



# STRATEGIC PLAN

2021-2023

**NORTH CAROLINA *Museum of Natural Sciences***





NORTH  
CAROLINA

**Museum  
of Natural  
Sciences**

**MORE INFORMATION**

Phone: 919.707.9800

TTY: 919.715.6464

Web: [naturalsciences.org](http://naturalsciences.org)

Social: @naturalsciences



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



# **STRATEGIC PLAN**

**2021-2023**





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>WELCOME</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>VISION &amp; MISSION</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CORE VALUES</b>	<b>10</b>
Credibility	10
DEAI and Social Justice	10
Nature Conservation	10
Statewide and Global Reach	10
<b>SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES</b>	<b>12</b>
Basis in Evidence	12
Ethical Practices	12
Science As a Process	12
Scientific Literacy	12
Value of Collections	12
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>15</b>
To Illuminate and Inspire	15
Biophilia: The Love of Nature — A Key Concept	15
<b>STRATEGIC GOALS</b>	<b>21</b>
Strategic Goal One: Relevant & Influential	21
1A. Excellence In Research and Collections	21
1B. Telling Stories People Care About	21
1C. The “It” Factor	21
Strategic Goal Two: Prioritizing People	23
2A. Meeting People Where They Are	23
2B. Knowing Our Audiences	23
2C. Optimizing Physical Infrastructure and Activating Spaces	23
Strategic Goal Three: An Environment That Fosters Innovation	25
3A. Anticipating Trends	25
3B. Embracing Creative Thinking From Within Our Institution	25
3C. Sharpening Our External Focus	25
Strategic Goal Four: Nimble & Responsive	27
4A. Data Collection	27
4B. Business Continuity	27
4C. A Framework for Institutional Growth	27
Strategic Goal Five: Business Acumen	29
5A. Resource Planning	29
5B. Effective Systems for Efficiency and Productivity	29
5C. Total Quality Management	29









*“Nature is painting for us, day after day, pictures of infinite beauty.”*

— John Ruskin









# WELCOME

---



It gives me great pleasure to present the 2021–2023 Strategic Plan for the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences (NCMNS). Despite the challenges of being closed to the public during much of the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have achieved many important outcomes.

- The Friends of NCMNS announced the acquisition of “Dueling Dinosaurs,” one of the most important paleontological finds of our time.
- The Museum has successfully pivoted to being a virtual museum during the period we have been closed, one of our Education teams even winning a statewide award for their efforts.
- Our scientists have received more than \$10M in grant funding to support original research, up 260% from 2019.
- We concluded negotiations with A Time for Science in Greenville, welcoming them as the newest member of our Museum family.
- The bonds we have with our university partners have strengthened and have progressed to new academic relationships.
- With the support of DNCR and in collaboration with our funding partners, we acquired the exhibition “Race: Are We So Different?” This will give new impetus to our efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in our institution and community.
- We launched “Love Nature: the Biophilia Podcast,” which kicked off with a two-part interview with the iconic biologist Professor E. O. Wilson.

These accomplishments demonstrate the even greater potential of the museum as we adopt a cohesive vision and supporting process to strengthen our collaborations with stakeholder communities. In 2021–2023, we aim to reinforce our foundation, on the way to becoming more nimble, empowered and productive, setting a positive example for our industry nationwide. Our objectives are aligned with

the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) strategic plan 2019–2021. The goals of that plan are Accountability, Innovation & Creativity, Quality, Customer Service, Diversity & Inclusion, Safety & Health, Teamwork & Collaboration. All of these we interpret and translate in the context of our Museum's operations.

The plan outlined in the pages that follow includes work on infrastructure, building strong teams and, above all, embedding best practice into our institutional culture. Throughout this process, we will continue learning about our guests, keeping their needs and drivers front of mind. We will continue to engage in outstanding scientific scholarship and set an example to other educators in our field. We will engage North Carolina's underserved communities as a priority in our pursuit of winning minds through unlocking hearts.

Many people contributed to the production of this plan. We are grateful to the NCMNS Strategic Planning Steering Group, which led the process and drafting of this document, and to the many who participated in our strategic planning charettes. We are also deeply indebted to the many members of our community who make this work possible.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge and thank Governor Roy Cooper and DNCR, especially Secretary D. Reid Wilson and former Secretary Susi Hamilton, for their leadership and unstinting support of the Museum and its aspirations.

**Eric Dorfman, PhD**  
Director & CEO  
North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences







A man with a beard and glasses is shown in profile, looking down at a small green insect on his hand. The background is a blurred image of a globe. The text "VISION & MISSION" is overlaid on the image.

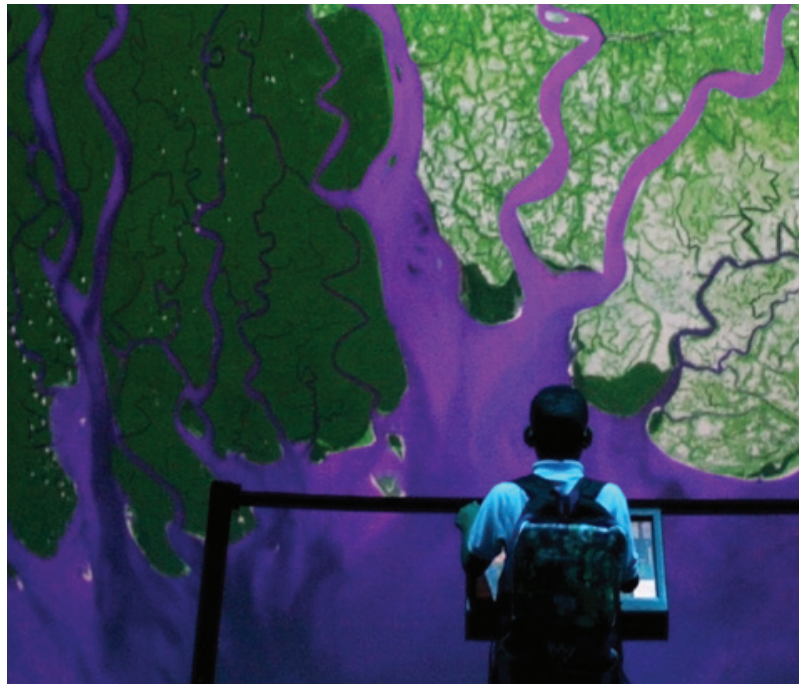
# VISION & MISSION

---

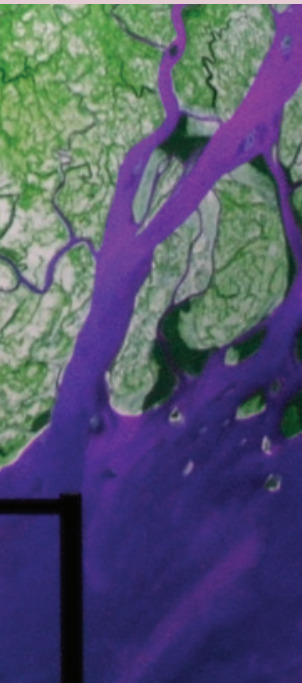
**Mission:** To illuminate the natural world and inspire its conservation.

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









# CORE VALUES

---

**Credibility.** We are committed to being a trusted voice for science, actively promoting a love for, joy in, and respect for the natural world. In everything we do, we are authentic, act ethically, with integrity and professionalism, and share a sense of fun when interacting with our communities.

**DEAI and Social Justice.** Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI), and the ability of all people to receive the basic benefits and responsibilities of social cooperation are lenses through which we view everything we do. In all cases, we celebrate diversity within our communities, strive to be mindful of our own biases, and are purposeful in how we support best social practices.

**Nature Conservation.** We believe that protecting wildlife and biodiversity is important for its own sake. In addition, in order to preserve the Earth for future generations, we advocate for the

need to reduce human impact on the environment. We also recognize that naturally functioning ecosystems are important in promoting human health and wellbeing.

**Statewide and Global Reach.** We take our profile as a North Carolina-based institution seriously, working to enhance the lives and scientific understanding of every person in the state. Equally, our knowledge of global processes crosses political boundaries and we balance our local perspectives with broader work on preserving the diversity of life on Earth and promoting planetary health.

**Creating Exceptional Life Experiences.** We strive to make a difference in people's lives, partnering with them to innovate, experiment, and create new knowledge that generates ideas to promote curiosity, community and foster an intergenerational connection to nature and science.







# SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES

---

**Basis in Evidence.** We believe conclusions should be drawn using evidence that is discoverable directly with the senses, repeatable and verifiable by others. We also put great store in the accuracy and precision of the information we collect.

**Ethical Practices.** Being ethical in our research is extremely important to us. Ethical norms — such as knowledge, truth, and avoidance of error — promote the aims of scientific research. We believe that values such as trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness are essential to collaborative work and ensure that researchers can be held accountable to the public.

**Science As a Process.** Rather than a mere set of facts, science is an ongoing process that evolves and changes as knowledge becomes greater. Science in action is about questions and how they are answered, not only about the answers themselves. This distinction is important in explaining why complex issues rarely have simple solutions.

**Scientific Literacy.** A science-literate populace can make intelligent and informed decisions that will positively affect the quality of their lives and those of their children. We believe that scientific literacy is important in providing a context for addressing societal problems and coping with adversity.

**Value of Collections.** Every specimen with good data provides a snapshot of a species or community at a particular point in time and space. We believe that museum collections are of irreplaceable value for the evidence they represent about processes, events, and interactions among people and the environment. As such, collections should be supported, and stewarded with the greatest care possible.













# INTRODUCTION

---

**To Illuminate and Inspire.** Our mission is fundamental not only in articulating our sense of purpose, but in helping set priorities around where we put our effort and resources. Our statement of mission falls naturally into two parts, focusing on illumination and inspiration. These words, while aligned, imply fundamentally different things. “Illumination” speaks to an orderly uncovering and dissemination of information. “Inspiration,” by contrast, implies creative self-expression and a call to action.

Combined, these words demonstrate a forward-thinking approach to creating and presenting knowledge. We already have the Nature Research Center, the structure of which has, since its inception, represented a new approach to natural history engagement. The upcoming addition of a new and innovative “Dueling Dinosaurs” exhibit enhances this nexus between effect and affect: a marriage between head and heart, the sciences and arts, between research and spectacle.

This relationship calls us to reexamine our brand to ensure that it strengthens the connection between rigorous science and public engagement. Over the next three years, it will also open us up to advancing work we already do well, like our citizen science program, as well as exploring new engagement opportunities,

such as artists in residence, STEAM education, environmental humanities and, importantly, the concept of biophilia.

## **Biophilia: The Love of Nature —**

**A Key Concept.** In this time of global environmental uncertainty, acknowledging the inexorable relationship we have with nature is non-negotiable. The Biophilia Hypothesis suggests that humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature. Edward O. Wilson introduced and popularized the hypothesis in his book, “Biophilia.” He defines it as “the urge to affiliate with other forms of life.” Humanity’s inherent affinity with life can be a means to unlock an interest in science that allows us to live better, and more responsibly, on the planet.


While we have recently launched a podcast dedicated to the topic, the concept also has the chance to ground and connect much of what we do at NCMNS. It can uncover similarities in disparate work areas, influence design of exhibits and programs, and guide us in crafting messages. It also opens our thinking to new and different partnerships with individuals and groups that might not have been initially obvious.









A photograph of a person sitting on a wooden boardwalk in a forest. The person is wearing a dark hoodie and shorts, and is writing in a notebook. The boardwalk is made of wooden planks and is surrounded by fallen leaves. The forest has many trees, some with green leaves and some with bare branches. The lighting is soft and natural.

*“The environment is where we all meet;  
where we all have a mutual interest; it  
is the one thing all of us share.”*

— Lady Bird Johnson





## **A KNOWLEDGEABLE AND EMPOWERED SOCIETY, MAKING DECISIONS INFORMED BY SCIENCE**

Our vision is focused firmly on the future. Interpreting it provides the basis for our work over the next three years.





### An Environment that Fosters Innovation

Trends;  
Thinking from Within;  
Inspiration from Outside



### Relevant & Influential

Research & Collections;  
Stories People Care About;  
The "It" Factor



### Nimble & Responsive

Total Quality Management;  
Business Continuity;  
Institutional Growth Framework



### Prioritizing People

People Where They Are;  
Knowing our Audiences;  
Optimizing & Activating Spaces



### Business Acumen

Resource Planning;  
Systems;  
Data Collection









# STRATEGIC GOAL 1

---

## Relevant & Influential

Influential organizations have a positive impact on the character, development, and behavior of society. To achieve that, they must be relevant. But, when the world changes as rapidly as it does today, this can be difficult. There are far more distractions, choices, opportunities and ways to communicate than in times past, which can test the strength of the bond with our public. This means we need to stay relevant. At the same time, 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 evidence of global change and interactions between people and the environment and provide a platform for research. Data management also allows us to share information where it is most needed. Together they form a scientific basis for conservation action, one of our core drivers. Over the next three years, we will provide infrastructure that supports collections, research, and species

conservation including showcasing our scientific endeavors and planning and designing spaces for enhanced storage.

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

We make discovery accessible by offering immersive experiences. Our important stories reach outside the present moment, making surprising connections between unrelated ideas. This is especially true exploring the connections between humanity and nature, and in 2021–2023 we will showcase stories that impact our lives.

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









# STRATEGIC 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 people's needs and drivers involves diagnosing their values, their style, and their emotions, and connecting with them in a way that is effective for them. This perspective is important to our efforts to address disparities that disproportionately affect underserved communities. Within the Museum, it calls on us to explore career pathways for staff to encourage tomorrow's leaders to stay with us and in our sector. From 2021 to 2023, we will expand initiatives that explore channels, languages, and voices geared to our audiences, as well as improving processes that address the needs of our team members.

**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 three years, we will work to understand the diverse needs of our audience segments so we can focus our engagement and education efforts, and better understand guest satisfaction.

### 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. Between 2021 and 2023 we will create master planning to evaluate, maintain, improve, and activate our premises to ensure our assets are protected and evolving for future generations.











# STRATEGIC 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 that is relevant for our stakeholders, and our strategy needs to harness our resources to support achieving this aspiration. This is more than simple formation of ideas. It means we will be mapping the Museum's mission, vision and offerings for 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 allows us to keep up with the latest in 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 three years we will formalize systems and capacity to monitor trends and incorporate them throughout our efforts.

**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 take action 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.

**3C. Sharpening Our External Focus.** Looking outside the boundaries of our field can yield very powerful and often surprising ideas for innovation. Between 2021 and 2023 we will develop a formal pipeline of new thinking into the Museum to create synergies, map and fill gaps in community needs, and innovate in the delivery of our exhibits, programs, and activities.









# STRATEGIC GOAL 4

---

## Nimble & Responsive

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how quickly and comprehensively our circumstances can change. Our challenge is to be able 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 changes in the systems and processes that eventually result in superior quality products and services and guarantee wise stewardship of public and private funds. In 2021–2023, we will develop and implement quality management methods to deliver a high-quality product.

**4B. Business Continuity.** Anticipating and controlling for risk allows us to account for unforeseen challenges and sometimes prevent them. By minimizing risks, we increase productivity by limiting 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.

**4C. A Framework for Institutional Growth.** Every organization goes through phases in its existence, typically from process 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 transition, once again, to another period of growth. Over the next three years, we will map out and implement these phases, specifically addressing gaps in infrastructure and business systems.









# STRATEGIC GOAL 5

---

## Business Acumen

This area of leadership thinking helps us to 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 and accountability 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 partner with 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 an aim to increasing efficiency and productivity of these work areas.

**5B. Effective Systems for Efficiency and Productivity.** Improving our efficiency is crucial for the productivity of our Museum, ensuring


opportunities for growth, greater accountability, 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.

**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.







A large flock of swans is gathered in a field of tall, golden-brown grasses. The scene is captured at sunset, with the sky and water reflecting the warm, orange and blue light. The swans are mostly in the background, appearing as soft, glowing shapes against the sky. In the foreground, the water is calm, with some reeds and grasses growing out of it. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

*“Nature holds the key to our  
aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive  
and even spiritual satisfaction.”*

— E.O. Wilson







**IMAGES COURTESY OF:** Karen Swain (front and back cover, 10–13, 15); Melissa Dowland (pages 2–5, 12–14, 16, 32–33); Mike Dunn (14–15); Sam Eubanks (18–19); Carla Burgess (22); Jeff Beane (23); Matt Zeher (24, 34).

**STRATEGIC PLAN** is printed on paper made with 100% post consumer waste, processed using chlorine-free practices, manufactured with 100% renewable, green electricity and is FSC certified which meets the mark of responsible forestry.





NORTH  
CAROLINA  
**Museum of  
Natural Sciences**

[naturalsciences.org](http://naturalsciences.org)