



HI-DESERT NATURE MUSEUM

2024 - 2028
STRATEGIC PLAN



HI-DESERT NATURE MUSEUM

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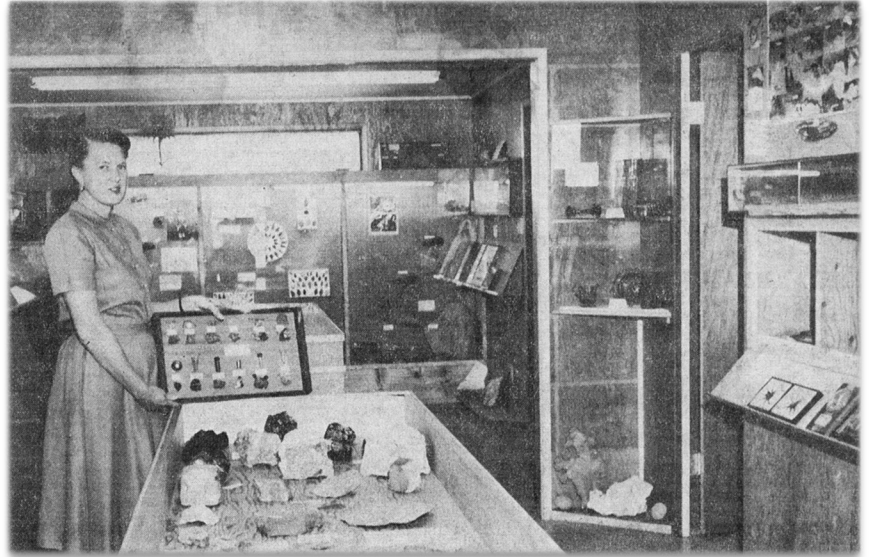
Mission Statement

The Hi-Desert Nature Museum is dedicated to the process of education by exploring the natural, artistic, and cultural heritage of the Morongo Basin and High Desert. The Museum seeks to inspire wonder, discovery, understanding, and responsibility in its community and visitors through exhibitions, programs, and collections in the arts, history, and natural sciences.



History of the Hi-Desert Nature Museum

In the spring of 1964, Parks & Recreation District Community Services Director Jerry Moore placed a newspaper ad seeking public ideas for new community programs. Evelyn Conklin and her father Percy "Slim" Conklin responded with their idea for a new nature museum. Hence, the Hi-Desert Nature Museum was born with its doors opening in October of 1964.



Operated through the County of San Bernardino Parks & Recreation Division, the 800 sq. ft. Hi-Desert Nature Museum in Jacobs Park was established primarily with items from Curator Evelyn Conklin's personal nature collection. Over the years, the museum's collection grew through generous donations from the community. At the museum's opening, a museum auxiliary was established by long-time resident Camilla Hudson to help support the museum. This auxiliary became the Museum Association in 1969 and helped bridge the financial gap needed to operate the museum.

In 1973, the HDNM moved to its current location, a 3,200 sq ft building at the newly constructed Yucca Valley Community Center. The museum was expanded yet again in 1989 with a room addition to house local animal taxidermy specimens in diorama settings. With the Town of Yucca Valley's incorporation in 1991, the HDNM was enveloped by the Town's Community Services Division and funded through the Town of Yucca Valley's discretionary General Fund. Evelyn Conklin served as Curator of the Hi-Desert Nature Museum for 28 years, retiring in 1992.

In Fall of 2023, the Yucca Valley Town Council awarded Evelyn the “Spirit of Yucca Valley” Award for her tremendous cultural contribution to town residents, with museum staff presenting the award to her in her home. She passed away on July 2, 2024.

Many of Evelyn’s contributions to the Hi-Desert Nature Museum are still evident today. From its opening, visitors would come to the museum to identify and research local minerals, flora and fauna, including wildflowers, insects, and reptiles. Evelyn also established the mini-zoo which included several different animal species including snakes and lizards.

Local artists have been celebrated at the museum since its inception. A dedicated rotating exhibit space highlights the lives and works of these artists, including Kirk Martin, Henry Mockel, Howard Pierce, Mark Junge, and many more.



The Hi-Desert Nature Museum Today

In October 2024, the Hi-Desert Nature Museum celebrated its 60th anniversary. Currently, the museum is comprised of three main sections: a rotating exhibit space, a natural history room, and a cultural/history exhibit room.

The museum's temporary exhibit space changes every eight to twelve weeks, with a wide range of exhibit topics including art, history, culture, science, and children's interactive summer exhibits. Every spring, the museum hosts an immensely popular annual community-curated recycled artwork exhibition.



Visitors will also find a natural history room which displays geology, insect, and fossil collections, as well as a desert diorama wall highlighting the flora and fauna of the High Desert. In the cultural/history area of the museum, live animals can be viewed in the mini-zoo, and culture and history exhibits spotlight local Native American tribes, mining, homesteading, and points of interest throughout the Morongo Basin. A dedicated children's area also allows children to immerse themselves in imaginative play.



The museum's current programming schedule provides educational workshops and lectures for children and adults on a variety of topics as well as children's summer camps. Recent programming has included STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) workshops for children ages 9-14, a "Minerals: Elements of Art" paint night for adults, an Earth Day Recycled Art Card Workshop for all ages, and four weeks of science and art-based children's summer camps.



In addition to educational programming, the museum hosts special events throughout the year, including free exhibit-themed fun days for community members of all ages. Spring 2024 events included a Wild West Pioneer Celebration in May and a transportation-themed family fun day in June. Activities at these free events included educational crafts, historical skill demonstrations, games, and food.

Field trips and tours are offered to visitors free of charge, and the museum staff provide presentations to local schools and homeschooling cohorts, scouting groups, church organizations, community organizations, and senior clubs.

In addition to the scheduled exhibits, educational programs, and events, the Hi-Desert Nature Museum welcomes visitors from all over the United States and the world to explore the rich local culture, history, and natural science of the Morongo Basin. In 2023, the museum welcomed over fifteen thousand visitors.



Organizational Values

The following organizational values drive the strategy, decision-making, and actions of the Hi-Desert Nature Museum and its staff.

Public Service We exist to enhance and better the lives of citizens in our region and those people visiting the Morongo Basin.	Responsibility Our practices promote fiscal, environmental, and ethical responsibility in our collections management, programming, and exhibit presentation.	Collaboration Partnerships with individuals and community organizations that share and/or are committed to our mission are essential and enhance interactions with our visitors both within and outside of the museum.
Inclusion The HDNM seeks to enrich visitors' experiences by celebrating the complexity of the area's past, present, and future through the inclusion of multiple perspectives across the demographic spectrum and strives to make its programs and exhibits accessible to all audiences.	Engagement Visitors feel connected and have more meaningful experiences when personally engaged. HDNM wants museum visitors to actively participate in and reflect on museum programming and exhibits.	Education Through both formal and informal learning, the HDNM facilitates educational discovery through educational programming/events, exhibits, and one-on-one interactions with visitors.

Vision for the Future

The vision for the Hi-Desert Nature Museum for 2024-2028 is to increase the museum's presence as an educational and cultural resource within the community. The Museum is dedicated to improving the relevance of collections and exhibits to the local area (Morongo Basin and Mojave Desert). HDNM also seeks to improve educational experiences by expanding educational interpretation of current exhibit displays, increasing the HDNM's presence within the community, and providing enriching interactive learning experiences for museum visitors.

Strategic Plan - Planning Process

The Hi-Desert Nature Museum Strategic Plan for 2024-2028 is a culmination of significant hours of research to gain a deeper understanding of the roles and best practices of public municipal museums. This strategic plan was developed with input obtained from key community stakeholders, including Hi-Desert Nature Museum staff, Town of Yucca Valley Community Services staff, Town of Yucca Valley administration, the Parks and Recreation Cultural Commission, outside museum professionals, and Hi-Desert Nature Museum visitors.

During the planning process, the 2023 National Annual Survey of Museum-Goers conducted by the American Alliance of Museums was consulted to ensure planning for programs, exhibits, and community events were relevant and up-to-date with current museum trends.



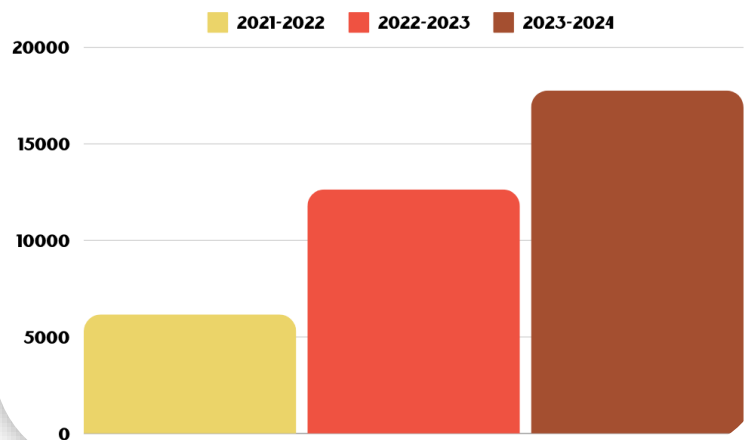
Important take-aways from the AAM survey are as follows:

- 90% of respondents think museums help them feel more connected to others. Specifically, half of respondents feel more connected to those from different cultures and half feel more connected to nature.
- 69% of respondents think museums provide intellectual stimulation and support cognitive growth.
- 60% of respondents think museums should share multiple viewpoints so visitors can consider perspectives other than their own.

ATTENDANCE - A final key takeaway from the AAM survey is that many museums are still recovering from pandemic closures, with two-thirds of museums reporting they have not yet returned to pre-pandemic attendance. While this is also true for the Hi-Desert Nature Museum, attendance has been increasing significantly on an annual basis. Post-pandemic, during FY2021/2022, the HDNM welcomed 6,162 visitors. FY2022/2023 showed an increase of 105% to 12,645 visitors, and FY2023/2024 presented another substantial increase of 40% to 17,765 visitors. These numbers are showing an increasing attendance that is rapidly reaching pre-pandemic numbers.

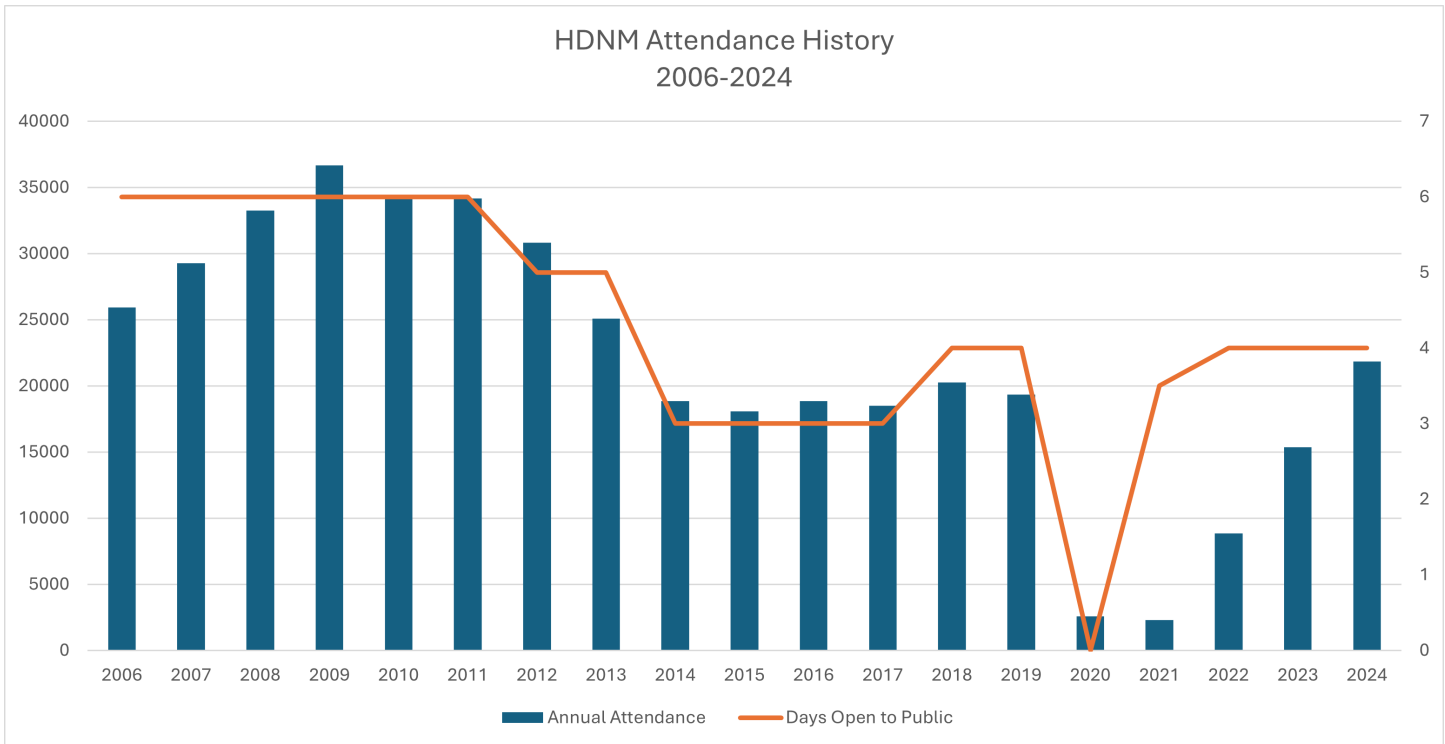
ANNUAL VISITATION (FISCAL YEARS)

Annual visitation rates for each fiscal year from 2021-2022 to 2023-2024.



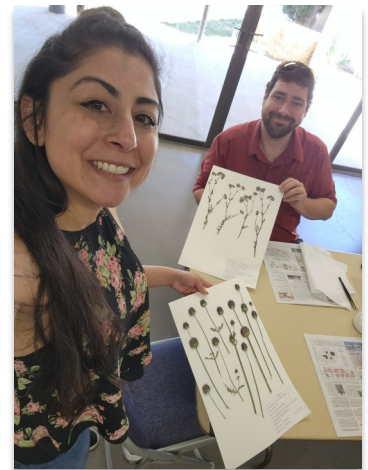
HI-DESERT NATURE MUSEUM Strategic Plan 2024-2028

Prior attendance history shows a close relationship between attendance and the number of days the museum is open to the public. From 2006 to 2024, the days open to the public have fluctuated from six to five, to four, to being closed during the pandemic, to being open for appointments only, and to the current schedule of being open to the public four days a week.



In addition to the national Annual Survey of Museum-Goers conducted by the American Alliance of Museums, the Hi-Desert Nature Museum staff conducted both formal written and informal verbal surveys of a sampling of over three hundred museum visitors from 2023-2024. Adult surveys indicated an interest in single day events/programs and hands-on workshops held in the afternoons and evenings, with 71% and 77% of respondents responding they were interested or very interested,

respectively, in those type of programs. The most selected topics of interest included local culture/history, botany, zoology, and geology.



The Youth Programming Survey indicated a desire for set weekly/monthly youth programming and single day events (81% and 83% interested or very interested, respectively). One hundred percent of respondents were interested in take-home Discovery kits with hands-on learning activities.

The primary topics of interest for youth programming included zoology, paleontology, geology, astronomy and ecology.

Summary of Strategic Goals

As a result of the planning process, the Hi-Desert Nature Museum has identified four primary strategic goals for the years 2024-2028, which are summarized below and detailed in-depth with budgetary requirements on subsequent pages.

Goal 1: Develop Meaningful Experiences for Museum Visitors

Strategies -

- * Increase Interpretation
- * Expand Programming
- * Exhibit Selection
- * Kids' Corner Development

Goal 2: Increase Community Partnerships Through Engagement and Collaboration

Strategies -

- * Revamp Current Sponsorship Program
- * Host and Participate in Community Events with Like-Missioned Organizations
- * Morongo Unified School District Grade-Level Field Trip Pilot Program

Goal 3: Focused Museum Collection Curation

Strategies -

- * Update Museum Collection Records
- * Strategically Curate Collection to HDNM Mission
- * NAGPRA Plan (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act)
- * Collection Maintenance

Goal 4: Update HDNM Facilities, Equipment, and Branding

Strategies -

- * Increase Backyard Usability for Programs and Events (Measure Y)
- * Modernize Mini-Zoo Exhibit (Measure Y)
- * Develop Plan for Permanent Outdoor Space
- * Logo and Marketing Redesign



Goal 1: Develop Meaningful Experiences for Museum Visitors

Strategy 1 - Increase Interpretation

Objective: Enhance current permanent exhibits with educational interpretive texts. Exhibit areas in need of updated or new educational labeling include the Animal Dioramas, Mini-Zoo, Geology Glow Room, and Mining exhibit.



Strategy 2 - Expand Programming

Objective: Grow diverse audiences through additional programming and events. The addition of a second part-time Museum Assistant would allow for expanded hours and programming during summers and breaks in addition to helping with collection management in the off season.

Strategy 3 - Exhibit Selection

Objective: Attract and inspire visitors through exhibitions that combine scholarly progress, public appeal, and community involvement. Ensure temporary exhibits represent a combination of the HDNM's mission of education in the arts, culture, and natural history of the Morongo Basin and appeal to a wide demographic.

Strategy 4 - Kids' Corner Development

Objective: Increase hands-on scientific exploration of children ages 3-12 in the Kids' Corner, focusing on Natural History of the Morongo Basin and Mojave Desert. Create a design plan for a Kids' Corner redesign which includes new interactive, hands-on, science-based exhibits for children ages 3-12 years old.



Measures of Success

- ◆ Continued growth in public engagement through attendance at the museum and at programs and events.
- ◆ Creation and installation of didactic texts on permanent exhibits.
- ◆ Kids' Corner redesign plan complete with space lay-out, science-based activity ideas, imaginary play areas and detailed cost/expense report.

Fiscal Impact and Budgetary Requirements



Funding is currently provided for needed printing, operating supplies and professional services to implement these strategies in FY24/25 and FY 25/26. Expanding programming and hours would necessitate the hiring of an additional museum assistant at .5 FTE.

Funding will need to be continued and increased into FY26/27 and FY27/28 to account for cost increases due to inflation as well as for development of remodeled Kids' Corner once the design stage is completed.

Goal 2: Increase Community Partnerships Through Engagement and Collaboration

Strategy 1 - Revamp Current Sponsorship Program

Objective: Revamp the outdated sponsorship program by developing a new community sponsorship program with a variety of support levels, including corporate sponsorship opportunities, in order to drive revenue and increase museum visitation while providing valuable benefits to community members.

Strategy 2 - Host and Participate in Community Events with Like-Missioned Organizations

Objective: Increase partnerships with local organizations by attending community outreach opportunities and hosting mutually beneficial collaborative events, such as a community-wide Earth Day Celebration.



Strategy 3 - MUSD Grade Level Field Trip Pilot Program

Objective: In collaboration with the Morongo Unified School District, develop a standards-based grade level field trip program and pilot the program with one local Yucca Valley elementary school.

Measures of Success

- ♦ The new Community Sponsorship Program will be developed with a list of membership levels, their cost/benefits, and possible incentives.
- ♦ HDNM will organize an Earth Day event with collaboration invitations extended to interested, like-missioned organizations to participate.
- ♦ HDNM staff will network with other community organizations at their local events in order to establish relationships and discuss possible future collaborative programming.
- ♦ The MUSD grade level pilot program will be implemented with a local Yucca Valley school in which all classes from the grade level receive an educational lesson from the HDNM Education & Engagement Coordinator and also attend a follow-up field trip to the HDNM.

Fiscal Impact and Budgetary Requirements



Funding is currently provided for needed printing, operating supplies and professional services to implement these strategies in FY24/25 and FY 25/26.

Funding will need to be continued and increased into FY26/27 and FY27/28 to account for cost increases due to inflation as well as for expansion of the MUSD grade level field trip program which will transition from a pilot program to a full program after the first two years.

Goal 3: Focused Museum Collection Curation

Strategy 1 - Update Museum Collection Records

Objective: Update online inventory and PastPerfect Collection Management Software for usability and record-keeping. Currently, 30% of the museum collection is accurately recorded in PP. We will increase record management by inputting a minimum of 5% of unrecorded items (approximately 130) each year. Each unrecorded collection item can take up to sixty minutes to update, more if research is needed.

Strategy 2 - Strategically Curate Collection for HDNM Mission

Objective: Develop a working list of collection items which do not meet the mission of the Hi-Desert Nature Museum and are eligible for deaccession.

Strategy 3 - NAGPRA Plan

Objective: Create a plan of action for NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) in order to inventory Native American collection items, repatriate items to their native tribes, and/or obtain permission to display current museum collection items.

Strategy 4 - Collection Maintenance

Objective: Improve long-term storage of collection items to ensure collection integrity.

Measures of Success

- ♦ An increase of museum collection records in PastPerfect by 20% after four years.
- ♦ A list of eligible collection items and their associated tribe as described under NAGPRA. Initial contact letters written and mailed to tribes seeking permission to display and/or requesting repatriation of listed items.
- ♦ A document detailing collection items which no longer meet the mission of the HDNM and are eligible for deaccession.
- ♦ A written plan for improvements needed to current museum storage practices in order to better maintain collection items for both long-term storage and emergency preparedness/protection.

Fiscal Impact and Budgetary Requirements



Funding is currently provided for needed operating supplies and professional services to implement these strategies in FY24/25 and FY 25/26.

Funding will need to be continued and increased into FY26/27 and FY27/28 to account for cost increases due to inflation as well as for any necessary improvements to current collection storage practices.

Goal 4: Update HDNM Facilities, Equipment, and Branding

Strategy 1 - Increase Backyard Usability for Programming and Events

Objective: Clean up and create a usable outdoor space by designing and installing exterior features which will appeal to the public and make the space usable for outdoor programs and events.

Strategy 2 - Modernize Mini-Zoo Exhibit

Objective: Update the structural and artistic design of the popular live animal mini-zoo to enhance the appearance and continuity with other museum exhibits and increase the educational impact for museum visitors.

Strategy 3 - Develop Plan for Permanent Outdoor Space and Upgrade Storage

Objective: Create a plan for an extension of outdoor space including permanent storage and education structure in order to meet the growing needs of the HDNM. Install a new replacement 12x24 storage shed for current museum supplies such as pedestals, acrylic cases, portable tables, and educational materials. Current shed, installed in 1987, has outlived its useful life.

Strategy 4 - Logo and Marketing Redesign

Objective: Develop a new marketing brand for the HDNM including a new logo and marketing materials such as brochures and merchandise. Current HDNM logo is seventeen years old.

Measures of Success

- ♦ The creation of a usable outdoor “backyard” space with shade, tool storage solutions, privacy fencing, resurfaced concrete flooring, pavers, and seating which can be used for expanded programs and events.
- ♦ The completion of a mural on the Mini-Zoo wall which ties into the color-scheme and design of other museum exhibits while highlighting educational information on desert animals.
- ♦ A written plan with a map and description of needed permanent exterior space including storage options and an educational space for field trips or programming. Demolition of current 12x24 shed and the purchase, installation, and insulation of new storage shed.
- ♦ The creation of a new logo representing the Hi-Desert Nature Museum along with the creation of new marketing materials with updated merchandising.

Fiscal Impact and Budgetary Requirements



Funding is currently provided for Strategies 1 and 2 through a Measure Y Museum Improvement Project funding allocation for FY24/25 and FY 25/26.

Funding will need to be continued and increased into FY26/27 and FY27/28 to account for cost increases due to inflation, professional services to assist with a permanent outdoor space design of \$7,000, and the cost to purchase, install, and insulate a 12x24' storage shed (\$25,000).

Appendix A

Strategic Plan Outreach

The 2024-2028 Strategic Plan was an intentional, thoughtful collaboration among several vital stakeholders of the Hi-Desert Nature Museum. The following stakeholders contributed to the development of this Strategic Plan:

Hi-Desert Nature Museum:

- ♦ Museum Supervisor, Celeste Hilderbrand: BS Anthropology, 13+ years experience in education/museum fields
- ♦ Collections & Exhibits Coordinator, Charlie Rossow: BA Art History, 27+ years of experience in the library/museum fields
- ♦ Education & Engagement Coordinator, Zachary Fleming-Boyles: BA Art Practice, 13+ years experience in education/museum fields

Town of Yucca Valley:

- ♦ Curtis Yakimow, Town Manager
- ♦ Susan Earnest, Community Services Manager
- ♦ Town of Yucca Valley Strategic Plan

Parks and Recreation Cultural Commission:

- ♦ Ed Keesling, PRCC Member

La Quinta Museum:

- ♦ Sharla Fox, Museum Director

Community Members:

- ♦ During 2023 and 2024, the Hi-Desert Nature Museum staff conducted four surveys of community members in order to obtain exhibit, event, and programming feedback. These four surveys resulted in 347 responses which were consulted during the creation of the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan.
- ♦ American Alliance of Museums: 2023 National Annual Survey of Museum-Goers

Appendix B

Strategic Plan 2024-2028 Timeline & Extra Budget Costs

To-Do

Name	Status	Due date	Extra Budget
Develop Meaningful Experiences for Museum Visitors	Working on it	2028-06-30	
Name			
Increase Interpretation	Working on it	2026-06-30	\$ 5,000.00
Expand Programming		2028-06-30	
Kids' Comer Update/Development		2027-06-30	\$ 20,000.00
Increase Community Partnerships Through Engagement and Collaboration	Working on it	2028-06-30	
Name			Budget
Host and participate in additional community wide events, i.e. Earth Day.		2027-06-30	
MUSD Field Trip Pilot Program		2026-06-30	
Focused Museum Collection Curation	Working on it	2028-06-30	
Name	Status		Budget
Update Museum Collection Records		2028-06-30	
NAGRPA Compliance		2028-06-30	
Collection Maintenance		2025-06-30	\$10,000
- Install new mini-splits for temperature regulation			
Update HDNM Facility, Equipment, and Branding	Working on it	2028-06-30	
Name			Budget
Increase Backyard Usability		2026-06-30	\$ 15,000.00
- New 10x12' tool shed, fencing, shade sails			
Modernize Mini-Zoo Exhibit		2025-06-30	\$ 3,500.00
- New glass cases, heating units			
Develop Plan for Permanent Exterior Space and Upgrade Storage		2026-06-30	\$ 32,000.00
- Consult w/Holt & New 12x24' storage unit			
Logo and Marketing Redesign	Working on it	2025-06-30	\$ 7,000.00
- New logo, signage, shirts, merchandise			
			\$ 92,500.00