

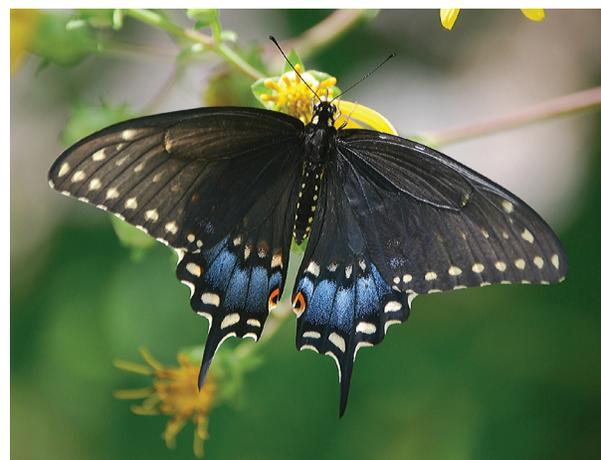
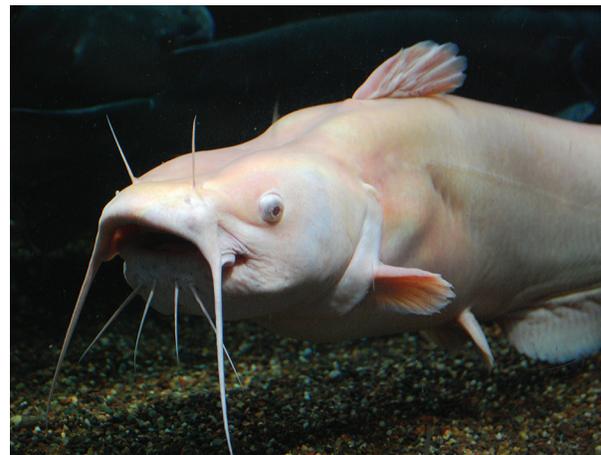


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VIRGINIA  
*Living*  
museum

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## Strengths

The Virginia Living Museum's greatest strength is its people: staff who are knowledgeable and dedicated, volunteers who are passionate and assist in every aspect of Museum operations. The Museum's Board of Trustees and Advisors are experienced and engaged in its strategic direction and financial sustainability. The Museum's reputation in the community is outstanding, especially in its support of K-12 Science education and in its customer service for members and visitors as a family attraction. Being one of only 14 institutions in the nation accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) adds to our reputation and credibility. The Museum is debt free and an outside audit confirmed its business practices are well-managed and efficient.

The Museum's mission, "connecting people to nature through educational experiences that promote conservation," is relevant and reflects a societal need in understanding and protecting the natural world that gives the Museum a higher purpose. The future is bright for the Virginia Living Museum (VLM) with opportunities for growth and partnership yet to be explored. The Museum's diverse collection of non-releasable animals is a great attraction for visitors and helps make the VLM unique. The Museum facility and grounds are attractive, safe and well-situated. The Museum's broad range of interactive exhibits and programs are appealing to all ages and backgrounds.

The Museum is also well-known for its support in the community, beginning as a grassroots organization and continuing a high level of local support both financial and evidenced through visitation, still the highest in Newport News with 270,000 annual visitors, 7,000 member families, as well as hundreds of individual donors and corporate sponsors. The Museum is an integral part of the community, each year providing an economic impact of \$9 million to the region and rating high in external polls as a valued community asset, especially among families with young children.

Our education programs are SOL and grade-level correlated and have been endorsed by the National Science Federation and both the U.S. and Virginia Departments of Education. Teacher reviews are consistently high and responsive to needs identified by the Museum's Education Council. The Museum is recognized as an education resource that could not be duplicated by the schools. Education enables the Museum to reach inner-city students who may not otherwise experience the natural world. An outside study confirmed that students who experience hands-on programs at the Museum were more likely to retain information than those studying the same material in a traditional classroom.

## Challenges

The greatest challenge facing the Museum is financial sustainability. The Museum has made great strides in eliminating debt, growing endowment, and generating income. However, the Museum still remains dependent on City funding from Newport News for operations. The City population is not growing and the City government has significant needs in basic services that affect its ability and willingness to provide sufficient support.

The Museum staff, particularly in animal care, are understaffed and underpaid, and benefits are limited and not competitive. The Museum is expensive to run, with 24/7 animal care needs, 100,000 square feet of aging facilities and 22 acres of property that are vulnerable to flooding and pollution. The aging facility and infrastructure requires constant maintenance and with limited funds available, the Museum is unable to work on long-term solutions.

The Museum's long-term major donors are aging and as found nationally, the next generation does not give at the same levels. There is more competition for both philanthropic and leisure dollars – more non-profits looking for donations as well as for-profit entertainment options. Often, the Museum cannot match pricing from other museums that receive more public funding (or are solidly endowed) to subsidize fees and grow their exhibits and programs at a faster pace.

The Museum's animal collection is under threat as the Commonwealth limits permits for rehabbers, making it harder for the Museum to acquire native and non-releasable animals. There are also changing perceptions of animals in zoos and aquariums, especially by Millennials who dislike seeing animals in captivity. The name "Museum" also has negative connotations for many as being a place that is not current or experiential.



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# VISION

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To be the leading organization in our community that “protects what’s precious” in the natural world by serving as a premier sanctuary for wildlife, a leader in science and conservation education, as well as a dynamic family attraction that contributes to the quality of life in the region.

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## SUMMARY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- I. Financial Health:** The Museum will continue to grow and develop diverse revenue streams and increase endowment. This includes an advocacy plan for public support and exploring revenue generating amenities and entertainment options.
- II. Human Resources:** The Museum will provide regular raises and competitive benefits to retain staff. Staff must have access to professional training and opportunities for continuing education to remain at the top of our field. The Museum will also explore adding more loaned executives and internships and grow service enterprise initiatives.
- III. Exhibits & Facilities:** The Museum will update exhibits and signage to better tell the story of our local natural resources. Exhibits need to be brightened and modernized to be more welcoming and engaging. This includes exploring new technologies as well as increasing interactives, especially those outside that encourage physical activity and connect to nature.

- IV. Animal Care & Conservation:** The Museum must complete its AZA accreditation, including the completion of its new animal care facility. The Museum will engage in more conservation partnerships with universities and environmental organizations as well as interactive programs and citizen science opportunities with visitors.
- V. Guest Experience, Volunteer Services & Education:** The Museum will develop more programmatic story telling for the public that engages a variety of ages and includes nature experiences. The Museum will continue to work in partnership with schools to develop relevant education programs and hands-on experiences that enhance student performance and understanding.

## I FINANCIAL HEALTH

**VISION:** *Develop a sustainable funding plan for the Museum.*

### **ACTION ITEMS:**

- Work in partnership with the City of Newport News and continue to advocate to establish city funding at the standard of 25% of total operating budget
- Create and sustain a Replacement Reserve Fund of \$100,000 or more to enable regular facility repairs/upgrades
- Grow the Endowment Fund to \$3,450,000 in cash
- Institute departmental earned income revenue growth goals of 5% annually
- Grow contributed annual income (development department) to \$1,000,000 annually
- Grow the now annual Otter Ball Gala into THE known opportunity for community philanthropy for VLM



## II HUMAN RESOURCES

**VISION:** *Develop a Performance Management System to emphasize increased engagement through employee satisfaction and contribution. Build a feedback and recognition rich culture of excellence and teamwork.*

### **ACTION ITEMS:**

#### **Onboarding and Recruiting**

- Develop a more thorough initial onboarding procedure/training for new hires so they become more familiar with the Museum mission, history, programs, and culture
- Develop recruiting and hiring standardized procedures

#### **Learning and Development (Growth)**

- Develop a more customized Employee Performance Review system with ongoing performance discussions throughout the year
- Set department and individual goals to drive outcomes
- Improve cross-departmental communication and support
- Institute an Employee Assistance Program to better support employee work-related difficulties as well as problems that originate outside the workplace that impact work attendance or performance

#### **Compensation**

- Increase education and discussion with employees about compensation and benefits
- Continue to offer merit pay increases and TSA match for employees (pending budget availability)
- Conduct a comprehensive wage, salary and benefits assessment with recommendations on ways to bring salaries and benefits to regional industry standards

#### **Leadership and Succession**

- Provide Department Heads with training, management tools, resources and policy frameworks to more effectively and professionally lead their departments
- Define leadership competencies to develop within departments
- Create department succession plans
- Create incentive opportunities for high-performing employees

#### **Diversify and Strengthen the Board of Trustees**

- Utilize a "Consent Agenda" for board meetings to liberate them of administrative details, allow for better governance, and facilitate topical discussions
- Provide members with "elevator speech" points or fast facts about the Museum mission and scope of impact and financial significance to the region

#### **Strengthen the Board of Advisors**

- Create social opportunities and rotation of Chairperson
- Engage with advisors for Master Planning support

### III EXHIBITS & FACILITIES

**VISION:** Assertive strategy for continual exhibit and facility improvements.

#### **ACTION ITEMS:**

##### **Update or Change Exhibits**

- Make major exhibit improvements to the World of Darkness Gallery to make it more engaging for visitors
- Redesign and transform the World of Darkness Discovery Center into an Environmental Conservation Station. Create an interactive area to discover how the VLM is actively engaged in conservation projects (pending financial support)
- Design and construct a shark/ray touch tank (pending financial support)
- Install professional plant signs in the native plant gardens and in selected areas around the Museum
- Research the best use (to maximize visitor engagement and income generation) of an off-site space should it become available

##### **Facility Improvement Plan**

- Create multi-year capital project and equipment plan
- Identify most pressing 5-year capital projects based on priority need
- Research potential upgrades to Museum Lobby



### IV ANIMAL CARE & CONSERVATION

**VISION:** Leadership in native species care and conservation.

#### **ACTION ITEMS:**

##### **Continue to Improve Animal Care Support to Meet or Exceed National Standards**

- Build an AZA mandated large animal support building
- Build a new AZA mandated ambassador animal support building, potentially increasing our sanctuary messaging at the same time
- Establish a Lead Veterinary position at the VLM to insure that all curatorial procedures and policies meet or exceed AZA standards
- Pursue AZA accreditation in 2018 to maintain the VLM's status as one of 14 dually accredited institutions in the nation (AZA and AAM)

##### **Increase Conservation Initiatives and Messaging**

- Add digital signage in both habitariums to provide greater focus on the conservation status of those animals and plants
- Integrate a conservation message in all VLM programs, events and increased signage
- Expand the participation of VLM staff with museum conservation projects to include all departments
- Work more closely with area plant rescue efforts to include displaying them on the grounds and propagating them for plant sales
- Increase the number of on-site propagated native plants for the plant sales with a focus on rare and hard-to-find species
- Develop a VLM-based conservation research initiative with CNU or other area universities



## V GUEST EXPERIENCE, VOLUNTEER SERVICES & EDUCATION

**VISION:** *Maximize interests of all stakeholders.*

### **ACTION ITEMS:**

#### **Maximize Guest Experience**

- Develop an experiential theme story/opportunity that applies to multiple generations and allows the visitor to become naturally connected
- Implement a new plan for the use of the various gallery and front desk video screens to supply more program and event promotions
- Increase the options for greater digital visitor interactives through the use of smartphones and other digital devices (including digital activity boards for the day's special tours, feedings, etc.)
- Develop an inclement weather activity plan for use on days when the outside trail cannot be opened
- Research possible visitor "add-ons" to enhance the visitors' experience as well as bring in additional revenue (provide a list of proposed "add-ons" after ROI analysis and input from other facilities)
- Implement a customer focused training initiative for all staff

#### **Enhance Volunteer Experiences**

- Implement additional online volunteer training opportunities
- Create robust Internship programs engaging Gen X and Millennials
- Increase the Teen Conservationists Program to expand on citizen science opportunities with our guests

#### **Diversify Educational Program Offerings**

- Develop the feasibility of a plan for possible implementation of a NN Teacher in Residence program and a VLM-based year-long NN classroom at the VLM
- Implement week long/full day summer camp opportunities
- Implement a pilot plan of outreach programs featuring the use of the VLM ambassador animals to teach human health sciences topics
- Transform the existing Education Council to a more focused effort with NN Public Schools to develop a two-way communication system on NN Schools' program needs and the Museum's resources

- Research new ways to use the planetarium resources for increased educational opportunities (e.g., gaming or 3-D computer simulation projects by area high school students)
- Develop a plan for and cost/benefit analysis of a long distance learning station at the Museum for connecting students beyond VA with our live animals and collections





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524 J. Clyde Morris Blvd.  
Newport News, VA 23601

757-595-1900

[thevlm.org](http://thevlm.org)

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