



Brooklyn Children's Museum @120

Strategic Plan 2020–2026





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Brooklyn Children's Museum @ 120

120 years ago, a new model for museums was founded in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. At a time when most cultural institutions were built for adult audiences on thoroughfares like Manhattan's Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn Children's Museum (BCM) was established in a residential neighborhood specifically to serve the families of Central Brooklyn. A product of the progressive education movement, the BCM experience is culturally-rich, hands-on, interactive, community-based and — most importantly — child-led.

Since then, Brooklyn Children's Museum has inspired thousands of museums and museum education programs around the world. **Over 20 million children have passed through BCM's buildings.** They fill the halls of museums, botanical gardens, science centers and performing arts organizations in New York City and beyond, infusing those spaces with the energy and diversity of Brooklyn. Today, BCM serves more than 300,000 children and caregivers annually, with 80% identifying as Brooklynites, and 60% coming from the Museum's adjacent neighborhoods of Bedford Stuyvesant, Brownsville, Clinton Hill, Crown Heights, East New York, East Flatbush, Fort Greene, Prospect Heights and Prospect Lefferts Gardens.

In 1899, Central Brooklyn was already home to people of diverse backgrounds. The diversity of our community is a foundational strength for Brooklyn Children's Museum, inspiring our exhibits and programs, bringing Brooklynites of different backgrounds together, and infusing our halls with power and energy that distinguishes BCM in the borough and among museums nationwide.

By the Numbers

In fiscal year 2019

20million+

served over 120 years

300,000

*children and caregivers
served*

30,000

*objects in the Museum's
collection*

35,000

*students and educators
visited on a field trip*

1,000

*live animals, plants
and bugs*

10

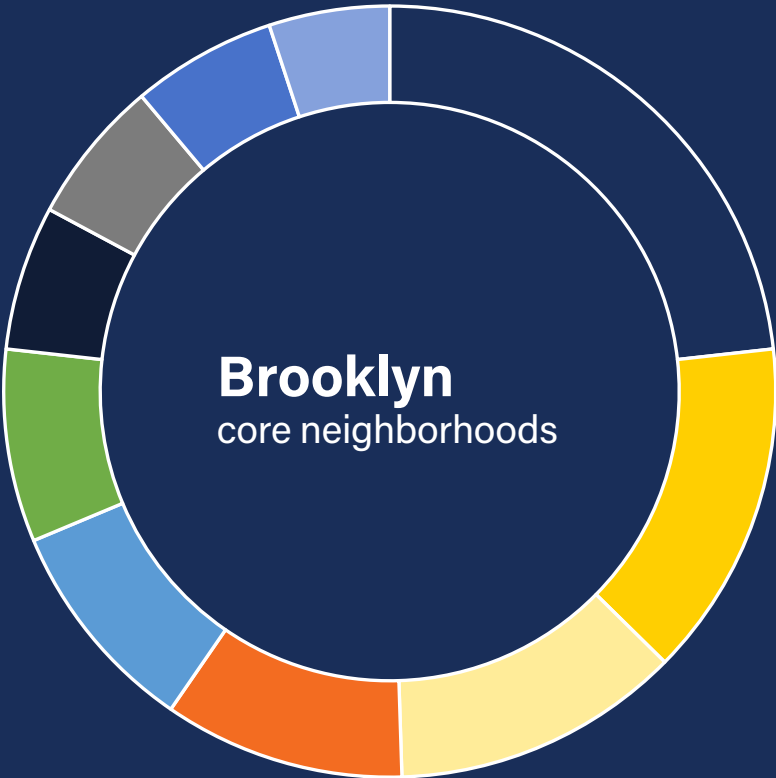
*full-day festivals
celebrating cultures
of Brooklyn*











With that context, BCM's 2020 strategic plan, Brooklyn Children's Museum @ 120, focuses on three core aspirations articulated by BCM's community, staff, trustees and families served, including:

- **Building new exhibits and spaces that are immersive and inspiring**, that appeal to children from infancy through the pre-teen years, and that increase BCM's capacity for serving the public.
- **Establishing financial stability, with one big goal — to provide access** for all families to the fullest extent possible.
- **Developing expertise in research and evaluation** to improve BCM's work, and to position us as a leader in Brooklyn and the field.

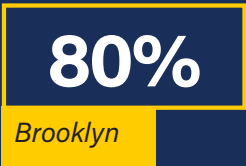
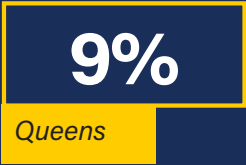
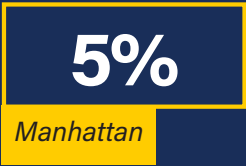
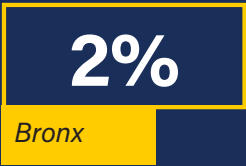

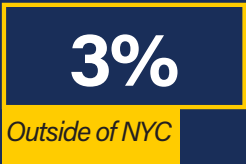
As Brooklyn Children's Museum plans our next generation of exhibits and programs, we are guided and inspired by our borough. Brooklyn values — adaptability, creativity, collaboration, intellectual curiosity and appreciation of multiple perspectives — matter more than ever. BCM feeds children's natural spirit of discovery, fostering a sense of belonging, celebration of identity and civic engagement. Brooklyn Children's Museum @ 120 is a roadmap for this work over the next six years and beyond.

BCM Visitorship



-  **23%**
Bedford Stuyvesant
-  **14%**
Crown Heights, Brownsville & East New York
-  **12%**
Prospect Lefferts Gardens, East Flatbush, Flatbush & Midwood
-  **10%**
Brooklyn Heights, DUMBO & Vinegar Hill
-  **9%**
Park Slope, Gowanus & Carroll Gardens
-  **8%**
Prospect Heights & Fort Greene
-  **6%**
Bushwick, Greenpoint & Williamsburg
-  **6%**
Sunset Park & Borough Park
-  **6%**
Carnarsie, Mill Basin & Sheepshead Bay
-  **5%**
Bay Ridge & Bensonhurst

Service in the boroughs and beyond

- **80%**
Brooklyn
- **9%**
Queens
- **5%**
Manhattan
- **2%**
Bronx
- **1%**
Staten Island
- **3%**
Outside of NYC



BCM Strategic Planning Process

An inclusive vision powered by community, staff and board.

In 2018, with an extraordinary bequest from the family of Margaret DeWolfe Tullock, one of BCM's early executive directors, Brooklyn Children's Museum launched a strategic planning process. The Museum partnered with Lord Cultural Resources on discovery, benchmarking and goal-setting to prepare the organization for its next phase of growth.

The planning process engaged the Museum's internal and external stakeholders over the course of twelve months. Through workshops, surveys, focus groups, interviews and in-depth conversations, Lord Cultural Resources heard from those who are central to BCM's story: every staff and board member; community members, including families, caregivers and educators; key opinion leaders from the fields of education, philanthropy, government, peer non-profits and community leaders; and the Museum's community partners. Lord also conducted extensive original research to provide context for Brooklyn Children's Museum, surveying the current landscape for children's museums and providing detailed benchmarks. Articulation of a theory of change to help understand BCM's impact in Brooklyn and beyond was a core element of the planning process. New mission and vision statements emerged from the theory of change discussions and are included on page 12.

Throughout all discussions, community emerged as a recurrent theme.

While Brooklyn Children's Museum attracts visitors from all over the world, BCM's work has the greatest impact for children in Brooklyn. The Museum commits to making its borough the central focus of its content, programming and business practices.



Theory of Change

At Brooklyn Children's Museum we

create experiences for children and families that ignite curiosity, celebrate identity and cultivate joyful learning

are inspired by the energy and diversity of Brooklyn, producing exhibits and programs that reflect, represent and respond to the borough and its residents

Our goal is for children to

navigate their own cultural journeys

practice inquiry, risk-taking and self-expression

see their communities reflected in the Museum

So that children

are adaptable, creative and compassionate

love to explore, discover and learn

recognize and value their own backgrounds

respect and appreciate multiple perspectives

**Through the power of art, science and the humanities,
children in Brooklyn and beyond**

are confident, empathetic and resilient learners



ABOUT THE FARM

The Farm is an aquaponics farm in Bushwick, Brooklyn and a New York City's largest urban aquaponics farm and education center. They promote local, sustainable urban aquaponics and environmental education through aquaponics farming and environmental education. The farm is a collaboration between The Farm, GreenThumb, and the Brooklyn Community Farm (BCF). The 1,500 square foot aquaponics system of The Farm is a hydroponic system (NFT) that grows leafy greens, including collards, kale, and spinach, and a variety of fish, including tilapia, rainbow trout, and bluegill. The farm also features a variety of educational programs, including a school garden, a community garden, and a variety of workshops and events. The farm is a great place to learn about sustainable agriculture and urban farming. We are learning about aquaponics and how to grow food in a way that is good for the environment. We are also learning about the history of farming and how it has changed over time. The farm is a great place to learn about the importance of food and how it is grown. We are also learning about the importance of water and how it is used in farming. The farm is a great place to learn about the importance of community and how we can all work together to make a better world.

The History of Aquaponics

Putting together fish and vegetable production is a natural idea. The term aquaponics was coined in 1979 by a man named Richard Whitmore. He was a pioneer in the field of aquaponics and was one of the first to combine hydroponics and aquaculture. His system was a closed-loop system that used fish waste to fertilize the plants. The plants then filtered the water for the fish. This system was a great way to grow food in a small space and it was also a great way to learn about sustainable agriculture. The history of aquaponics is a long one and it has been used in many different ways around the world. It is a great way to grow food in a small space and it is also a great way to learn about sustainable agriculture.

Early aquaponics systems were used in many different ways. Some were used to grow food in a small space and some were used to learn about sustainable agriculture. The history of aquaponics is a long one and it has been used in many different ways around the world. It is a great way to grow food in a small space and it is also a great way to learn about sustainable agriculture.

Our Mission

Inspired by the energy and diversity of our borough, Brooklyn Children's Museum creates experiences that ignite curiosity, celebrate identity and cultivate joyful learning.

Our Vision

Brooklyn Children's Museum inspires and challenges families through immersive arts, sciences and humanities exhibits. Children direct their own cultural journeys, practicing inquiry, risk-taking and self-expression. A pioneer in progressive education, BCM is an accessible resource for the borough and the field, supporting confident, empathetic and resilient learners in Brooklyn and beyond.





Our Program Philosophy

Brooklyn Children’s Museum exhibits and programs are:

- Child-led, fostering independence and discovery;
- Interdisciplinary & inquiry-based, encouraging exploration of multiple perspectives;
- Sensory, hands-on and physical;
- Grounded in ethical interpretation of BCM’s 30,000-object collection; and,
- Responsive to and reflective of the diversity, needs and interests of Brooklyn families.

Our Commitment to Community

In all of its work and business practice, BCM commits to its Brooklyn community by:

- Serving all families regardless of ability to pay;
- Building community for parents and children in Brooklyn;
- Reaching beyond our walls into schools and other neighborhoods;
- Using local vendors and supporting small business;
- Employing Brooklynites and supporting their families by paying 100% of health premiums for staff, their spouses and dependents; and,
- Providing space and sharing resources with other Brooklyn-based CBOs.

Goals

Five goals emerged from the planning process, representing long-range qualitative results Brooklyn Children's Museum seeks to achieve over the next six years. These goals align with the Museum's six-year Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Plan, which is available on request.

1

Energize BCM's physical space through new exhibits and facility updates

2

Create engaging and relevant programs in partnership with Brooklyn communities

3

Achieve financial sustainability through earned revenue, philanthropy and creative partnerships

4

Expand institutional capacity, with a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion practices

5

Promote BCM's brand by investing in communications, marketing and design





Goal 1 Energize BCM's physical space through new exhibits and facility updates

Exhibits are the number one driver of visitorship at Brooklyn Children's Museum. Exhibits at BCM are rooted in Brooklyn's environment and people, with the goal of building empowered self-identity, and a sense of shared space and community among Brooklyn families. Exhibits are sensory-based and hands-on, present learning opportunities through inquiry and exploration, and ethically use BCM's 30,000-object collection to engage children. BCM's exhibits are much-beloved, but require an update after more than a decade of continuous use.

- OBJECTIVES:**
- Create a master plan for exhibits and other spaces, with four guiding and unifying principles: 1) maximizing public space; 2) child-centered design that privileges child-led and unfacilitated experiences; 3) gross-motor, immersive and sensory experiences; and, 4) connection and relevance to families in Brooklyn
 - Design, produce, install and program two transformational permanent exhibitions with gross-motor components: the Earth Science Garden and the BK History Climber
 - Adjust target age-range to reflect children ages 8 to 12 in exhibit design, while retaining a commitment to early-childhood audiences
 - Plan and realize robust temporary exhibitions in BCM's second-floor gallery, including at least one "blockbuster" every two years
 - Invest in accessibility, ensuring that the needs of audiences of all abilities and learning styles are met
 - Plan lobby upgrades to improve visitor experience and maximize earned revenue



Goal 2 Create engaging and relevant programs in partnership with Brooklyn communities

Rooted in Crown Heights since 1899, BCM is beloved by generations of Brooklynites. Half of the Museum’s 300,000-person audience identifies as living in Central Brooklyn, a region comprised of six culturally and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods – Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, East Flatbush, East New York and Prospect Lefferts Gardens. Central Brooklyn’s combined population exceeds that of Boston, Denver or Detroit, and the Museum embraces the opportunity to deepen our exchange and expand our impact in this geographic area. BCM’s commitment to Central Brooklyn optimizes the Museum’s programming and financial health, while touching the lives of Brooklynites in meaningful ways.

- OBJECTIVES:**
- Expand strategic partnerships to deepen impact among children and the caregivers in Central Brooklyn
 - Strengthen the framework and activation of school partnerships, with a focus on Central Brooklyn public elementary schools
 - Develop evaluation capacity and implement evaluation processes to better understand successes, needs and opportunities
 - Create a Community Advisory Board that contributes to development, planning and assessment for programs, exhibits and capital initiatives
 - Continue the Museum’s six-point Commitment to Community (included on page 15)



Goal 3 Achieve financial sustainability through earned revenue, philanthropy and creative partnerships

Brooklyn Children’s Museum’s strategic plan reiterates our commitment to ensuring that every family can have outstanding cultural experiences at the Museum, regardless of their ability to pay. To maintain and expand free and reduced admission, and to ensure that our exhibits are responsive and inclusive, the Museum must generate increased revenue from all sources: public, philanthropic and earned. Financial health allows BCM to eliminate barriers to visitation, opening its doors to all families in the borough.

- OBJECTIVES:**
- Cultivate a culture of giving among visitors and Brooklyn philanthropists, expand BCM’s membership and individual giving programs and create a planned giving initiative
 - Engage institutional and corporate funders and create and communicate compelling narratives aligned with their priorities
 - Conduct a feasibility study for a consolidated fundraising campaign with an endowment component
 - Professionalize and brand-align earned revenue functions, including space rentals, birthday parties, café and gift shop
 - Identify creative and brand-aligned space partnerships, including auxiliary business, co-locations and space rentals
 - Develop metrics, goals and processes to understand, project and evaluate revenue opportunities



Goal 4 Expand institutional capacity, with a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion practices

Brooklyn Children’s Museum’s organizational culture values inclusion, multiple perspectives and diverse voices. Our culture is an asset that must be nurtured by every employee and trustee, from senior leaders to frontline staff. In 2019, BCM’s board of trustees approved a Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Plan, expanding its commitment to attracting and developing diverse talent, and confirming practices to ensure a sense of belonging and safety for visitors, staff and board. Recruiting and retaining talented staff and board leadership is essential for BCM to realize large-scale exhibits, programs and community partnerships. The Museum’s physical plant must also be addressed to support excellence of service in BCM’s space.

- OBJECTIVES:**
- Invest in talent throughout the organization, with a focus on building expertise in exhibit development, fundraising & earned revenue and marketing & communications
 - Create internal structures and systems, with a focus on finance, human resources and building operations
 - Align operations and business practices with BCM DEI Plan and Commitment to Community
 - Improve building operations and invest in building maintenance, including HVAC and other critical systems
 - Regularly assess DEI goals, revising goals as needed, and ensuring that the Museum maintains its commitment to meeting objectives related to the Plan



Goal 5 Promote BCM's brand by investing in communications, marketing and design

Marketing, branding and communications are critical to drive visitorship, increase earned revenue and raise BCM's profile in the philanthropic community. These areas require investments in strategy, design, content and paid advertising. Specific areas mentioned by trustees and staff included updated signage throughout the Museum, print materials, improved social media content, paid advertising and a dedicated press strategy.

- OBJECTIVES:**
- Build BCM's brand as an essential and memorable experience for Brooklyn families
 - Update Brooklyn Children's Museum visual brand and graphic identity
 - Develop compelling stories and content to use in marketing, advertising and press
 - Define metrics and measures of success that can be tracked over time
 - Invest in measurable paid and organic social media, print, physical promotion and marketing partnerships
 - Create a communications and press strategy, including a crisis management plan
 - Develop evaluation capacity, including program evaluation, market research and surveys
 - Cultivate media relationships, including those beyond the cultural sector

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 Toni Yuille, Con Edison
 Judy Zuckerman, Brooklyn Public Library

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