Maximize our mission. That is what all of us in the children’s museums field aim to achieve. Serve more families. Spark more learning and development in children. Create more joy. What are the best strategies to achieve these mission goals? An intriguing strategy is to launch satellite museums that bring curated playful learning experiences geographically closer to more families. Do they work? Like many strategies, it depends.

Minnesota Children’s Museum (MCM), located in St. Paul, Minnesota, opened in 1981 and has grown to serve 530,000 visitors each year. In 2010, strategic planning revealed that geographic distance affected a family’s ability to experience the high-quality, playful learning experiences offered at the museum. Moving our mission outside our walls became an imperative. The board of directors adopted a strategy to “expand reach by decentralized growth.” Initiatives included touring a small exhibit to communities throughout greater Minnesota (outside the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area), installing literacy-based exhibits in libraries across the state, and opening a satellite museum in Rochester, Minnesota.

**Satellite Museum Number One**

Rochester, home of Mayo Clinic and the third largest city in Minnesota (after Minneapolis and St. Paul) has the fastest growing population in the state. Rochester is located eighty miles from St. Paul. In 2007, an independent group of parents established a 501(c)(3) to create a children’s museum in Rochester. After three years of development, which included seeking advice from MCM staff on multiple occasions, a memorandum of understanding was signed to explore the possibility of becoming a satellite museum of Minnesota Children’s Museum. In 2011, the two boards of directors voted to merge. With $700,000 in seed funding from a state fund that dedicates a portion of Minnesota sales tax for increasing access to arts and culture, Minnesota Children’s Museum of Rochester opened in 2012 in leased space in a strip mall just outside of downtown Rochester. The operational startup timeline went quickly—seven months from board vote to doors open—due to the ability to leverage MCM staff expertise and existing systems and processes.

MCM intentionally kept the local community in the driver’s seat, tapping local strengths whenever possible. The Rochester board became an advisory committee to the MCM board. The advisory committee provided MCM with Rochester-area connections and expertise that were instrumental in finding the site, identifying a contractor for the build-out, selecting the Rochester museum’s new director, and hiring local staff for onsite operations and administration.

We also made extensive use of expertise and resources in St. Paul. Flagship museum staff managed the build-out, set up box office processes and IT systems, trained staff, created exhibits, and started programs. MCM also provided other back-office services, including finance, human resources, development, and membership management. Fortunately, the new museum did not have to start from scratch to fill the 5,000-square-foot satellite location with compelling visitor experiences. Since MCM is a leader in developing traveling exhibits, we were able to mine those exhibits as well as the museum’s additional inventory of temporary exhibits. The Rochester satellite museum
continues to rely on periodic change outs to refresh the experience for visitors.

Marketing the Rochester location has been handled locally, with support from the marketing-communications team in St. Paul. With a limited budget for paid advertising, the Rochester museum has built awareness largely through media relations, social media, promotional partners, and word-of-mouth. The St. Paul marketing team supports the Rochester location with graphic design, web management, email newsletters, and strategy.

Managing memberships posed some challenges. Because the general admission price of the satellite was roughly half that of the main museum, a Rochester-only membership made the pricing attractive for visitors to the smaller-scale experience. We initially created a separate membership structure for Rochester using different naming conventions, pricing, and benefits unique to the site. This proved confusing for members and staff at both museums. After a few years, we streamlined both locations, offering a Rochester-only membership, but designating all other museum membership levels with the same name, pricing, and benefits (ex: Passport, Deluxe and Premier).

Over the past six years, the Rochester satellite has served 30,000 visitors annually, with 3,500 square feet of learning experience space—a high ratio of attendance per square foot based on ACM benchmarks. Visitorship includes 1,000 member families who greatly appreciate the opportunity for playful learning in their community. Two-thirds of these member families only visit the Rochester satellite and do not make the hour drive to St. Paul. Clearly, we achieved our goal of expanding playful learning to more families.

A recent market analysis projected attendance could double to 60,000 visitors if the space grew. Additionally, getting out of leased space would strengthen sustainability and allow more investment in the visitor experience. Local fundraising has grown tremendously from the first year—another great sign of meeting a community need.

Our growth challenge is to find an available and affordable site and to cultivate donor support to a new level for a successful capital campaign. All museum professionals know the heavy lift it takes to find suitable space and raise funds. In this regard, a satellite museum is not any easier than an emerging museum.

**Pop-Up Museum**

Meanwhile, in 2016, MCM opened a museum at the Mall of America (MOA), located eleven miles from St. Paul, again thanks to the state arts and culture fund that underwrote the satellite’s startup and initial operational expense. The mall museum was positioned as a “pop-up” experience offered during the partial and complete closures of the main museum due to expansion construction. We intentionally did not call it a satellite museum because that had a permanent sound to it. If the pop-up was wildly successful, we could then consider transitioning it into a more permanent satellite museum.

The MOA museum space was similar in size to the Rochester satellite. The number of annual visitors served was nearly 100,000! We successfully achieved our short-term goals for the project, specifically to 1) offer general visitors and members an additional experience while the main museum was un-
Isn’t this a drain on resources? Typically, this was the first question I was asked when a children’s museum contacted me during satellite location research. It surprised me then and still does. When I was the CEO of the Children’s Museum of Richmond (CMoR), we developed our satellite concept in late 2009, the early days of the Great Recession, to improve the museum’s financial performance. In the same way that banks open branches, restaurants franchise, and our fellow nonprofit YMCAs create centers throughout their service areas, museums open satellites. Satellite children’s museums can make informal early learning a more easily accessible resource for families, while improving the flagship museum’s financial sustainability.

**Solutions for Declining Attendance**

The Children’s Museum of Richmond moved to a new location next to the Science Museum of Virginia in 2001. After nearly seven years without a major overhaul, CMoR’s annual attendance dropped from its opening high of more than 225,000 visitors to less than 170,000. We took several steps to improve the situation, including simplifying membership offerings, raising nearly $1 million to update exhibits, building an aggressive special event schedule, and acquiring and combining two beloved community holiday traditions. The combination revived attendance, but then it plateaued.

We sensed we might have hit a point of diminishing returns. We decided to test this hypothesis with a marketing study that focused on both our visitors and, more importantly, our non-visitors. The study confirmed what we suspected. Our brand awareness was a stratospheric 98 percent, with more than 90 percent of respondents expressing happiness with our “product” (the museum experience).

What we were doing was not the problem; it was convenience. In our market, driving more than twenty minutes with young children was a barrier to regular visitation. When we did a geo-plot of museum member households, sure enough, our members were clustered within about a twenty-minute drive of the museum. Results from this study confirmed that if growing attendance was our goal, continuing to raise money to build new exhibits and programs at our current facility would not achieve it. We had to overcome the convenience issue if we wanted to grow the audience.

Fortunately, we thought we already had much of the infrastructure in place to tackle this problem. We didn’t think we would need another finance office, marketing, guest services, or education team, or even another facilities crew. We might need to beef these areas up, with better software, more interns or hourly employees, and a more robust vehicle for hauling things. Overall, the costs of operating what we considered another museum floor—rather than another museum—were marginal.

One of the museum’s original founders, a successful businessperson, recognized what we were attempting to do: capture more market share and spread our overhead over more visitors. He decided to fund our first satellite museum located near a new, upscale mall west of town in an area with many young families. We negotiated the space to include the entire buildout that we designed and used our backer’s funding ($250,000) to fill the space with exhibits.

For CMoR at the time, opening a 10,000-square-foot satellite was like opening a new exhibit gallery. We value-engineered the exhibits, tapping into our storage exhibits in new and creative ways. More than 125,000 visitors came to the satellite the first year; many families came every week. Based on our marketing study results, spending $250,000 on new exhibits at our existing facility would not have gained the museum an additional 125,000 visitors!

**Richmond Satellite Expansion**

With one satellite open, other communities nearby started calling. Two more satellites followed, strategically located beyond that twenty-to-thirty-minute drive barrier. They also fit our other criteria, such as having a sufficient number of households with children eight and under. We analyzed current visitor and member data to get a clearer understanding of demographic profiles, and looked to see where more of our target audience lived. By bringing a smaller version of the Children’s Museum of Richmond to them, new visitors reduced the overall cost per visitor while expanding the museum’s mission. (See “Keeping Satellites in Orbit” on page 4 for what followed in CMoR’s satellite story.)

**Expansion Philosophy Moves to EdVenture**

In 2015, I left the Children’s Museum of Richmond to become CEO of EdVenture Children’s Museum in Columbia, South Carolina. EdVenture wanted to expand its footprint, but had another goal: to establish a museum presence in areas of great economic need. EdVenture was already doing programming around the state; satellites were seen as a natural outgrowth of existing outreach efforts.

**EdVenture Hartsville**

With a focus on early learning, EdVenture’s first satellite opened in July 2018 in the small community of Hartsville, South Carolina. Hartsville is a quaint town about seventy miles northeast of Columbia, an hour-and-twenty-minute drive from EdVenture’s flagship location. Surrounded by an area along the I-95 corridor that includes rural communities with economic challenge,
n space, a satellite’s ability to maintain its orbit comes down to a balance between two factors: its velocity and the gravitational pull between the satellite and the planet it orbits. Keeping satellite museums in orbit takes a balance of multiple factors, including human resources, financial resources, and community relationships. Similarly, that “gravitational pull”—in this case, the link between the “base station” of the museum’s mission and the satellites—is extremely critical to keeping those museum satellites in orbit.

In 2010, the thirty-year-old Children’s Museum of Richmond (CMoR) opened its first satellite in an upscale shopping district just twelve miles from the main museum. The museum now has three satellites—CMoR Short Pump, CMoR Chesterfield, and CMoR Fredericksburg—which together host an average of 140,000 visitors. Including the main museum, CMoR serves a total of 400,000 visitors annually. Following the 2010 opening in the Short Pump location, the museum opened satellites in Chesterfield and Fredericksburg, Virginia.

What have we learned? Before any museum considers opening a satellite, it is essential to evaluate the many factors involved, from quality of the museum experience, to the level of staff needed to launch and later run a satellite, to the nature of the communities in which the satellite plans to live, to the smallest details regarding costs, both current and future.

Lesson 1: Costs & Risks

Make sure you fully understand expenses involved in both opening a satellite and running it after it is open. These expenses include costs directly related to the satellite, as well as satellite-related expenses born by the main museum as it supports a new facility.

If you currently own your flagship museum building and are planning to lease the new satellite location, there are expenses beyond rent that you may not have contemplated. For example, at CMoR’s Chesterfield and Fredericksburg satellites, located in strip malls, the common area maintenance costs were under-estimated at the outset. These costs are often variable and significant, and sometimes you don’t find out about them until after the landlord has incurred them.

For example, a lease agreement for one CMoR satellite included specific hours of operation, more typical of a retail store. This provision had the unintended consequence of increasing costs, as visitors did not come to the museum during those extended hours, but we still needed to pay for staffing. We were able to eliminate that requirement during lease renewal negotiations.

Satellites differ from other temporary program or pop-up locations in that they make a commitment to a community. If you are planning to operate a satellite location for many years, be aware that rent increases over time. Depending on the agreement with the landlord, especially if they are a property manager or commercial landlord, rent may increase significantly with changes in the market. This was the primary reason we had to relocate our first satellite museum to a smaller building about a mile and a half down the road but in the same general area. Moving and reopening a location is more work than opening a new satellite. So, make sure to understand the landlord’s long-term plans for leasing space at the satellite location—especially if it is in a developing area that could grow in value in a relatively short timeframe. A museum’s planning and funding horizon is much longer than that of a commercial tenant; build that extra lead time into the lease renewal contract.

Be sure to get an estimate of all costs and potential rent increases beyond the timeframe for the proposed lease, so you can calculate the renewal rate. Ask the landlord to provide an estimate of common area maintenance costs (snow removal, repairs to parking areas, etc.) and your responsibility for any existing equipment (heat pumps, hot water heaters, etc.). The best suggestion is to find a landlord who wants to support your museum’s mission and can offer significantly reduced rent and related fees. In our experience, commercial landlords will work with us, especially when influenced by local philanthropy. However, they need to understand—and sometimes be educated concerning—our role in the community and how we are funded. CMoR currently works with a broker who also sits on the museum’s development committee.
Lesson 2: Quality of the Experience

Establish routines for maintaining the quality of the museum experience at all of your locations. The new locations typically get all of the “love” during the launch phase, but do not forget to have a plan (and additional funding) for maintaining and updating all museum locations. As we all know, the quality of the museum experience is affected by both the exhibits/programs and staff interactions with visitors, so training, goals, and plans for updating programs and exhibits need to continue beyond the launch. This means increased staffing levels, and not just the visitor/guest service team for each location, but also expanding the main museum’s facilities, marketing, and/or exhibit teams. Do not assume that you can add locations and not add human resources!

Lesson 3: Mission Control

When a satellite opens in a new community, there is major institution-wide focus on boosting new earned revenue and creating special events geared to attracting new audiences. As a result, the museum’s mission-based programs can fall by the wayside. The emphasis on building marketing staff can temporarily outpace programmatic staff.

Ongoing communication with—and education of—our “neighbors” as well as our landlords continues to be essential to maintaining our brand and increasing awareness of our nonprofit children’s museum mission in the three distinct communities. To that end, CMoR is developing a new marketing strategy that addresses how we message to visitors, community members, and funders to talk about the learning through play that goes on in our museums.

In all children’s museums, flagship and satellites included, families age out, and businesses and leaders change. CMoR Fredericksburg, for example, is located in northern Virginia, a highly transient area due to the flux of government and military families. Marketing is tough for many businesses in that area. Neighbor tenants in our mall location change frequently. As a result, we train our satellite location managers to convey our mission to our visitors and the evolving roster of tenant neighbors.

Needs differ in each of the communities served by satellites. Under the umbrella of CMoR’s mission to “inspire growth in all children by engaging families in learning through play,” we found ways to highlight the programs and exhibits that fit best with individual communities’ interests. For example, Fredericksburg visitors expressed interest in programming for families with children with special needs, such as autism. In that location, we established a night dedicated to this audience segment, complementing similar programs already offered at the other three CMoR museums. Our Short Pump audience, on the other hand, was very interested in parent forums on school readiness. CMoR Chesterfield visitors are very focused on programs that support school readiness and literacy for underserved areas of their community. Understanding each satellite’s community profile is critical to continuing to attract both funders and visitors for the locations and the organization overall. It’s impossible to duplicate the depth, richness, and variety of the flagship museum experience in a scaled down facility, so it is a good strategy to identify a key focus or audience for which the satellite can become known as a particularly good community resource.

Lesson 4: Ties to the Community

Among real satellites, there are challenges with staying in orbit if the satellite is too far away from the Earth. In the case of a museum satellite, distance can be more than simply geographic. If a satellite museum is located too far from the main museum, it may affect support from the administrative and facilities team. But, most certainly, you will be challenged if the “distance” manifests in lack of connection and support from the satellite community. Building relationships with Fredericksburg, for example, which is about forty-five minutes north of the Richmond area, is much harder than with the two satellites that are closer to both each other and the main museum.

As context for this discussion, it is important to understand that the initial funders for CMoR Fredericksburg were a core group of families who had first banded together to start a children’s museum on their own. When that effort stalled, they chose instead to become a CMoR satellite. During the transition, most of founding family funders moved on to other philanthropic interests—and their children aged out of children’s museum range. We have not yet to be able to connect with new individuals in the same demographic in the area. To revitalize this key local demographic, we have included a member of the Fredericksburg community on the CMoR board of trustees, and we developed relationships with other nonprofits in the area such as Smart Beginnings Rappahannock and the regional YMCA. In addition, partners such as the University of Mary Washington (located in Fredericksburg), have become CMoR champions, promoting volunteer opportunities with their students and supporting our efforts to create an outdoor space at this location. In fact, the University of Mary Washington Foundation owns the Fredericksburg satellite building. As a nonprofit education-based organization, they are an excellent landlord partner.

In addition to being much closer to the main Richmond museum, CMoR Chesterfield, located in the suburb of Midlothian, has cultivated relationships with Chesterfield County, which funds the museum for direct services such as field trips and scholarship museum memberships. The county also includes CMoR Chesterfield in their school and “Communities in Schools” programs for underserved members of their community, providing space for CMoR staff-led family learning activities at these events. Cultivating similar relationships with Fredericksburg-area schools, or even Henrico County schools (CMoR Short Pump is located in Henrico County) would undoubtedly benefit the satellites and our efforts in working with local families, but the process is very time-consuming.

Evaluation: Sustaining Orbit

Regrettably, some satellites malfunction. As with a real satellite, you need to constantly monitor and assess their performance. In a periodic check of the CMoR satellites, we review profit and loss statements for each specific location as well as attendance and membership trends by location each year.

For all museums considering satellites, in addition to extensive pre-opening scrutiny, an annual satellite review, once they are open, will identify any new risks or issues that may affect a location. Results may suggest a commitment to prioritizing maintenance or other needs in the budget for the coming year to address possible shortcomings. If a satellite is not performing well, you will have to make some hard decisions about whether you can keep it in “orbit.” The most important goal for success is not the launch and just getting on the map, but creating a sustainable children’s museum whose long-term impact contributes to the well-being of the children, families, and communities it serves.

Shannon Venable is president and CEO of the Children’s Museum of Richmond.
Why did you open a satellite?

Volunteers, including active young mothers, who wanted a resource like the Mississippi Children’s Museum (MCM) in their community, contacted executive director and CEO Susan Garrard for advice about starting a children’s museum. What began as a conversation about pop-up-type experiences eventually became a discussion about opening an MCM satellite. The museum conducted a feasibility study two-and-a-half years ago, and the overwhelmingly positive results led the museum to begin a planning process and a capital campaign.

Where is it? Describe the community in which it is located.

Meridian, located one hour and thirty-five minutes away from Jackson, is a medi- cal hub for a five-county rural area in East Mississippi. Bordering Alabama, it is also a regional hub for three Alabama counties. A small number of members and field trip groups visit the flagship museum in Jackson from this part of the state(s), but generally, this region includes many children currently underserved for enrichment activities.

When do you expect to open?

We have reached about 75 percent of our capital campaign funding goal; we plan to be at 95 percent before breaking ground, which we anticipate will happen in 2019.

Who initiated the satellite process?

Community volunteers initiated the process, but the satellite soon received strong support from local governments (city and the county), as well as foundations that support education and local initiatives.

Does the satellite have an ongoing partnership with any local entities?

The satellite is a wholly owned LLC of the Mississippi Children’s Museum. MCM has created strong local relationships through a robust advisory committee of the MCM board of directors, which includes representation from Meridian-area businesses, schools, nonprofits, and community groups. The city of Meridian has contributed to the project, and the county is involved in the building process.

Do you rent or own the building? What is the length of your commitment?

Mississippi Children’s Museum-Meridian is building new construction on an eight-acre site close to downtown. The museum will be a permanent part of the community.

Who is the audience?

MCM-Meridian will serve pretty much the same audience as MCM-Jackson: children ages zero to twelve and their families and caregivers. The museum will further serve children through programs with Meridian public elementary schools as well as surrounding county school districts.

Is it a scaled down version of the flagship museum, or does it have a dedicated focus?

The new museum will take its inspiration from the flagship museum. In addition, through charrettes and community engagement, the design team hopes to capture what is unique about Meridian and its history, particularly in transportation (the city has a historical connection to railroads).

Budget and management structure?

MCM-Meridian is currently in a capital budget campaign; we are not yet open or providing direct services. The satellite has an executive director, and a shared services agreement with the flagship museum, which will provide marketing, finance, development, and management oversight. The satellite has a separate budget. Development staff and the CEO of MCM-Jackson are very involved in raising money for the satellite, but the primary contact for the capital campaign is the executive director of MCM-Meridian.

Membership/admissions/marketing?

These operational issues are currently under development.

DO’s

• Ensure you have the staff capacity to create the satellite because it is a very detailed process!
• Conduct a feasibility study to ensure the community has significant resources to make it happen.
• Engage the community in the planning process.
• Make sure staff leadership and community leaders have a shared vision and buy-in for the plan.
Children's museums are highly focused on audience and community, which sets them apart from most art, history, and science museums. This focus makes the question of “Do we or don’t we create satellite museums?” particularly compelling.

Four years ago, when I joined Discovery Place (DP) in Charlotte, North Carolina, as president and CEO, I felt like a ringmaster at a circus! Discovery Place is actually “Discovery Places”: it encompasses four museums, each with a unique focus, audience, and location. Discovery Place Nature opened its first permanent home in 1951, adjacent to one of Charlotte’s public parks, Freedom Park. Discovery Place Science, which opened in 1981 in the center of downtown Charlotte, is a large-scale science center on a campus with three buildings, two theatres, and a parking garage, that offers a broad portfolio of museum experiences.

Over the last two decades, children’s museums have become highly valued community assets in the United States and around the world. Once found primarily in major cities, children’s museums are now located in smaller cities and towns and rural locations. Everyone wants one! But within professional circles there is debate over quality and quantity issues. How many children’s museums can a population sustain? How do we ensure a quality museum experience in all of them, especially in a satellite facility, which by its very nature is a secondary and almost always smaller museum?

**Expanding the Brand**

Within the last ten years, two children’s museums, known as Discovery Place KIDS, opened in two different communities: the first in 2010 in Huntersville, a Charlotte suburb fourteen miles north of the city, and the second in 2013 in Rockingham, a small city in a rural part of North Carolina. The goal of both museums was to provide hands-on museum experiences for families with young children living in the surrounding communities of Charlotte. These museums would also be “feeders” for Discovery Place Science in downtown Charlotte. While DP KIDS Huntersville fits this model, DP KIDS Rockingham, located seventy-seven miles southeast of the city, took a different route to achieve its mission and impact.

Even with nearly forty years of history managing multiple locations, once the two Discovery Place KIDS locations opened, it became necessary to consider how we communicated the Discovery Place “brand.” We ultimately chose a master brand strategy in which each museum name communicates Discovery Place plus a simple but clear individual identification signaling its focus—Discovery Place Science, Discovery Place Nature, or Discovery Place KIDS.

**Satellite Children’s Museum Defined**

There are many museum satellite models—even the Metropolitan Museum of Art includes more than one museum. Many museums offer off-campus events and activities, some one-off, some ongoing. But for the purposes of this article, a satellite museum is defined as any permanent museum facility that is created by and reports to another museum of similar or larger size, but that serves a different market/community or subject matter. The satellite may or may not resemble the “parent” or flagship museum; it may have a close operating relationship with the flagship museum or it may function virtually independently. It may also share some portion of the main museum’s name or it may have a different name entirely.

A museum may have one satellite or several; sometimes there is an “anchor” or “flagship” museum and sometimes not. Even though each of the DP museums shows great diversity in terms of size and audience, in our master brand strategy they equally form the network, with a corporate organizational structure that links operations.

A satellite museum follows the policies and procedures of the parent organization. In our case, DP network museums benefit from access to business services such as accounting and financial management, sales and marketing, development and grant writing, human resources, facilities, etc. In a smaller museum, one person may be responsible for several of these areas. At Discovery Place, we have found that the network of museums offers great synergy as well as professional opportunities for staff.

A satellite museum represents a long-term commitment to a community and/or a location. Before a museum takes that step, there are other ways to experiment with expanding mission and audience—and many are very similar to pre-opening activities undertaken by emerging museums. While developing EdVenture Children’s Museum in Columbia, South Carolina, in the 1990s, we used pop-up experiences to engage and educate the community about what a children’s museum was before completing the permanent museum. Mobile exhibits, small spaces in libraries, large portable experiences like planetariums, Imagination Playground block sets, etc., also help communicate what a children’s museum is about while building momentum for a permanent facility. An established museum looking to grow might engage in many of these same activities before pursuing the satellite option.
But First, the Big Question: Why Are You Opening a Satellite?

- Do you want to serve new audiences that you are not able to serve adequately in your current facility?

Charlotte is a rapidly growing metropolitan area. Our rationale for expansions or additional facilities is linked to the region’s growth. Through surveys and focus groups, we learned how much drive time is just right for parents of young children.

- What does the satellite community want?

Sometimes there are political and/or civic motivations for wanting a children’s museum in someone’s “home community.” Smaller cities and larger towns vie to be attractive places to live, work, and play. Children’s museums are now seen as an appealing amenity. Inquiries come from a variety of stakeholders, including city managers, elected officials, and parents. The calls typically go something like this: “We have an abandoned grocery store downtown and someone suggested that you might put a children’s museum in there for our community’s children. We think you should be able do it in about six months.” Try to understand the motivations and aspirations of the person who has approached you as you balance their pitch with economic realities.

- Are you trying to avoid competition and/or benefit from a nearby community?

A city manager asks if you would create and run a children’s museum for them. It may be tempting to open a satellite of your museum to capture that city’s audience before a new independent museum can. But even before you think about how much money you may need, stop and learn about the community’s demographics and your current audience.

- Will a satellite museum make money for the parent museum?

A museum may gain financially from a satellite facility, but I would caution anyone from thinking there is a huge financial pay-off in satellites. The most realistic goal is to operate the satellite museum with a positive financial position. This includes covering the costs of parent museum staff time spent on any aspect of satellite operations, such as accounting and financial management, human resources, marketing, exhibit maintenance, training, etc.

- Will the appeal of a new museum facility draw substantial investment and contributions for its capital costs, such as buildings, exhibits, etc.?

The water experience at Discovery Place Kids Huntersville is designed for children of all ages but includes special access for toddlers.

Will the facility receive an adequate level of ongoing contributed support?

Large transformative gifts (one-half of the total project costs, for example) are really attractive. While it generally makes sense to say yes to one-time gifts of that magnitude, it is really important to think about the long-term sustainability of a satellite museum that might bear your institution’s name. It’s usually easier to raise support for capital projects than annual operations, even though the former is generally a more significant amount. Discovery Place KIDS has two museums that look and feel similar, but their financial operations could not be more different. Take a cold, hard look at the community in which you might place a satellite.

- What are the long-term growth needs for the flagship museum? Would a satellite help or hinder?

If you are in a growing region, establishing a satellite is usually a medium-term strategy for managing growth, but it still can be a very attractive one. It can be easier and quicker to open a satellite facility than to expand or redesign the entire flagship museum. But you can never lose sight of the long-term needs of the flagship museum, which you will eventually have to address. Satellites will not fix main museum problems permanently.

Here’s another twist: Have you looked at all potential growth possibilities, including becoming a satellite to a larger, new museum? This can be a great entrepreneurial opportunity for the organization. It is important to carefully evaluate a variety of strategies and ideas as any museum thinks about growth.

- How can I possibly say no? They want us!

It can be very flattering to be approached by leaders from another community who admire your museum and want one—or a branch of yours—in their town. And it can be very difficult to say no. Therefore you have to approach both the mission and the margin of any offer and assess both the opportunities and the risks. Once you have determined that a satellite is a win-win, work very closely with community leaders to create a museum that reflects their community, even if the entire project was inspired by a visit to your museum.

Do Your Homework

Still serious about a satellite? First, get the facts. Focus on the following:

- Will the audience be drawn from the main museum’s core audience, or will the new satellite audience be additive?

- How much support is the satellite community’s local government willing to commit?

- What are the demographics within an hour’s drive of the satellite?

- Based on the demographics, will the
Why did you open a satellite?

A constellation of the right elements happened. In 2014, Brooklyn Children’s Museum was approached by a developer and the Brooklyn Bridge Park Corporation (BBPC), a nonprofit entity charged with creating and maintaining “a world class park that is a recreational, environmental and cultural destination enjoyed by residents of, and visitors to, New York City.” BBPC required the developer to have a community partner before they could develop the land. The park was very interested in increasing diverse audiences, and BCM has years of experience working with those audiences.

In 2014, BCM signed an agreement to open a satellite space originally intended to not only reach new, diverse audiences, but also to contribute financially to BCM. It has broken even. BCM was not worried that SPARK would cannibalize the main museum—it was too far from it, and there was not much crossover audience. Also SPARK was small and offered a very different experience from the flagship museum.

Where is it? Describe the community in which it is located.

SPARK, described as “a new art and play space...in Brooklyn Bridge Park,” is located in DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass). This Brooklyn borough encompasses one of the wealthiest zip codes in the country as well as an area of greatest need (New York housing projects).

SPARK is about five miles from the flagship museum in Crown Heights, but about thirty minutes away by subway. Very few visitors go to both museums.

When did it open?

Fall 2016.

Do you rent or own the building? What is the length of your commitment?

The developer and BBPC jointly lease space to BCM for SPARK at $1/year, plus a monthly maintenance fee to building management. The lease is for five years with five-year renewal options.

Who is the audience?

SPARK is aimed at a younger audience (and their parents and caregivers) than the flagship museum. This includes toddlers, kids not in preschool, kids who like art, and the approximately forty families living in the building.
The Children’s Museum of the Upstate-Spartanburg includes 6,000 square feet of indoor exhibit space with seven exhibits designed specifically for children ages birth to five. The two-story site also includes a large classroom, sales area, small office, restrooms, and an elevator.

The museum is located in downtown Spartanburg and is attached to other historic storefront businesses. The venue is easily accessible with street-level access in the front and a large public parking lot directly across the street.

Why did you open a satellite?
In 2016, The Children’s Museum of the Upstate (TCMU) launched a five-year strategic plan that included the goal of “developing outreach experiences that engage regional communities and invite them to visit TCMU.” Through partnerships and programming for communities within a forty-five-minute drive of our flagship museum in Greenville (TCMU-Greenville), we considered not only outreach activities but possible satellite locations outside of Greenville County.

Where is it? Describe the community in which it is located.
TCMU-Spartanburg is thirty-five miles, or within a forty-five-minute drive, from TCMU-Greenville. The “Upstate” region includes ten counties in the commerce-rich I-85 corridor in the northwest corner of South Carolina, home to the cities of Greenville, Spartanburg, and Anderson. As of 2016, the area includes a population of 1,347,112 people. Situated between Atlanta and Charlotte, the Upstate is the fastest-growing region of South Carolina. Greenville, the largest city in the region with a population of 267,453 and an urban-area population of 400,492, is the base of most commercial activity. Spartanburg, followed by Anderson, is next in population.

Over the last several years, downtown Spartanburg has been undergoing a major transformation, and the growth is evident. However, nearly 55 percent of Spartanburg children ages three to four are not enrolled in preschool, resulting in an enormous deficit in kindergarten readiness. TCMU-Spartanburg’s goal is to aid local families with school—and particularly kindergarten—readiness, as defined by the Spartanburg Community Indicators Project and the Spartanburg Academic Movement.

When did it open?
A ribbon cutting and VIP event was held on May 15, 2018. We opened to the public the following day.

Who initiated the process?
Museum leaders began conversations about the Spartanburg space in late October 2016. The board approved the proposed plan in March 2017 and a final lease agreement was signed the next month. An exhibit design/build contract was signed in early May with Kraemer Design + Production, Inc. The initial design charrette was held that month to gather input from staff and community stakeholders. Building upfit began in June 2017 and all of the exhibit design and fabrication ran concurrently.

Does the satellite have an ongoing partnership with any local entities?
The museum is working with city and county governments, school administrators in multiple school districts, corporations, businesses with local headquarters, and other nonprofits with similar missions to ensure the museum’s development and programming meets community needs. While no formal partnerships were formed, the museum received some funding from the city and additional support from corporate and individual donors.

Do you rent or own the building? Length of commitment?
The museum has a five-year lease with options to extend. We have a graduating discounted rent rate: in year three, the rent will go up by fifty cents per square foot; in year five, it will go up another fifty cents per square foot. At that point we will be at market rate.

Who is the audience?
Families, caregivers, and educators who have or care for children ages birth to five. The flagship museum targets a similar audience but includes children ages birth to twelve.

Is it a scaled down version of the flagship museum? Or does it have a dedicated focus?
TCMU-Spartanburg is designed to accommodate the physical, cognitive, and social needs of children five and under, both in square footage and exhibit scale and design. (For comparison, TCMU’s flagship museum features 80,000 square feet with twenty exhibit spaces.)

The museum enables area families to continually learn and grow together. This mission and purpose is critical to the future success of the museum.

Stay true to your mission.
Work with the community to identify a very specific need that you have to fill.
Find partners and donors that share the passion and see the value of creating an informal learning environment in their community.
Be conservative with projections for potential attendance, revenue, etc. Fund the project and first year of operations before opening the doors.

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Why did you open a satellite?

In 2006, community leaders from Sugar Land, Texas, approached the Children’s Museum of Houston about opening a children’s museum. At the same time, CMH had recently completed an expansion and was already operating over capacity. It made sense for CMH and Sugar Land community leaders to discuss synergies to ensure we could create the most value possible for the broader community.

Where is it? Describe the community in which it is located.

Sugar Land is about twenty miles southwest of downtown Houston. According to the Fort Bend County Chamber of Commerce, the county’s population has increased by 7.2 percent since 2010, making it one of the ten fastest-growing large counties in the United States. In 2015, its total population was 625,000 people from 200,202 households. Employment has increased by 78 percent since 2000. And a 2013 study found that Fort Bend County “comes closer than any other county in the United States to having an equal distribution of the nation’s four major ethnic communities.” Fort Bend County also has the fastest growing population of young children in the thirteen-county Houston metropolitan statistical area (MSA).

When did it open?

May 21, 2016.

Do you rent or own the building? What is the length of your commitment?

FBCDC has a ten-year lease at $1/year, with the right to extend it. While this condition is not contained in a contract, CMH is committed to running a museum as long as the community is willing to financially support it.

Who is the audience?

The audience of both FBCDC and CMH is the same: children under twelve, their families, teachers, and caregivers. Fort Bend’s child poverty rate is around 20 percent, less than Houston’s 33 percent. However, Fort Bend County includes some population extremes: it has a higher concentration of people living 200 percent below poverty than the greater Houston area. At the same time, it also has a larger percentage of high household incomes than Houston, in part because of the high-income, highly educated immigrant population of Ismaili Muslims and Filipinos who live in the county’s upscale suburban cities. Fort Bend is also one of the most economically diverse communities in the United States.

Is it a scaled down version of the flagship museum? Or does it have a dedicated focus?

FBCDC is 12,500 square feet; CMH is about 50,000 square feet, including an outdoor play area. FBCDC includes some

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Satellite Museums: Before You Jump In...

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satellite qualify for any particular state funding, such as education, arts, or community development?

• What are the key characteristics that distinguish it from the flagship museum? Is the location in a small town or rural area, versus an urban area? What’s the local driving and parking culture?

• What’s the competition for family time?

• What staff are needed to support the satellite? Are these additional positions, or does the current flagship staff have the capacity and bandwidth to absorb the growth? (If there are additional positions, will they be eliminated once satellite is open?)

• Should the museum board include members from the satellite community?

• How will the museum brand change, and how will you manage your new brand?

• Will an additional museum adversely affect the existing museum(s)?

• How will you create and maintain the quality of your flagship museum experience in the smaller satellite museum? Will the satellite be perceived as a “real” museum or an indoor play space? Does that matter?

• How will you budget for and manage multiple operations?

• How will you reach your new audience? What’s the local media market like? What will your marketing plan be?

Red Flags

A city under an hour’s drive from your museum has expressed interest in your creating a satellite facility in their city. Be alert for red flags that may appear as discussions proceed, such as the following:

• Your museum already has a significant percentage of visitors and members from that community. If your current museum is overcrowded more than 50 percent of the time, it might be a good thing to launch a satellite museum. However, if that’s not the case or if the other community’s population of young children and young adults (who will one day have young children) is declining, you might want to turn down the offer.

• The potential satellite community doesn’t step up to contribute to funding the capital costs or can’t provide the civic leadership to raise the funds.

• The proposed location poses significant architectural and design challenges.

• Your museum is not in the best financial or operating position. It is easier to grow an existing museum before expanding to a second operation. It doesn’t get easier with two (or more) museums. It’s like having twins, or triplets, or more. A museum that is undercapitalized gets worse off the more it expands. Before considering a satellite, get your own house in financial order!

Last Word: Delivering Quality

Leading a children’s museum is a lot like being a parent: the easiest day is when the “baby” is born. The real museum work—delivering value to another community—is much harder and takes much longer! It may seem like a satellite is an easy spin-off of a thriving, successful organization. However, the reality is that the superficial clone approach will not succeed as a museum.

Children’s museums care about creating opportunities for children, convincing communities that children are top priority, and demonstrating how powerful and transformative informal learning really is. As a field, we have an obligation to commit to a high-quality educational experience for young children, their families, and caregivers. We should also learn the value of saying no when a community seeks you out, but can’t support the capital needs, much less sustain the operations.

Over the last two decades the children’s museum brand has grown and become a highly valued asset for communities. To keep our brand strong, we must encourage the growth of high quality children’s museums—and any satellites they may create—to ensure good community fit and create long-lasting and powerful cultural organizations.

Catherine Wilson Horne is president and CEO of Discovery Place in Charlotte, North Carolina. Prior to this, she was president and CEO of Ed-Venture Children’s Museum in Columbia, South Carolina.

CORRECTION:
In the Volume 31, Number 4 issue of Hand to Hand (Brain Research and Children’s Museums), the attribution on page 10 incorrectly identified the author of “Helping Busy Parents Support Their Kids’ Brain Development” as Anthony Detrano. The correct author is the Bezos Family Foundation.
es, this part of the state has been known for weak educational outcomes. This is a key demographic of the audience we wanted our satellite to serve.

We looked at the population within that twenty-to-thirty-minute drive of Hartsville and projected attendance and membership based on what we experienced at EdVenture in Columbia, as well as in comparison to smaller children’s museums in more rural areas. We calculated earned income potential from visitors and compared it to operating costs. We then explored how to fund the gap through municipal and philanthropic resources. Many communities, hungry for the services that children’s museums can provide, are eager to consider an annual investment given these tangible and intangible returns. Every small city economic development person would love to have a thriving children’s museum as part of their community’s mix of assets when recruiting companies to locate there. And many local government officials perceive less risk and are more willing to invest in a satellite museum than with an independent startup group without professional experience or proven success.

EdVenture Hartsville is housed in a 4,500-square-foot, 1940s-era brick building. A good imagination was required to see its full potential, but high ceilings with clerestory windows offered natural light while leaving ten feet of unobstructed wall space—perfect for our needs.

The design aesthetic took its inspiration from a small-scale Jules Verne-themed working carousel located in the back of the museum. Originally purchased for our Columbia museum, we decided it would have more impact in Hartsville where it would not compete with the flagship museum’s existing signature exhibits, such as Eddie, the world’s largest child, and a real Boeing 757 cockpit protruding from the museum’s second story.

The carousel is balanced against a Tower of Power exhibit in the front of the museum, which encourages visitors to work together to generate light streams that combine into a ball of light that touches the ceiling, plays a tune, and finally congratulates participants on successful teamwork.

These two “wow” exhibits bracket a town square with a real ambulance (purchased from the retired inventory of our friends at the Children’s Museum of Omaha!). The square also includes miniature versions of recognizable Hartsville landmarks, such as a grocery store, bank, and hospital, as well as an art and recycling center and theater. While small, the museum packs lots of activity in a visually compelling and lively space. The Hartsville staff manager trained at EdVenture, and her staff delivers the same early childhood floor programs offered at the main museum.

The new satellite brings EdVenture’s suite of community program offerings to the Hartsville community. Because EdVenture’s satellites are developed as an extended delivery system for the main museum’s experience, this approach reflects the organization’s existing culture.

**DO’s**

- Get full support from the municipality in which you plan to open. Understand all public funding sources (local and state).
- Do your homework: understand the demographics and the numbers. Opening a satellite is not much different than opening any new children’s museum: you have to know the full economics of the proposition.
- Retain a strong link to the main museum brand (quality experience, logo, name, etc.)
- Raise all the money (capital and operating) upfront, before the museum opens. The most exciting time of the museum is right before it opens; it’s very hard to raise money without that pre-opening excitement.
- Drive people to memberships: Get the membership revenue up front. Cost per visit is not so important. There are fixed costs no matter if you have ten visitors or 100.

**DON’Ts**

- Don’t get saddled with rent. Find local support for the facility. Working with community leaders or city governments is usually preferable to working with commercial landlords.
- Don’t forget to consider geographic distribution and audience travel time (every area is different: some satellites operate successfully within a few miles of the main museum; others do better over an hour’s drive away).

**But Is It Profitable?**

While we only anticipate about 20,000 to 25,000 annual visitors in Hartsville, the museum was designed to be financially viable and contribute to the overall financial sustainability of EdVenture. After sharing projected attendance, expenses, and earned revenue figures with Hartsville city officials, not only did they commit both to capital and operating support, but they also helped convene the community’s philanthropic leadership. Hartsville was never intended to contribute heavily to EdVenture’s bottom line—and it doesn’t—but it does cover its incremental operating costs and contributes to needed support functions, such as finance, education, and development. The satellite benefits from the collective experience of EdVenture staff, and while it only contributes a small percentage of staff costs, the majority of these same costs would be expended for one location or several.

The impact of satellites on sponsorships and development is another financial benefit that often falls below the radar on a profit and loss statement. I’ve worked with many companies and foundations that supported the museum because of its multiple locations. Some liked the forward-leaning approach, and some simply appreciated more exposure to more visitors in different locations. To fully understand the financial impact of a satellite, one needs to understand how another location motivates donors as well as the families who perceive additional value from the opportunity to visit multiple area museums.

**Myrtle Beach: A Satellite/Merger Hybrid**

In 2015, EdVenture entered into a management agreement with the board of directors of the Children’s Museum of South Carolina in Myrtle Beach to manage and support the museum in lieu of their hiring another director. The museum was too small (in both square footage and budget) to adequately serve the more than sixteen million visitors to the Myrtle Beach area each year.

The agreement was initially drafted to draw on EdVenture’s marketing and development resources to help the Myrtle Beach museum. However, it included language clarifying that a full merger of the two organizations would ensue should a viable, new, bigger location become available. It was important to be clear about this sequence of events, because project-killing donor confu-
of CMH’s signature exhibit galleries, such as How Does It Work?, Kidtropolis, and Tot’Spot. Similar to flagship museum exhibits, FBCDC’s exhibits are designed to reflect Fort Bend County wherever possible. For example, Kidtropolis Houston is a “city run by kids for kids [mirroring] a real city, complete with its own city hall, municipal building, mercantile center, bank, news center, market, diner, art school, and even a vet clinic.” Its counterpart in Sugar Land offers the same experiences but its iconic buildings “mirror and highlight the diverse community of Fort Bend County.”

Both museums run the same program themes each week with small adaptations.

Budget and management?

FBCDC staff includes a director of visitor services, a gallery manager, a fabrication shop technician, and Discovery Guides. The flagship manages the budget, PR and website, online ticket sales, membership program, birthday party program, school and summer group visit reservations, and attendance tracking. Flagship staff plan and execute member and fundraising events.

The satellite manages its own school and group reservation visits, birthday parties, and onsite membership sales.

FBCDC has a dedicated annual budget of approximately $850,000. In addition to that number, CMH provides as estimated $300,000 in annual overhead support. Annual revenues from attendance and membership sales total approximately $570,000, and contributions total approximately $236,000. During the capital campaign, a future operations fund of $1.65 million was raised to plug operations differences, as needed each year. Since 2016, this has ranged from $100,000-$200,000 annually.

Membership/admissions/marketing?

Admission fees are the same and memberships can be used at both locations (there is no location-specific membership option). In its first year of operation, total attendance was 107,673, 70 percent of which were members. In its second year, total attendance was 112,385 people, 63 percent of which were members.

FBCDC markets directly to the Fort Bend community using social media targeting planned communities, proprietary newsletters, and web sites. Aside from TV coverage, there are sufficient Fort Bend media outlets (magazines, newspapers, web sites) to support this strategy. FBCDC also places trade ads in Fort Bend publications.

The broader CMH advertising message reinforces the benefits of having a reciprocal membership to FBCDC and CMH. This messaging includes the fact that families in the Houston area have two great museums to visit for quality family learning experiences, and museums members have double value for their memberships.

(Completion of page 11:)

DO’s

- Satellite donors need to see detailed startup building costs and a business plan to understand how the new museum will be sustainable over time. This knowledge builds confidence.
- Establish credibility. FBCDC demonstrated its community impact by operating as a museum without walls and offering community-based programs before beginning fundraising.
- Work to ensure that established, community-based organizations welcome the satellite museum as a partner rather than interloper. This positioned the campaign as a win-win for the community rather than a drain on its resources.
- Fund the process. The campaign took two and a half years to reach its goal following a two-year pre-campaign period, during which we laid the initiative’s foundation. An interim funding stream was needed to support the operational costs of this work. In our case, two CMH board members living in Fort Bend County underwrote the salary of a full-time fundraising staff and related campaign expenses dedicated to the project.

The Children’s Museum of the Upstate will regularly participate in free-with-admission programs that prepare children for academic success. Spartanburg programming is aligned with what has been most successful at the Greenville flagship, including daily Story Time, music and movement programs, the Off the Wall art program, Sensory Friendly Days, and Random Acts of Science. All programs feature lots of cooperative, physical play.

In fall 2018, TCMU-Spartanburg will host field trips for groups of three-to-five-year-olds that will include free play with an option of adding classroom programs that cater to SC State Standards. Beginning in 2019, the museum will host multiple special events that parallel those happening at TCMU-Greenville.

Budget and management?

The satellite has two full-time staff, a site director, and a site manager, supported by ten part-time staff. Spartanburg-specific programs and events are managed locally. The flagship runs all other executive, marketing, fundraising, and operations functions.

The satellite maintains a site-specific budget that is part of the overall TCMU budget. All revenue is processed through the flagship museum, which also coordinates all fundraising activities. Funds raised on behalf of the Spartanburg location directly support the satellite’s programming and outreach activities.

Membership/admissions/marketing?

During the first full month of operations, 30 percent of visitors were members. Annual memberships are reciprocal.

TCMU-Greenville admission is $9/child and $10/adult; TCMU-Spartanburg admission is $5 per person (children and adults).

With both museums sharing an overlapping market, a single marketing plan promotes the museum experience and benefits at both locations. We communicate TCMU-Spartanburg-specific programming through a targeted email contact list, developed by leveraging partner relationships, engaging visitors at the door, and through social media and our website. The museum website features a gateway hub page that allows users to select the site they want to visit. Visitors are then routed to site-specific websites that include all of the information relevant to the correct museum location.
Why did you open a satellite?

The Children’s Museum of Tacoma (CMT) has been working with military families for the past eight years, taking the museum’s kindergarten readiness program, Play to Learn onto Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM). JBLM is the third-largest military installation with young families in the US. Twenty percent of our county’s population is somehow affiliated with the military.

JBLM, a deployment base housing Madigan Hospital, creates unique circumstances and challenges for its military populations. Frequent deployments and long training exercises have negative impacts on children’s healthy development. Children have a hard time attaching to an absent parent. They are also impacted by the stress the present parent experiences and by the frequent household transitions that occur when the deployed parent returns home. In addition, because of JBLM’s extraordinary healthcare system, there is a greater percentage of children with special needs—25 percent versus 10 percent in the general public. Military families with children with special needs are often reassigned to JBLM specifically for the care available there. Play is a natural and effective tool in helping families reconnect, and can help children experiencing special needs make great strides in their development.

This combination of circumstances led JBLM leadership to identify a need for greater resources for young families. With the Play to Learn partnership as a platform, discussions escalated to include the creation of a children’s museum on base—the first known of its kind in the world.

When do you expect to open?

The satellite has been in development for the past five years. In June of 2015, Commander Chuck Hodges signed orders making the museum’s relationship with JBLM official, dedicating space and committing to making it a reality. CMT at JBLM is proposed to open late summer 2019.

Does the satellite have an ongoing partnership with any local entities?

Because the satellite will be located in JBLM’s town square, we anticipate lots of partnership and activity with neighboring businesses. Programmatically, the museum has been building relationships and partnerships with therapists, childcare providers, and the medical community to ensure the services and programs we are planning reflect the needs of the community. Focus groups have helped the museum shape the physical space, the playscape complement, and initial program offerings. We are designing flexibility into the space and budget to make sure we can meet emergent needs, which we expect to learn more about once we are “living” on base.

Do you rent or own the building? What is the length of your commitment?

Because the satellite will be located in JBLM’s town square, there is no lease, just a memorandum of understanding, which is for five years and renewable. The military will upgrade the building to the museum’s specifications, and the museum is responsible for the playscapes and operations.

Where is it? Describe the community in which it is located.

CMT is located within our community’s United Way building in downtown Tacoma’s museum district. In comparison, the satellite is a stand-alone building (an old roller skating rink), adjacent to a bowling alley, skate park, spray ground, playground, and soccer fields. This is all with stunning views of Mt. Rainier, beyond which the Blackhawk and Cheyenne helicopters are stored.

JBLM is about eleven miles south of CMT and is so large it is referred to as the fifth largest city in Washington State. The base is undergoing a revitalization and creating a “lifestyle center” for those who live and work there. The building that will house the museum is the epicenter of the lifestyle center. JBLM has chosen to put children at the center of their “city.”

Children’s Museum of Tacoma at Joint Base Lewis McCord
Tacoma, Washington

Tanya Durand, Executive Director

Children’s Museum of Tacoma at Joint Base Lewis McCord (JBLM) will include about 11,000 square feet of galleries, two program rooms totaling 1,200 square feet, and a small office. It will share space with the military’s office of Child and Youth Services (CYS). This is a key partnership; every family new to JBLM must physically visit the CYS offices to enroll their children in school, childcare, etc. The museum will offer a welcoming place for that military function, and families will become very familiar with the museum.

Boeing and its Employees Community Fund recently announced that it will provide $1.5 million to create the Play is on Base project, the world’s first children’s museum on a military base, which is expected to serve 30,000-50,000 families in its first year.
Who is the audience?

The museum on JBLM will serve a slightly different audience than the flagship. Specifically, we expect to see more temporarily single heads of household, children experiencing special needs, families with wider age ranges of children (birth to age eleven at the satellite, in comparison to birth to age six at flagship), and a larger homeschool population.

Is it a scaled down version of the flagship museum, or does it have a dedicated focus?

CMT is roughly 8,000 square feet of galleries, 1,200 square feet of offices, and 800 square feet of program/preschool classroom. The satellite will actually be larger than the flagship by almost 1,000 square feet. The satellite will be similar to the flagship in aesthetics and its focus on creativity. Playscapes will still be fantastical in nature, but with a heavier focus on STEAM activities, whereas dramatic play is the focus in the flagship.

Budget and management structure?

We have created an estimated operating budget will be tracked separately from the flagship museum’s operating budget. However, there will be some fluidity between the two, and one is expected to support the other, if needed. We expect that the satellite will operate at a loss with fundraising bridging the gap. It has not yet been determined whether a separate or joint fundraising effort will be most effective.

We currently envision a museum manager on site, plus an assistant manager, and dedicated playguide/floor staff. CMT’s deputy director intends to work from JBLM one day a week to ensure operations and culture true to the museum’s brand promise; other program staff will visit JBLM as needed. The operating plan for JBLM is currently under design with many detailed questions unanswered.

Membership/admissions/marketing

CMT’s board of directors is committed to continuing their commitment to access: the satellite will operate under the flagship’s unique Pay as You Will model.

A membership program will be offered at the satellite. While this is still under design, it is likely that satellite members will have access to the flagship museum. However, because the satellite is on a closed military installation, public access is limited and so reciprocity is not possible. Anyone with a military ID or the ability to get on base will be able to visit the museum. The base is open two to three times per year to the general public, and while we’ll likely be open those days, we’re not sure what to expect.

Admissions and marketing TBD.

DO’s

• Convene focus groups with your new audience early in the process.
• Identify key leaders/stakeholders in your new community. Get to know them and introduce them to your flagship.
• Engage staff in the satellite decision as much as you can. You likely won’t have resources to staff up before you launch the satellite, and you’ll be depending on your existing staff to make it a reality. Give them some skin in the game.
• Raise funds within your campaign to shore-up new operations, should they not meet revenue goals. The last thing you want to do is damage the flagship’s sustainability.
• Determine what aspects of your brand and culture are important to replicate at the satellite. It should have a distinctive look, but still feel like your flagship museum.

DON’Ts

• Don’t hire all new staff to operate the satellite without giving them lots of time to understand and soak up your culture. It’s harder to fix a broken culture than to create a new, solid one.
• Don’t let the creation of the satellite dilute the energy you put into the flagship. You want your audience excited to see you grow, not jealous of the new facility.
• Don’t go too fast. Go as fast as you can, but take as long as you need.
• Don’t expect everyone to be as excited about this as you are. Funders are worried about mission creep, sustainability, and premature growth. Take time to write a solid case for support and include your new audience’s voices.
• Don’t forget to show gratitude to your staff. They probably already feel overworked or under-resourced and now they are taking this on, too!
Satellites: Yes, No, Maybe
continued from page 2

under construction, 2) generate supplementary revenue, 3) increase visibility of MCM in a different part of the metropolitan area, and 4) gain insights about operating in a suburban mall environment. A shopping mall was selected to take advantage of existing foot traffic and common area infrastructure, limiting staffing and operational costs. There were no security systems or restrooms to build out (or clean!). Plus, marketing was easy—we simply added the tag “also located at the Mall of America” to existing advertising done for the main museum.

Members loved the additional location and took full advantage of it. The visitor mix was 70 percent members, skewing significantly toward serving members than the main museum did. Anecdotally, staff reported that a number of general visitors stated they had not heard of Minnesota Children’s Museum. Of those who decided to become new members, nearly seven out of ten visited the main museum one or more times.

Sounds successful, right? While we declared “success,” having met the short-term goals described above, we closed the MOA pop-up after nineteen months when the main museum reopened. If it was successful, why didn’t we transition it to a satellite museum? In short, it was a financial decision: with one-time state funds not available as an ongoing subsidy, the revenue did not cover the expenses for a more permanent satellite location.

Mall management expected us to pay market rate rent to continue a permanent operation. Comparable retail-based rents were the norm at other metro area malls as well. And without the existing infrastructure of an indoor mall, there would be capital buildout expenses and higher ongoing operational costs. We estimated that the operating gap would be at least $100,000 per year.

Considering the operating deficit, we concluded that a small, relatively nearby satellite museum was an expensive member benefit. We believed there were other investment opportunities that would do more to further the museum’s mission and strategic goals—including our aim of fully leveraging the $30 million expansion of our flagship location and increasing programs for families in need.

**Proof-of-Concept of a Satellite Museum Network**

Through the satellite and pop-up museums, MCM was strategically testing the proof-of-concept of a satellite museum network with multiple locations in the state.

We learned that MCM’s expertise was beneficial in accelerating the early phases of startup—from sourcing and enhancing exhibits, to designing programs, to training visitor services staff, to leveraging back office systems.

We learned that the farther the distance between the satellite museum and the main museum, the harder it was to run the operation efficiently. The proximity of the MOA location made visitor service staffing significantly easier because we were able to leverage frontline and managerial employees from St. Paul. This proximity also made operational support, such as exhibit maintenance, IT and marketing, less challenging.

We learned about the time and resources needed to grow a local donor base, curate exhibits to uniquely reflect the community, and develop separate marketing plans. A key learning is that, in order to build local support, a museum needs to fit its community. It can’t simply be a replicated branch. This approach is distinctly different from what works for other franchise models, such as restaurants or banks.

For MCM, we have concluded that a satellite museum network is not an efficient way to advance the mission of sparking more learning through play. We have no plans to pursue other satellite museums.

The board of directors has recently completed a new strategic planning process in which they reflected on the best strategies to achieve our vision of kids playing more. Child-directed play is declining and that has serious ramifications for a child’s development. But physical access to places to play is not why play is declining. Therefore, instead of more bricks-and-mortar sites, our new theory of change is to focus on programmatic initiatives that engage parenting adults in understanding the value of play. We are committed to inspiring more play beyond a museum visit by:

- advancing broad-based communication initiatives, engaging member families and the wider community via social media, digital channels and public relations;
- investing in higher-touch equity initiatives to deepen service for families with less access to resources, including establishing an early learning collaborative across social service agencies to build knowledge and skills with evidence-based tools and culturally relevant play-based interventions; and
- building alliances with like-minded entities, such as pediatrician networks, to promote play among more parenting adults.

**Advice**

A satellite museum might be right for your organization. My greatest piece of advice is to go into the decision with your eyes wide open. Don’t let the initial operational ease cloud your long-term sustainability judgment. Solving the financial equation is just as much work as starting an independent museum. Complete a robust fundraising feasibility assessment for both a capital campaign and ongoing operating support. Identify space options that fit within the community’s fundraising capacity. Refresh your memory of your flagship museum’s history. What did it take for the founders and other leaders who carried on their legacy to get to where your museum is now? Do you have all the ingredients to do it again? If yes, you are in a great position to decide if the time and resource investment to establish a satellite museum is the best advancement of your mission.

Dianne Krizan is president of Minnesota Children’s Museum in St. Paul, Minnesota.
Why did you open a satellite?

We wanted to bring early childhood learning experiences to more children in communities adjacent to Tucson. Children’s Museum Tucson (CMT) had many visiting families with children ages zero to five. However, for those families living in Oro Valley (and other parts of our community that were a 30-minute or more drive away), museum visits were infrequent. An hour round-trip drive isn't something a parent with young children is eager to do very often. In many cases, given the short attention span of kids under five, the total drive time to and from our downtown location was often greater than the time spent at the museum.

Where is it? Describe the community in which it is located.

CMOV is thirteen miles north of Tucson in Oro Valley, a 50,000-person bedroom community. Historically, Oro Valley was known for its large retirement population, but the number of young families has been growing in recent years.

When did it open?

May 2015

Who initiated the process?

The mayor of Oro Valley asked if we would consider opening a satellite in his community, which already had a growing reputation as very family-friendly. City leaders thought the addition of a children’s museum would further the town’s goals of providing meaningful (and educational) opportunities for residents with young children.

Does the satellite have an ongoing partnership with any local entities?

The Town of Oro Valley provides $75,000 in annual operating support for CMOV. This equates to about 25 percent of the satellite’s budget. CMOV also signed a five-year funding agreement with the Town of Oro Valley.

Do you rent or own the building? What is the length of your commitment?

The museum has a five-year lease, paying market-rate rent in a retail center. As the occupancy of retail space in Oro Valley is over 90 percent, there is no motivation for landlords to discount the rent.

Who is the audience?

Children ages zero to five and their parents/caregivers; our flagship museum is zero to ten, plus parents/caregivers.

Is it a scaled down version of the flagship museum, or does it have a dedicated focus?

CMOV focuses on early learning.

Budget and management?

CMOV has one full-time, salaried site manager and three to four part-time employees. Flagship museum staff run everything other than CMOV’s day-to-day operations.

A CMOV-specific budget is used internally, but we are one organization. Every year the board approves one budget that encompasses both museums.

A small percentage of the flagship museum’s salaries (executive director, accountant, membership coordinator, marketing direc-
The Children’s Museum Research Network (CMRN), a partnership between the Association of Children’s Museums and the University of Washington Department of Museology, started in 2014 with support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to develop field-based research in children’s museums. Members of CMRN include representatives from fifteen children’s museums in the United States and Canada.

In 2017, CMRN completed a study that examined parents’ and caregivers’ perceptions of what they learned about their children as a result of family visits to a children’s museum and what they thought contributed to that learning. Data from the survey and follow up interviews shed light on the caregivers’ perceptions about the importance of the designed environment to both foster their children’s learning and provide a space that allows the adult to observe their children.

Participants were recruited from eight children’s museums to receive a survey one to three days after their visit to the museum. 223 caregivers completed the survey between August and September 2017. As a follow up, fifty-three people indicated that they were willing to participate in a post-survey phone interview. Members of CMRN completed phone interviews with twenty caregivers (37 percent participation) between January and February 2018.

When asked if they discovered anything about their children during their visit to the museum, participants indicated that they learned about their children’s interests (82.61 percent), how their children interact with others (70.05 percent), how their children solve problems (66.67 percent), and how their children think (64.25 percent). Further, 70 percent of the caregivers indicated that they learn things about how their children learn, such as their processes, preferences, characteristics, and skills.

What is it about children’s museums that prompts these discoveries for caregivers? Two survey questions explored this, and the responses often referred to the built environment of the museum. When participants were asked what they were doing when they made these discoveries, most named specific exhibits they were in, or materials and objects they used.

When asked what it was about the children’s museum environment that made it possible for them to observe their children’s learning, the top responses again referred to the context and materials.

During interviews, caregivers were asked to rate, on a scale of one to seven, how important it was that they learned something about their children’s learning during the museum visit. All of the participants indicated high levels of importance, with scores of five to seven. For these individuals, the sense of value was related to observing learning experiences they could replicate. They also valued opportunities to be an observer of their children within unique physical environments. When asked what makes children’s museums unique environments, the caregivers referenced the variety of activities, spaces intentionally designed to support children’s learning and development, and opportunities for purposeful, hands-on play.

Over the course of this study, it became clear that caregivers value learning about their children, and that exhibits, materials, and activities at the museums provide them the opportunity to do so. These data suggest that whether at a main site, satellite location, or outreach pop-up, providing settings for adults to participate in as well as observe their children’s learning extends the value of the visit.

Flagship museum admission is $9 per person (adults and children; infants under one are free); CMOV is $7 per person.

CMOV does very little direct marketing. As a destination for families with young children, people in CMOV’s target market know that we exist. When we do market, we use publications and other opportunities that specifically target the area near the satellite. Versions of the museum’s logo can encompass both or be location-specific.
Satellites Extend the Mission
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sion could wreak havoc on a future museum expansion if two separate 501(c)(3)s existed. In 2016, the city of Myrtle Beach expressed a commitment to secure a new location. The full merger went into effect, and the Children’s Museum of South Carolina became EdVenture Myrtle Beach.

A few months later, a mayoral election upset changed the city’s political landscape. One of the Children’s Museum of South Carolina’s founders won the election! The new mayor has an even bigger vision for the children’s museum and hopes to place it as a central feature of a new city arts district. For now, the project has gone back to the drawing board. While this has delayed opening plans, the city’s commitment remains stronger than ever. Unfortunately, the museum’s old building can’t hold up any longer, and the museum will go dark while planning, fundraising, and new site location happen. The theme for the new satellite, inspired by Myrtle Beach’s goal to become known as a welcoming vacation destination for families with special needs children, will be “Design for All.” Families needing support will experience accommodative features designed into every aspect of the space, exhibits, and programs.

New Museum or New Satellite?

Over fourteen years of working in children’s museums, I’ve been involved in five satellites. Calls come from large museums considering satellites, but more often from parents who have moved from larger to smaller cities and want to start a children’s museum in their new town. I am sympathetic to their cause. I would love all children to have easy access to the wonder and growth that happens in a children’s museum. But I also know how challenging it is to raise money, to spend that money to maximum effect, and then figure out how to keep a new museum operating when the donor community moves past the excitement of opening day.

An industry heavy with many small, financially challenged organizations can never achieve the overall impact of one with a more financially sustainable “hub and spoke” design. Getting to scale is tough in any enterprise, but especially in nonprofit organizations. I encourage those callers to reach out to their community’s closest museum and explore what a satellite of that museum might look like in their smaller town. And if you receive one of those calls, I encourage you to consider the satellite option. It may strengthen your financial position while expanding your own mission-delivery system.

If planned with financial sustainability in mind, satellites can spread fixed costs across more visitors, bring the additional benefits of scale, and enable best practices to be shared more readily. I cringe when I hear people say, “Mission versus margin.” Mission is not the opposite of margin any more than play is the opposite of learning. Satellites offer a way to experience the synergistic and complementary roles of “mission and margin” where each amplifies the other, creating additional impact for the families we serve.

Karen Coltrane served as CEO of the Children’s Museum of Richmond (Virginia) and later EdVenture Children’s Museum in Columbia, South Carolina. She recently became president & CEO of the Leadership Center for Excellence, based in Arlington, Virginia.