



Museums Empowered

Sample Application MA-40-17-0669-17
Project Category: Organizational Management
Funding Level: \$25,001-\$250,000

Sciencenter Ithaca, NY

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$207,040
Amount of cost share:	\$207,379

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Abstract
- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

Sciencenter, Ithaca, NY
Sciencenter in Transition
ABSTRACT

The Sciencenter proposes to undertake a comprehensive strategic planning process that will result in an institutional roadmap for decisions and actions over the next five years. This strategic plan will integrate organizational capacity building with professional development at all levels of the organization - staff, board and community levels. This process will build a stronger, more focused Sciencenter, one that has broad impact in the field, while retaining the community-responsive nature that has been a critical part of the Sciencenter's success.

The Sciencenter is at a unique and opportune moment in its history: The Sciencenter's founding executive director retired in March of 2017 after 26 years as its leader; also in March 2017, we successfully completed a \$4.1 million capital campaign; and we are expanding Sciencenter's programs through several national and collaborative projects. This all coincides with the end of the previous five-year plan and presents an ideal time to look at the institution as a whole, and strategically plan for its growth.

The project will take place from October 1, 2017 - September 30, 2019, and consists of the following activities: 1) Research; 2) Strategic Planning; 3) Communication; and 4) Performance Measurement and Evaluation. Einstellung Labs will serve as consultants to the project, leading the strategic planning process with the staff and board, and assisting with internal and external analyses that will inform the resulting strategic plan. In addition, we will partner with six advisory board members who represent a diverse group of museum professionals from around the country. These advisors will serve as resources as they also help guide the Sciencenter through the strategic planning process.

As a result of this project, the Sciencenter will have: 1) an adaptive framework that results in a community-responsive organization with a culture of quality, distinction, and excellence; 2) a plan for financial sustainability and growth; and 3) empowered audiences.

We intend to have the following results for the Sciencenter, staff, and board.

The Sciencenter is a community-responsive organization with a strategic framework that fosters a culture of quality, distinction, and excellence; financial sustainability; and develops and delivers empowering science programs.

Sciencenter staff have increased capacity to evaluate programs and operations on an ongoing basis, and make decisions that positively impact their professional growth, their departments, the organization, and the audiences the Sciencenter serves.

Sciencenter board members are more fully engaged, with their efforts focused at the strategic direction of the organization. The board is also more easily able to recruit key community members and leaders to serve on the Sciencenter's board.

Ultimately, the goal of this project is to position the Sciencenter to strategically enact our mission, vision, and goals in order to help build a science literate community that is empowered to use science in shaping a better future.

Performance measurement will be integrated throughout the project. Through staff and board surveys and continuous check-ins, the consultants will assess how successful we are in developing our staff and organizational capacity in order to meet the needs identified by the community.

Einstellung Labs will also evaluate how the implementation of the first year of the strategic plan is going and help identify any changes or additional actions that need to take place in subsequent years.

Sciencenter, Ithaca, NY
Proposal to IMLS Museums Empowered
Sciencenter in Transition

I. PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Proposed Project

The Sciencenter proposes to undertake a comprehensive strategic planning process that will result in an institutional roadmap for decisions and actions over the next five years. This strategic plan will integrate organizational capacity building with professional development at all levels of the organization - staff, board and community. This process will build a stronger, more focused Sciencenter, one that has broad impact in the field, while retaining the community-responsive nature that has been critical to the Sciencenter's success.

Project Need

The Sciencenter is at a unique and opportune moment in its history. The Sciencenter's founding executive director retired in March of 2017 after 26 years of leading the organization from a small storefront science activity center to a nationally recognized science museum that sees over 100,000 visitors on-site each year.

In addition to the change in leadership, the Sciencenter recently wrapped up a \$4.1 million capital campaign (7% over our \$3.8 million goal) designed to revitalize and grow its exhibits and educational programs. It is expanding its national reach in traveling exhibitions through a \$1.25 million partnership with NASA. And it is leading national collaborative efforts around early childhood STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). These factors put the Sciencenter in a position to significantly deepen and broaden its reach and impact in the coming years.

Sciencenter's most recent strategic plan (completed in 2012) outlined three age-based initiatives around which all exhibits and educational programs focus (see page 2 for further detail). While this plan has guided our work on a programmatic level, it does not encompass museum operations, staff development, or financial sustainability. The leadership transition, together with the end of the capital campaign, and other major project initiatives noted above, coincides with the end of the previous five-year plan, providing a unique opportunity to look at the institution as a whole and strategically plan for its growth.

The proposed strategic planning process will help the Sciencenter determine the future direction of its educational programs, exhibit offerings, and revenue streams through an iterative process that allows for ongoing reflection and evaluation. We intend to use the resulting strategic plan as a living document, meant to inform and guide us in everything we do. The plan will include details on the specific objectives, strategies and performance measures which determine how we will evaluate our success over the next five years. Ultimately, our goal is to have a responsive, strategic framework that continues the Sciencenter's culture of quality, distinction and excellence, and helps us look towards an even greater impact on our audiences.

Who will Benefit

Through development of an organic and community-responsive strategic plan that actively involves both internal and external stakeholders throughout the process, we expect to have the following benefits:

- 1) During the planning process, **staff and board** will gain a deeper understanding of the community the Sciencenter serves, the impact of the Sciencenter's work, its objectives, strategies on how to achieve those objectives, and how to measure results. Staff will also have many opportunities to learn of and investigate various industry, cultural, social and technological trends that may positively impact their work and professional growth.
- 2) Following the planning process, **staff and board** will be trained in design thinking, understand current trends throughout the museum field, and have plans in place for ongoing professional development.

The Sciencenter will benefit from: 1) having an adaptive framework that results in a community-responsive organization with a culture of quality, distinction, and excellence; 2) having a plan for financial sustainability and growth; and 3) empowering audiences through science programs. Sciencenter staff will have increased capacity to evaluate and implement needed changes to programs and operations on an ongoing basis, while making decisions that positively impact themselves, their departments, the organization, and the audiences the Sciencenter serves. Sciencenter board will be more engaged and focused at the strategic level, and will be better able to recruit key community members. And finally, our community will benefit from having a responsive, accessible science center, and will ultimately be empowered to use science in shaping a better future by being science literate citizens.

Advancing our Strategic Plan

The Sciencenter's most recent strategic plan, developed from 2011-2012, was focused on how to implement our mission and vision - to *empower* youth through science. Through a series of stakeholder meetings, board and staff retreats, and focus groups with more than 200 members of our community, a plan developed around three linked, age-based initiatives that together form a continuous pathway of informal science education extending from birth to high school: Early Explorers (ages 0-5); Young Scientists (ages 5-11); and Future Science Leaders (ages 11-14). The strategic plan outlined programmatic strategies under each initiative, and we have spent the past five years aligning all the Sciencenter's exhibit and program work around these strategies.

For example, with funding from IMLS (Grant #MA-10-14-0097-14), Sciencenter educators launched a program to increase adult comfort and confidence in STEM so that parents and early childhood teachers could support their young children's early STEM learning (*Early Explorers*). Our exhibits team redesigned some of our most popular exhibits to provide more opportunities for collaboration, experimentation, and discovery for our *Young Scientists*. Sciencenter educators have also designed and implemented a youth-led program for middle school *Future Science Leaders* that empowers these students as they develop and deliver STEM programs for our younger guests.

The last strategic plan served the Sciencenter well in that it clearly linked our *programmatic* work to our mission and vision of empowering youth through science. However, at an *operational* level, the Sciencenter has not done the kind of comprehensive analysis that would also allow us to align operational decisions to longer-term organizational goals. The proposed project seeks to address this issue by taking a broader approach to the Sciencenter's next strategic plan in order to better position the staff and organization for long-term success.

Addressing the Goals of the Museums Empowered Program

The ultimate goal of this project is to strengthen the Sciencenter's ability to serve our public by building capacity at the staff, board, and organizational levels. The proposed planning process will cut across all departments. The resulting long-term impact of this strategic plan will be a "systemic change" in how the Sciencenter strategically enacts our mission, vision, and goals at all levels of the organization. This project aligns with the "Organizational Management" project category because the planning process will support the Sciencenter's efforts to be a "resilient organization with the goal of long-term sustainability and relevancy."

II. PROJECT WORK PLAN

Project Activities

The project consists of the following activities: 1) Research; 2) Strategic Planning; 3) Communication; and 4) Performance Measurement and Evaluation.

- 1) Research: The research phase will start with an internal assessment of the Sciencenter’s institutional model, leadership, staff, systems, internal culture, external resources, and fiscal resources. This assessment will be led by Einstellung Labs and will frame critical organizational issues to be addressed in the ensuing strategic plan. In addition, the assessment will look at external stakeholder perspectives on current Sciencenter programs, and additional stakeholder needs and interests in order to identify future opportunities.

The internal assessment will be complemented by collecting best practices from the museum field. These best practices will be gathered through informal and formal conversations and interviews with executives and other senior-level staff at museums throughout the country. The Sciencenter will convene an advisory board of six museum professionals (see pages 5-6 for complete advisory board list). These advisors will contribute both their own examples of best practices, as well as connections to other museums and resources that could help inform this project.

To further aid in the collection of best practices, and to provide the Sciencenter with a more in-depth picture of what these best practices look like as they are implemented, the research phase will also include site visits to museums throughout the country. Two staff will attend each site visit to geographic areas with a rich diversity of museums so that we maximize staff resources and visit multiple museums on each trip. Our target geographic areas include the Northeast (NY, MA, CT, NJ), mid-Atlantic (MD, DC, VA), and San Francisco/Bay Area, CA. These areas may change based on our initial research and feedback from our advisory board.

- 2) Strategic Planning: The strategic planning process will be led by Einstellung Labs and is described fully in Supporting Document 1. Consultants from Einstellung Labs will work with staff and board through a series of meetings, surveys, and interviews to give ample opportunity for staff and board to share their perspectives on opportunities and challenges that should be incorporated into the strategic plan.

Community Conversations

The Sciencenter is the only community-built science center in the country. 2,600 volunteers donated 50,000 hours of time to renovate and expand a former water treatment plant to create the museum’s facilities as they are today. The result is that the local community has a particular sense of ownership in the Sciencenter and its work, and as such will care deeply about the results of the strategic planning process.

The Sciencenter will engage in a series of thoughtful community conversations and focus groups that help us understand the unique needs of our community, better define the services we provide, and be cognizant of the changing social and technological landscape that affects how individuals live and learn. These external stakeholder interviews and conversations will be led by Einstellung Labs. We anticipate that these external sessions will include community members, local teachers and school administrators, parents, leaders from local government and community organizations, local universities and colleges, and businesses.

Staff and Board Retreats

Einstellung Labs will also facilitate day-long planning retreats with staff and board. These retreats will set the strategic vision and priorities for the plan. Combined with the background research and assessments, this retreat will provide enough information for our consultants to draft a strategic roadmap, which will be refined with input from Sciencenter leadership, staff and board. The roadmap will recognize and be responsive to market and audience trends, and provide key strategic steps to ensure the Sciencenter has the focus and capacity to carry out its vision. The plan will include timelines, accountability and estimated resources required.

Staff Professional Development

Einstellung Labs will work iteratively with Sciencenter leadership to develop the roadmap and the accompanying tools, including providing professional development for staff in their use. Staff will receive specific training on design thinking and program analysis, while senior-level staff will learn about methods for supporting professional development and growth amongst the staff they supervise. During implementation of the first year of the plan, Einstellung Labs will return to facilitate a review of Sciencenter's progress, identify key lessons learned, and assist in the development of any agreed-upon action steps.

- 3) Communication: Once the initial roadmap is completed, the Sciencenter will continue to work with our consultants to develop a strategy for communicating the results of this planning process to key stakeholders, staff, and board. This strategy could include community conversations, presentations, and other forums for sharing the finished plan and actions for implementing it. The communication plan will also identify actions for senior leadership to take to ensure that staff and key stakeholders are kept in the loop with regards to implementation, and also have ample opportunities to provide senior leadership with feedback regarding the implementation of the strategic roadmap.

The result of these activities will be that the Sciencenter has a five-year strategic plan that provides a responsive framework for staff and the organization as a whole. Our goal is that the strategic plan:

- fosters a culture of excellence
- is visitor-focused and community driven
- invests in ongoing evaluation and improvement
- ensures the production and delivery of empowering science programs, and
- promotes financial sustainability

In order to specifically build staff capacity, the strategic planning process and resulting roadmap will also include the following components:

- New retention, recruitment and hiring processes that align with strategic goals
- Improved on-boarding procedures for new staff and board
- Revised performance evaluation system that aligns with the strategic plan
- Individual professional development plans for each staff member that aligns personal professional development with strategic institutional development

- 4) Performance Measurement and Evaluation: We will work towards a responsive strategic framework that includes ongoing evaluation and iterative implementation. Performance measurement will be integrated throughout the project. Through staff and board surveys and continuous check-ins, the consultants will assess how successful we are in developing our staff and organizational capacity in order to meet the needs of the community.

Einstellung Labs will also evaluate how the implementation of the first year of the strategic plan is going and help identify any changes or additional actions that need to take place in subsequent years.

Project Risks

As with any strategic planning process, there is a large investment of time and money. One risk is that the plan will reflect a fixed point in time and won't be adaptive to organizational and community changes. In preparation for the planning process, we'll be working closely with Einstellung Labs to ensure that the resulting strategic plan is not a static document, but one that provides a guiding framework that allows staff and board to address changing needs. In particular, the Sciencenter's strategic planning process will emphasize staff professional development as fundamental part of building organizational capacity so that the strategic framework is actually used in making decisions and ensuring that staff, along with the document continues to grow and adapt. The resulting strategic framework will be incorporated into annual work planning, budgeting, and other organizational processes with the help of our consultants.

Project Planning, Implementation and Management

Our project team will include the following key staff and consultants:

Dean Briere, Executive Director: Dean has over 25 years of experience in science center program development, management, and finance, and has provided leadership to the development of two strategic planning and implementation processes. He will be the project director and provide strategic direction and decision-making as the Sciencenter goes through the strategic planning process.

Michelle Kortenaar, Senior Director of Engagement and Learning: Michelle has 10 years of experience in developing and delivering hands-on science programming. She leads the Sciencenter's education department and our national collaborative projects around early-childhood STEM. She will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the strategic planning process and implementation, including coordinating with consultants, staff, and board. In addition, in her role as lead of the Sciencenter's education department, Michelle will be responsible for providing input and feedback on the strategic priorities identified during this project.

Senior Director of Museum Environments: The Sciencenter is currently recruiting for this position. As a leader of a team that develops and maintains all of the Sciencenter's exhibits and facilities, this person will provide an important perspective on the strategic direction of the Sciencenter. The senior director will be responsible for providing input and review at key points during the strategic planning process.

Amy Gaulke, Public and Media Relations Manager: Amy has eight years of public relations, communication and media experience. She will be responsible for coordinating with consultants on community stakeholder meetings, and for implementing parts of the communication plan that relate to community members and outside stakeholders.

Alexander Zwissler, Principal, Einstellung Labs: Alex will conduct the strategic planning process as outlined by the draft plan attached as Supporting Document 1. Alex has over 25 years of experience, including eight years as the CEO of Chabot Space and Science Center in Oakland, CA.

Katie Levedahl, Associate, Einstellung Labs: Katie will assist with the strategic planning process. She has over 15 years of experience in developing informal science education programs.

Other senior-level Sciencenter staff, including Senior Director of External Relations and Directors of Advancement and Guest Relations will be involved in providing review and feedback at key points in the planning process. In addition, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Senior Director of Administration will be heavily involved in developing any new personnel policies and practices that come out of the planning process.

Our work will be aided by a group of six advisory board members from the museum field. These advisors include: **Joanna Haas**, Executive Director, Kentucky Science Center, Louisville, KY; **Chevy Humphrey**, President

and CEO, Arizona Science Center, Phoenix, AZ; **Stephanie Ratcliffe**, Executive Director, The Wild Center, Tupper Lake, NY; **Barry VanDeman**, President and CEO, Museum of Life and Science, Durham, NC; **Charlie Walter**, Director, Mayborn Museum Complex, Waco, TX; and **Tifferney White**, CEO and President, Discovery Children's Museum, Las Vegas, NV. We have attached letters of commitment from each of the six advisors as Supporting Document 2.

Sequence of Activities

The project will take place over two years, from October 1, 2017 - September 30, 2019. The timeline is as follows and can be seen in more detail on the attached Schedule of Completion. 1) Research: October 2017 - March 2018; 2) Development of Strategic Plan: April 2018 - September 2018; 3) Communication plan development and implementation: August 2018 - September 2019; 4) Implementation of Year 1 of the strategic plan: October 2018 - September 2019; 5) Evaluation: July 2019 - September 2019.

Financial, Personnel, and Other Resources

In order for this project to be successful, the Sciencenter will need committed board members, dedicated staff, and strong community support. The Sciencenter requests \$212,411 from IMLS to support this project, and will contribute an additional \$212,545 in matching funds through a combination of in-kind and cash support.

The Sciencenter is a well-loved community institution, with a strong staff and an engaged board. The last five-year planning process resulted in a strong programmatic focus on mission and vision and as such, the Sciencenter is well-positioned to undertake a more comprehensive approach to strategic planning that builds organizational, staff, and board capacity for the maximum impact.

Tracking Progress

As project director, Executive Director, Dean Briere, will work closely with our consultants to ensure that the project is on track to meet our planning goals. Our consultants will develop surveys and other tools to gather feedback from staff, board, and community members to assess levels of engagement and growth throughout the project. The communication plan will similarly include surveys or other forums to gauge community support for the resulting strategic framework.

Sharing Project Results

The Sciencenter, with the help of our consultants from Einstellung Labs, will create a communication plan that disseminates the results of the planning process to the community, staff, and board. The communication plan will also identify strategies to continually communicate changes and implementation to these same groups. In addition, the Sciencenter anticipates using our experience to contribute to larger, field-wide discussions around creating responsive strategic plans for changing times at conferences and through other forums.

III. PROJECT RESULTS

Performance Measure Statement

As with all Museums Empowered projects, the Performance Goal associated with this project is to train and develop museum professionals. We will survey staff and board participants using the following Performance Measure Statement: "My understanding has increased as a result of this program/training." We will work with our consultants to develop other survey questions that will be tailored to specific trainings and/or outcomes related to the strategic planning process. Our goal is for Sciencenter staff to have the understanding, capacity, and tools needed to evaluate programs and operations on an ongoing basis so that they can make better decisions for themselves, the organization, and the audiences we serve.

We will collect data from staff and board using anonymous surveys throughout the planning process. Surveys have already been identified as one of the tools we will use to do preliminary and ongoing assessments so the

performance measure statement can easily be incorporated into these planned surveys. Our consultants will collect the survey responses and number of respondents, which will both be reported to IMLS annually. Responses from surveys will also be reported to Sciencenter senior leadership to help inform strategic plan development and implementation.

Intended Results

The attached logic model (see Supporting Document 3) details the intended short-term outcomes and long-term impacts of this project. During the project period, we intend to have the following results for the Sciencenter, staff, and board.

The Sciencenter is a community-responsive organization with a strategic framework that fosters a culture of quality, distinction, and excellence; financial sustainability; and develops and delivers empowering science programs.

Sciencenter staff have increased capacity to evaluate programs and operations on an ongoing basis, and make decisions that positively impact their professional growth, their departments, the organization, and the audiences the Sciencenter serves.

Sciencenter board members are more fully engaged, with their efforts focused at the strategic direction of the organization. The board is also more easily able to recruit key community members and leaders to serve on the Sciencenter's board.

Ultimately, the goal of this project is to position the Sciencenter to strategically enact our mission, vision, and goals in order to create a science literate community that is empowered to use science in shaping a better future.

Change in Knowledge, Skills, and Behavior

Our target audiences for this project are the Sciencenter's staff and board. As a result of this project, Sciencenter staff will have increased capacity to manage change and evaluate programs and operations on an ongoing basis; and Sciencenter board will be more engaged and focused on the strategic goals of the organization.

Tangible Products

The project will result in the following tangible products: 1) a five-year, responsive strategic framework that will guide organizational programs and operations; 2) a communication plan that will be used to inform community members, staff, and board of key milestones and progress throughout the planning process; 3) new materials and policies that will provide concrete tools for increasing staff capacity as part of the strategic planning process, such as individualized professional development plans and revised position descriptions and performance evaluations that are aligned with the resulting strategic goals.

Sustaining Project Benefits

The strategic planning process will position the Sciencenter for long-term growth and financial sustainability. In addition, by incorporating staff professional development and capacity building into this project, the benefits of going through the process and the resulting strategic framework are integrated into how staff view their positions and growth. As staff grow, they have increased individual capacity, which taken together with other staff will yield stronger organizational capacity. This capacity translates into stronger programs and exhibits that serve our community, attract new memberships and guests, and ultimately result in increased admissions and membership revenues that will continually support the Sciencenter.

Sciencenter in Transition
Schedule of Completion

ACTIVITY	Year 1												Year 2												
	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	
<u>Research and Planning</u>																									
Sciencenter Internal and External Assessment	█																								
Advisory Board Kick-Off Meeting	◆																								
Best practices research	█																								
Site visits	◆		◆		◆																				
<u>Strategic Planning</u>																									
Strategic Planning Consultant visits to Ithaca	◆		◆		◆	◆							◆												
Community Conversations	█																								
Staff and Board Retreat		◆																							
Staff professional development	█																								
Plan Development					█																				
Plan Implementation													█												
<u>Communication</u>																									
Communication plan development											█														
Communication plan implementation											█														
<u>Evaluation</u>																									
Staff surveys and check-ins				●																					
Implementation Review																			█		█				
Plan adjustments and actions																			█		█				