



Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts

WHITAKER NEXT: *A BRIDGE TO OPPORTUNITY*

FY 2025 - FY 2028

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over twenty-five years ago, a dedicated group of visionary leaders worked together to bring the bold idea of Whitaker Center to reality. Since 1999, Whitaker Center has welcomed over 4.5 million visitors and generated more than \$300 million in local economic impact through spending on dining, lodging, retail, and entertainment. Among these visitors are more than 500,000 students who have participated in exceptional STEAM programs that spur curiosity, creativity, and joy while exposing the next generation to new career pathways. As Whitaker Center celebrates its silver anniversary serving as the Crown Jewel of Harrisburg, a renewed sense of effort is underway to convene with enterprising partners and determine how best to position the organization for sustained relevance and success for the next 25 years and beyond.

The following priorities were identified for Whitaker Center as it positions itself for the next 25 years:

- Create financial stability and long-term security for the organization
- Complete the transformation of physical facilities to support new programming and address infrastructure investments required for structural integrity
- Expand programming by building on current offerings in art and science while introducing new initiatives that drive innovation
- Position Whitaker Center as an Innovation Brand– uniquely combining art and science in one facility and through a singular suite of programs
- Build a purpose-driven team to lead Whitaker Center into the next decade

The enclosed packet provides the 2025-2028 strategic goals that include a comprehensive view of the current state of the organization, the shifting landscape in which it operates, the identity and role Whitaker Center aspires to fulfill, and the capabilities and resources required to bring Whitaker NEXT to life.



OPTIMIZE THE GUEST EXPERIENCE

**We're building bold, immersive experiences that
delight all ages a deepen connection.**

Whitaker Center is committed to reimagining what a cultural experience can be. Through revitalized exhibits, expanded programming, and elevated entertainment, we aim to turn everyday visits into unforgettable discoveries. This goal ensures every guest—no matter their age, background, or reason for visiting—finds something meaningful, surprising, and worthy of coming back for.



Key Strategic Ideas and Objectives

Engage All Generations Through Fresh, Impactful Programming

Led by Education Department
Years 1-3

- **Strengthen community interest group relationships** to design offerings for all ages.
- **Activate Digital Cinema** for live podcast, talk back, and science events.
- **Introduce fun evaluations** to measure engagement in real time.
- **Refine education feedback** program.

Why it matters: When programming reflects the lives and interests of real people in our region, we build loyalty, deepen learning, and prove our value as a community hub.

Curate a Signature Calendar of Events Featuring Both Science and the Arts

Led by Executive Leadership Team and
Production Department
Years 1-3

- **Design unique experiences** that connect science and art across all parts of the center.
- **Launch arts education program** with creative leaders, artists, and local talent.
- **Enrich entertainment lineup** with top-tier performances.

Why it matters: We're curating moments you can't find anywhere else. We're sparking imagination and inspiring a lifelong love of science and the arts.



Key Strategic Ideas and Objectives

Present Fresh, Interactive, and Future-Ready Exhibits

Led by Education and Production Departments
Years 2-3

- **Sunset and replace Carnival of Health exhibit** to introduce something new and bold.
- **Create schedule** for exhibit rotations and assessment.
- **Source interactive exhibits** with movement, AR/VR, and hands-on elements.


Why it matters: Rotating exhibits keep our guests curious, encouraging them to return. We're ensuring our offerings reflect the most exciting developments in science and creativity!

Design a WOW! Experience from the Very First Step

Led by Facilities and Marketing Departments
Years 1-3

- **Reimagine entrances** with signature installations or exhibit pieces that spark curiosity.
- **Modernize Science Center entrance** with additional windows and doors for street visibility.
- **Create unforgettable impressions**, positioning Whitaker Center as the cultural and creative hub of Central PA.

Why it matters: First impressions matter. A sense of wonder begins the moment our guests walk in our building. We want it to be magnetic.



SECURING THE FUTURE

We're investing in the people and places that make Whitaker Center unforgettable so every guest, staff member, and community partner can thrive.

From the building you walk through to the team that welcomes you in, we're committed to upgrading the Whitaker experience inside and out. This phase of our work focuses on modernizing our space, aligning our team culture, and prioritizing accessibility and safety, ensuring that Whitaker Center continues to be a vibrant, welcoming destination for generations to come.



Key Strategic Ideas and Objectives

Reimagine How Guests Navigate Our Space

Led by Education and Production Departments
Years 1-3

- **Design an intuitive, user-friendly guest map** to support independent exploration.
- **Relocate box office desks** to increase visibility and elevate guest experience.
- **Install dynamic signage** to help guests find their way and explore what's next.

Why it matters: Clear and beautiful signage improves accessibility, encourages exploration, and boosts confidence for every kind of guest.

Invest in the People Who Power Whitaker Center

Led by Executive Leadership Team
Year 1

- **Refine internal operations** to ensure we are running efficiently, sustainably, and with care.
- **Build a culture of clarity and accountability** that supports every team member.
- **Launch professional development opportunities** tailored to both individual and organizational goals.
- **Encourage staff involvement** in local and regional professional organizations.

Why it matters: When our team thrives, our community thrives. Skilled, empowered staff are the heartbeat of guest satisfaction, innovation, and long-term success.

Key Strategic Ideas and Objectives

Modernize Our Space for Safety, Sustainability & Cohesion

Led by Executive Leadership Team and
Facilities Department
Years 1-3

- **Partner with consultants** to complete a Building Reserve Study and chart a clear, cost-informed capital improvement path.
- **Prioritize renovations** that directly impact visitor comfort, aesthetics, and safety.
- **Replace aging carpets, unify interior wall colors, and create a fresh, cohesive visual identity** throughout the building.
- **Upgrade technical systems** in the Sunoco Performance Theater to support top-tier performances.

Modernize Our Space for Safety, Sustainability & Cohesion, cntd.

- **Remodel public restrooms** with sustainability and ease-of-use in mind—featuring low-touch, low-water fixtures.
- **Redesign the Digital Cinema lobby and concessions area** to improve flow, experience, and revenue opportunities.
- **Ensure ADA accessibility** across all guest-facing areas.

Why it matters: A beautiful, functional, and accessible space sets the stage for wonder and signals to every guest that they belong here.



MAKE LASTING CONNECTIONS

We're building a stronger Whitaker Center by aligning our business model with our values and making every dollar stretch further, every partnership count, and every gift go further in serving our community.

At Whitaker Center, connections power everything we do. From trusted relationships with donors and partners to the strategic infrastructure that helps us manage our growth. This goal ensures we're not only operating wisely and efficiently, but that we're scaling with purpose. A smarter, stronger foundation means more programs, more access, and more impact across Central PA and beyond.



Key Strategic Ideas and Objectives

Encourage a Culture of Generosity That Sustains the Mission

Led by Executive Leadership Team
Years 1-2

- **Solidify a forward-looking vision** that honors Whitaker Center's current community while cultivating new relationships and expanding stakeholder engagement.
- **Design a comprehensive and sustainable development initiative** including:
 - Major Gifts
 - Annual Giving
 - Planned Giving
 - Individual Giving
 - Long-term Capital Campaign

Encourage a Culture of Generosity That Sustains the Mission, cntd.

- **Engage board members** to advance and support the mission with both time and resources.
- **Grow a more robust pipeline** for corporate partnership funding.

Why it matters: Every smart internal decision means more resources can be directed toward mission-focused programming and guest experiences.



Key Strategic Ideas and Objectives

Grow Meaningful Partnerships with Community Stakeholders

Led by Executive Leadership Team
Years 1-3

- **Re-engage with the City of Harrisburg** and elevate Whitaker Center's voice in civic conversations.
- **Build trust and long-term buy-in** with business leaders, public officials, and local changemakers.
- **Be a visible, strategic contributor to regional conversations** about growth, education, and economic development.

Why it matters: When we show up as a regional thought leader and community collaborator, our work is seen, supported, and sustained.

Build a Smarter, Leaner Business Model

Led by Finance and Production Departments
Years 1-3

- **Refine internal processes** to control costs and negotiate smarter, faster, more sustainable contracts.
- **Create competitive pricing structures** to remain in line with market value.
- **Connect development and accounting** to reflect strong stewardship and transparency.

Why it matters: Every smart internal decision means more resources can be directed toward mission-focused programming and guest experiences.



LEVERAGE COMMUNITY IMPACT

**We're sharpening our voice, amplifying our reach,
and forging authentic connections with the goal
of becoming one of the most recognizable,
respected, and beloved destinations in the region.**

At Whitaker Center, we know that visibility is about belonging. A bold, clear brand identity helps people connect to what we offer. And building strong, reciprocal relationships with our community means we become a destination that is a trusted partner in exploration, inspiration, and learning.



Key Strategic Ideas and Objectives

Craft a Bold Brand Identity That Sparks Curiosity and Trust

Led by Marketing Department
Year 1

- **Shape a compelling brand story** that reflects who we are and who we're becoming.
- **Develop sub-brands** that capture the unique energy of our spaces:
 - Sunoco Performance Theater
 - UPMC Science Center
 - Select Medical Digital Cinema
 - PNC Innovation Zone
- **Define and prioritize our key audiences**, so every message meets people where they are.

Why it matters: A clear and magnetic brand makes people want to visit, donate, volunteer, and tell others why they love this place.

Grow Our Circle Through Thoughtful, Inclusive Outreach

Led by Marketing and Production Departments
Year 1

- **Expand visibility** through partnerships, storytelling, and targeted outreach.
- **Reach new audiences** who may have never realized how much we offer.
- **Create an Ambassador Program** to empower community voices in sharing what makes Whitaker Center special.
- **Refresh and refocus our Volunteer Program** to help increase guest engagement.

Why it matters: Outreach is for creating a place where people feel invited to participate. They should see themselves reflected in our space.



Key Strategic Ideas and Objectives

Build Trust With Every Interaction

Led by Executive Leadership Team and Marketing Department

Years 1-2

- **Establish a reliable communication system** that listens, responds, and grows from community feedback.
- **Share consistent messaging** that aligns with our mission and values across every department and platform.
- **Act as a thought leader** who centers human experience, education, and joy in everything we share.

Why it matters: Trust is built in small moments. It's important that people know what we stand for and that we care.



DEFINING WHITAKER CENTER

VISION

To be the premier destination of choice for our guests through education and cultural experiences that celebrate the joy of discovery and entertainment.

MISSION

To create a space in our communities by offering educational, creative, and cultural experiences that turn moments into memories.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES (VALUES)

We spark innovation.

We pride ourselves in igniting curiosity, imagination and wonder. We invite inquiry and exploration of new ideas and new ways of seeing each other and the world.

We build bridges.

We are a bridge for science and the arts; and a collaborative connector of communities to each other and the wider world. We produce programs, exhibits and events that invite and engage a wide cross-section of our region.

We create a bright future.

We design possibilities, continuously striving for relevance and vitality. We are protective of our resources to ensure our longevity.



OUR PROMISE

A thriving Whitaker Center mirrors the spirit of our community and embraces a wide range of perspectives. We recognize that a diverse group of stakeholders across our staff, board, and community leaders deepens our connection to the people we serve. To truly welcome all, we are committed to removing barriers to engagement wherever possible, while upholding our responsibility to remain financially sustainable.



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