



Museums Empowered

Sample Application ME-260401-OMS-26

Discovery Place

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$248,860
Amount of cost share:	\$266,759

Discovery Place will implement a professional development initiative to modernize workforce infrastructure and strengthen professional development systems to support staff across multiple locations across the institution. The project supports the implementation of a modern human resources information system that will connect performance management, professional learning, career pathway development, and workforce analytics within a single integrated platform. Paired with adaptive leadership training, mentorship structures, and documented career pathways, the new system will enable Discovery Place to cultivate a future-ready museum workforce equipped to navigate organizational growth and evolving technology-enabled museum operations. The organization will also expand professional development through adaptive leadership cohorts, innovation workshops, and a structured employee mentorship program designed to build leadership capacity and cross-department collaboration. The project will equip up to 160 full-time staff members with clearer advancement pathways, stronger leadership competencies, and the infrastructure needed to support sustained organizational growth.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of Completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the current Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program and project category to which you are applying.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

Program Goal & Associated Objective: This proposal aligns with Museums Empowered Goal 3: Organizational Management—strengthening and supporting museum staff as the essential part of a resilient organizational culture—specifically Objective 3.1, which supports the development of comprehensive organizational learning opportunities that address emerging priorities facing museums. Discovery Place is requesting \$248,860 from the Museums Empowered program to support a three-year organizational management initiative designed to modernize workforce infrastructure and strengthen professional development systems across the institution. At the center of this effort is implementation of a modern Human Resources Information System (HRIS) that will connect performance management, professional learning, career pathway development, and workforce analytics within a single integrated platform. As Discovery Place expands its network of museums and prepares to add new staff across multiple locations, stronger systems are needed to support leadership development, internal mobility, and long-term workforce stability. Paired with adaptive leadership training, mentorship structures, and documented career pathways, the HRIS will enable Discovery Place to cultivate a future-ready museum workforce equipped to navigate organizational growth and evolving technology-enabled museum operations.

Building on workforce investments launched in 2020, Discovery Place will use the HRIS as the foundation for more consistent performance management, workforce analytics, career pathway documentation, succession planning, and leadership development tracking. The proposed activities will equip approximately 160 full-time staff members with clearer advancement pathways, stronger leadership competencies, and the infrastructure needed to support sustained organizational growth. As museums increasingly integrate digital tools and artificial intelligence into daily operations, institutions must ensure staff are prepared to work confidently in technology-enabled environments. This initiative will help Discovery Place build the systems needed to support a future-ready workforce capable of integrating new tools responsibly and effectively across museum functions.

Discovery Place brings science, nature, and design together to create transformative learning experiences for the Charlotte region and beyond. The organization serves nearly 700,000 guests annually through a network of four museums, school and community outreach programs, and a STEM Center for Career Development that houses Youth Development initiatives. Discovery Place Nature, one of four locations in the Discovery Place family of museums across North Carolina, closed in 2024 to make way for a new 13-acre campus, the Charlotte Museum of Nature, scheduled to open in 2027. Attendance at the new campus is projected to double that of the former museum, with approximately 200,000 guests expected in the first year. Discovery Place is also developing a fifth museum location in Matthews, North Carolina, projected to open in 2029.

As the organization expands its network of museums and prepares to add approximately 40 new staff members, the workforce landscape is evolving rapidly. Museums increasingly rely on digital tools, data systems, and emerging technologies to operate effectively, requiring staff who are prepared to work in technology-enabled environments. Strengthening workforce infrastructure, including implementation of a modern HRIS, will allow Discovery Place to attract, develop, and retain a future-ready workforce while equipping staff with the skills and training needed to responsibly integrate new technologies, including AI, into daily work. As institutional scale increases, workforce systems must evolve as well. Discovery Place's current HRIS does not provide the integrated performance management, learning tracking, workforce analytics, or advancement visibility required to support a growing multi-site museum organization.

Advancement of Discovery Place's Strategic Plan: This project directly advances Discovery Place's strategic priority to "Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Culture to Support Growth," adopted by the Board of Trustees as part of the *Learning for a Lifetime* strategic agenda. A modern HRIS will allow Discovery Place to align professional development, performance management, leadership preparation, and workforce planning within a single system. This infrastructure will enable more consistent coaching conversations, clearer advancement pathways, and better organizational insight into emerging leadership pipelines.

Needs to be Addressed: Museums across the United States continue to face workforce instability, particularly among frontline and early-career positions. Sector surveys show that many museum employees consider leaving the field due to limited advancement pathways, inconsistent supervision practices, and high levels of job stress.

Discovery Place has identified similar workforce challenges internally through its annual Culture Amp staff engagement surveys and facilitated staff listening sessions conducted between 2023 and 2025. Earlier engagement surveys indicated that only 55% of staff reported being engaged, prompting a series of workforce investments beginning in 2020. These assessments highlighted several recurring themes, including limited visibility into advancement opportunities, inconsistent supervisory practices across divisions, and weak connections between professional

development activities and career progression. Staff feedback also indicated interest in stronger mentorship opportunities and more structured leadership preparation for employees interested in advancing within the organization. These findings informed the design of the proposed workforce initiative and underscored the need for more integrated systems to support staff development across the museum network. The most recent survey conducted in September 2025 shows engagement has improved to 66%, though staff feedback indicates that clearer advancement pathways and leadership development systems are still needed to sustain progress.

At Discovery Place, frontline and early-career roles represent approximately 59 percent of the workforce and serve as primary entry points into museum careers. These roles are essential to guest experience and program delivery, yet without clear career progression frameworks, high-potential staff may seek advancement opportunities elsewhere.

As museums adapt to rapid technological change, workforce systems must help staff understand how emerging tools like AI can support planning, communication, learning design, and operational decision-making across departments. Across museum functions, including education program design, exhibit development, visitor engagement, operational planning, communications, and workforce management, staff will need growing confidence in how digital tools and data systems can support daily work. As artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies become more integrated into workplace tools used for research, planning, scheduling, and communication, museum professionals must understand how to apply these tools responsibly within institutional contexts.

At present the institution lacks a centralized system for documenting skill development, tracking emerging training needs, and connecting professional growth with performance goals. Implementation of a modern HRIS will provide the structure needed to organize learning pathways, document skill acquisition, and support a workforce that is prepared for evolving museum work.

Target Group: Frontline, early-career, and non-managerial staff represent the primary target group for this initiative. These roles include approximately 95 staff members working as museum educators, guest experience associates, exhibit facilitators, program coordinators, and operational support staff across Discovery Place’s museum locations. These positions serve as primary entry points into museum careers and play a critical role in delivering daily visitor experiences and educational programming. While many employees in these roles demonstrate strong interest in long-term museum careers, advancement pathways and leadership development opportunities have historically been informal or inconsistently communicated. This project will expand access to structured leadership training, innovation workshops, mentorship pairings, and clearly defined career ladders so staff can build skills, prepare for supervisory roles, and pursue internal advancement.

Overall Project Beneficiaries: All Discovery Place employees—approximately 160 staff members across ten divisions—will benefit from this initiative. Staff will gain clearer advancement pathways, structured leadership development opportunities, and improved performance management systems. The new HRIS will centralize goal setting, evaluation processes, professional development tracking, and workforce analytics. Managers will gain better tools for coaching, leadership preparation, and workforce planning. Museum guests will benefit indirectly through stronger institutional knowledge, improved staff continuity, and consistent service delivery.

PROJECT WORK PLAN

Project activities will be implemented over a three-year period. Year 1 will focus on vendor selection, implementation, and staff onboarding for the new Human Resources Information System (HRIS), along with the launch of leadership development cohorts and innovation workshops. Years 2 and 3 will focus on full integration of career ladder frameworks, succession planning processes, mentorship programming, and continued leadership training. Evaluation activities will occur throughout the grant period, with dissemination of findings through webinars and conference presentations beginning in Year 2 and continuing through the conclusion of the project.

The project will require coordinated investment of personnel time, technology infrastructure, and professional development resources. Grant funds will support implementation of a modern HRIS, leadership development programming, mentorship activities, and career pathway development across the institution. Project resources include HRIS acquisition and implementation costs, personnel time for program coordination, leadership development facilitation, and evaluation activities necessary to sustain implementation across the three-year grant period. Key personnel include the Chief Operating Officer serving as Project Director, the Director of Human Resources overseeing HRIS implementation and career framework development, the Director of Research and Evaluation leading evaluation activities, and a Manager of Organizational Development responsible for coordinating leadership cohorts, innovation workshops, and mentorship programming. Together, this cross-divisional team will ensure that project activities are implemented consistently across departments and that staff at all levels are able to participate in leadership development and workforce planning initiatives.

Proposed Activities

Priority 1: Workforce Infrastructure Modernization through HRIS: Discovery Place will implement a modern HRIS to serve as the operational backbone of this workforce development initiative. As the organization expands across multiple museum sites and increases staff capacity, the HRIS will provide the integrated infrastructure necessary to align professional development, performance management, workforce analytics, and leadership pipeline development.

Discovery Place's current system does not provide sufficient reporting capacity, learning documentation, or performance alignment tools needed to support a growing multi-site museum organization. The upgraded HRIS will centralize performance management, professional learning records, advancement readiness indicators, and workforce analytics within a single platform.

Implementation will occur during Year 1 of the grant period and will be led by the Director of Human Resources in coordination with the Manager of Organizational Development. The implementation process will include vendor selection, system configuration, data migration, staff onboarding, and phased rollout of performance management and learning modules. Training sessions will be conducted for supervisors and staff to ensure consistent adoption of goal setting, professional development tracking, and performance documentation tools.

Beyond improving administrative efficiency, the HRIS will serve as a strategic workforce planning tool. The system will allow Discovery Place to track leadership development participation, identify emerging leadership pipelines, analyze retention patterns, and align succession planning efforts with institutional growth. The HRIS will also support documentation of emerging workforce competencies and provide a structure for tracking learning participation and supporting supervisor conversations about evolving workplace skills.

Quarterly system reports will monitor adoption rates, completion of performance reviews, alignment of staff goals with division objectives, and participation in professional development programs. These metrics will help Discovery Place ensure that the HRIS functions not only as an administrative tool but as the foundation for a future-focused workforce development system.

Priority 2: Career Path Development: Discovery Place will formalize organization-wide career progression frameworks to strengthen internal mobility, clarify advancement expectations, and support leadership continuity across divisions. While previous compensation studies established transparent salary bands, advancement pathways within and across divisions are not consistently documented or communicated. This initiative will create division-specific career ladder frameworks that define role competencies, advancement criteria, required skills, and potential lateral or upward mobility pathways.

Talent Management will partner with division leaders to develop career ladder frameworks for each of the organization's ten divisions. These frameworks will outline progression from entry-level roles to supervisory and management positions, including the knowledge, skills, and performance indicators required for advancement. Where appropriate, pathways will also identify lateral development opportunities that allow staff to build cross-functional experience.

Once developed, division leaders will receive training on integrating career ladder frameworks into regular supervisory conversations, annual performance reviews, and professional development planning. Career progression discussions will become a standard component of one-on-one meetings between supervisors and staff. Participation in leadership development cohorts, mentorship programs, and innovation workshops will be documented within the HRIS and recognized as contributing evidence toward advancement readiness. Participation in professional development programs will strengthen the organization's internal leadership pipeline.

The career ladder frameworks will also identify evolving competencies relevant to modern museum work, including digital collaboration, data-informed decision-making, and the responsible use of emerging technologies where appropriate to specific roles. Incorporating these competencies ensures that advancement pathways reflect both traditional supervisory readiness and the changing skills needed in a technology-enabled workplace. Internal mobility trends—including promotions and lateral transfers—will be reviewed annually using HRIS reporting tools to evaluate whether career pathway implementation is strengthening advancement opportunities for existing staff.

Priority 3: Leadership Development and Mentorship: Discovery Place will expand and formalize a multi-tiered professional development framework designed to build adaptive leadership capacity across the organization. This framework integrates cohort-based leadership training, organization-wide innovation workshops, and a formal mentorship structure to ensure that leadership development translates into sustained practice and institutional impact.

Adaptive Leadership Cohorts: Discovery Place will conduct two Adaptive Leadership Cohorts annually, each serving 12–15 participants drawn from multiple divisions. Cohorts will run for four months and include twice-monthly facilitated sessions focused on leading through complexity, navigating organizational change, and strengthening cross-functional

collaboration. The cohort structure provides a sustained learning environment in which participants can apply leadership concepts directly to operational challenges facing the institution.

Curriculum content will draw from established adaptive leadership and complexity management frameworks and will include practical tools for diagnosing organizational challenges, distinguishing technical problems from adaptive challenges, and guiding collaborative problem-solving. Instruction will incorporate the Cynefin model as a structured decision framework for analyzing complex situations, alongside Belbin Team Role assessments, experimentation through Small Experiments with Radical Intent (SERI), and structured reflection on organizational “immunities to change.” Through these activities, participants will explore real institutional challenges and develop strategies for addressing complex operational and programmatic issues.

Each cohort will culminate in a cross-divisional group project that applies cohort learning to a real museum operational challenge. These projects ensure that leadership development activities remain closely connected to institutional priorities and operational needs rather than remaining theoretical exercises. Cross-divisional collaboration within cohort projects also strengthens institutional knowledge sharing and builds leadership relationships across departments.

Participation and completion will be documented within the HRIS learning module, allowing supervisors and staff to connect leadership development activities with performance goals and professional development plans. This integration ensures that leadership training contributes directly to advancement readiness, succession planning discussions, and long-term workforce development.

Innovation Workshops: To extend leadership learning beyond cohort participants, Discovery Place will offer four half-day Innovation Workshops annually. These workshops introduce adaptive leadership principles and collaborative problem-solving approaches for staff across divisions. Workshops will include interactive exercises focused on distinguishing technical solutions from adaptive responses and practicing cross-functional collaboration. Sessions may also explore practical applications of emerging workplace tools that support planning, research, and communication across museum operations.

Employee Mentor Program: To reinforce learning and support continued professional growth, Discovery Place will formalize an Employee Mentor Program that pairs leadership cohort participants with trained mentors who have previously completed leadership development programming. Mentor–mentee pairs will meet at least twice monthly during the four-month cohort cycle to discuss learning application, professional goals, and opportunities to practice leadership behaviors within current roles. Mentors will receive orientation outlining expectations, meeting cadence, and strategies for constructive feedback.

Meeting frequency and participation will be documented through the HRIS learning module. Midpoint satisfaction surveys will assess mentor–mentee alignment, and if satisfaction ratings fall below established benchmarks, pairings will be reassessed and additional mentor support provided.

Graduates of the leadership cohorts will be eligible for stretch assignments, cross-functional project leadership roles, and inclusion in succession planning discussions, ensuring that leadership development contributes directly to institutional advancement opportunities.

Priority 4: Sharing Best Practices and Outcomes: Discovery Place is committed to contributing to the broader museum field by sharing lessons learned from this workforce development initiative. Upon completion of Year 2 and again at the conclusion of the grant period, Discovery Place will synthesize evaluation findings, workforce analytics trends, and implementation insights into practical resources for peer institutions navigating similar workforce challenges. Dissemination will focus on three areas: 1) Structuring adaptive leadership cohorts within mid-sized museum organizations; 2) Integrating mentorship programs with career pathway development and succession planning; and 3) Leveraging HRIS infrastructure to align professional development, performance management, and workforce analytics

Discovery Place will produce a three-part webinar series designed for human resources, talent development, and organizational leadership professionals within museums and science centers. Webinars will present project outcomes, implementation strategies, and lessons learned, translating evaluation findings into practical frameworks that peer institutions can adapt.

In addition to webinars, Discovery Place will pursue presentation opportunities at the Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC) and American Alliance of Museums (AAM) annual conferences. Dissemination materials will include summary briefs, implementation checklists, and evaluation findings that support replication by peer institutions. Sharing both successes and course corrections will allow Discovery Place to contribute to sector-wide conversations about strengthening workforce systems and preparing museum professionals for evolving institutional environments.

Project Team: This initiative builds on prior leadership development investments and will be implemented through an established cross-divisional governance structure aligned with Discovery Place’s growth strategy. The project will be led by a cross-functional team representing executive leadership, talent management, IT leadership, and evaluation expertise. Together, this team provides strategic oversight, operational execution, and data-driven accountability.

Project Director: Sarah Fantle, Chief Operating Officer, will serve as Project Director and provide executive oversight. In this role, she will ensure alignment between project activities and organizational growth strategy, monitor milestone progress, and report outcomes to senior leadership and the Board of Directors. As COO, Ms. Fantle oversees institutional operations and workforce planning, positioning her to integrate leadership development, career pathways, and HRIS modernization into standard operating practice.

Talent Management Lead: Gee-Gee Johnson, Director of Human Resources, will oversee implementation of career ladder development, succession planning processes, and HRIS modernization. She will coordinate division-level engagement, facilitate career framework development, and lead system adoption across the organization. Ms. Johnson holds a Professional in Human Resources (PHR) certification and has direct responsibility for workforce analytics, recruitment, and compliance functions.

Technology and Systems Lead: Barrett Long, Senior Director of IT and Data Management, reports to the COO and will oversee technical implementation of the HRIS and ensure successful integration with Discovery Place’s existing technology infrastructure. In this role, he will guide system configuration, data migration, security protocols, and organization-wide adoption of HRIS tools. Mr. Long also serves as executive sponsor of Discovery Place’s internal AI Committee, where he leads exploration of emerging technologies and their practical application across museum operations. With more than two decades of experience managing enterprise information systems and leading complex technology projects within the Discovery Place network, he brings deep expertise in systems integration, data management, and technology-enabled organizational change. Mr. Long’s participation in the project will be supported through Discovery Place’s existing IT operations budget and is not included as a grant-funded expense.

Evaluation Lead: Dr. Courtney Ball, Director of Research and Evaluation, will oversee all project evaluation activities, including engagement analysis, mentorship satisfaction assessments, internal mobility tracking, and retention metrics. Dr. Ball will ensure that evaluation findings inform mid-course adjustments and are translated into dissemination materials for field-wide knowledge sharing. Her expertise in research design and quantitative analysis supports rigorous measurement aligned with Museums Empowered requirements.

Manager of Organizational Development (To Be Hired): The Manager of Organizational Development will lead implementation of Adaptive Leadership Cohorts, Innovation Workshops, and the Employee Mentor Program. This position will coordinate cohort facilitation, mentor training, participation tracking, and cross-divisional project development. In addition, the role will support integration of professional development activities within the HRIS platform, ensuring that leadership training, career pathway development, and workforce analytics are consistently documented and connected to performance management processes. As Discovery Place prepares staff for evolving workplace practices, this role will also help incorporate discussions of technology-enabled workflows and emerging tools into leadership development and innovation workshops. During Year 1, this role will dedicate approximately 80% effort to project implementation, decreasing to 60% in Years 2–3 as systems become embedded into ongoing operations. Should recruitment extend beyond anticipated timelines, trained internal facilitators will continue delivering leadership cohorts to ensure continuity.

Risk Assessment and Mitigation: Discovery Place recognizes that organizational change initiatives—particularly those involving technology implementation, workforce development systems, and leadership training—require careful planning to ensure sustainability and staff engagement. The project leadership team has identified several potential risks and mitigation strategies aligned with the initiative’s priorities of workforce infrastructure modernization, career pathway development, leadership training, and institutional knowledge sharing.

Recruitment and Staffing Delays: Successful implementation of leadership development programming depends on timely recruitment of the Manager of Organizational Development, who will coordinate Adaptive Leadership Cohorts, mentorship activities, and professional development tracking within the HRIS. To mitigate potential delays, recruitment will begin at the start of FY26 with contingency planning in place. Existing trained leadership staff can facilitate early cohorts if necessary to maintain program continuity. Project milestones will be reviewed quarterly to ensure timeline adjustments do not compromise key deliverables.

Staff Capacity and Mentorship Participation: Frontline and supervisory staff must balance operational responsibilities with participation in leadership development activities. To mitigate potential participation constraints, cohort and mentorship engagement will be incorporated into workload planning and recognized as a formal leadership

contribution. Mentors will receive orientation outlining expectations and meeting cadence. Midpoint surveys will assess mentor-mentee effectiveness, and pairings will be adjusted if satisfaction benchmarks are not met. Participation patterns will be monitored through the HRIS learning module to ensure balanced engagement across divisions.

HRIS Implementation and Technology Adoption: Implementation of a new HRIS presents potential challenges related to data migration, system adoption, and integration with existing workflows. Discovery Place will conduct structured vendor selection, phased system rollout, and organization-wide training to support successful implementation. Quarterly system usage reports will monitor adoption rates, completion of performance reviews, and participation in professional development activities. If implementation milestones shift, the project timeline will prioritize system stability before expanding advanced performance management modules.

Technology Integration and Workforce Readiness: As museums increasingly rely on digital tools and data systems, staff must adapt to evolving workplace practices. To address potential uncertainty around new technologies, Discovery Place will incorporate discussions of technology-enabled workflows into innovation workshops and leadership training. The HRIS learning module will allow the organization to document participation in these learning activities and track emerging competencies related to technology-supported work practices over time.

Tracking Progress to Achieve Intended Results: Discovery Place will implement a structured evaluation framework that integrates quantitative workforce metrics, qualitative feedback, and implementation monitoring to assess progress across all project priorities. Evaluation oversight will be led by the Director of Research and Evaluation in collaboration with the Chief Operating Officer and Director of Human Resources. Evaluation activities will focus on four primary outcome areas: leadership development participation, career pathway implementation, workforce infrastructure modernization, and employee engagement.

In addition to traditional workforce development indicators, the evaluation framework will also assess progress in preparing staff for technology-enabled work environments. As museums increasingly rely on digital tools and data systems, Discovery Place will track staff participation in learning opportunities related to technology-supported workflows and document how these skills are incorporated into professional development goals and leadership training activities.

Leadership Development Participation and Satisfaction: Participation in Adaptive Leadership Cohorts, innovation workshops, and mentorship programs will be tracked through the HRIS learning module. At the conclusion of each cohort cycle, reports will measure participation rates, completion rates, and cross-divisional representation among participants. Mentor–mentee meeting frequency will be tracked monthly. Surveys administered at the midpoint and conclusion of each cohort cycle will measure perceived relevance, leadership skill development, and mentor effectiveness. If satisfaction ratings fall below established benchmarks, program adjustments such as mentor reassignment, schedule modification, or additional mentor support will be implemented.

Career Pathway Implementation and Internal Mobility: Following development of division-specific career ladder frameworks, Talent Management will track supervisor training completion and integration of career ladder discussions into performance reviews. Internal mobility indicators—including promotions and lateral transfers—will be monitored annually and compared with pre-project baseline data to assess whether career pathway implementation contributes to increased advancement opportunities for existing staff. Succession planning exercises conducted annually will identify emerging leaders and potential leadership gaps across divisions. These findings will inform recruitment priorities for leadership cohorts and mentorship pairings.

Workforce Infrastructure Modernization: During HRIS implementation in Year 1, evaluation will focus on system adoption rates and staff training completion. Quarterly reports will monitor the percentage of staff with documented professional goals, completed performance reviews, and recorded professional development activities. Following system implementation, workforce analytics generated by the HRIS will allow Discovery Place to track retention trends, recruitment cycle duration, leadership pipeline development, and participation in professional development activities. These metrics will allow the institution to evaluate how workforce systems support organizational growth and staff advancement.

In addition to monitoring workforce development participation, Discovery Place will track staff engagement with learning opportunities related to technology-supported work practices and digital collaboration tools. Participation data will be reviewed annually to assess whether staff are increasingly incorporating technology-enabled workflows into planning, communication, and program development activities.

Employee Engagement and Retention: Discovery Place will administer its Culture Amp engagement survey annually during the grant period. Engagement scores will be compared to the baseline established in the most recent survey cycle to assess changes in staff perception of professional development opportunities, supervisory support, and advancement

clarity. Annual attrition rates will also be reviewed and compared with pre-grant averages. Where retention challenges persist within specific divisions or role categories, leadership development opportunities and mentorship participation will be expanded to address identified needs.

Dissemination Metrics: Participation in webinars, conference sessions, and dissemination activities will be tracked through registration and attendance reports. Post-session surveys will measure the usefulness of shared resources and the likelihood that peer institutions will adopt similar workforce development practices. Evaluation findings will be synthesized annually and used both to refine project implementation and to support field-wide knowledge sharing. Dissemination materials will include summary briefs, implementation checklists, career pathway framework templates, mentorship program design tools, and evaluation findings that support replication by peer institutions seeking to strengthen workforce infrastructure and professional development systems.

PROJECT RESULTS

Short-Term Results (Years 1–2). By the end of Year 2, Discovery Place will have: 1) Four Adaptive Leadership Cohorts annually, serving approximately 24–30 staff members per year; 2) 90% documented meeting compliance among cohort participants; 3) Career ladder frameworks for 10 divisions and trained supervisors in their use; 4) Completed succession planning exercises across divisions; and 5) 95% of staff with documented performance goals and completed annual reviews within the HRIS. These outputs will result in increased clarity around advancement pathways, improved alignment between professional development and performance evaluation, and more consistent leadership preparation across divisions. These changes will strengthen staff leadership skills, improve supervisors' ability to coach and develop employees, and increase staff confidence navigating advancement pathways and technology-enabled work environments.

Intermediate Outcomes (Year 3). By the end of Year 3, Discovery Place expects to demonstrate: 1) A five-percentage-point increase in employee engagement above the 66% baseline established in September 2025; 2) Increased internal mobility, measured through year-over-year growth in internal promotions and lateral transfers relative to pre-grant baselines; 3) Improved mentorship satisfaction ratings exceeding 80% across cohort participants; 4) Reduction in recruitment cycle duration for supervisory and mid-level roles, reflecting strengthened internal leadership pipelines; 5) An increase in the proportion of staff who report confidence using digital collaboration tools, data systems, and other technology-supported workflows in their daily responsibilities, as measured through engagement surveys and professional development tracking.

Long-Term Institutional Impact. Over time, these outcomes will contribute to reduced voluntary attrition among frontline and early-career staff, stronger cross-divisional collaboration and shared leadership language, increased institutional resilience during periods of expansion and operational change, and a scalable workforce development model that prepares Discovery Place staff for the evolving demands of museum work in an increasingly technology-enabled environment, including the responsible integration of emerging tools such as AI. Project tools, implementation insights, and evaluation findings will be shared through webinars, conference presentations, and publicly available implementation resources designed for museum human resources and organizational development professionals.

Sustainability: Discovery Place views this initiative not as a time-limited program, but as a structural investment in workforce systems that will continue beyond the grant period. Leadership development cohorts, mentorship structures, career ladder frameworks, and succession planning processes will be embedded into standard Talent Management operations by the end of Year 3. Once designed and implemented, these systems require ongoing maintenance rather than redevelopment. The Manager of Organizational Development position will remain part of the institutional staffing plan, with decreasing grant reliance as responsibilities transition into ongoing operational budgets.

The HRIS will serve as a permanent workforce infrastructure platform supporting performance management, professional development tracking, advancement planning, and succession management. After initial implementation and training are complete, annual system costs will be incorporated into the organization's operating budget.

Discovery Place's executive leadership team has formally prioritized staff development and workforce stability within its FY25 Management Plan. Annual engagement surveys, internal mobility tracking, and succession planning exercises will continue beyond the grant period as part of standard governance practice. Workforce metrics will be reviewed annually by senior leadership and reported to the Board of Directors to ensure continued accountability.

As Discovery Place expands its museum network, including the opening of the Charlotte Museum of Nature and the development of a fifth museum location in Matthews, North Carolina, strong leadership pipelines and workforce systems will be essential to sustaining operational excellence across multiple sites. This investment in modern workforce infrastructure will prepare staff not only for current roles but for the evolving demands of museum work in an increasingly technology-enabled environment.

Work Plan Schedule of Completion
IMLS: ME-FY26
Discovery Place, Inc.
Building an Adaptive Workforce: Investing in Tools to Strengthen Professional Development and Engagement

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