

SAN DIEGO
HISTORY
CENTER

ENGINEERING
FUN!
KIDS FRIENDLY
SANDCASTLES

History
People
PAST
Community
SPORTS
PRESENT
ART
Culture
FUTURE
SAN DIEGO
HISTORY
CENTER

MOPA
THE SAN DIEGO
MUSEUM OF ART
DANIELA VIGORE
MUSEUM

Casa de Balboa
The former residence of Commodore John D. Sloat, the first American to capture San Diego from the Spanish, this historic home is now a museum. It features original furnishings and a collection of artifacts from the early days of the city's history.

San Diego History Center REIMAGINED

Our case to elevate, sustain, and celebrate San Diego's History, Art, Innovation, Sports, Community, and Culture.



A new inviting entryway creating connection to visitors on The Prado.



Our vision is bold and future-focused.

Picture a place where you are able to step into the life of San Diego, where history and landscapes converge, and where the past meets the present. A place where community voices are elevated and stories and moments are shared. A place where history is revealed, and the future is imagined.

Through interactive exhibits, engaging programming, archival collections, and unique experiences, the new History Center will celebrate what makes San Diego home.

Why now?

San Diego lacks a permanent exhibit focused on its history and the time is now to embark on this fundamental transformation. Our goal is to unlock a museum experience that represents all of us—a place where San Diegans and visitors of all ages can come together to celebrate history, cultures, and community. By understanding our past and connecting it to our present and future, we can contribute to a healthy, vibrant, and inclusive community, and give voice to these stories every day.

Join us as we reimagine the San Diego History Center as a place that reflects the multi-faceted San Diego community, brings our history to life, and helps shape our future. Together, let's build a place worthy of America's Finest City.

IMAGINE

A new experience in the heart of Balboa Park – that connects San Diegans to our shared past and honors and celebrates those who have made our region the 8th largest city in the nation.

A new History Center in the heart of San Diego, one that goes beyond just preserving history but also brings it to life.

A new interactive and inclusive experience that educates and inspires San Diego residents and visitors alike.

The San Diego History Center has been the premier custodian, keeper, protector, and steward of all things San Diego since 1928. Our founders had the foresight to create an institution that could evolve with the community, and now, as we approach our centennial, we are re-imagining what our museum must include to remain relevant in the twenty-first century.



OUR STORY

A BRIEF HISTORY

The San Diego History Center, founded as the San Diego Historical Society in 1928, has always been the catalyst for preserving and promoting the history of the San Diego region.

Founded by a group of civic-minded citizens, the Junípero Serra Museum was built to house the institution on Presidio Hill, site of the founding of San Diego. In 1982, the Historical Society moved its collections and museum to Balboa Park, maintaining the Serra as an auxiliary museum and educational center. In 2010, the institution was renamed the San Diego History Center.



THE SAN DIEGO HISTORY CENTER TODAY

Today, San Diego is one of the most dynamic, culturally rich, and innovative regions in the U.S. At the San Diego History Center, we make history interesting and fun and seek to engage audiences of all ages in revealing how the past has shaped the San Diego of today and set the stage for the important discussions about where we as a community are heading in the future.

Preserving and promoting the history of the San Diego region for over 96 years, the San Diego History Center is a Smithsonian Affiliate and one of the oldest and largest historical organizations on the West Coast, in addition to being one of the few historical institutions in the U.S dedicated to serving a major metropolitan region. No other institution is solely devoted to preserving San Diego's collective history and enhancing community identity.

The History Center is a lifelong learning center for all members of our community, providing outstanding educational programs for schoolchildren and enriching programs for families and adults. Our Research Archives serve residents, scholars, students, and researchers both onsite and online. The San Diego History Center's online websites, with rich and deep historical content, access to search the archive and online image library, and educational and exhibition content, are a resource to a worldwide audience that measures more than one million interactions annually.

The History Center operates facilities in two National Historic Districts: The San Diego History Center and Research Archives in Balboa Park, and the Junipero Serra Museum in Presidio Park.



The History Center is critical to our community's wellbeing because we:

- + Provide context to who we are as a region
- + Preserve our shared history
- + Encourage people to connect to place
- + Invite people to see themselves contributing to history
- + Bridge the past to today and the future
- + Develop better citizens

Our Mission

Our mission is to preserve our region's history and connect people with our shared past through preserving, educating, and promoting the rich and diverse stories of the San Diego community. By understanding our past and connecting it to our present and future, we contribute to a healthy, vibrant, and inclusive community.

Our Vision

To be a vibrant community resource treasured locally and respected internationally whereby our region's history is shared through diverse stories that inspire us and celebrate what makes the San Diego region unique.

Our Values

HISTORY BELONGS TO ALL OF US

Our history should be a shared experience that is reflective of many individual cultures, ethnicities, and communities. The institution is focused on greater inclusivity, authentic engagement with a multiplicity of constituencies, and shared authority.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY

History helps us make sense of and provide context to what happened in the past and illuminates an informed and empathetic path forward.

OUR ROLE AS A HISTORY MUSEUM

As a history museum we have the responsibility to embrace both the good and bad of the past and to create new relationships and civic dialogues that help alleviate social inequality.



SAN DIEGO HISTORY CENTER:

REIMAGINED

The San Diego History Center has occupied its Balboa Park location since 1981. Despite its desirable location and sound structure, the museum is dated, worn, and in need of capital investment. Lacking are the physical improvements, digital and AI technology, and other advancements and experiences demanded by today's and tomorrow's visitors.

In 2019 we developed an interpretive master plan which included over 90 hours of community input. This plan, coupled with a 2023 planning study involving over 300 individuals, is guiding our redesign planning process.

Our transformed Balboa Park museum will be one that you will want to visit - as each visit is unique and tailored to you. As you explore with family and friends you will discover and celebrate what makes San Diego unique.

Join us as we embark on this bold transformation of the institution and our Balboa Park museum and Research Archives.



Our Reimagined Museum Will:

FOSTER A VIBRANT COMMUNITY

Connect the past and present, using history to inform our future. Celebrate the unique experiences and cultures that define the San Diego region.

EDUCATE AND INSPIRE

Delight in a permanent, world-class exhibition filled with unique programs for lifelong learning that highlight our region's distinctive character.

PRIORITIZE ACCESSIBILITY

Physical improvements include opening all three museum levels and adding high ceilings to enhance the visitor experience. Donation-based admissions and reduced fees help to remove financial barriers and ensuring everyone can participate in our shared history.

PRESERVE OUR HERITAGE

Safeguard and make accessible San Diego's past for future generations through sound and state of the art preservation practices.





OUR NEW MUSEUM WITH COMMUNITY-INFORMED

1 NEW SAN DIEGO EXPERIENCE

People, communities, and place make San Diego unique. Our new permanent exhibit will explore our region's diverse shared histories by examining the people, communities, experiences, innovations, and stories that have helped elevate San Diego to world-class status.

Features of the permanent exhibit will include:

Stepping Into Life of San Diego

A dramatic mixed-media feature anchors the entry atrium, bridging free and ticketed spaces while inviting visitors to explore San Diego's rich history. Featuring artifacts, visual, audio, and interactive displays.

Our Shared Home

An immersive experience that orients visitors to our region by using historical maps and geological insights to transport visitors through San Diego's history and its evolution. This monumental installation will share stories of water resources, isolation, city planning, transportation, migration, and much more.

Becoming San Diego

This largest core exhibit gallery traces the evolution of our region by spotlighting its people, communities, and built environments created through time, place, and story. *The Timeline* feature allows visitors to explore an array of formative moments, forces, and events in San Diego history. *Our Experiences* invites visitors to be fully enveloped by imagery and audio, creating an intimate, sensory-rich experience showcasing times and places unique to San Diego. *Our Stories* includes an iconic tower composed of multiple images of people, celebrating contemporary storytelling and the diverse voices of San Diegans.





ENHANCEMENTS WILL INCLUDE:

2 ADDITIONAL MUSEUM ENHANCEMENTS

Enriched Educational Offerings and Expanded Classrooms

Enhance learning with interactive K-12 programs, field trips, virtual experiences, and classroom outreach, all amplified by our upgrades and new exhibits.

San Diego Fine Art Gallery

A permanent free art gallery to showcase premier San Diego art and artists.

Expanded Community Spaces

Transform spaces into classrooms by day and community hubs by night, fostering collaborations with previously excluded organizations.

Taste San Diego

A culinary experience featuring the creativity of San Diego's finest chefs and food producers.

Enhanced Archive Experience

Utilize contemporary technologies like digitization and AI multimedia to make our vast collections more accessible, while continuing to preserve our region's history.

State-of-the-Art Theater and Presentation Capabilities

An enhanced state-of-the-art theater will provide for cutting-edge technology and presentation and viewing experiences.

History Lab

The History Lab gallery offers an engaging, hands-on space designed for families, younger learners, and curious visitors of all ages. Visitors can uncover the tools and processes historians use to study the past while actively engaging with the SDHC's collections, stories, and expertise.

Innovations: Anticipating the Future

Celebrating San Diego's unique role in changing the world through innovation, this gallery positions innovation as an enduring act of anticipating, preparing for, and shaping a shared future.

Improved Physical Accessibility

Eliminate barriers and better connect what is inside the museum to visitors outside. We will increase internal accessibility for the first time by connecting all three levels within the museum space.

FUNDING THE VISION:

INVESTING TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE SAN DIEGO'S RICH HISTORY

Join us in preserving and celebrating the vibrant history of San Diego while creating an inclusive and accessible place that showcases the essence of our beloved home.

The San Diego History Center needs your support to transform this vision into a reality. With your help, we can undertake much-needed renovations and enhanced visitor experience that will bring our story to life.

Your support will also establish an impact fund, providing financial flexibility and durability to advance our mission. In addition to ensuring our viability, this support will further reduce barriers for visitors to experience our museum by offering reduced fees and greater accessibility.

We appreciate your consideration of investing in this important campaign for San Diego and all San Diegans. Your support will change our history.



THANK YOU

FROM ALL OF US

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THANK YOU

We appreciate your consideration of investing in this important campaign for San Diego and all San Diegans. Your support will change our history.

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Note: Architectural renderings are initial concepts only and subject to change.

San Diego History Center | Case for Support | Version 02/2025

