In 2015, the Children’s Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus completed a large-scale expansion fueled by guest demand, a need for greater capacity and strong community support. Despite a prolonged recession, the Museum successfully raised more than $16 million to expand its facility, campus, programs and exhibits.

Today, we have achieved results beyond our wildest dreams. Attendance since expansion is years ahead of the conservative estimates we calculated — and we anticipate continued growth.

Not only does our Museum delight and inspire Colorado families, but institutions from across the region, the country and the globe seek us out to design fresh, dynamic experiences for their own communities. And we continue to be bold with exhibits and programming right here at home; pushing boundaries every single day.

With the tailwind of success behind us and the opportunity to think fearlessly about the future, we engaged in a year-long master planning process to envision what the Museum could become. To ensure we remain vitally relevant to those we serve, we explored our community today and looked ahead 20 years to imagine the Denver metro area of tomorrow.

*To the Moon and Back* provides a big-picture look at the Museum’s ambitious organizational direction from now until 2030.
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Who we are

What does it mean to be a place where children are the heroes of their own stories? A place where children and their grown-ups are invited and encouraged to explore, create and learn together? A place where all families are welcomed and celebrated in meaningful, authentic ways?

At the Children’s Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus, we empathize with the obstacles families face when searching for worthwhile shared experiences. Through our exhibit and program offerings, we champion the wonder and joy of childhood—but we know that in order to accomplish this, we must make it easier for parents and caregivers to say “yes.” Yes to exploring. Yes to being messy. Yes to failing and trying again.

In a world filled with quick-hit entertainment, we strive to be something different. We aspire to help create life-affirming, long-lasting memories through layers of creative discovery.
our approach

We respect the fundamental competency of children, and believe that all children possess extraordinary potential, strength and creativity. We—through the environments and experiences we provide—support children as they make meaning and construct knowledge through exploration and interaction with intriguing phenomena, real tools, beautiful materials and other human beings.

As we look ahead, the need for authentic play experiences will be increasingly significant for both children and adults. For children and teens, social, emotional and mental health issues are on the rise (perhaps, as some argue, due to the amount of time children spend interacting with screens) and the true play-based experiences like those offered by our Museum can be a substantial remedy. In addition to developmental benefits, authentic play connects humans to each other and the world around them in a way that screens cannot.

In a world where the independence of children is challenged, there is growing demand for more risk-oriented play to help foster social and emotional connections between children as they explore, learn and problem-solve together. The power of play lies in encouraging and developing the innovation, sense of adventure and resilience needed to thrive.

our museum exists...

To support children, and the adults who love and teach them, as they strive to make sense of the world, integrate new information with prior knowledge, and organize it into meaningful understandings.

To spark the curiosity, imagination and interests of children by engaging them in playful exploration and shared moments of discovery with parents, caregivers and educators.

To cultivate children’s identities as curious learners and capable makers of meaning, and to prepare them for an increasingly complex future.
our **mission:**
To create extraordinary experiences that champion the wonder and joy of childhood.

our **vision:**
That all Colorado children and grown-ups realize the benefits of discovery, creativity and play.

**a commitment to our community:**
The Children’s Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus is a community gathering place. We welcome all children and their adults, regardless of ability, age, color, creed, ethnicity, gender expression, gender identity, immigration status, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status, and invite everyone to learn and explore together.

We celebrate diversity in all aspects of our organization. Through inclusive programming, exhibits, communal spaces and hiring practices, we commit to creating an environment that reflects and respects our community.
today’s museum

The Children’s Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus resides on nine acres along the South Platte River, adjacent to Gates Crescent Park and I-25. We are a focal point in a corridor prime for family entertainment; a gem in the middle of a rapidly evolving community.

Today’s Children’s Museum is a very busy place. Our campus changed dramatically following a major expansion in 2015, allowing us to serve a greater number of guests with our unique style of play and learning. Our 47,000 square foot facility features 15 interior exhibit galleries and six flexible programming studios. In Joy Park, the Museum’s 60,000 square foot outdoor experience, guests can discover canyons, rivers and sand dunes, and make their way to the very top of Adventure Forest – all in the heart of downtown Denver.

The Museum embraces a strong commitment to access for all, and offers multiple free and low-cost admission programs for families in need. As a result of these programs and high community demand, we have experienced rapid growth in attendance, significantly increasing our reach and impact. Our total number served in the three years post-expansion was 1,628,627, and annual attendance now is 55% higher than pre-expansion.

Following expansion, the Museum used its hard-earned expertise to create The Exhibits Team, an entrepreneurial design arm of the Children’s Museum. The Exhibits Team contracts with museums, libraries and other organizations locally, nationally and globally to design experiences that extend the Museum’s play-based learning approach beyond our Denver campus. And all proceeds support new innovation right here at home.

The last few years have been an exciting time, but success can breed challenges. Recognizing rapid growth, an ever-changing region with evolving demographics, and growing community and industry demands, the Museum welcomes the opportunity to pave the way for future success and increased impact.
When we kicked off our year-long master planning process in January 2018, we embraced the adventure, curiosity and real-world problem solving that is central to everything we do at the Children’s Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus.

To serve the dynamic needs of our community in a constantly changing environment, we knew we needed to create a far-reaching and comprehensive plan that encompasses our unique campus, programs and organization.

**we went to the moon and back to:**

**Engage** the community in a wildly visionary space and to picture what might be possible.

**Imagine** future generations of multicultural families and anticipate the unmet needs of our city and state in 2030 and beyond.

**Explore** how we might leverage innovation and expertise to support families and meet our mission in more bold, inclusive and effective ways.

**Envision** ourselves as a sought-after resource fueling child-powered learning across the region, country and globe.

**Increase** the gravitational pull of our campus.
what we did

The master planning process advanced in four phases, each step built on the research, analysis, ideas and insights gleaned from previous steps. We began by scanning our external environment and identifying changes with greatest potential for impact. This served as a launch pad for member and stakeholder engagement.

Next, we studied our community with a focus on children and families, where they will live, and how the Children’s Museum might serve them 10-20 years from now. We asked questions of our members and community stakeholders to better understand current desires and anticipate the needs of future generations.

We synthesized all we heard to ideate around multiple organizational models; including a more decentralized approach with satellite locations, taking a stronger advocacy role, serving as a curator of experiences for other organizations and various others. With the help of our master planning task force, board of directors and Museum staff, we explored and tested each model, identified promising directions from each, and created the ideal hybrid for the Museum’s future.

master planning: 4 phase process
We engaged nearly 2,000 people in the creation of the Museum’s master plan through:

- In-depth **demographic analyses and future forecast** of the Denver metro area population and projected member base **through 2040**

- **Nine ethnographic observation visits** conducted at the Children’s Museum and other local cultural organizations

- **The participation of over 1,750 Museum members** in an email survey

- The **engagement of 70 community stakeholders** with diverse backgrounds and perspectives through phone interviews and an online questionnaire

- **The exploration of multiple organizational models** for the Museum

- **Three targeted focus groups** to dig deeper into how the Museum can increase impact

- **11 master planning task force meetings** over 12 months

- Five facilitated sessions with Museum leadership to **investigate the earned revenue potential** of new adult and family engagement opportunities, and The Exhibits Team, an entrepreneurial design service of the Children’s Museum

- **Six facilitated sessions and presentations** with the Museum’s Board of Directors

- **Two all-staff sessions**, bookending the process

- **Strategic positioning analysis** to affirm what distinguishes the Museum in the marketplace

- The creation of a **10-year revenue and expense projection model and expansion cost calculator**

- Case studies of three **other children’s museums** actively using satellite locations to serve regional communities
The master planning process kicked off with a Board and Management Retreat and a Staff Visioning Retreat along with additional follow-up meetings to start to imagine the Museum of the future.

Questions that emerged served to frame the master planning process. They included:

- How can we increase the gravitational pull of our campus?
- Are we listening to what our customers want?
- How relevant will our exhibits be in 10-20 years?
- How do we stay true to our hands-on hallmark experiences while incorporating new technologies?
- Can we extend our services and expertise?
- Who are our potential strategic partners?
- How might we be a leader and influencer?
- What will our Museum of the future look like?
- How might we frame our role in family connectivity?
- What would it mean to truly be inclusive?
- How can the Museum help to increase transportation mobility for our guests?
- Can we provide continued connection to nature in an urban environment?

Topics that arose and were validated throughout the process included opportunities for the Museum to:

- Expand earned revenue sources and further diversify our funding base.
- Strengthen our ability to invest in staff.
- Advocate for improved public transportation options to the Museum.
- Be more inclusive of all backgrounds.
- Improve operational access through increased parking and extended Museum hours.
- Extend mission impact locally and throughout the state through partnerships.
- Engage partners in close proximity to our campus to form a creative district and a shared vision.
Members love the Museum... but they don’t love the crowds.

More than 1,700 members participated in our master planning survey. They provided rich data and insights for the future.

Overall, member satisfaction is very high. A vast majority would recommend membership, and most were likely to renew their membership. Those who indicated they would not recommend most frequently cited crowds and congestion as their rationale. The main thing members would like to see changed is the amount of space available.

When asked what makes the Children’s Museum unique, the most common responses revolved around the specific activities available and the variety of experiences.

“It provides more hands-on activities for children vs. more just viewing learning. It also provides opportunities for creative play and explorative play.”

“The activities are fun, full-bodied experiences. Get sticky in the bubbles, create rockets, splash in the water, climb, etc.”

“The Children’s Museum definitely offers the most variety... indoor and outdoor activities, art, science, cooking and even seasonal events.”
When asked to share one word to describe the Museum, nearly half (42%) of respondents said “fun.” Other terms frequently mentioned included “play,” “engaging,” “interactive,” “educational” and “learning.”
Members universally agree that “being engaging for children” describes the Museum "well" or "very well." This rating is critical, as members identified this trait as the single most important attribute when choosing activities to do with their children. The two biggest areas of opportunity for the Museum are to create more space, and to be able to provide rotating experiences, possibly through temporary/traveling exhibits.
We also asked members to compare the Museum’s performance to 17 local organizations on a series of features and attributes. Custom-designed comparison analysis demonstrated that members rated the Museum above most competing organizations in providing unique experiences and being a good value. Additionally, the Museum had an edge in offering high-quality activities and a wide variety of experiences. Comparison analysis ranked Denver Museum of Nature and Science and Denver Zoo as the Museum’s strongest cultural competitors, with each ranking equal to or higher than the Museum in areas like engaging adults and children and ease of access.

Members offered a variety of ideas for the Museum to consider for the future, including extended hours, easier parking, and expansion of the current building. Members also suggested satellite locations, traveling exhibits, temporary or pop-up exhibits, and partnerships to spread the joy of learning throughout the metro area. These suggestions address both the current challenges of crowding and anticipate a future population that is both larger and more geographically dispersed. Others noted that the Museum could do more to design experiences for older children and those with special needs.

One thing to note, survey findings indicated that the needs and desires of our members sometimes vary by demographic group. For example, compared to white families, families of color assign greater importance to multicultural/diversity efforts and a commitment to serve a wider variety of age ranges. Families who identified as having lower incomes tended to assign greater importance to future efforts that expand programs of all types, including online resources for families and schools.
We asked 70 Denver metro leaders representing industries and concerns vital to Colorado to assist us in identifying future community needs and to share their thoughts on how we might deepen or extend the Museum’s impact. A synthesis of their input revealed the following suggestions and bold ideas.

**Be a model of multicultural inclusion.**

Stakeholders believe the Museum is positioned to continue to be a leader for equity and access. They noted that as demographics shift, it will be increasingly important for the Museum to continue its focus on inclusivity, serving as a role model regionally and beyond. Initiatives should be multi-pronged and consider age, family structure, living situations, race, socioeconomic status, education levels and immigration status.

To serve a more diverse audience, stakeholders recommended the Museum be even more dedicated to seeking out the voices of underserved populations. Interviewees spoke about the need for institutions to go beyond providing signage in different languages. What’s more important, particularly for refugee and immigrant populations, is an environment that reflects their cultural identity.

Successful efforts would result in broader communication, community engagement and awareness. Internally, a staff that embodies the diversity of Museum guests aids in creating an inclusive environment and would further all efforts in an authentic, reflective way.

**Recognize transportation and operational barriers.**

Several interviewees expressed frustration at the difficulties involved in traveling to the Museum due to traffic, parking and commuting time. Additionally, they noted that some families cannot visit the Museum during regular business hours because of employment and family commitments. On the other hand, some interviewees shared optimism that within the next 20 years, increased access to public transportation should alleviate some of these concerns. Several interviewees mentioned that a shuttle service from proximate neighborhoods, like Sun Valley, could help alleviate these barriers.
Expand family play and learning.

Shared play and learning experiences between adults and children are critical to the social and emotional well-being of both. In addition to the developmental benefits for children, play builds the confidence of parents and the social resiliency of families as a whole. Interviewees consistently spoke of the critical role that a supportive, loving adult can play in a child’s development; the Museum provides a safe space for this bond to form.

While the Museum is currently a catalyst for child-powered learning, there is an opportunity to develop spaces or take-home resources that encourage whole family engagement. Such resources would allow the Museum to create intellectual property and could create possible revenue opportunities.

Foster empathy and critical thinking skills through the arts.

Art programming has proven vital in the development of creative and critical thinking skills, and there is a desire to expand upon the Museum’s already robust lineup.

While we have a large Art Studio and Artist-in-Residence Program, it was suggested that we contemplate the addition of music to provide a more expansive view of the arts. It was also suggested that allowing children to explore music and art through a multicultural lens would build empathy and understanding of others, while simultaneously empowering children to explore their creative side.

Increase offerings beyond our campus.

Anticipating that an influx of families will move and live outside Denver County, interviewees expressed a strong desire to extend the mission delivery of the Museum beyond the physical campus through additional locations and/or exhibits to reach a broader audience. Fortunately for the Museum, there are numerous organizations throughout the region with which we could potentially partner, including schools and early childhood centers, libraries, hospitals and other cultural institutions.
Focus groups were conducted with three distinct markets: parents of children with intellectual and/or physical disabilities, aged newborn through 8; parents of lapsed member households with children aged 5 through 10; and Latinx parents with children aged newborn through 6. Each focus group was composed of 10 participants. This research was designed to dig below the surface of typical responses to issues such as crowding to reveal the underlying desires and motivations of families.

There were clear trends across all three groups regarding attributes each felt were most important for their families.

**Parents have more choices than ever when thinking about family-friendly activities.** Museums, outdoor spaces, parks, libraries and recreation centers are all tailoring their offerings to serve families, a highly sought after consumer group. The Children’s Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus is an established, trusted institution; however, with more organizations focused on serving young children, it is time to consider our differentiators and how we can best serve the whole family.

**Parents seek rich experiences.** They want to know that if they invest the time to go to the Museum, they will be able to fully experience it. Parents stated there are certain activities that are negatively impacted by the high volume of guests. The Teaching Kitchen, in particular, was identified as difficult to experience, particularly on busy days. They also want to know that their children can engage with exhibits for as long as they desire and that they, as parents, will not feel “in the way.”

**Parents are willing to make trade-offs for their children.** Despite parents overtly stating their desire for family-oriented activities, parents are willing to sacrifice their own comfort or enjoyment for their children. The Museum has the opportunity to position itself as a place where all members of the family can be engaged.

**Parents want more access to the Museum.** Parents across the board perceived the operating hours of the Museum to be insufficient. They would like it to be open earlier and later, ensuring the operating times align with when parents and caregivers of various backgrounds can participate. Parents with young children, in particular, noted their child wakes up around 6 am, but the Museum does not open until 9 or 10 am, when children are ready for naps.
The Museum could better meet the needs of children with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. There was a strong desire among this group to find ways to engage with families outside of the Museum. Many respondents spoke about how a “take-home” kit that provides activities and resources that build on the lessons learned at the Museum would be beneficial.

Parents seek expanded offerings for older children. Rather than creating new spaces oriented toward older children, participants suggested elevating current offerings to appeal to various developmental stages. This approach in particular was popular as it is perceived to encourage cross-age interactions between child guests at the Museum. Programmatic offerings are another area they expect more from the Museum.

Adventure Forest, the Museum’s outdoor aerial adventure course, was brought up throughout the focus group discussions as a needed, and welcomed, addition to the Museum’s current offerings, as it caters to a diverse age range. While redesigning all-new exhibit spaces is not feasible, developing new experiences that are also relevant to older children would allow the Museum to attract families that have children of various ages, thus allowing the Museum to transform into a destination where memorable experiences are created and shared by all family members.

Parents noted that inclusive practices value multiple languages and cultures. Focus group participants noted that to be truly inclusive, the Museum needs to have a plethora of languages and cultures represented, serving as a space where children can be introduced to people different from themselves. Participants also suggested partnership opportunities that would help to further engage the Latinx community.
The State Demography Office projects that by 2040, Colorado will be home to almost 8 million people, up from 5 million in 2010. With an **expected population of 4.3 million**, the seven-county Denver metro population will have almost doubled.

By 2040, current population estimates indicate there will be roughly 425,000 children newborn through age 8 in the metro area, increasing from 340,000 in 2018, at a growth rate of 25%. The largest expected shift is a shrinking percentage of the working population due to the dramatic growth of the 65+ age group - a 191% increase.

Colorado’s non-Hispanic White population, while increasing in number, has reached its maximum size in relation to the total population. The metro area’s Hispanic population is expected to continue growing dramatically for the foreseeable future. The State Demography Office projects that by 2050, approximately 1.6 million metro area residents will identify as Hispanic, compared to approximately 800,000 in 2018. It is predicted that the Hispanic community will comprise mostly second- and third-generation residents. The African American population is not projected to grow much as a percentage of the total population, remaining steady at 5%.

Super diversity, or the diversification of diversity, is occurring across the region today. Current trends are expected to continue over the next 10 to 20 years, resulting in a Denver metro area of 2040 that will reflect a remarkably wide range of languages, cultures and nationalities. This is evident already in the increasingly diverse makeup of Denver, where according to the city’s Office of Community Support, at least 140 different languages and dialects are spoken and immigrants from six continents make up one-sixth of the population.
Much of the total population growth will not occur in the city and county of Denver, but rather in Adams and Arapahoe Counties. This **suburban population growth** is expected to continue and even surpass the growth of Denver proper. Population projections show that Adams and Arapahoe Counties are also expected to eclipse Denver County in the newborn through 8 age group—the Museum’s target audience.
The Museum’s future neighborhood is bright, dynamic and busy. Numerous large-scale development projects will significantly reshape the Museum’s immediate neighborhood as well as the larger Denver metro region, changing where people live, work and play.

The South Platte River Corridor will see more families with the proposed increases in transportation access and, for the first time since its opening, the Museum will be in walking distance to those living on the east side of the South Platte River. Increased foot traffic coupled with new light rail proximity will put potentially thousands of people within easy reach, strengthening the Museum’s role as a center of gravity in its current location. Whether they have flown, biked, light-railed, bussed or walked, we expect the Museum to be at the center of a bustling community.
Sun Valley is one of the most proximate neighborhoods to the Museum and is historically home to some of the most underserved and low-income populations of Denver. This neighborhood houses an increasingly diverse population, including a significant immigrant and refugee population, and it is quite literally in the backyard of the Museum’s campus. Denver Housing Authority and Sun Valley EcoDistrict seek to revitalize this area with a $240 million investment.

The River Mile development on the Elitch Gardens site is a planned 25-year project (beginning in 2020) just across the South Platte River from the Museum. The proposed $665 million in new housing, bridges, roads and parks will transform the neighborhood surrounding our campus and will bring an influx of families to the area. The Museum will be more connected to communities near the Platte River than ever before.

Meow Wolf Denver at Colfax and I-25 is another highly anticipated development. By 2040, Meow Wolf Denver will be an established creative hub and cultural destination in Denver, located just down the river from the Museum.

The Denver Broncos are planning a new entertainment complex in the south parking lot of Mile High Stadium, with retail, commercial and residential components. In the future, we anticipate this development will see a significant increase in population and amenities.
Based on predicted changes in Denver metro demographics, the makeup of Museum guests – and their expectations of the Museum – will evolve.

- The growth of the senior population and an increase in retirees presents unique opportunities for the Museum to serve extended families and older adult caregivers.

- As our society grows more aware of the range of intellectual and developmental abilities of both children and adults, we anticipate the Museum of 2040 will be visited by families and groups seeking high-quality, inclusive experiences.

- As people move to urban centers like downtown Denver, and the surrounding suburban areas also become more populated, the need for authentic experiences in natural areas is expected to increase. Open, outdoor areas, like the Museum’s Joy Park and the adjacent Gates Crescent Park, will likely see increased demand.

- As commuting times and the desire for family togetherness increase, the demand for more play and learning opportunities closer to home is expected to rise.

- As millennials and Generation Z redefine “family” to include friends and others who may not be blood relatives, children’s museums will need to embrace these new family units.

- We anticipate the metro area will follow national trends and become super diverse. Guests will look to the Museum for inclusive, multicultural and multigenerational experiences.

“Today’s 4-year olds will be parents in 2040.”
transportation
The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) has big projects in the works, including a study of the I-25/23rd Avenue interchange, the prime point of entry to the Museum. That stretch of the interstate is congested and prone to accidents, and a redesigned interchange will increase multi-modal access from the Jefferson Park neighborhood, west of I-25.

The Regional Transportation District (RTD) is pursuing several major initiatives, including the First and Last Mile Plan to strategically examine transportation accessibility. It is intended to promote environmentally-friendly travel (e.g., biking, walking), and to implement new plans to ensure public transit options are more accessible.

technology
In the hustle and bustle of day-to-day life, it can easily be forgotten that the past 10 to 15 years have been marked by the development of technologies that today are fully integrated into the human experience. For frame of reference, Apple launched the first iPod in 2001 and the first iPhone in 2007.

Futurists predict a number of technology-related changes by 2040 that will impact our lives, including self-driving cars becoming the norm, artificial intelligence that is comparable to human intelligence, the elimination of many diseases as medical technologies advance, and virtual reality becoming indistinguishable from reality. As technology becomes increasingly intertwined in daily life, the opportunity to engage in authentic play will be especially cherished.

environment
Concerns about global warming are increasing, with experts forecasting that over the next 20 years we may be faced with dwindling natural resources as a result of climate change. Environmental stewardship and protection of natural resources, such as the South Platte River, will likely become top-of-mind for families who visit and reside near the Museum.

In Colorado, water in particular could become an increasingly scarce and expensive resource, with warmer temperatures impacting the snowpack Colorado depends upon as its primary water source. Many of the outdoor-based activities and wildlife Coloradans currently enjoy may be restricted and threatened due to a warmer and drier climate. Ultimately, this means that in the world of 2040 we may not be able to experience the Colorado outdoors in the way that we do now.
We *looked ahead* to 2040 to create a *10-year plan* for 2030.
where we landed

Exploring who we are today and looking 20 years into the future yielded important insights that set the stage for our master plan. This process brought clarity and revealed untapped potential to deepen and extend impact in the Denver metro area and throughout the state.

As we chart our course from now through 2030, it is imperative the Museum considers how to serve the evolving needs and desires of all families. The wide range of research we conducted illuminated opportunities for us to increase our role as a critical resource for the development of happy, fulfilled children and families.

In this section we present the insights we gained from our work and the commitments we solidified. We also provide overarching goals which will inform the Museum’s organizational direction for the next decade. The Museum’s Leadership Team will use this to develop a series of three-year strategic plans, providing additional direction and detail from now until 2030.
The master planning process affirmed several key points for us, setting the stage for our future path.

1. **The Museum’s downtown campus is critically important and will continue to be the central focus of our work.**

   The Museum’s nine-acre campus provides ample opportunity to expand, allowing us to increase the number of innovative experiences we offer as well as much-needed additional parking and administrative space. The campus also has the advantage of being in the heart of a vibrant entertainment district, with major new initiatives on the horizon. An additional distinct advantage is the Museum’s unique location adjacent to the South Platte River and Gates Crescent Park, offering precious natural experiences in an increasingly dense urban environment.

   With more families projected to live outside Denver County, we must work to increase the gravitational pull of our campus. We must invest in relevant, broadly appealing exhibits and programs; remove barriers by working to increase public transportation and ridesharing options; look at expanded hours of operation; and continue our commitment to access, offering low- to no-cost admission for families in need.

   Recognizing projected population growth and changing family demographics over the next 20 years, the Museum considered multiple organizational models, exploring how best to fulfill our mission in the future. We considered the idea of satellite locations to increase our reach to families throughout the seven-county metro area, however, feedback from museums around the country who invested in satellite locations indicated that, generally, multiple locations strained resources and offered lesser quality experiences.

2. **We must work with partners to extend the impact of our mission beyond our campus.**

   While owning and operating satellite locations presents challenges, there is great opportunity to partner with organizations to extend the Museum’s reach and impact. Expanding the work of The Exhibits Team, an entrepreneurial design arm of the Children’s Museum, we will work with museums, libraries and other organizations locally, nationally and globally to design interactive, play-based experiences like those found on our campus.

   Strategic partnership opportunities are plentiful in nearby developments and neighborhoods, and have the potential to deepen the Museum’s impact on surrounding communities.
We will continue to fulfill our mission through the power of play.
As a champion for play and learning across the state, the region and increasingly the
globe, the Museum is in a unique position to continue to extend the impact of the power
of play. We will continue to advocate for the importance of free thought and free play in
the development of young children, and will encourage caregivers to embrace this
vitally important learning experience across a lifetime.

Additionally, we will take the power of play a step further through the creation of The
Play Institute. Leveraging play as a dynamic tool to open creative channels and deepen
relationships, The Play Institute will offer adult participants from businesses and other
organizations innovative approaches to problem-solving and team-building. Utilizing
a highly customizable curriculum, The Play Institute will inspire, challenge and remind
grown-ups in our community that there are benefits to acting like a kid again.

Supporting positive human interactions will be at the heart of our work.
We live in an increasingly fragmented and disconnected world with growing rates of
anxiety, loneliness and depression; where different generations operate in separate
universes of information and communication; where our ability to empathize with each
other has declined significantly over the past four decades.
As an established expert in the arena of authentic play
and active learning, the Museum can help our
community by creating a welcoming space for
families to connect with each other through
the wonder and joy of childhood.
our guiding principles

We are committed to creating an immersive world where wonder and joy rule the day. We will do this by:

- Delivering relevant, exemplary, fresh, dynamic play and learning opportunities where children invent the narrative, inhabit their roles and initiate the action.

- Creating meaningful experiences for children and families by promoting positive interactions and considering the needs of adults as we design Museum experiences.

- Celebrating inclusivity by creating spaces where all guests feel welcome, where children and adults are treated with respect, and where we cultivate everyone’s innate capacity for creativity, originality, joy and connection.

- Embracing the multiculturalism of our region, state and world by inviting the community into the Museum to foster common bonds of empathy and understanding across diverse cultures, places and peoples.

- Driving innovation in the design of outstanding experiences and suitably leveraging technology to accentuate child-powered learning.

- Thinking about open-space design and the importance of sensory-friendly environments to facilitate the creation of memorable experiences for children and their caregivers.

- Being a champion for play and early childhood development for all as we serve as a civic leader and expert resource for healthy, fulfilled children and strong families.
We discovered how the Museum might bring the wonder and joy of childhood to life every day; more inclusively, more thoughtfully and to more people.
To honor our multicultural community, individual family structures, and opportunities for increased access, we will lead the field locally and nationally in providing an environment and experiences that are designed to be welcoming for everyone.

**Our Strengths**
Play provides social and emotional benefits to both children and adults while simultaneously building critical adult/child bonds. Our Museum provides respite from a hectic world and offers an opportunity for guests from different neighborhoods, schools and zip codes to come together in a true communal space to experience positive, life-affirming joy and connection.

**Our Challenges**
In a world where social isolation is on the rise, the need for shared, meaningful human connection is more pronounced than ever. There are few environments that effectively encourage and facilitate such opportunities, yet there are many, many choices for how families can spend time together. The Children’s Museum must continue to establish its expertise for providing inclusive, family-focused, play-based experiences.
From now to 2030, we will:

- Use a co-constituent design process for exhibits and programs, inviting varied groups representative of our community to provide input and feedback, ensuring we offer inclusive experiences that are welcoming and impactful for all.

- Create play and learning experiences for families as a whole, considering the needs of both children and adults.

Increase our reach and programming to ensure all children and families can experience the benefits of the Museum, with particular focus on:

- multigenerational families, families with children who have intellectual or physical disabilities, immigrant and refugee populations and low-income families – all growing and underserved populations in our community.

Our Commitment

We will reach and serve an audience representative geographically, socio-economically and culturally of the seven-county Denver metro community, measuring our success annually and adjusting our approach as needed each year.
**GOAL 2:**

boldly advance and champion play and informal learning throughout our community and region

We commit to more deeply engaging partners in our community to grow our impact and advance play and learning beyond our current campus.

**Our Strengths**
There is no place like the Children’s Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus. Our hands-on approach to play-based learning is highly desired in the children’s museum field and beyond. We are experts in play who help to develop and sustain healthy and fulfilled children, adults and families.

**Our Challenges**
As we look at a community full of enthusiastic partners, we must be strategic when and with whom we decide to partner, while maintaining an open door in our community to serve as a resource.
From now to 2030, we will:

Co-create child focused experiences beyond the Museum campus with strategically identified community partners. The Exhibits Team, the Museum’s design services team, has designed experiences for other children’s museums, space and flight museums, and a variety of other organizations. Future plans include possible partnerships with local and state libraries and city municipalities.

Advance the conversation about the importance of free thought and free play for early child development through ongoing partnerships with other like-minded organizations and initiatives. The Museum has current collaborations with Vroom, Denver Preschool Program, Earlier is Easier, the Denver Evaluation Network and many others.

Continue work with research partners, exploring and furthering our collective knowledge regarding early childhood education and the benefits of play. Current partners include Dr. Yuko Munakata at University of Colorado Boulder, Dr. Kristen Lyons and Dr. Lisa Kindleberger Hagan at Metro State University, and Dr. Tracy Vozar and Dr. Jennifer Paz at University of Denver.

Research and launch The Play Institute. Leveraging play as a powerful tool to open creative channels and deepen relationships, The Play Institute will offer adult participants from businesses and other organizations novel approaches to problem-solving and team-building. Utilizing a highly customizable curriculum, The Play Institute will inspire, challenge and remind grown-ups in our community that there are benefits to acting like a kid again.

Our Commitment

Strategically work with organizations throughout the Denver metro community to boldly advance the benefits of play, through collaboration, joint research and mentoring.
Now is the time to be bold, courageous and reflective in our programming and exhibit design – to be constantly learning and to do more for those we serve.

**Our Strengths**
The Children’s Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus is poised to lead the next iteration of exhibit and program design with a team of expert educators and designers eager to push the boundaries of innovation and play-based learning. Doing so will extend our first-mover advantage among colleagues and competitors worldwide and keep our Museum cutting edge.

**Our Challenges**
An increasingly competitive marketplace requires ongoing investments to rise above the static and clutter of others with fresh new experiences.
From now to 2030, we will:

- Be audacious in our approach to developing unique offerings through evolving design and recognizing the ever-changing global marketplace, while ensuring we stay committed to our core values and mission.

- Utilize a co-constituent design process, involving those we serve and community partners. Their involvement throughout the process will inform, test and strengthen our latest and greatest ideas, helping us bring them to fruition.

- Continue to take on exciting new projects locally, nationally and globally with The Exhibits Team, the Museum’s in-house design team, and continue to explore our role as a consultant, offering program development and organizational planning expertise - all to propel play-based learning around the world, gain intellectual capital, and to advance innovation right here at home.

Our Commitment

Continually enhance and improve the exhibits and programs at the Children’s Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus, adding one new exhibit per three-year strategic planning period. Utilize The Exhibits Team, the Museum’s entrepreneurial design arm, to design at least one new exhibit at an external location each year, furthering our reach and impact.
GOAL 4:
attract and retain high quality staff, volunteers and board members

The Museum must attract and retain talented, dedicated staff, volunteers and board members by ensuring a fulfilling and opportunity-rich organizational culture.

Our Strengths
Our staff are the Museum’s greatest asset, and our robust volunteer program and visionary, supportive board are essential to the Museum’s sustainability and growth.

Our Challenges
The exponential growth, focus on innovation and dedication to serving an ever-growing community has created additional pressure and responsibilities for our staff. Coupled with the need to attract and retain talent in an increasingly expensive region with low unemployment, there is high turnover among front line positions.
From now to 2030, we will:

- Provide competitive pay and benefits, professional development opportunities, and an inclusive and welcoming work environment.

- Work internally and with other arts and culture organizations to develop a pipeline of future generations of multicultural and inclusive leadership to advance our Museum, the field and broader community.

- Amplify our approach to attract and retain dynamic individuals that represent the broad spectrum of our community, recognizing that having staff and volunteers representative of those we serve creates a welcoming and inviting experience for our guests.

- Continue to engage board members and volunteers who embrace the Museum’s mission and service to community.

Our Commitment

Ensure the Museum’s board, staff and volunteers are representative geographically, socio-economically and culturally of the seven-county Denver metro community in which we reside, measuring our success annually and adjusting our approach as needed each year.
Based on Museum attendance and market share in 2018, and population projections from the State Demography Office, the Museum’s annual attendance in 2030 will be more than 700,000 children and adults.

Recognizing that market share and attendance projections may change, we will take a conservative, but flexible approach to growth, evaluating trends and adjusting plans accordingly.

**Our Strengths**
Our Museum is a leading cultural attraction in a high-growth area destined for major investment and expansion over the next 20+ years. We are recognized as a vital resource and partner in this neighborhood.

**Our Challenges**
Current capacity limitations exist, particularly with parking and available interior space. And traffic in the region and our neighborhood is an increasing problem. As the region grows and the geographic distribution of our audience widens, we will be challenged to reach everyone we seek to serve.

**GOAL 5:**
meet demands of significant population growth and maintain or exceed current market share
From now to 2030, we will:

- Continually evaluate market share and population trends.
- Plan to expand our building, experiences, amenities and parking with both short- and long-term investments.
- Extend our hours and evening and weekend activities to expand opportunities for families to visit the Museum.
- Look at serving a broader age range, including older children and multigenerational families, and add more adult-focused offerings.
- Partner with neighbors to realize new opportunities and shared resources in an ever-growing, densely populated entertainment district.
- Explore increased public transportation and ridesharing opportunities.

Our Commitment
On an ongoing basis we will enhance operations, programs and exhibits to maximize our current footprint. We will plan for and launch a capital campaign to support opening an expanded Children’s Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus by 2030. At a minimum, we will add 100 parking spaces, 14,000 public square feet and 3,000 administrative square feet, which will support serving a conservative estimate of 700,000 Museum guests each year.
GOAL 6:
ensure financial sustainability and
identify new revenue opportunities

To ensure we respond to our community in meaningful and relevant ways, we will sustain our financial vitality, and strengthen and diversify alternative sources of revenue that provide us greater freedom to innovate and adapt.

Our Strengths
We are in a strong financial position with a diverse income pool and ample reserves. We have an established entrepreneurial sector with incredible opportunity for growth and a demonstrated reputation of fiscal responsibility.

Our Challenges
Through the master planning process, we have identified increased market demand for our audience and a highly competitive landscape. To stay relevant, we will need to maintain excellence, be strategic with new exhibit and program offerings, and prioritize highly effective partnerships and endeavors that further the Museum as a leader in our field and community.
From now to 2030, we will:

- Maintain and grow raised- and earned-revenue opportunities.
- Expand the exciting work of The Exhibits Team, the Museum’s design services arm, locally, nationally and globally, and explore additional entrepreneurial consultant opportunities.
- Develop a business plan for and launch The Play Institute. Working with other businesses and organizations, The Play Institute will provide a new revenue line for the Museum while inspiring, challenging and reminding grown-ups in our community that there are benefits to acting like a kid again.

Our Commitment
We will utilize revenue earned through The Exhibits Team and The Play Institute to launch the Innovation Reserve, which will be used to fund cutting-edge experience design on our campus. More than $900,000 in annual net revenue is projected through these efforts by 2030.
This master plan was approved unanimously by the Board of Directors on February 26, 2019; sparking incredible enthusiasm for the transformational journey ahead. From now through 2030, this plan will serve as a road map, guiding us as we evolve to serve the needs and desires of all families.

As we begin fiscal year 2020, the Museum will develop and implement a 3-year strategic plan that will carry us through fiscal year 2022, with subsequent strategic plans thereafter. These are supported by yearly staff-developed work plans with specific measures of success designed to ensure the goals of the master plan are met.

In 2030, the Museum will be significantly more accessible to all children and families, will serve over 700,000 guests each year, and will be an essential resource to our local community and beyond. We will have considerably more exhibit, program and amenity spaces, and will leverage our expertise to be boldly entrepreneurial, realizing more diversified income and service streams than ever before.

The Children’s Museum of 2030 is ready for launch and the countdown begins today!
Thank you for joining our journey of learning, exploration and discovery to create the Museum’s Master Plan!

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Cyndi Kerins
Sarah Brenkert
Amy Burt
Jonathan Goldstein
Jon Handwork
Cisco Ocampo
Zoe Ocampo
Nicole Ortiz
Chris Van Dyken
Kim Zies

And so many others, including...
Museum Staff
Museum members and guests
Erin Brown
Emily Bustos
Chris Chavez
Susana Cordova
Jandel Allen-Davis
John Desmond
Christy Dobson
Andrea Fulton
Scott Gilmore
Christoph Heinrich
Lee Ann Hogan
Elsa Holguin
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Megan Miles
Claudia Moran
George Pond
Kris Rollerson
Lisa R. Roy, Ed.D.
Susan Steele
Gary Steuer
Patrick Tennyson
Brian Vogt
Nancy Walsh
Megan Wilson

Thanks to our partner, Corona Insights
Master Planning Team: Karla Raines, Matt Herndon, Andrew Streight, Molly Hagan and Jim Pripusich. Their founder named the company Corona because the word means “light.” It’s the knowledge that surrounds and illuminates an issue—exactly what they provide. Their firm’s mission is to provide accurate and unbiased information and counsel to decision makers. They provide market research, evaluation, and strategic consulting for organizations both small and large. Learn more at www.CoronaInsights.com
appendices

appendix a: how we learned

- Demographic Profile of Families of Young Children in the Denver Metro, March 2018
- General Population and Membership Projections, March 2018
- Ethnographic Observations, February-March 2018
- Museum Member Survey, March 2018
- Stakeholder Questionnaire, March 2018
- Summary of Insights – Online Stakeholder Input + Member Survey, April 2018
- Insights from Museums with Satellite Locations, July-August 2018
- Stakeholder Interviews, June-August 2018
- Focus Groups, July-August 2018

appendix b: where we looked

- Chronic Loneliness is a Modern-Day Epidemic: http://fortune.com/2016/06/22/loneliness-is-a-modern-day-epidemic/
- Denver elementary school population is expected to decline by about 7% by 2021: https://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2018/01/05/it-is-kind-of-crushing-southwest-denver-projected-to-lose-nearly-2000-students/
- Denver ranks 5th in African American household income, but African American household income still lagged significantly behind median American household income: https://www.bizjournals.com/denver/news/2017/12/13/forbes-where-denver-ranks-for-african-americans.html?ana=e&_ae_set3&s=article_du&ed=2017-12-13&u=21976413004e4acd0ef29c1b5ab6af&jt=1513204606&j=79336381
- Easy Mile - First and Last mile transportation: https://easymile.com/
- Including the 21st Century Family: https://incluseum.com/2014/07/07/including-the-21st-century-family/
- Piton Foundation Neighborhoods Data: https://www.shiftresearchlab.org/
- Regis University and Arvada Center to expand partnership: https://www.bizjournals.com/denver/news/2017/12/11/regis-university-arvada-center-partner-to-expand.html?ana=e&_ae_set3&s=article_du&ed=2017-12-
• River Mile: https://www.rivermiledenver.com/
• The Status of Denver’s Children: A Community Resource 2017.*
• The Status of Denver’s Children: A Community Resource 2018.** https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denver
• Why Museum Professionals Need to Talk about Black Panther: https://jhuxhibitionist.com/2018/02/22/why-
museum-professionals-need-to-talk-about-black-panther/
• Why Race Matters in Planning Public Parks: https://www.citylab.com/design/2016/03/why-race-matters-in-planning-
public-parks-houston-texas/474966/
*Link no longer available. **For updated reference.

appendix c: tools we created
• Capital Campaign Forecasting Model – Expansion Cost Calculator
• Financial Forecasting Model
• Visitation Projections

campus map

adjacent property
The Children’s Museum of Denver at Marsico Campus abuts property owned by Denver Parks & Recreation, the Regional Transportation District and the Downtown Aquarium.