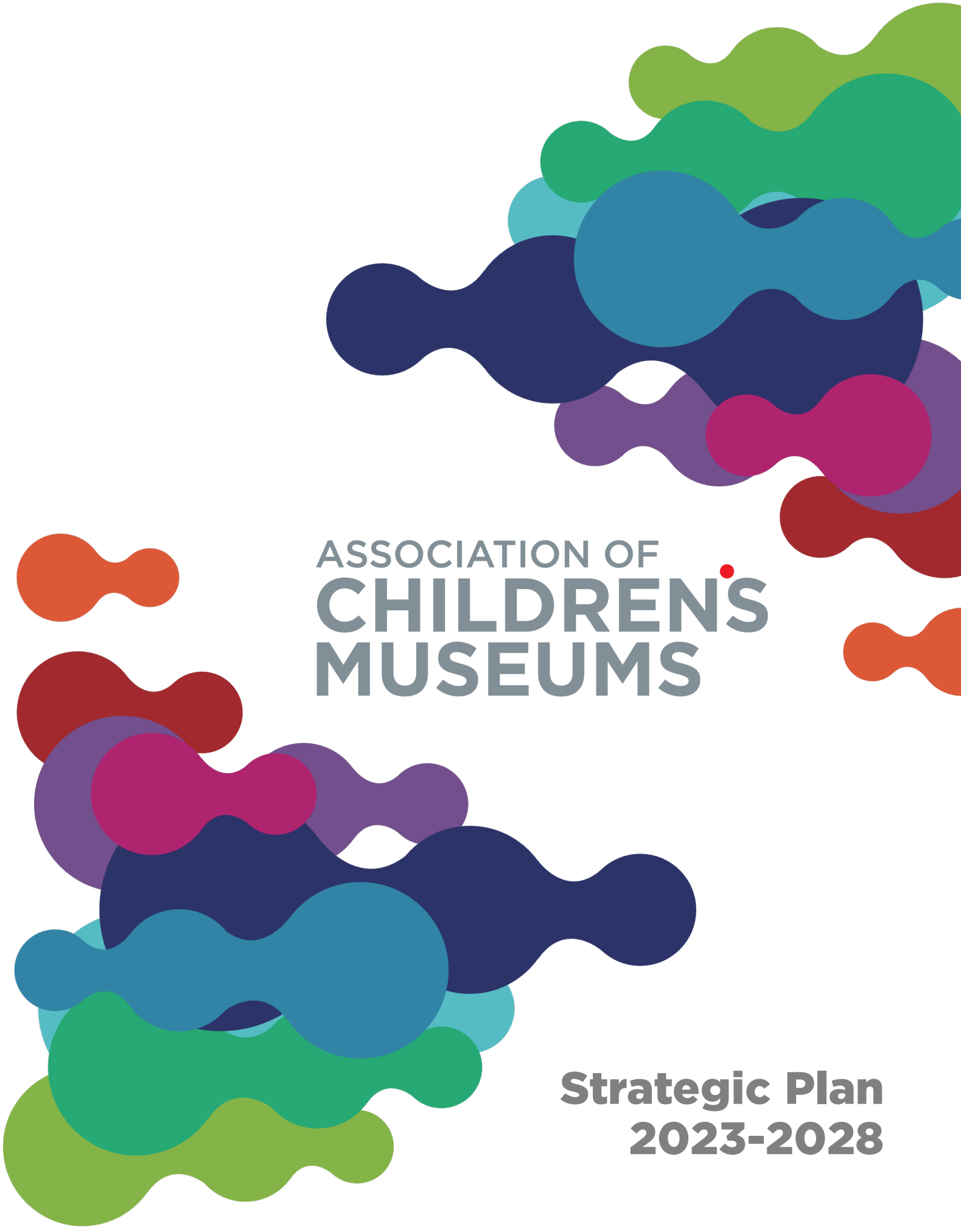


ASSOCIATION OF
CHILDREN'S
MUSEUMS

Strategic Plan 2023-2028

Dear Children's Museum Community,

Today's young learners and their families are facing a myriad of seemingly intractable challenges, many of which are interwoven and all of which threaten the quality and accessibility of their future opportunities. Few would disagree that today's children and families find themselves grappling with issues like the earth's worsening climate; life-threatening disparities in access to basic health care; widespread housing and food insecurities; an unforgiving knowledge-based economy that penalizes a lack of vocational and technical skills; an ever-growing mental health crises; the fallout from a pandemic that ravaged far too many lives, livelihoods, and children's educational opportunities; and terrifying gun violence that traps families in fear.

These serious challenges also provide the opportunity for ACM and its members to reinforce our collective vitality, resilience, and power to serve as allies and partners for systemic change. We are fully committed to helping children and their families grow into confident and skillful lifelong-learners, inquirers, and change agents. Why do we know that a turnaround is achievable? Because before and during the worst of the pandemic, we have witnessed numerous remarkable instances in which ACM and our members pooled their creativity, resilience, expertise, and other resources to ensure that the recent pandemic would not have the last word about unlocking the possibilities that await a world that celebrates, honors, and respects its children.

After conducting many interviews and extensive conversations with the field and reflecting on the confluence of the conditions and factors described above, the ACM Board of Directors authorized and approved a five-year strategic (2023–2028) plan that focuses unapologetically on the well-being of children and their families.

ACM's Approach

Having identified the direction in which ACM should concentrate its resources, the board also stipulated that ACM's ongoing goals and objectives should be filtered through two critical and overarching lenses: diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) and environmental resiliency and regeneration, positioning ACM and its future projects to have net positive impacts.

In adopting this approach, ACM has not abandoned its decades-long emphasis on early learning through hands-on, interactive exhibits that stimulate curiosity and motivate learning. In fact, we will increase our efforts in this regard as we promote the power of play to help children learn, grow, and thrive. Additionally, ACM and its members must continue to expand our creative reach and influence beyond traditional boundaries, to bring our values and knowledge to bear on the broader societal issues affecting young learners' social and educational development.

ACM's Priorities

Based upon the backdrop and conditions already described, we have identified four aligned priorities for ACM:

Priority 1: Elevate the children's museum community

Priority 2: Lift up children and families

Priority 3: Advance the field through advocacy, policy, and research

Priority 4: Strengthen the organization

In 2022, ACM began a year-long celebration, marking 60 years of service and advocacy, expanding ideas about the power and role of children's museums. Indeed, ACM's members now include places with names like Children's Discovery Museum, Museum of Science, Museum of Discovery, Museum of Exploration, etc. All of these special museums seek to advance the well-being of children and families through learning via hands-on, interactive, engaging, and playful exhibits and experiences. Increasingly, we are supporting international members who prioritize children and families in Europe, Africa, Latin America, Canada, Australia, Asia, and elsewhere. This legacy must be acknowledged, reinforced, and celebrated, and we must draw greater attention and resources to amplify the reach of this vital work. Going forward, we will continue to leverage the collective voice of ACM members by elevating museums serving children and families and amplifying their impact.

It is virtually impossible to lift children onto promising paths toward educational success without paying credence to the family and community ecosystems in which they live. After all, children rely almost exclusively on caring family members, caretakers, surrogate guardians, and educators, and these are the people who must be aware of the rich and broad benefits that emanate from children's exposure to museums specifically designed for young learners' intellectual and social development. ACM will work to ensure that the power of children's museums is universally understood and appreciated, with a focus on access for those living in under-resourced communities.

The work and objectives presented above will require a stronger and much better-resourced ACM, in the areas of both governance and operations. Indeed, multiple aspects of our infrastructure are being updated to support ACM's board and the new strategic plan, and an aggressive focus on building additional support for ACM's mission and vision will be required. This support may take multiple forms, including new financial resources, strategic alliances and partnerships, joint ventures, and shared responsibility with both public and private sectors. We will remain fully accountable and fiscally responsible for the investments we receive from our strategic partners and supporters. ACM will leverage a combination of its in-house team, external relations, members, and technology to improve our visibility, research capability, impact assessments, overall efficacy and efficiency, and visibility across the field, among policymakers, and within critical subject-matter conversations affecting children and families.

The urgency facing our children's futures cannot be overstated. It is precisely for this reason that ACM has chosen to reformulate and direct its resources toward doing more to support the field, while increasing our focus on lifting up children and families. Are our goals and objectives ambitious? Do we expect to move the needles that track progress on the overall conditions in which children and their families find themselves? In a fractured society such as the present, is our strategic plan achievable? The answer to each of these questions is an unequivocal yes! Our optimism is derived from vital and impactful work already happening in children's museums here and abroad and in the leadership of our member museums and the ACM Board of Directors. We must persist and succeed in this work, because the children, caregivers, and families we serve deserve our best efforts and clear results. Therefore, we welcome your input and invite you to come and join us in this necessary, ambitious, life-changing, and life-affirming endeavor.

Sincerely,

Arthur G. Affleck, III

Executive Director
ACM

Tanya Durand

Past, Board President
ACM

Joe Hastings

Board President
ACM

Contents

1. Introduction.....6
2. Methodology.....10
3. Organizational Statements and Overarching Lenses.....13
4. Strategic Priorities.....16
5. Acknowledgements.....21

Introduction

1. Introduction

With new leadership in place and the 60th anniversary of the Association of Children's Museum's (ACM) founding occurring this year, the time is right to revisit the ACM's direction and consider its future.

The importance of children's museums for our communities cannot be understated. This strategic plan creates a roadmap for implementation of new directions and priorities and for highlighting the impact of children's museums worldwide. The roadmap showcases the integral place children's museums serve in the hearts of families and at the tables where decisions affecting children are discussed.

A new executive director for the organization and upheavals of the COVID years encouraged ACM's board of directors to develop a 5-year strategic plan to chart the organization's course going forward. With a focused vision, the plan will help ACM meet and support its members where they are and continue to be the leading resource for the field.

ACM engaged the international arts and culture consulting firm, Lord Cultural Resources, to work collaboratively with the board, executive director, and staff leadership to facilitate a strategic planning process to revisit mission and vision, set impactful goals, and develop measurable objectives.

Lord Cultural Resources is a global professional practice dedicated to making the world a better place through culture.

We assist people, communities, and organizations to realize and enhance cultural meaning and expression.

We distinguish ourselves through a comprehensive and integrated full-service offering built on a foundation of key competencies: visioning, planning and implementation.

We value and believe in cultural expression as essential for all people. We conduct ourselves with respect for collaboration, local adaptation, and cultural diversity, embodying the highest standards of integrity, ethics, and professional practice.

We help clients clarify their goals; we provide them with the tools to achieve those goals; and we leave a legacy as a result of training and collaboration.

We encourage you to acknowledge the presence of the people who came before, wherever you are.

Methodology

2. Methodology

The strategic planning process has been undertaken in three phases

Phase 1: Assessment
Phase 2: Vision Setting
Phase 3: Implementation

Phase One entailed gathering data from a background review of ACM, an environmental scan, and meetings with a variety of internal and external stakeholders.

Community engagement was a large part of the ACM strategic planning process. During this phase of the process, input was received from 195 individuals. This engagement included ACM Board and staff, CEOs from ACM member organizations, representatives from peer organizations, and ACM constituents from around the world.

Phase Two consisted of the development of the Key Findings, Critical Issues, & Strategic Options submitted to the ACM Board and leadership prior to the Strategic Planning Workshop held on June 14, 2022.

Eleven trustees attended the workshop in person, and six attended online in a hybrid meeting which took place at the Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art and Storytelling, in Harlem, NY. Several ACM staff members attended online for the morning portion of the workshop. The goals of the day were to review and discuss critical issues, strategic opportunities, and high-level priorities for ACM's future, as well as to review ACM's organizational statements.

Lord Cultural Resources presented the preliminary draft document to ACM's Strategic Planning Committee (Executive Committee) during two online meetings held in July and September. Lord presented a draft Strategic Plan at the ACM board meeting via Zoom on October 13, in Washington, DC., which was followed by dialog and feedback, and the adoption of a new vision and mission statement, and the authorization of the plan development moving forward.

Phase Three of this process is Implementation, where ACM staff will further develop these objectives by identifying actionable tasks to achieve day-to-day elements of each priority.

Organizational Statements & Overarching Lenses

3. Organizational Statements and Overarching Lenses

The vision and mission of an organization are powerful statements that express in a very public way its intentions and guide how it engages its community and the broader public. Together, they are the cornerstones of an organization's identity. The mission is the organization's reason for being, and the vision is the impact it aims to achieve in the world.

Revisiting the organizational statements during the strategic planning process is integral to ensuring that the values and ethos of the organization sync with its current trajectory. This allows an organization to innovate and evolve.

Based on the findings of Phase One and the priority areas determined by the Board, all Strategic Workshop participants agreed that the ACM Vision and Mission statements should be updated to reflect current challenges and threats to children and families. These include threats linked to inequality, climate change, pollution, early education deficits, injury and violence, harmful commercial marketing, unhealthy lifestyles and diets, and migration.

Children's futures are uncertain, and urgent action is needed to respond to these threats. While ACM and the children's museum community cannot eliminate all the threats to children's health, safety and well-being, the organization is committed to using its playful learning approach, and its advocacy, programming, and community partnerships to address these problems proactively and with a sense of urgency.

The Key Findings report proposed revisiting the Mission and Vision Statement to reflect ACM's new strategic directions and to articulate the aspirational direction of the organization.

The Board approved draft organizational statements that have evolved into the final statements in this plan.

Mission

We champion children's museums and together enrich the lives of children worldwide.

Vision

A world that prioritizes the rights of all children to playful learning and a healthy, safe, and equitable future.

Overarching Lenses

All our work in each Strategic Priority will be evaluated through the two overarching lenses of DEAI and environmental resiliency and regeneration. Each objective and its corresponding plans for implementation and evaluation will be considered through these filters.

Our commitment to a DEAI lens means that every decision made by the organization, from hiring practices for staff, board and contractors, to all practices of planning for Interactivity and meetings, to ordering materials and supplies, will amplify our work of inclusivity and give priority to historically under-represented voices.

Our commitment to environmental resiliency and regeneration means that every decision will be considered from a stance of not only doing less environmental harm, but of doing more environmental good through our work, to create the regenerative future our young audiences deserve.

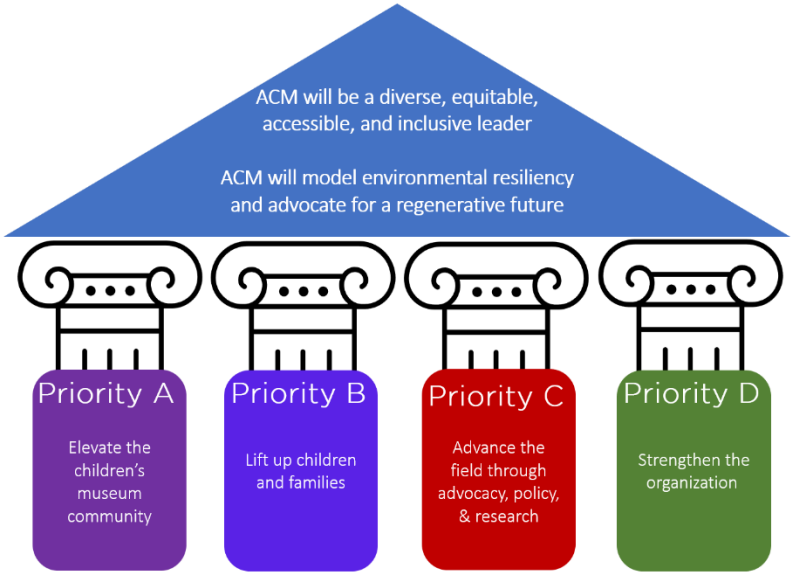
This means evaluating and intentionally changing our internal practices to reduce carbon emissions and waste, thus finding new ways to guide our field through conservation of resources and environmental leadership. The collective impact of our association and field wide commitment to DEAI and environmental resiliency and regeneration will create much needed meaningful change.

Strategic Priorities

4.Strategic Priorities

The diagram to the right shows how the two overarching lenses focus all our work through each priority and subsequent objectives:

- ACM will be a diverse, equitable, accessible, and inclusive leader
- ACM will model environmental resiliency and advocate for a regenerative future



Based upon internal and external assessment from the field, the ACM Board identified four Strategic Priorities for its work, providing concentrated areas of focus to give direction to ACM initiatives, current and future. Each priority is followed by objectives that will be confirmed by staff during the final implementation phase.

Strategic Priorities are identified here as long-range, qualitative standards that the organization strives to achieve over the next five years

Objectives are short-term, quantifiable levels of achievement specified in plans and budgets. Objectives are measures of fulfillment of longer-term, qualitative goals, which often aim towards multiple priorities.

Priority A: Elevate the children's museum community
Priority B: Lift up children and families
Priority C: Advance the field through advocacy, policy, & research
Priority D: Strengthen the organization

PRIORITY A: ELEVATE THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM COMMUNITY

Strategic Goal: Leverage the collective voice of ACM members by elevating museums and amplifying their impact

Objectives

- Utilize ACM's power of convening to further opportunities for professional development in the field and expand the global reach
- Highlight and celebrate the vital role of children's museums in the public eye by developing a comprehensive and sophisticated marketing strategy
- Organize around an array of broad-based topics with field-wide appeal to empower museum leaders
- Customize association member benefits to create equitable value propositions
- ACM will increase professional development opportunities to cultivate emerging leaders within the field

PRIORITY B: LIFT UP CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Strategic Goal: Advocate for children and support children's museums as they address issues impacting children, prioritizing playful learning and healthy, safe, and equitable communities

Objectives

- Promote early childhood education programming via play and playful learning in children's museums, schools, and the community
- Serve as convenors to the field about issues affecting children and families
- Leverage strategic opportunities and partnerships supporting children and children's museums for the betterment of the field
- Share resources with museums to help them create healthy learning environments for children and families and focus on parents and caregivers
- Lead, advocate and champion children's rights, policies, and initiatives globally
- Expand and share research with association members and the field

PRIORITY C: ADVANCE THE FIELD THROUGH ADVOCACY, POLICY, & RESEARCH

Strategic Goal: Champion the work of children's museums through advocacy, policy, and research

Objectives

- Champion children's museums at the federal level, and support advocacy at a state/local level for resources and policies that advance children's museums and further playful learning
- Advocate for increased access and opportunities for federal support for the sector
- Collect, develop, and amplify research, data, and stories that advance the growth and reputation of children's museums

PRIORITY D: STRENGTHEN THE ORGANIZATION

Strategic Goal: Create a sustainable organization by strengthening ACM's infrastructure—people, processes, and resources

Objectives

- Strengthen internal structures around people, finances, systems, & technology
- Build a culture of philanthropy to grow individual giving, major gifts, and contributed income
- Identify and assess new pathways to increase earned revenue
- Conduct a review of ACM structure and governance (Board and internal organization)
- Enhance the governance structure to represent the association's diverse membership and communities they serve
- Build the ACM brand and develop marketing and communication strategies

5. Acknowledgements

ACM Board of Directors 2022-2023

Executive Committee (2022-2023)

President
Joe Hastings
Executive Director, Explora
Albuquerque, NM

Past President
Tanya Durand
Executive Director, Greentrike
Tacoma, WA

Vice President - Governance
Tifferney White
Chief Learning Officer, Discovery Place
Charlotte, NC

Vice President - Initiatives
Joseph Cox
President/CEO, Museum of Discovery and Science
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Vice President - Initiatives
Dené Mosier
President and CEO, Kansas Children's Discovery Center
Topeka, KS

Treasurer
Stephanie Terry
Executive Director, Louis J. Koch Family Children's Museum of Evansville
Evansville, IN

Secretary
Putter Bert
President and CEO, KidsQuest Children's Museum
Bellevue, WA

At-Large Board Members (2018-2024)

Lara Litchfield-Kimber
Executive Director, Montshire Museum of Science
Norwich, VT

Carol Tang
Executive Director, Children's Creativity Museum
San Francisco, CA

At-Large Board Members (2021-2025)

Brenda Baker
Director of Exhibits, Madison Children's Museum
Madison, WI

Michael McHorney
Executive Director, Children's Museum of Eau Claire
Eau Claire, WI

At-Large Board Members (2022-2027)

Crystal Bowyer
President and CEO, National Children's Museum
Washington, DC

Atiba Edwards
Executive Vice President & Chief Operating Officer, Brooklyn Children's Museum
Brooklyn, NY

Melissa Kaiser
Chief Executive Officer, DISCOVERY Children's Museum
Las Vegas, NV

Felipe Peña
Executive Director, Brownsville Children's Museum
Brownsville, TX

ACM Staff

Arthur Affleck
Executive Director

Gina M. Flores Stumpf
Chief of Staff

Victoria Garvin
Senior Director, Professional Development & Membership

Stephanie Yang
Senior Director of Finance & Administration

Jennifer Rehkamp
Director of Field Services & Research

Keni Sturgeon
Director, Strategic Initiatives

Gabrielle Gallagher
Director, Communications

Sharon Chiat, CMP
Senior Manager, Professional Development & Events

Brendan Cartwright
Manager, Special Initiatives

Daniel Fernandez-Baca
Coordinator, Museum Membership

Emily Miranker
Manager, Development

Bianca Mona
CCLI Program Manager

Kelly Perkins
Office Manager

Blythe Romano
Research Assistant

ASSOCIATION OF CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS