
Planning for the Future to Preserve the Past

Vermilionville Living History Museum and Folklife Park



Completed 04.24.2020. Effective 06.01.2020.

David Garcia

4/24/2020

Chief Executive Officer

Date

Bayou Vermilion District Board President ¹

Date

¹ Now that boards can vote remotely, the board will vote and sign at the May 27th Board meeting. The CEO has approved and is signing digitally.




Executive Summary

This Strategic Plan represents the latest iteration of thirty years of inquiries and challenges, assessments and planning, experimentation and evaluation, trial and error, successes and failures, experiences and discoveries, laughter and tears, joy and sorrow. Indeed, when the Bayou Vermilion District was first tasked with creating a new type of economic development through cultural tourism, a plan was hatched to meet a growing demand among the general public and a critical need for the local population. Lafayette Parish authorities, under the leadership of the local chamber of commerce, recognized our over-dependence upon the oil and gas sector, even though it had raised the standard of living for the area that had remained mostly impoverished since the end of the Civil War, through the Great Depression and up to the end of WWII. The downturn in the petroleum industry of the early 1980s, coupled with the nation-wide interest in all things Cajun, directed their efforts to create a space that would attract visitors from around the country and the globe, as well as a place where traditional crafts could be demonstrated and passed down. Thirty years ago, on April 1, 1990, Vermilionville Living History Museum and Folklife Park opened its doors to the public for the first time. Since then, over a million visitors from all fifty states and dozens of countries have come through our doors. Vermilionville has been lauded by many as the centerpiece of our region's cultural tourism industry that has flourished into a vital part of the overall economy.

The last thirty years have not been without their challenges. The impetus to highlight the Acadian side of our history had the detrimental effect of obfuscating and oversimplifying the complexity of the large array of cultures that contributed essential elements to that history. In spite of the original mission to highlight the cultures of Native American and peoples of African descent, it was only in recent years the staff and leadership committed it to writing in plans and institutional documents toward that end. Vermilionville is making great strides to include the many voices who came together to tell the story of the region in a multi-faceted approach. This strategic plan reflects not only the different narratives but also the allocation of physical spaces dedicated to the telling of those stories.

After thirty years and several strategic plans, the time has come once again to reassess our goals and objectives. Our application for accreditation with the American Alliance of Museums proved the impetus for that process. However, as we reach the end of this journey, we have run into a formidable obstacle: the COVID-19 pandemic. Museums, restaurants, and large public gatherings have been shut down, and as of this writing, there is no real certainty as when we will be allowed to operate, nor under what circumstances, once the ban is lifted. Nonetheless, this planning process has put us into a better position for handling emergency situations and given us the mindset necessary to prepare for our eventual re-opening.

As part of this process, we interviewed numerous stakeholders, either in person or through written questions. These stakeholders ranged from elected officials and business leaders, to members of local cultures we are tasked with representing, to arts and culture professionals. We sought out and received their input as well our members' and regular visitors' ideas on how to improve representing the history and culture of the area. This strategic plan reflects the input of all our stakeholders' thoughts, opinions, and suggestions.



During this process, the Bayou Vermilion District Commission had one resignation of a board member and three term-limited board members who left. Fortunately, one of the new board members was a former board member who was still eligible to serve. Another already had experience with our organization as a volunteer. The other two were very proactive in informing themselves by taking a tour of all our operations and by speaking directly to many employees to understand where we stood in the accreditation process and our overall activities and procedures. All four received information packets outlining their duties and responsibilities as board members.

This plan also takes into account several outside factors that either will directly or indirectly affect Vermilionville. The biggest project is by far the planned Interstate-49 (I-49) Connector, which will most likely have an on/off ramp near Vermilionville.² Bringing the thruway up to interstate standards, has long been in the planning stages. The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development has been studying how best to build the 5.5-mile stretch, which goes from just south of the airport up to the intersection of I-10 and I-49. Lack of funding, superannuated environmental impact studies, and opposition from surrounding neighborhood groups have delayed the project. The proposed interstate has catalyzed improvement projects along the corridor to mitigate any detrimental effects that may be incurred through the passage of a major highway through the heart of the city. Our proximity to the airport assures that access to Vermilionville will not be interrupted once the work begins. However, the continued delays and the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 crisis may delay the improvements planned.

I-49 corridor improvements include the development of Heymann Park, located directly across the bayou from Vermilionville. Plans are being made that may or may not begin anytime soon, which fall under the authority of the Lafayette Consolidated Government. The general idea is to create a river walk and fishing pier on the eastern bank of the Vermilion. There are also plans to connect the east bank to Vermilionville on the west bank by a footbridge that would land near our proposed Watershed Lab and Exhibit building. The landscape design around the building would be a complement to the transformation of Heymann Park and even connect it to the Atakapa-Ishak trail that passes directly in front of Vermilionville. We are moving forward with the construction of the Watershed building as the other projects are not under our control. We are nonetheless preparing to be a part of those plans when they come to fruition.

It is our pleasure to present our strategic plan as part of our accreditation process. You will find below, in addition to our vision and mission statements, our three main goals and how we plan to achieve them. They are 1) Museum Excellence, 2) Broadening Community Support, and 3) Organizational Effectiveness. These goals were chosen in accordance with our vision and mission statements. In order to achieve excellence and accreditation, we must constantly and consistently better programming, interpretation, inclusion and the conservation of our cultural and natural resources. By broadening community support, we can engage the very people in the surrounding community who are, in many cases, descendants of those populations whose lives we portray. Since we are in large part funded by local taxes, we must demonstrate to the public and local elected officials that we are spending its money judiciously, thus encouraging the decennial renewal of the millage. Finally, the best way to fulfill our

² The Evangeline Thruway, which is adjacent to Vermilionville and the Lafayette Regional Airport, is a major highway that connects areas south and east of Lafayette to I-49.

vision and mission is to ensure organizational effectiveness. By improving our human resource processes and staff satisfaction, identifying and remediating impediments to a diversified board and staff, solidifying our fundraising infrastructure and planning collaboratively, we will ensure the longevity of the Museum as we enter this uncertain period in history due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Appendices are placed with their corresponding strategies and include action plans, reference guides, and supporting documentation.

The following plan will be included in all external and internal reporting processes for the Museum. Summarized versions of the plan will be included in our board reports, posted on our website, and printed in our newsletter and public Annual Report. We will have six-month check-in meetings and annual meetings in October/November to review the accomplishments of the previous year's operating plan and to create the next annual operating plan.³ It will be required reading for new staff and board members to ensure succession during voluntary and involuntary turnover.

Appendix A – 2020 Operational Plan and Implementation Tools


Organization Profile and History

In 1984, the Bayou Vermilion Restoration Foundation, Inc. commissioned the 1985 Bayou Vermilion Corridor Master Plan for the Lafayette Parish Bayou Vermilion District. Issues and goals were identified in public workshops and by a taskforce. The Plan outlines opportunities along the bayou between 1985 and 1995 as well as longer-range projects. Among these plans were the two goals of preserving Acadian Culture and Archeological Indian Sites. The Commission believed that Lafayette Parish had a potential for diversified economic development, public enjoyment, and civic identity. Goals to accomplish the preservation of culture included participation in programs and events that promote Lafayette's position as the Center of Acadian Culture and preservation of Archeological Sites and of the related Indian Cultures. The creation and evolution of Vermilionville Living History Museum and Folklife Park fulfilled some of these goals and became a central staging area for the Bayou Vermilion District's environmental projects and educational events.

Vermilionville opened Sunday April 1st 1990 to a crowd of four thousand visitors. In the first month, the Museum averaged about six hundred people a day. Many contracted and volunteer groups guided Vermilionville in the first decade, including the nonprofit Bayou Vermilion Restoration Foundation, the Historic Steering and Vermilionville committees (some members who later joined the Historic Foundation Friends of Vermilionville), and a brief contract with Tolson Management Company which purchased artifacts and collaborated on interpretation and exhibits for the Museum opening. In 1994, a Vermilionville Historic Foundation and then Lafayette Parish Bayou Vermilion District signed a management agreement splitting responsibilities for the management of the Museum. In 2000 the Vermilionville Living History Museum Foundation incorporated with the state.

In 2006, the Vermilionville Director became the CEO of BVD, Vermilionville's parent organization, and this merger of 2 management positions became permanent.

³ During financial budgeting for the following year.



Since 2006, a single chief executive officer has served as the director of Vermilionville and the Bayou Vermilion District.

In 2012, BVD and Vermilionville rebranded and appointed its first permanent curator. Prior to 2012, Vermilionville only intermittently had a curator and usually only for a few years. In 2017 Vermilionville completed its Core Documents for Accreditation with the American Alliance of Museums and started its journey to meet the standards of excellence for museums.

As of 2016, Vermilionville is comprised of several types of departments: those that encompass BVD *and* Vermilionville-related duties (Communications and Outreach, Office Manager, Maintenance, Environmental Awareness), mostly revenue generating (Giftshop and Hospitality), and mostly mission related duties (Curatorial, Museum Operations).

On March 14th and 15th, we cancelled our regularly scheduled Cajun Jam and Sunday Dance until further notice. On March 16th, the state and local government ordered the shutdown of several businesses, including entertainment venues. We were permitted to keep our gift shop and restaurant open, but we decided to end those services as well when we saw wholly inadequate customer traffic. On Wednesday April 1st, 2020 Vermilionville celebrated its 30th anniversary while we were temporarily closed to the public due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Vision

Vermilionville Living History Museum and Folk Life Park will be recognized locally, nationally and internationally for celebrating the vibrant shared south Louisiana history and cultures with impactful programs and interpretation that engage and inspire visitors today and for generations to come.

Mission

Vermilionville's mission is to increase appreciation for the history, culture, and natural resources of the Native Americans, Acadians, Creoles and peoples of African descent in the Attakapas region through the end of the 1800s. Through historic interpretation and conservation along the Bayou Vermilion, we strive to educate guests on the interactions of these groups and the connections between past and contemporary folklife, thus empowering guests to apply these lessons from our shared histories.




Museum Excellence

As a steward of historic integrity, the Museum provides visitors intellectual and educational enrichment and compelling interpretation with ethically managed collections.

Vermilionville's staff and Accreditation Planning Committee identified Museum Excellence as an area for improvement through internal and external surveys, consultation, the accreditation application process, interviews, and analysis of institutional documents.

Internal surveys and meetings revealed inconsistent collecting practices, unclear training materials, and lack of institutional memory, ultimately revealing the need for better internal communication of industry standards. With the lack of early documentation for Vermilionville's collections and the most recent research and interviews in preparation for the 30th anniversary, it became clear that institutional memory loss was a continuous problem in the Museum's history. Documentation about past programs, interpretive materials, and planning are too dispersed or non-existent for use in future planning. Creating a program portfolio, interpretation plan, and comprehensive collecting plan will lay the foundations for museum excellence in the next five years for future staff and leadership.

We used two hundred external surveys and community consultations to identify Museum Excellence as a priority. The surveys and workshops provided a visitor



perspective on museum themes, perceived focus, and personal connections to the content. The external surveys opened discussions about future visitor and non-visitor surveys and analysis of the information gathered during strategic planning. Visitors' frequently asked questions focused on object-based interests and interactions which inform the approach and interpretation. Annual Interpretive Training Workshops with the staff engaged community groups, allowing them to answer staff questions and assist in identifying opportunities for improvement, actively informing the interpretive planning process. These workshops also helped improve our internal processes for inclusion and our understanding of our geographic communities.

Our Accreditation Peer Review Site Visit report identified the need to clarify our interpretive focus and whose history we interpret, and to review our mission. In the next five years Vermilionville will build on the clarified mission statement by aligning programs and interpretation with a "Big Idea"⁴ and best practices. Three clarified points in our interpretation include whose history and culture we interpret, how strongly we should emphasize the Museum's role in conservation of natural resources, and what is our "why."

In our founding documents and early-published materials, the "why" of Vermilionville focused on helping local and international visitors understand their own and other's history, as well as propagate local folklife. We believe that understanding builds empathy and the importance of empathy has increased with the public health and economic crisis. We will use the information gathered from stakeholders to provide what value we can in the next five years. The arrival of a global pandemic required a swift and comprehensive review of the virtual and offsite accessibility of the Museum's educational resources. We revised tasks and approaches for the plan and Appendix A – First Year Operating Plan, and will meet in November 2020 to create the 2021 Operating Plan. Our strategies for the first year will focus on cost-free approaches, financial recovery, and providing digital learning.

Strategies

We will build on the research and information gathered during the accreditation process to improve staff manuals, monthly mandatory trainings, and documentation of Museum history to prevent information loss, and clarification in external collaborations.

By 2025 we will have interpretive content, programmatic offerings, tour packages, teacher trainings, and education materials aligned with the mission and each other, ensuring future excellence.

We will use inclusive practices to accomplish all of these strategies. For Vermilionville, inclusion means creating positive representations of our mission's cultures and relevant interpretation for visitors both local and international. Once this goal is reached through inclusion, Vermilionville staff will create a new survey to measure visitor and non-visitor perceptions of Vermilionville. Of the two hundred external surveys taken in preparation for this strategic plan, only four fill-in responses mention Native Americans and fifteen mention Creole as part of Vermilionville's impact and offerings. That is compared to about ninety fill-in response mentions of Acadians and Cajuns. A successful inclusion process in all strategies will result in more visitor responses reflecting a general understanding of the Museum's core mission.

⁴ Beverly Serrell

1 Program Excellence

We used review of past strategic plans, interviews with former directors, and strategic planning worksheets to select consultation groups for programs, contribution to scholarship through conferences, and financial planning as the most important tasks for program excellence. A Program Portfolio will address past and present programs for the most efficient planning and communication of priorities to all stakeholders.

In 2019 staff and board members created the Native American Committee focused on continuing and developing the relationships with Louisiana's indigenous people. Vermilionville had intermittent Native American inclusion over the past thirty years, with Native American participation, representation, and engagement by tribes as shareholders waxing and waning with different tribes and tribal groups over time. The goal of this committee is to explore the steps taken in the past, assess our current relationships, share information, resources, and ideas in order to shape Vermilionville's relationships in a consistent and balanced manner with Louisiana's indigenous peoples, and to move forward in a respectful and inclusive way. The committee is currently comprised of two Vermilionville staff members and three members of the Foundation Board. This committee will always include a member of the Museum Operations department and a member of the Curatorial department, as this will help to ensure that both contemporary and historical culture are being weighed in conversation and program development.

Increased subject experts and professionals on the Bayou Vermilion District and Vermilionville staff opens the opportunity for contributions towards scholarship through a conference uniting the different cultural and environmental aspects of the mission. In 2019 both Bayou Vermilion District and Vermilionville staff recognized a critical need, as well as an opportunity to host an academic conference to explore the connections between cultures and their closely related natural resources, focusing on why and how to preserve, conserve, and restore those resources. This program aims to highlight the organization's efforts in both fields, and to offer a platform for experts to share their research and perspectives in an effort to increase our collective knowledge base. The staff plans to secure expert speakers from across the nation who will attract conference attendees from relevant fields and organizations, so that they may return to their own context with new perspectives and management strategies. The staff began coordinating efforts to design the conference, and plan to host the first one within a three-year timeframe. Program success will be evaluated through inaugural attendance, return attendance, surveys, eventual expansion and monitoring of potential revenue.

Year 1:

- A. Prioritize programs based on mission and sustainability. Complete a program portfolio that includes
 - Past programs
 - Present programs
 - Potential programs.

Staff will also look for opportunities for improvement to emerge from the Portfolio process to set priorities for the five-year plan.

Measures of success:

- Compiled tangible information for current and recent past (10 years) programs: attendance, expenses, revenue.
 - All current programs assessed based on the Mission/Sustainability worksheet
 - Lower-performing programs are assessed for possibilities for improvement (mission value up/ attendance up/ cost down, etc.)
 - Successful implementation of a Culture-Nature-Art conference.
- B. Continue the Native American Committee.

Measures of success:

- A complete (and documented) understanding of the history of relationships between Vermilionville and the many tribes and tribal groups of Louisiana.
- A unified plan for engagement with tribes, tribal communities, and indigenous individuals as part of our Culture Day series.
- A balanced committee that can focus on any upcoming concerns, issues, or programming opportunities for Vermilionville in regard to Louisiana tribes and tribal communities.
- An increase in the number of tribes and tribal communities that Vermilionville interacts with regularly.

Year 3:

- A. Add an annual conference uniting the natural and culture aspects of our mission.
- B. Reimagining Culture Days.

Year 5:

- A. Analyze sustainability of new programs, invest in high mission, high sustainability programs, divest low mission and low sustainability, gauge value of further investment in low mission/ high sustainability and high mission/ low sustainability programs.
- B. Begin to contribute to scholarship on the conference theme.

Appendix B – Worksheet for Program Analysis

2 Interpretive Excellence

Interpretive planning will address the clarification of the mission statement, as well as the vision for an inclusive, accurate, relevant interpretation. The final product will be an Interpretive Plan and Training Manual. The plan will consolidate the materials we provide to artisans, tour guides, and teachers, as well as outward facing materials to streamline training, online resources, and media statements about our houses, cultures, and crafts.

Interviews with former employees about past programs and interpretation provided valuable information about approaches to interpretation. Continuing the interviews will give staff a better understanding of missing institutional information and opportunities for better evaluation.

The Curatorial Department started interpretive planning by creating a “resources and ideas” inventory, looking through past documents and observing present practices.

We are using *Exhibit Labels* by Beverly Serrel to create a “Big Idea” that tour guides will use to scaffold the information presented through the village. This will also help us create measurable learning objectives along interpretive themes.

Artisans and tour guides receive primary and secondary source materials throughout the year, monthly interpretive presentations, and annual workshops as part of interpretive training. The Museum Operations Department tests the artisans on written materials after they have had a chance to review the materials.

In addition to program collaborations, content is continually checked and reviewed for ethical representation. The Curator requests feedback from the subject experts on Vermilionville Living History Museum Foundation (VLHMF, or Foundation) for any changes to existing materials or ideas, and asks for recommendations about content from consultations. The Curator requests a guest-curated exhibit from a community member, tribe, or other museum annually.

In an effort to provide front-line staff with the interpretive tools they need without adding too many hours to their week, the Curator started annual workshops and monthly “Pastries and Pastimes” learning opportunities. In 2018, based on feedback about training from the artisans and curatorial staff, the Curator started the first annual interpretive workshop. Each workshop is a daylong event with speakers and discussions about a theme or culture. The Annual Interpretive Workshops are organized by the Curator but lead by subject experts or community members.

Finally, we will align learning objectives, teacher resources, tour add-ons, and interpretive training with mission and collections.

Year 1:

- A. Create the Museum’s “Big Idea,” learning objectives, and Interpretive Plan for exhibits and the village. Update lesson plans and pre-visit tour materials.
- B. Develop guided tours for children in a manner that is age appropriate and relevant, rather than a diluted version of the adult tour. Have teachers review the tours in action.
- C. Define the cultures in our mission with stakeholder input.
- D. Interview former directors and curators to include their perspectives and lessons learned.
- E. Apply the pre and post surveys conducted at Interpretive Training Workshops into the Interpretive Plan and Training Manual. Invite presenters to comment on the Interpretive Plan and join consultation committees.

Measure of Success

- Support and increased participation from consulted groups in the planning process.
- K-12 children show understanding and engagement with the tour materials.

Year 3:

- A. Measure learning objectives with observation, intercept surveys, and pre and post surveys for guided tours.
- B. Schedule a complimentary tour to Board members and subjects experts and conduct pre and post surveys.

C. Apply collected feedback to the new interpretive process.

Measure of Success

- Completed Interpretation Plan and Training Manual.

Year 5:

A. Write and distribute an artifacts binder for artisan use.

B. Remove “non-active” collections from display areas.

Measures of Success:

- Guided tours and in-house interpretation have a distinct connectivity that points to a collective whole and inspires our guests as outlined in the mission statement.
- Interpreters are equipped to discuss a wide-range of challenging topics.
- Have diverse interpretive perspectives for all artifacts and a display method of artifacts that supports the interpretive theme of the exhibit space.

Appendix C – Interpretive Master Plan Project

3 Cultural and Natural Resource Conservation

To meet best practices for collections, Vermilionville is creating an Institutional Collecting Policy and an Institutional Collecting Plan, aligning collecting across all departments. We will increase the institutional reputation for responsible Collection and conservation of collections. Our many collections include living, natural history, historical, and architectural collections. Our Restoration Specialist will create a Repair Log and Restoration Specialist Manual to centralize records about our historic houses and ensure historic preservation practices specific to each house are documented.

Year 1:

A. Complete a useable Collecting Plan and Policy.

B. Applied for a grant to fast track collections inventory.

Year 3:

A. Continue to professionalize the internship program with learning goals and an updated Memorandum of Understanding with the ULL Department of History Public History Program.

B. Write and grant or fundraise for a Collections Assessment Program. ⁵

C. Create a third collection on the Louisiana Digital Library with one hundred artifacts from Vermilionville’s permanent collections.

Year 5:

A. We will be a touring and training resource for the University of Louisiana at Lafayette History and Public History Program.

B. Digitize and add objects to Vermilionville’s three collections on Louisiana Digital Library

⁵ <https://www.imls.gov/grants/available/collections-assessment-preservation-program>

Measures of Success:

- Vermilionville will have a reputation for excellent collections, conservation practices, and accessible collections.
- Collections management and research is profession enough to be a training resource for the University Program.
- Digital access to prioritized collections.

Appendix D – Collections Policy and Collecting Plan Outline

4 Improving the Visitor Experience

In addition to creating and measuring learning objectives, we intend our visitors to have a positive experience in a welcoming environment. Visitor comfort is very important to the museum experience, and we will plan for the health and safety of visitors short term and measure the quality of museum experience long term.

When disaster, pandemic, or other emergencies call for the closing of Vermilionville, we will continue to partner with local agencies to provide educational assets to the community in several different mediums. We are currently partnering with Acadiana Open Channel (AOC), The United Way of Acadiana, the Pugh Family Foundation, Acadiana Center for the Arts, Lafayette Public School System, and other education/culture-based museums and organizations. We will develop short (10- 30 minute) segments for the AOC that will feature music, cultural stories or stories in Louisiana French, craft demonstrations, and/or lesson plans that will be broadcast for free in our area. Many of these are designed for a student at home to be able to follow along, either independently or with family members, with materials that are included or readily available.

These resources will also be shared on our Facebook page, but the AOC partnership AOC is vital because it vastly extends accessibility. While not every home has a computer with internet access, virtually every home will have a television, and the AOC's channels do not require subscription from any service. This allows Vermilionville to serve both as educational assets in times when the Museum is closed, and as a resource for students and families in our community that are at-home during school and/or work closures.

Year 1:

- A. Create a safe reopen plan following the COVID – 19 quarantine period.
- B. Create televised/radio/online opportunities for quarantined and affected community members.
- C. The Museum Operations department will conduct visitor engagement training for artisans based on museum audience research and development methodology.
- D. Locate visitor experience surveys produced by all departments for all experiences.
- E. Conduct a Pastries and Pastimes on museum visitor studies.

Measures of success:

- Curatorial and Museum Operations will oversee the development of a “distance-engagement” program that will be activated whenever Vermilionville must be closed for any extended period of time.
- Vermilionville is prepared to instantly switch to this “distance-engagement” program.
- Have an ongoing collection process of content formatted for social media or television as an education resource for our community and keep Vermilionville in people’s minds.
- This content will display both curatorial and programmatic aspects of Vermilionville, (i.e. sharing about artifacts, and also craft and/or music demonstrations) as well as other educational resources, such as lesson plans developed for this purpose.

Year 3:

- A. Create surveys to measure visitors’ comfort modeled after the “Visitor Bill of Rights” (see Appendix E.1)
- B. Centralize visitor experience survey results across departments for the previous five years.
- C. Measure length of stay of self-guided visitors, one possible quantification of quality of experience.

Year 5:

- A. Measure success of visitor experience and adjust training and offerings based on feedback.
- B. Update site plan based upon visitors’ needs and input.

Measure of Success:

- Visitors feel comfortable, welcome, respected, challenged, edified, socialized, and energized. Walk-in visitors spend an average of three hours exploring all of Vermilionville’s offerings and have a “flow experience.”⁶

Appendix E.1: Visitors’ Bill of Rights

⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi



Broadening Community Support

We reinforce and strengthen the active and informed support of the Museum's mission within intersecting communities in today's world. The Museum reinforces relationships with current stakeholders and builds new advocates from all facets of our current socio-political-economic environment and culture.

In at least the last ten years, Vermilionville has three main funding sources: earned income, grants, and funds from our parent organization. Staff and leadership identified financial sustainability in the 2017-2020 strategic plan and the necessary infrastructure and research began during the Accreditation Self Study. Our peer reviewers noted financial diversification as a necessary goal, and Vermilionville Living History Museum Foundation (VLHMF) and staff noted the importance of adding charitable income. The VLHMF has mainly focused on processing grants applied for by staff and this resulted in minimal to no annual individual or corporate donations.

The Bayou Vermilion District (BVD) is the parent organization for Vermilionville and supplies part of its funding source. The BVD is funded by a tax millage renewed every 10 years since 1986. In the last four millage renewals, fewer voters and declining support for tax funded projects has resulted in a declining majority of votes for the renewal of the millage to fund the BVD. At the conclusion of this 2020-2025 Strategic

Plan, the BVD will be preparing for the 2026 millage renewal. Broadening Community Support of the Museum will inform voters of our Museum's benefit to the region. Vermilionville conducted the last comprehensive visitor research project in the early 2000s. We have an opportunity to create visitor analysis tools and use the upcoming census data to compare our local visitors with our geographic community. Understanding our audience will give us the tools to create opportunities for investment. One such tool is our ongoing external survey to understand perception and reasons for not visiting.

Strategies

We believe that museums are an important part of every community and that our advocates can promote museums in the whole state by promoting Vermilionville Living History Museum and Folklife Park. Through building government and voter support using branding and advocacy tools, we can ensure we have the funding to fulfill our mission and provide value to the community. We can only fulfill our mission and provide value to our community with data about our audience, so we will spend time and resources on audience research and development in the first three years of our Plan.

1 Building Government and Voter Support

Vermilionville will build government support by tracking and communicating the social and economic impact of our Museum to officials and representatives. Local government will be advocates of the Museum and more representatives will attend events at the Museum. We believe that government support for all art and culture institutions benefits each institution individually and the community as a whole. Conversely, if there is more community support, it is more likely there will be government support. When we are successful, the millage renewal will pass with a larger margin in our favor.

Year 1:

- A. Identify opportunities for advocacy improvement with Acadiana's city and parish elected and appointed officials, local school boards, and other leaders in our communities.
- B. Share the 2020 Bayou Vermilion District's Annual Report with the identified office holders. Consider renaming the report to reflect the strategic plan.
- C. Analyze millage renewal voting trends by precinct and identify opportunities for educating communities about BVD/ Vermilionville.
- D. Share the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan
- E. Ensure that we invite officials to Vermilionville/BVD Events, such as Culture Days, Earth Day, and Boat Parade, both as guests and as participants.

Year 3:

- A. Build relationships by attending public meetings, conducting office visits, and staying in constant contact. Clarify the parameters between lobbying, advocacy and liaison to local government in Board member's handbook.
- B. Launch millage renewal campaign.
- C. Begin annual meetings for presenting the Annual Report to Stakeholders.

Year 5:

- A. Create a schedule of official's election terms and election dates to ensure unbroken advocacy.
- B. The Foundation Board, in conjunction with Vermilionville staff (eventually the development officer) will support and promote renewal of the BVD millage. Initial discussion by March 2021. Target date for implementation: January 2024.⁷
- C. Create a dedicated fund for awareness raising and election costs.
- D. Finish millage renewal campaign. Analyze results and plan future strategies.

Appendix F – Advocating for Your Organization with Local Government AASLH

2 Audience Research and Development

Vermilionville will use the external surveys gathered during the accreditation application process and the 2020 census to research and develop material to attract visitors onsite and in the media. The Museum is open to the public about 1,836 hours a year, and holds several events and opportunities a year outside of regular operating hours. Our current number of visitors fluctuates between 50,000 and 60,000. Fifty eight percent of visitors that sign in are from the United States, with twenty-one percent from Louisiana. We welcome guests from over fifty different countries, with France and Canada being the largest source of international guests. Louisiana and Texas make up about fifty percent of our guests from the United States, with California and Florida the next highest percentage. Through staff observation and general evaluation, we noticed that the highest percentage of our visitors are school-aged children and white couples with or without children.

The southwest Louisiana region called Acadiana has about 1.4 million residents. Located in a hub city, Vermilionville can serve not just Lafayette Parish residents, but the surrounding parishes as well. We will use the Audience Research strategy with the Capacity Building strategy to estimate the human resource cost of reaching as many visitors as possible. At surveys submitted at our special event days, which are often our largest attendance days, the vast majority of attendees are from Lafayette and surrounding parishes.

Increasing the number of visitors and understanding visitors and potential audiences will positively affect earned revenue and charitable donations. Once we complete the audience research and plan development, we will implement lessons learned to attract first time visitors and to encourage repeat visitors to be advocates and donors.

Year 1:

- A. Improve the external survey to measure where Vermilionville ranks in visitor attractions in south Louisiana.
- B. Understanding our visitors – build new tools for visitor analysis including zip code collection, intercept surveys, and observation.

Year 3:

- A. Increase audience diversity through providing value to diverse communities.
- B. Consolidate and track international visitor data to build a better audience/market plan.

⁷ Note: board members can not directly lobby for passage of the millage due to state ethics law

- C. Partner with the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism and the Louisiana Travel Promotion Association to collect and share visitor data about Acadiana visitor attractions.
- D. Create Audience Development Plan.

Year 5:

- A. Implement Development Plan.

Measures of success:

- A twenty percent increase in pre-COVID visitor numbers and more diverse visitors.

3 Diversified Financial Support

In an effort to solicit more charitable donations, we are in the process of intensifying our fundraising efforts through our nonprofit Foundation. Although we missed the April 1 fundraising celebration date of our 30th anniversary due to COVID-19, 2020 will still give us opportunities to engage the public. The local economy, still largely dependent upon the oil and gas industry, however, may have a harder time bouncing back should the price of oil remain at historically low levels. Philanthropic dollars may become increasingly rare if the state does not diversify its economy. In the meantime, we have increased our social media presence and included a direct link to donate to Vermilionville if they found the resource valuable. It is important that we remain on the public's radar during these trying times by offering them alternative ways to engage with mission-related material.

Our staff, website designers, and Foundation board will facilitate charitable income by collaborating on fundraising and donor relationships. The Director of Outreach liaisons with corporations and local business to solicit donations and volunteers. The redesigned website clearly presents *who we are* and *what we do*, and prominently features the Donate, Volunteer, and Membership buttons to better highlight organizational support options. The Accreditation Planning Committee Taskforce formed a financial sub-committee to review and vet ideas for financial diversification, creating a plan included in diversified financial support, financial stability and fundraising infrastructure strategies.

Year 1:

- A. The Foundation Board, in conjunction with the Vermilionville staff, will oversee planning and implementation of an annual fundraiser evening. Tickets for tables, individual tickets, sponsorships, and silent auctions, among other methods, will be used to cover costs and raise funds. The first of these fundraising evenings was scheduled for April 1, 2020, but was canceled due to COVID-19 measures. Prior to the cancellation, the event was sold out.
- B. Offer opportunities for small donations with content provided online.

Year 3:

- A. The Foundation Board will fill empty board seats with individuals who have experience in private and public fundraising, government relations, entrepreneurship, and financial management.
- B. Apply for multi-year grants.

- 
- C. Vermilionville staff, in cooperation with Foundation Board members, will compile a list of potential individual donors of large amounts. Target date for initial implementation: January 2020
- a. The Vermilionville CEO and Foundation Board members will cultivate relationships with potential donors
 - b. This project will be ongoing and reported to the Foundation Board in the annual planning/projections report and assessment report.
- D. Vermilionville staff, in cooperation with Foundation Board members, will compile list of foundations that share similar visions with Vermilionville's. Target date for initial implementation: January 2020
- a. All foundations will be approached every year for major funding
 - b. This project will be ongoing and reported to the Foundation Board in the annual planning/projections report and assessment report.

Year 5:

- A. Vermilionville staff, BVD Board members, and Foundation Board members will create a plan to protect collections and preserve the cultural heritage should the doomsday scenario of the 2026 millage not be renewed and above fundraising strategies are inadequate. Initial discussions by August 2021. Target date for emergency plan completion: December 2024. We could use this plan in the future if there was a decrease in funding for another reason.

Measure of Success

- Contributions are 30% of revenue.

4 Advocacy and Branding


Advocacy is building relationships on behalf of the Museum and promoting all the ways in which our Museum is essential to the community. The current crisis facing visitor attractions has made our need for advocacy on the local and national level even more urgent. With nineteen board members across two boards, 50,000 visitors a year, and hundreds of volunteers, our potential for advocacy is exponential. Over the next three years, we will devise a plan for creating advocates of different levels of responsibility.

We will use advocacy and branding to improve our marketing and visibility as a vehicle for increased community support. The goal of branding as a marketing tool is increased visibility. We are going to build on our 2012 BVD re-branding to increase brand recognition by stakeholders.

Year 1:

- A. Finish boards' elevator speech
- B. Identify advocates, potential advocates and spokespersons.
- C. Implement tools to streamline communications to market more events
- D. Evaluate strength of brand with focus groups.
- E. Develop written brand guidelines.
- F. Create an advocacy packet.

Year 3:

- 
- A. Present the mission to stakeholders in seven different ways
 - Clearly visible in our Visitor Center
 - Included on the cover of our Board binders.
 - Through a mission memorization project
 - Highlighted in billboards and signage
 - Through audio resources including radio and podcasts.
 - Included in program announcements and printed programs
 - Shared with and displayed by project partners, clients and events
 - Study feasibility for sponsoring a sheltered bus stop with a vinyl wrap.
 - B. Strengthen branding across all entities.
 - C. Brand consistency across all BVD entities.
 - D. Share advocacy training and materials with identified spokespeople.

Year 5:

- A. Use brand to effectively market to stakeholders with all avenues of media, sponsorships, and onsite signage

Measures of Success

- Brand recognition by stakeholders.
- Staff as active professional participants in the community.
- Brand consistency across all BVD entities.
- Built trust in our communities.
- Continued support from elected officials, community leaders and the voting public.



Organizational Effectiveness

We strategically use all organizational resources to fulfill our mission and serve the needs of the public to achieve the greatest impact.

As the organization grew to over fifty employees over the last eight years, it became necessary to provide better Human Resource (HR) services. Previous de facto administrative HR person was the Office Manager. However, as our workforce grew, it became more difficult for her to carry out role and perform the day-to-day functions of running an office. During that time, we added retirement benefits for our full-time employees, which added a further administrative layer to her work. As the number of employees increased, it also became apparent that they had unmet needs that only a dedicated HR professional could provide.

Most museums exist for the public good, and tax dollars partially support Vermilionville. It is a priority that we provide the most value to our community while using our resources effectively and efficiently.⁸ Vermilionville will work towards efficiency

⁸ "Efficient (adj.) – Performing or functioning in the best possible manner with the least waste of time and effort." The Difference Between Effectiveness And Efficiency Explained <https://www.insightsquared.com/blog/effectiveness-vs-efficiency-whats-the-difference/> (accessed 4/13/20)

and effectiveness using seven strategies to build trust and accountability, necessary foundations for our second goal of Community Support. As outlined in the organizational history and the site planning documents, the Museum has limited space, shared spaces with the parent organization, and multiple goals that requires resources. Organizational documents, history, strategic planning worksheets, and internal surveys revealed the need to prioritize the internal improvement of organizational effectiveness.

Strategies

A successful, effective Vermilionville will have a high caliber and diverse staff, a positive and widespread institutional reputation, and demonstrate high standards of governance. Our facilities will contribute to the core mission while instituting infrastructure that supports financial stability.

1 Improved human resource processes


In 2020, the CEO hired a Human Resources consultant to build and enhance the capacity of each staff member to perform at his or her maximum potential. To become familiar with staff and the Museum's culture and environment, the consultants conducted interviews and meetings with the CEO, each director and department head, and the BVD Board President. Based on the information learned from the above, the consultants learned that 1) staff at all levels take great pride in performing their positions in alignment with the Museum's Mission and Vision, and 2) there is a strong desire for management/supervisory training, personal/career development, clear policies and a need for an enhanced collaborative environment. The goal of the consultants is to build a robust and effective human resource function, to develop and maximize competencies, and maintain a positive and healthy work environment where results-based performance and continuous learning are valued and demonstrated.

Year 1:

- A. Develop Management Training Program: conduct needs analysis and identify learning modalities. Topics: *Collaborative planning/decision making/problem solving; Working with different communication styles; Managing conflict; Building an inclusive and multi-generational work place.*

Measures of Success:

- Applied learning from the training will be tracked in the performance management tool
 - Demonstrated understanding of the differences regarding communication and decision-making styles among colleagues and management team
 - Highly functioning collaborative team that meets/exceeds agreed upon measures of success and demonstrates effective long-range planning
 - Reduced voluntary turnover
- B. Enhance current systems, processes and procedures to foster greater employee engagement, professional satisfaction and Museum excellence
1. Establish an effective, robust collaborative model with Directors and Department Heads to plan and strategize current and future programs/activities
 - i. The team will identify shared standards, data to track, accountability, deadlines, etc.

- 
- ii. The team will proactively identify trends, opportunities, challenges, problems/remedial action, budget constraints/enhancements,
 2. Update job descriptions and share with all staff; ensure role clarity among all levels of staff
 3. Update Employee Handbook/HR Policies and Procedures; train all employees on a regular basis
 - C. Develop and implement a success-driven performance appraisal/management tool and staff development program.
 1. Conduct focus groups of managers and staff to develop key performance indicators
 2. Test the performance appraisal and gather feedback
 - D. Research/compare current compensation and benefit plans to similar State/tax funded Museums
 1. Share results with CEO, Board and management team; see Year 3, D

Year 3:

- A. Assess and adjust management development/training and performance appraisal/management tools that we implemented in year two to ensure alignment with the Museum's Vision, Mission and strategic plan.
 1. Applied learning will be tracked/documentated by the CEO, Directors and Department Heads using the performance management tool
 2. Conduct performance improvement training
 3. Track applied learning/results as reported on the performance management tool and from staff focus group meetings
 4. Leadership training module will identify/develop skills within each position and within the team
 5. Determine through staff and management focus groups if the training/development program continues to prepare staff for their roles as the needs of the Museum change

Measures of Success:

- Assessments of training initiatives reflect employees' strengthened skillsets as desired objectives are met.
 - Personal and professional skillset development results in higher retention of employees.
 - Employees that are put on Performance Improvement Training plans implement their PIP Plans successfully, and their subsequent performance reviews reflect this growth and development.
 - Staff and management focus groups report that the Performance Management system is user-friendly and helpful in meeting individual objectives.
- B. We will demonstrate the principles of diversity and inclusion in our staff to more accurately represent the communities we serve because of Talent Acquisition training and revamping the selection process to achieve the goals



implemented in year two. We intend to reflect our global, multicultural following among our staff and volunteers.

1. Monitor processes, assess outcomes, and adjust selection and onboarding methods.
2. Conduct further Talent Acquisition training based on assessment

Measure of Success:

- New Hire sourcing will attract more qualified minority candidates, through Job Fairs and/or targeted Talent Identification methods such as recruiting at historically Black colleges/universities and other higher education institutions.

C. Assist Directors and Department Heads with assessing the current training methodologies and monitoring process for Village staff and artisans to identify and implement enhancements that further Museum Excellence.

1. Identify learning modalities that have been effective in the past.
2. Conduct a Gap analysis; identify results of past and current training to determine what methodologies are working/ what needs improving.

Measure of Success:

- Employees report greater levels of satisfaction with training methodologies. The manager rates individual employee's performance higher following the training.

D. Develop compensation and benefits funding strategy with Board and CEO based on the research findings in Years one and two.

1. Explore/identify long term funding sources
2. Recommend an equitable, affordable compensation structure based on position and required experience/expertise
3. Identify an affordable and effective rewards and recognition program

Measures of Success:

- The board has approved a compensation structure, and the CEO in collaboration with the HR consultant have analyzed all employees' salaries for internal/ external equity.
- A rewards and recognition program has been funded and implementation/training are scheduled.

E. Develop/implement tools for collecting and monitoring staff feedback regarding employment conditions, human resources/management practices, and how work is accomplished.

1. Conduct a staff survey and report results to all staff in a timely manner
2. Engage staff in discussions regarding survey results and seek feedback

Measures of Success:

- An interdepartmental Staff Satisfaction committee is formed to meet regularly, review human resource/management practices and policies, and to recommend avenues to address concerns.

- In collaboration with the CEO and HR, the Employee Satisfaction Committee will share the survey results transparently.

- F. Develop a succession plan for executive and management positions
1. By year 4 identify core requirements for each position
 2. Identify potential reorganization needs/opportunities that may be impacted by funding, public interests/uses of the Museum, and Board priorities

Measures of Success:

- a) A succession plan is in place with individuals identified as successors for each executive, management, and other key positions.
- b) A Gap Analysis plan is developed to analyze each position and the individual's capacity to meet core requirements.

Year 5:

- A. Continue to monitor and focus on the Performance Appraisal/Management program and tools for adaptation and refinements.
- B. Expand the Management Training and Development program based on performance and assessments; staff training/development is provided on a systematic basis.
- C. Staff diversity and inclusion continues to be a priority and cultural value.
- D. Employee Satisfaction is frequently assessed, tracked, and reported.
- E. The interdepartmental collaborative work style will be routine.
- F. HR policy and programs are administered effectively and efficiently, while maintaining staff satisfaction and meeting budget constraints

Measures of Success:

- Succession Planning transitions to the “job shadowing” or “apprentice” component to develop new skillsets for identified staff.
- The Employee Satisfaction Committee, in collaboration with HR and the CEO, plans for and reports results and next steps of implemented initiatives to all staff, CEO and Boards on a bi-annual basis.
- New training tools, technology, methodologies are monitored regularly and introduced to staff in a timely manner.
- Personal and professional skillset development results in increased job/career satisfaction and employee retention; mentoring and coaching for development is ongoing; minimal voluntary turnover is experienced.
- Effective sourcing for minority candidates reflects a higher rate of minority new hires and volunteers.
- The assessment data of goals and strategies will indicate the success and areas for improvement needed for the next 5 years.

2 Alignment

The need for alignment and clarity became clear with the revision of the 1994-2000 Memorandum of Understanding, the strategic planning worksheets, and the Self-Study process for accreditation. The Accreditation Planning Committee identified communication between both boards and staff as a strategic priority after reviewing

internal staff and board surveys. By building on the success of the revised MOU and implementing and training staff and leadership on expected roles, Vermilionville will work toward alignment between the Boards and staff and the Boards will be aligned with each other.

Year 1:

- A. The Vermilionville Living History Museum will develop Board Member Handbook outline and share it with the Bayou Vermilion District Commission.
- B. Advisory Committees will create committee charges.
- C. Build consensus between the boards and among all board members on roles and accountabilities.

Year 3:

- A. The Foundation Board will host a training session every January to welcome new board members and familiarize them with proper procedures and policies. As part of that training, the new board members will receive copies of the Vermilionville Living History Museum Foundation Board By-laws, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Foundation Board and the Bayou Vermilion District Board, a Foundation Board handbook, a calendar of monthly meeting dates, a calendar of Vermilionville events, and a curator's tour of the village. The onboarding session will begin January 2021.

Year 5:

- A. An attorney will review the 1994, 1999, 2000, and 2018 Memorandums of Understandings between the Bayou Vermilion District Commission and the Vermilionville Living History Museum Foundation to ensure thoroughness and legality.

Measures of Success:

- The alignment will result in the demonstration of clear [decision-making processes](#) that are mission focused and in an effective use of time and resources.

Appendices

Appendix G – Vermilionville: Vision, Operation and Oversight

Appendix H - Board Member Checklist for Museums

Appendix I - Delegation of Authority

Appendix J - Statement of Support

Appendix K - Museum Board Member Handbook Outline

3 Diversity

We believe that diverse representation in leadership and collaboration is the only way to excellence and effectiveness for museums. Four different political entities appoint commissioners to the BVD: the Mayor-President of Lafayette Consolidated Government, the other mayors of the incorporated towns in Lafayette Parish, the Lafayette Parish Council, and the Lafayette City Council. All appointees must be

residents of Lafayette Parish. As written in the BVD's enabling legislation, the Lafayette Parish Council must appoint one person of color to the commission, but there is rarely more than the required diversity spot. Commissioners are appointed to four-year terms, renewable one time but they can return after a term off the board. As members rotate off the board, the CEO and the staff will consult key stakeholders to recommend a diverse pool of candidates for each of the appointing authorities to draw upon whenever positions become vacant.

Given the historical timeframe and the geographical limits of our interpretation, we are acutely aware of the origins of present-day inequalities and disparities. Our time period starts in Louisiana's colonial past and the settlers' relation with the Native American populations, through the antebellum period, the suppression of minority languages and cultures, to the time of segregation and Jim Crow laws. Many, if not most of our employees are direct descendants of the men and women who lived during those times. With that in mind, we strive to hire a competent, experienced, and diverse workforce who are aware of the historical and cultural context in which Vermilionville operates. For the artisans and musicians who interact with the public, we employee and train many locals who self-identify as members of the historical groups we represent.

In collaboration with our HR consultant, we are working on developing policies on selection, training and retention to assure diversity and equity in hiring.

Year 1:

- A. Fill out Appendix L and share Board diversity list based on our geographic and demographic community for the appointing groups to reference when voting on candidates.

Year 3:

- A. Exceed the required diversity minimums and broaden the institutional definition of diversity for the Bayou Vermilion District Commission and Vermilionville Living History Museum Foundation.
- B. Build a culture of inclusivity to ensure all board members' perspectives are heard and respected.

Year 5:

- A. Measure success of tasks and make new strategies.

Measures of Success

- Both boards reflect the diversity in our community and contribute their perspective to long term planning.

Appendix L - Board of Directors

4 Fundraising Infrastructure

Increase the Foundation Board's capacity to do fundraising by creating a policy for fundraising and simplifying the process to accept and disburse funds while maintaining appropriate documentation. The written plan and policy for fundraising would include online giving, donor asks, analysis of current philosophies on philanthropy, summaries of tax policies, and donor relationship roles.

The foundation in collaboration with staff develop a funding strategy for a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software to support non-profit donor management. CRM technology would help staff to compile information about donors and campaigns, as well as streamline and track that data for reporting. There are discounts for nonprofits, grants for technological advancements, and donors available to help fund CRM purchase and implementation costs.

Year 1:

- A. Achieve BBB Charity Accreditation to assist us in creating sound and trustworthy infrastructure that meets national standards
- B. Create a plan to track systematically donor information, recognition, and involvement.
- C. Identify quotes and funding for Foundation and staff accessible Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software.
- D. Prioritize fundraising campaigns for each fiscal year.

Year 3:

- A. Expand annual online giving platforms campaign.
 - a. Amazon Smile
 - b. Website donations
 - c. South Louisiana Giving Day
- B. Monetize Vermilionville resources, including staff skills, by making staff available for private consultation on matters of individual expertise. Target date for initial implementation: March 2021
 - a. investigation into current rates for various jobs would need to be completed
 - b. fee schedules would need to be created based on per-job and per-hour rates
 - c. this project would be ongoing and would be reported to the Foundation Board in the annual planning/projections report (see C:i above) and assessment report.
- E. Foundation Board, BVD Board, and Vermilionville staff will discuss the feasibility of using portions of Vermilionville's physical space to be rented out as commercial space.
 - a. It is possible that these spaces could serve as small-scale, mixed-use incubator that perhaps could be housed in a portion of the aforementioned space
- F. Vermilionville will analyze the feasibility of hiring a part-time grant writer to target large (\$25,000 or more) grants. Target date for implementation: December 2020
 - a. The costs for the grant writer could be covered as a line item in grants
 - b. A grant writer would allow Vermilionville staff to devote more time to their museum-centered responsibilities
 - c. The grant writer would be required to attend Foundation Board and BVD meetings and, between meetings, to inform the Foundation Board's executive committee of grants being applied for and won.

- d. A grant writer would allow more oversight, from beginning to end, of the grant seeking process

Year 5:

- A. Vermilionville will consider hiring a full-time development officer to oversee grants, gifts, donations, and membership. Target date for implementation: December 2021
 - a. The development officer's responsibilities would encompass the grant writer's responsibilities, thus making the latter unnecessary.
 - b. Development officer's activities would be reported to the Foundation Board in the annual planning/projections report and assessment report
 - c. The Development Director's salary would be included in each grant.

Measures of Success

- Fundraising infrastructure is in place to increase contributions to 30% of revenue.
- Fundraising infrastructure accurately accepts and tracks contributions.

5 Financial Stability

“Nonprofit is a tax status, not a business strategy.” American Alliance of Museums keys to financial sustainability: Pay attention to information, foster financial literacy, build a culture of experimentation, and use project management documentation that yields information regardless of the project outcome.⁹ At the beginning of each fiscal year, directors propose a budget to the CEO based on the goals and projects for the next year. The CEO and the BVD board's financial committee review the budget, which the whole BVD board then votes on. The department director manages that approved budget for their department for the rest of the year.

The eruption of Covid-19 on the international scene in the first quarter of 2020 has had a devastating effect on the world's economy. The hospitality and tourism industry, of which Vermilionville is a part, has been particularly hard hit. Without the ability to travel far from home, and then for only essential outings, there can be no visitors or facility rental clients to welcome to the Museum. Since that time, we had to furlough our artisans, musicians, gift shop clerks, and some of the restaurant staff. A VPN was set up for the office workers who could continue to work from home. In the meantime, we are ramping up our presence on social media.

The timing of this crisis, if there ever is a good time for a crisis, is particularly egregious. April and May are two of our biggest revenue generating months due to increased visitor numbers. As of May, our estimated losses are in the \$185-200,000 range. Vermilionville's parent organization, the Bayou Vermilion District (BVD), has the resources to weather this storm for a time. The extent to which the BVD can continue to support the operations of Vermilionville depends entirely on the duration of the local and federal shelter in place orders. Short-term, we will have to absorb the losses through transfer of funds. Long-term, we may have to open without some of the features our facility is known for, like costumed interpreters throughout the village for example, until it is safe and we can generate more funds. Additional furloughs, if warranted by economic

⁹ 2020 AAM Trends Report

conditions, are not out of the question. We are now focused on developing a reopening plan/ plan to reopen once visitor attractions are allowed to open.

Year 1:

- A. Create a financial recovery plan by using the appendices.
 - a. Assess the financial value of donations made by the Museum in a fiscal year across all departments. Create a budget, capping contributions made by the Museum in the form of goods, services, and discounts.
 - b. Compare Museum revenue losses to savings from reduced staff and services.
- B. CEO will present to the Foundation Board require a financial annual planning/projections report from Vermilionville staff.
 - a. the report will detail grants, donors, gifts, and membership targets for the upcoming year
 - b. the report will include potential grant and donor names, any known potential gifts for the upcoming year, and membership increase goals
 - c. for potential grants and donations, the report will itemize possible funding for each grant and target asks for each donor will be noted.
- C. Require annual assessment report from Vermilionville staff to be presented to the Foundation Board at its final meeting of every year
 - a. the report will detail grants won, donor contacts, gifts, and membership gains for the previous year
 - b. The report will also include assessment sections to review what worked best and what did not work—and why—in the previous year.

Year 3:

- A. Train staff and leadership about museum funding structures and how to balance mission with revenue.

Measures of Success

- Knowing where the money is coming from and knowing that everything you do supports financial stability.
- Reduced need of financial support from the parent organization.

Appendices

Appendix M - 2020 Financial Stability Trends Report


Appendix N - Museum Funding and Institutional Accounts Guide

6 Site Planning

The CEO will create a Site Master Plan to use in decision making, capacity building, and stakeholder communications. Successful Site Planning ensures that facilities contribute to the core mission and financial sustainability of the Museum.

Over the past five years, Vermilionville’s management team has reimagined the use of our physical spaces. Each proposed idea allocates space to better accomplish our mission and improve workplace practices to meet industry standards.

Pursuant to the purpose outlined in our enabling legislation of improving the water quality of Bayou Vermilion and all other acts which would enhance the general



condition of Bayou Vermilion, we are in the planning stages of building a Water Quality Laboratory and Watershed Exhibit. The lab will test for impediments in the water such as nitrates and fecal coliform, and the watershed exhibit will be moved there from the cabin structures in the Visitor Center. The buildings that currently house the watershed exhibit will be converted into climate-controlled artifact lab and storage facilities.

The contract for the Watershed Quality Lab and Exhibit was awarded in October 2019 to Garden City Construction of Lafayette. While some design details have had to be re-worked due to input from the Fire Marshall, work on the building will begin summer of 2020. The Fire Marshall determined the water supply was insufficient, so new water lines are being installed to meet fire code. Estimated construction completion time is 10-12 months. Once we move the Watershed Exhibit from its existing location, we will begin work on the artifact storage and restoration space.

To address a lack of space for exhibit preparation, controlled micro-climate storage, and overcrowding in the village we plan to repurpose the vacated watershed exhibit into an Artifact Preservation Lab that will incorporate all of these aspects. The design of the buildings represent plantation cabins, so we will also take this opportunity to re-work the interpretive content and install creative exhibit elements to prompt visitors to reflect about labor exploitation, home, community, and family.

Since 2015, the Museum has expanded livestock and gardens to propagate heritage plants and illustrate with living history the agriculture that surrounded this region in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In 2016, the heritage gardeners planted a 450 square foot Acadian Brown Cotton field at the entrance to the Museum behind our introductory house, Maison des Cultures. We repurposed the existing 100 square foot garden space near our textiles interpretive house from decorative plants to plants traditionally used in the dyeing of fabrics and leathers. The heritage gardeners added two eight feet rows to the vegetable garden behind the Mouton House and 50 square feet added to the sugar cane garden. Small boxes for the planting of herbs were built and placed at the Mouton Kitchen, the Broussard Kitchen, and outside of the Buller House. In the area next to the Native American Common Ground, we added a 150 square foot garden with plants that Native Americans used for medical and ceremonial purposes, and a large 10-foot diameter circle was established nearby for the demonstration of Native American agricultural techniques. The space in front of our barn, approximately 2,600 square feet, was fenced in for housing heritage chicken breeds. In between the Chapel and Boucvalt, approximately 7000 square feet were fenced in for the keeping of heritage livestock.

Over the next several years, we will implement the following improvements: the trees around the brown cotton will be trimmed back to allow for more light and a 50 square foot expansion of that space; the animal paddock will be relocated from where it stands now, to a space of comparable size behind the Broussard house; we will develop a trail in the woods along the bayou to highlight some of the plants that Native Americans gathered for use. We will also repurpose the small pollinator garden space near the watershed exhibit as a small garden representative of an enslaved person's personal garden.

The Director of Hospitality led meetings to address the proposed city developments across the river, and we will continue to meet as the proposals for a bridge connecting the north and south sides of the river develop. There are very few pedestrian friendly bridges crossing the Vermilion River and the potential for future

developments connecting Vermilionville and Heymann Park will effect Vermilionville traffic, finances, and connection to the adjoining neighborhoods.

Over the next five years, the CEO and department directors will create current use and potential capacity data to be used with this and the next strategic plan. On our most popular Culture Days, we have counted anywhere for 900-1,600 visitors over the course of a 10am to 4pm day. Our facilities are rented for an event called Black Pot and there are as many as 3,000 participants over the weekend, but that is counting people camping in the ball fields adjacent to our facilities and cooking and visiting on the parking lot. Based on these numbers, the Museum has the physical capacity for approximately 280,000 – 400,000 visitors per year. We will use Site Planning, Capacity Building, and Audience Research and Development to begin to build our visitors. For events being held in the Performance Center such as concerts and seminars, the building capacity is limited to 300 as per the fire code. However, the Performance Center has large sliding barn doors that open the space onto the area in front of the building. We have a 20x60 foot tent that we use in that area and add another 100-150 people for a total of just over 400 for special events. We will use the information we gather in 2020 to inform the 2021 operational plan.

The COVID-19 crisis, as stated, has had a deep effect on our business as well as on the airline/airport industry. It is in our best mutual interest to leverage a new partnership that will adapt to both our situations once it is clear where everyone stands after this crisis is over. We now pay \$1,950 a month to the airport commission to lease land for the Museum. While we certainly cannot leave the site nor is moving another tenant on site feasible, we will renegotiate with the Airport Commission when our lease comes up. The airport is presently building a new terminal. We already have a small but strategic presence in the current airport. We can further enhance our presence in the new space in a way that can be beneficial to the airport and ourselves by having a small exhibit space where travelers can see what Vermilionville has to offer just across the street.

Year 1:

- A. The Watershed Lab and Exhibit begin construction phase.
- B. Establish nature trail in the museum grounds.
- C. Research funding for the Restoration Lab and Collections Storage.

Year 3:

- A. Collaborate in the Heymann Park and Beaver Park improvements projects.
- B. Complete Restoration Lab and Collections Storage renovations and collections transfer.

Year 5:

- A. Open lines of communication with the Airport Commission for the 2029 lease agreement.

Measures of Success

- Our physical site is developed, redeveloped, and pedestrian accessible.
- How we use our site fulfills our mission.

- Collaborative relationships are established to ensure the Museum serves the community and our visitors.

Appendices

Appendix O.1 - Site Plan Draft 1

Appendix O.2 - Research and Water Park Plan

Appendix O.3 - New Water Quality Building

7 Capacity Building

An inter-department analysis of the Museum's capacity will allow us to use time and resources more effectively. We will build the museum's capacity to receive more visitors by analyzing traffic flow, identifying bottlenecks, maximizing outdoor space use, and planning for increased maintenance needs.

Year 1:

- A. Conduct capacity analysis building on information gathered during the self-study process.
- how many tours can we accommodate with physical space and staff per day/year/quarter
 - external client rentals/ non-mission income generating
 - mission related events
 - capacity of shared spaces with BVD
 - list mission events outside of regular opening hours
 - IT/AV limitations
 - Workforce capacity

Year 3:

- A. Each department will create a report with the space, time, and tools needed for the maximum capacity of services. The staff will use this report at the annual operating plan meeting to set goals and conduct gap analysis.

Year 5:

- A. Build Capacity

Measures of Success

- Increased capacity to welcome visitors safely and comfortably
- Ability to accommodate increased visitors without compromising our mission.

7 - Ethics

Over the next three years, staff and leadership will exceed legal requirements to meet ethical standards in all its operations by putting Museum and operational expectations into writing. We will ensure ethical behavior in all unexpected situations by training staff on vision, beliefs, and values.

In order to ensure the ethical handling of internal and external information gathered through information technology, we will implement IT standards for the protection of that information. We are currently in the process of transitioning from our

former third party contracted Information Technology (IT) to our current company. Once this is completed we plan to improve IT standards by updating the system recovery plan, updating system documentation, creating recommendation report for improving current technical architecture, including software, wireless network development, and software consolidation, creating IT policies and procedures, and identifying specific workforce professional development need and providing training recommendations. We are compliant with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard.

Year 1:

- A. Continue Annual State Board of Ethics training
- B. Revise Institutional Code of Ethics by adding values and beliefs gathered during the vision statement process.

Year 3:

- A. Train Department heads on Financial Accounting Standards
- B. Meet standards of technology

Measures of Success

- all those who work for or on behalf of a museum understand and support its mission and public trust responsibilities.
- revenue-producing activities and activities that involve relationships with external entities are compatible with the museum's mission and support its public trust responsibilities
- programs promote the public good rather than individual financial gain.
- collections in our custody are lawfully held, protected, secure, unencumbered, cared for and preserved
- governance understand and fulfill their trusteeship and act corporately, not as individuals
- working relationships among trustees, employees, and volunteers are based on equity and mutual respect

Appendices

Appendix P.1 - 2017 Ethics Code

Appendix P.2 - Values and beliefs gathered during vision process

Appendix P.3 – Revising the Ethics Code Bibliography