

Where Science & Imagination Meet

Cleveland Museum of Natural History
Strategic Plan

**Audience
Engagement**

**Scientific
Leadership**

**Lifelong
Learning**

**Organizational
Excellence**

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Strategic Plan

Cleveland Museum of Natural History

The Cleveland Museum of Natural History is poised for reinvention. Through an ambitious expansion and transformation, we aim to inspire in our local and global audiences an enduring sense of connection with the natural world. This strategic plan, finalized in 2021, signals our commitment to adopting a community-centered and inquiry-based approach in our efforts to tell a unified story of life and the forces that shape our planet. It also provides us with a roadmap for responding to our rapidly changing world and maximizing investment in the Museum—including changes in the way we think, plan, hire, and organize ourselves—as we pioneer a new model for science education and the interpretation of natural history. It will guide our activities through the completion of our expansion in 2024 and the first full year of operating our new and reimagined spaces in 2025.

As our planet faces an ecological tipping point, the Museum believes that understanding science and appreciating our interconnectedness with nature are key to the survival of all life on Earth. We strive to be a place where visitors acquire this mindset and are empowered with the tools to secure a healthy future. In the past year, the global pandemic and calls for social and racial justice have also challenged us to think differently about the relationship between our Museum and the people we serve.

We are reinventing our campus, galleries, and visitor experience with a focus on these timely issues. Rather than telling the story of natural history through the traditional timeline and discipline-based approach, our exhibits and experiences—in-person and virtual—will place humans within a broader context and explore themes such as sustainability, human impact, and human health. We will lead from a place of scientific inquiry, revealing the interrelatedness of biological and planetary processes and the effects of these forces on every aspect of our lives.

We are also committed to expanding our accessibility, service, and impact in Northeast Ohio—at our University Circle campus, online, through community-based partnerships, and across the 11,000+ acres of protected land we steward throughout Ohio. The Museum draws an average of 375,000 visitors each year, but we know this number represents a relatively narrow segment of our population.

We strive to become an essential destination for Northeast Ohio residents and visitors of all ages and backgrounds, a major contributor to the economic, educational, and civic vitality of our city, and a beacon for promoting science literacy worldwide.

In order to expand our reach, we will need to ask, listen, and evolve to meet the needs of our diverse communities.

In 1920, a group of Northeast Ohio's civic leaders envisioned this institution as a center for scientific learning and the sharing of knowledge for the public good. Today, building on a century of world-class research, an exceptional collection of 5 million artifacts and specimens, and a track record of strong management and fiscal responsibility, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History is honoring our founders' vision by prioritizing access, responsiveness, relevance, and transparency. These themes will be reflected in our new physical spaces and in the way we will interpret and present the biological and planetary sciences.

The opportunity we face is tremendous: to be a local, national, and global leader in science, education, conservation, and community-building, and to do so in ways that are meaningful, exciting, and accessible for all. We invite you to join us in working together for a better tomorrow.



Sonia Winner, President & CEO



Jonathon L. Grimm, Board Chair

Our Mission

To inspire, through science and education, a passion for nature, the protection of natural diversity, the fostering of health, and leadership to a sustainable future.

Our Vision

To explore, engage, and empower for a better tomorrow.

Save Curiosity

Our Values

In everything we do, we strive to be:

Inclusive

We want all people to feel welcome. At the core of this institution is an appreciation for nature's extraordinary diversity and a recognition that building a diverse workplace will make us smarter, stronger, and more connected to our community. We strive to provide unfettered access, establish cross-cultural relevance, and create a welcoming environment for every visitor.

Empowering

We seek to empower our audiences, employees, and community with scientific facts and meaningful experiences that contribute to health and well-being. We look for innovative ways to ground natural history in its relevance to our daily lives and our collective futures. We stand as stewards of the environment to promote scientific literacy and empower individuals to make informed choices that protect their communities and the planet.

Courageous

We are committed to approaching our work with courage and striving for continuous improvement through rigorous inquiry, creative thinking, evaluation, candid communication, and constructive feedback in a culture that takes risks and embraces innovation.

Accountable

We hold ourselves to the highest professional standards and are accountable to the institution, our stakeholders, and the public. We will challenge our assumptions, act and speak with honesty and integrity, be resourceful and efficient, and maintain objectivity in the pursuit of knowledge.

Connected

We act as partners to our community and to academic, cultural, and research organizations in our region and worldwide by building strategic relationships that advance our mission and the scientific field. We will pursue strong, lasting connections that promote scientific learning and positive change.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

01

Audience Engagement

BECOME AN AUDIENCE-CENTERED MUSEUM THAT ENGAGES, SERVES, AND ENHANCES GREATER CLEVELAND AND THE SURROUNDING REGION.

As a pillar of Cleveland's vibrant University Circle district, home to top-tier science, art, music, and botanical institutions, the transformed Museum will strengthen connections—both physically and conceptually—across these leading cultural institutions. Our elevated presence will enrich University Circle's integrated campus of learning, serving local residents, businesses, visitors to the greater metropolitan area, and the nation at large. By becoming an essential resource in our city for learning about science, conservation, and sustainability, we aim to translate our strengths into tangible improvements in the health and quality of life of Clevelanders. Using a community-centered approach to reinvent the way we explore science and nature will broaden the Museum's reach and impact.

OBJECTIVES

- Expand community outreach and programs to maximize public benefit for Cleveland.
- Use feedback, data-driven insights, and technology to deepen ties with visitors and engage new audiences.
- Build dialogue and collaboration with peer cultural, academic, and research institutions.
- Leverage our wildlife and Museum-owned natural areas to engage more visitors.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

02

Scientific Leadership

LEAD AND INNOVATE IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND INTERPRETATION TO ADDRESS PRESSING ISSUES OF OUR TIME.

We seek to create an integrated research program that is focused on relevant questions and capable of responding to modern concerns with scientific approaches. In a significant shift away from traditional natural history museum practices, we are dismantling obsolete, siloed modes of research and inquiry. By reorganizing our curatorial division into interdisciplinary teams, strengthening ties between our on- and off-site scientific work, and leveraging the 11,000+ acres of nature preserves that we steward as living laboratories, we strive to address priorities of local and global importance, including environmental sustainability and human health.

OBJECTIVES

- Showcase our preserved and living collections and connect audiences to science and nature through a new, interdisciplinary program strategy.
- Support and encourage future generations of environmental stewards and citizen scientists.
- Leverage our global leadership in the study of human origins and amplify the insights that our research provides into our lives today.
- Build the country's most interdisciplinary and integrated museum-based scientific staff.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

03

Lifelong Learning

**TRANSFORM THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE TO
EDUCATE PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND INSPIRE
A LIFETIME OF LEARNING.**

Science literacy is imperative to human survival, and natural history museums can play an integral role in cultivating lifelong learning and demonstrating the relevance of science to our lives. The Museum's transformation will reinvent our exhibits and experiences in ways that offer new opportunities to educate the public, encourage citizen science, and instill respect for the natural world. Our physical reinvention will be accompanied by a transformative new approach to educational programming—in-person and virtual—that will enable the Museum to present an integrated story of life on Earth and the processes that shape it.

OBJECTIVES

- Become Ohio's leading convener for discourse on citizen science, conservation, and sustainability.
- Interweave the science of human health with the story of natural history and provide interpretations that foster public well-being and improve health outcomes.
- Invest in new digital assets, infrastructure, and capacity to make educational offerings more accessible, dynamic, and relevant.
- Prioritize access and transparency on site to eliminate barriers to Museum participation.
- Offer experiences that introduce our citizenry to careers in science and demonstrate the importance of science in every field.

Strategic Goals and Objectives

04

Organizational Excellence

INVEST IN ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE, FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY, AND A HEALTHY CULTURE.

We recognize that to maximize the investment being made in our campus and programming, we must simultaneously invest in our internal potential. To secure our long-term future, we will work to broaden and deepen our community's investment in the Museum, both in terms of engagement and philanthropic support—inspiring more repeat visits and a greater sense of loyalty. To build the commitment and loyalty of our donors, members, and visitors, we must demonstrate the value and impact of our research, educational programming, and community service. Internally, as we optimize our campus and programs, we will focus on creating a productive, collaborative, inclusive, and innovative working environment.

OBJECTIVES

- Secure funding to complete the transformation of our campus, exhibits, and programs.
- Implement a cohesive philanthropic/fiscal strategy to grow annual support and earned income, and pursue thoughtful investments.
- Ensure that our organizational structure and staff skillsets align with organizational goals.
- Invest in our culture to ensure values alignment and attract and retain a highly skilled, diverse workforce.

Programmatic Spotlight

KEY CONTENT AREAS

The Museum's core pursuits of scientific research and interpretation, collections development and stewardship, exhibits, and educational programs will revolve around four key content areas: biodiversity, human origins, human health, and human ecology. Across all of our work and public offerings, our scientists, educators, naturalists, and researchers will work to investigate and amplify these subject areas in ways that ignite curiosity, orient visitors within the natural world, and demonstrate the vital connections between healthy and biodiverse environments, our own health, and the health of the planet. From the hyper-local to the global level, this thematic, interdisciplinary approach will increase the Museum's relevance and impact in our community and among natural history museums worldwide.

BIODIVERSITY

We will highlight connections between the deep history of our planet and life on Earth and the processes that shaped the world we know today.

HUMAN ORIGINS

Harnessing our rich history in paleoanthropology, we will pursue groundbreaking research and develop exhibits that connect visitors to their origins.

HUMAN HEALTH

By exploring human health in an evolutionary and anthropological context, we will foster an understanding of health as the product of our genetic origins, our cultural practices, and our interactions with the natural and built environment.

HUMAN ECOLOGY

We will connect audiences with their place in nature and their capacity to take action toward a sustainable future.



We appreciate the many conversations and planning sessions conducted with our Museum community. Thank you for your contributions to this vision for the future.