

Three-Year Strategic Plan of Action (2026–2028)

Prepared using information from our planning session May 2, 2026 at the Cass County Community Foundation and our *2026–2027 Investor Report*.

Executive Summary

The Cass County Historical Society (CCHS) is at a pivotal moment in its organizational development. Following several years of stabilization, infrastructure improvements, artifact relocation, and operational restructuring, the Society now has the opportunity to transition into a sustainable, community-centered museum organization that serves as both a historic preservation institution and an educational resource.

This three-year strategic plan outlines an actionable framework focused on:

1. **Financial Sustainability**
2. **Collections Stewardship & Digitization**
3. **Museum Experience & Accessibility**
4. **Community Engagement & Education**
5. **Organizational Capacity & Governance**
6. **Preservation & Facilities Stewardship**

Our plan builds upon current efforts to restore and remodel our museums, digitize our collection, expand programming, provide new experiences and develop community partnerships.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Cass County Historical Society is to collect, preserve, and share Cass County, Indiana history.

Vision Statement

To become a sustainable and accredited regional historical organization that connects people to Cass County history through accessible collections, engaging educational experiences, preservation leadership, and innovative storytelling across two museum campuses.

Core Organizational Values

Organization priorities recorded during the May 2026 strategic planning session:

- Preservation of local history
- Community engagement
- Collaboration
- Accessibility
- Stewardship
- Tourism development
- Education
- Storytelling
- Integrity
- Belonging and inclusion

Current Organizational Assessment

Strengths

- Two unique museum properties offering distinct visitor experiences
- Strong community identity and growing local support
- Expanding educational programming
- Experienced leadership with museum and education expertise
- Growing collections management systems using PastPerfect
- Increasing public engagement through events and tours
- Established relationships with city and county government
- Established relationships with state and other county historical institutions

Challenges

- Deferred maintenance and aging infrastructure
- Limited staffing capacity
- Large backlog of uncatalogued materials
- Deaccessioning off-mission collection items
- Need for ADA accessibility improvements
- Incomplete exhibit spaces
- Dependence on fundraising and grants
- Need for long-term financial sustainability
- Inconsistent volunteer support

Opportunities

- Tourism growth - arts & culture
- Expanded school partnerships
- Digital collections access
- Community partnerships and sponsorships
- Volunteer development
- Grant funding for preservation and accessibility
- Interactive and immersive programming

Strategic Priorities (2026–2028)

PRIORITY 1: Build Long-Term Financial Sustainability

Goal: Create stable and diversified funding streams that support sustainable operations, preservation, staffing, and programming.

Objectives:

1.1 Expand Annual Giving and Membership

- Increase membership participation by 25% annually
- Develop awareness of Annual Campaign
- Introduce business and lifetime membership levels
- Create donor recognition opportunities within museum exhibits

1.2 Strengthen Grant Funding

- Pursue local, state and federal grants
- Seek technology and digitization grants
- Apply for tourism and accessibility funding
- Build relationships with regional foundations

1.3 Increase Earned Revenue

- Expand museum shop merchandise
- Implement admission charges at both museums
- Develop paid guided tours and premium experiences
- Create educational workshops and ticketed events

1.4 Develop Endowment and Legacy Giving

- Promote planned giving opportunities
- Strengthen Community Foundation partnerships
- Promote existing endowment campaigns

Key Performance Indicators

- 25% increase in annual fundraising revenue by 2028
- Grow membership to 200+ active members
- At least 3 new grant awards annually
- 25% increase in earned income

PRIORITY 2: Complete Collections Organization & Digitization

Goal: Ensure the Society's collections are professionally organized, preserved, accessible, and digitally available for future generations.

Objectives:

2.1 Continue Collections Organization

- Complete inventory and sorting of uncatalogued materials
- Establish standardized storage systems
- Improve artifact tracking and location accuracy

2.2 Expand PastPerfect Database

- Add 3,000 additional records by 2028
- Prioritize high-risk and high-interest collections
- Grow volunteer-assisted data entry initiatives
- Transcribe existing records

2.3 Improve Digital Accessibility

- Professional website development
- Increase digital educational resources
- Create searchable archives for researchers and schools
- Purchase and install StQry QR museum guide and translation services

2.4 Build Archival Capacity

- Pursue funding for Archivist Technician position
- Develop digitization volunteer training program
- Create collections handling procedures manual

Key Performance Indicators

- 3,000+ digitized items entered into PastPerfect
- Public digital access portal launched
- 30% reduction in stored materials via ethical deaccessioning
- Volunteer digitization team established

PRIORITY 3: Enhance Museum Experiences & Accessibility

Goal: Create engaging, inclusive, educational museum environments that serve diverse audiences and increase visitation.

Objectives:

3.1 Complete First Floor Cass County Museum Remodel

- Install new exhibits: natural history, farms/mastodons, transportation
- Improve exhibit interpretation and labeling
- Establish docent schedule
- Increase visitor flow

3.2 Advance Second Floor Planning

- Fund architect fees and gain construction blueprints
- Begin exhibit design and collections preparation for installation
- Gain estimates for second floor construction

3.3 Improve Long Home Museum Accessibility

- Fund development of ADA access construction plans
- Rework of northwest corner of property, back porches
- Improve pathways, grounds, entrances, and navigation signage
- Create video tour, provide on site and online

3.4 Introduce Technology-Based Interpretation

- Develop QR-code smartphone tours
- Add multilingual interpretation
- Introduce audio tours and accessibility tools
- All of the above provided by StQry application

3.5 Expand Immersive Programming

- Launch “*From Dark Pages*” mystery tours, paranormal programs
- Rewrite and revive cemetery walk program
- Expand live interpretation and reenactment programs
- Develop family-focused interactive experiences

Key Performance Indicators

- First floor remodel completed at Cass County Museum
- ADA accessibility provided at Long Home Museum
- 20% increase in museum visitation
- New interpretive technologies introduced

PRIORITY 4: Strengthen Community Engagement & Educational Impact

Goal: Position CCHS as a central educational and cultural resource for Cass County and beyond.

Objectives

4.1 Expand Educational Programming

- Increase school partnerships
- Develop curriculum-aligned field trip experiences
- Create traveling education kits for classrooms

4.2 Grow Public Programs

- Expand Legacy Speakers series
- Increase First Saturday attendance
- Expand 4th quarter holiday programs
- Add ticketed events

4.3 Strengthen Volunteer Recruitment

- Launch structured volunteer onboarding
- Develop volunteer appreciation initiatives
- Improve committee function and efficiency

4.4 Increase Public Visibility

- Expand digital marketing and storytelling
- Increase local media partnerships
- Develop consistent social media content strategy

4.5 Promote Arts & Culture Tourism

- Collaborate with tourism organizations
- Develop regional tourism partnerships
- Package museum experiences with downtown events

Key Performance Indicators

- 20% increase in program attendance
- 40 active volunteers by 2028
- Increased school group participation annually
- Growth in website and social media engagement

PRIORITY 5: Strengthen Organizational Capacity & Governance

Goal: Build leadership structures, staffing systems, and governance practices that support long-term organizational success.

Objectives

5.1 Strengthen Board Development

- Conduct annual board training
- Follow a volunteer first - trustee second recruitment pathway
- Improve committee function and efficiency
- Improve management of trustee voting processes

5.2 Improve Operational Systems

- Develop written staff policies and procedures
- Create long-term maintenance schedules
- Improve data collection and reporting systems

5.3 Expand Staffing Capacity

- Pursue funding for future Archivist Technician position
- Evaluate existing roles and responsibilities
- Update written job descriptions and evaluate compensation
- Create internship partnerships

5.4 Improve Strategic Planning Processes

- Conduct annual strategic plan reviews
- Establish measurable annual benchmarks
- Be consistent with distribution of bi-annual investor report
- Be completely transparent with community

Key Performance Indicators

- Annual board assessment completed
- Committee participation expanded
- Operations manuals completed
- Staff and volunteer satisfaction improvements

PRIORITY 6: Preserve and Sustain Historic Properties

Goal: Protect and maintain museum facilities through proactive preservation and responsible stewardship.

Objectives:

6.1 Implement Preventative Maintenance Plans

- Develop monthly building maintenance and cleaning schedules
- Conduct regular preservation assessments
- Prioritize proactive repairs over emergency response

6.2 Continue Museum Restoration and Remodeling

- Address structural restoration and remodeling priorities
- Improve environmental controls
- Provide ADA accessibility
- Beautify museum grounds

6.3 Improve Collections Environments

- Upgrade all HVAC systems
- Improve storage conditions
- Enhance environmental monitoring
- Enhance collection storage security measures

6.4 Restore Additional Historic Assets

- Advance William Chick Family Log Cabin restoration
- Expand preservation planning for future property use

Key Performance Indicators

- HVAC upgrades completed
- Long Home restoration phases advanced
- Environmental standards improved
- Log Cabin safely reopened

Implementation Timeline

2026: Foundation & Stabilization

- Complete first floor remodel
- Expand digitization work
- Launch ticketed events
- Increase membership campaign
- Finalize ADA architectural planning
- Strengthen volunteer systems

2027: Expansion & Engagement

- Expand educational programming
- Advance second-floor remodel fundraising

- Increase tourism partnerships
- Grow donor and sponsorship base
- Strengthen endowment development

2028: Sustainability & Growth

- Launch digital collections access
- Evaluate strategic outcomes
- Expand staffing capacity
- Begin second-floor exhibit implementation planning
- Launch next strategic planning cycle

Conclusion

The next three years represent a transformational period for the Cass County Historical Society. The organization has already completed critical stabilization work and built a strong operational foundation. With continued investment, thoughtful planning, and community support, CCHS can evolve into a leading regional historical institution that preserves the county's past while actively shaping its cultural future.

By focusing on sustainability, accessibility, preservation, education, and community engagement, the Society will continue fulfilling its mission while expanding its impact for future generations.

Two Museums. One Mission.