

National Institutional Model for Presenting Accurate Relevant Nuclear Science Information for People of all Ages and Interests – 9476

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ABSTRACT

The National Museum of Nuclear Science & History (formerly National Atomic Museum) will soon open a new facility; the largest, broadest in scope and most comprehensive of all DOE affiliated museums or visitor centers. This new Museum facility is operated as a public-private partnership between a non-profit and governmental entity. Use of the museum as a place for presentation of various forms of historical and technical information, while attracting general audience interest is critical to financial viability.

INTRODUCTION

Approaches to presentation of technical or controversial information in a public museum setting, exploring partnerships and alliances for corporate and community support.

The Need for a National Institution – A need exists for a non-governmental, independent, un-biased, competent resource that can be accessed by many, of interest to a broad spectrum of society and with an over-arching public information mission to meet varied requirements and interactions. This need is based in four areas of use and user. First is the scholar or academic user. This type of user will access the Museum less for the publicly developed exhibition materials and more for archival, collections, and photographic resources. Often spending lengthy amounts of time at the Museum, the scholar will apply for internal level access and work with curatorial or collection staff to find areas of interest among materials in storage. The second level of user is the destination tourist. Strange as it may seem to a technical group such as those in attendance at WM symposia, the Museum exists primarily as a touch-point for this group. This sector of the user base is characterized as people that have a pre-existing interest in nuclear science and/or history. These individuals will have read many texts about this topic, spent time researching the web for details regarding the information they seek. This is the group that will identify this museum as a place worthy of special travel, an overnight stay or organization of a trip to be sure it is included. As a sector, these visitors are from all across the world, many traveling nationally or internationally. Due to the deeper interest in the specific topic of nuclear science or history, this group includes technical work-force members that visit New Mexico as part of their job, going to meetings, conferences, temporary service at the national labs or other technical work sites in the southwest region. The third group of users are casual browsers and lightly interested, curious visitors. This group is the largest of the visitor demographic and in many cases are open to new ideas, looking for new information that can help them form an opinion. This sector of visitor often spends a long time in the museum exhibits, enjoys the presentation of a video or seeks out on-floor interpreters such as docents to ask questions. The fourth sub-set of visitor users are students engaged in educational programs at the museum. This sector is of all ages from about 6 to adult and most are part of organized group participation. This group of users are generally interested in the museum are many are on the classic “field-trip” therefore having various levels of true interest ranging from continuing educational adult interest to a fidgety fourth-grader.



The National Museum of Nuclear Science & History - Albuquerque, New Mexico

Significance of Congressional Charter and Smithsonian Institution affiliation – The importance of the Museum’s congressional charter cannot be understated. This designation has given elevated stature to the institution as well as protection from federal and DOE budget cuts in the past. Achievement of this status placed the museum as the single “corporate” Museum for DOE and locked in the mission as very broad and nationally focused, something other “site placed” more local history museums did not have. The location of the Museum at a “non-site” but high tourism destination city, allowed some insulation from having a narrowed focus of mission. The connection to Smithsonian has also been of importance to outsiders as well as staff. The SI affiliations program was created to allow certain nationally recognized institutions to have better access to SI curatorial and collection assets. It was also created to foster sharing of more artifacts thereby reducing SI’s need for storage and it was carefully built to raise significant revenue for SI. The National Museum of Nuclear Science & History has been an affiliate of SI since 2002; this connection has been beneficial in planning the new museum and in fund development. The Museum is the only in the DOE cadre with both congressional charter and SI affiliation.

Broad Public Mission – The Mission of The National Museum of Nuclear Science & History is generally spelled out in the public law to include all atomic information related to peaceful and military applications. The method to present this information is also hinted at in the body of the law as language contained refers to preservation of artifacts and presentation of exhibits and programs to the public. The Museum, like any that succeed, must live within its community to survive. Thus, providing resources to our community fosters respect and brand loyalty in the form of visitors, donors, members, users of programs like summer camp, outreach and teacher services. Without attention to the maintenance of the public mission as a resource, interest would wane, users would find other service providers and the Museum would suffer financially and institutionally.

History as an Institution – The National Museum of Nuclear Science & History began as an idea of military leaders in the mid-1960’s under a former name. Local Albuquerque, New Mexico based Defense Department officials recognized a need to collect the various examples of nuclear weapon shapes, and deployment units for posterity and for eventual display. The museum began as a DoD operated facility known as the Sandia Atomic Museum, in 1969, later the “Atomic Museum” when taken over by predecessor organization to DOE, ERDA. In the late 1980’s committees were formed to request a national designation for the Museum which was achieved when President George H. W. Bush signed the “National Atomic Museum Act of 1991” into law. Subsequently on a separate track, local supporters

formed a non-profit organization chartered in 1992 known as the National Atomic Museum Foundation, (NAMF). This group was to become the eventual driving force in improving the Museum and in pressing forward with plans to relocate the Museum outside of its original home on Kirtland Air Force Base. As time went by, the presentation of exhibition materials expanded to better reflect the broader mission, the Museum moved away from only presentation of nuclear weaponry. The events of 9/11/2001 closed the Base to the public and forced the Museum to move to a temporary site and pressure was now on for the creation of a permanent home. In fall 2006, land was granted and in fall 2007 work began on the final new Museum facility owned by NAMF with a grand opening in less than 1 month.

Audiences and constituencies, conscience, conflict and compromise – The expansion of public exhibition topics caused conflict among those early supporters satisfied with the former all-military focus. As the Museum opened to more community use and involvement, critics came forward to comment on the way that information was presented. The Museum formally engaged the “anti-nuclear and peace activist” community with specific programming options for dialogue and shared ideas. Newly realized pressure came as dialogue over support with various corporate funders progressed, some with an interest in being supportive of only one part of the Museum mission. Careful balance of these competing interests, adherence to non-biased presentations or multiple viewed points and strong media and community involvement training for staff and board was instrumental in maintaining the Museum as a positive and trusted voice. Handling controversial topics in the press and in other media became critical to public perception of the institution as measured and solid. Controversy and issues that are controversial have not been shunned as they represent opportunity for dialogue, public involvement, media interaction and press relations but only if handled with skill. This is not an area that is ever static, as it will always require vigilance and an understanding of ethics and involvement of policy development by the Board of Directors.

Educational Outreach and Programming – The creation of useful, curricula based formal and informal program content is absolutely critical to continual success of the Museum. Using technology and new forms of communications is equally as important to reaching an audience with “news they can use” about Museum content. The National Museum of Nuclear Science & History has a local and national reach for educational programming and centers this on STEM content and military and science history. Educational resources consist of school tours and programs, State-wide Outreach programming, summer camp and after-school programming and adult educational lectures and events. A new public information endeavor known as The National Media Program has been developed and is being piloted around a newly recognized need. This group is being formed from those that have served on the “Technical Advisory Panel” as a technical information response team that can be called on by the Museum, members of the media and corporate partners for content validation and accurate fact checking. This is a new service offered by the Museum.

Financial considerations, public and private revenues – The National Museum of Nuclear Science & History exists as a public/private partnership where the not-for-profit portion is able to act in ways that bring in resources and is helped by some support funds from the local national lab. DOE does not currently directly fund the Museum or give money directed to it for Sandia to pass along in support of the operations. Because of this, the museum as an institution has taken a path to seek private support for programs and operations as it has grown. There is, however, a limit to the amount of funding available for sustainability from private revenue sources needed for operations and a recognized donor fatigue from asking to often. In the private funding source categories the major elements are earned and contributed revenues. In earned revenues, the largest “business units” are admissions income, store sales, memberships, program fees and facility rental income. In the contributed revenues category, funds are requested for program or exhibit sponsorships, annual appeal support, general donations, planned or deferred giving and grant funding. The National Atomic Museum Foundation maintains a small contract for service with Sandia national Labs that has helped bridge from the temporary to the permanent

location. Sandia does not get funds from DOE to pay this but supports through indirect budget. In future years, the lab expects DOE to pay for “its museum” and to reduce this support as the new facility proves its financial viability.

Earned Sources Percentage of revenue General level

Admissions	28	\$305K
Store Sales	25	\$290K
Memberships	5	\$55K
Program Fees	13	\$190K
Facility Rentals	3	\$35K

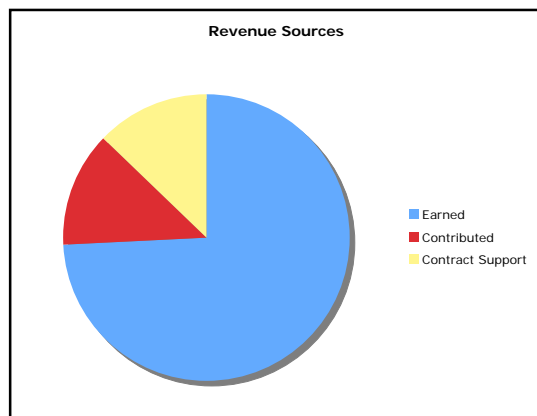
Contributed Sources

Sponsorships	3	\$36K
Appeals, Event	6	\$70K
General Donations	1	\$8K
Planned giving *		
Grants	5	\$40K

Note: Figures based on portion of a full operational year, shows transition revenue expectations.

- Planned giving is not included in operations budgetary calculations

Revenue Chart, total projected revenue \$1,18M



Governance and accountability, bridging two distinct worlds – It has proven to be a manageable but complicated endeavor to serve in the two spheres of influence of government and private interaction as an organization. Adherence to the requirements of GAPP, audit, Sarbanes-Oxley, IRS 501c3 regulation and the directives of a Board of Trustees as well as those actions required by DOE and the oversight by a national lab takes great patience and involvement by museum management. Creation of complimentary policy manuals that do not infringe on each other’s realm is hard to conceive and yet for the most part, it has been possible. Development of a “capitalism staff motivation model” needed for success as a non-profit is in direct conflict with the motivation of employees that work in a national lab setting.

WM2009 Conference, March 1-5, 2009, Phoenix, AZ

Examples: (SNL) Operating Procedures for acceptance and display of Radiological
Artifacts
(NAMF) Financial Policy and Procedures Manual

The Politics of support, a varied history – The National Museum of Nuclear Science & History exists now as a privately operated place for many to use as a resource. Yet it is DOE that holds the requirement under public law to see the museum flourish. DOE has not seen itself as squarely in the “museum business” yet many actions taken by the agency do absolutely include dissemination of public information, historic preservation, education of the nation’s youth, archaeology, records and archives management; all elements of the world of museums. The museums that live within DOE’s premise met as a group in the summer of 2006 and formed a loose group called MVCnet, which stood for Museums/Visitors Centers network. This group is beginning a plan to educate big DOE on the role of its museum resource for Americans. The group noted that there is a very spotty record of consistent financial support from the agency nor much activity in coordination of effort or message.

List of those organizations attending MVCnet 2006

DOE Federal Preservation Office/Chief Historian
National Museum of Nuclear Science & History
Atomic Testing Museum
Bradbury Science Museum – Los Alamos
Hanford CHREST
Hanford B Reactor Historical Association
Hanford Reach Center
Weldon Spring
Lawrence Livermore
Brookhaven National Lab
Idaho National Lab
Fermilab (Lederman Science Center)
Mound
Fernald
Savannah River
Rocky Flats Cold War Museum

Other organizations not participating but expected to contribute to discussion:

SLAC (Stanford Research)
American Museum of Science & Energy – Oak Ridge
Argonne National Lab
NREL

Organizational cooperation, co-promotion, communication – That this group of widely developed and located institutions came together in 2006 to discuss a way to better meet the needs of DOE and of their own communities is a positive example of institutional courage. In the coming years it is my hope that this group can develop methodology for research that will indicate the economic value of the institutions, and how many millions of persons experience the mission of DOE, its contractor lab and work sites and receive a message about the agency. With this collaborative data in hand, it will be easier, yet not without difficulty to speak to agency leadership about a sustained financial commitment for the institutions. The funding needed is not great in the big picture but in all cases mean the difference between success and failure.