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## Case Statement

### **IMAGINE U CHILDREN'S MUSEUM MISSION STATEMENT**

*To create a new regional learning center for Tulare County that provides quality interactive exhibits for children and their families and a unique opportunity to experience activities that will educate, enrich and expand the boundaries of their lives.*

### **BACKGROUND**

ImagineU Interactive Children's Museum is a valuable educational asset that serves the needs of children, families and schools in Tulare County as a center for learning and discovery. ImagineU was founded in 2002 by Angela Huerta, a former Tulare County Office of Education home educator. The museum provides an interactive environment where children can learn about art, science, and the world around them. ImagineU encourages children to think for themselves through the power of play and creative exploration. More than 14,000 members, students, and guests visited ImagineU in 2012.

Now the South Valley has an opportunity to help build a new 15,000+ sq. ft. museum with state-of-the-art hands-on exhibits for all families in the surrounding area.

### **FUTURE VISION**

The current museum was made possible with the generous donation of a former Giant Chevrolet dealership building. After operating in the existing 2,800 sq. ft. facility for three years, it was obvious the community required a bigger facility that offered expanded learning and interactive possibilities in a family environment. Thus the vision of a state-of-the-art educational facility was born. In 2005 design and development began. The capital campaign "Raising the Roof" started and generated over \$250,000. Community support increased with sponsorships and donations of all sizes. In 2009 the State of California, Parks and Recreation Proposition 84 Nature's Facility Grant became available. Our project had progressed to a level that we felt we could make a strong case for our project to be selected. There were over 800 applications submitted for the grant, and ImagineU was one of 40 recipients, receiving one of the largest awards, \$5.4 million dollars. Since the receipt of the grant, we have been hard at work finalizing all aspects of design and development. We have worked with the City of Visalia to find an exceptional site at Oak Street and Tipton Avenue, a block from the City Transit Center and next to the future Downtown eastward expansion. The outdoor water exhibit and play area is adjacent to a riparian walkway along Mill Creek. Directly to the east is a planned city park currently in development.

We are now at the point of looking forward to the upcoming groundbreaking in the fall of 2013. The future facility will be built to LEED Certified specifications, creating a strong environmental foundation for renewable energy, sustainability, and conservation of our natural resources. The building was designed by Russ Taylor of The Taylor Group of Fresno, California, with new and exciting exhibits designed by nationally renowned exhibit designers at Haizlip Studios of Memphis, Tennessee.

### **PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES**

ImagineU is one of over 300 children’s museums around the country leading a movement that combines specific learning objectives with play in informal learning environments. In a community with few options for inexpensive, educational play experiences, ImagineU fills a vital role in building strong families and inspiring children.

The areas of science, art, health and literacy are strong themes in the ImagineU programming –

“Crafty Critter Wednesdays,” “Happy, Healthy Thursdays,” “Free Story Hour Fridays” and “Science Explorer Saturdays.” Family Camps coincide with spring, summer, and winter school breaks. Field trips allow teachers to supplement their classroom instruction and fulfill science curriculum standards.

All of the ImagineU interpretative and interactive exhibits correlate with the State Educational Content Standards and help develop essential foundation skills. The medical and dental exhibits help reduce the fear of going to the doctor and expose children to medical careers. Our Imagination Castle celebrates role play; children can try on costumes, play musical instruments, use puppets, and act out their emotions on stage for their peers and caregivers. Our multi-lingual grocery store is a favorite of the under five crowd.

The Exhibit Committee rotates the exhibits to sustain an innovative environment. Many of these exhibits will go with us to the new museum. We recently obtained some outstanding exhibits from the Castle Museum of Science and Technology in Atwater, Ca. that will be rotated at the new museum.

### **WHY A CHILDREN’S MUSEUM IS SO IMPORTANT**

A new generation of children’s museums has been recognized as a “must have” for many forward thinking cities. Research shows that children learn through play, by pretending and imitating. Their brain synapses are fired and connected and their motor skills are developed by having an exciting place to explore and play. Visalia is proud to offer such a valuable option in education, family fun, and exciting experiences to its city and surrounding communities.

ImagineU is the only children’s museum of its kind within a three-hour drive in any direction of the City of Visalia. Our unique location in Central California—between Yosemite National Park and Kings Canyon National Park and off the 99 corridor—contributes to our success.

Our museum is a place of imagination, a place that engages children with interactive exhibits, and a place that can create meaningful family experiences.

### **WHY WE NEED TO EXPAND**

Today over 14,000 visitors per year overwhelm our tiny 2,500 square foot museum. We conservatively estimate that over 80,000 visitors will enjoy the new museum in its first year, a number confirmed through the Association of Children’s Museums, professional consultants and national statistics.

The population of Tulare County has more than doubled since 1970 to more than 440,000 and has increased by 20.2% in the last decade, making it the eighth fastest growing county in the state. Its

population is 60.6 % Hispanic, ranking second in the state. As a result of this phenomenal growth, the need for safe and educational outlets for the children of Tulare County is overwhelming.

ImagineU serves the needs and interests of diverse visitors who have varied backgrounds and experiences. Many moms' groups, home-school families and parents of preschoolers make ImagineU part of their weekly routine, providing social interaction and educational programs that stimulate curiosity and motivate learning. Parents and caregivers can spend quality time with their children, learn something new themselves and experience the wonder of becoming lost in the present moment as they play. Teachers and pre-schools love bringing their classes to ImagineU, but more space is needed to properly serve them.

As an important and worthy community investment, the new museum will

- Serve the needs and interests of children all over the valley by providing exhibits that are integrated with school curriculum and regional sustainability topics
- Provide programs that stimulate curiosity and motivate learning
- Serve as a town square for children and families where play inspires creativity and lifelong learning, and families from various cultural backgrounds can meet.

### **LEADERSHIP**

President Cheryl Christman leads the ImagineU Board of Directors. The board includes parents and community leaders with professional experience in business, banking, education, architecture, interior design, marketing, community relations and child development. The many committees developed in support of the museum include Finance, Marketing, Grant Writing, Fundraising, Building, Exhibit, and Education & Programming.

Our engaging staff works closely with the exhibit committee and education coordinator to ensure a well-run facility. Operations Assistant Judy Ananian manages the day-to-day operations of the museum. Other part-time staff instructs and assists museum guests with exhibits to insure a positive and educational experience, as well as facilitating birthday parties. More than 50 volunteers fulfill important roles in the success of ImagineU.

### **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Many of the community organizations involved with the museum, and committed to its success through involvement, are American Association of University Women, College of the Sequoias, Read for Life, Boys and Girls Club, CASA, First 5 of California, BrightStart and HeadStart.

### **COST AND FUNDING**

ImagineU currently operates on a yearly budget of just under \$200,000. This includes generous in-kind support from Giant Chevrolet, Rent-a-Space Storage Center and DMI Agency's Raise Magazine.

Grant funding

- City of Visalia grants provide operations and art camp funding
- A Visalia County Center Rotary Club grant provides Free Admission Fridays

- As an affiliate of United Way of Tulare County, ImagineU receives funding for school field trips and activities
- Fresno Regional Foundation grants provide free family art camps for low-income families

As a non-profit organization, ImagineU also receives funding and support from community members, businesses, organizations and local government agencies.

In order to make ImagineU accessible to all we strive to keep our fees reasonable. A \$5 per person admission fee, under 2 yrs. are free and a \$100 annual membership help financially support the museum. In addition we offer party room rentals and school field trips. The annual DREAMBUILDERS' BASH Auction held in early summer as well as the Annual Campaign throughout the year also help to financially support the current museum. At the new facility we will be able to offer Science and Art Enrichment after school programming which will be an additional factor in our future sustainability.

### **WHY WE NEED YOUR HELP!**

We are asking for the community's support to bring this amazing Children's Museum to fruition.

Growing by leaps and bounds over the past 11 years to where we are today suggests we are really on to something! We have the support of the City of Visalia, and the State of California, and now we are asking the community to help ImagineU bring it home. If we can bring 14,000 visitors through our doors at 700 E. Main Street in 2013, imagine what we could do with this new 15,000+ sq. ft. facility.

Although we have received much from our supporters, the realities of a project this size is challenging. Over the course of development, the opportunity for a more accessible and pleasing site became available at Oak Street and Tipton Avenue. A new site meant a redesign of the building and exhibits to fit the new location. In addition, a 2,000 sq. ft. banquet and meeting room has been added that will open up to the amphi-meadow and provide an indoor-outdoor venue available for special activities and community events. The new design addition will enable additional revenue, future expansion and the opportunity to bring in traveling exhibits.

The grant was submitted in 2010 and since being awarded in 2011 the project has evolved, and building costs have changed. The development of this project has been collaboration with the City of Visalia, Urban Tree Foundation, and professional consultants who contributed their expertise to the plans and decisions made about the project. The Community's needs and future growth have been key factors in all decisions affecting the expansion of the facility. We believe the final design will serve the community not only today but for decades to come. We can assure you every step has been taken to maintain the integrity of the project while insuring a financially sound plan.

To complete our dream of building the New ImagineU Interactive Children's Museum in the community of Visalia, California, ImagineU is seeking to raise \$2 million dollars. There are many opportunities for community involvement in the naming of the building and exhibits. Just imagine your family or business name on an exciting exhibit, or even the building. With your help, ImagineU will educate our youth, be the destination of choice for visitors throughout the State of California, and be a South Valley treasure for generations to come.