



SANTA CRUZ MUSEUM
of natural history

Strategic Plan

2021-2024



Contents

1. Foreword	4
2. Evolution and Achievements	5
3. Strategic Approach	6
4. Mission, Vision, Values	8
5. Strategic Direction	5
6. Acknowledgments	17

Foreword

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Museum staff, I am pleased to present the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History's 2021-2024 Strategic Plan. This plan centers our mission and sets a path toward our vision. It outlines strategic priorities that reflect our values and will help us to achieve our goals in a dynamic environment.

Creating this plan during such a tumultuous time has been a unique challenge. Our world is facing unprecedented changes, and this planning process has highlighted the importance of being dynamic, flexible, and responsive. At this juncture it is critical that the Museum evolves to ensure that it continues to play a relevant role into the future.

Our organization has undergone a period of revitalization and growth in the past three years. This ambitious plan builds upon the strong foundations we have laid, and will prepare us for yet another transformation. These goals prioritize: diversity, community-building, stewardship, science education, and organizational resilience. We plan to leverage our strength as a convener, and redouble our commitment to including diverse perspectives as we adapt to a changing world. Using strategic foresight, we plan to meet the moment together.

This Strategic Plan was created with input from many people throughout our community. I am incredibly grateful for the care and dedication to our future that was demonstrated by the neighbors, partners, members, donors, volunteers, staff, and board members who contributed their ideas. Together, our dedicated board and staff, along with our partners and community, will bring this plan to life. Over the course of these next three years, we will celebrate new milestones and launch the Museum into a new phase of service. I look forward to sharing the Museum's bright future with you.



Felicia B. Van Stolk
Executive Director

The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History became one of the oldest institutions in Santa Cruz when it opened to the public in 1905. The foundational collections that established the museum were bequeathed by two local naturalists and community leaders, Laura Hecox, and Humphrey Pilkington. These first contributions began a long tradition of preserving and sharing a love of nature with the Santa Cruz community.

For over a century, the Museum was operated by the City of Santa Cruz. At that time it was called the "Santa Cruz City Museum of Natural History". In 2008, the City turned over the Museum to the nonprofit Santa Cruz Museum Association. As a newly independent organization, the Museum's name was changed to the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History in 2010.

Since becoming independent, the Museum has undergone tremendous growth. Through multiple cycles of strategic planning, the organization has established new foundations based in best practices for Museum and nonprofit management. The Museum's revitalization improved visitor experiences, exhibits, educational programs, collections management, and organizational resilience.

Now, the Museum is a vibrant, community-supported nonprofit organization. It serves over 32,000 people per year. It welcomes tourists and local visitors, school groups, families, and other community organizations. Through interactive exhibits, place-based programming, and access to natural history collections, the Museum connects people with nature and the resources to enrich lifelong learning.



Strategic Approach

Beginning in January of 2021, the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History began a strategic planning process to guide the institution into the future. This process was spearheaded by the Executive Director, and supported by the Board of Directors and staff throughout, as illustrated in the following diagram.

Internal and environmental scans contextualized the Museum's position in the community and how it is performing against broader trends. The Executive Director researched local and global issues regarding museums, the environment, education, social issues, and nonprofit organizations to identify key trends and forecasts for changes ahead. She reported her findings to the board and staff to inform their discussion and brainstorming about the Museum's future.

Input from the community was also vital to understanding the expectations and hopes for the Museum's role. Due to public health restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person interviews were not possible; instead a survey was sent through the Museum's newsletter, social media, and community networks. We gathered 277 responses from neighbors, partners, members, teachers, donors, volunteers, staff, and the board. They provided feedback about every facet of the Museum's operations, and shared their own hopes and dreams for the institution.

With the key information from the scans and stakeholder surveys, the Executive Director, Board of Directors, and staff underwent an iterative and collaborative process to identify the Museum's strengths, weaknesses, needs, and opportunities. Together, they have formed a vision for the future, and prepared a strategy to carry the Museum toward success.

3





Extensive reading and review.	Input from staff and board.	Critical issues discussion and Goal Setting.	Department Heads develop tasks to support objectives and goals.	Benchmarks monitored bi-annually and adjusted as needed.
Strategic foresight exercises.	Key informant interviews.	Input from relevant board committees and staff to create Objectives under each goal.	ED and Director of Operations develop financial plan to support activities.	
Assessment of progress on current strategic plan.	Public surveys.	Board approval of Goals and Objectives.		
SWOT analysis.				



Mission, Vision, and Values

The Mission, Vision, and Values of the Museum were defined through a consultant-led process in 2018. This strategic planning process has reaffirmed that these are core to the Museum's identity.

The Mission is at the heart of what we do, defining our purpose. Our Vision describes the impact that we will have, and our Values define our approach and radiate through all of our work.

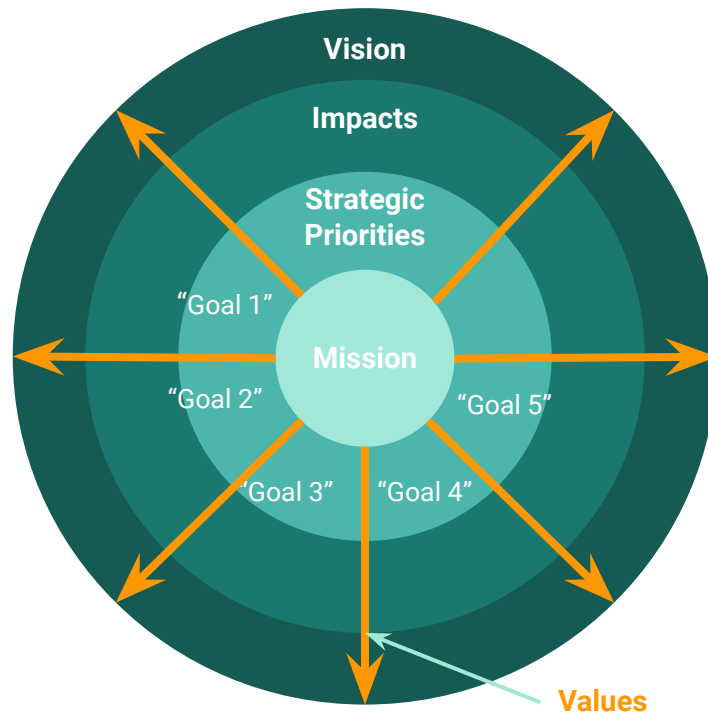
Our Mission

Connecting people with nature and science to inspire stewardship of the natural world.

Our Vision

The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History is a valued community resource that excels in science education and cultivates curiosity, appreciation, and stewardship of nature.





Our Values

Our values will challenge us every day to be true to our mission. They will inform our choices, our behaviors, and our approaches to key issues.

1. **COMMUNICATE** how science impacts our daily lives and that anyone can be a naturalist
2. **BUILD** a community around a shared curiosity for and appreciation of the natural environment
3. **CREATE** a dynamic and inclusive place for learning, dialogue, study, and exploration
4. **OFFER** interactive learning experiences for children, families and adults
5. **FEATURE** the region's rich and unique natural resources
6. **CELEBRATE** diverse cultural connections to nature
7. **COLLABORATE** with others to create positive change towards stewardship

Strategic Direction

5



The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History will continue its long legacy of service, building upon its strong foundations to be resilient, resourceful, and flexible as we chart a course into the future. The following institutional goals outline our strategic priorities and describe how we intend to impact the community and achieve the Museum's Vision. The implementation of these goals has been designed to be responsive to a dynamic landscape, while centering our mission and values.

01

Promote Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI), and highlight many cultural connections to nature.

02

Serve as a resource for high-quality environmental and science education

03

Facilitate community-building around a shared appreciation of nature and science

04

Cultivate a sense of place with local environments to foster stewardship

05

Strengthen a dynamic and resilient organizational structure

Goal 1

Promote Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI), and highlight many cultural connections to nature

through both internal practices and public engagement.

The Museum will be welcoming for visitors, staff, and volunteers, and a diverse community will embrace and find value in the Museum.

OBJECTIVES

A

Improve internal practices to increase and support DEAI.

B

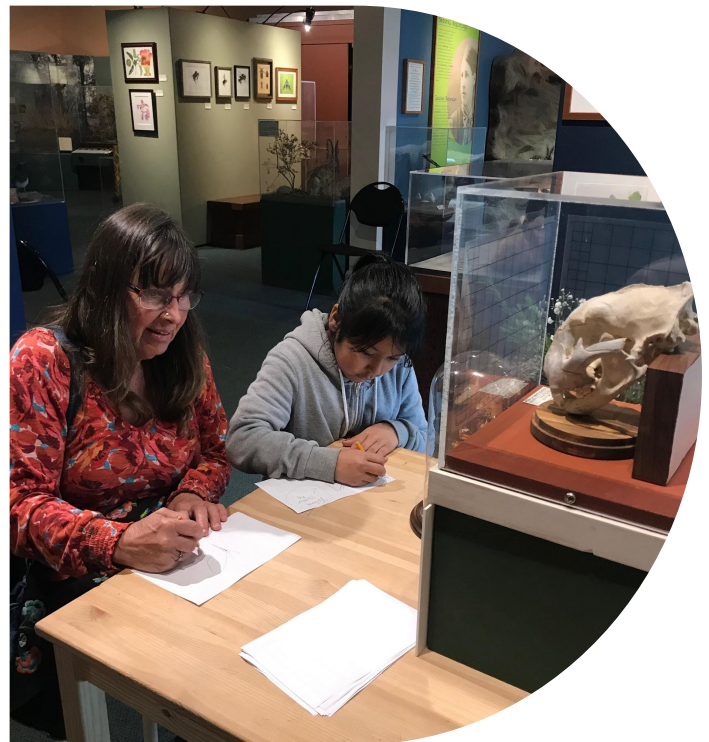
Provide professional development (PD) for staff and volunteers in support of practices that promote DEAI.

C

Develop and implement inclusive processes for designing programs and exhibits.

D

Apply culturally informed stewardship practices to the care of resources in the collections to preserve and represent cultural diversity.



Serve as a resource for high-quality environmental and science education

by working closely with educators and experts, employing best practices, and leveraging our unique resources to create effective learning opportunities.

The Museum will be highly regarded as a place for learning for students of all ages.



OBJECTIVES

A

Support teachers and students by providing services, resources, and programs that align with formal education goals and standards.

B

Provide opportunities for alternative education for students of all ages.

C

Leverage collections for education and research.

Goal 3

Facilitate community-building around a shared appreciation for nature and science

by encouraging exchange, inviting inclusivity, and creating diverse and accessible opportunities to engage.

The Museum will be a hub for connection and shared experiences anchored in nature and science.

OBJECTIVES

A

Create opportunities for dialogue and engagement with nature and science learning.

B

Reflect social & cultural interests of communities historically excluded & underserved by the Museum in exhibits, programming, & outreach.

C

Create diverse, accessible opportunities for gathering and sharing experiences to facilitate connection and community-building.



Cultivate a sense of place with local environments to foster stewardship

by supporting learning, skill-building, and connection to nature.

The Museum will connect people with the local environment, empowering them to become effective stewards of the natural world.



OBJECTIVES

A

Emphasize education about environmental challenges that may impact the community.

B

Facilitate, demonstrate, and cultivate environmental stewardship.

C

Create engaging exhibits that highlight local environments.

D

Enhance collections that support understanding and research, with special focus on regional resources.

Goal 5

Strengthen a dynamic and resilient organizational structure

by investing in staff, employing strategic foresight, and practicing sound fiscal management.

The Museum's staff, infrastructure, and financial resilience will support its continued evolution as a modern cultural institution.

OBJECTIVES

A

Create responsive work plans using strategic foresight.

B

Ensure staff and volunteers feel valued, and are appropriately supported and compensated.

C

Build and apply a robust data program to enhance achievement of strategic goals.

D

Deepen financial resilience through diverse revenue streams, new opportunities for income, and sound fiscal management.

E

Initiate the facility Master Planning process to ensure the Museum space serves long-term strategic goals.



The development of the Strategic Plan would not have been possible without the engagement of Board and Staff teams, and the input of our neighbors, partners, donors, volunteers, members, and visitors. We gratefully thank them for their input and support.



SANTA CRUZ MUSEUM
of natural history

santacruzmuseum.org