Case Study: Museum of Discovery

The Museum of Discovery was opened in 2003 in downtown Museumville, Indiana.

Museumville is home to a prestigious university known for its engineering and theater programs. The city's largest employer is an airplane manufacturing plant.

The museum was developed and funded by the city as part of a downtown revitalization project. Its intended audience is children 0 – 12 and their families. Key exhibit galleries include a role-play farm area, a grocery store, a water play area and a locally-made climbing structure.

While the museum was popular for its first five years, its attendance began to decline in 2008 due to the world financial crisis and the bad press surrounding an accident where a young guest broke their leg after falling from a section of the museum’s climbing structure.

The museum receives a small operating budget from the city, which barely covers their operating expenses.

After the accident, corporate sponsorship funding began to decline.

Due to a lack of funding, the museum’s exhibits have not been updated since 2007. Instead, the city donated old dioramas from the local natural history museum and old static exhibits from the local history museum.

Over the past five years, the museum's online reviews have become increasingly negative, such as:

“There’s really nothing for younger children to do.”

“The place always seems dirty, many of the exhibits don’t work, and the staff seem like they want to be somewhere else.”

“What kind of museum is this? I thought it was a children’s museum, but they’ve got a whole bunch of tired exhibits from other museums from around the city.”

“I’ll never take my kids on that climber. It just seems unsafe.”

As part of their citywide budget cuts, the city of Museumville has decided to stop providing funding to the museum after 2020.

The city has offered to gift the museum and its building to a local group if they can demonstrate their ability to effectively operate the museum in the next two years.

A local philanthropist has donated $500,000 to the group to aid them in their renovation efforts. There are no restrictions on the use of the funding, so can be used for infrastructure, exhibits, marketing, staffing, etc.

What measures can this local group take to help turn this museum around?