



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2028

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**Bonanzaville**  
CASS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bonanzaville’s future is now. From its humble beginnings in 1954 as a Fargo history museum in the basement of Minard Hall to its establishment as a pioneer village in the 1970s, the Cass County North Dakota Historical Society has embraced growth and development. And our trajectory is clear. Bonanzaville’s Strategic Plan 2023–2028 is the road map for the future, now is the time to step boldly into the organization’s next chapter.

Bonanzaville fosters the experience of the areas rich pioneer history and culture for the people of Cass County , the region, the State, and visitors from around the globe. Living history is the heart of the organization, and drives our presence in the community. Tens of thousands of lives have been enriched by the organizations historic buildings, mini-museums, and permanent collection of an estimated 400,000 artifacts. Its annual spring school tours have educated hundreds of thousands of school children for decades, while spring , summer and fall special events create lasting memories for area families. Many recent developments including: \$600,000 in repairs to the historic buildings, the hiring of a full time curator after 8 years with out one, and the repairing and creating of several community partnerships has enhanced Bonanzaville’s strategic position . Bonanzaville is a trusted and safe space for civic, social, and educational interactions, and creates a positive economic impact.

Over the past three years Bonanzaville has reinvested in its physical property, recruited skilled professionals, and revamped its iconic events. These investments have attracted new and diverse audiences. Notwithstanding its growth, achievement, and successes, Bonanzaville still has had its share of challenges, affecting three crucial areas: (1) Long-term financial sustainability, (2) Increased Organizational Capacity (3) Improving Visitor Experience and 4) Providing Stewardship for Historical Resources. Bonanzaville began the strategic planning process to capitalize on the strengths of the museum while addressing opportunities for correction and growth. This plan is the result of more than 7 years of research and discussion among members of the museum’s board of trustees, staff, stakeholders and partners, and the resources of the Institute of Museum and Library Services and North Dakota Museum Assessment program grant.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CON'T

Over the next five years Bonanzaville will focus on a series of strategic priorities that will shape the organizations future. Practical and efficient, Bonanzaville's Strategic Plan 2023–2028 prioritizes its goals and objectives and reinforces the mission, vision and values that drive the museum.

*Beth Jansen, Executive Director*

## “Bonanzaville’s future is now.”

### MISSION

Bonanzaville, USA, we are dedicated to the Education, Enlightenment and Enrichment of the lives of our guests through the use of History; by preserving, sharing and connecting the past with the present.

### VISION

A place of interactive unique experiences that inspires people of all ages to learn about earlypioneers, their descendants and their impact; a place called **Bonanzaville, USA.**

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AT A GLANCE

### 1. Build Core Organizational and Financial Capacity.

The board of directors and employees recognize that for the organization to compete in an ever growing local economy they must commit to building an organization that is financially strong and has appropriate infrastructure. The Board and Staff are committed to financial transparency setting a high bar for generosity, engagement and support.

### 2. Elevate Visitor Experience.

Bonanzaville is undertaking steps to build its audience. For that to be successful, all visitors, whether members, out-of-town guests, or event attendees, must have a positive and engaging experience and feel welcome on the campus. Ease of parking, accessibility to people of all abilities, inviting signage, interior and exterior interpretations, and friendly and knowledgeable staff all matter. Bonanzaville will update and create engaging permanent exhibits, add enlightening rotating exhibits from multiple perspectives, continue updating exterior and interior interpretations, and increase the cultural and historic competency of all staff.



*Interior of Dobrinz school house*

## Strategic Priorities at a Glance cont.

### 3. Provide Stewardship for historical resources.

Bonanzaville will develop and initiate a step by step process in the storage and documentation of artifacts. Site wide artifact storage will be organized and the overabundance of duplicated and neglected items deaccessioned. Bonanzaville will create a Historic Site Master Plan to assist in determining the future preservation of our historic buildings.

### 4. Define Bonanzaville's role as an essential regional museum that has a clear message, devoted membership and positive civic presence.

To communicate all that we are, the museum must develop communication and marketing strategies that clearly define the organization for its local, regional and national stakeholders, audiences, potential audiences and peers in the museum industry. Clear and concise messaging will position Bonanzaville to increase its membership base, single-time visits and participation in its educational programming and to maintain and grow its funding base.

## SHARED VALUES

### PEOPLE:

Bonanzaville will hold the Board, it's employees and volunteers to the highest standards of conduct. We will be politically neutral, Civic minded, and ethically sound in our presentation of the history of our area.

Bonanzaville, where we care about our volunteers and staff and are committed to finding and developing great people.

### EDUCATION:

Bonanzaville, is a place for the community and others outside the area to be educated and engaged through the rich history of Cass County North Dakota, and the people who lived here.

### WHY WE ARE HERE:

Bonanzaville supports the community through education, relation, and example. With educational, civic, patriotic, and entertaining programs and demonstrations. Partnerships that strengthen community. While staying politically neutral, ethically consistent, and fiscally responsible. Focusing on the Safety and Security of our visitors, clients, volunteers, and staff.

# BUILD CORE ORGANIZATIONAL AND FINANCIAL CAPACITY

## HISTORY

The Cass County Historical Society, organized in 1954, became a North Dakota nonprofit in 1955. Later that year, it moved into the museum business when the Pioneer Daughters donated the contents of their historical museum, housed in the basement of Menard Hall at North Dakota Agricultural College (now North Dakota State University). It wasn't until 1972 that the original museum building was constructed (on land donated by the Red River Valley Fair). Artifacts were moved from Menard Hall to the new museum. Since 1967, CCHS had been collecting buildings from around the county and moving them to the location now called Bonanzaville. The name refers to the large bonanza farms that once existed in the Red River Valley.

**Goal #1:** Develop a balance sheet strategy to build the museum’s overall capacity and sustainability: build operations cash on hand to \$200,000 through net positive operations

**Objective:** Bonanzaville is better positioned to pursue manageable growth and take advantage of future opportunities.

Strategies	Activities
Increase contributed income with a focus on the corporate and business community.	<p>Create a building sponsorship plan by 6/1/24.</p> <p>Recruit building sponsors for 20 of the buildings with a total annual commitment of \$29,000 by 6/1/28.</p> <p>Increase event sponsorship to \$72,000 by 6/1/28.</p>
Increase contributed income with a focus on individual donations.	<p>Create a donor recognition program by 6/1/25.</p> <p>Increase Individual donations by 5% annually.</p> <p>Create a planned giving policy and plan by 6/1/26.</p>
Increase earned revenue.	<p>Create a membership campaign by 6/1/25.</p> <p>Increase membership to 500 active members by 6/1/28.</p> <p>Increase admissions by 5% annually.</p> <p>Increase event rental income to \$75,000 by 6/1/27.</p> <p>Create one pay for service educational event Per month Oct-April Netting \$3000 in annual revenue by 6/1/28.</p>
Increase Grant Funding.	<p>Apply for one federal grant annually.</p>
Increase Fundraising.	<p>Create an annual fundraising event/gala by 6/1/26.</p> <p>Increase fundraised income to \$70,000 by 6/1/2027.</p>

## BUILD CORE ORGANIZATIONAL AND FINANCIAL CAPACITY CON'T.

Build financial reserve through net profit budgeting.	Budget for an annual net profit of \$40,000 each year of the plan using profit to fund reserve..
Restrict debt and fund projects.	The organization will build funding for each project prior to starting development by 5-1-24.

**Goal #2:** Align staffing, build resources, expertise and technology to support and ensure advancement of the organization.

**Objective:** Bonanzaville is better positioned to fulfill its mission.

### Strategies

### Activities

Assess staff structure and identify models and best practices in the field.

Identify and determine ideal staff structure for organization by 6/1/2024.

Identify next full time hire that would best assist the organization by 6/1/2024.

Hire said position by 6/1/2025.

Build and retain a highly talented, committed and engaged staff.

Analyze local staffing market for each position annually.

Maintain competitive salaries for staff accordingly, increasing budgeted amounts annually as needed.

Maintain current benefit stipend for full time employees.

Explore Benefit package options and cost to determine best course of action annually.

Grow the talent and engagement of the Board of Directors.

Identify areas where the museum is lacking in skills, personal attributes and resources by 12/31/2024.

Recruit 3 non-board members to serve on committees and task forces to develop a pipeline of new trustees 12/31/2024.

Provide annual leadership/onboarding opportunities for board of directors by 1-1-24.



### 2022 GOOGLE REVIEW

“This is so much more than just a museum! The Cass County Historical Society has put together a fantastic complex of historical buildings on this gigantic site! Every building has its own story with several dedicated to specific displays. One building houses law enforcement memorabilia. Another is dedicated to firefighters, their apparatus & lifestyle. Some of the building were moved to the site from all over the area! My favorite by far that the airplane building. It’s not got the most of the best displays but it’s the only place I’ve ever been able to walk through a C-47!! We were there for four hours and didn’t see it all. Well worth the price of admission. It’s a must for anyone interested in the history of the Red River Valley.”

## TRIP ADVISOR 2022 REVIEWS

“This was an amazing museum. It had trains, planes, and antique cars. The main indoor museum was well done, but make sure you take your time and read the exhibits literature. The outside town buildings are like a step back in time. “

“Good trip. We arrived at approximately 12:30 pm and made our way towards the entrance of the building. We bought our tickets and toured several exhibits that were inside the main building. We learned a little about the early history of North Dakota, along with the women rights movement, bonanza farms, the Spanish flu and saw several old historical artifacts. Next, we went outside and started to explore the 30+ different historical buildings. There was an informational plaque outside each building, detailing a little about the previous owners of the building. I wish the plaques provided more information about the significance of each building in the community, rather than just talking about the previous owners. .... There is a ton to see and read, and the museum does a good job of providing a wide variety of buildings and artifacts. “

## ELEVATE VISITOR EXPERIENCE.

**Goal #1:** Create an inviting atmosphere for visitors while telling the valuable stories of Cass Counties rich history.

**Objective:** Improve quality and relevance of permanent and rotating exhibits and interpretations in village buildings.

### Strategies

### Activities

Update and revitalize permanent exhibit spaces following a chronological as well as thematic timeline in the founding of the area, while exhibiting a larger number of artifacts in the collection.

Move Indigenous display to first third of permanent exhibit space as the chronological and thematic start of the timeline to the settlement of the area by 9-1-23.

Create and install “Founding Fargo” Exhibit by 5-1-25.

Complete timeline through the redesign of the Bonanza farm exhibit by 5-1-27.

Increase artifacts displayed by 10% overall in exhibit spaces by 5-1-28.

Build collaborations with community partners to offer rotating exhibits sharing diverse perspectives.

Create an exhibit committee including members from academia, K-12 education, design professions, and topic appropriate organizations per exhibit by 5-1-26.

Plan rotating exhibit calendar adding two new topical exhibits annually by 5-1-25.

Install only annual or bi annual rotating exhibits by 5-1-2028.

Update and/or add interpretation to historic buildings.

Add and or update object interpretation to each item in the Dahl Car museum, Mowm building, train and tractor buildings by 5/1/2026.

Add object and/or building interpretation to an additional 5 historic buildings annually by 12/31/28.



# ELEVATE VISITOR EXPERIENCE. CON'T.



Develop historically based public programs for target audiences.

Add 3 historically based public programs on site or in public spaces from October 1st to May 1st for 3 different target audiences by 5-1-24.

Add Monthly historically based public programs on site or in public spaces from October 1st to May 1st for 3 different target audiences by 5-1-25.

Add bi Monthly historically based public programs on site and in public spaces from October 1st to May 1st for 3 different target audiences by 5-1-27.

Add more hands on interactive experiences through out village and museum exhibits.

Add one hands on interactive experience for each of the three permanent exhibits in the main museum by 5-1-27.

Add one hands on interactive experience for the Dahl Car Museum, Moum Building and Tractor Building by 5-1-28.

Goal #2: Increase visitor enjoyment of space with in village and length of visit .

Objective: Create a park like experience for visitor enjoyment while in pioneer village.

## Strategies

## Activities

Replace two deteriorating pole buildings in center of village with usable park like visitor amenities.

Demolish both buildings by 6/1/2024.

Build Rustic looking park shelter on old Carriage building space by 12/31/2025.

Add a playground to south half of Dawsons space by 12/31/25.

Create a welcoming multi use green space on the remaining corner of space by

Collect data specific to enjoyment of visit and length of visit on visitors experience.

Develop and implement visitor surveys to be emailed to each visitor after their visit. 5/1/24.

Determine Base line of score and average length of stay for visitors 10/1/24.

Receive positive surveys by 80% of guests 5/1/26.

Increase positive surveys by 3% annually over the course of the plan. 10/1/28.

**“The More  
you Know  
about the  
past the  
better you are  
prepared for  
the future”**

*Theodore Rosevelt*



# PROVIDE STEWARDSHIP FOR HISTORICAL RESOURCES

**Goal #1:** Develop a Maintenance Program for the continued preservation, use, and potential development of the facilities and grounds and justify the budget line to the board of directors .

**Objective:** Provide a clear path for maintaining and repairing the organizations historic buildings and facilities.

## Strategies

## Activities

Identify and prioritize structural needs for each building.

Create “Condition Reports” that compile historical overviews, documentation of previous work, annotated floor/elevation plans ,photo’s, and initial project list for 5 historic structures annually by 5-1-25.

Determine annual facility needs and justify the budget line in the annual organizational budget.

Maintenance manager and curator will coordinate to produce a Maintenance Plan, outlining both cyclical maintenance and prioritized work based on Condition Reports that follow industry guidelines for work on historical structures by 5-1-26.

Maintenance Manager and Executive Director will produce an annual maintenance report which subtotals cyclical maintenance, work identified in maintenance plan, and unplanned maintenance to the board of directors by 10-1-27.

**Goal #2:** Identify and prioritize needs for the artifact collection . Cataloging/ inventorying items, separating them into collections by object-type, and providing appropriate storage environments for each collection.

**Objective:** Provide a clear path for inventory and storage of organizations historic artifacts..

## Strategies

## Activities

Review Collections practices and identify appropriate storage and preservation needs for the various collections.

Apply for AAM Collections Assessment Program to focus specifically on collection care issues by 5-31-25.

Add environmental monitoring devices to museum storage and exhibit spaces by 5-1-26 .



Historic buildings give us a sense of continuity, identity and belonging, they inspire us with awe, beauty and sacredness, they teach us our history, ancestry and learning, and they foster healthy, sustainable communities.

# Provide Stewardship for historical resources con't.

## Collection Care

According to Smithsonian Institute the Stewardship of collections implies an obligation to the present and the future; a promise to take care of things that have significance and value, on behalf of others. One central component of stewardship is collections care , the activities associated with organizing and maintaining collections to keep them safe, accessible, and in good condition. Collections care includes identifying, recording, and locating collections contents; storing them in a safe, well-maintained environment; handling them in a way that prolongs their life and usefulness; conserving or restoring them, when necessary; ensuring that they are accessible physically and intellectually when needed for display, loan, or study; and monitoring their location, use, and condition.

	<p>Curator will compile/create a Scope of Collections Statement and comprehensive Collections Management Policy to guide collections related aspects of future strategic planning by 5-1-28.</p>
<p>Build intellectual control of objects and records in the museum’s collection.</p>	<p>Continue Village inventory project, which began in 2020, completing at least one building annually by 5-1-2025.</p> <p>Digitalize existing paper records and documentation regarding the museum collections, including previous inventories by 5-1-27.</p> <p>Complete systematic inventory of each of the four current main museum spaces by 5-1-28.</p>
<p>Relocate or move objects that do not fit the mission of the organization , are repetitive in the collection, are in disrepair, or cannot be stored in acceptable conditions.</p>	<p>Transfer archival materials to the North Dakota State University Institution for Regional studies/Archive as accessible “Bonanzaville” collection by 5-1-25.</p> <p>Begin inventory and deaccession project for Building 16 and other non-historic outbuildings by 5-1-25.</p>



*Interior of Hunter Times*

## DEFINE BONANZAVILLE'S ROLE AS AN ESSENTIAL REGIONAL MUSEUM .

**Goal #1:** Establish clear and concise messaging about the purpose and scope of the museum and pioneer village.

**Objective:** Position Bonanzaville to increase its membership base, attendance at events and educational offerings, and admissions.

### Strategies

Promote Bonanzaville's unique role in Cass County and the region.

Implement Marketing and communication efforts across multiple platforms.

### Activities

Develop key messaging to communicate history and continued relevance in the community by 5-1-24.

Present organization as a community collaborator and social setting.

Promote Education programming onsite and in community.

Develop a social media plan/calendar to incorporate key messaging/branding message with event marketing– 5-1-24.

# DEFINE BONANZAVILLE'S ROLE AS AN ESSENTIAL REGIONAL MUSEUM CON'T

Implement Marketing and communication efforts across multiple platforms Cont..

Create Metrics for social media plan 10-1-24.

Make it convenient for visitors to share their experience with friends and followers using standardized hash tags, tags, and easily accessible QR codes 5-1-25.

Adapt website to align with strategic goals and key messaging. 5.1.26.

Increase brand visibility on local and regional marketing platforms 5-1-27.

**Goal #2** Promote organizations position in the regional/state/national museum community.

**Objective** Bonanzaville is an integral and important cultural institution, with a collection, exhibitions, and programs that are recognized through out the regio and state.

## Strategies

## Activities

Develop strategies and implementation techniques to enhance professional relationships and visibility within the museum community.

Curator will attend the American Association of State and Local History ( AASHL) national conference by 5-1-27.

Curator will engage with the AASHL “Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (STEPS)” and outline a completion path by 12-31-26.

Curator will be involved with museum, local history, or anthropological organization at the:

- Regional level by 5-1-25
- National level by 5-1-27

Curator will position himself to co-author an article on a collection related topic to be published in a professional or academic publication by 5-1-28.

Curator will position himself to present on a mission or collections related topic at a professional or academic conference/event by 5-1-28.



### THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY

“ History is the foundation for strong, vibrant communities. A place becomes a community when wrapped in human memory as told through family stories, tribal traditions, and civic commemorations as well as discussions about our roles and responsibilities to each other and the places we call home. “



## Board of Directors 2023

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Kristen Fellows— President

Jonathan Haux— Vice President

Angela Smith—Secretary

Brock Tallakson— Treasurer

Brad Nudell

Dan Suckert

Laura Maeyert

David Groven

Kent Lindeman

Bill Erickson

Shane Cullen

Mike Nobis

Nicole Rygh

## Staff

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Beth Jansen— Executive Director

David Hubin— Curator / Collections Manager

Megean Solberg— Events Coordinator

Tyler Hasse— Maintenance Manager

## The Process

The work began in 2018 with a grant for the Institute of Museum and Library Service Museum Assessment Program. This assessment pointed out the present and future needs of the organization as well as suggested changes associated with the 2018-2023 strategic plan. The change in leadership in 2020 as well as the development of the board of directors from a working board to a governance board over the course of the last three years lead to a second museum assessment in the fall of 2022 through the North Dakota Museum Assessment Program.

The organization's staffing team as well as board representative Angela Smith met with the assessor Gerald Newborg former State Archivist/Division Director, State Historical Society of North Dakota, on two occasions in the fall of 2022. These meetings included the newly hired Curator/Collections Manager David Hubin. Gerald provided a final assessment with the primary goal of assisting the organization in creating a 2023-2028 strategic plan that addresses the needs of the organization as it pertains to exhibits and collection not addressed in 2018-2023 plan.

January through July of 2023 Executive Director, Beth Jansen and Curator Collections Manager, David Hubin with the guidance and direction of the board of directors crafted the plan for approval at the August 16th 2023 meeting of the organizations board of directors. The 2023-2028 Strategic Plan is intended to lead the organization into the future building capacity, enriching the lives of our visitors, caring for our collection, and serving the amazing community we reside in.