

Churchill County Museum

2026-2030 Strategic Plan



This publication was produced by Churchill County Museum staff, based on the work of Nathan G. Strong of the University Center for Economic Development, College of Business at the University of Nevada, Reno, with Strong's findings based on the University's research. Senior museum staff and several members of the Churchill County Museum Association Board of Trustees underwent a two-day retreat facilitated by Strong during which the ideas presented in this document were developed. This document, later prepared by museum staff, is intended as a road map for the next five years, but does not constitute a binding agreement to provide specific goods, services, or contracts.

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About the Churchill County Museum

The Churchill County Museum (CCM) is a public-private partnership of Churchill County and the Churchill County Museum Association, a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. Located near historic Route 50, the museum was given the honor of being the “Best Little Museum on the Loneliest Road in America.”

Interest in preserving the history of Churchill County began in 1964, Nevada’s centennial. In Fallon, this commemorative celebration included decorating the windows of Maine Street businesses with artifacts from the area’s past. After the 1964 festivities had ended, community volunteers were determined to establish a permanent repository for local history.

They did not have to wait very long. In 1967, Margaret and Alex Oser purchased the old Safeway building for Churchill County, planning to turn it into a new library. However, by that time the library board had already received funding to create a facility at 553 South Maine Street, where Churchill County Library sits to this day. Community volunteers, now officially organized as the non-profit Churchill County Museum Association (CCMA), lobbied the Churchill County Commissioners to instead turn the old Safeway into a museum.

The volunteers’ hard work paid off and the Churchill County Museum opened its doors on July 4, 1968. Since that time, visitors have marveled at the many displays of Churchill County’s history and heritage filling the nearly 11,000 square foot facility. In the following decades, the museum obtained the 1905 Woodliff Building, a 4,000 square foot exhibit annex, and a nearly 7,000 foot addition. Today, the county maintains these buildings and supports the museum’s 9 staff members, while the CCMA provides funding for the collections and exhibits.



Museum Dedication, 1968.



The Churchill County Museum today.

Since the CCM’s last strategic plan launched in 2018, the museum has made great strides to professionalize. In 2019, two curator positions became full-time, aiding in recruiting staff with high quality educations. 2021 saw the conversion of some exhibit space into offices, allowing for greater organization of collections and workspace, vastly improved production facilities, and archives with compact, rolling storage.

These changes have already paid dividends in user experience. Since 2018, CCM has premiered a staggering 16 new long-term exhibits created with modern design techniques and sensibilities, created new

interpretation for 13 other long-term exhibits, presented multiple temporary exhibits in its changing gallery each year, and beautified the museum with new art, photographs, and signage. CCM has continued its commitment to programming with a rejuvenated Children's Discovery Room, regular lecture series, introduced Chautauqua programming and regularly-updated scavenger hunts, strengthened its social media presence, and resumed publication of *In Focus*, a journal on various local topics.

As we move into our next planning cycle, the CCM board and staff strive to continue this trend of professionalization, as well as improving our facilities and strengthening the connection to our community.



Our Communities, Our Stories mural project, 2021-23.



Rolling shelves, installed 2022.



Visitor in new Newlands Exhibit, 2026.



Sports! 2026 temporary exhibit

Guiding Statements

An organization is only as good as its principles. Every 501(c)(3) is required to have a mission statement, which defines the organization's purpose and outlines its activities. Vision statements guide where an organization plans to go. These both shape and are shaped by values, which are a set of beliefs, traits and norms the organization possesses. These are the statements which drive our work:



Staff member working with students at E.C. Best.

Mission

To help people forge meaningful connections to Churchill County's natural and cultural heritage, strengthen community ties, and shape our future.

Vision

At the heart of a thriving community, the Churchill County Museum inspires generations to discover and appreciate Churchill County, encourage thoughtful dialogue, exercise creativity, and implement positive change.

Values

Forge meaningful relationships with individuals and organizations across generations: Connect on an intellectual and emotional level with organizations and individuals across generations to leverage each other's strengths and support one another.

Stewardship and preservation of cultural and natural heritage: Preserving objects and knowledge relating to Churchill County's past, present, and future.

Education about cultural and natural heritage: Promoting and providing access to objects and knowledge related to Churchill County's past and present for all.

Dedicated supporters: Supporting community members and visitors with respect and dedication.

Continual improvement: Always striving to change and improve in accordance with professional standards and our evolving community.

Integrity: Conducting ourselves with honesty while fulfilling our obligations to others.

Planning Goals

As part of our strategic planning process, we identified four major areas important in our work and created goals with some overlap within this framework. Each of these individual goals will be described in greater detail in the following pages. We plan to accomplish the following within the next 5 years.

Collections and Stewardship

Facilities

Revise Collections Policy		Redesign museum entryway and store location
Host 1 traveling exhibit per year	Research capital improvement plan towards an improved campus	
Conduct four oral history interviews annually	Develop a grant program, applying for one grant quarterly	
Increase program attendance 10%	Increase membership 10% annually	Develop a volunteer program to increase volunteer hours fivefold
Meet with at least 12 unique community organizations per year	Develop tiered donor structure	Design a professional development program for staff
	Develop marketing strategy and defined advertising budget	

Community Engagement

Capacity Building



Goal Explanations

Revise and Implement Updated Collections Policy

Area: Collections & Stewardship

Explanation: The collections policy as written neither matched current CCM practice (as it included positions removed in 2018) nor best practices in the museum field. A collections policy is considered a core document of a museum, explaining which objects the institution preserves and outlining procedures for acquisitions, care, access, and (when necessary) disposal. Relying on professional staff, the museum will adopt a new policy meeting professional standards.



Increase Program Attendance 10%

Area: Community Engagement

Explanation: CCM has made efforts each year to present a variety of quality programming options. However, overall museum attendance had decreased throughout the 2010s and early 2020s. We will experiment with advertising, format, timing, and content to build new connections and strengthen existing ones.



2026 Spring Lecture by Shannon Hooper.



2026 Youth Chautauquans.

Meet with At Least Twelve Unique Community Organizations per year.

Area: Community Engagement

Explanation: Churchill County has a wealth of community organizations. Over the years, CCM has cultivated some wonderful relationships with multiple local organizations including the Churchill County Library, the City of Fallon, and our local newspapers. However, the strategic planning committee noticed space for expansion with groups such as the School District, NAS Fallon, Western Nevada College, and others. To maintain and strengthen existing partnerships as well as cultivate new ones, the museum plans to meet with twelve unique community organizations per year.

Redesign Museum Entryway and Store Location.

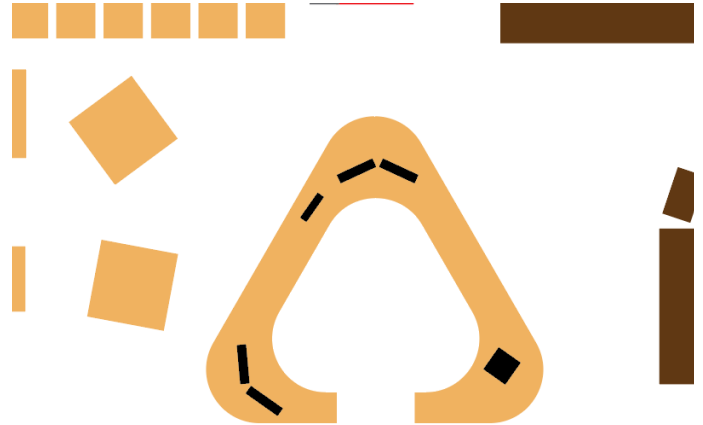
Area: Facilities

Explanation: The museum's current entryway is nearing twenty years old and beginning to show its age. Staff has also noted a number of issues with the existing front desk's design. Major difficulties include the high counters causing issues for shorter or wheel-chair-using people; its only opening being in the far corner making it slow to enter and exit; and the register and store being opposite the work stations causing confusion for visitors. CCM hopes to alleviate some of these problems by redesigning the space.

Right: Wear on floor behind front desk.

Lower Left: Current Layout of lobby area

Lower right: Proposed updated layout of lobby area.



Implement a Professional Development Program for Staff and Analyze Impacts

Area: Capacity Building

Explanation: Though CCM has made it a priority to recruit and maintain trained and qualified staff, there's always more to learn. Professional development strengthens institutional capacity, improves service delivery, and supports organizational resilience. Professional development can also introduce new ideas into our institution, which may help in unexpected ways. As such, the museum plans to create a dedicated professional development program and analyze its impacts.

Develop a Volunteer Program to increase total volunteer hours fivefold.

Area: Capacity Building

Explanation: In the last decade, especially since COVID lock-downs, our volunteer corps has shrunk to near nonexistence. Developing a more robust program will allow paid staff to delegate some of their more rote tasks, thereby freeing them for more complex duties, as well as allowing CCM to complete programs which would be too time-intensive to justify for professional staff, such as newspaper digitization.

Right: Volunteer working on inventorying CCM's obituary collection.



Develop a marketing strategy and tie it to a defined advertising budget for inclusion in annual budget cycle.

Area: Community Engagement / Capacity Building

Explanation: While CCM has engaged in some advertising, it has traditionally been ad-hoc. Establishing a defined strategy supports intentional outreach, coordinated promotion, public communication efforts, and alignment between institutional priorities and available resources.

Right: Advertising postcards for 2026 Spring Lecture.

Increase Membership by 10% Annually

Area: Community Engagement / Capacity Building

Explanation: While CCM's attendance has grown significantly in the last few years, it has struggled with membership. As a free museum, it lacks the obvious benefits membership grants in most institutions. The museum hopes to grow its membership through outreach, switching to an annual model, and by continuing its newly-resurrected publication *In Focus* (left) to present a tangible reward for members.



Develop a Tiered Donor Structure

Area: Community Engagement/Capacity Building

Explanation: While CCM has multiple membership levels, each confers the same benefits to its members, and there is no tier structure for single donation. Developing and adopting a tiered structure would support enhanced fundraising capacity, improved donor engagement, and long-term financial sustainability.



Bombus! By Exhibit Envoy, Fall 2025.

Conduct Four Oral History Interviews Annually.

Area: Collections and Stewardship & Community Engagement

Explanation: In the 1990s and early 2000s, the museum had a robust oral history program, which captured the widely-varied life stories of prominent community members at the time. However, it has been 20 years since that program ended, and we now have a new generation of community elders (some of whom we have already lost). By training volunteers to gather these stories, we can preserve them for future generations and build engagement with aging segments of our population.

Host One Traveling Exhibit Per Year

Area: Collections and Stewardship & Community Engagement

Explanation: Bringing in high-quality traveling exhibits reduces potential damage to our collections during the exhibition process, as well as both encouraging repeat visitation and potentially attracting new audiences by featuring topics our collection is unable to support. Prior to the adoption of this plan, the museum had already worked sporadically with several exhibit vendors, but we now seek to make this involvement a regular part of our exhibit plan.



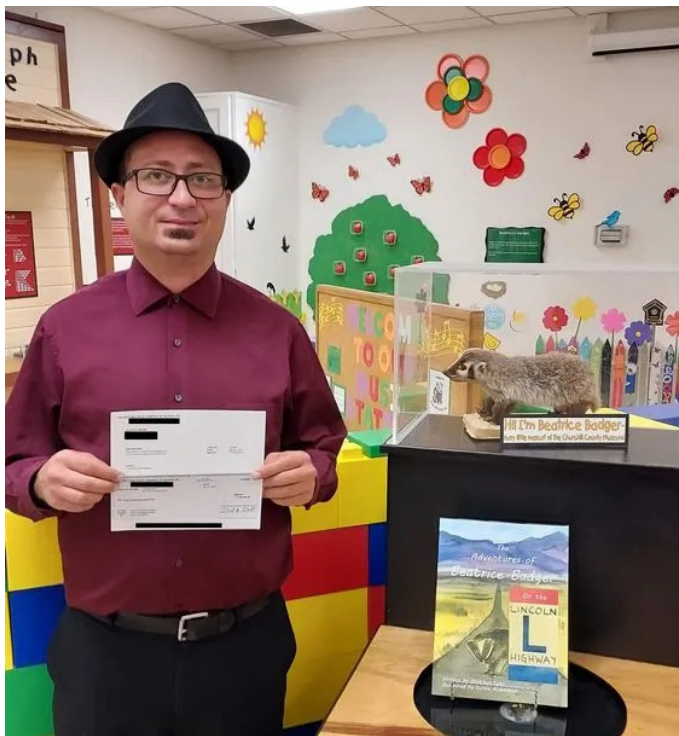
Staff testing the oral history stage.

Develop a Grant Program, Applying for One Grant Quarterly

Area: All.

Explanation: By expanding its capacity for grants CCM will diversify and leverage funding sources, creating new possibilities. Establishing a consistent approach to grant identification, application, and management will strengthen financial resilience and support programmatic and operational priorities. Since engaging in the strategic planning workshop and beginning to implement this plan, CCM has been awarded well over \$50,000 in grants, allowing it to pursue new opportunities, such as a second Beatrice Badger children's book and restoring the Woodliff building.

Left: Staff member holding a check to assist in publishing the second Beatrice Badger book.



Plot a capital improvement campaign plan including, but not limited to, a needs assessment, a feasibility study, towards an improved campus.



Archive with water damage and gaps to exterior in door.



Long uneven alleyway between collections storage, annex, and main museum, which confuses guests and creates issues during inclement weather.

Area: All.

Explanation: Many of CCM's struggles come from its facility. Its buildings are aging and none of them were designed to house a museum, leading to difficulties with climate and a layout unsuited for modern museum purposes, construction constraints due to existing ducting and electrical work, guest confusion due to lack of flow, and difficulties moving objects safely and efficiently around the facility.

This planning effort will include, at a minimum, a facility needs assessment and a feasibility study, along with other research and consultations as appropriate. The resulting written plan will establish priorities, identify potential phasing strategies, and clarify the scope and timing of future capital improvements.

This goal emphasizes deliberate, long-range planning rather than immediate construction or fundraising commitments. Completion of the capital improvement campaign plan will support informed decision-making, coordination with local government partners, and alignment with broader preservation and community planning efforts. By establishing a clear planning framework during the current five-year planning horizon, Churchill County Museum will ensure future facility improvements align with professional standards, fiscal stewardship, and recognized benchmarks for governance and institutional sustainability.



Aging exhibits in a layout built around grocery store electrical create navigation and renovation difficulties.

How You Can Help

As you can tell by reading this brochure, CCM's goals are widely varied and supporting some of them costs nothing. Visiting the museum, attending programming, or helping spread the word in person or online can all contribute to helping the museum achieve its goals.

If you have a little more time to contribute, inquire about being a volunteer! As we develop our program more opportunities will become available, but we can always use more docents and digitizers.

Membership and donations of all sizes make these goals possible. Whether you have \$1, \$100, or \$1,000,000 (we can dream!) every contribution brings us one step closer to providing the best experience possible for the people of and visitors to Churchill County.

