

THE CINCINNATI OBSERVATORY CENTER

"The Birthplace of American Astronomy"
A National Historic Landmark



STRATEGIC PLAN

Adopted by the Board of Trustees on September 9, 2004

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SUMMARY

Since 1997 the Cincinnati Observatory Center (COC) has accomplished a tremendous amount. The educational program has grown from serving 1,200 people annually in 1996 to serving 20,000 by 2003. In addition, the initial fundraising has been extremely successful--about \$2 million has been raised and reinvested in a total renovation of the Observatory's buildings and grounds, in support of the educational program, and in establishing a small \$100,000 endowment.

In terms of operations, the Observatory's total operating revenues (as of 2004) are approximately \$275,000 and expenses are nearly \$260,000. Of the total revenues, about \$190,000 comes from the University of Cincinnati under the Operations Agreement detailed in Section V of this document. The remainder comes from educational program fees, rentals, partnerships, and private donations.

In early 2004 the COC board decided that the Strategic Plan adopted in 1999 was in need of revision due to the dramatic changes and success that has taken place in the last several years.

This revised strategic plan, therefore, presents a new vision and guidelines by which The Cincinnati Observatory Center (COC) can achieve its mission. It also provides the baseline strategy by which we can measure our progress and plan for the future. From this strategic plan the COC will develop its annual plans.

The primary strategic initiatives are:

- Maintaining the Cincinnati Observatory Center on a sound financial footing. The current agreement with the University of Cincinnati for operating support expires at the end of 2009. The COC, therefore, must reformulate its finances to meet that challenge. A major component of that reformulation will be the creation of an ENDOWMENT of at least \$3 million in order to continue funding the Observatory's educational program and operations.
- Reformulating the Educational Program. The COC strives to spark the curiosity and critical thinking of its visitors through astronomy and science education. As a result, the COC will continually reevaluate both the number and variety of programs that it offers. In addition, the COC will strive to serve as a conduit for those interested in astronomy, science, and engineering.
- Creating teaching exhibits. As part of its educational role, the COC will continue to create and display exhibits of astronomical instruments, Observatory and astronomical history, and our collections to further enhance current and future educational programs while maintaining maximum flexibility in the use of our buildings.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Cincinnati Observatory Center organization was first formed in 1997 as a volunteer committee dedicated to revitalizing and preserving the Cincinnati Observatory and its historic setting. In late 1997 the committee applied for and received the prestigious Department of the Interior's National Historic Landmark designation for the Cincinnati Observatory's buildings and grounds. In 1998 the committee was formally incorporated as The Cincinnati Observatory Center and began operating the Observatory's programs. In March of 1999 the COC became a not-for-profit organization and University of Cincinnati, which owns the Observatory, granted The Cincinnati Observatory Center a long-term lease to the Observatory buildings and grounds, and a generous 10-year support agreement to partly fund the programs and operations of the Observatory.

The result of our evolution is a strong broad-based community and public/private partnership of many entities: they include the University of Cincinnati, other universities, neighbors of the Observatory, community organizations, amateur and professional astronomers, preservationists, and other interested parties who came together to plan for the future use of these wonderful nineteenth-century buildings. The result has been a committed, passionate, and diverse group that has established a thriving educational program, completed a state-of-the-art \$1.6 million renovation of the Observatory and grounds, and established a small endowment for the Observatory.

We think our story is an exciting one, and an excellent example of successful collaboration between a university and a

neighborhood, between public and private, between amateurs and professionals, and between volunteers and staff. This collaboration has yielded dedicated and diverse individuals passionate about continuing to make The Cincinnati Observatory Center the thriving and revitalized educational center it has become. We have achieved great successes but much needs to be done.

II. MISSION STATEMENT

The Cincinnati Observatory Center will promote the study and practice of astronomy among a broad audience, and assist professional and amateur astronomers, schools and universities to further their educational efforts on behalf of astronomy. While fulfilling this mission, The Cincinnati Observatory Center will maintain the integrity and heritage of an historic nineteenth-century observatory, including relevant artifacts illustrating the history of astronomy and its relationship to broader fields of science throughout the years.

In order to accomplish this mission, The Cincinnati Observatory Center will:

- Promote public programming, and provide educational opportunities and resources for the public at large, school and university educators and students, and professional and amateur astronomers, including:
 - Public astronomical viewing
 - Classes and workshops
 - Tours, displays, and presentations
- Showcase the unique facility as “The Birthplace of American Astronomy” by continually maintaining and improving the buildings, grounds, and collection of historic artifacts, while striving to adopt and integrate the latest technology in fulfillment of our mission.

III. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Our passion for astronomy and science will inspire children and adults alike through our emphasis on educational outreach and public programming.
- Our teaching of astronomy will integrate innovative technology and methods with our unique historic facilities and instruments.
- We will strive to make our facilities and programs available to all.
- We will use our program diversity, prominent history and commitment to public science education to increase our contribution to the Greater Cincinnati community.
- We will continue to operate on a sound financial footing into the future, becoming financially self-sufficient by 2009 through a combination of established and innovative fundraising approaches and partnerships.
- We will work collaboratively with the Friends of the Observatory (FOTO) to support the development of amateur astronomy; we also value FOTO involvement and volunteerism in building and broadening our programming and educational effectiveness.
- We will develop partnerships with other educational and not-for-profit organizations to further our shared interests.
- We will preserve and maintain our facilities, grounds and astronomical collection in the best tradition possible, following the National Historic Landmark standards and other expert guidance.
- Our mission and vision will provide the focus for our supporting strategies and actions.

IV. 10-YEAR VISION

The Cincinnati Observatory Center will expand and promote its reputation as:

One of Cincinnati's premier astronomy and science education institutions

- Providing unique astronomy programs for education and practice
- Inspiring future generations of astronomers and scientists
- Serving as a community-wide resource for astronomical knowledge and experience
- Exploring opportunities for appropriate research programs
- Incorporating the latest technology and educational methods within an historic facility

A financially secure and independent institution

- Build endowment by communicating the value of The Cincinnati Observatory Center
- Exercise self-sufficiency and entrepreneurial initiative to enhance facilities and programming
- Generate sufficient revenue to expand operations in support of our mission

The "Birthplace of American Astronomy"

- Maximizing the unique opportunities afforded by a functional nineteenth-century observatory to communicate the continuing relevance of astronomy and science
- Using the resources of our facilities and collections to promote understanding of the heritage and influence of astronomy and science in society at large

V. 10 YEAR GOALS AND STRATEGIES

I. EDUCATION: Build on our current successes in astronomy and science education through enhanced programming and linkages to public/private school systems and home-school networks. Further broaden the Observatory's programming for amateur astronomers, college students and the general public.

Objective:

K-12-College

- Expand the number and variety of our education programs for school groups both on-site and in schools.
- Continue to provide teacher training using traditional and innovative approaches in response to proficiency exam requirements.
- Re-evaluate our programming and teaching aids periodically and develop new materials and approaches, as needed.
- Introduce "in-depth" astronomy programming for highly motivated students...future professional or amateur astronomers.

Public

- Continue to build our evening public programming offerings with expanded classes, viewing opportunities and astronomy "event" programming.
- Establish ongoing humanities programming at the Observatory, by introducing a lecture series designed around relevant history and science topics (non-astronomy specific).
- Increase public awareness of the COC through expanded community outreach efforts, including collaborative work with other community and not-for-profit organizations, and business/private rentals.

Amateur Astronomy

- Actively support the needs of the amateur astronomy community by sharing COC resources, facilities and staff.
- Encourage astronomy research projects as a way to further learning and skill development

II. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: Build operating revenues and an endowment of sufficient size to ensure the long term sustainability of the Observatory after 2009.

Objective:

- Develop and implement a plan for establishing an endowment of sufficient size to provide for the COC's future financial needs post 2009.
- Broaden and expand our operating revenues through creative offerings and program sponsorship.
- Expand COC membership to increase revenues and improve current and future gifting potential.
- Continue grant writing efforts to foundations and corporations to request funding for education, preservation and endowment needs.

III. PRESERVATION: Establish a museum of astronomy in support of the Observatory's historic role and status as "The Birthplace of American Astronomy".

Objective:

- Establish a professional-grade, teaching collection of American astronomy exhibits, using the Observatory's historic instruments and documents as its centerpiece.
- Ensure that the recently renovated buildings and grounds are properly maintained and preserved in accordance with National Park Service Guidelines. Further improvements/upgrades will be made as resources permit

VI. ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

The COC is a State of Ohio corporation and has Federal not-for-profit (501-C-3) status. An internally elected Board of Trustees consisting of 15 members governs and operates the Cincinnati Observatory Center (COC).

The COC has been operating the facility and its educational programs since 1997. As one indicator of success, in 2003 the number of people served reached 20,000 (for perspective, the number of people served in 1996 was about 1,200). The majority of the work of the Observatory is astronomy and science education to children, students, and the public at large.

STAFF/VOLUNTEERS:

- The center currently has three full-time staff: 1. an Executive Director overseeing all operations and staff and reporting to the COC Board; 2. an Observatory Astronomer reporting to the Executive Director; and 3. an Outreach Teacher also reporting to the Executive Director.
- In addition, the Friends of the Observatory (FOTO) contributes dozens of unpaid volunteers that carry out many of the Observatory's programs and are coordinated by the Executive Director. Volunteer hours, while not accurately measurable, probably exceed more than 5000 hours per year.
- The Board also has created an Advisory board of experts and a series of committees to carry out the organizational work of the COC.
- *10-YEAR OBJECTIVE: THE COC WILL CONTINUE TO IMPROVE ITS UTILIZATION OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS TO MEET THE MISSION OF THE CENTER.*

MEMBERSHIP:

- The Observatory maintains a non-voting membership of more than 350.
- *10-YEAR OBJECTIVE: THE COC WILL BUILD ITS MEMBERSHIP TO AT LEAST 1,000.*

BOARD COMMITTEES:

- The Observatory maintains standing committees (created by the COC bylaws) and ad hoc committees (created by the Board as needed) to carry out the organizational work of the Observatory.

CURRENT COMMITTEES:

- Administration/Finance (Standing Committee)
2004 Chairs: President (Juan Santamarina), Vice President (George Strietmann), Treasurer (Rob Anning), and the Executive Director (Jim Neumeister)
 - Nominating (Standing Committee)
2004 Chairs: Bud Baily and Dobbs Ackermann
 - Education and Programs (Standing Committee)
2004 Chair: Mike Flick
 - Fundraising (Standing Committee)
2004 Chairs: TBD
 - Public Relations (Standing Committee)
2004 Chair: Greg Hand
 - Grounds, Facilities, and Maintenance (Ad Hoc Committee)
2004 Chairs: Jim Neumeister, Dobbs Ackermann and Jack Gore
 - History/Exhibits (Ad Hoc Committee)
2004 Chairs: John Ventre and Anne Timpano
 - Personnel (Ad Hoc Committee)
2004 Chair: Tricia Bevan
 - Membership (Ad Hoc Committee)
2004 Chair: TBD
- *10-YEAR OBJECTIVE: THE COC WILL BETTER ORGANIZE AND UTILIZE ITS COMMITTEES TO FULFILL ITS MISSION. THE COMMITTEES WILL BEGIN TO MEET REGULARLY AND AT THE DIRECTION OF THE BOARD CARRY OUT SPECIFIC PROJECTS. ALL BOARD MEMBERS WILL BE A MEMBER OF AT LEAST ONE COMMITTEE. IN ADDITION, THE COMMITTEES WILL RECRUIT MEMBERS FROM OUTSIDE THE BOARD IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THEIR WORK.*

VII. FINANCIALS

The COC operates the buildings and grounds under a 40-year renewable lease (lease began January 1, 2000) from the University of Cincinnati which owns the buildings and grounds. In addition, the University of Cincinnati contributes a significant amount of operational funds under a 10-year Operations Agreement which began January 1, 2000. While the COC has had a solid financial record, it is largely due to the University of Cincinnati's generous annual support

- The COC has raised about \$2 million since 2000 and has reinvested the money in a state-of-the-art renovation of the Observatory's buildings and grounds, in the establishment of the educational program, and in the creation of a small endowment of about \$100,000. In addition, the COC regularly maintains \$25,000 for flexibility in operations and an additional \$25,000 in operational reserves.
- The Observatory's total operating revenues (as of 2004) are approximately \$275,000 and expenses are nearly \$260,000. Of the total revenues, about \$190,000 comes from the University of Cincinnati under the Operations Agreement. The remainder comes from educational program fees, rentals, partnerships, and private donations.
- *10-YEAR OBJECTIVE: MAINTAINING THE CINCINNATI OBSERVATORY CENTER ON A SOUND FINANCIAL FOOTING. The current agreement with the University of Cincinnati for operating support expires at the end of 2009. The COC, therefore, must reformulate its finances to meet that challenge. A major component of that reformulation will be the creation of an ENDOWMENT of at least \$3 million in order to continue funding the Observatory's educational program and operations.*