



MONTSHIRE MUSEUM OF SCIENCE

STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020





INTRODUCTION

After 40 years of growth, the Montshire Museum of Science has arrived at a moment in which we need to look toward the future, examine our place in the community, and confirm our greater impact in Vermont, New Hampshire, and the national community.

To make significant advances in how we approach the wonder of discovery and engage our various communities in the joy of science, the Museum must think strategically about our programmatic initiatives, the opportunity of our 100-acre landscape, refining our business operations, and how we communicate our story.

Science is important—the act of “wondering, investigating, questioning, data

collecting, and analyzing” helps us to make meaning of the world around us¹. People of all ages need to have positive experiences with science and develop critical thinking skills for them to fully participate in creating a better world for tomorrow².

Science museums that promote hands-on discovery and free-choice learning are proven environments for engaging people with the joy of science³.

In 2012, the Montshire’s board of trustees and staff launched the first phase of the Montshire 2020 planning process to articulate the Museum’s unique attributes, refine the Museum’s Mission and strategic priorities, and initiate short-term projects to guide the next phase of the planning

process. This initial process cast a large stone into the waters of our understanding, creating ripples of energy and excitement that led to the successful David Goudy Discovery Fund fundraising campaign and leadership transition.

This 2016-2020 Strategic Plan articulates the second phase of Montshire 2020, continuing the Museum’s planning process.

After considerable community-based research and discussions among the trustees and staff, we are pleased to present our strategic vision and goals for the next four years.

This plan is a second stone cast into the river of our experience.

It’s time to make waves.

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STRATEGIC VISION

The Montshire Museum of Science will engage people of all ages in experiencing the joy of science by maximizing opportunities for discovery for our primary and emerging audiences and elevating our outdoor experience.

To make this possible, we will need to strengthen our core base of operations and tell our story in new and exciting ways.

We want to ensure that we continue building on our current level of success, remain relevant and responsive to our

community, and pave the way for the Montshire's future.

We've been here for 40 years, and through the next four years we will develop and galvanize our operations to best serve our community for the next 40.

MISSION

To awaken and encourage a lifelong interest in science through exhibits and programming dedicated to hands-on discovery and education for people of all ages.

Unique to this mission is Montshire's 100-acre New England riverfront setting, which fosters deep and creative learning in both the physical and natural sciences.

OUR BRAND PILLARS

In 2012, the Montshire underwent a rigorous branding exercise that resulted in a brand promise and six interrelated brand pillars.

Our brand is our identity, our strategic filter, and our understanding of who we are and how we interact in this world as an institution.

As publisher Marc Valli wrote, “A brand is an idea making its mark in the world. It is a dream growing into maturity...⁴”

We believe in delivering on our brand promise, and determine our new initiatives based on how well they fit within our brand pillars:

Discovery
“Discovery” for the Montshire means learning science through an interactive process.

The act of “doing science” provides effective learning opportunities, which surprise, enlighten, and empower visitors.

Exhibits and programs are collections of learning experiences that interrelate and support shared learning goals, and the accuracy of science content is paramount. We emphasize genuine

experience with real phenomena, objects, and natural specimens. We aim to make connections and meaning with real-world experiences.

We strive to provide new, rewarding experiences with each visit, and encourage visitors to share their thinking, wonders, observations, and insights.

100 Acres
The Museum views its “100 Acres” as an expansive, integrated indoor and outdoor experience.

This landscape makes the Montshire unique and unlocks special “place-based” learning opportunities to our visitors.

We take a holistic approach to designing our indoor/outdoor learning environment, and our exhibits and trails promote exploration of our northern New England landscape.

Aesthetics
At the Montshire, “Aesthetics” means art and architecture optimized for science learning.

Art and aesthetics spark creativity, connections, and excitement about science and the Montshire. Artists offer valuable and memorable additions to

our visitor experience. Our aesthetics fit the context of our northern New England environment.

Accessibility
Our experiences need to be relevant and engaging to all visitors. The Montshire is for people of all ages, backgrounds, learning styles, and physical/cognitive abilities.

The Museum should be easy to approach, enter, use, navigate, and understand.

Exhibit experiences resonate on multiple levels, regardless of one’s knowledge of science. Programming offers breadth and depth to serve a variety of ages and interests.

Friendliness
We embody “Friendliness” by being warm, inviting, and comfortable. Visitor amenities, comfort, and customer service are priorities.

The Museum respects visitors in all of our interactions and communications.

We provide a safe, intimate learning environment, and demonstrate that science and museums need not be uncomfortable or threatening.

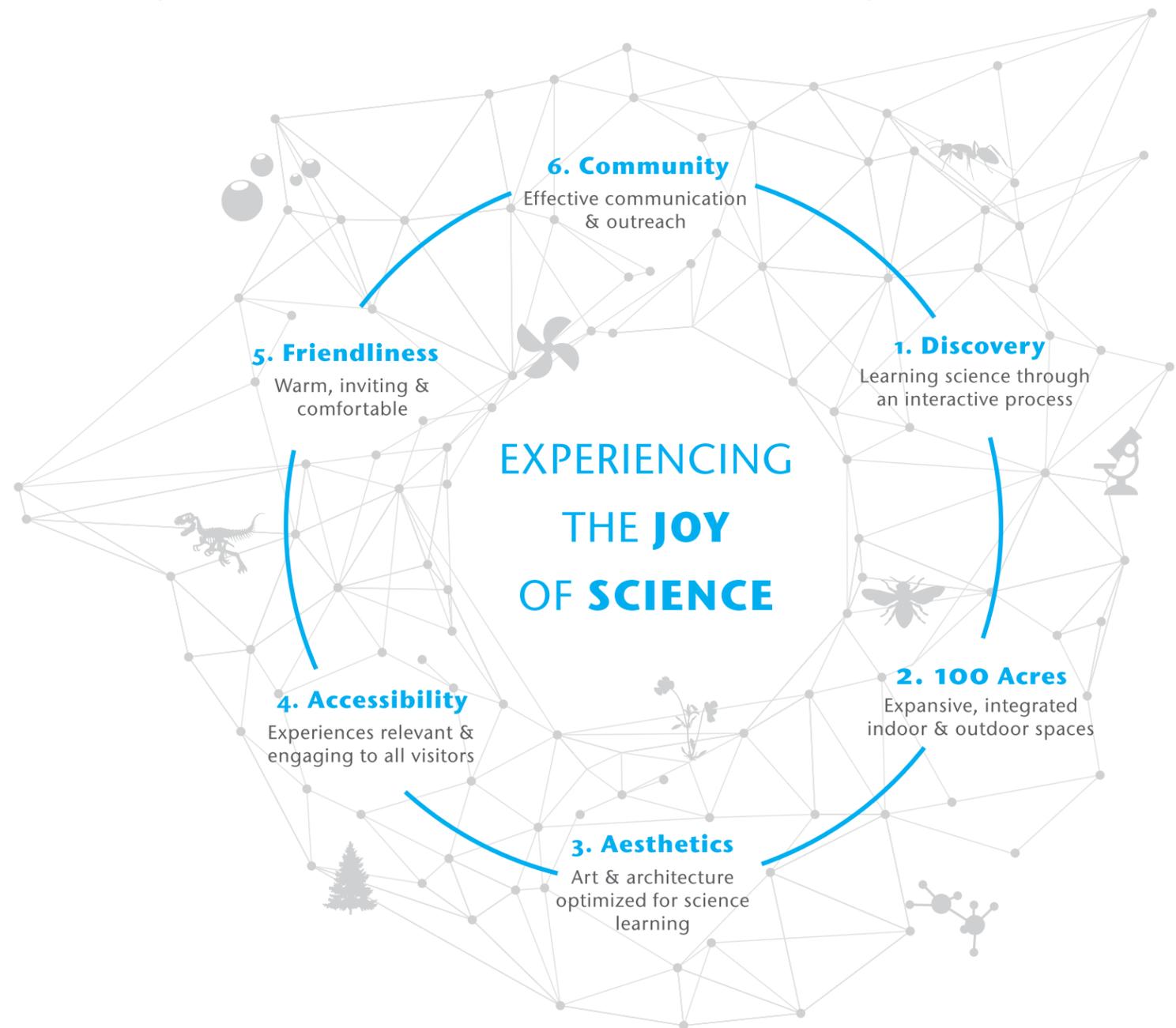
“A BRAND IS AN IDEA MAKING ITS MARK IN THE WORLD. IT IS A DREAM GROWING INTO MATURITY.” –MARC VALLI

Community
We strive for effective collaboration and outreach. We are responsive to our evolving community and its needs and interests, and we foster a sense of community ownership among visitors, staff, trustees, volunteers, and partners.

We select partners carefully, with attention to cost and mission-based outcomes. We maintain proactive efforts to engage members of our community who are economically disadvantaged, and our outreach programs support K-12 science education

throughout Vermont and New Hampshire.

Our professional staff supports and engages with the larger science-museum community, and we act as a responsible and supportive “corporate” citizen.



COMMUNITY RESEARCH

To move Montshire 2020 from vision to action, our brand pillars (Discovery, 100 Acres, Aesthetics, Accessibility, Friendliness, and Community) guided the creation of a community-facing study.

Research was conducted utilizing online surveys (610 participants) and a series of ten listening sessions/focus groups (77 participants).

While the majority of participants felt that they were “doing science” at the Montshire and that our exhibits accurately communicate science, we heard that it was important to have fun as well as learn something when visiting the Museum.

We learned that variety is essential—special or touring exhibitions influence participants’ decisions to visit, and having different exhibits or new programs throughout the year enriches the visitor experience.

The Montshire is essential to the social and intellectual development of children under eight in the Upper Valley, and our members would appreciate more opportunities for upper elementary and middle school students so that their children don’t “age out” of a valuable community resource.

Local schools and teachers have a lack of science education resources and our presence is vital.

The majority of respondents valued our indoor experiences slightly more than our outdoor experiences, though a large percentage of participants indicated that the outdoor areas and trails make the Museum a special place.

David Goudy Science Park was noted as our most popular outdoor destination and people only occasionally visit the trails.

The outdoors is incredibly important to community members in the Upper Valley of Vermont and New Hampshire, and having accessible, easy-to-traverse pathways with new opportunities for hands-on scientific investigation and observation would be a value to our region.

Participants felt that we provide adequate amenities, and have a facility that is easy to navigate, but voiced numerous comments about how to further improve these features to ensure that we are an exceptional, family-friendly destination.

Our carbon footprint is important to our community, and people

would like to see the Montshire’s facility become a leader in environmental sustainability.

We continually heard that we are a valuable part of the local community, and were surprised to hear suggestions for programming that the Montshire already produces.

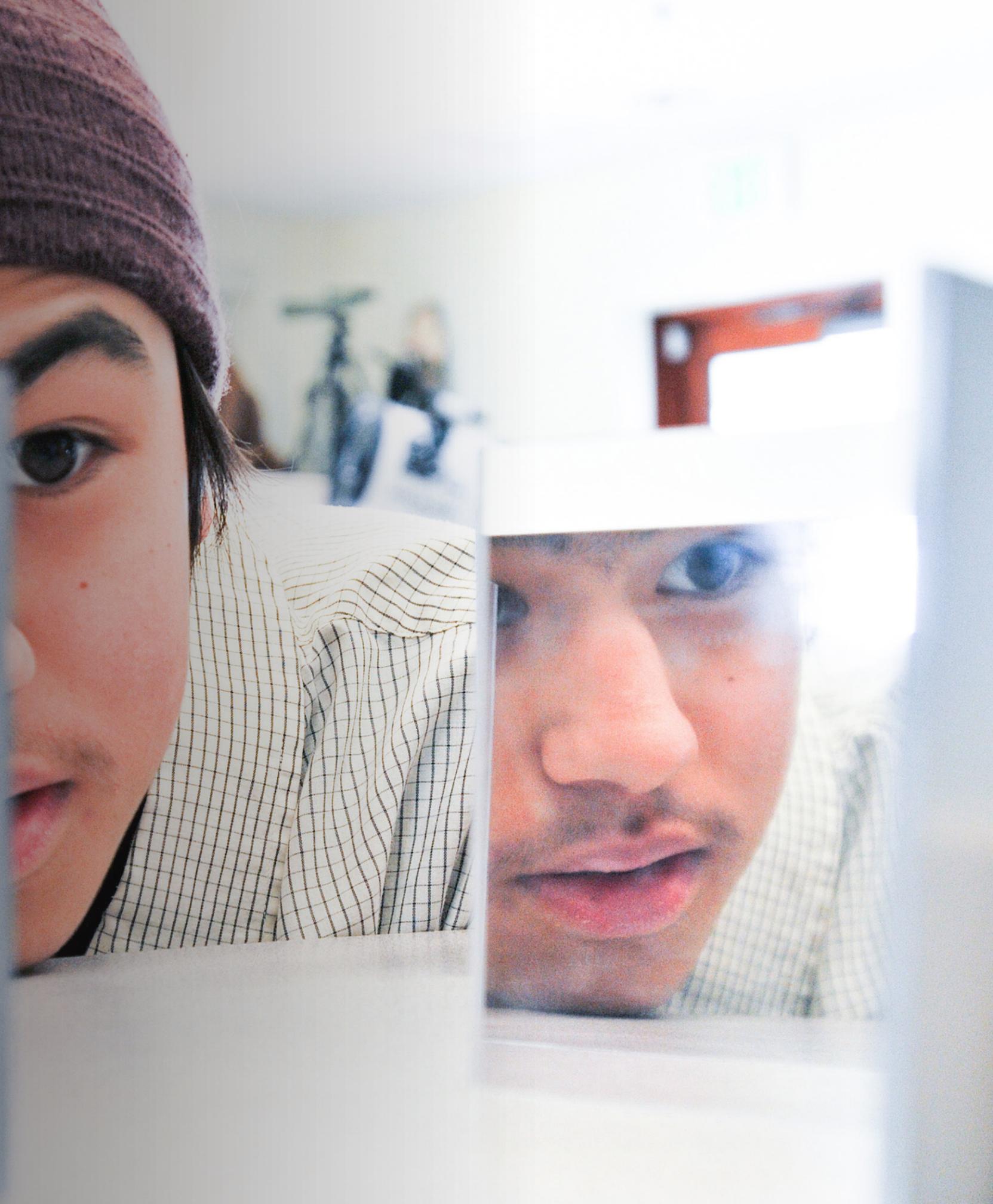
The Museum needs to work harder to communicate about our programs for families with economic disadvantages.

Teens and college students didn’t know how to access programs designed for them.

Young adults expressed difficulties in making social connections in the Upper Valley and wondered how the Museum could be more relevant to their lives.

Others valued the Montshire as a reputable, trusted institution—they would enjoy the Montshire becoming a place where people convene to discuss or present information about a variety of science topics.

Respondents would like us to collaborate with community organizations and participate in community activities.



STRATEGIC GOALS

After reviewing the findings from the community survey and listening sessions/focus groups, the Montshire trustees and staff developed four strategic goals with objectives to guide the Museum's work through 2020.

Goal 1: Maximize Opportunities for Discovery

- **Focus on our core audience of families with children ages 8 and younger and develop new opportunities for families with children ages 9-14.**

Families with children ages 8 and younger experience new and changing opportunities at the Museum, and we'll investigate developing more opportunities for families with children ages 9-14.

We have a sustainable model for fresh, ever-changing experiences that deeply engage members and repeat visitors in awakening and encouraging a lifelong interest in science.

- **Provide fresh experiences including new programs and rotating exhibits.**
- **Maintain PreK-8th grade school services and programming for teens and adults.**

While the bulk of our work will focus on our core constituency, we'll continue to engage school, teen, and adult audiences.

Beyond 2020: We have the capacity to engage new teen and adult audiences.

Our exhibits provide a wide array of science experiences and open up the world of possibilities to visitors.

Year-to-Year: We maintain a high standard for serving all participants through quality STEM learning experiences that are relevant and responsive to our community.

By 2020: Families with children ages 14 and younger say that the Montshire is a place for them, and we specifically see children ages 9-14 more engaged in science in the Museum and in our community.

The Montshire contributes to the increased lifelong intellectual curiosity in our citizenry and increased science literacy in our community.

Goal 2: Elevate Our Outdoor Experience

- **Map out a high-level master plan for our 100-acre landscape that focuses our outdoor experiences on "Discovery."**

We collaborate and partner with outside organizations to manage and maintain our outdoor environments, broaden our outdoor educational experiences, and study best practices in safety and outdoor environments.

Our 100 acres are well-maintained and accessible to more visitors throughout the year. Our outdoor programs and activities attract and fulfill multiple constituencies.

- **Build a network of community partners to collaborate on outdoor maintenance, management, and new educational programming.**

By 2020: We have a clearly articulated vision and compelling story for the outdoors that is understood by our multiple constituents.

Beyond 2020: We are prepared to commence a major outdoor project that enlivens the visitor experience and maximizes opportunities for discovery.

Year-to-Year: We better understand and have defined goals for our 100-acre landscape, and utilize a master plan that guides our strategic thinking over the next four years.

Visitors feel that our outdoor and indoor exhibits create a cohesive, holistic experience in support of our Mission.

People deeply connect with our outdoor environments as a place for discovery.

Visitors from near and far spend more time engaged in discovery in our outdoor environments.

Goal 3: Strengthen Our Core

- **Design and implement a rolling, multi-year business plan that galvanizes internal operations.**

of our buildings, operations, and business practices, and have the knowledge to improve our environmental footprint.

The Museum has improved human resources and information technology services.

- **Develop and execute an improvement plan for amenities, infrastructure, staff capacity, funding, and facilities.**

Visitors feel that the Montshire is a friendlier place through improved amenities and visitor services.

People feel that the Montshire is an incredibly warm and friendly place and customer service data indicates measurable improvements.

Year-to-Year: We develop and maintain a rolling three-year budget and feel confident progressing with our deep work in local schools and supporting access for families that are economically disadvantaged.

By 2020: The Museum has a standard for multi-year budgeting and fundraising.

Beyond 2020: The Museum is prepared for a major new project that broadens our capacity to engage visitors in the wonder of discovery.

Montshire staff are well supported and satisfied with their work experience, and well prepared through professional development.

Necessary maintenance on the building and grounds has been completed with a focus toward reducing our carbon footprint and environmental impact.

A warm and friendly environment encourages more visitors to deeply engage with science.

We understand the environmental impact

Visitor engagement increases due to improved amenities. Museum employees feel they have clear objectives.

Our solid base of operations allows the Montshire to remain flexible to changing external conditions.

Funding capacity increases proportionally to our resource needs.

We have a dedicated and professional staff that will lead us into the future.

Goal 4: Tell Our Story

- **Hone our brand identity and communications strategies.**

By 2020: Our brand identity resounds throughout Vermont and New Hampshire.

and maintain an open dialog with the community.

- **Deepen our community, regional, and national profile.**

Our online and print communications strategies improve visitation and support.

Members of the media value the Montshire as a trusted resource.

Year-to-Year: People recognize our brand at a local level and all Montshire materials have a consistent look and message.

People telling our story intuitively articulate what we are, what we do, why we do it, and how that connects to them.

Beyond 2020: Our brand and story resonate throughout the country, positioning us for larger collaborations and projects.

Various constituencies understand our impact and respond through increased visitation, opportunities for collaboration and partnerships, and philanthropic support and investment.

Our base of supporters and funders knows our story and acknowledges our work.

We have a strong internal understanding of how we communicate our brand identity.

Donors recognize the impact of their gifts and sustain their support.

Because audiences understand the value of scientific discovery within our society, their actions and diverse forms of support sustain our Mission.

We remain flexible to new modes of communications

ABOUT US

The Montshire Museum of Science in Norwich, Vermont, is a nationally recognized, hands-on science museum with more than 125 exhibits on nature, technology, astronomy, and the physical sciences.

The Montshire's unique, 100-acre riverfront setting includes outdoor exhibits, scenic trails, water features in David Goudy Science Park, and the Hughes Pavilion.

Visiting exhibitions, educational programs, and special events are offered throughout the year.

The Montshire opened its doors in 1976 and

has been an important contributor to the science education of the people of Vermont and New Hampshire for over 40 years.

The Museum received the National Award for Museum Service from the Institute of Museum and Library Services in 1995, and has been the recipient of numerous grants from the National

Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, the United States Department of Energy, Institute of Museum and Library Services, and NASA.

The Museum formed the Dartmouth-Montshire Institute and works closely with Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire on numerous projects each year.

EVALUATION

The Montshire senior leadership team will monitor the strategic plan and on an annual basis report financial metrics, visitor feedback, internal business growth, and general learning and growth in the Museum field to the board of trustees.

¹ NGSS Lead States. *Next Generation Science Standards: For States, By States*. (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2013), 7.

² National Research Council (U.S.). Committee on a Conceptual Framework for New K-12 Science Education Standards., and ebrary Academic Complete. *A Framework for K-12 Science Education: Practices, Crosscutting Concepts, and Core Ideas*. (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2012), 96.

³ Falk, John H., and Lynn D. Dierking. *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000.), 114.

⁴ Valli, Marc. "In My Brand is My Beginning," *Elephant*, 27, (Amsterdam: Frame Publishers 2016), 192.

Strategic Planning Committee

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This Strategic Plan was adopted September 19, 2016 by the Montshire Board of Trustees.
Made possible with support from Lisa Cashdan and Peter Stein.



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