Science Central Strategic Plan

Fiscal Years 2017-2020

Approved: March 17, 2017
I. INTRODUCTION

The Strategic Plan Committee met, starting Summer 2016, to develop the next 3-year Strategic Plan. This Plan will run from Fiscal Year 2017 through 2020. The newly expanded Plan will be a “refresh” of past Plans with new content and strategies, as well as revised components from the 2014-2017 Plan. In addition, the Committee determined to continue the approach of making this a historic document, providing Science Central background as a way to understand the previous activities and upcoming organizational strategy.

Science Central (SC) was initiated as the Science Collective of Northeast Indiana, Inc. in 1981, was renamed as SC in 1987, and opened at its current location at 1950 North Clinton Street in November 1995. Since then, SC has continued to provide Northeast Indiana with educational, entertaining, interactive experiences to a wide ranges of ages and audiences, such as families, schools, scouts, home schoolers, adults, and other unique groups enriching the community. Science Central is the only science center in the region. Since opening, about 2.5 million people have been impacted by on-site visits or off-site outreach programs. The direct educational, entertainment and cultural benefits SC provides the City of Fort Wayne, Allen County, and northeast Indiana is an important quality of life component for the region. From an economic impact, the organization attracts visitors from the broader Midwest, generating over $1 million of economic benefit annually to the area and providing jobs to over 70 full- and part-time employees.

SC offers about 200 hands-on exhibits in 35,000-square feet of renovated space, with topics emphasizing the Physical, Natural, and Applied Sciences; approximately 3,000-square feet of administrative office space; 3,000-square feet of a temporary exhibitions gallery that changes three times throughout the year; approximately 10,000-square feet of space on the Lower Level West Side used for exhibits, programs and facilities/maintenance equipment storage, and an exhibits shop; and 5,000-square feet of space on the Top Level West Side used for exhibits, programs and Science Central records storage. Much of the unused space represents an opportunity for future growth and expansion. SC is the most-visited museum in Fort Wayne, the only all-ages, hands-on science center in the region, the only GEMS (Great Explorations In Math and Science) site in Indiana, the only Flying Wild site in northeast Indiana, and the only EIE( Engineering is Elementary, Boston Museum of Science) in Indiana, and was one of the Portal To the Public-sponsored national sites. In addition, Science Central has the only museum installation of NOAA’s Science On a Sphere in Indiana.

It is recognized that the upcoming 2017-2020 Strategic Plan will include some unique large projects. Some of these will be moving forward on the decision to initiate the next Capital Campaign to receive the University of Saint Francis planetarium projector and install the only public planetarium in Fort Wayne; targeted staffing such as expanding the development department; potential implementation of the proposed December 2016 Department of Labor regulations.
II. STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Over the 2014-2017 time period, the Strategic Plan was truly a ‘living, breathing’ document. Components were reviewed and updated on an almost-weekly basis at staff, Committee and full Board meetings. Its ongoing review was a basis for many of the new programs, marketing activities and financial successes over the previous few years, including the important 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary celebrations. In the Summer of 2016, a Committee met to again begin a 9-month process for developing a 2017-2020 Plan. The Committee consisted of Martin Fisher, Science Central President; Mike GeRue, Board President; Larry Kay, Board Secretary; and Board members Tom Carroll and Jake Fetters.
III. ASSESSMENT

Science Central’s Customer/Visitor

In 2016, for the 2017-2020 Plan, the Committee and staff has recognized the Science Central audience has expanded over the previous three years. While not the most prevalent group, we now see general public visitors include college students on dates, groups of high school student friends, and even senior citizens without grand kids. In addition, certain new events were developed as a part of the 20th birthday celebrations were targeted to specific groups. This includes the new 21-and-over parties (such as the Murder Mystery in February and Soulless Science in October), which do not target a general public, but do target a potential fundraiser audience. Finally, new audiences developed through specific programming includes the Sci Fi Central mini-con, Pokemon Go Day, and student classes around the world through our interactive video conferencing (i.e. distance learning). It is possible the classic audience of the 2 adults and 2 children is no longer the standard audience. In fact, data from various contractors associated with ASTC and AAM support that as the American population has changed, the “traditional museum audience” may not exist. In other words; in order to meet the needs of the Science Central “audience,” it is a process of continuous and intentional reinvention.

Science Central’s Key Relationships

The following relationships are critical to accomplishing our mission at SC as a partner and/or audience:

- Adults with children, such as the parents, grandparents, legal guardians, caretakers, etc., as well as those without children, such as college and high school students, who make the decision to visit SC for a quality experience that is educational and entertaining.
- Educators from formal environments (public, private, home school), pre-service and in-service, and informal (scouts, community centers, etc.) who want specific programs that appeal to students and supplement students’ acquisition of knowledge consistent with their particular curriculum or program standards.
- Schools including public schools, private schools, home schools, and colleges/universities that want high-quality programs to meet specific needs associated with the Indiana State Standards, delivered either as SC field trips, outreach programs in the schools, or Interactive Video Conferencing to classrooms/sites around the nation and even around the world.
- Local businesses that want a high-quality, science-centered venue that supports the community’s technical educational needs and develops an interest in STEM.
- Foundations that want to contribute meaningful value to the community and the cultural appeal of the region.
- Local and regional government and elected officials who are influential, create a positive atmosphere in the community, and want to make connections for economic development opportunities and educational advancement, and cultural experiences that improve the quality of life for local residents.
- Board Members, including Advisory Board members, who are volunteer community leaders, able to assist with the development process and promote SC to the community.
- Community volunteers who serve on various committees, daily operations and special projects.
Other non-profits or community groups, such as museum/cultural attractions, downtown/community visitor groups, community festivals and fairs, and educational/service organizations that meet the needs of the community and region.

Media such as the television stations, radio stations and the social media forum.

The Organization

Math and science are required skills for everyday living. Science Central helps make the concepts of science understandable. **Science Central is an important link to ensuring a scientifically-literate work force for northeast Indiana, and the entire tri-state region, now and in the future.** We provide the programs necessary to stimulate a regional culture that supports science and technology, and our investment in this community is demonstrated through these programs. Through outreaches to schools, educator workshops, distance learning, family visits to the center and community events, Science Central strives to generate interest and confidence in science at an early age, helping children succeed in these subjects at school. With our unique interactive programming, we are helping prepare the next generation of students to be scientifically literate so they will pursue STEM majors at the college level. In addition, we work with adults to understand science or apply science in their lives.

In the most recent Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) report from 2014, 87% of American science centers receive public funds on an annual basis for general operations. **Science Central, unlike the majority of American science centers, still does not receive any annual government funds for general operating expenditures.**

SC is now viewed as one of the most important and most recognized cultural attractions in the city of Fort Wayne. Partners such as the city and media, and groups such as the Downtown Improvement District and Visit Fort Wayne (convention and visitors bureau) have made concerted efforts to include Science Central in their promotions. This has led to increased visibility, marketing, admissions, memberships, special events, etc. In preparation for the 20th birthday celebration in November 2015, Science Central significantly expanded existing activities, and “pushed the boundary” with new projects. At one of the annual Board Retreats, the Board and staff developed extra Actions Steps for the 2014-2017 Plan. And, in an effort to expand programming to new audiences, new projects were initiated.

Assessment Summary

In the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan, the following six Critical Issues and Challenges exist:

Building and Site
Science Central does not own the building, land or parking lots. For example, items such as lawn care and landscaping, and a lack of enough parking spaces has been a significant problem. The old City Light and Power Plant building is owned by the City of Fort Wayne. It can take a significant amount of time for the City to make necessary repairs. The City covers a portion of the site/land/lot maintenance and external repairs. The costs associated with maintenance, repairs, utilities, cleaning, lawn service, facilities staffing, etc. have been very challenging for SC to maintain. SC spent 12% of the Budget each year (over $509K, from Spring 2014 through Fall 2016), on direct and indirect site and building costs via utilities, insurance, staffing, repairs and maintenance. Therefore, there must be a shift in operations so that Science Central funds:

- Do not go towards assets not owned by SC
• Do not pay for projects that are not going towards Mission

Exhibits and Facilities
The visitor experience inside the building, their interactions with the building itself and the interactives, while good, could be improved. As an example, visitors indicate on surveys and on social media sites the lack of new exhibits, broken exhibits or facility issues. In general, there is a “dated” look on the floor. The presence of high-maintenance exhibits, a poor elevator system, and a lack of accessible storage has been challenging for staff. And, a shortage of needed components, such as classrooms or an ideal floor layout for evening events, has prevented opportunities to maximize earned revenue. A need exists for:
• facility improvements such as elevator, classrooms, storage
• creating a uniform look on the floor with carpet, paint, signage, laminates/colors, lighting
• repairing/improving existing exhibits, and installing new exhibits

Long Term Funding
This would include revenue generation, an Endowment, general funding, and development activities such as fundraisers and grants. Short-term cash flow and day-to-day finances, such as Payroll and Accounts Payables, are healthier than in the past. However, SC receives all of its funding from only two sources – Earned Revenue (admissions, programs, memberships, gift shop, etc.) and Unearned Revenue (grants, foundations, donations, sponsorships, fundraisers, planned giving, etc.). Therefore, SC’s funding model is not typical within the science center field. According to numerous studies by the Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC), a majority of U.S. science centers receive annual public (government) funds – city, county, State and/or Federal - for general operations. Furthermore, these funds account for a significant portion of their annual budget. SC does not and has not received public funds for annual general operations. In addition, the other significant missing component of SC’s funding portfolio is the lack of an Endowment. While not as common in science centers, endowments are common at science museums and art museums, and do exist at other local museums, such as the art museum, as well as performing arts organizations, including the philharmonic and ballet. Without these two factors, too much of SC’s funding ratio comes from competitive grants through foundations which does not allow for long-term financial planning and stability. Therefore, the need exists to:
• expand unearned revenue through existing sponsors and sponsorship/funding opportunities, and obtain new funders and donors
• increase earned revenue by expanding current revenue sources and developing new revenue streams
• develop the framework for and fund an Endowment
• Continue to evaluate opportunities for public funds

Information Systems and Technology
While there has been improvement with IT in the past few years, it is still a significant challenge. SC is occasionally able to purchase needed equipment on a limited basis, but it is not part of a timed plan or done on a system-wide approach. Sometimes, it has been done as an immediate band-aid solution, which is not ideal for operational effectiveness. While SC has been more selective, there has been a reliance on donated, used equipment leading to operational challenges such as:
• lack of needed software, outdated and inadequate programs
• hardware issues, network capabilities, and lack of needed equipment
• lost staff productivity, and challenges in providing needed training
• inability to schedule and/or plan for an equipment replacement program
Staffing
Science Central has been open for 20-plus years. The human element is essential to completing the Mission, and is accomplished through both long-term and new staff. Science Central has a fairly small number of key staff (directors, managers and coordinators) compared to science center peers. This group does a significant amount of work, both behind-the-scenes, as well as in direct contact with visitors. Finding enough offices, work stations and meeting spaces has proven to be challenging. While payroll is the largest line item in the annual budget, wages/salaries do not necessarily reflect the field. Being below industry norms has led to shorter staff retention. Finding the right people who are comfortable with the work load and ability to multi-task is a continuous challenge. Just as important, finding the right people who fit with the corporate culture is an issue. Critical issues include:

- navigating through the proposed December 2016 U.S. Department of Labor rules for Exempt employees and any other future employment or healthcare laws
- recruitment and retention
- appropriate training, cross-training and scheduling to cover multiple duties
- analyzing the staffing model of pay scale, number of staff, and Organizational Chart
- planning for current and upcoming staffing needs
- improving operational efficiencies and saving time

Marketing
This would include standard marketing techniques such as advertising, PR, and the media, to enhance the community perception. Historically, Science Central had very little funds for paid advertising. Small amounts were pulled from sponsorships, fundraising events, and larger grants, and placed into a self-restricted Marketing account. However, it was recognized that funds must be used appropriately and at the right time. Therefore, there must be:

- a marketing plan/timeline for annual placement
- adequate budget for more effective marketing and advertising
- an understanding of our audience to connect marketing to program attendance, general admissions, memberships, etc.
- new methods to stay relevant to the community – social media, new outlets or materials, etc.
IV. MISSION AND VISION

Science Central’s Mission Statement
Science Central is a regional resource that provides inspiring and fun hands-on science education for all people of all ages.

Science Central’s Vision Statement
Science Central will be the premier gateway for informal science education in the region.

Science Central’s Tag Line
Spark Your Imagination!
V. GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES

Goal 1: Improve Infrastructure

Objective 1. Improve External Building/Structure and Site
   Strategy 1. Parking
   Strategy 2. Safety
   Strategy 3. First Impressions

Objective 2. Improve Internal Exhibits, Components and Facilities
   Strategy 1. Planetarium Capital Campaign
   Strategy 2. Improved and Cohesive Internal Look
   Strategy 3. Maintenance Plans
   Strategy 4. Additional Class/Presentation Space
   Strategy 5. Additional Administration Space
   Strategy 6. Develop Exhibits In-house

Goal 2: Expand Long Term Funding

Objective 1. Implement New Revenue Generation
   Strategy 1. Annual Campaign
   Strategy 2. Planned Giving
   Strategy 3. Endowment

Objective 2. Increase Existing Revenue Streams
   Strategy 1. Revenue Generating Exhibits
   Strategy 2. Fundraisers
   Strategy 3. Sponsorships
   Strategy 4. Grants

Goal 3: Enhance Operational Capacity

Objective 1. Enhance Information Systems and Technology
   Strategy 1. IT Administration
   Strategy 2. Security
   Strategy 3. Staff and Customer/Visitor Experience

Objective 2. Improve Human Capital
   Strategy 1. Staff, Board, Volunteer Diversity
   Strategy 2. Staff, Board, Volunteer Duties and Efficiencies
   Strategy 3. Business Continuity Plan

Objective 3. Optimize Our Impact and Mission
   Strategy 1. Programs
   Strategy 2. Memberships
   Strategy 3. Admissions

Goal 4: Strengthen Marketing and Image

Objective 1. Unify External Brand Recognition
   Strategy 1. Branding and Logo Standards
   Strategy 2. Digital Presence

Objective 2. Create Internal Unified Voice
   Strategy 1. Marketing Plan
   Strategy 2. The Review and Implementation Process
## VI. RESPONSIBILITIES

**L** = Lead, Primary  \  \ **S** = Support, Secondary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Board of Directors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Market &amp; Devel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Improve External Building/Structure and Site</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Improve Internal Exhibits, Components and Facilities</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Implement New Revenue Generation</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Increase Existing Revenue Streams</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Enhance Information Systems and Technology</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Improve Human Capital</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Optimize Our Impact and Mission</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Unify External Brand Recognition</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Create Internal Unified Voice</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>