

Wilmington Railroad Museum Foundation, Inc.
Strategic Plan
“Continuing to Steam Ahead”
2019-2024



“Continuing to Steam Ahead”

- I. Executive Summary
 - A. Museum description and current status
 - B. Introduction and Document Objective

- II. SWOT Analysis

- III. The Strategic Plan - Steaming Ahead
 - A. Mission
 - B. Goals
 - C. Strategies
 - D. Activities
 - E. Metrics

- IV. Next Steps

Appendix: List of Participants

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wilmington Railroad Museum is celebrating its 40th Anniversary of providing educational and enjoyable experiences to visitors and sharing the history of railroads in the United States, with an emphasis on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad which was headquartered in Wilmington, NC.

The location of the museum is of historical and relevant significance, since it sits at the foot of Red Cross and Nutt Streets, along the Cape Fear River in an original 1883 Atlantic Coast Line Freight Warehouse. However, the museum began with just a few table top displays in the Dudley mansion on Front Street in 1979 and then moved into a three-story section of ACL Warehouse Building A in 1983. The move across the parking lot into the current ACL Freight House Building B in 2007 was a critical improvement, allowing additional space and a more accessible facility.

Outdoor displays of rolling stock include a 1910 ACL steam engine with tender, a 50' boxcar and a caboose, popular with visitors as a great historic item to explore and as a party rental option. The museum features both a history hall and extensive model train layout displays. The history hall includes in-case displays of the history of railroads featuring information on the development, operations and relocation of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad offices. Some features include office equipment, safety information, railroad signals and signage along with several other topics of railroad history. Various occupations of railroad workers are also incorporated into the exhibits. Model train layouts are interactive and include O, HO, G and N scale examples. These model layouts are incredibly popular with visitors and provide many volunteer opportunities for modeling enthusiasts.

Originally, the location of the Wilmington Railroad Museum was considered the far end of the tourist driven area of the historic downtown. Over the past years, the area has seen a revitalization with Cape Fear Community College building new facilities and new industries, such as PPD, building modern offices. Other expansion which includes a new convention center, marina, two significant luxury mixed use/condominium developments, and new hotels are also now part of the neighborhood. A completed Cape Fear Riverwalk connects the entire downtown area much to the enjoyment of visitors and locals alike. These examples of area growth have created an increase in foot and vehicle traffic, which is an opportunity for more visitors, but a challenge for parking.

The Wilmington Railroad Museum has seen dedicated interest and visitorship since its relocation in the current facility and emphasis has been on maintaining the current exhibit experience and increasing financial stability. The Museum still holds the Guinness World Record for Longest Model Train, achieved in 2011. Various fundraising and capital projects have been included in the past twelve years, and the museum has added a theatre and purchased the "Sunshine Train" as an added marketing feature.

It is imperative that the museum take existing strengths and continue to "Steam Ahead" to build a financially stable future and enhance visitor engagement to ensure competitiveness in an increasing tech-savvy world. To this end, a committee was developed to evaluate current conditions within the organization and develop a plan for continued improvement in a documented, organized, and accountable fashion. The museum has created goals and lists of planned improvements in the past, but strategic planning is a new process. Board of Trustee members were interested and enthusiastic about the potential of this planning.

Strategic planning began in February of 2019 and featured a review of the current Mission Statement, a charter of the committee’s expectations and purpose, and a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats).

The Strategic Planning Committee was established with these intended purposes:

- Assess WRRM Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats relative to our current situation and 5-year future.
- Boil those down to a handful of critical priorities
- Keep Board informed as plan develops to obtain buy-in and approval around those priorities
- Achieve Board consensus on how best to engage the work around those priorities

The SWOT analysis resulted in a list identified items determined by the Committee. These SWOT identified items were then categorized by common theme and labeled as goal areas. Those goal areas were evaluated and prioritized to create Goals, Strategies and Activities that could be measured and reported.

The resulting plan is summarized below and discussed in detail in the body of this document. The intention of the Strategic Plan is to be a living document that can be reviewed and updated as the museum grows and changes in the future.

II. SWOT Analysis

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated volunteers • Model Train Layouts • Strong history content/artifacts • Historic Building • Location • No Debt • Modest Endowment • Strong/special focus on children • Special/unique skill sets of volunteers 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location / outside of tourist hub • Lack of signage • Lack of collection documentation • Design of History Hall <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Path of circulation • Professional appearance • Interactive • Map or guide for visitors • Connection to shipping/port • Need updated tech – wireless, etc. • Need new generation of volunteers
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of our endowment • Space in current building to expand • Traveling/rotating exhibits • Obtaining new donor support • Improved maintenance of facility (City of Wilmington) • How to connect with railroad non-enthusiasts • Ad Hoc committees for fundraising • Grants • Additional photos, artifacts • Add historians and other skill sets to Board • More/better use of email to reach members • Special Events/Collaborations with other institutions/groups 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal day and special events • Special skill sets of volunteers (only one person knows certain info) • Water/Storm damage • High Rent

III. The Strategic Plan – “Continuing to Steam Ahead”

A. Mission –

The Mission of the Wilmington Railroad Museum is to provide an educational and enjoyable experience concerning the history, technology, and impact of the rail industry with emphasis on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad.

B. Goals –

The Strategic Planning Committee categorized and evaluated the results of the SWOT analysis and identified three distinct goals for improvement. The goals are:

1. Strengthen Financial Stability
2. Increase Visitor Engagement
3. Attract New Volunteers and Increase Volunteer Sustainability

Goal 1 – Strengthen Financial Stability

Our analysis revealed that the museum has historically existed with limited finances. An identified strength is that, as an organization, we have not accrued debt over the last forty years. We do, however, manage with limited daily funds and work with limited resources to remain in business. In addition, the generous endowment received from Drs. Frank and Ruth Funk continues to provide assistance with capital projects on occasion and works as a small cushion that we have preserved. Currently, the museum continues to recover from financial (and structural) losses due to Hurricane Florence in September 2018. While the museum was extremely fortunate to have had little damage to the collection, exhibits or model train layouts, the initial financial loss was significant. Additionally, the museum had to close to the public for fourteen days in March, 2019 as most interior spaces had to be covered in tarps for protection during significant roof repairs to correct hurricane damage. The total loss from Hurricane Florence has been estimated at \$18,000.

This goal focuses on strategies to improve income and decrease expenses to create a measurable financial stability for museum operations and improvement projects.

Strategies –

1. Income: Identify income sources and how to sustain and expand them.

Activities –

- a. Expand the scope of the Fundraising Committee to acquire additional Business Sponsors for various events and needs.
- b. Develop a subcommittee to obtain Grants and Donations from new sources
- c. Promote special events for raising funds

2. Expenses: Reduce expenses related to daily operations and procedures.

Activities –

a. Evaluate staffing needs and hours

b. Reduce waste:

b (1) Consolidate banking accounts and eliminate finance charges

b (2) Identify businesses that offer less expensive purchasing options

b (3) Reduce expenses of postage and printing by using online communications

c. Establish accurate accountability systems for Staff and Volunteers

c (1) Participate in Quickbooks training

c (2) Install simple Point of Sale system for flexibility and accountability

c (3) Streamline membership processes to reduce postage and print expenses and expedite the process for new members to receive their card.

Goal 2 - Increase Visitor Engagement

Currently visitors express some confusion about maneuvering through the front entrance to purchase tickets and knowing what to do without asking. In addition, the traffic flow or pathway through the History Hall is unclear causing visitors to be unsure of the best way to experience the museum.

This goal focuses on improvements to make visitors comfortable upon entering, especially for the first time and to engage them with some anticipatory information about museum contents as well as provide a map of the History Hall to help guide them.

Strategies –

1. Redesign and update front desk layout and appearance

Activities -

a. Enlarge “Ticket Agent” window to allow for accessibility and visibility and a visually welcoming entrance for visitors.

b. Establish areas in the room for ticketing/sales, gift shop, model railroad merchandise.

c. Include displays or small exhibits that include “teaser” information about what visitors will see in the museum and that will provide introductory information about the historic nature of the building/setting.

2. Redesign the History Hall for ease in circulation and clarity of information.

Activities -

a. Re-organize existing display cabinets by theme: History, Occupations, Operations.

- b. Where effective, eliminate the use of cabinets to make artifacts more engaging.
- c. Upgrade contents of cabinets.
- d. Apply standard formatting for signage and labels (font, size and color).
- e. Create a map or diagram (color coded) to help guide visitors.
- f. Implement a self-guided audio tour using a link from the website.
 - f (1) Install new data cabling and wireless access points for visitor access.
 - f (2) Create audio tour and link to website

Goal 3 - Attract New Volunteers and Increase Volunteer Sustainability

The museum has a committed and sizable group of volunteers for the model railroad committee. These volunteers have regular schedules and spend many hours maintaining the layouts, interacting with visitors and participating in special events. In addition, we have three volunteers who work in the Gift Shop (each ½ day/per week), and a corps of Storytime readers (about six people) who regularly sign up to read stories to our youngest visitors twice per month. Several regular volunteers operate the Sunshine Train and regularly interact with visitors.

A critical aspect of our volunteer base, is that there are some specific volunteers who possess a unique set of skills and/or knowledge and this needs to be shared with others and imparted to a new and young group of new volunteers to remain sustainable. In addition, since we are a small organization, there are many varied needs where it would be valuable to utilize a reliable volunteer base to accomplish.

Strategies -

1. Attract new volunteers

Activities –

- a. Create a list and description of tasks that could be accomplished by volunteers
- b. Develop and utilize a form to enlist new volunteers. Post list of opportunities on website.
- c. Design a script or bulleted list of museum facts for tour guides to use
- d. Create curriculum-based activities for use by school groups

2. Identify and enlist new volunteers to learn specific skills from current volunteers

Activities -

- a. Work with schools and colleges to identify interested volunteers
- b. Seek volunteers with electronics/technology/social media/marketing interest and abilities

Strategic Plan Matrix

GOAL	STRATEGY	ACTIVITIES	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE
<p>1. Improve income and decrease expenses to create a measurable financial stability for museum operations</p>	<p>Identify income sources and how to sustain and expand them.</p>	<p>a. Expand the scope of the Fundraising Committee to acquire additional Business Sponsors for various events and needs.</p> <p>b. Develop a subcommittee to obtain Grants and Donations from new sources</p> <p>c. Promote special events for raising funds</p>	<p>Fundraising Committee: Derek Miller</p> <p>Nancy Pritchett</p> <p>Hope Morgan</p>	<p>February – October</p>
	<p>Reduce expenses related to daily operations and procedures.</p>	<p>a. Evaluate staffing needs and hours</p> <p>b. Reduce waste: b (1) consolidate banking accounts and eliminate finance charges b (2) identify businesses that offer less expensive purchasing options b (3) reduce expenses of postage and printing by using online communications</p> <p>c. Establish accurate accountability systems for Staff and Volunteers c (1) Participate in Quickbooks training c (2) Install simple POS system for flexibility and accountability c (3) streamline membership processes to reduce postage and print expenses and expedite the process for new members to receive their card.</p>	<p>Colette Anderson</p> <p>Colette Anderson</p>	<p>February 2019</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>February 2019</p> <p>January 2019 and quarterly</p> <p>March 2019</p> <p>March-April 2019</p>

GOAL	STRATEGY	ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE
2. Increase Visitor Engagement	Redesign and update front desk layout and appearance.	<p>a. Enlarge "Ticket Agent" window to allow for accessibility and visibility.</p> <p>b. Establish areas in the room for ticketing/sales, gift shop, model railroad merchandise.</p> <p>c. Include displays or small exhibits that include "teaser" information about what visitors will see in the museum and that will provide introductory information about the historic nature of the building/setting.</p>	<p>Bill Massey</p> <p>Colette Anderson</p>	<p>Dependent on office Repairs</p> <p>Design proposal by May 31, 2019</p>
	Redesign the History Hall for ease in circulation and clarity of information.	<p>a. Re-organize existing display cabinets by theme: History, Occupation, Operations.</p> <p>b. Where effective, eliminate the use of cabinets to make artifacts more engaging.</p> <p>c. Upgrade content of cabinets</p> <p>d. Apply standard formatting for signage and labels (font, size, and color)</p> <p>e. Create a map or diagram (color coded) to help guide visitors.</p> <p>f. Implement a self-guided audio tour using a link from the website.</p> <p>f (1) install new data cabling and wireless access points for visitor access.</p> <p>f (2) create audio tour and link to website</p>	<p>Howard Sprow</p> <p>Colette Anderson</p> <p>Colette Anderson</p>	<p>Design Proposal – April 2019</p> <p>Reorganization – May/June 2019</p> <p>September 2019</p>

GOAL	STRATEGY	ACTIVITIES	LEAD RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE
3. Attract New Volunteers and Increase Volunteer Sustainability	Attract new volunteers	a. Create a list and description of tasks that could be accomplished by volunteers	Hope Morgan	April 2019
		b. Develop and utilize a form to enlist new volunteers. Post list of opportunities on website.	Colette Anderson	May 2019
		c. Design a script or bulleted list of museum facts for tour guides to use	Tom Harris	May 2019
		d. Create curriculum-based activities for use by school groups	Colette Anderson	August 2019
	Identify and enlist new skilled volunteers to learn specific skills from current volunteers	a. Work with schools and colleges to identify interested volunteers	Colette Anderson	August 2019
		b. Seek volunteers with electronics/technology/social media/marketing interest and abilities	Colette Anderson	September 2019

Strategic Planning Committee Members:

Colette Anderson – Executive Director
Tom Harris – Board of Trustees President
George Dolan
Charles Kernan
Bill Massey
Derek Miller
Hope Morgan
Nancy Pritchett
Howard Sprow