

HI-DESERT NATURE MUSEUM

STRATEGIC PLAN

2014-2016



Hi-Desert Nature Museum
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Civic Institutions

Museums, in the extraordinary variety of communities across the country that have created and cherished them, have a deeply rooted community connection that is uniquely their own.

- Americans from all income and education ranges visit museums. There are 2.3 million museum visits per day, adding up to 600 million visits per year to American museums.
- There are more than 17,500 museums in the United States and 9 out of 10 counties in America have at least one museum—75% of them considered to be small and 43% located in rural areas.
- More than one-third (35%) of museums are free to the public, and of those museums that do charge, 98% offer special discounts and nearly 62% have free admission days.
- Of Americans age 18 and older, one in 480 is a museum volunteer.

Protectors of our Artistic, Historic, Scientific and Cultural Heritage

Organized as public trusts, American museums are grounded in the tradition of public service and hold their collections and information as a benefit for those they were established to serve.

- Museums care for more than 750 million objects and living specimens.
- 93% of all museums have permanent collections.
- In a recent survey, after their families, Americans rank authentic artifacts in history museums and historic sites most significant in creating a strong connection to the past.

MUSEUMS WORKING IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

Public education, in its broadest sense, is best served not only by our schools and libraries, but also by museums. As community centers, they offer people of all ages and future generations access to our nation's cultural and natural heritage. Their special role in public education is centered on the capacity of museums to provide the public an interactive, object based place to better understand its community, its nation, and its world. From art museums to zoos, museums are gathering places for people to meet and spend time with families and friends.

The public benefits from the many services a museum provides to its community.

Centers of Learning

The educational role of museums is at the core of their service to the public. People of all ages and backgrounds come to learn from the collections, exhibits and programs created by museums through their research and scholarship.

- A recent national survey indicates that Americans view museums as one of the most important resources for educating our children and as one of the most trustworthy sources of objective information.
- Museums provide more than 18 million instructional hours for educational programs such as professional development for teachers, guided field trips, staff visits to schools, and traveling exhibits in schools.
- Nearly 11,000 American museums provide K-12 educational programming. Most museums offering educational programs in math, science, art, and history use local and state curriculum standards to shape their educational programs. Almost 9 out of 10 Americans (87%) find museums to be the most trustworthy or a trustworthy source of information among a wide range of choices, including 38% who see museums as one of the most trusted sources.

Key Partner in Travel and Tourism

Museums provide a common experience that families share across generations and create memories. They are national treasures that allow grandparents, parents and children together to see history come alive, make a scientific discovery, or wonder at a work of art.

- Trips including cultural and heritage activities comprise one of the most popular and significant segments of the travel industry, accounting for over 23% of all domestic trips.
- Museums rank in the top three family vacation destinations.
- One-third of Americans say they have visited an art museum, a history museum, an aquarium, zoo, botanical garden, or science and technology center within the past six months.

Statistics provided by the American Alliance of Museums, Washington, DC



OVERVIEW OF THE HI-DESERT NATURE MUSEUM

For 50 years the Hi-Desert Nature Museum has been dedicated to helping the citizens of the Morongo Basin and High Desert discover “with new eyes” the rich cultural heritage and natural history of this area. Generations of students, and museum visitors have relied on the museum to inform, inspire, interpret, and entertain. As the Hi-Desert Nature Museum looks to the future, it aspires to create an ever more inviting community gathering place to nurture life-long learning and reflection.

The Hi-Desert Nature Museum was founded in 1964 by Evelyn Conklin; her father, Percy Conklin; Camilla Hudson, a long-time resident; and Jerry Moore, Community Services Director of the Parks and Recreation District. With the incorporation of the Town of Yucca Valley in 1991, the museum became a division of the Community Services Department. The museum has always been a family-oriented facility whose original purpose was to display and educate residents and visitors about the desert environment. The original collections consisted primarily of gifts from the community-at-large.

The Hi-Desert Nature Museum holds collections that represent parts of the earth’s history and the art, culture and natural science of the Morongo Basin and High Desert. Through its public programs, the Hi-Desert Nature Museum seeks to bring the diversity of natural, artistic, and cultural history to life in relevant, dynamic, and engaging ways. The museum strives to make people stop and think.



MISSION STATEMENT

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

VISION STATEMENT

- To support and advance the museum's mission, the Hi-Desert Nature Museum will provide an educational and cultural center for residents and visitors to explore the unique and diverse natural, cultural, and artistic world of the Morongo Basin and the High Desert region of California. The Museum is dedicated to public service and shares a commitment to provide services and opportunities to its constituents.
- Collect, study, and interpret the region's natural, cultural, and artistic heritage.
- Preserve the museum's collections in trust for future generations.
- Engage a diverse audience and inspire inquiry through the development of relevant educational programs.
- Foster an understanding, appreciation, and stewardship of the area's environment and natural resources.
- Celebrate the Morongo Basin's native peoples and cultures.
- Provide a historic context for understanding how conditions and decisions of the past impact the region today and shape its future.
- Promote regional arts and artists through the display of art exhibitions that enrich the quality of life for residents and visitors of the Morongo Basin, and provide art education for children and adults.
- Face the challenges of the future by promoting knowledge and understanding of our ever changing world.
- Promote collaboration and partnerships with the community, affiliates, and educational institutions.
- Provide an educational environment that stimulates life-long learning.

CORE VALUES

Core values drive an institution's strategy and decisions and contribute in a definitive manner to its success. The very culture of the organization is determined by its values and philosophy. These values are the ideals and inspiration that guide the decisions and actions taken by the Hi-Desert Nature Museum as an institution and by its individual employees.

Respect and Inclusiveness

Fostering trust, collaboration, appreciation, diversity

Leadership and Excellence

Promoting integrity, initiative, high standards, self-motivation

Scholarship and Professionalism

Encouraging creativity, inquiry, analysis, documentation, communication, and upholding ethical standards and museum principles

Commitment and Responsibility

Encouraging legal, ethical and fiscal responsibility, stewardship, accountability, institutional continuity

Accessibility and Responsiveness

Furthering service, sharing resources, flexibility

Knowledge and Life-Long Learning

Promoting curiosity, discovery, teaching

SINCE THE LAST STRATEGIC PLAN

The last strategic plan for the Hi-Desert Nature Museum was completed in 2008. It laid out the museum's goals in six phases, to be completed by 2012. Based on the Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update from 2008, the strategic plan was directed towards the expansion of the museum's programming as well as the size of the facility.

Reviewing the objectives set in the previous strategic plan, the staff had accomplished or was in the process of accomplishing the defined goals. The 2008 recession forced the Town of Yucca Valley to redirect its focus. Because of funding reductions, some of the museum's accomplishments were negated, and it was forced to backtrack on its progress.

In times of financial crisis, cutting staff is one of the ways to save money. With reductions in Town staffing, museum staff had to take on duties outside museum functions, such as running the Youth Commission, producing the Recreation Guide, and assisting in general town planning procedures. Between 2010 and 2013 the museum lost 2.75 FTEs, a Registrar and a Museum Assistant, who also managed the gift shop, as well as a Museum Supervisor.

The elimination of the Registrar position in 2010 stopped all work on a collections inventory, as well as collections and exhibit maintenance. The Museum Assistant position was eliminated in April 2013. Consequently, the museum was forced to eliminate its gift-shop. Though not adding major funds, the gift-shop was very popular with visitors.

The Museum Supervisor took an early retirement offer and left the museum in May 2013. With that, the museum was left with 1.5 FTEs. Open hours were reduced from five days per week to three days per week, and programming had to be adjusted accordingly. The Starry Nights Festival was cancelled along with one Family Fun Day and all off-site educational services. The popular lecture series was shortened.

Recently, the museum was able to recover the full-time Registrar and Exhibit Coordinator position.



FUNDING

The Hi-Desert Nature Museum is part of the Town of Yucca Valley's Community Services Department. It is fully funded by the Town of Yucca Valley and functions as a Municipal Museum. Town funding is supplemented through donations, membership fees and occasional small fundraisers. Funds thus raised are dedicated for use in special exhibits or large scale purchases that would go beyond the scale of the average budget.

SPONSORS

Traditionally museums offer a membership program which offers certain benefits including free entrance, gift-shop discounts, behind the scenes tours, etc. These commonly offered membership benefits can not be applied to the Hi-Desert Nature Museum. However, museum patrons have shown a desire to support the museum and its mission. Offering a sponsorship program will allow museum supporters to make a contribution towards certain museum programs and to remain engaged with the museum.

This program will also provide a framework to approach small business and corporate sponsors in the future.



Goal

Design and Implement a Museum Sponsorship Program

Strategies

- Identify sponsorship levels for Hi-Desert Nature Museum patrons.
- Research and evaluate successful sponsorship programs from other museums.
- Out phase exciting membership program and integrate current members into new sponsorship program.

Key Performance Indicators

- Have a successful sponsorship program in place.
- Increase participation in the new program by 20% in comparison to previous memberships.

Facility and Exhibit Spaces

The museum started in an 800 square foot building in a local park. In 1973, it moved to its present location in the Yucca Valley Community Center Complex. In 1989, an expansion was added to house taxidermy specimens in diorama settings. The museum is currently housed in a 5,300 square foot, one-story, reinforced concrete block and masonry building (see the museum floor plan on the following page).

In accordance with its previous strategic plan, the museum has been working on updating exhibit spaces and display cases. In 2010, three custom museum quality exhibit cases were purchased and installed in Room 3, which now houses the museum's Native American collection. Some of the older exhibit cases were refurbished and painted to match the new display cases. The gallery space in Room 1 had exhibit panels installed that expand the hanging space, making the installation of temporary exhibits much easier. Track lighting was installed, as well. The Kids Corner was repainted with nature murals on its walls to make it look more inviting for children.

Still, some of the museum's interior is unaltered and appears dated. The exhibit cases that house the museum's popular Gem & Mineral Collection are at least 30 years old and even though the exhibit has been updated, the exhibit cases need to be restored to comply with today's collection standards. The 1989 expansion, Room 3, still has the original light fixtures as well as the built in dioramas. Even the Kids Corner could profit from some upgrades in furniture and new educational toys and interactive features.

Goal

Update exhibit spaces, Kids Corner, and display cases.

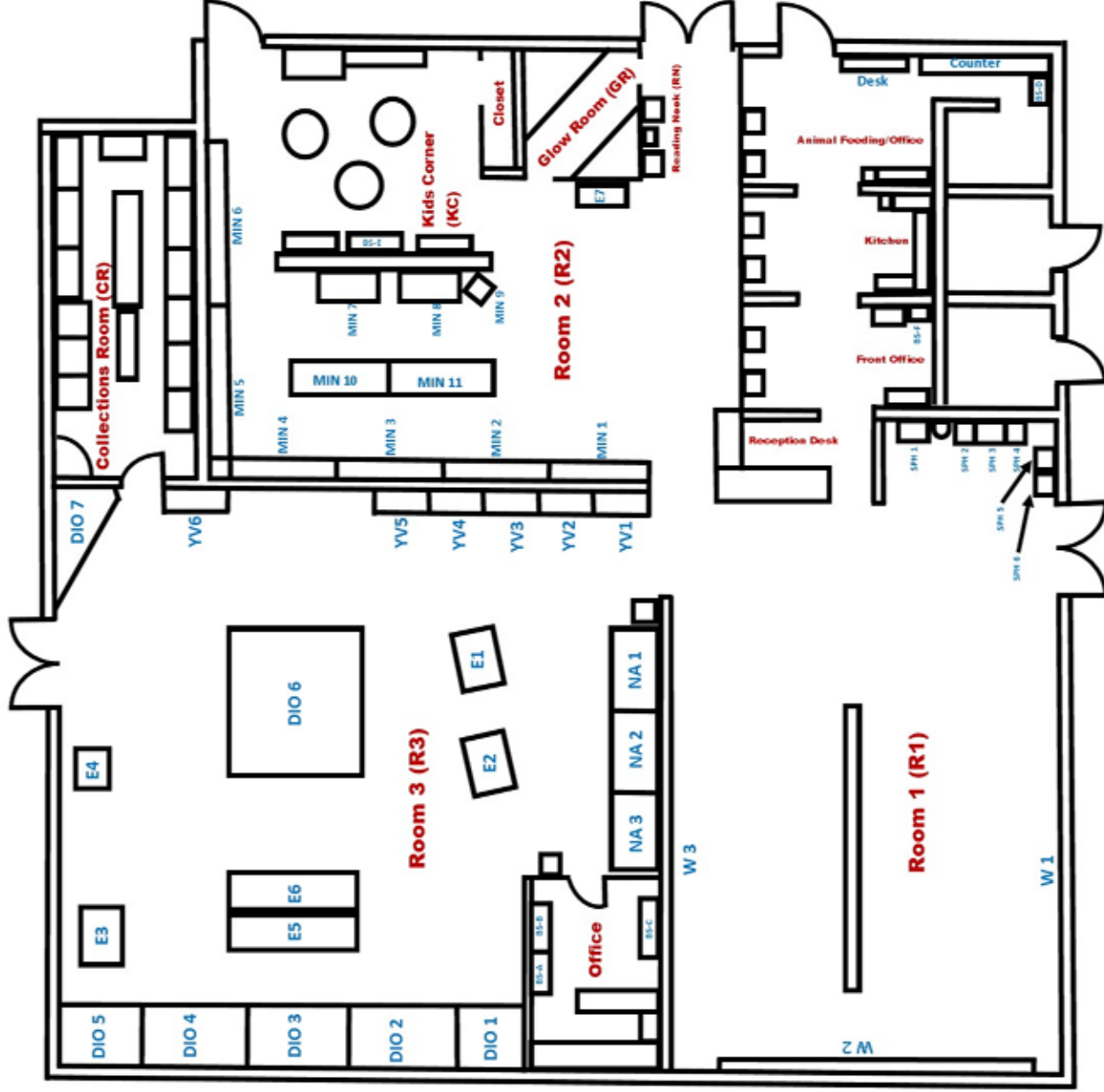
Strategies

- Titivate Room 3 to achieve a professional museum exhibit and program space.
- Research and evaluate lighting options for Rooms 2 and 3.
- Investigate the possibility of updating the Gem & Mineral cases without having to replace them.
- Explore options for updating the Kids Corner with furniture and educational toys.

Key Performance Indicators

- Exhibit spaces are appropriately lit and inviting.
- Exhibit cases are refurbished and conform to present museum standards.
- Kids Corner presents an appealing space providing educational opportunities for children.

2014 Existing Hi-Desert Nature Museum Floor Plan and Layout (not to scale)



LOCATION CODES

- BS- Book Shelves
- CR Collections Room
- DIO Diorama Cases
- E Exhibit Cases
- GR Glow Room
- KC Kids Corner
- MIN Mineral Cases
- NA Native American Cases
- R Room
- SPH Sphere Cases
- W Walls
- YV Yucca Valley History (Pioneer) Cases

Educational Programs

The public face of the Hi-Desert Nature Museum is perhaps nowhere better seen than in its education programs. These programs serve schools, families and other groups that visit the museum.

On-Site Educational Programs

With careful scheduling the museum can maintain its mandate to be available for school groups that visit the museum for educational programs.

The museum will maintain a monthly youth education program—Kid EdVentures, as well as seasonal activities.

Lecture series are a prominent part of the museum's outreach and educational adult lectures will remain an important part of the museum's educational mission.

Off-Site Education Services

Off-site education services will be offered depending on demand and resources available.

Goal

Maintain and possibly improve the Hi-Desert Nature Museum's education programs for visitors of all ages and for schools throughout the region.

Strategies

- Maintain a wide variety of on-site education program offerings for youth and adults.
- Formalize evaluation process.
- Open the museum for school fieldtrips and lectures on days the museum is closed to the public.

Key Performance Indicators

- Conduct at least one educational Youth Program per month.
- Present one Brown Bag Lunch Lecture per month.
- Have a consistent offering for school fieldtrips.

Long Range Goals (2016 - 2019)

Expand the depth and reach of Hi-Desert Nature Museum education programs for visitors of all ages and for schools throughout the region.

- Create a new full-time Youth Program Coordinator and Museum Educator position to support the museum's education mandate as well as coordinate Youth Programs in the Recreation Department.
- Expand on-site education program offerings to reach new and underserved markets with afternoon tours, preschool and after-school programs, teacher training opportunities, and summer programs.
- Increase marketing efforts to promote education programs.
- Collaborate with teachers to develop partnership programs that support statewide learning requirements and specific school district curriculum.
- Formalize evaluation and the use of educational assessment tools.
- Develop K-12 Traveling Study Collections.

Public Programs

While the Hi-Desert Nature Museum has no shortage of ideas and contacts for interesting and relevant public programs, it currently lacks both space and staff to produce them and a marketing budget for promotion. The most effective strategy to encourage public attendance will be to focus on high-draw family programs, such as Earth Day, which draws approximately 4,000 people to the museum every April. According with the goals set in the previous strategic plan the museum developed themed Family Fun Days, the first of which was launched in 2009. These biannual Family Fun Days proved extremely successful with an average attendance of 600 visitors. The museum also expanded the yearly Halloween Spooktacular to become a big family event with an average attendance of 400 visitors.

Goal

Maintain a manageable number of public programs to serve regional residents and visitors with timely and relevant programs.

Strategies

- Increase the activities during Family Fun Day and Halloween Spooktacular with the aid of the Recreation Department.
- Keep the Earth Day Conservation Fair relevant by attracting new organizations and vendors.

Key Performance Indicators

- Present two major-draw family programs annually.
- Earth Day Conservation Fair scheduled.

Collections

The Hi-Desert Nature Museum's collections play an integral role in how the museum educates visitors about the natural, artistic, historical, and cultural heritage of the Morongo Basin and High Desert. The museum's collections can provide study specimens for researchers, and are the foundation for public programs, including exhibits, K-12 education, and many life-long learning opportunities. Due to the valuable nature of these collections, there is both a lawful and an ethical obligation to maintain objects within the public trust. Management of the collections is an inclusive process that ensures all objects placed under the museum's custody are documented and cared for in such a way that makes them suitable and available for use in exhibits and programming.

The museum recovered the full-time Registrar position in July 2014 for the purpose of reestablishing collections as a means of fulfilling the museum's mission. Therefore, in moving forward with this two year plan, the museum will focus on restoring functionality of their registration and collections management activities in order to increase accessibility to collections.

Goal

Regain both intellectual and physical control of objects within the museum's custody to increase public, community, and research access.

Strategies

- Stabilize objects on exhibit and in storage through established preventive care and regulatory monitoring systems.
- Perform a baseline inventory of collections in order to document the location and assess the condition of every object currently in the museum's custody.
- Begin cataloging permanent objects, detailing object provenance, physical description, and including a photograph.
- Identify and prepare objects that no longer fit the museum's mission for deaccession.

Key Performance Indicators

- The registrar has incorporated integrated pest management and environmental monitoring systems.
- Every object on exhibit and in collections storage has been inventoried within two years.
- Object records in PastPerfect have been updated and/or created to reflect inventory results.
- 30% of permanent collections objects have been cataloged in PastPerfect.
- Deaccessioned objects have been transferred to reputable organizations.

Exhibits

Through permanent and temporary exhibitions, the Hi-Desert Nature Museum has the ability to make artifact-based learning accessible to thousands of visitors each year. In the past, the museum has successfully utilized exhibitions as a means to provide natural science education, share local history, highlight talented regional artists, and interpret the museum's collections to the general public. In the present, the museum struggles to conform to certain aesthetic and environmental standards, limiting the museum's ability to accommodate the types of displays and exhibitions that audiences have come to expect and appreciate in modern museums. Making certain modifications to improve the environmental conditions, security, structure, and layout of the museum's exhibition spaces will open up exhibition and interpretive opportunities, and provide a more conducive learning environment.

Temporary Exhibits

May 2014, the museum hosted a dinosaur exhibit titled *Hatching the Past*, costing roughly \$7,000 for a four month rental period. The exhibition received outstanding reviews from museum visitors and, during its time at the museum, visitorship increased nearly 12% (in comparison to 2013's June to September attendance roster). The success of the *Hatching the Past* exhibition demonstrates the museum's ability to attract larger audiences through high-profile temporary exhibits. However, with renting such exhibits come certain stipulations. Many rental companies and organizations require exhibit renters to demonstrate varying levels of environmental standards and security in order to host exhibitions. The Hi-Desert Nature Museum initiated an integrated pest management and environmental monitoring program to include in the standard facility report. In the future the museum hopes to be able to rent exhibits that require higher standards.

Permanent Exhibitions

The Hi-Desert Nature Museum cares for and manages more than 3,000 objects, representing the history, art, culture and natural science of the Morongo Basin and Mojave Desert. As part of its overall mission to educate visitors about the area, the museum is determined to provide continued public access to these objects through their display and interpretation. Yet, with the rapidly changing standards of museum exhibition, and with roughly two thirds of its collections on display, the museum finds itself at an important crossroads. The museum's current method of display is outdated in comparison to modern standards and is in need of some modifications. The museum cannot accommodate a full renovation of its exhibition spaces at this time. However, it can make minor to moderate updates in order to restore and revitalize its permanent display spaces to produce engaging exhibitions for its visitors while maintaining stable environments for its collections.

Exhibits continued...

Goal

Adjust to present museum standards in order to present engaging and informative temporary and permanent exhibitions.

Strategies

- Remove objects from displays that are no longer appropriate to the museum's mission.
- Establish themes in exhibition spaces and arrange object displays accordingly.
- Establish in-gallery environmental and pest monitoring systems.
- Update lighting fixtures in exhibit Rooms 2 and 3.
- Retrofit existing exhibit and diorama cases to make them more environmentally secure for collections.
- Paint existing exhibit cases to coordinate with museum quality Native American cases.

Key Performance Indicators

- The registrar has incorporated integrated pest management and environmental monitoring systems, and scheduled routine object and exhibit maintenance.
- Permanent galleries are updated within two years.
- All exhibit cases have been retrofitted to meet environmental standards within two years.
- The museum has been able to secure more high-profiled rental exhibitions.
- The museum has received positive feedback.
- Visitorship has increased by 15%.

Museum Accessibility

Since the Town of Yucca Valley incorporated and assumed responsibility for the Hi-Desert Nature Museum in 1991, the museum has undergone several changes.

Traditionally the museum was open to the public six days per week and staff were on site seven days per week. After the 2010 staff reduction the museum had to reduce hours to five days and as of June 2013 the museum had to reduce hours even further to three days per week. Yet the public's demand for museum access has not diminished.

A 2011 study by the AAM (American Alliance of Museums) showed that during the recession the attendance in museums was actually increasing, due to the fact that people tend to stay closer to home and take advantage of the parks and museums nearby.

The Hi-Desert Nature Museum could see an increase in visitation in the years of the recession. This is reflected in the annual visitation increase by 44% between 2006 and 2009. This shows that in this community the museum has an important function for families and seniors. The museum has been an institution in Yucca Valley for 50 years, and for generations of children it has been part of their childhood and their first exposure to the world of museums. Every time the museum limited access the public has been very upset.

Goal

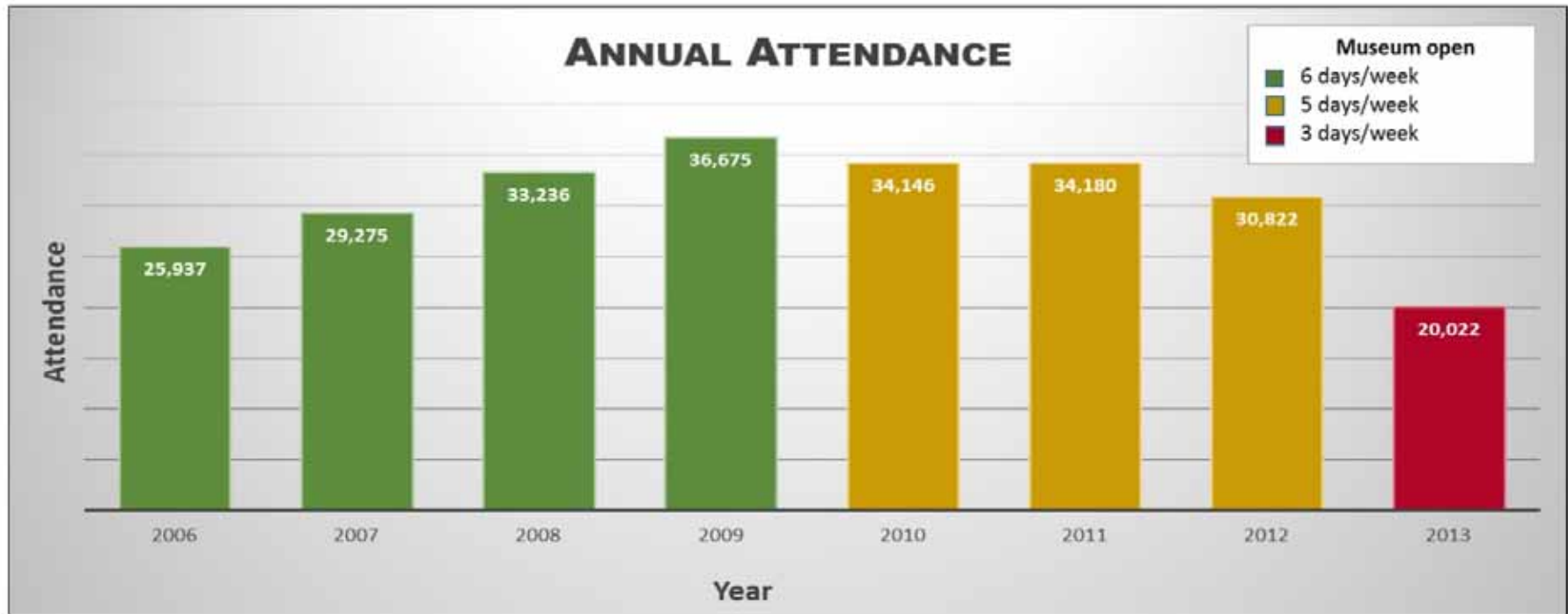
Strengthen the museum's staffing structure to enhance its ability to address the demands of museum services and activities, and add one more day of public admittance during the summer months.

Strategies

- Create a new 20-hour part-time position with focus on visitor services.
- Continue the internship program with Copper Mountain College.
- Expand the volunteer base of the museum.

Key Performance Indicators

- Part-time position created and hiring completed.
- Intern trained and program established.
- Increase in dedicated volunteer staff.



2009 MUSEUM SERVICES	vs.	2013 MUSEUM SERVICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museum open 6 days per week with 3.75 FTE. • Public Programs, including Earth Day, Starry Nights Festival, Halloween Spooktacular and two Family Fun Days. • On-Site Educational Programs, including school field trips, Art & Science Tuesdays, Winter Lecture Series, Brown Bag Lunch Lecture Series, movie night at the museum, and seasonal crafts. • Off-site Educational Programs at schools, nature preserves and community clubs. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museum open 3 days per week 1.5 FTE (as of May 2013). • Public Programs, including Earth Day, Halloween Spooktacular, and one Family Fun Day. • On-Site Educational Programs, including Winter Lecture Series, Science Saturdays, Art & Culture Wednesdays, and seasonal crafts.