



Smithsonian  
*Center for Learning and Digital Access*

**Strategic Plan**  
**2018–22**

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Students explore a prototype of the Center's digital learning platform, the Smithsonian Learning Lab.

# Introduction

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The increased access provided by digital media technologies has made museum resources, such as cultural artifacts, historical documents, and scientific specimens, widely available. Educational researchers and practitioners are now developing effective ways to use digital resources—particularly those from authoritative sources, such as the Smithsonian Institution. Digital representations of the Smithsonian’s millions of resources have the power and potential to enable students to develop *deeper learning* competencies that will help them compete globally and the transferable skills that will help them succeed throughout their lives.

## Deeper Learning

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Deeper learning focuses on a set of six competencies that students can develop throughout their PK–12 education.

- Master academic content
- Think critically and solve complex problems
- Work collaboratively
- Communicate effectively
- Learn how to learn
- Develop academic mindsets

SOURCE: [https://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Deeper\\_Learning\\_Defined\\_\\_April\\_2013.pdf](https://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Deeper_Learning_Defined__April_2013.pdf)

## The Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian Institution is the world’s largest museum, research, and education complex, with 19 museums and the National Zoo. The Smithsonian is shaping the future by preserving heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing resources with the world. By 2022, the Smithsonian’s vision is to build on its unique strengths to engage and inspire more people, where they are, with greater impact, while catalyzing critical conversation on issues affecting our nation and the world.

The Smithsonian Center for Learning and Digital Access strategic plan aligns with the Smithsonian Institution’s strategic plan by supporting the following goals:

- \* **Be one Smithsonian**
- \* **Reach 1 billion people a year with a digital-first strategy**
- \* **Understand and impact 21st-century audiences**
- \* **Catalyze new conversations and address complex challenges**

# The Smithsonian Center for Learning and Digital Access

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## History

The Smithsonian established the Smithsonian Center for Learning and Digital Access in 1976 to serve public education by bringing Smithsonian collections and expertise into the nation's classrooms. For more than 40 years, it has published educational materials and provided one access point to Smithsonian educational resources. The Center is now housed within the Office of the Associate Provost for Education and Access.

To understand the needs of teachers, students, and museum educators, the Center spent more than a decade in active experimentation and research, culminating in the launch of a new online platform—the Smithsonian Learning Lab. Since its launch in 2016, museum and classroom educators have used the Lab's tools to create thousands of new examples—ranging from experiments to models—for using Smithsonian resources for learning.

The Center now studies how teachers and students use digital museum resources and broadly disseminates this knowledge through professional development to advance museum and digital learning.

## Impact

The Center serves the Smithsonian community as well as the nation's classroom educators, to increase collaboration, skills, and agility in the use of digital resources for educational purposes, through guidance, assistance, and training. It collects and analyzes data on the Institution's educational programs and outreach and promotes the adoption of best practices. The Center also implements programming in support of Smithsonian initiatives that recognize excellence and innovation in education and promote dialogue on issues crucial to its primary audience encompassing children and young people.

## Mission

The challenge now facing the Center is to connect digital museum resources with deeper learning, to offer the best outcomes for students and to ensure that the Smithsonian is recognized as a trusted and preferred source for digital education content and curriculum development. The Center recognizes the importance of its role as a catalyst for deeper learning and its responsibility to provide accessible digital museum resources for curriculum development.

In pursuit of those ends, **the mission of the Center is to deepen, enrich, and personalize learning by encouraging and supporting the creative use of museum resources through research and collaboration with the education community.**

## Vision

The Center's vision is that **educators everywhere cultivate curious, skillful, and engaged digital citizens.** This vision is an expression of both its responsibility to educators and its highest hopes for the future for learners. It is a statement that calls the Center forward on a path of innovation that is rooted in delivery of pragmatic results.

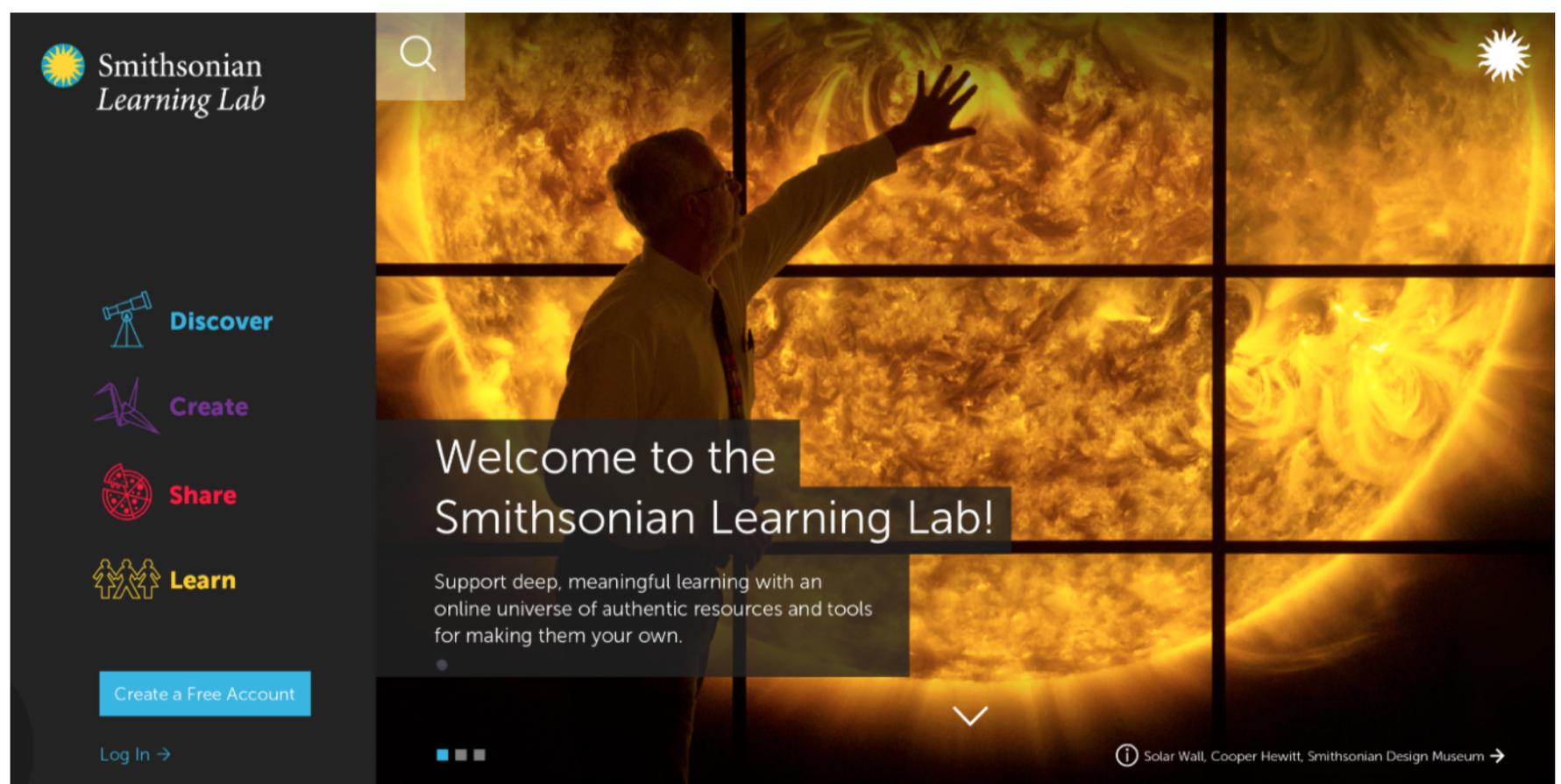
# Priorities

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In selecting its priorities, the Center's team considered where it should focus its resources to have the greatest impact upon fulfilling its mission and serving the Smithsonian's strategic plan. These considerations include how the Center can: deepen, enrich, and personalize learning through the creative use of museum resources; help learners discover new knowledge, and share resources with educators around the world; help the Smithsonian reach one billion people a year through its digital first strategy; and help catalyze new conversations and address complex challenges.

The Center determined that these three program priorities would best address its mission:

- 1. Foster deeper learning through the effective use of Smithsonian digital resources.**
- 2. Sustain and evolve dependable digital platforms to access, create, deliver, and improve educational experiences.**
- 3. Contribute knowledge to improve practices in museum education and digital technology.**



The Smithsonian Learning Lab platform is an essential element of the Center's strategy for addressing its three priorities.

## Priority 1: Foster deeper learning through the effective use of Smithsonian digital resources.

### Goals

Curriculum/content developers and Smithsonian educators collaborate to develop digital learning resources that expand the Smithsonian's reach and impact.

The Center creates or identifies and validates model digital learning resources that align to PK-12 standards.

Educators use digital learning resources in deeper and more meaningful ways.

### Approaches

- Identify and leverage existing Smithsonian programs and initiatives to scale impact.
- Seek and create opportunities for Smithsonian educators to co-develop content and reach broader audiences through strategic collaborations.
- Collaborate with experts to create model digital learning resources that deepen students' learning by using authoritative resources and research-based methods.



A content development workshop in action

- \* Conduct research on the most effective uses of digital resources for deeper learning.
- \* Create rubric to determine criteria for and characteristics of model collections.
- \* Identify creative uses of digital learning resources that can be generalized for larger audiences.
- \* Adapt digital learning resource models to meet the needs of diverse learners.

- Train content/curriculum creators in deeper learning approaches and digital learning technologies.
- Collaborate with content and curriculum creators to create digital learning resources that align to PK–12 standards that encompass the following content areas: social studies, science, language arts/English, mathematics, arts, and cultural competencies.
- Inventory published collections to determine alignment with PK–12 standards.

## Metrics

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**Learning Lab digital learning resources are endorsed/adopted by district, state, and professional associations.**

Targets:

- State education and school district authorities in 25 states
  - Five national professional associations
  - 100,000 registered users
- 

**Increase the skilled use of Smithsonian educational platforms and resources.**

Target:

- 50% of Smithsonian-authored digital learning resources are based on models

## Priority 2: Sustain and evolve dependable digital platforms to access, create, deliver, and improve educational experiences.

### Goals

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Users have access to dependable and evolving digital platforms that address their needs.

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User base grows due to improved compatibility and accessibility features.

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Users improve their skills in using and creating digital learning resources and platforms through access to support and community features.

### Approaches

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- Make Learning Lab compatible with education learning management systems.
- Regularly engage users with supports, strategies, trainings, etc. with a wide variety of approaches.
  - \* Pilot within-platform support approaches, such as real-time coaching, pop-up tutorials, etc.
- Conduct evaluations to continually improve audience experiences.
- Audit platforms for accessibility and develop strategies for improving access for more users.
- Establish central technical and financial support for ongoing maintenance of platforms.
- Support internal units in addressing their audiences' needs by enhancing Learning Lab features.
  - \* Partner to fund enhancements.
- Sustain and formalize training and support (internal and external) for the platforms as they evolve.
  - \* Train staff on the use of data for decision making.
- Maintain highest industry standards for user privacy and safety.

- Monitor user created content for adherence to Smithsonian Terms of Use and appropriateness to PK–12 audiences.

## Metrics: Learning Lab

### Increase registered users.

Target:

- 100,000 registered users

### Increase traffic.

Targets:

- 350,000 visits per year
- 5 million page views per year

### Increase user satisfaction.

Target:

- based on to-be-determined baseline

### Increase engagement.

Targets:

- 30% of registered users create content
- 10% increase in repeat visitation

### Increase pan-Institutional support for Lab development.

Targets:

- increased unit-level grant support for feature development
- maintenance fully centrally supported

### Press and recognition for Lab's value, quality, and impact in education.

## Metrics: Education Data Gathering and Evaluation (EDGE)<sup>1</sup>

### Increase the number of units that use data.

Target:

- 90% of the units with educational offerings

<sup>1</sup>The EDGE platform, managed by the Center, is used to aggregate data about education programs and offerings from across the Institution in order to inform decision making.

## Priority 3: Contribute knowledge to improve practices in museum education and digital technology.

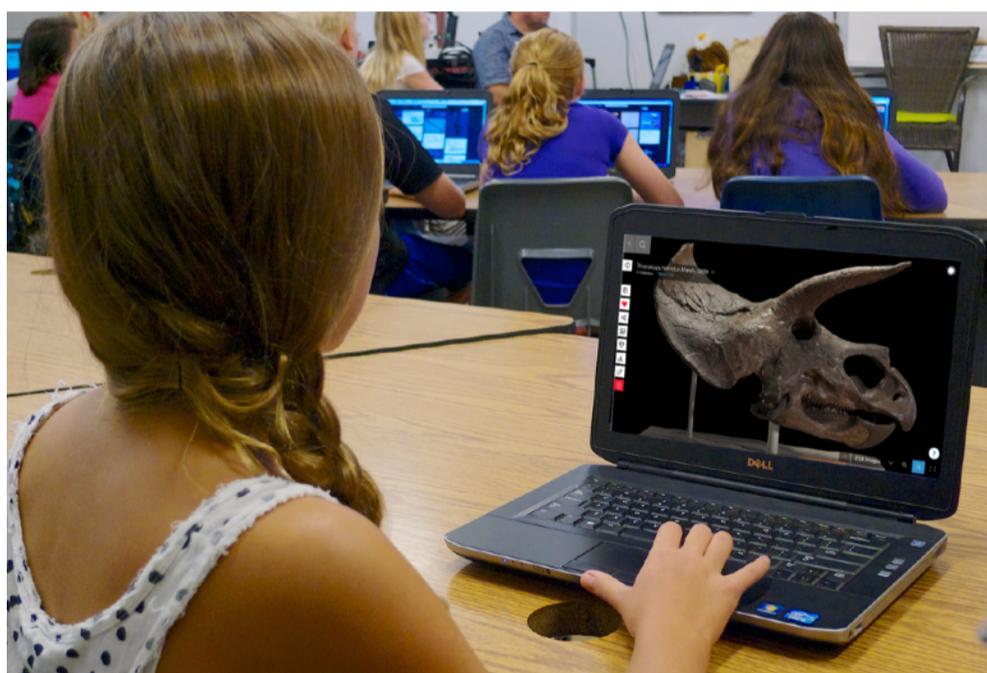
### Goals

Smithsonian educators consistently use research and data to improve their practice and influence decision-making.

Smithsonian collections managers and curators use research to improve descriptive information for Smithsonian collections and resources that is educationally oriented and accessible to the learner.

### Approaches

- Expand the functionality of existing dashboards and develop unit-level<sup>2</sup> dashboards for collecting and reporting data on educational offerings and use of digital resources and collections.
- Conduct metrics pilot(s), coach and communicate findings with units, and develop relevant features into platform.
- Train staff on the use of data and evaluation processes for decision making.
- Capture and communicate models and methods used by units through documentation of experiences, stories, case studies, and research.
- Sustain and formalize training and support (internal and external) for the educational uses of digital resources and platforms.
- Seek and create opportunities for Smithsonian educators to co-develop content and reach broader audiences through strategic collaborations.



The Center's ultimate goal is to ensure students can use the millions of resources available from the Smithsonian to develop knowledge and skills for life.

<sup>2</sup>"Unit" refers to an individual Smithsonian museum, research center, or other office.

- Identify Smithsonian partners for piloting the development of educationally oriented metadata and conduct research to understand the characteristics of highly accessible metadata.
  - \* Pilot metadata modification or new metadata generation.
  - \* Advocate best practices for impact-driven digitization and metadata generation.
- Incentivize exemplary education achievement and innovation through recognition, awards, publicity, and publishing opportunities.
- Facilitate dialogues with target audiences to inform senior leadership on topics essential to the Smithsonian.

## Metrics

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### Sustained pan-Institutional unit-level EDGE data input.

Target:

- More than 90%
- 

### Adoption of reach/engagement/impact (and future) evaluation metrics.

Target:

- 100% of the Smithsonian units with educational offerings
- 

### Internal stakeholders trained on educational platforms and methods.

Targets:

- All units have access to training opportunities quarterly
  - Trainings are aligned with need and are consistently highly rated
- 

### Unit-level participation in educational metadata pilots

Target:

- 3 units

# Summary

For 40 years, the Center has created learning experiences for teachers and students. However, recent innovations in digital technology have transformed the landscape—from the extraordinary level of access to museum resources, to the ability of learners and educators to personalize the learning experience, to the demand upon educators and the Center to ensure the learning experience is deep and meaningful.

The Center is committed to offering deep and rich digital learning experiences and to supporting educators (within the Smithsonian and beyond) in their quest to provide the highest quality digital education experiences. In fulfilling these responsibilities, the Center will foster deeper learning through the effective use of Smithsonian digital resources; sustain and evolve dependable digital

platforms to access, create, deliver, and improve educational experiences; and contribute knowledge to improve practices in museum education and digital technology.

Through research and collaboration with the education community, and by encouraging and supporting the creative use of museum resources, the Center strives to deepen and enrich learning, so that educators everywhere cultivate curious, skillful, and engaged digital citizens.

The screenshot shows a digital learning lab interface. At the top, there's a search icon and a sun icon. The title 'Fabulous Fabrics' is prominently displayed. Below the title, there are buttons for 'Unpublish' and 'Edit Collection', along with icons for sharing, liking, and other actions. The creator's name 'Jean-Marie Galing' is shown, along with statistics: '1 Favorite' and '1 Copy (view)'. The design is categorized as '+1' and the age level is 'Primary (5 to 8 years old)'. A brief description reads: 'Use images to introduce a stamp-printing lesson with primary students. Observe selected images and discuss...'. Below this, there are four bullet points: 'What shapes or lines do you see?', 'Which fabrics have repeat patterns?', 'Which fabrics have alternating patterns?', and 'What could the fabric be used for...'. A 'Read More' link is also present. The main content area is a grid of 24 images showing various fabric patterns, including floral, geometric, and plaid designs, as well as photographs of people wearing patterned clothing. At the bottom of the interface, there is a footer with the Smithsonian Learning Lab logo, navigation links (About, Help, Contact Us, Updates, Terms of Use, Privacy, Kids Online Privacy Statement), and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. There are also icons for FERPA and COPPA compliance.

This educator-created Learning Lab collection for elementary students uses textiles from the Archives of American Art; the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; and the National Museum of American History to inspire students' own pattern making.



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