

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026

NEW JERSEY
STATE MUSEUM



Inspiration. On display.

Table of Contents

BUILDING ON THE PAST, LOOKING TO THE FUTURE	3
THE PLANNING PROCESS.....	8
CORE ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENTS.....	11
Mission	
Vision	
Core Values	
GOALS	13
GOAL 1: Create an Environment that Embraces NJ's Communities	15
Objectives	
GOAL 2: Create and Leverage Partnership to Advance Initiatives	17
Objectives	
GOAL 3: Create a Vibrant and Cohesive Visitor-Centered Experience	19
Objectives	
GOAL 4: Create a People-Centered Workplace Embracing Diversity and Collaboration, and Encouraging Big Ideas	21
Objectives	
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	23

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Building on
the Past,
Looking to
the Future

BUILDING ON THE PAST, LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

“The human connection between the object and the individual is an opportunity for us to explore.”

– New Jersey State Museum staff member

As the world becomes both infinitely smaller *and* exponentially bigger, museums are being called upon to help make sense of change. Museums must remain relevant, accessible and innovative to provide meaningful experiences for their communities. Now past its 125th year, the New Jersey State Museum is addressing this changing climate and through this Strategic Plan, placing contemporary concerns central to our work.



Photograph by Ricardo Barros

With technology creating a rapidly changing world where information is instantly available, a one size fits all approach no longer works. The New Jersey State Museum must be part of the fabric of communities and allow visitors to find themselves in the stories being told. For over 125 years, the State Museum has told stories of exploration and discovery. In its galleries, classrooms and laboratories, the State Museum strives to understand, catalogue and share our world for the benefit of New Jerseyans and visitors from around the region, as well as for scholars across many disciplines from around the world. From the backyards of New Jersey to the far reaches of space, there has never been a shortage of knowledge to be shared or memories to be made at the State Museum.

Formally established in 1895 by the New Jersey Legislature and Governor George T. Werts, the New Jersey State Museum was the first state museum in the country to define education as its primary mission. The State Museum received initial accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums in 1974 and has continuously maintained its status since that time, a major accomplishment as only 4% of US museums hold this distinction.

New Jersey State Museum

Comprised of four distinctive collection bureaus: Archaeology & Ethnography, Cultural History, Fine Art and Natural History, the State Museum's collections of over 2.4 million specimens, artifacts and objects tell NJ stories, and place the science, history and art of the state in a national and global context. The Museum also has two bureaus focused on programming and the visitor experience, as well as exhibit design and fabrication — the bureaus of Education and Exhibits, respectively. Within the Bureau of Education, the State Museum's full dome video Planetarium presents a large part of the Museum's programming, incorporating both educational content and a variety of entertainment features.



In 2011, the State Museum took on the administration of the War Memorial, a building on both the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Dedicated to the memory of the soldiers and sailors from Mercer County, NJ who died fighting World War I, the War Memorial houses a 1,807-seat, fully- equipped theater for performances and assemblies, and a number of stately rooms for meetings and conferences. Like the State Museum, the War Memorial serves the community through a variety of programming and rental opportunities.

Escalating costs and the increasingly demanding search for support for exhibitions, programs, research and collection growth has continued to be a challenge as public funds dwindle and tax changes impact philanthropic giving. For over 50 years, the Museum has been supported in its work by the New Jersey State Museum Foundation, a non-government, non-profit organization that provides critical fundraising and advocacy. The Foundation serves as the primary development office of the State Museum and seeks to create a collaborative and strong private/public partnership that promotes a culture of philanthropy within the State Museum and the community. In the same context as the Museum, the Foundation is challenged by the rising costs of managing and operating a nonprofit in a competitive market, by the constantly changing economic landscape, and by the vast differences in the ideologies of population groups/generational populations. To ensure that the Foundation can effectively and efficiently meet the needs of the Museum while remaining nimble and growth-minded, the Foundation Board of Trustees and the staff pursue creative solutions and opportunities to build its own capacity and expand its support of the Museum. The two primary Foundation programs that are essential to the visitor experience are the Museum Shop and the membership program. These remain vital to the success of both the Foundation and the Museum. A third but less established function of the Foundation is advocacy on behalf of the State Museum. This strategic plan will coordinate efforts of the Foundation to facilitate the Museum's success while preparing the Foundation for growth and strengthening its current operations.

Of all the State Museum's strengths, among the most compelling are the breadth of the collections and the diversity of the community the Museum serves. The State Museum plans to harness these strengths. The extensive collections, categorized broadly as science, history and art, create countless opportunities to spark excitement, connection and pride in visitors. Creating cohesion between the collections of the State Museum is an opportunity to present multidisciplinary stories in new ways. The Museum strives to present exhibitions and programs that will have relevance and meaning to all of the state's residents.

The State Museum's vast collections, the largest in a New Jersey museum, span from prehistory to the present day. An anchor cultural institution in historic Trenton, the State Museum provides expertise and opportunities to connect visitors with New Jersey stories, and to place the science, history and art of the state in a broader context. The New Jersey State Museum is more than just a destination — it's a journey.

Now, as the New Jersey State Museum celebrates over 125 years of public service, is the perfect moment to reflect on its impact in the community and beyond. The State Museum finds itself at an interesting part of its own story; filled with the potential to become a beacon for a revitalized Trenton through the strengthening of the support network and leveraging the reinvigorated institutional capacity, and by continuing to serve the entire state through robust and meaningful services. The future is bright at the State Museum, in Trenton and in New Jersey.



A photograph of two young boys sitting at a dark table in a classroom or workshop. The boy on the left, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is focused on a small electronic component in his hands. The boy on the right, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, is looking on with interest. On the table, there is a white rectangular container, a small electronic circuit board with wires, and other tools. The background shows a wooden cabinet and a blurred figure of another person.

The Planning Process

THE PLANNING PROCESS

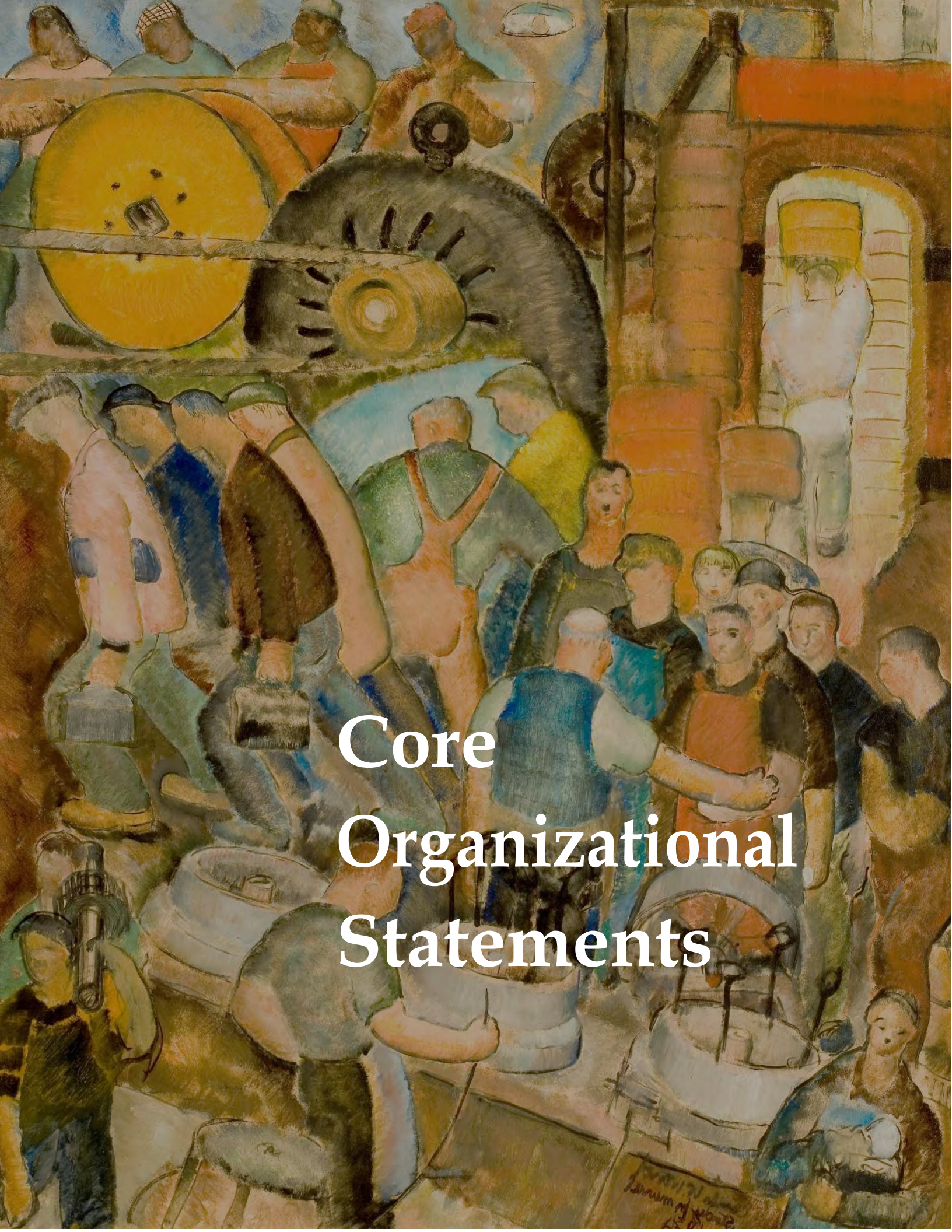
In early 2019, at the conclusion of the previous strategic plan and with the American Alliance of Museums application for reaccreditation in progress, the New Jersey State Museum leadership engaged Lord Cultural Resources to guide the development of a five-year strategic plan looking at mission, organizational health, institutional cohesion, evaluation and guidelines for increasing diversity.

The planning process considered the perspectives of internal and external constituent groups through workshops, one-on-one interviews, surveys, and meetings. As the official state museum and a division of the NJ Department of State, administration officials were an integral part of the process, attending workshops and engaged in one-on-one discussions. The State Museum has also begun the work necessary to improve the diversity of its organization through engagement with the New Jersey Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Guided by a leadership team, and led by the Museum's Strategic Planning Committee, all State Museum and New Jersey State Museum Foundation staff were involved. Through workshops and conversations, staff took ownership of the process, more clearly defining the Museum's identity and impact in order to make meaningful and informed decisions about the State Museum's future goals. The work increased institutional cohesion in alignment with the mission and strategic plan.







Core Organizational Statements

CORE ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENTS

The New Jersey State Museum mission answers the question, “why do we exist?” The mission inspires and guides staff. The vision describes the impact strives to make on the diverse communities it serves. The values are the core principles which guide our work on a daily basis. Together, these form the State Museum’s core organizational statements. Each statement is a result of the recent strategic planning process.

MISSION

The New Jersey State Museum is a center for the exploration of science, history and the arts. We preserve and share stories that inspire curiosity and creativity for the enrichment of our communities.

VISION

The New Jersey State Museum is a trusted resource for shared cultural and natural heritage. Through engaging, authentic and inclusive experiences, we celebrate individuality and broaden awareness of the world.

CORE VALUES

At the New Jersey State Museum, we value...

- Respect for people, cultures and the natural world
- Integrity, accountability and the highest ethical standards of stewardship
- Pursuit of knowledge through collecting, scholarship and interpretation
- Accessibility for all
- Diversity, inclusivity, collaboration and kindness
- Flexibility and responsiveness to meet challenges and opportunities
- Supportive, trusting and positive workplace environment

Goals



GOALS

The New Jersey State Museum strategic plan is centered around four goals. Each goal is accompanied by objectives - short-term, quantifiable levels of achievement specified in plans and budgets as measures of fulfillment of longer-term, qualitative goals.



1. Show Community Value:

Create an environment that embraces NJ's communities



2. Connect to Your Allies:

Create and leverage partnerships to advance initiatives



3. Create Cohesion:

Create a vibrant and cohesive visitor-centered experience



4. Strengthen Your Core:

Create a people-centered workplace embracing diversity and collaboration, and encouraging big ideas



GOAL 1:

CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT EMBRACES NJ'S COMMUNITIES

The idea of the New Jersey State Museum as a connector — bringing together different groups and peoples — was one of the strongest themes and most discussed topics during the planning process. Trenton, New Jersey's capital city, will act as an incubator for new ideas and strategies that will grow outward to become statewide. The New Jersey State Museum will be a magnet for cultural tourism and a center for community initiatives and programming. Through partnerships with local and state entities, the State Museum will leverage its position as the official museum of the state to strengthen its relationship with constituents statewide.

Objectives

- a. Invite local communities to embrace a sense of ownership and a voice in the State Museum
- b. Foster a welcoming environment for our diverse audiences
- c. Reflect the diversity of the state
- d. Use Museum resources to engage our local diverse communities and to expand this engagement statewide
- e. Examine the role of the War Memorial as a community anchor





GOAL 2: CREATE AND LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS TO ADVANCE INITIATIVES

Support networks for museums, including the New Jersey State Museum, do not infer only financial support. The support network for a museum starts with its board and most ardent advocates. The Strategic Planning workshop participants agreed that the New Jersey State Museum Foundation must be strengthened and diversified across all representations, and capacity for giving. Strengthening the State Museum's network also includes enhanced collaboration with other government entities, as well as with higher education and affinity organizations throughout the region.

Objectives

- a. Share strategic plan widely
- b. Implement a Board development process for the Foundation
- c. Increase advocacy for the Museum across the state, with the effort led by the Foundation Board
- d. Synergize relationships between the New Jersey State Museum and other State agencies
- e. Synergize relationships between the New Jersey State Museum and affinity groups, colleges/universities
- f. Create long-range and short-range development plans
- g. Determine how the War Memorial serves, and is served by, this goal





GOAL 3:

CREATE A VIBRANT AND COHESIVE VISITOR-CENTERED EXPERIENCE

The State Museum is housed in mid-century buildings with galleries dedicated to long-term exhibitions of collections in each subject area. Other public spaces within the facilities include changing exhibit galleries, the Museum Shop, classrooms and a public laboratory. The work planned for the next five years will review how these spaces are used and reimagine the ways and means of telling New Jersey's stories to 21st century audiences. The work also aims to make the stories told in the galleries and through digital content more inclusive of a multiplicity of communities while creating a cohesive narrative throughout the Museum campus.

Objectives

- a. Create cohesion that is reflected throughout the galleries
- b. Provide services and staffing to meet visitor needs
- c. Enhance wayfinding
- d. Improve security interactions and services





GOAL 4:

CREATE A PEOPLE-CENTERED WORKPLACE EMBRACING DIVERSITY AND COLLABORATION, AND ENCOURAGING BIG IDEAS

Investing in institutional capacity is investing in the future and strengthening the core of the State Museum. To become a valued resource for Trenton, and in order that big ideas for the State Museum to be realized, concurrent investment in staff and the physical plant are vital.

Objectives

- a. Fill staff vacancies
- b. Explore internships, volunteer opportunities, and partnerships that strengthen Museum goals and objectives
- c. Expand Foundation capacity
- d. Create an inclusive, progressive staff culture
- e. Produce more collaborative exhibits and programs
- f. Restructure staff space





Acknowledgements

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“Thank you!”

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