



## 10 Steps to Starting a Children's Museum

1. **Assessment and Initial Recommendations**
2. **Stakeholder Kickoff Meeting and Feedback**
3. **Three Concepts to Test**
4. **Museum Documents, Mission, Vision, and Values**
5. **Museum Strategic Plan**
6. **Collateral Materials**
7. **Fundraising**
8. **Building Design, Exhibition Design, and Fabrication**
9. **Museum Opening**
10. **Evaluation**

Museum Planning, LLC is a turnkey museum service provider working with clients from setting initial objectives to opening day. Since 1999, Museum Planning has been part of opening and expanding more than forty museums. Most of Museum Planning's work has been with science centers, natural history museums, and children's museums.

### How to Start a Children's Museum in Ten Steps

1. **Assessment and Initial Recommendations:** Engage Museum Planning, LLC to start the process with a twenty- to thirty-page written document of the current situation, including area demographics, local nonprofits, and fundraising capacity. This document will include recommendations. I often see groups make the mistake of starting prematurely with business planning. It can be challenging to have stakeholders work in an open-ended way to create a series of possibilities for comments and reactions. However, the best fundraising generally involves creating an inclusive process instead of handing a potential funder a sixty-page business plan. Creating an inclusive funding process with potential donors is a highly effective fundraising tool.
2. **Stakeholder Kickoff Meeting and Feedback:** Assemble a group of stakeholders, including schoolteachers, parents, potential funders, city officials, superintendents of schools, and young people (eight to twelve years old). Try to include multiple points of view and perspectives; it is helpful to have people who are not interested in creating the children's museum to understand their point of view. Present the initial findings and recommendations (item number one above). Usually, this is all that is needed to stimulate conversation and gauge interest. At this point, you will either (a) realize the project is not feasible; (b) regroup, and make a new meeting for new plans; or (c) move forward with the meeting results.



3. **Three Concepts to Test:** Create three concepts to test with a wide range of stakeholders for feedback and suggestions. Gather data and create a presentation of findings. It is important to include potential funders in this process. Over and over, I have seen potential funders get excited by the passion and energy of the public.
4. **Museum Documents, Mission, Vision, and Values:** Develop preliminary museum documents of mission, vision, and values. Publish the results of public testing and museum documents on a preliminary website to stimulate public interest and elicit feedback.
5. **Museum Strategic Plan:** Create a museum strategic plan and visitor-experience narrative explaining how to accomplish project objectives.
6. **Collateral Materials:** Prepare schematic floor plans, renderings, preliminary capital costs, and preliminary operating costs for fundraising.
7. **Fundraising:** People tend to worry the most about this step in the process. In my experience, if the steps above have been completed in a transparent and inclusive manner and the project has been “right-sized” (funding capacity, local community requirements, diverse feedback), funding moves quickly (one to two years) from a lead gift to a public capital campaign to reaching capital campaign goals.
8. **Building Design, Exhibition Design, and Fabrication:** In my experience, if the above steps are followed, the building design, exhibition fabrication, and building fabrication move smoothly. Often the most challenging part is the project setup. Over and over, I have seen projects that are not set up well from the outset go through multiple expensive changes and redesigns due to improper initial planning.
9. **Museum Opening:** Often, the capital campaign is not fully funded before a museum gala. The museum gala event provides an opportunity to complete the capital campaign and prepare for marketing and operating the new children’s museum facility. I always recommend a soft opening, which will reveal any issues before the public opening.
10. **Evaluation:** Hire an objective outside evaluator to work with staff and visitors to make recommendations for changes to the project.

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- [Museum Planning, LLC portfolio](#)
- [Museums 101 book](#)
- [Designing Museum Experiences book](#)
- [Museum Courses: online classes in museum studies](#)
- [Museum Planner blog](#)