



Strategic Plan
2022–2026
(Draft)

Arkansas State University Museum
STRATEGIC PLAN 2022–2026
Regional Gem of Informal Learning

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MISSION STATEMENT

Arkansas State University Museum serves the academic mission of the University and provides quality programming that broadens the perceptions and aspirations of people in Northeast Arkansas and the Northern Mississippi River Delta region. Within this mission, the Museum endeavors to connect people with their history, foster education as a family value, promote diversity, engage minds in progressive thinking, and enhance the sense of community among all audiences.

MISSION IMPLEMENTATION STATEMENT

ASU Museum supports its mission by:

1. Collecting, preserving, caring for, managing, interpreting, and exhibiting material objects that document a diversity of human experiences, with emphasis on Northeast Arkansas and the Northern Mississippi River Delta region.
2. Providing informal learning opportunities in a broad range of instructional formats that share knowledge of history, natural history, cultural heritage, and human endeavors that have shaped Arkansas's cultures past and present.
3. Providing STEM/STEAM-supporting activities that introduce children to promising careers of the future.
4. Supporting faculty and students through tours, collections research opportunities, and other museum-based activities that complement university courses.

VISION: *Regional Gem of Informal Learning*

ASU Museum’s 2022–2026 strategic plan is a vision for sustaining high quality mission-focused operations within predictably stable resources. The Museum will maintain a regional lead in informal learning, support the University’s academic and diversity goals, work toward significant exhibit upgrades, bolster collections functions, and in 2024 reaccredit with the American Alliance of Museums (AAM).

During the five-years covered by this plan, we will endeavor to strategically poise the Museum for opportunistic expansion in a new or substantially upgraded facility, the funding of which would be dependent on the passage of a tax initiative or other major external source. The success of the 2022–2026 plan is not *dependent* on a new or upgraded facility. Consistent with previous years, the Museum will require additional funds in order to maintain standard operations and will seek these funds through grants, memberships, donations, and sponsorships, as well as earned revenue from the gift shop, fee-based programs, and endowment interest.

RELEVANT AREAS OF MUSEUM OPERATIONS

Strategic Area 1: Public Dimension (Educational Programs, Exhibits, Public Relations, Marketing)

Museums are educational institutions. They are perceived as public trusts and can be held accountable as such by law.¹ People expect museums to meet their published missions and provide educational programs that serve their named audiences. Museums are especially valued for offering informal learning opportunities. Signature among these are exhibits. Educational programs typically include but are not limited to events, tours, and gallery activities.

Public relations and marketing tie closely to education and other public-facing operations. The success of the Museum’s programs depends in part on the Museum’s public image and reputation and on how effectively offerings and services are promoted and marketed.

Strategic Area 2: Professional and Academic Dimension (Collections, Discipline Standards/AAM Accreditation, Academic Support)

The Museum’s professional and academic dimension is critical to its mission. As a unit of Arkansas State University (“A-State”), the Museum must maintain good standing both within the University and within the museum professional community. The Museum’s success in this latter professional arena is measured by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), through which Arkansas State University Museum has been accredited since 1973. The AAM is the nation’s

¹ Cf. Marie C. Malaro and Ildiko Pogany DeAngelis, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2012, Third Edition), p. 3–21.

only museum-accrediting agency. Of the over 33,000 museums in the US, fewer than 1,100 are accredited by the AAM.

AAM accreditors assess all museum operations. Strategic Area 2 identifies the Collections discipline as a pressing priority for advancement at ASU Museum. Most museums are founded upon collections. People rightly perceive that a museum’s core functions include the compilation, interpretation, organization, preservation, maintenance, and safety of collections. The expectation is that museums hold collections in trust for the public in perpetuity, and, from a legal point of view, museums are held to a Duty of Care in regards to their Collections function.²

Arkansas State University Museum also supports the academic mission and professional responsibilities of its parent organization, Arkansas State University. In this capacity, the Museum provides support to faculty, their classes, and students through informal learning methods and other museum-appropriate services and activities.

Strategic Area 3: Diversity

The Museum supports the diversity objectives of its parent organization and follows the University’s organizational-level diversity policies and practices. The Museum’s public-facing dimension is unique in the University. This presents an opportunity for the Museum to make a distinctive contribution to the parent organization’s diversity objectives through serving all sectors of the general public in Northeast Arkansas and the Northern Mississippi River Delta. In this regard, the Museum seeks to model ideals of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion consistent with those valued within the museum field at large. The Museum’s service aspirations can only be realized if all visitors—including racial or ethnic minorities, immigrants, differently abled, and other under-represented or marginalized groups—feel welcome, regardless of age, religion, economic status, or gender identity.

ASU Museum has a small staff and a small operating budget and relies on grants and other external funds to supplement part-time wages, exhibits, and program requirements. These limitations make it all the more essential to name diversity as a strategic area equal to the other strategic areas. The Museum’s ability to advance diversity is equally contingent on careful strategizing, prudent use of time and resources, staff resourcefulness, and curatorial ingenuity. With strategic planning, moreover, content that advances diversity becomes integral to exhibits and programs.

Strategic Area 4: Major Development and Facilities

ASU Museum continually seeks to improve its public services and its collections stewardship. The most satisfying fulfillment of the Museum’s aspirations presuppose on-going upgrades to its exhibits, public education spaces, and Collections functions. Realization of these upgrades is predicated upon how successful the Museum will be in securing external funds, placing Strategic Area 4 in critical tandem with the other three strategic areas.

² Cf. Malaro and DeAngelis, p. 18.

MAJOR PROGRAM ASPIRATIONS

These long-term aspirations cross all strategic areas and are contingent upon external funding and/or unpredictable external factors.

1. Inclusive Exhibits Initiative. This initiative will address diversity content in the galleries, with the ultimate goal being to better include perspectives from outside dominant cultural groups. Simple improvements could be handled gradually on budget. More developed improvements will require funds for additional expertise that includes representation from the non-dominant cultures in question as well as funding assistance for supplies and targeted acquisitions supporting the improvements.

2. Red Wolf Exhibit Initiative. An exhibit on the Red Wolf (A-State’s mascot and a federally endangered species) in the Main Gallery would enrich the campus experience, enhance community pride, and address general audience needs. It would also support a major inter-agency red wolf conservation project that has been prioritized for local development by the ASU System. The outside services of an exhibit design and fabrication firm will be required.

3. Children’s Gallery/Expansion Initiative. This initiative seeks to leverage the community’s strong interest in children’s hands-on STEM/STEAM programs in support of significant facility upgrades or, ideally, a new museum-purposed facility at a more accessible location. The improved facility would enable acquisition of permanent children’s exhibits and provide flexible activity space that would better serve school children and families, foster education as a family value, support A-State’s long-term early recruitment strategies, and contribute to a larger, regional student-recruitment pool and greater community support for A-State from philanthropists. Every component of this initiative (permanent exhibits, space, upgraded facilities) needs substantial external start-up funding as well as ongoing permanent funding for additional staff and loan exhibits.

ASU MUSEUM STRATEGIC PLAN 2022–2026

STRATEGIC AREA 1: Public Dimension

- 1. Connect people of Northeast Arkansas and the Northern Mississippi River Delta to their history and enhance the sense of community among audiences through mission-focused endeavors. This goal serves all but targets adult audiences, including older teens, college-age youth, and aging populations.**

Action Steps 2022–2023:

- Conduct a holistic analysis of current exhibits in reference to Major Program Aspirations involving programs and facilities.
- Within budget, address diversity content deficits in permanent exhibits. Investigate grant funding for implementation. See Strategic Area 4, Goal 2, Action Steps 2024–2025, a–d.
- Work with Red Wolf Exhibit Initiative partners to plan a travelling suitcase exhibit on red wolves.
- Within budget, make modest or cosmetic upgrades to one or two permanent exhibits.
- During TinkerFaire and Arkansas Science Festival, put an Arkansas history focus on a substantial number of activities (ongoing).
- Develop an assortment of new Arkansas history programs that target school-aged youth.
- Work with A-State Office of Admissions to help with recruitment strategies for high school students.
- Develop strategies that make the Museum and Arkansas history appealing to A-State students visiting on their own/outside of class assignments and to older teens in general.
- Devise mitigations consistent with any lingering pandemic concerns (if applicable).
- Review and update website content as relating to exhibits and programs.

Action Steps 2024–2025:

- Contingent upon developments of two prior years, determine priority and next steps needed for Major Program Aspirations that involve programs and new or upgraded facilities. See Strategic Area 4, Goal 2, Action Steps 2024–2025, a–d.
- Within budget, make modest or cosmetic upgrades to one or two more permanent exhibits.
- Develop strategies to appeal to older teens and college-aged audiences.
- Advertise and launch new Arkansas history programs that target school-aged youth.
- Work with Collections staff to identify artifacts that support our core stories and that could be put on the website.

Action Steps 2026:

- Follow through on exhibit initiatives.
- Continue to address diversity content deficits in permanent exhibits.
- Within budget, make modest or cosmetic upgrades to one or two more permanent exhibits.

2. Through educational programs, exhibits, and STEM/STEAM-supportive activities, introduce regional children to prospective fields of the future, and build towards a regional culture that values education. This goal serves all but targets school teachers, school children, and families. We will:

- Sustain strong children’s and STEM/STEAM-supportive programs.
- Support A-State’s early student recruitment endeavors (pre-K–grade eight) that contribute to a larger, regional student-recruitment pool and greater community support for A-State from philanthropists.

Action Steps 2022–2023:

- a. Retain connections with the (revamped) Discovery Network (ongoing as feasible).
- b. Explore avenues to better inform schools and teachers about our offerings.
- c. Introduce and promote curbside pick-up and return of Travelling Suitcase Exhibits³ for school teachers.
- d. Ensure that at least some programs foster intergenerational learning.
- e. Start delivering a weekly online program.
- f. Devise mitigations consistent with any lingering pandemic concerns (if applicable).

Action Steps 2024–2025:

- a. Re-evaluate action steps in consideration of the status of Children’s Gallery/Expansion Initiative.
- b. Invent low-cost children’s hands-on games or activities for the galleries.
- c. Implement incentives for teachers to bring their classes to the Museum.
- d. Continue working with Arkansas Biosciences Institute, ASU Early Childhood Development Center, College of Education and Behavioral Science, and other A-State units whose interests and activities complement the Museum’s programming for children.
- e. Increase variety of online/remote programs.

Action Steps 2026:

- a. Increase frequency of online/remote programs.
- b. Develop and prioritize education-related actions steps appropriate to our aspirations and funding capacity in response to results of audience assessment (see Strategic Area 4, Action Steps 2024–2025, b). This will apply only if the audience assessment project has been or is near being completed.

³ The Museum’s Travelling Suitcase Exhibit (TSE) Program consists of suitcases on wheels with themed hands-on educational materials that teachers, home-schoolers, A-State student teachers, and other educational leaders can check out for free for a period of two weeks. Examples of themes are Fossils and Mastodon, Native Americans of Northeast Arkansas, Arkansas Pioneer History, and Rockabilly. All TSEs include lesson plans keyed to Arkansas Common Core Standards and non-accessioned items such as artifacts, books, videos, charts, and diagrams.

STRATEGIC AREA 2: Professional and Academic Dimension

1. Bolster Collections and ensure museum professional standards in all museum disciplines. We will:

- Improve Collections functions to highest standards possible within means.
- Leverage positive work advancement in Collections to support reaccreditation efforts in coordination with all other strategic areas.
- Ensure all museum activities have a sound basis in research and function at high standards.
- Maintain accreditation with American Alliance of Museums (AAM).

Action Steps 2022–2023:

- a. Work toward Object-Record Reciprocity of all collections (highest priority).
- b. Continue steady improvements in storage as feasible within budget.
- c. Investigate feasibility of expanding staff in collections.
- d. Continue to hone collections consistent with earlier decisions on materials that need to be deaccessioned (ongoing). These include items designated for transfer to other units (books, archives, etc.) and items that should *not* have been accessioned initially (current-use tools, equipment, exhibit props, short-term instructional manuals, etc.).
- e. Increase digitization of collections.
- f. Develop a strategy for improving management and usefulness of Fossil and Mineral collection.
- g. Conduct a holistic analysis of collections in reference to Major Program Aspirations under consideration.

Action Steps 2024–2025:

- a. Continue to work toward Object-Record Reciprocity of all collections (high priority, see above).
- b. Advance assessment of the Fossil and Mineral collection.
- c. As appropriate to status of expansion aspirations, reconsider space in Collections wing.
- d. Submit reaccreditation documents to American Alliance of Museums in November 2024.
- e. Seek acquisition opportunities in consideration of Major Program Aspirations.
- f. When it becomes most strategic vis a vis our Major Program Aspirations, consider identifying pockets of needs in Collections that could be packaged and presented for funding to collections- and preservation-oriented granting agencies that fund small museums.

Action Steps 2026:

- a. Continue efforts toward Object-Record Reciprocity of all collections.
- b. Contingent upon status of expansion possibilities, evaluate previous action steps to help guide strategic plan moving forward.
- c. Review progress on Fossil and Mineral collection.
- d. Target collecting to support exhibit and program goals as outlined in other strategic areas.

2. Provide academic (A-State faculty and student) support through applicable museum functions. We will:

- Support faculty and formal classes through collections, exhibits, tours, and other museum programs.
- Support academic research, academic activities, and creative endeavors of faculty and students through informal learning methods and other museum-appropriate services and activities.

Action Steps 2022–2023:

- a. Consider how our efforts to fulfill museum functions in Collections, exhibits, and programs offer research opportunities for A-State faculty and students completing formal coursework.
- b. As manageable, develop active/hands-on, informal learning opportunities within Collections and in existing exhibits and programs that can intersect with curriculum.
- c. Consider expanding upon the tours that we can customize for specific faculty, classes, or departments.

Action Steps 2024–2025:

- a. Create research opportunities that would support museum functions or initiatives, such as for the Red Wolf Exhibit Initiative, exhibit upgrades, tours, education, etc.
- b. As manageable, refine the active/hands-on learning opportunities within Collections and in existing exhibits and programs.
- c. Consider how to present our core story on the web site in support of A-State formal curriculum and the Museum’s own education goals.

Action Steps 2026:

- a. Create research opportunities that would support museum functions or initiatives, such as for the Red Wolf Exhibit Initiative, exhibit upgrades, tours, education, etc.
- b. Provide suggestions to faculty demonstrating how our exhibits, collections, and programs interface with their curriculum.
- c. Consider how the website could be revised to assist A-State departments and supplement curriculum.

STRATEGIC AREA 3: Diversity

Advance the social health of Arkansas and its future leadership by nurturing ideals and practices that promote diversity. We will:

- Embrace diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion as foundational values.
- Follow the University’s internal policies and infrastructure for diversity, accessibility, inclusion, and civility and for evaluation and collecting data.
- Support ideals broadly held among American museums for diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) across operations within the Museum’s purview, notably within the Museum’s public dimension.⁴

Action Steps 2022–2023:

- a. Offer programs that reflect a broad range of interests, experiences, and needs. Programs must be within mission parameters (history and culture of Northeast Arkansas, STEM/STEAM-supportive).
- b. Seek diversity in visitors, staff, and ASU Museum Advisory Council.
- c. Create welcoming and inclusive environments and workplaces.
- d. Partner with other university units to create, within mission parameters, inclusive programs.
- e. Collect evaluation data on grant-funded programs and within IRB requirements.
- f. In orientations, familiarize museum employees and members of the ASU Museum Advisory Council with internal, university, and museum community policies and values regarding diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion.

Action Steps 2024–2025:

- a. Offer programs within mission parameters that reflect a broad range of interests, experiences, and needs.
- b. Continue to seek diversity in visitors, staff, and the ASU Museum Advisory Council.
- c. Continue to create welcoming and inclusive environments and workplaces.
- d. Continue, within mission parameters, to partner with other university units to create inclusive programs.
- e. Continue to collect evaluation data on grant-funded programs (within IRB requirements).

Action Steps 2026:

- a. Within mission parameters, offer programs that reflect a broad range of interests, experiences, and needs.
- b. Continue to seek diversity in visitors, staff, and the ASU Museum Advisory Council.
- c. Continue to create welcoming and inclusive environments and workplaces.
- d. Continue, within mission parameters, to partner with other university units or community partners to create inclusive programs.
- e. Continue to collect evaluation data on grant-funded programs (within IRB requirements).

⁴ Cf. Cecelia Garibay and Jeanne Marie Olson, *CCLI National Landscape Study: The State of DEAI Practices in Museums* (Cultural Competence Learning Institute 2020), p. 4.

STRATEGIC AREA 4: Major Development and Facilities

1. Leverage the Museum’s role as a regional informal learning destination to poise the Museum for expansion (cf. Major Program Aspirations, point 3). Expansion is dependent on the advancement of a Jonesboro tax initiative; or, on a new major donor opportunity specifically directed at ASU Museum. This goal includes:

- Seeking alignment of opportunities and resources for expansion.
- Achieving a sufficiently ready state to respond quickly to a funding opportunity.

Action Steps 2022–2023:

- a. Work with Administrators and the Office of University Advancement to manage development endeavors and respond to expansion opportunities.
- b. Carry out the Measurement of Museum Social Impact study (MOMSI), which is being conducted by the Utah Division of Arts and Museums. The study looks at how best to measure the social impact of museums on visitors and communities. Integrate results of study into planning.

Action Steps 2024–2025:

- a. Work with University Administrators and the Office of University Advancement to manage development endeavors and respond to expansion opportunities.
- b. Plan an audience assessment project consistent with status of expansion efforts, that is, adjusted for whether we are moving ahead with expansion planning or whether efforts to pursue new or upgraded premises must be suspended or abandoned.

Action Steps 2026: TBD (pends outcome of earlier strategies and efforts).

2. Conceptualize major gallery make-overs to address exhibit aspects of Major Program Aspirations (contingent upon external funding). This goal includes:

- Coordinating exhibit efforts with the status of expansion initiatives.
- Monitoring and coordinating with the status of ASU System’s other red wolf plans, which have been given priority in development.
- Coordinating with external developments that are expected to bring our Red Wolf Exhibit Initiative (Major Program Aspirations, point 2) to priority in 2022–2023.
- Prioritizing African American history as a first phase of addressing diversity content deficits in the galleries (Major Program Aspirations, point 1).
- Maintaining these goals even if they are not realized in the five-year period covered by this strategic plan.

Action Steps 2022–2023:

- a. Conceptualize possible remakes of the Animal Gallery that include a new red wolf exhibit.
- b. Form an exhibit planning committee of red wolves experts who are willing to work with Director and curators in support of the Red Wolf Exhibit Initiative.

- c. Hold the committee meetings with the purpose of providing direction for moving forward with the Red Wolf Exhibit Initiative.
- d. Develop a funding strategy that will enable us to move forward with the Red Wolf Exhibit Initiative.

Action Steps 2024–2025:

- a. In pursuit of the Inclusive Exhibits Initiative (Major Program Aspiration point 1), identify historians who are experts on the history of African Americans in Northeast Arkansas and who are willing to join a committee that will work with Director and curators toward this goal.
- b. Hold committee meetings with the purpose of providing direction for moving forward with Inclusive Exhibits Initiative.
- c. Develop a strategy for bringing additional curatorial expertise on staff to help develop and implement plans for the Inclusive Exhibits Initiative.
- d. Develop a funding strategy that will enable moving forward with the Inclusive Exhibits Initiative plans.

Action Steps 2026: TBD (pends outcome of earlier strategies and efforts).

3. Identify major facility upgrades needed for maintaining functionality.

- Continuing efforts to upgrade facilities, especially if plans for expansion cannot move substantially forward or are suspended.

Action Steps 2022–2023:

- a. Replace air handler to ensure ongoing climate control in collections storage. **This is essential if the Museum remains in the current building.**
- b. Investigate integrated automated climate monitoring in galleries and collections.
- c. Improve program space.

Action Steps 2024–2025:

- a. Conceptualize installation of compactor storage units in Collections wing and consider how this could be funded.
- b. Improve program space.

Action Steps 2026: TBD (pends outcome of earlier strategies and efforts).

4. Review existing and explore new revenue-yielding strategies.

Action Steps 2022–2023:

- a. In Gift Shop, identify new commodity areas that could enrich offerings; rethink merchandising and promotion strategies.
- b. Enhance marketing of birthday parties, and consider broadening target market (to include elderly, etc.).
- c. Consider additional fee-based programs.
- d. Devise mitigations consistent with any lingering pandemic concerns as needed.

Action Steps 2024–2025:

- a. Same as 2022–2023, but adjusted as necessary to be consistent with the status of Major Program Aspirations (contingent upon external developments).
- b. Consistent with status and/or outcomes of expansion efforts and potential opportunities, plan membership drive, working with the Office of University Advancement.

Action Steps 2026:

- a. Follow through on Major Program Aspirations (contingent upon external developments).
- b. If plans for membership drive are determined to be viable as a fund-raising strategy at this point in time, execute membership drive.