

ANNUAL PLAN

FY 2024



NORTH CAROLINA **Museum of Natural Sciences**



NORTH
CAROLINA
**Museum
of Natural
Sciences**

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State of North Carolina, Roy Cooper, Governor;
Department of Natural and Cultural Resources,
D. Reid Wilson, Secretary

ANNUAL PLAN

2023/2024

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VISION & MISSION

Mission: To illuminate the natural world
and inspire its conservation.

Vision: A knowledgeable and empowered society,
making decisions informed by science.



INTRODUCTION

As a team, it is our pleasure to present the FY2024 Annual Plan for the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences, the third and final from our FY2022–2024 Strategic Plan.

Based on agreed priorities, this Plan continues to delineate our path forward. It shares our successes and incorporates the improvements we've made towards tracking and evaluating our work to fulfill our mission and vision. We continue to assess how we've done things in the past while keeping an eye towards where we want to be in the future.

This annual plan is synergistic, building on accomplishments of the past 12 months, while rooted in a continual assessment of how our core activities elevate our priorities. Taken as a whole, we feel this plan helps us achieve our vision for North Carolina's science museum. The initiatives found within, we hope, elevate our efforts to support our business operations, engage in projects that allow us to better understand our audiences, and to adjust our programming to better share the stories of the natural world and our place within it.

In offering this next year of planning, we are keenly aware of the support provided to us by:

- the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources,
- the State Legislature,
- the Friends of NCMNS,
- the Museum's Advisory Commission, as well as
- our statewide community.

Their ongoing involvement has strengthened our resolve to have the greatest impact possible.

Last, but far from least, we are extremely grateful to the Museum staff, whose commitment and dedication are the major driver of our ongoing achievements.

NCMNS Leadership Team

GOAL 1

Relevant & Influential

World-class organizations strive daily to make a positive impact on the lives of others. When the world changes as rapidly as it does today, one of our greatest challenges is staying relevant to our audiences and communities. There are far more distractions, choices, opportunities and ways to communicate than in times past, and this can test the strength of the bond with our public. While finding new ways to remain top of mind, we must remain faithful to our core drivers of science, education and conservation.

1A. Excellence in Research and Collections.

Conducting novel research and stewarding our collections are core functions of NCMNS. Collections provide a platform for much of the Museum's research. In addition, they offer evidence of global change over time and give insights into interactions between people and the environment. Over the next year, we will continue to provide infrastructure that supports collections and research, including showcasing our scientific endeavors and planning and designing spaces for enhanced storage.

1A.1. Collection storage and interpretation

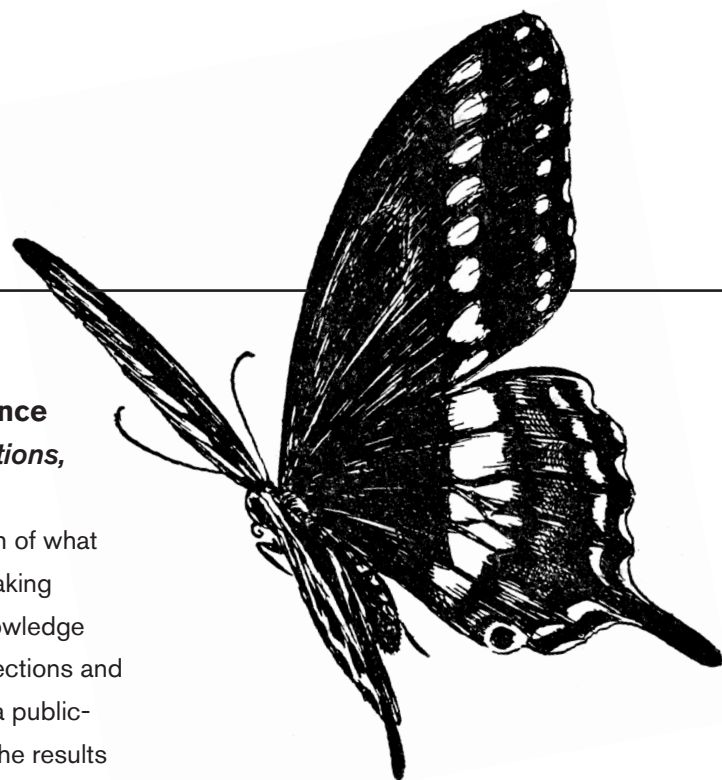
Leads: Museum Director, Research & Collections, Evaluation & Project Management

We will continue to develop a larger plan that will provide critical information for development at Prairie Ridge and the Research Lab and allow us to plan for our future scientific capacity, as well as public engagement opportunities in all NCMNS locations. In 2023/24, we will continue to consolidate thinking and begin a roadmap for implementation, while simultaneously completing projects that address lab, storage and office space needs within the existing Gold Star Drive lab footprint.



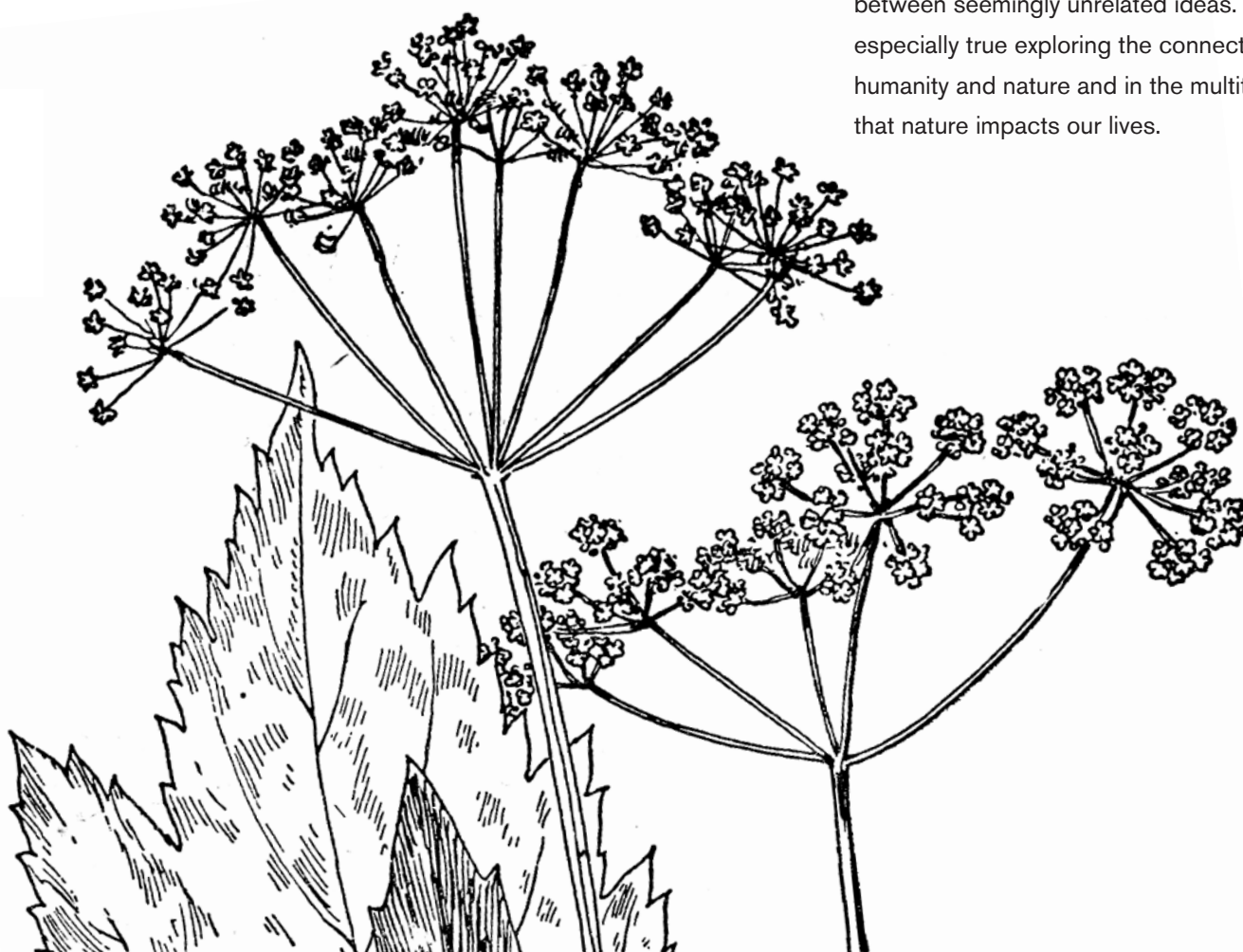
1A.2. Promoting Museum science
*Leads: Marketing & Communications,
Exhibits & Digital Media*

Science is the engine that drives much of what we do at the Museum. Our effort in making new discoveries and creating new knowledge comes both through studying our collections and engaging in field-based research. As a public-facing institution, our duty is to make the results of our scientific discoveries as relevant and accessible to the public as possible. In 2023/24, we will refine and continue to implement a plan to enhance the visibility of our researchers' accomplishments and the advances they bring to scientific discovery.



**1B. Telling Stories People
Care About.**

We make discovery accessible by offering immersive experiences. Our important stories reach outside the present moment, often making surprising connections between seemingly unrelated ideas. This is especially true exploring the connections between humanity and nature and in the multitude of ways that nature impacts our lives.



GOAL 1

1B.1. Live animals at the Museum

Leads: Living Collections, Veterinary Sciences, Research & Collections

Live animals housed within Museum exhibits have the power to unite and educate the community, providing an understanding of the interdependence of animals and their habitats, as well as forming the basis for conservation programs. Additionally, their behavior can be studied as part of our research. In 2023/24 we will execute plans based on the analysis of the past two years of the role of live animals, and their future use for engagement at NCMNS. Plans include the incorporation of live animals at regional sites, exploring the possibility of AZA accreditation, and the expansion of animal encounter experiences in live exhibits and in educational programming.

1B.2. Regional stories

Leads: Marketing & Communications, Regional Network

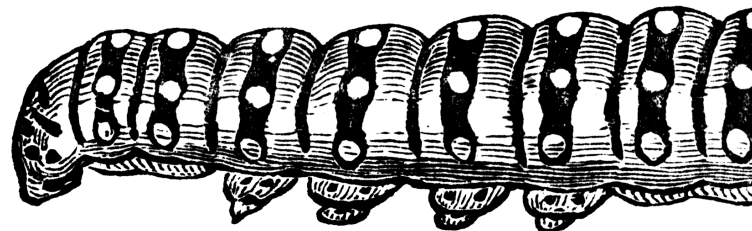
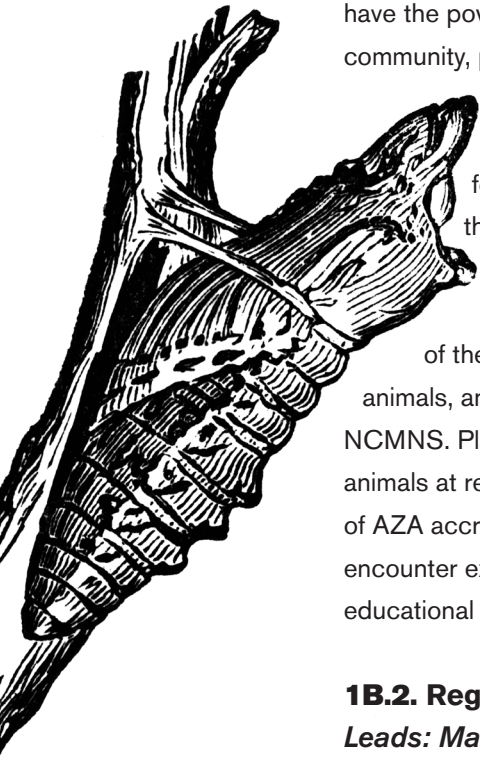
One of the most important goals for science education is engendering trust in the scientific process and its conclusions, at the same time sharing the stories of our museum and North

Carolina's natural heritage. Even in the digital age, geography is an important influence on the uptake of our messages. In 2023/24, we will set the stage for increased statewide communication by developing and implementing a system of information sharing that integrates the stories of our regional network sites and outreach programs.

1B.3. Science in education programs

Leads: Research & Collections, Education

One thing that makes NCMNS unique is the proximity of researchers to the public, providing an important insight into the scientific process. Contributions of our scientists can come in many forms, from the structured to the informal, in person, online or in print. It is important to present the work of NCMNS scientists to our guests and supporters. In this next financial year, we will continue to take stock of scientific contributions to the Museum's educational activities, with a focus on linking scientists with educators to enhance our informal educational offerings.





1C. The “It” Factor. Like charismatic people, organizations can stand out for being magnetic, creative and innovative, and for having bold ideas that break through the noise. In the coming year, we will continue to undertake initiatives that focus on culture and communications, with an eye toward being grounded in our authentic voice internally and exerting that influential voice externally.

1C.1. Strengthening Our Brand's Message

Leads: Marketing & Communications, Evaluation & Project Management

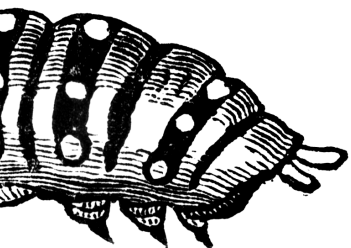
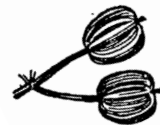
Our brand is the outward manifestation of our Museum's personality. It is an opportunity to create and strengthen our institution's message and allow it to evolve, supporting our core values and priorities, and connecting with our

audiences in a new, authentic way. In 2023/24, we will investigate our core strengths and look to emphasize those in our branding.

1C.2. RACE exhibition and pop-up

Leads: Exhibitions & Digital Media, Evaluation & Project Management

RACE: Are We So Different? was originally shown at NCMNS in 2017. This exhibition looks at race through the lens of science, history and personal experiences to promote a better understanding of human variation. The purchase of the exhibition for NCMNS allows us to reinvigorate the stories through the latest lenses, emerging audiences and our local context. In 2023/24, we will update and disseminate a pop-up version of this exhibition as round two of that project. In preparation for relaunching the main exhibition for display at a yet to be determined location, the large-scale exhibition will be set up in an offsite location for guest feedback, review and analysis. Updating of the larger exhibition will be well underway in 2023/24.



GOAL 2

Prioritizing People

Every aspect of what we do — from our educators and scientists within the Museum, to the children and parents who come through our doors — boils down to people, what they think and how they feel. And by understanding the human element, we will be more productive, lead our sector more effectively, create brand loyalty and do better work. To enjoy these benefits, however, we must be purposeful about integrating the human element into the Museum's key priorities.

2A. Meeting People Where They Are. Considering peoples' needs and drivers on an individual basis involves recognizing that no one channel, language or voice speaks to everybody. This perspective is important to our efforts to address disparities that disproportionately affect ethnic minorities and other underserved communities. In 2023/24 we will examine our communication style, as well as opportunities for guests to play an active role in making meaning. Within the Museum, we will explore pathways to encourage tomorrow's leaders to make a long-term contribution to society and the planet.

2A.1. Bilingual and multilingual experiences

Lead: Education

Museums are by nature outward facing. In our state, 690,000 households speak primarily Spanish at home, by far the most common of the more than 20 non-English languages spoken. Part of our commitment to inclusiveness is using languages that let people know they are welcome within all of the Museum's offerings. In 2023/24, we will continue to evaluate opportunities for bilingual and multilingual offerings within our visitor experiences and formalize this capacity within our infrastructure. Our goal now is to expand beyond our commitment to bilingual special exhibitions and begin to extend bilingual opportunities to programs and existing exhibits in all museum locations. This will be an ongoing effort.



2A.2. Informal education for RACE

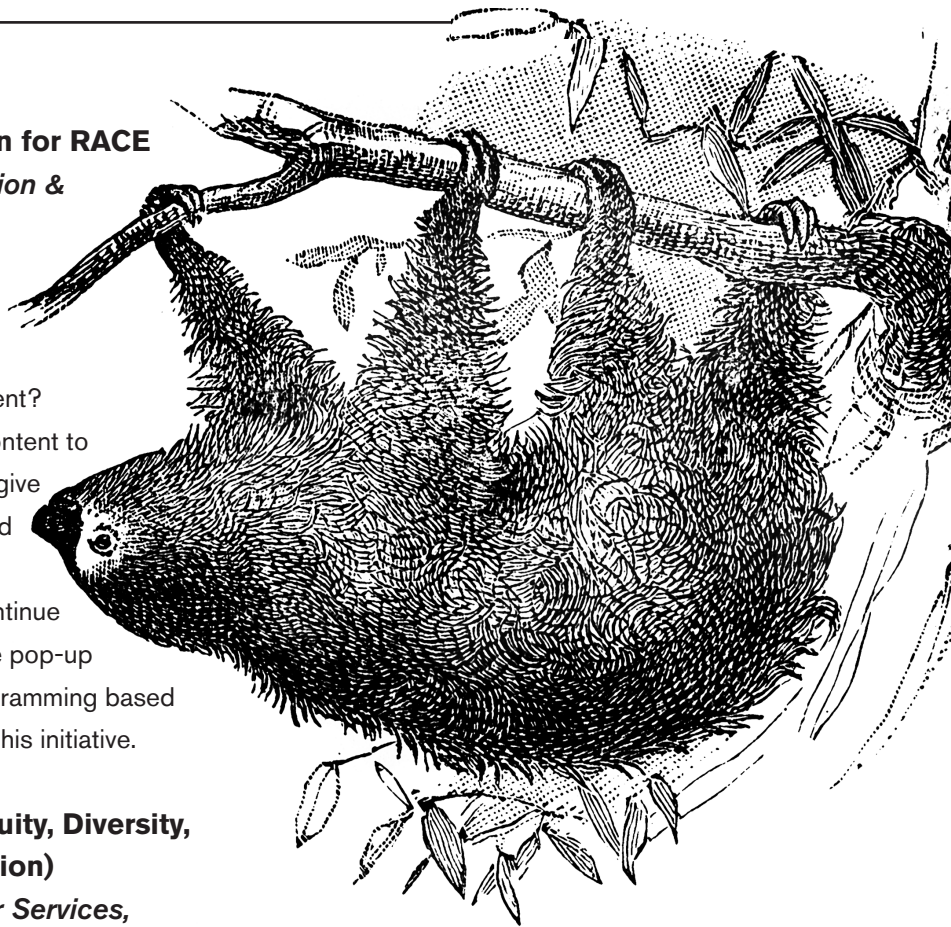
Lead: Education, Evaluation & Project Management

One of the most important aspects of the North Carolina relaunch of the RACE: Are We So Different? exhibition is leveraging the content to enhance the experience and give people from every background the chance to engage and grow. In 2023/24, we will continue to evaluate, update and share pop-up exhibits and educational programming based on themes developed within this initiative.

2A.3. JEDAI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion)

Leads: Guest & Volunteer Services, Education

With the goal of bringing about meaningful and lasting institutional change from within, in the past two years two groups of NCMNS staff attended iPAGE, the Science Museum of Minnesota's leadership program for teams of Informal STEM Institution (ISI) professionals, which is dedicated to supporting diversity, promoting inclusion, increasing access and achieving equity in the ISI sector. Recognizing the importance of expanding the Museum's effort to include justice as part of its DEAI work and recognizing that access to iPAGE training is limited, in the next fiscal year we will continue to prioritize staff participation in Justice, Equity, Diversity, Accessibility and Inclusion (JEDAI) professional development opportunities and form a JEDAI committee to develop a plan of action for the Museum going forward.



2A.4. The 100 Counties Project

Leads: Regional Network, Education, Research & Collections, Guest & Volunteer Services

Our mandate as a statewide institution is to serve all the people of North Carolina. The 100 Counties Project is a Museum initiative to record the activities we undertake in different counties across the state and to use this information to help us set future programming priorities. In the next financial year, we will use the initiative to inform business-as-usual activities, update the website annually, and review the 100 Counties operations to ensure that all 100 counties are being served by NCMNS.

GOAL 2

2B. Knowing Our Audiences.

As the most-visited attraction in North Carolina, and with a mandate to serve customers across the state, audience engagement is a clear indicator of performance. Over the next year, we will use a number of complementary methods to understand the diverse needs of our audience segments so we can focus our engagement and education efforts, and better understand guest satisfaction.

2B.1. Audience segmentation

Leads: Evaluation & Project Management, Marketing & Communications

Audience segmentation works to divide our audiences into groups that have similar interests or behaviors. By considering our audiences as segments who engage with culture in different ways, we can craft more-targeted marketing messages and consistently provide more relevant content. In 2023/24, we will continue to review the analysis collected by MHM Insights Culture Segment studies performed in FY's 2022 and 2023.

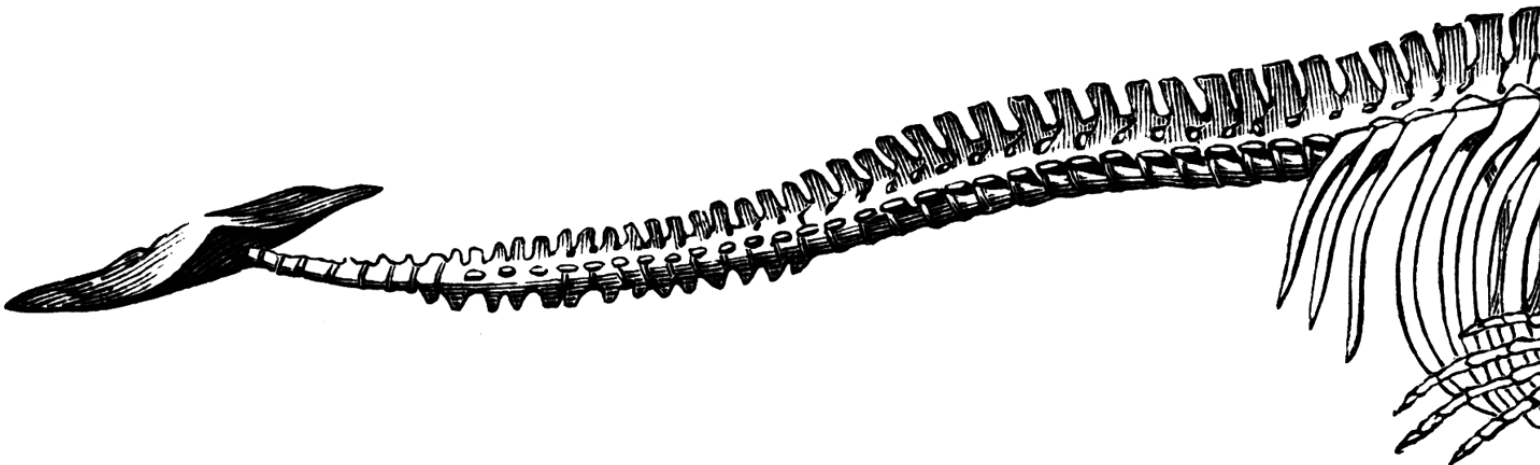
2C. Optimizing Physical Infrastructure and Activating Spaces.

The vast majority of what the Museum does, even creating our digital offerings, involves physical infrastructure. When we fully leverage the emotional power of that infrastructure by activating it, our galleries can capture our guests' imagination. In 2023/24 we will create a baseline for master planning to provide insights to evaluate, maintain, improve and activate our premises. In this way, we will ensure that our assets are protected and evolving for future generations.

2C.1. Gallery review

Leads: Exhibitions & Digital Media, Deputy Museum Director

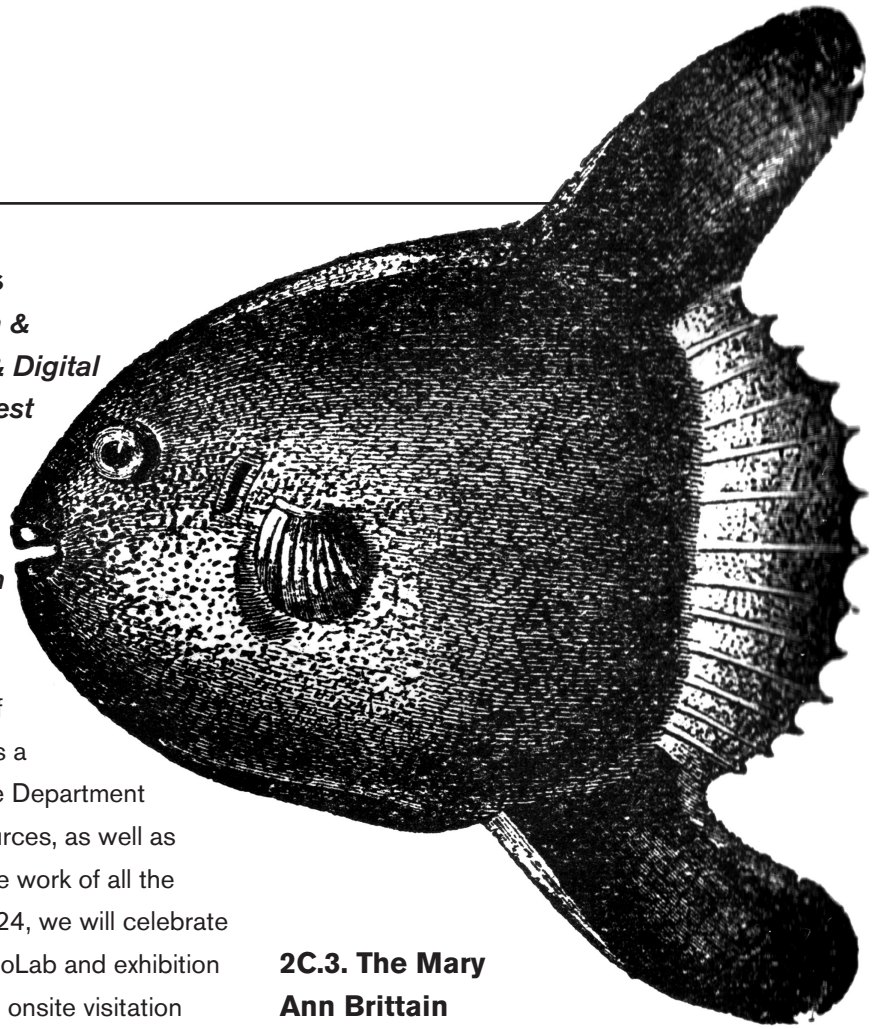
Many of our long-term galleries in the downtown Raleigh campus remain unchanged since they were installed and need refreshment. In 2023/24, we will continue to execute a plan to refresh existing galleries, setting the stage for larger-scale thinking later.



2C.2. Dueling Dinosaurs

Leads: Friends, Research & Collections, Exhibitions & Digital Media, Development, Guest & Volunteer Services, Evaluation & Project Management, Museum Director, Deputy Museum Director

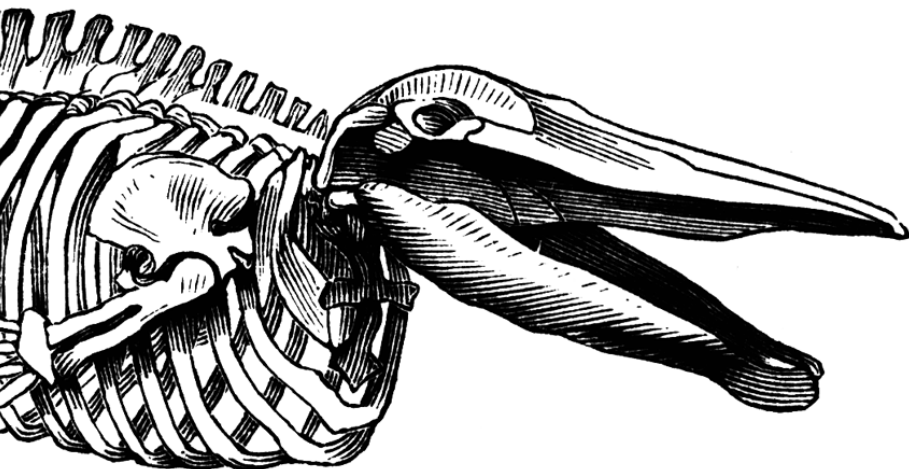
One of the most important paleontological discoveries of our time, Dueling Dinosaurs is a major strategic initiative of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, as well as the Museum. It touches on the work of all the Museum's sections. In 2023/24, we will celebrate the opening of the SECU DinoLab and exhibition as we give access — through onsite visitation into the lab itself or through online streaming — to anyone in the world who would like to follow along on our journey of discovery.



2C.3. The Mary Ann Brittain Education Center

Leads: Regional Network, Evaluation & Project Management, Development

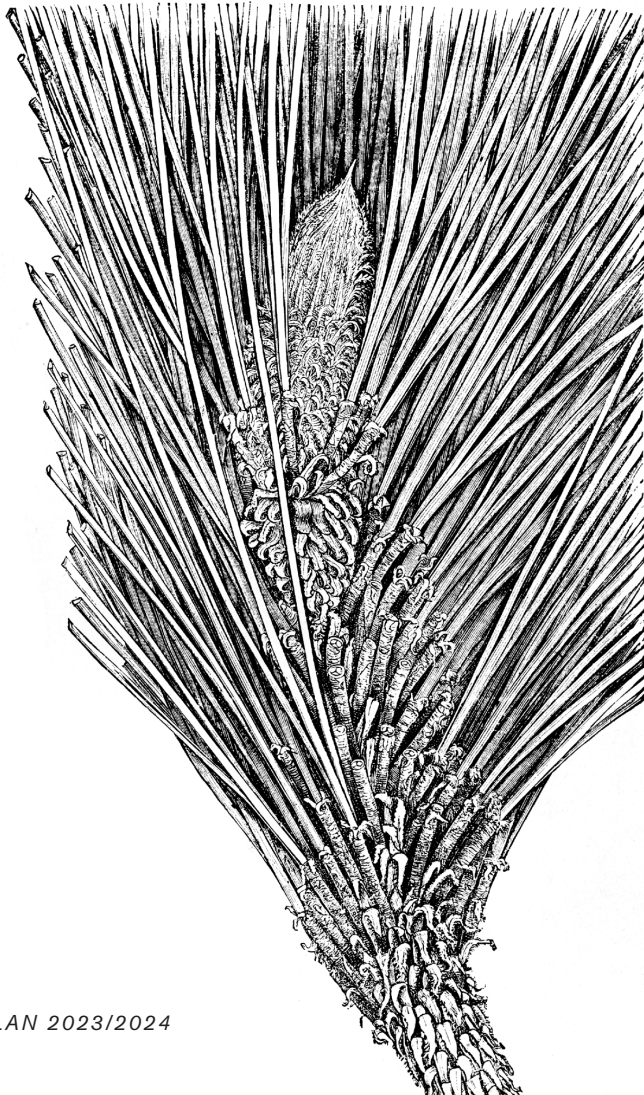
Our ability to engage people authentically with our outdoor spaces comes, in no small part, with our ability to host them and provide a quality educational experience. Our new Education Center will be an anchor for further thinking about the site. In 2023/24, we will complete fundraising for the Education Center.



GOAL 3

An Environment that Fosters Innovation

A forward-looking institution develops and implements new ideas in a culture that rewards experimentation and taking calculated risks. Innovation is about creating new value for our stakeholders. Our strategy needs to harness our resources to support achieving this aspiration. This is more than the simple formation of ideas. It means we will be mapping the Museum's mission, vision and offerings onto defined customer markets in an organized way, to ensure the greatest possible impact.

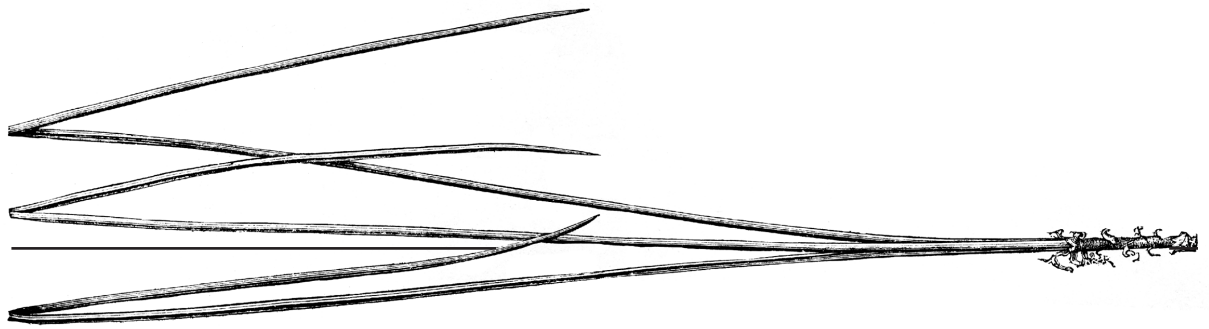


3A. Anticipating Trends. Being able to identify and respond to trending topics significantly increases our effectiveness. This can provide opportunities across the Museum's activities. Within merchandising, it encourages us to keep up with the latest technology and manage our brand's reputation. In science, it encourages us to interface with colleagues who have made strides in our field and look for opportunities for synergy and collaboration. Over the next year, we will continue to formalize our systems and capacity to monitor trends and incorporate them throughout our efforts.

3A.1. Environmental best practice

Lead: Green Team

The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences is committed to pursuing a triple-bottom-line approach of environmental, financial and social responsibility. Our mandate as the State science museum challenges us to support an economy aimed at reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities, one that aims for sustainable development without degrading the environment. By finding innovative ways to do more while lessening our ecological footprint, we aim to drive sustainability efforts and build resilience into all our activities to continue positively impacting the communities we serve. In the next financial year, we will continue to consolidate our cross-institutional activities into a single framework.



3B. Embracing Creative Thinking From Within Our Institution.

We aspire to a culture that embraces and encourages innovative thinking to keep the Museum relevant. Giving our team members permission to act and make decisions within our institution is key to achieving this. Under this Strategic Plan, we will foster a culture of inclusive creativity and curiosity to develop new pipelines and enhance existing avenues for staff contributions.

3B.1. Leadership pathways

Leads: Deputy Museum Director, Career Pathways Committee

Effective leaders impact the world around them in a positive direction, with significantly more powerful mental, emotional and relational capabilities, including new ways of seeing, knowing and being. A career development path provides employees with leadership opportunities and an ongoing mechanism to enhance their skills and knowledge. It can also have a direct positive impact on morale and career satisfaction in meeting section-level and institutional objectives. In 2022/23 we established a Career Pathways Committee to review internal practices and set priorities for action in 2023/24.

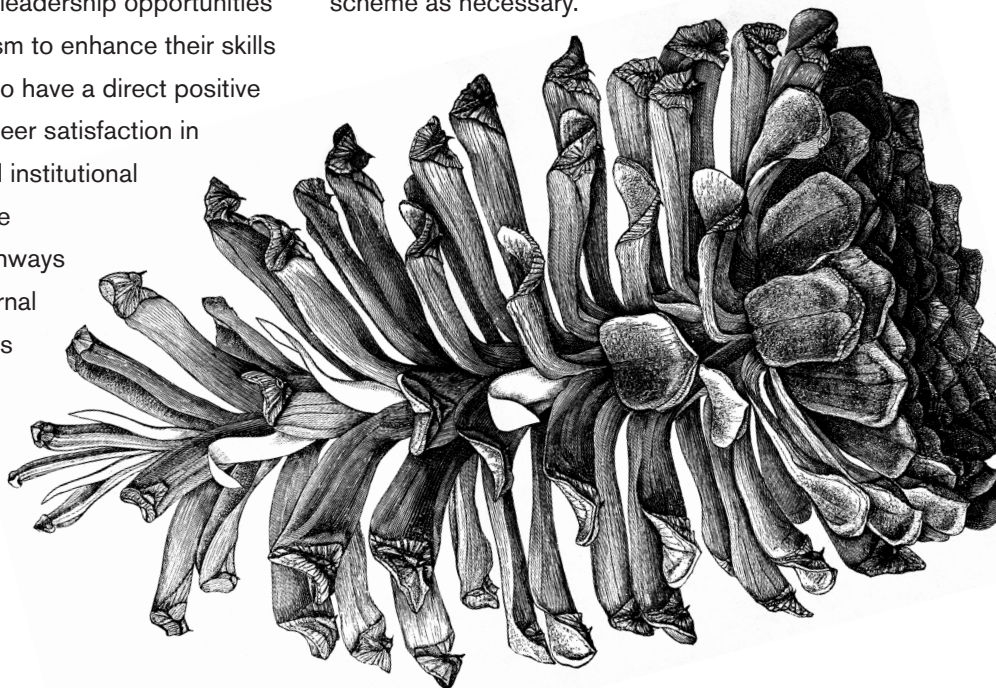
3C. Sharpening Our External Focus.

Looking outside the boundaries of our field can yield very powerful and often surprising ideas for innovation. In 2023/24 we will develop a formal pipeline of new thinking to create synergies, map and fill gaps in community needs, and innovate in the delivery of our exhibits, programs and activities.

3C.1. Best practice forums

Lead: Deputy Museum Director

Professional development helps employees continue not only to be competent in their profession, but also to excel in it. Engaging in external best-practice forums like conferences is key to ensuring that knowledge and skills stay relevant and up to date. It also allows us to be more aware of changing trends and directions in our field. In the next financial year, we will increase funding and review and adjust the scheme as necessary.



GOAL 4

Nimble & Responsive

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us how quickly and comprehensively our circumstances can change. Our challenge is to adapt quickly to changing environments, while maintaining and growing our relevance. The measure of both nimbleness and responsiveness is our ability to keep transforming ourselves based on developing circumstances. Our systems must be ready to anticipate and adapt to shifting needs, both internally and externally

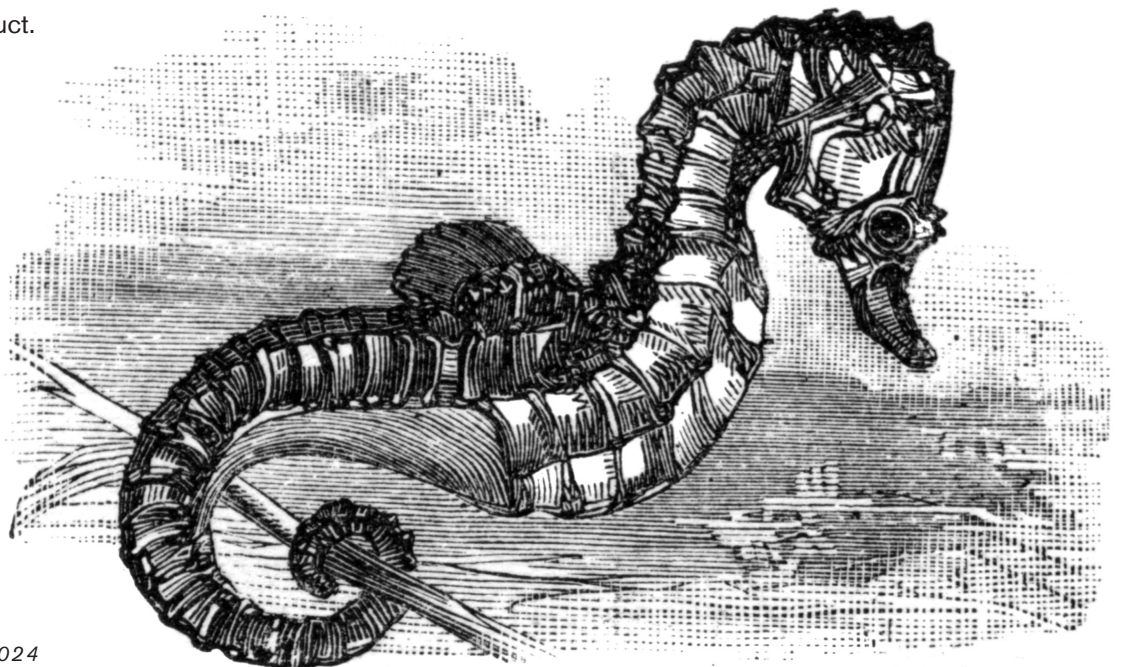
4A. Total Quality Management.

Quality is a crucial parameter that can differentiate our institution from others in our sector. Its tools ensure continuous quality improvement in the systems and processes that eventually result in superior products and services and guarantee wise stewardship of public and private funds. In 2023/24, we will develop and implement management methods to deliver a high-quality product.

4A.1. Tracking animal health and welfare

Leads: Veterinary Sciences, Living Collections

Monitoring the health and welfare of our live animals is an essential feature of the Veterinary Sciences and Living Collections teams. Establishing baselines and trends is essential to have the ability to interpret fluctuations and respond in a timely manner to identified issues. In the next financial year, we will review defined parameters and update as needed. Veterinary Sciences Section staff will work closely with Living Collections staff to develop a more collaborative approach to wellness and welfare monitoring. In 2023/24, Living Collections will initiate the annual welfare evaluations, then Veterinary Sciences will follow up with a review of welfare and completion of an annual wellness exam for each animal.



4B. Business Continuity.

Anticipating and controlling risk allows us to account for unforeseen challenges and sometimes prevent them. In minimizing risks, we increase productivity by limiting any waste of time and resources. Under this Strategic Plan, we will address business continuity and institute a framework for managing risks within the Museum's operations.

4B.1. Business Continuity Plan

Lead: Security

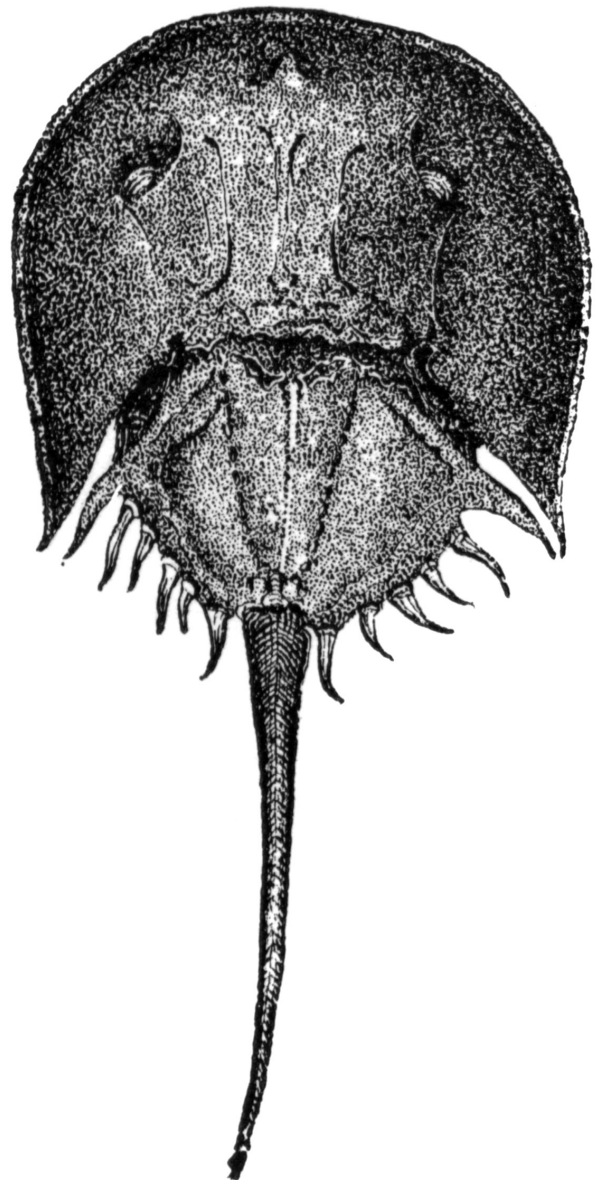
Business continuity is a proactive plan to avoid and mitigate risks that could lead to a disruption of operations. It details steps to be taken before, during and after an event to maintain the viability of an organization. Anticipating these risks is key to an organization's ability to respond effectively to challenges when they arrive. In 2023/24, we will review the plan and adjust as necessary.

4B.2. Special exhibitions

Leads: Exhibitions & Digital Media, Development, Friends

Special exhibitions are an important NCMNS offer as they provide the opportunity to show our community a range of perspectives on science and nature to supplement our permanent exhibitions. The Museum relaunched its special exhibitions program in 2022/23 and have seen success in attracting and retaining members, increasing store sales, and increasing the number of 3D movie ticket sales because of the increased

visitation that special exhibitions attract. In FY2024, the primary focus of the Museum will be attracting visitors to the Dueling Dinosaurs. Special exhibitions during this year will include the end of "Spiders: Fear to Fascination" (closing on October 29, 2023) and the beginning of "Amazing Pollinators" (opening June 15, 2024). During this year, we will be identifying and contracting exhibitions for FY2025 and beyond.

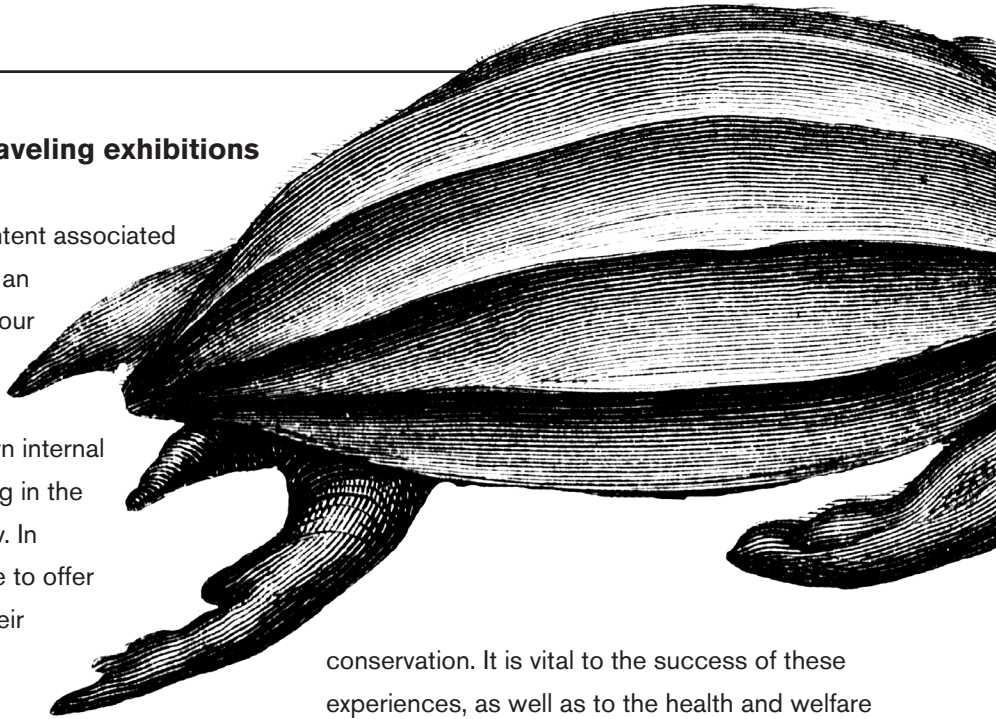


GOAL 4

4B.3. Education in traveling exhibitions

Lead: Education

Providing educational content associated with special exhibitions is an important way to deepen our guests' understanding and take advantage of natural tie-ins with our own internal experts, all the while aiding in the overall appeal of the show. In 2023/24, we will continue to offer programs and evaluate their contributions to special exhibitions.

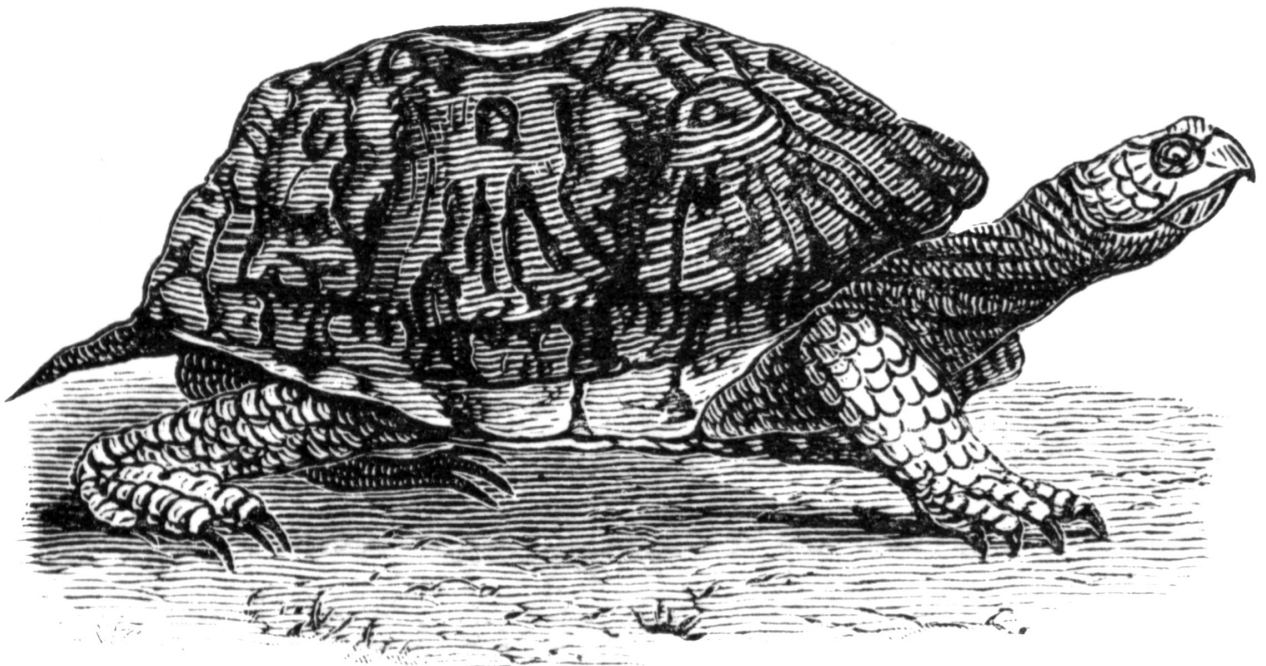


conservation. It is vital to the success of these experiences, as well as to the health and welfare of the animals, that the enclosures are in peak condition. In 2023/24, we will continue to develop maintenance-related tools while identifying potential cases of deferred maintenance and opportunities to upgrade habitats.

4B.4. Live animal habitat enclosures

Leads: Living Collections, Veterinary Sciences, Exhibition & Digital Media, Development

Live animals are important to guests' overall feeling about the Museum and provide a portal to specific stories about science and





4C. A Framework for Institutional Growth.

Every organization goes through phases in its existence, typically from consolidation, transition and then to growth in a cyclical fashion. NCMNS grew enormously between 2000 and 2012 and is due for another consolidation phase to ensure it can move smoothly, once again, and transition to another period of growth. Over the next year, we will continue to map out and implement these phases, specifically addressing gaps in infrastructure and business systems.

4C.1. Organizational lifecycle

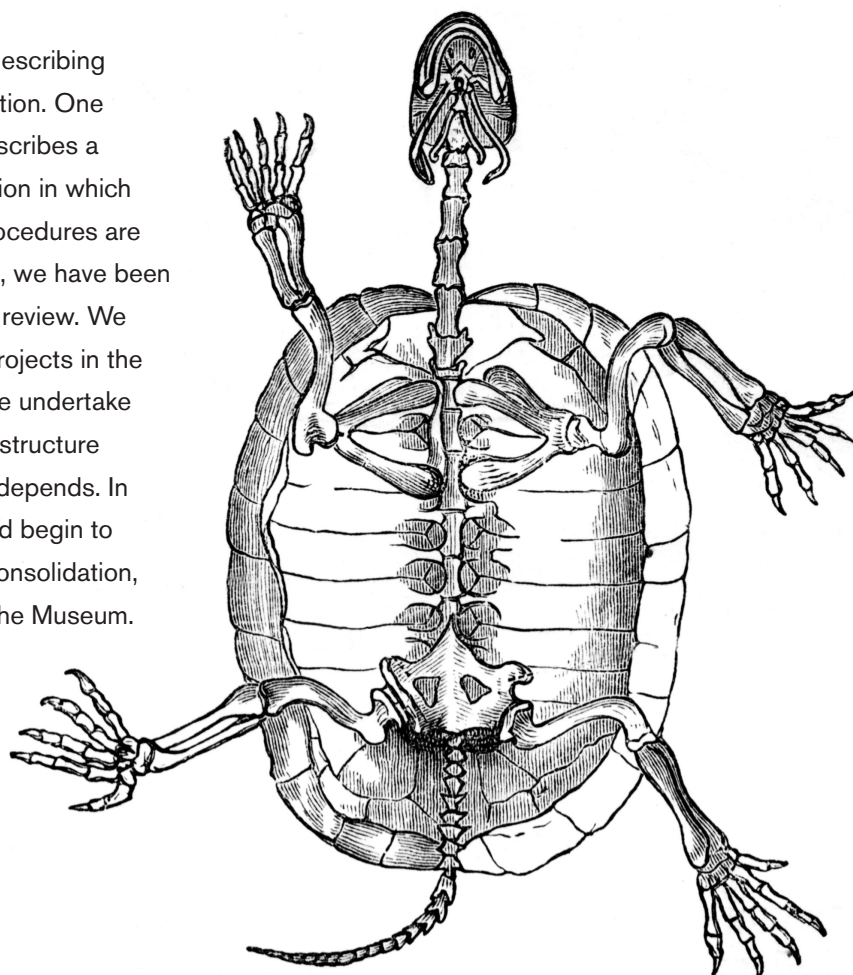
Lead: Museum Director

There are many different models describing the lifecycle stages of an organization. One that is particularly useful for us describes a period of infrastructure consolidation in which the organization's systems and procedures are reviewed and refined. Since 1879, we have been through periods of expansion and review. We currently have two major capital projects in the works, making it imperative that we undertake a review of the administrative infrastructure on which our forward momentum depends. In 2023/24, we will review, refine and begin to execute the plan encompassing consolidation, transition and growth phases for the Museum.

4C.2. Conservation Action Plan

Leads: Research & Collections, Veterinary Sciences, Living Collections

An institutional Conservation Action Plan (CAP) is important to develop focused strategies and measures of success. A Museum-wide CAP will integrate project teams across multiple sections of the Museum to identify appropriate and effective conservation strategies and actions in an objective, consistent and transparent manner. In the coming financial year, we will draw on the information compiled in 2022/23, determine broad categories for conservation action, and draft a road map for completion.



GOAL 5

Business Acumen

This area of leadership thinking helps us perform locally and globally under the influence of a logical thought progression. Keeness and quickness in understanding and dealing with business situations promotes good outcomes in the face of changing circumstances and is a method of improving financial performance and leadership development.

5A. Resource Planning. With the aim of prioritizing the Museum's financial needs, under this Strategic Plan we will assist the Friends of NCMNS in developing and refining a Revenue Generation Plan that focuses on forecasting both earned and contributed income. It will explore

ways to expand and deepen our commercial offer, as well as charting a direction for philanthropy. Further analysis will also consider return on investment and effort, with the aim of increasing the efficiency and productivity of these work areas.

5A.1. Revenue Generation Plan

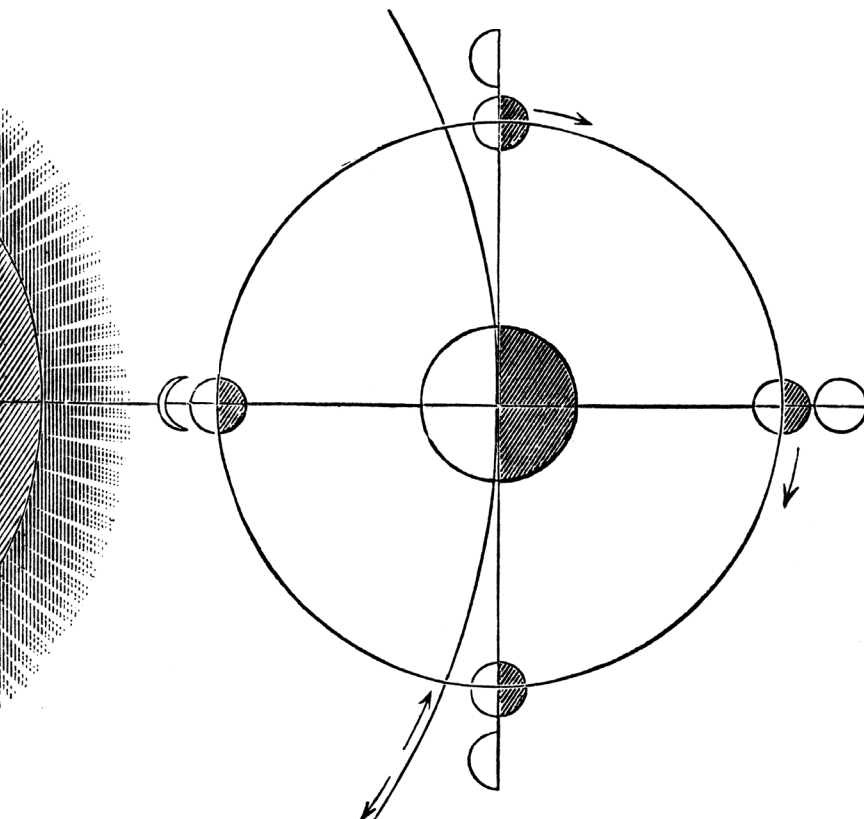
Leads: Museum Director, Deputy Museum Director, Friends

The goal of the Revenue Generation Plan is to identify existing and new revenue-generating opportunities and, to the best of our knowledge, forecast their contributions. In 2022/23, the Friends and the Museum developed its first Revenue Generation Plan in line with the Museum's Strategic Plan. The Plan will be reviewed in early 2024 to compare with the original goals, identify any areas that were targeted but not pursued, and add new opportunities that may have arisen since its original development.

5A.2. Fundraising framework

Lead: Development

In 2023/24 the Museum will continue to work closely with the Friends of the NCMNS to grow the Museum's base of support through membership, special events and exhibition sponsorship, and capitalizing on the public opening of and interest in the Dueling Dinosaurs. In addition to the Mary Ann Brittain Education Center, the Development Department will work with Museum leadership to identify and prioritize the Museum's next major fundraising initiatives.





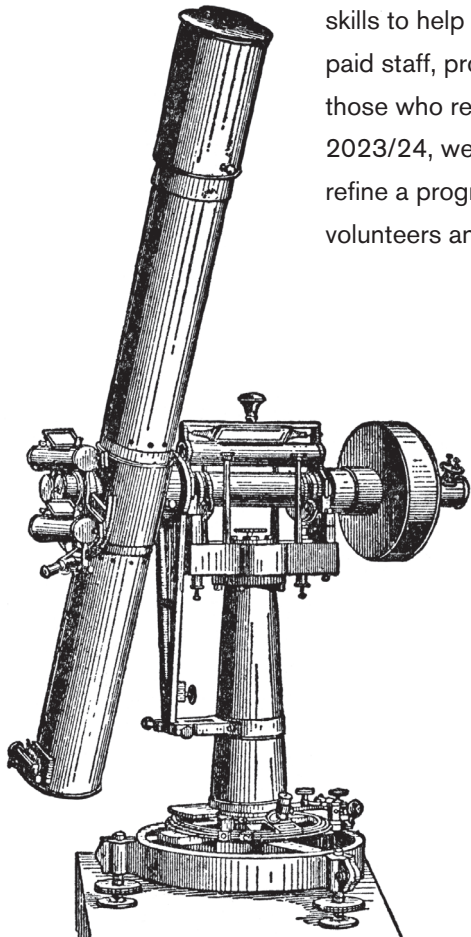
5B. Effective Systems For Efficiency & Productivity.

Improving efficiency is crucial for the productivity of our Museum, ensuring opportunities for growth and improved service to our community. In this part of our strategy, we will advance initiatives that refine our processes through improved technology, placing greater focus on stakeholder communications and relationship building, assessing the management of our resources, and investing in employee training.

5B.1. Professional development for volunteers and interns

Lead: Guest & Volunteer Services

Those who volunteer for us benefit the Museum in myriad ways, many contributing prodigious skills to help us achieve success. As with our paid staff, professional development benefits those who receive it, as well as the institution. In 2023/24, we will continue to expand, improve and refine a program for professional development for volunteers and interns.



5C. Data Collection. For an institution like ours, gathering data to help us better understand our guests and communities is vitally important. Through data collection we have the quality information we need to make informed, evidence-based decisions. Under this Strategic Plan, we will use data-driven methodologies to stay on top of trends, provide answers to problems, and analyze new insights that affect our business.

5C.1. Data collection

Lead: Evaluation & Project Management

Because of the importance of data collection in effective decision making, it is imperative that we identify disparities in the knowledge that underpins our activities. Our aim is to focus our resources and energy on those areas for continuous quality improvement. In 2022/23 we established the Museum Dashboard, which is accessible to all Museum employees. In 2023/24 we will continue to expand and refine the metrics on the Dashboard and perform a regular review of statistics to identify areas for improvement.

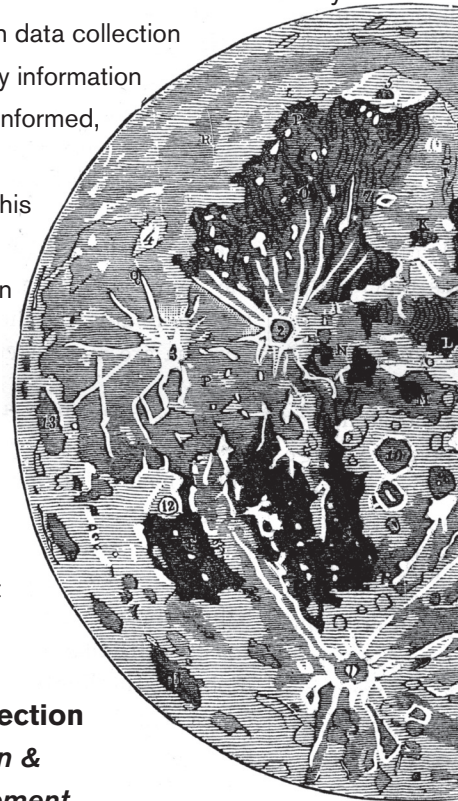




IMAGE COURTESY OF: Karen Swain (front cover)

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