

1. Statement of Need

Discovery Center at Murfree Spring had its start in 1986 as a grassroots effort of young parents who set out to create a children's museum for the community. Countless volunteers provided the manpower to open a hands-on museum in a 100-year-old Victorian-style home. In its first year of operation, 11,000 visitors enjoyed the facility. Within 10 years, plans were underway to create a new building. With tremendous community response and strong governmental support at all levels, funds were raised resulting in an 18,000 square foot building opening in 2002, located adjacent to a 20-acre urban wetlands and serving 30,000 visitors annually.

In 2006, a collection of antique cars and model trains was donated that spurred growth for the museum. A single foundation donated \$1.8 million to expand the facility by over 8,000 square feet and a new "Water, Wings and Wheels" gallery was created. Public response has been strong, and we project visitation of over 115,000 for 2008 – an increase of over 350% in just six years.

Discovery Center serves fourteen counties in Middle Tennessee including Rutherford and Williamson Counties, the two fastest growing counties from 2006 to 2007 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. It is accessible by foot to neighborhoods and three nearby schools through pedestrian walkways and crosswalks. Because of our downtown location and the large population of families in Rutherford County, Discovery Center serves as a vibrant community center.

Discovery Center has kept pace with our growing community in terms of space, programming and accessibility. Due to the fact that over 45% of students in Murfreesboro City Schools and nearly 50% of students in Tennessee qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program, Discovery Center strives to provide access to the museum in a cost-effective manner. Admission is \$5 per person for everyone ages 2 and over (under 2 are free) and our policy is never to turn anyone away due to an inability to pay. Free family memberships are provided to low-income families, and we have a policy to never turn anyone away for inability to pay.

An upgrade to our current front desk system is sorely needed. Currently, all walk-in attendance is logged manually. Visitors sign in on our sign in sheet with their name, number of visitors, reason for visit, and membership status. Then, the front desk staff enters those numbers into a simple Access database. Monetary transactions are recorded in a cash register that is then manually entered into our accounting software by our accountant. This is a time consuming process for visitors and staff, and allows for much human error, which inhibits our ability to generate accurate, timely reports. The current system does not capture critical demographic information needed to assess our audience.

A system is needed that allows for more effective and strategic tracking of visitors and members. This will improve our efficiency, increase our cost-effectiveness, and create an easier, faster check in system for our members. It will also help us gain more information about our visitors. This information is crucial for many reasons.

- Knowing when and why visitors come helps provide statistical data that will allow us to fine tune staff and volunteer schedules
- Public and private funding requires accurate and detailed tracking of attendance

Narrative - Children's Museum Corporation of Rutherford County

- Marketing, development, grant applications, and statistical reports require detailed visitor information
- Data that reflects the demographics, such as the number of school children, local visitors, out-of-town visitors, members, etc. strengthens our ability to communicate impact on the community and to plan strategically

Strategic Plan

In 2002, Discovery Center began a two-year process of updating the museum's strategic plan through 2010. The process began with an all-day Board retreat, facilitated by the Associate Executive Director of the Center for Non-Profit Management. The Board at that time consisted of school principals, young parents, professors from Middle Tennessee State University, long-time and new community residents, and leaders from a variety of small businesses and non-profit local agencies. Senior staffs from the Education, Exhibits, and Development departments were also present at this session, which resulted in a broad strategic overview involving finances, community development, exhibits, and programs, marketing and administration. In addition, it was determined that additional marketing assessments and visitor surveys were needed to guide specific objectives. Over the next year, information about community needs and audience was gathered through member surveys, analysis of demographic data, and interviews with teachers, Board members, volunteers, staff, and visitors.

From this information, Discovery Center staff spent additional months detailing specific actions and providing additional input towards specific goals. Senior staff presented the strategic plan to the Board of Directors for final approval. The strategic plan is reviewed twice a year by staff and Board, with revisions made as necessary to meet the needs of the museum and our community. Changing needs are determined by daily assessments of exhibit usage, visitor comments, suggestions and developing collaborations with local organizations and individuals and assessments of national, state, and local trends.

Software and technology upgrades are a key part of our overall strategic expansion to be completed by 2010. Providing our staff and our board with accurate, timely reports regarding membership, visitation and programming allows for us to better understand, and in turn, better serve our patrons. The software upgrades, along with professional staff and volunteer development, relates to the museum's strategic plan by directly supporting three of Discovery Center's five main strategic goals as outlined in our Strategic Plan:

- *Expand and increase target audience to reflect demographics and growth of Rutherford County.*
 - Upgrading our current system of tracking visitors will allow us to better analyze the number and diversity of memberships and visitors.
- *Increase community and regional awareness of Discovery Center as a unique and high-quality educational resource and as an exciting destination for programs and exhibits.*
 - More in-depth tracking of visitation would allow our marketing department to better market our selves and our impact on community.
- *Ensure effective and efficient administration of Discovery Center.*
 - The additional software and hardware will help increase the efficiency and accuracy of several areas of administration including accounting, visitor service and scheduling.

2. Project Design

The overall goals of this upgrade are to put up-to-date, best practices in place for our front desk staff that will allow us to speed up the visitor process, increase our efficiency and accuracy, reduce long-term expenses related to front desk systems, and create a better reporting system. Discovery Center currently utilizes Vista software for the scheduling and tracking of all our programs, rentals, school groups and birthday parties. Discovery Center would purchase the Vista front desk and membership software modules that work with our current program for a complete visitor management system. This software will allow for real-time tracking and updating of visitors and members, visitor survey capabilities at point-of-sale, direct access to customer touch points and demographical information and targeted correspondence to members and visitors. Peripheral hardware that would be purchased includes two point-of-sale systems that include a monitor, receipt printer, bar code scanner, cash drawer and credit card reader. Our Vista Administrator would attend an online training course through Vista. The administrator would then train remaining staff members. A two-year support contract would be purchased to ensure accurate use of the new system.

3. Project Resources: Time, Personnel, Budget

Timeline

Since the Discovery Center currently uses one Vista product, integration of the two new Vista modules can happen quickly. Discovery Center would purchase the software in October of 2009. Our Vista Administrator would participate in training on the new system and in turn train remaining staff members in November 2009. This will allow for ample training and practice time before rolling out the new system for the beginning of the next fiscal year in January 2010. Staff and visitor surveys will be conducted throughout the first three months of 2010, and Discovery Center will assess the success in meeting objectives by June of 2010.

Personnel

Though our entire staff will be affected by having access to better data, the personnel most affected by this technology upgrade will be the Executive Director and Visitor Services Coordinator.

Billie B. Little, Executive Director, will serve as the project supervisor. Ms. Little is the founding director of the Discovery Center and has been the leader in planning and funding the museum during each phase of growth. She will oversee the purchasing of the new system and work closely with the Visitor Services Coordinator to fully integrate the new system into the museum and ensure the new process is a positive addition for staff and visitors.

Visitor Services Coordinator, Meredith Peck, has been with the Discovery Center for four years. She schedules all rentals, groups and birthday parties with the current Vista system, serves as our Vista Administrator and manages the front desk staff that interacts with visitors. She will be in charge of integrating the new software into the front desk check-in process as well as staff training and conducting surveys to ensure that the new visitor system is working smoothly.

We will also utilize Technology Integrations, LLC to assist in installing the software and hardware needs as well as help in securing training on the new software. Technology

Integrations will also keep the Discovery Center up to date on best practices in technology issues.

Budget

The total budget for this project is \$36,474.45. This total cost includes the purchase of software (19%), hardware (23%), integration/training/evaluation (50%), and indirect costs (8%).

Discovery Center will match funds through additional grants, operating funds and donated services and items. Discovery Center has a 20-year track record of sustainability and every project is managed effectively and efficiently using a combination of staff, volunteer and community support. This project is part of the museum's strategic plan and time has already been allocated as part of the planned responsibilities of the museum's Visitor Services Coordinator. Discovery Center will secure grants from local companies and foundations, with which we already have well-established relationships. Companies such as AT&T are annual supporters of the Discovery Center and have supported technology updates in the past.

4. Impact

By upgrading our current visitor management system, this project will achieve the following outcomes:

Outcomes	Indicator(s)
Better visitor sign-in process	Decreased average sign-in time per member by 20%
Increase efficiency and accuracy	Reduce variability and optimize workflow of front desk staff
Reduce long-term costs	Decrease part-time salary staff expense through better scheduling by 15% Decreased data entry time of front desk staff by 50%
Enhance reporting capabilities	Ability to generate more in-depth reports on visitor demographics and usage for marketing and development purposes

This upgrade will result in the creation of a technology infrastructure that will greatly enhance the programming the museum provides. In-depth information on visitors will allow for better scheduling of staff and development of public programs as well as marketing strategies for the museum and its programs. Funds and staff time that are currently being used to maintain our antiquated system will instead be devoted to hands-on, educational science, arts and health programming. Throughout the first quarter of 2010, surveys and self-assessments will be conducted on staff and visitors to ensure that the goals of the project are being reached.

BUDGET FORM - PAGE FOUR

Section B: Summary Budget

	\$ IMLS	\$ Cost Share	\$ TOTAL COSTS
1. Salaries and Wages			
2. Fringe Benefits			
3. Consultant Fees			
4. Travel			
5. Supplies and Materials			
6. Services			
7. Student Support			
8. Other Costs			
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS (1–8)			
9. Indirect Costs			
TOTAL COSTS (Direct and Indirect)			

Project Funding for the Entire Grant Period

1. Grant Funds Requested from IMLS

2. Cost Sharing:

 a. Cash Contribution

 b. In-Kind Contribution

 c. Other Federal Agencies*

 d. TOTAL COST SHARING

3. TOTAL PROJECT FUNDING (1+2d)

% of Total Costs Requested from IMLS

* If funding has been requested from another federal agency, indicate the agency's name:

Completion Schedule Year One

	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Purchase of Vista Software & Peripheral Hardware	■	93%								
Vista Administrator Training and Development of New Visitor Check-in System		■	7%							
Staff Training			■							
Roll out of integrated software					■					
Assessment & evaluation					■					

Percentage designates approximately how grant funds will be spent.