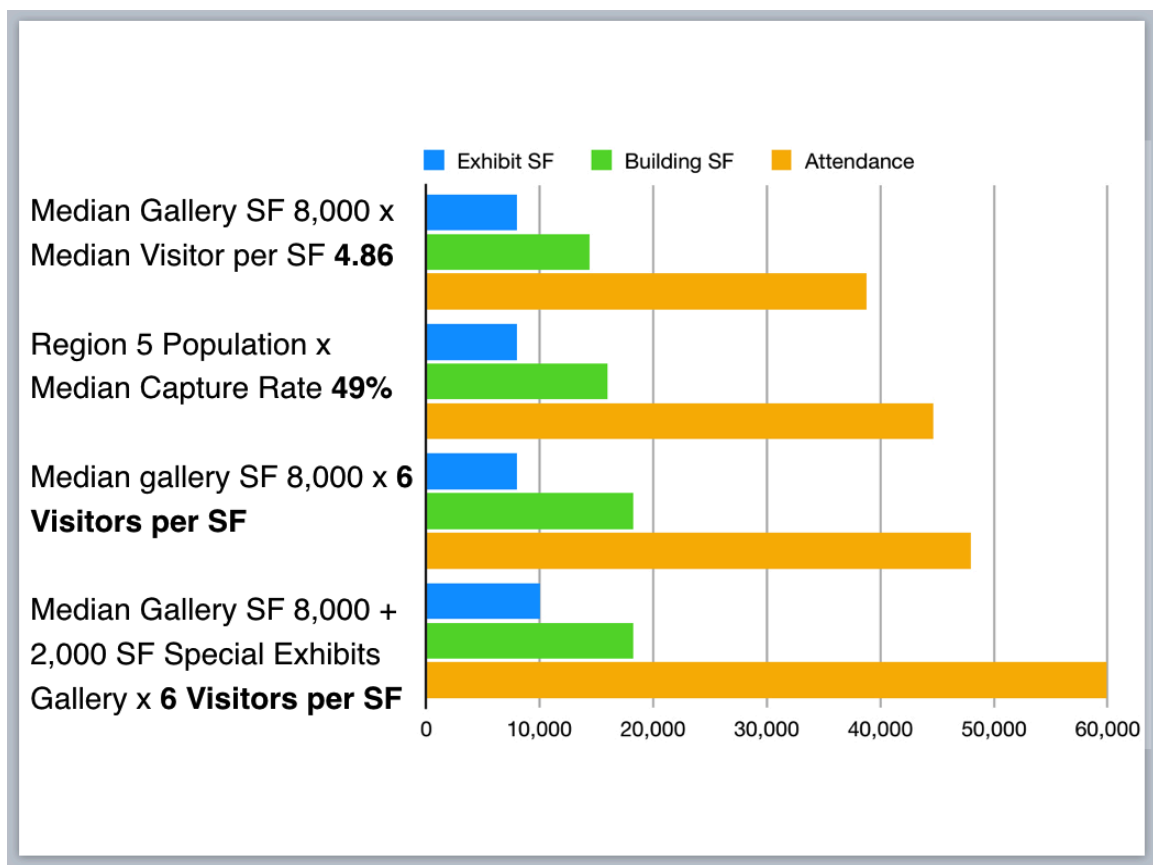
This number demonstrates a correlation between exhibit size and attendance. It is achieved by dividing annual attendance by the square feet of exhibits in a museum. Among the benchmark museums, this calculation results in a median of 4.86 visitors per square foot per year. The national average, across hundreds of museums, is six visitors per square foot, suggesting room to grow.



Implications for WonderTrek Children's Museum

The following summary graph presents four different calculations useful in projecting future attendance. They suggest a range from 38,000 to 60,000 visitors annually, based on exhibit sizes ranging from 8,000 to 10,000 square feet.

This somewhat wide range is typical at this early stage of planning and reflects many unknown factors, including location, exhibit size, quality of exhibits, and future leadership. As planning progresses, information about these factors will be brought into subsequent benchmarking studies.



The Museum Facility

Children’s museums can be architecturally demanding, integrating design elements from schools, libraries, public parks, theaters, and even restaurants. A successful design process starts early and starts from the museum’s core—audiences, experiences, and values. The following criteria, gathered from early planning discussions, lay out a set of visitor-experience expectations that will later inform site selection and architectural programming, when space needs, visitor flow, and facility functions are established and reconciled with the proposed budget. These forward-looking guidelines will help communicate the spirit and purpose specific to *this* children’s museum throughout the design process.

Criteria to Guide Facility-wide Design

- **Carries the Mission**—It’s a place that conveys values, says to children “this is for you and you are important.”
- **Transparent**—It is readily legible by children and adults, instills navigational confidence.
- **Permeable**—Visitors move easily into, out of, and through the facility; program activities easily traverse the walls, outdoor light and atmosphere are felt indoors.
- **Connected**—It is home to multiple experience venues, purposefully juxtaposed and connected by various design elements.
- **Variety**—Architecture accommodates change from day to day, from season to season, from year to year.
- **Memorable Identity**—Whimsical features and curiously out-of-context elements give the museum some landmark characteristics that set it apart from other similar facilities.

Criteria to Guide the Design of Specific Areas

Arriving: Before the Front Door

When the children’s museum first comes into view, everything children and families see will add to the sense of anticipation, whether visiting for the first time or returning to a favorite place. The walk from the parking area up to the front door is interactive and highly experiential and may invite visitors to:

- Follow footprints;
- Walk along a creek;
- Touch and smell trees, shrubs, and flowers;
- Tap out a tune on a xylophone;
- Look through a kaleidoscope at a bed of flowers, an assortment of rocks, or a snowman.

Main Public Entrance: An Open Door to the Community

The architecture provides the set up for friendly encounters—inviting places to sit, a shelter, and points of interest to gather around. In the constant flow of people arriving and leaving, children will see and meet people like—and not like—their own. Staff and volunteers come and go through the same doors as visitors. This area offers:

- A sense of arriving at a place with a singular identity, a place like no other;
- Dramatic architecture—drawing on color, shape, scale, movement, and light;
- Elements that engage the senses, the feel and smell of natural materials and plantings;
- Photo opportunities;
- Space for performers and performances;
- Different types of doors, big and small, a revolving door, an extraordinary door handle;
- Cultural artworks that welcome visitors.

School Group Entrance: Just as Fun as the Front Door

The museum will provide a separate entrance for school groups that accommodates different admission procedures than at the main entrance and ensures:

- A first-class entry experience for all students;
- A safe place for buses to drop off and pick up students away from traffic.

Admissions Area: Checking in and Getting Going

Visitors appreciate clear and loud cues about what to do next in a place where lots is going on. In addition to admissions, this area will have:

- Clear access to bathrooms;
- A place to hang up coats in cold weather;
- Something fun to do while waiting—water tiles, mirrors, finger mazes;
- An easy way to head outdoors in the summer;
- Orient visitors to what's ahead with images and views into the exhibits and program areas;
- Enough room so that “coming in” doesn’t get confused with “going out.”

Places for Programs: Dynamic Variety

Facilitated activities can happen throughout the museum campus. Specific places, however, can easily be transformed into magnetic centers for activity. Certain factors will help this happen, such as:

- Children seeing something fun in all directions;
- Opportunities for large-scale activities requiring several hundred square feet;

- Program stages that facilitate a range of activities, from quiet to loud, from intimate to highly social;
- The addition of a few play elements transforming a space for 15 minutes;
- Integration with surrounding settings and exhibits.

Places for Exhibits, Settings, and Activities: Made for Children

While exhibit design is largely responsible for what makes an impression on visitors in the galleries, architecture plays a critical role in shaping spaces for playful exploration. Design objectives for exhibits include:

- Whimsy, imaginary places and settings;
- Unlikely combinations of objects;
- Children's art;
- Color, lighting, noise, sound, water, smell;
- Connectivity, connecting experiences in multiple directions.

Architecturally, certain elements promise to engage children in spaces:

- Tall ceilings provide a surprise, multiple levels indicate more places to go;
- Details in floors;
- Windows and light, through the walls and the roof;
- Spaces only young children can fit into, a door or short tunnel;
- Compelling sightlines, peek-throughs from one space to another;
- Varied openings to the outdoors.

Classrooms: Unpredictable Places

When children arrive from a school setting, they can expect learning environments that are museum like—open for the unexpected. Maybe these are called Exploration Labs and each one is different, with one functioning as a maker's space. Regardless of what they are called, these spaces are likely to be:

- Messy, as if Miss Frizzle were in charge, with pine needles and leaves strewn about the floor;
- Where furniture is varied and out of the ordinary, logs and stumps for sitting;
- Visually accessible and transparent into and out of, mirrors and peep holes;
- Adjacent to galleries;
- Outfitted for water activities.

Outdoors: Authentically Seasonal Experiences

The settings and activities outdoors are both a place to grow (nature) and a place to take off (industrial) with:

- Material choices important in the design;

- Relates to the region, reflects present and historical activities of the area;
- A camp fire now-and-then;
- Places for extraordinary events, even explosions;
- Change of seasons highlighted;
- Live animals;
- Ice carving, coloring;
- Shelter where needed to extend the experience in various weather conditions.

Places to Eat: Connecting Food, Community, and Learning

Settings for snack time and school lunch that:

- Are adjacent to exhibits;
- Are cool and funky;
- Offer the same kind of experiences that are happening everywhere else in the museum.

Criteria to Guide Site Selection

Location: Finding the Best Place for Region 5's Children's Museum

Planning work to date has not yet determined a location for the children's museum. As that process unfolds, the following criteria will help guide in making choices.

- Recognized location, known to people in Region 5;
- Easy to get to, people can easily visualize a visit from anywhere in Region 5;
- Available parking and easy bus drop off;
- Space for outdoor learning environments;
- Convenient for visitors coming from the lakes;
- Contributes to the region's revitalization, a place where momentum is building, where there's synergy;
- Access to schools (Half of the region's students come from Crow Wing County and Pillager.)

Organizing to Move Ahead

There are many steps, milestones, and players in moving from the idea of starting a children's museum to opening the doors and serving the community. One version of these steps is covered in the Capital Project Phases and Milestones in the Appendix. Some steps are in the near distance and will only become apparent in a meaningful way with time and progress. There is also a set of action steps for the museum to initiate upon completing the strategic master planning process.

Action Steps

Complete the steps to establish the museum: filing articles of incorporation; applying for tax-exempt status and federal and state filing; forming a Board of Directors with by-laws; and begin board development.

Develop a well-reasoned business plan based on the museum strategic master plan and research on other museums. A business plan puts numbers to the master plan, quantifying the project's building, exhibit, and campaign costs and predicting revenue from the capital campaign.

A business plan should also include an operating budget for the first five years with attendance projections and the cost of operating the museum and earned and contributed income. This is a plan that will need to be reviewed and updated during the course of the project as new information. Completion of the business plan should precede raising funds.

Start now to become a regional museum. Region 5 may not currently have a clear identity among residents, visitors, and businesses in the five county area. Nevertheless, the museum's future success relies on being regional. Attendance must come from across the region. A case for financial support in grants and other appeals will be stronger with evidence of being regionally based. Finally, goodwill towards the museum from every corner of the region will be invaluable.

Developing a regional identity begins with a regional mindset, one that informs choices and decisions, and considers a regional perspective. The museum will convey an intention to be regional when it:

- Recruits board and committee members from across Region 5;
- Cultivates partnerships across all five counties, with the tribes, and Camp Ripley;
- Consider sites in all five counties in choosing a site for the museum;
- Selects a name that communicates a regional interest; and
- Finds opportunities to be visible in cities, towns, and schools across the region's five counties.

Launch a site search process: Planning work to date has not yet determined a location for the children’s museum. Selecting a site for a museum is always a major decision and with long-term implications. Location, size and characteristics of the site, and the facility itself, relate to and influence the museum’s size, potential attendance, capital and operating costs. For a regionally based museum that intends to serve five large counties, site selection carries perhaps even greater significance than for most museums. Starting with a site-selection committee—and recognizing the importance of being a *regional* museum, the planning committee, or board, should consider the following criteria in its site search.

Site Selection Criteria

- Recognized location, known to people in Region 5
- Easy to get to, people can easily visualize a visit from anywhere in Region 5
- Available parking and easy bus drop off
- Space for outdoor learning environments
- Convenient for visitors coming from the lakes
- Contributes to the region’s revitalization, a place where momentum is building, where there’s synergy
- Access to schools (For instance, half of the region’s students come from Crow Wing County and Pillager.)

Begin the serious and long-term work of community engagement around inclusion.

Since the earliest conversations about a children’s museum for the region, the museum has expressed a strong interest in being inclusive: serving all children and being open onto the wider world. As noted in the *What We Heard Summary* (in the Appendix), Region 5 has not experienced the same influx of diverse ethnic groups that other parts of Minnesota have. At the same time, participants in community conversations expressed concern that *“children growing up in the region will be unprepared to work and live among people from diverse cultures.”* The Leech Lake and Mille Lacs Bands are valuable learning partners within the region. A few communities within the region are home to Latino and African families. Building on existing relationships with members of these groups, the museum should work towards forming a committee for community engagement around inclusion.

Grow public awareness across the region. With the strategic master plan completed, the museum will have words and images to express what it believes a dynamic, play-based, family-centered experience can contribute to the region. The plan itself will convey the museum’s commitment to planning and will serve as a likely tool for recruiting board members. Through informal and formal conversations with friends, supporters and potential partners, the museum can gauge interest and build support. These conversations will also serve as starting points for exploring how the museum can best engage children, families, and educators from across the five counties and work, over the next few years, with these understandings in mind. Together a well-worked

community engagement plan and public awareness strategy will build towards a strong and warm reception and ongoing support when the museum opens.

I decided that we had to act like a museum from the very beginning. Rather than simply plan for a building that would be a decade away, we felt it was crucial to curate exhibitions, publish books, craft the virtual museum on line—in essence, to demonstrate the quality and creativity of our work to potential donors, collectors, members of Congress, and the Smithsonian.

Making a Way Out of No Way
Lonnie G. Bunch III
National Museum of African-American
History and Culture

APPENDIX

Planning Participants

Planning Committee

Kevin Donnay	Widseth, Smith, and Nolting, Partner
Paul Drange	Sourcewell, Director of Regional Programs
Nate Grotzke	Close-Converse, Broker
Sheila Haverkamp	Brainerd Lakes Economic Development Corporation, Executive Director
Staci Hedley	Region 5 Development Commission, Regional Development Planner
Dianne Heldman	Sourcewell, Administrative Support
Cheryl Hills	Region 5 Development Commission, Executive Director
Matt Killian	Brainerd Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce, Executive Director
Chris Lindstrom	Pequot Lake Schools, Superintendent
Megan Rehbein Administrator	Brainerd Lakes Economic Development Corporation, Office
Quinn Swanson	Happy Dancing Turtle, Sustainability and Stewardship Manager
Shannon Wheeler	Pequot Lakes Schools, ECFE

Listening Session Participants

March 27-28 2018

School Leaders

Rick Aulie	Pine River Backus Elementary, Principal
Kurt Becker	Crosby-Ironton, Elementary Principal
Brenda Benson	Literacy Coach, Crosby-Ironton
Vern Capelle	Upsala, Superintendent
Melissa Hesch	Pequot Lakes Elementary, Principal
Doug Jacobson	Tri-County Community Action, Executive Director
Chris Lindholm	Pequot Lakes, Superintendent
Mike Malmberg	Pillager Schools, Superintendent
Josh Smith	Pillager Elementary, Principal

Parents

Jeff Baillif	jeff.baillif@essentiahealth.org
Toni Bieser	tonib@hytecconstruction.com
Jessica Gangl	jessica.bpsf@gmail.com
Gabe Johnson	gabe@devinejohnson.com
Mary Devine Johnson	info@visitbrainerd.com

Tim Nelson	tim@lakehome.com
Kurt Porter	kurt@seversonporter.com
Sarah Smith	sarah@campconfidence.com

Early Childhood Educators

Tahnee Flowers	Brainerd Schools, ECFE Coordinator
Rebecca Jones	Little Falls School District, Early Childhood Teacher
April Kinney	Pequot Lakes, School Readiness, Teacher

Businesses

Mike Bjerkness,	Brainerd Lakes Economic Development Corporation, Workforce Director
Steve Christenson	Ascensus, Executive Vice President
Mary Gottsch	Bridges, Director
Tom Haglin	LINDAR and Avantech , CEO
Sheila Haverkamp	Brainerd Lakes Economic Development Corporation, Executive Director
Char Kinzer	Crow Wing Power, PR Manager
Kevin Larson	Consolidated Telecommunications Company/CTC, Director of Public Affairs
Kristi Westbrook	Consolidated Telecommunications Company/CTC, CEO-General Manager

Hopes, Concerns and Expectations

February 28, 2018

What are your hopes, expectations, and concerns about the process of planning a children's museum?

- Hope the museum happens as soon as it's possible
- Concern: build on/continue on momentum
- Love the idea of a children's museum as a grandmother. What a children's museum could do for all children, in spending time outside the classroom. promise
- Tourism
- Conscious of the whole region
- Hope NJPA doesn't tire of the whole process
- Hope it's the best children's museum in the state, even nationally
- Children have big dreams for children
- Hope the process picks up steam
- We pull in the impacted and interested parties
- Concerns: we're volunteering our time
- Make sure the entire process is co-constructed with us. Use knowledge on the team.
- Don't replicate and redo work done. Process doesn't get in the way of progress.
- Plan-do-learn-adjust.
- Hope this is a magical place of learning for little children
- Facilitate as a place of coordination for the many things happening for middle school and high school kids.
- Don't want our mission to be fuzzied out by related goals.
- Hopes: a museum for all children that all children can go to. Give children a sense of worth and value.
- Hope it becomes a tourist destination. Attention contributes to revitalize the area.
- Will people step up financially?
- Hope we create a space that families can immerse themselves in play. Support for parents.
- Affordable, acceptable by all
- Family: the pressure on families. Encourage our youngest learners in a family setting.
- Momentum; must be regional. Build on momentum in Brainerd-Baxter area.
- Concern about financial resources to make it happen
- Hope it's a creative, inspirational, fun space. Blow-out the walls, expectations for kids and environments
- Pay attention to the environment: space, materials, topics
- Mission: stay tight to kids. Be regional. Be mindful of including other voices.
- Hope our children's museum has a seasonal side...non-summer time
- NJPA and Chamber have great reputations. People will want to piggy back onto the project to make their project happen.

Hopes, Expectations, and Concerns

Make it fun, magical, and inspiring; a place where children feel valued

Keep the focus on the children and families of Region 5; make it affordable, accessible, and relevant

Make it a museum for all; a place for the region's families and an attractive destination for visitors

Keep it regional; plan with the region to be for the whole region

Conduct an inclusive and reflective process; "Plan-Do-Learn-Adjust"

Draw on the planning group's knowledge and reputation; be mindful of their time and talents

Don't lose the momentum; leverage the current sense of urgency

Stay focused on the mission; don't be pulled off course

Keep an eye on funding; will contributors step up when called upon?

Regional Backdrop

March 2018

POPULATION

- A) Region 5 has been growing over the last decade and growth is expected to continue. Growth has been uneven across the Region, from a small population loss in Todd, to a small increase in Wadena, more than 14% in Crow Wing. Covering a large geographic area, the Region has a wide range in population density. (2017 Regional Profile)
 - B) Regionally, population swells seasonally to more than 300,000 in the summer months with families, retirees, from the region, Minnesota and beyond. (News OK)
 - C) The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, a band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, has an enrollment of 9509 members. (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)
- The Region anticipates changes in its population: about 8% population growth, increasing ethnic diversity, and an aging population. (Resilient Region)
 - Ethnic diversity will grow and expand from existing clusters associated with food processing jobs. (Resilient Region)
 - Long term (2040), population increases are expected in the 25-34 and 35-44 age range. (2017 Regional Profile)
 - The Region's population is significantly older than statewide: 20.1% of the population compared to 13.9%. (CREDS)
- How can a children's museum help attract more young families to the area and encourage young families to stay in the area?
 - How can a children's museum be welcoming to an increasingly diverse population?
 - How can a children's museum build on the advantages of a greater presence of older adults in the area?

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

- A) Families are vital to the growth and development of the region, which is apparent in housing strategies, goals to improved livelihoods, recreational activities, and parent involvement in child's education. (Multiple sources)
 - B) At the same time, families face challenges: 10% are considered food insecure and the five counties fall in the lower third of Minnesota's counties for overall health. (Growing Food Connections)
- 2014 child poverty rates range from 11.8% (Crow Wing) to 17% (Cass and Wadena) compared to 11.5% statewide. Between 40 and 60% of children K-12 schools are eligible for free and reduced lunch. (MDH; Resilient Region)
 - Childcare in Greater MN is a challenge (cost, location, hours) especially for low-income families, single-parent families, and families with infants and children with special needs. Even when childcare is available, quality childcare is a persistent challenge. As employers struggle to find employees and raise wages, providers leave childcare. (Initiative Foundation)

- Initiatives, projects, and services for young children exist (early ed scholarships, Pierz playground, Sensory Room in Upsala) but a systemic approach to serving young children and valuing childhood isn't apparent. (Multiple sources)
- In what ways can parents connecting with other parents around their children help build social capital—shared experiences, connections to place, connections among citizens?
- How can the region take a more active role around valuing children, childhood, and play?
- Are there ways in which a children's museum might contribute to improvements in children's wellbeing?
- How can the Good Life start with children and childhood?

LEARNING & EDUCATION

- A) Serving students from pre-K to post secondary, the region's educational landscape spans five counties, with 24 school districts, private schools, two community-technical colleges, and Leech Lake Tribal College. (Multiple sources)
- B) The area's plan documents, programs, and initiatives reflect active support of K-12 education geared towards recruitment, support, training, and recognition of educators; student enrichment across literacy, arts, and STEM; career and college readiness; and post secondary transitions. (NJPA)
- For Region 5, the 2013 high school graduation rates were 81%, somewhat higher than the 79% statewide average while the percent of adults 18 and over with a college degree (30%) is lower compared with adults statewide (41.2%). (NJPA; MN Dept. of Ed; 2017 Regional Profile)
 - Priorities highlighted in regional plans align with the informal learning approach of a hands-on museum: lifelong learning; early childhood education; STEM; place-based arts; activity-based; parent engagement in their child's learning. (Resilient Region; Pequot Lakes Schools Strategic Roadmap)
 - ECCE, Pre-K, and 500 early childhood scholarships are helping to strengthen the early learning landscape. The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe operates several early childhood programs, Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig School (K-12) providing an indigenous approach to education. (Multiple sources; Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)
 - To what extent could hands-on, open-ended experiences for young children, their parents and caregivers, and youth contribute to a regional culture of lifelong learning?
 - How could a children's museum help make the critical role of early experience—learning, play, attachment—visible to families, educators, and decision makers?
 - How could an informal learning environment, like a hands-on museum, complement and support school priorities and goals?

PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- A) Robust and inclusive planning at the county and regional levels provides Region 5 with a dynamic base for future growth and development. In particular, *Resilient Region* sets the stage for well-informed growth and development into the future.

B) The Region enjoys a diversifying economy that includes health care, tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, government, many non-profit organizations, and an emerging local-foods movement.

- The Brainerd Lakes Area is on the cusp of positive and transformative change, including redevelopment of the Potlatch/Wausau mill, the River to Rail initiative; and a referendum on a new performing arts center. (Multiple sources)
- Given its location, the Brainerd-Baxter area functions as a regional hub, serving as a gateway to the area.
- Historically, railroads have played a significant role in the region's development—as a one-time headquarters and later repair shop for the Northern Pacific—and by the Mississippi River crossing at Brainerd. Currently, BNSF maintains an active line through the region, provides employment opportunities, and helps sustain an important iconic element of the region's sense of place.
- High-speed internet access for households was 40% (2011) with a goal of 95% (no date given). (Resilient Region)
- The partnerships and collaborations that have emerged from regional and county planning have the potential to invigorate new community networks and initiatives. (Resilient Region, River-to-Rail initiative, CREDS, NJPA, county comprehensive plans)
- How can the high standards for regional planning also serve as a guideposts for community engagement and inclusive practices for a children's museum?
- In what ways can a public place that is open and welcoming to all also be a place where economic disparities among children recede?
- How can the wellbeing of children and childhood become a measure of economic vitality?

NATURAL RESOURCES & THE ENVIRONMENT

A) The lakes, woodlands, and waterways of the Region are critical assets to the local economy and quality of life. At the same time, those resources are threatened.

B) Visitors and permanent and seasonal residents have access to a wide range of outdoor recreational opportunities including state and local parks, trails for hiking and biking, water trails, and the Chippewa National Forest.

- The particular mix of wetlands, lakes, rivers, streams, woodlands, and fertile agricultural lands contribute significantly to the Region's memorable sense of place.
- A southwest to northeast transect through Region 5 reveals a brief transition from upland prairie to northern hardwood forest to a mixed hardwood and coniferous forest.
- Only small portions of Region 5 are represented by established watershed organizations. (Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts)
- About 75% of the Leech Lake Reservation is in the Chippewa National Forest. (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)
- More than 200 bodies of water (ditches to lakes) in Region 5 are defined by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency as impaired (water quality). (Minnesota's Impaired Waters List)
- Growth and development in parts of the region pose challenges to the natural resources that make the area attractive and contribute to quality of life.

- How can the children's museum support families in strengthening children's sense of place in the region?
- Given what we know about how time in nature contributes to children's wellbeing, how might the children's museum help children spend more time in nature?
- How can the children's museum expand ways children experience nature and the outdoors?

ARTS & CULTURE

- A) Arts and culture, like the region's outdoor recreational opportunities, drive tourism and contribute to the area's quality of life; they attract people to the area and help keep them here.
 - B) Region 5 communities have access to, and are well supported by, many established arts organizations, from local groups to the Five Wings Arts Council.
- Region 5 is ninth in population but ranks third in creative worker density in the workforce. (Creative Minnesota)
 - The region's cultural-events calendar is heavily booked with a diverse range of fairs and festivals, music performances, outdoor recreation, and motor sports. (Explore Minnesota)
 - The most active centers for arts and culture include Brainerd, Little Falls, Pine River, Wadena, and Walker. (Explore Minnesota, Region 5 arts organizations)
 - Communities throughout Region 5 have drawn on historical themes (fur trade, railroads, lumbering, and immigration) when developing their identities and attractions. County historical societies and various other history museums help sustain this sense of place through exhibits and programs.
 - How can an informal-learning destination enhance the region's quality-of-life offerings by serving a wider range of the population, including young children and students in and out of school?
 - In what ways can working with artists, makers, and performers be a strategy for growing social capital? How can artists contribute to the community by working together with and for children?

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What We Heard Summary

MAY 1, 2018

Introduction

The goal of this summary is to identify issues, trends, opportunities, and thematic threads that will influence and help shape plans for a WonderTrek Children's Museum. Further, this summary is intended to inform a shared understanding among the planning committee about the purpose, audience, experiences, partners, learning interests, and potential impact of the proposed museum. Information was gathered from many sources, including regional-backdrop research, four listening sessions with community groups, two planning-committee workshops (2-28 & 3-28, 2018), and a meeting of ECCE Early Childhood Coordinators (4-6-2018). This summary covers the following areas:

- Region 5 Context
- The Region 5 Challenge and Opportunity
- The Children's Museum On The Regional Landscape
- Who Must The Museum Serve?
- What Must A New Children's Museum Have?

Region 5 Context

Demographic and Social Trends

Region 5, comprised of Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena Counties, has been growing over the last decade and growth is expected to continue. ***Growth, however, has been uneven across the Region***, from a small population loss in Todd, to a small increase in Wadena, and more than 14% in Crow Wing. Across the Region, population density varies significantly and, as summer residents and tourists come and go, the area can experience seasonal shifts of more than 300,000 people. This ***seasonal shift is more than demographic, influencing the social dynamic of the region as well***. As one participant in the community conversations reiterated, "Summer is for tourists, winter is for locals."

The Region enjoys a diversifying economy that includes health care, tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, government, many non-profit organizations, and an emerging local-foods movement. While some industries have declined over the years, others have emerged to keep the regional economy relatively strong. Robust and inclusive planning at the county and regional levels provides Region 5 with a dynamic base for future growth and development. In particular, *Resilient Region* sets the stage for well-informed growth and development into the future.

Schools and the Education Landscape

Serving students from pre-K to post secondary, the region's education landscape spans five counties, with 24 school districts, private schools, two community-technical colleges, and Leech Lake Tribal College. The area's planning documents, programs, and initiatives reflect ***active support of K-12 education geared towards recruitment, support, training, and recognition of educators; student enrichment across literacy, arts, and STEM; career and college readiness; and post secondary transitions.***

Evident from the community conversations, ***sustaining a talented and well-trained workforce is a high priority among school and business leaders.*** In the Brainerd/Baxter area especially, there is considerable interest in helping youth explore alternative approaches to finding and starting a career (e.g. Bridges Career Academies & Workplace Connection). ***Keeping young families in the area and attracting new ones is an equally high priority.*** A children's museum is seen as a high-value amenity for families wanting to raise children in the area—and a high-value asset for the region.

Wealth Gap

Families are vital to the growth and development of the region, which is apparent in housing strategies, goals to improve livelihoods, recreational activities, and parent involvement in child's education. ***At the same time, many families face challenges: 10% are considered food insecure, and the five counties of Region 5 fall into the lower third of Minnesota's counties for overall health.*** While the Region experiences high rates of poverty, it's also home to one of the state's most desirable lake districts, where income and wealth are far above median.

As reflected in the community conversations, this ***economic disparity is well known and of great concern, especially among those working with the region's children.*** Even for families in the middle, it takes a two-person income to make ends meet. In this context, community members wanted to see programs that would make a trip to the children's museum affordable for any family. It was also noted that there is a contingent of the population that is generous with their time and money, especially when it comes to public service.

Aging Population

The region's population is significantly older than the state average, due in part to the area's attractiveness as a retirement destination. This was widely acknowledged in the community conversations but noted ***more as an asset for the future children's museum.*** Retirees can a valuable resource for volunteers, storytellers, and builders.

Cultural Diversity

Region 5 has not experienced the same influx of diverse ethnic groups as other parts of Minnesota. Participants in the community conversations expressed concern that ***children growing up in the region will be unprepared to work with and live among***

people from diverse cultures. Within the region, the Leech Lake and Mille Lacs Bands of Ojibwe can be valuable learning partners as the museum develops ways to integrate different cultures and traditions into its programs and practices. Additionally, a few communities in the region are now home to Latino and African families, in particular Long Prairie. It is expected that ethnic diversity will continue to grow from existing clusters, especially with those associated with food processing jobs.

Some community members could imagine the arts increasing diversity in the region. Like the region's outdoor recreational opportunities, the arts drive tourism and contribute to the area's quality of life. They may also be a way to bring more of the world to the children and families of Region 5.

Where People Live

In many rural areas of Region 5, families can become isolated by geography, poverty, and not knowing what's available to them. **Many participants in the community conversations pointed to transportation, income, and lack of awareness as substantial barriers to participation in the children's museum's offerings.** There is a sense that parents don't know what they have access to. **To counter a family's sense of isolation, the museum will have to address geographical access as well as instill a sense of belonging, or affiliation within the museum.** It could be a place that builds awareness about the resources families have in the region.

The Region 5 Challenge and Opportunity

The Challenge: One Place or Many?

Region 5 holds diverse and varied landscapes, areas of wealth and poverty, urban and rural lifestyles, and a range of historical legacies. **Together, these elements don't reveal a clear and unified sense of place.** Participants in the community conversations, however, pointed out certain social habits and values shared by many in the five-county region, including: a love of the outdoors, being involved in civic life, cherished family traditions, and shared stories around events and locations.

The Opportunity: Coming Together Around Place

People—their stories and ways of life—may be as meaningful as history and the environment when it comes to describing Region 5 as a distinctive and unified place.

Along with heritage and nature, the people of the region can provide the elements of place that play out throughout the museum.

People

- Children at the center of civic life
- Participating in community events, contributing to civic endeavors
- Individuals with notable accomplishments and people we see everyday

- Organizations that help people (e.g. NJPA, Region Five Development Commission, CTC, chambers of commerce across the region, Paul Bunyan Education Cooperative)

Heritage

- Industries that provided livelihoods—railroads, mining, logging, early tourism, dairy farming, etc.
- Community identity recalled and sustained through community celebrations, museums, and landmarks (Paul Bunyan)
- Visible legacy—railroad tracks and buildings, farmsteads, mines, architecture

Nature

- Lakes, woods, and waterways
- Nature learning centers, trails
- Farmlands

The Children’s Museum on the Regional Landscape

When Region 5 families are interested in getting together with other families, they have a great variety of events and destinations from which to choose. The options revealed through a regional survey and feedback from community members fall into several categories.

- Libraries and parks (unstructured visits and organized programs)
- Children and family-oriented programs (ECFE, Franklin Arts Center, library programs)
- Educational destinations (museums, zoos, nature centers)
- Commercial (water parks, malls, movie theaters)
- Participatory sports events (organized sports, school and community teams)
- Churches and civic clubs (social events and programs, camps, public service activities)
- Public events and festivals (community celebrations, parades, concerts, art fairs)

Patterns of attendance for the children’s museum (frequency of visits and attraction to programs and events) probably will be most similar to parks and libraries. Families who are in the habit of going to parks and libraries will likely visit the museum and view it as a place that offers experiences that are reliably the same *and* different from one visit to the next.

According to participants in the community conversations, ***many of the places where parents meet up with other parents and their children, are not perceived as being for everyone.*** This is largely a matter of cost (access), but social factors may also play into this perception (inclusion). There is a great desire for a family destination wherein everyone would feel like they belong. In general, participants see all of these venues as complementary to a children’s museum, more than competition.

Traveling distance and transportation are key concerns among community members. Currently, families and schools have to leave the region to visit a children's museum. While a road trip to the Twin Cities or Duluth can make for a fun family outing, this isn't an option available to all. Also, as much fun as an urban excursion can be, it's a big commitment of time, which limits the number of visits. All agree that ***family visits to the children's museum should be a frequent and easy***. While some community members said that families won't drive more than 30 miles for amenities, others described how difficult it is for families to make even a 10-mile trip. One way or another, it will have to be ***a high-visibility, landmark destination to make it worth the drive***.

Valuing Children's Play

Overwhelmingly, ***community members acknowledged the importance of play in children's lives***. Many cited the increasingly structured lives of children, especially around play. They lamented that children today are missing out on the "free-range" childhood of previous generations, noting that, "children have forgotten how to play on their own."

While some participants preferred to call it "open exploration," play is clearly recognized as essential to a child's development and overall well-being. With more opportunities for unstructured play, the region's children can engage in different modes of learning, particularly multi-sensory, and exercise their imaginations and curiosity. Participants also cited ***the need for highly active, physical play for all children. Play and risk-taking*** go hand-in-hand. Without some element of risk, children are unable to test their own limits and approach new challenges, such as climbing a ladder or moving unwieldy objects. It is worth noting, that participants in the community conversations expressed a relatively high tolerance for risky activities.

Conversations around play included references to dramatic play in particular, and references to skill building. A key priority among the region's school leaders is ***"skills more than content."*** Some suggested the four Cs of 21st Century learning—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity.

360-Degree Interactivity

Participants in the community conversations were asked to reflect on the region's offerings for families and children. How are current needs being met? What's missing? What could a children's museum provide that other learning venues can't? Not surprisingly, responses focused on ***a place for fun, playful learning and open exploration. The responses, however, also pointed to a more comprehensive view of interactivity, one that goes beyond children interacting with learning environments, to include interactivity between children and staff, children of different ages, parents and children, parents and staff, and parents and parents***. Participants described a place where parents could learn about their children's development and practice conversations with their children.

School Connections

The area's schools, not unexpectedly, have closer relationships to their immediate communities than they do to the region as a whole. That said, school leaders and other community members expressed an interest in establishing ***a role for the children's museum in supporting region-wide education goals.***

Currently, school field trips cover a wide geography, from local camps to the State Capitol. Other destinations include local history museums, parks, Deep Portage Learning Center, Little Falls Zoo, and Safari North Wildlife Park. School leaders asked if the ***children's museum could be a place that brings school children and teachers together from across the region***, "putting Pillager kids with Crosby kids." Various agencies are doing this now (Paul Bunyan Education Cooperative, Region Five Development, and Bridges Academy), but what are the more social, field-trip opportunities?

A children's museum could also enhance what's happening in schools through other means as well:

- ***Personalized, individualized learning***
- ***Kinesthetic activities not available in the classroom***
- ***Building on NJPA's longitudinal research***
- ***Collaborative learning across teams and schools, connecting teachers***

Who Must the Museum Serve?

In the words of the planning committee, ***this will be a museum for "every child who wants to attend."*** This unwavering commitment to access includes children in low-income families not living in Brainerd. Further definition of audiences includes:

- Families with children birth to 12 years, with an inclusive definition of family in mind
- Students in and out of school, including home, charter and private schools and schools outside the region
- Agencies and organizations that serve children, including e.g. ECFE, day-care providers, Kid Connection, church camps, Big Brothers and Big Sisters
- Regional school districts, including teachers and administrators
- Tourists and summer residents
- Junior and Senior High School students in docent roles or project-focused programs

What Must a New Children's Museum Have?

Outdoor Activity—There is great interest in providing a place where dirt and mess are key elements of the learning experience. Families want more ways for their children to have "free-range experiences," something that was taken for granted just a generation

ago. At the children's museum, this could be a nature-play environment outfitted with natural materials, sand, and water. It could also be a place where teachers learn more about nature learning. "We have a nature center in the our backyard, how do we teach with it?" Also, an outdoor learning area might provide an attractive platform for early STEM learning.

Food—A place to eat a snack together as a family and with others. Through food, children and their families can follow connections to places where food is raised and grown. This could be one of the places in the museum where children can see things get done, from growing a garden to cooking dinner. Food is a bridge between agriculture on one end and children's health on the other.

Water—Lakes, rivers, and wetlands are, undeniably, an important part of life in Region 5. The children's museum must offer water to play in and feature water as an honored element of the surrounding natural environment. Exhibits could encourage exploration of the properties of water (locks and dams) and draw attention to what lives in water (touch pools).

When participants in the community conversations talked about water, the focus was often on access. The region's lakes are perceived as less public (less accessible) than the Mississippi River, for instance. There may be an underlying expectation that the children's museum will increase access to what has been a middle-class privilege. Can water-based exhibits and activities somehow reflect and support family time in nature, for all?

A Sense of Place—This area holds a rich heritage of railroads, dairy farming, logging, mining, and tourism. Communities throughout Region 5 have drawn on the power of place to create and sustain memorable and distinctive identities. As such, a sense of place shows up regularly in children's daily experiences. While admitting that locals don't go to the area's history museum, participants in the community conversations suggested that the museum be a place where stories from the past are kept alive and showcased. Some other ways to feature place include:

- As a way into STEM learning, providing task-and-challenge models that prompt and inspire problem-solving;
- Stories that connect natural resources, geography, and geology;
- Food production changing over time;
- Storytelling by seniors.

Global Diversity—Children growing up in Region 5 probably won't experience the same kind of cultural diversity as children in larger metropolitan areas. Yet, as young adults they will enter a world that is increasing diverse and will have greater contact with global culture than previous generations. Participants in the community conversations agreed that a children's museum could play an important role in giving the region's children

positive experiences with diverse cultures. A children's museum could help bring the world to Region 5. There is a strong desire to engage the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and Latino communities in Long Prairie in the planning and development of the children's museum.

Changing Exhibits—There are many reasons to refresh the museum experience with new and changing offerings. By hosting touring exhibits, the museum can expand its range of stories and experiences. New exhibits draw attention from the press and provide a good reason to add extra marketing, all helping to keep the museum in the public eye. Change can occur on many levels, from year to year, month to month, and even day to day through lively programs.

Challenging Activities—Regardless of where children are in their development, the museum should provide environments, activities, and opportunities for every child to take a risk, try something new, reach, and push toward the next challenge. This can be climbing into a tree, balancing on a swing bridge, solving a puzzle, or building the next tallest tower.

Meeting People—People—who they are and what they do—are interesting to children. Participants in the community conversations asked if there are ways to bring people and their stories into the museum, to be a part of the museum experience and help undo the anonymity of the people children see in their everyday lives:

- People who work in public services (from politicians to firefighters), volunteers;
- Amish and different cultures;
- Notable locals, people who have done remarkable things in their lives;
- Artists in residence, children taking part in ongoing projects.

Children's Mental Health—The museum should not only be a happy place for children, it should be about children's happiness, a model and a resource for adults to better understand the elements of a happy childhood.

R5 Learning Experiences Framework

In order to thrive, all children should enjoy...	In particular, the Museum focuses on experiences in 6...	Involving children through varied that encourage children and adults to use...	Over ti positi
... Essential Experiences	Experience Areas...	Engagement Strategies ...	Process Skills	
1. Feeling welcome and accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making Meaningful Connections • Get Moving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play • Conversation • Digital Media • Materials Exploration • Place-based Contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Thinking • Communication • Collaboration • Creativity 	• Enjoy
2. Noticing, wondering, and exploring their world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring Together • Get Moving 			• Inspiri and e
3. A growing sense of competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get Moving • Expressing Yourself 			• View comp doers
4. Supportive relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making Meaningful Connections • Exploring Together 			• Enjoy paren
5. Understand feelings, ideas, and perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagining Something Different • Expressing Yourself 			• Enjoy make
6. Being open to an expanding world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagining Something Different 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel o future • Feel p

WonderTrek Children's Museum Comparables

	MSA	Attendance	Capture Rate	Facility SF	Exhibits SF	Visitors SF	School Attendance
Brainerd-Baxter	91,067	--	--	--	--	--	--
(1) Children's Discovery Museum	46,385	22,138	48%	14,400	12,000	1.84	4,813
(2) Duluth Children's Museum	279,771	40,019	14%	8,100	7,152	5.59	1,555

(3) Central Wisconsin Children's Museum	70,019	23,000	33%	15,000	5,000	4.6	2,780
(4) Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota	98,255	97,288	99%	17,000	11,000	8.84	9,294
(5) Children's Museum of LaCrosse	139,225	73,000	52%	30,000	15,000	4.86	6,000
(6) Northwoods Children's Museum	21,430	27,000	126%	12,000	8,000	3.37	1,925
(7) Fairbanks Children's Museum	97,581	41,000	42%	8,000	4,000	10.25	1,242

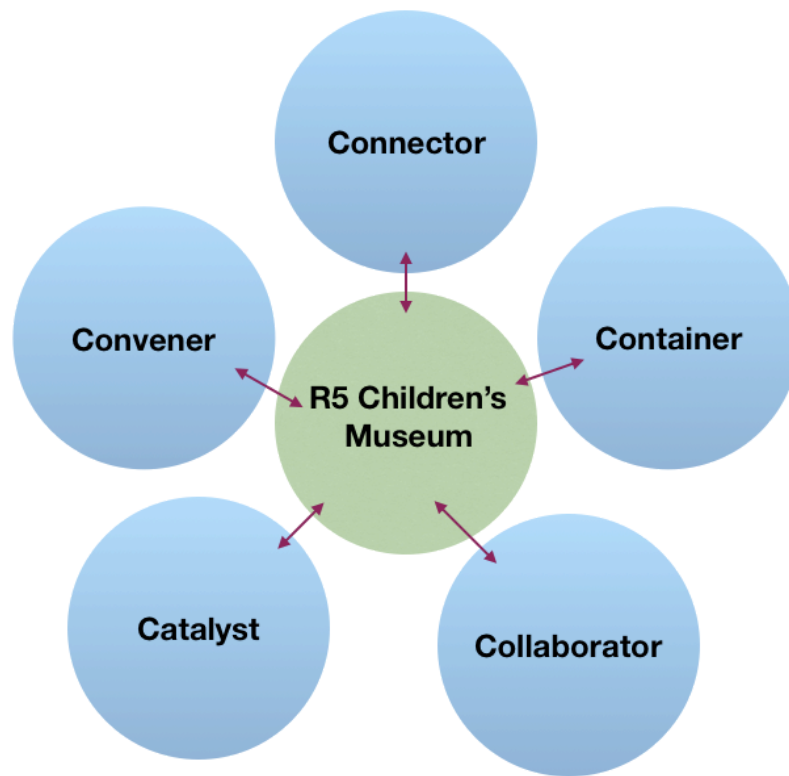
Partner and Stakeholder Engagement

The R5 children's museum will work with a wide range of partners and players from organizations, school districts, and businesses in towns and cities across the region to advance its mission, extend its reach, and deepen its impact.

Work with different partners on various projects will involve the museum in assuming various roles. In formal and informal ways, the museum may take the role⁷ as a:

- Connector, networking around a shared interest. Linking people, ideas, and organizations with related expertise and shared interests;
- Container, as a venue for programs and events. Providing physical space for individuals and community groups to serve the museum, its audience, or the region;
- Convener, bringing multiple parties together around a shared issue. Bringing children, families, and groups to explore, learn, create, and celebrate;
- Collaborator, creating something new together. Contributing expertise, resources, and good will, often working with multiple partners, to address larger, more complex problems, challenges, and ideas
- Catalyst, activating change. Building awareness, inviting new perspectives, or mobilizing for action on a relevant topic or current issue.

⁷ Based on Walker Art Center Art and Civic Engagement – <http://media.walkerart.org/pdf/ceworkbook.pdf>
WonderTrek Children's Museum Vergeront Museum Planning



Capital Project Phases – Starting a Museum

Strategic Master Plan (6 Months)

- Project Overview
- Vision, Mission, Values
- Community Context
- Museum Goals
- Target Audience Definition and Profile
- Visitor Experience Framework
- Business Plan

Predesign: Architecture and Museum Experience (6 Months)

- Site Selection
- Architect Selection
- Architectural Scope and Program
- Design Integration (building and museum experience)
- Exhibit Designer Selection
- Exhibit Predesign

Schematic Design (6 - 8 Months)

- Capital Campaign Plan
- Site Plan
- Architectural Plan
- Marketing Plan
- Schematic Exhibit Plan
- Preliminary Code Review
- Cost Estimate
- Operations Plan

Design Development (8 - 12 Months)

- Capital Campaign Plan
- Exhibit Design Development
- Architectural Design Development
- Updated Cost Estimate

Construction Documentation (8 – 12 Months)

- Capital Campaign Continues
- Construction Documents
- Prototyping
- Engineering Review
- Preparation of Bid List
- Final Code Review

Construction and Installation (12 - 18 Months)

- Building Permits
- Building Construction
- Exhibit Fabrication
- Shop Drawing and Testing
- Launch Marketing Campaign
- Launch Membership Campaign
- Capital Campaign Continues
- Debugging and Shakedown
- Building Construction
- Exhibit Installation

Opening

- Punch List
- Post Opening Evaluation
- Project Close-out

Lessons Learned from Other Museum Projects

The following list of lessons shared by museums that have started up or have expanded relate to the overall process. More lessons can be found at:

<http://www.astc.org/pubs/dimensions/2001/may-june/smooth.htm>

- Communicate, communicate, communicate. Keep members of the team, close friends and supporters well informed. Keep public officials and the public informed.
- Manage expectations – yours and theirs. Prime the public without the hype.
- Engage the community at every step. It's their museum. Make time to gather input, test ideas, and prototype exhibits.
- Celebrate milestones and small victories.
- There will be delays. Schedules change. Build flexibility into the plan and know where you can be flexible.
- Start planning the future before you open. Opening the museum is the start—not the ending—of the process.
- Document the process. Record decisions, discoveries, and changes. Keep a journal and photograph milestones.
- Everyone needs to be thanked often and sincerely and in different ways: volunteers, friends, donors, contractors, board members, neighbors. Find what those ways are and don't forget anyone.

