



DESERT  
DISCOVERY  
CENTER

SCOTTSDALE

**MISSION STATEMENT**

*Educate and inspire  
a global audience  
to value, thrive in,  
and conserve desert  
environments through  
transformative  
experiences based  
on scientific studies  
in Scottsdale's  
McDowell Sonoran  
Preserve and  
from around  
the world*

**DESERT DISCOVERY CENTER**

**Project Definition Summary**

Thinc Design, the Desert Discovery Center experience designer, has presented its initial Project Definition Report. This includes concepts being explored to implement the community's vision for this integrated education and research center to be located at the Gateway to Scottsdale's McDowell Sonoran Preserve. Based on the idea that we protect what we love and love what we know, the Desert Discovery Center represents the final piece of the ultimate Preserve vision – to educate and inspire long-term stewardship by educating our next generation of conservationists.



## A SENSE OF PLACE

At its heart, the mission of the Desert Discovery Center Scottsdale is to inspire the current and especially future generations to take up the challenge and claim the future in the spirit of possibility: our future and the future of this planet. We start with the idea that we protect what we love, and love what we know. In the Center, experiences that excite us, rouse emotions, provoke reactions, awaken our senses and make us feel differently can inspire a shift in perspective with enduring impact. Stirring our imaginations and emotional responses can lead to deeply felt connections with ideas and the surrounding landscape. This is the transformative potential of a visit to the Center.

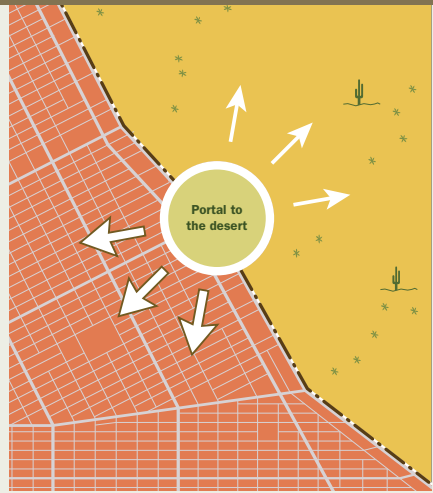
The experience is grounded in a “sense of place” that starts with a surprising lens on the location of the Center itself. Views into the Preserve are further delineated by the variety of biomes: rocky mountainous outcrops, lush riparian washes and shrub-filled valleys. The breadth of desert life—not limited to wildlife but rather encompassing the local urban and natural environments—is the beginning of the story and the opening for exploring potential futures of coexistence and wellbeing.

Locating the experience within the boundary of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve also demonstrates the Center’s mandate: to reflect and develop the commitment that started the Preserve in the first place, and grow it into a 21st-century version for responsible investment in future generations: from preservation to sustainability.

Being in this place can establish a connection to the landscape as part of a journey that stirs us to see it differently—as a part of *who we are* and ourselves as a part of *what it is*. This is the potential of experiencing the Center as a gateway to the Preserve, and this is why the Preserve is the right place for the Center.

The Desert Discovery Center is positioned to inspire generations of local residents and tourists to see the desert with a fresh perspective: not as a separate, uninhabited landscape, but as the ground beneath our feet. As an environment that people live in, everyday, with many fellow species, and share in the supply of water and air. A place that inspires us to meet the challenges of the environment with both research and creativity.

*Located at the edge of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, the Center offers views in all directions to the spectrum of “living in the desert:” the natural environment, the suburban streets and visible in the southwest distance, the city.*



**Proposed: Time Windows**



# ASPIRATIONS FOR THE DESERT DISCOVERY CENTER

**Inspire future generations to preserve and protect**— the story of the Preserve is an invitation to see the potential and value of local preservation, at all scales, and it will inspire local pride and ownership that will grow stewardship in current and future generations

**Educate**— alignments with STEM and STEAM frameworks will inform the design concepts and exhibits, supporting the educational mandate of the Center

**Build anticipation for exploration**— an experience that stirs people’s imagination, curiosity and sense of discovery...for many, it will be their first exposure to the real desert

**Show people the “world of the desert”**— the desert cannot be seen in a day or on a single hike...there are things happening below the surface and inside plants that most of us cannot see, as well as off-trail locations where species are known to congregate or ancient sites with petroglyphs that must stay undisturbed

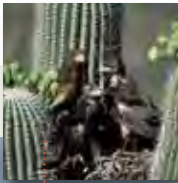
**Support tourism**— many people seek experiences that connect them with the “real place”: authentic knowledge, cultural practices and activities...the Center is ideally placed to align with the strategy of the Scottsdale Tourism Advisory Task Force’s long-term plan for interpretation on the climate and ecology of the desert

**Be inclusive**— design planning will address accessibility for all visitors, including experiences that can replicate some of how the desert “feels” for those who cannot have a direct encounter

**Be a model of sustainable design and practice**— in its architecture and exhibit design, the Center should be sensitive to the landscape and create the least amount of visual interruptions and impact on the environment...the eventual size of the Center has been of particular concern and we should aim to define its size in terms of what is needed to achieve the mission and economic and environmental viability...in its operations, the Center should follow practices for sustainable cohabitation with neighboring residents, including traffic and parking management

## How Do We?

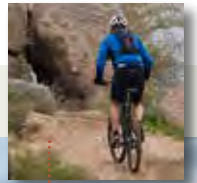
*Learn from Nature*



*Learn from our past*



*Enjoy the desert*



*Reveal the cycles of the seasons and how species respond*



*Explore responsive design that is beautiful and expresses our creative potential*



*Harvest the desert*

# REVEAL THE DESERT: FOUR QUESTIONS

## Small Footprint, Big Vision

The concept “living in the desert” suggests peeling back the layers of the local environment, and the history, myths and assumptions about the desert to reveal its variance, dynamism and potential.

For instance, many aspects of the Sonoran ecological system are not easily visible or visible all the time. There are few but dramatic climate events. There is also a record of both natural history—including geology—and human history that laid the foundation for understanding the place and how people live and have lived there, including how the indigenous huhugam (ancestors of the O’odham) sheltered, harvested resources, and thrived as desert inhabitants.

Questions (1) and (2) place a lens on the Preserve, the Sonoran and locally focused research. (3) and (4) include a global perspective, whilst maintaining local examples to showcase Scottsdale and Phoenix as desert cities that can share research and practices for smart desert living with other places in the world. At the heart of this proposition is the reminder that human habitation in the desert is not limited to the past nor is the desert limited to the natural environment: Scottsdale and Phoenix are as much part of the desert as is the Preserve.

Current research informs all parts of this storyline, from life sciences to sustainable urbanization and human physiological responses to the sound of water, for example. Why does the desert appear to inspire such a wealth of emotional and creative responses? How have its species inspired biomimic design? The breadth of research suggests a unique trans-disciplinary approach that is progressive and world leading. The following notes outline the potential range of content under each of these questions but are not limited to a single experience or exhibit.

### CONCEPT

- 1. What is this place?**
- 2. What don’t we see?**
- 3. What can we learn from living in the desert?**
- 4. What future do we want to create?**



**Respond to the desert**



**Make homes**



**Design for sustainable desert living**



**Reveal climate events**



**Express our relationship with the desert**



**Understand and harvest the flow of water into the land**



## HOW DO WE TELL THE STORY?

**Sensory Experiences**— to accentuate our reactions and awareness of light/shade, temperature, sounds and smells of the desert

**Transitional Spaces**— linking outdoors and indoors, inviting people to take in the beauty of their surroundings

**Pause Points and Whisper Galleries**— resting spots that encourage people to stay and witness changes, enclosures that allow guests to pick up on subtle sounds

**Teaching Spaces**— allowing for a variety of teaching styles, dedicated teaching lab, pop-up teaching experiences, Arizona State University demonstrations, seminars, symposia

**Time Windows**— “windows” that showcase a given spot at various points in time and space: 12 hours ago, three nights ago, the last rainy season, etc.

**Digital Sandbox**— using kinect sensors and projectors, providing a topographical map allowing visitors to sculpt and re-sculpt the sound

**Micro/Macro Experiences**— allowing visitors to speed up, slow down, zoom in and zoom out

**Views to the City**— giving perspective on the Desert Discovery Center sitting at the urban edge to the Preserve



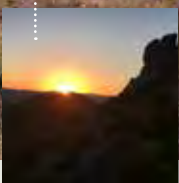
*Respond to climate change*



*Reveal what people may not always see*



*Build smart cities in deserts*



*Attune ourselves to the environment*



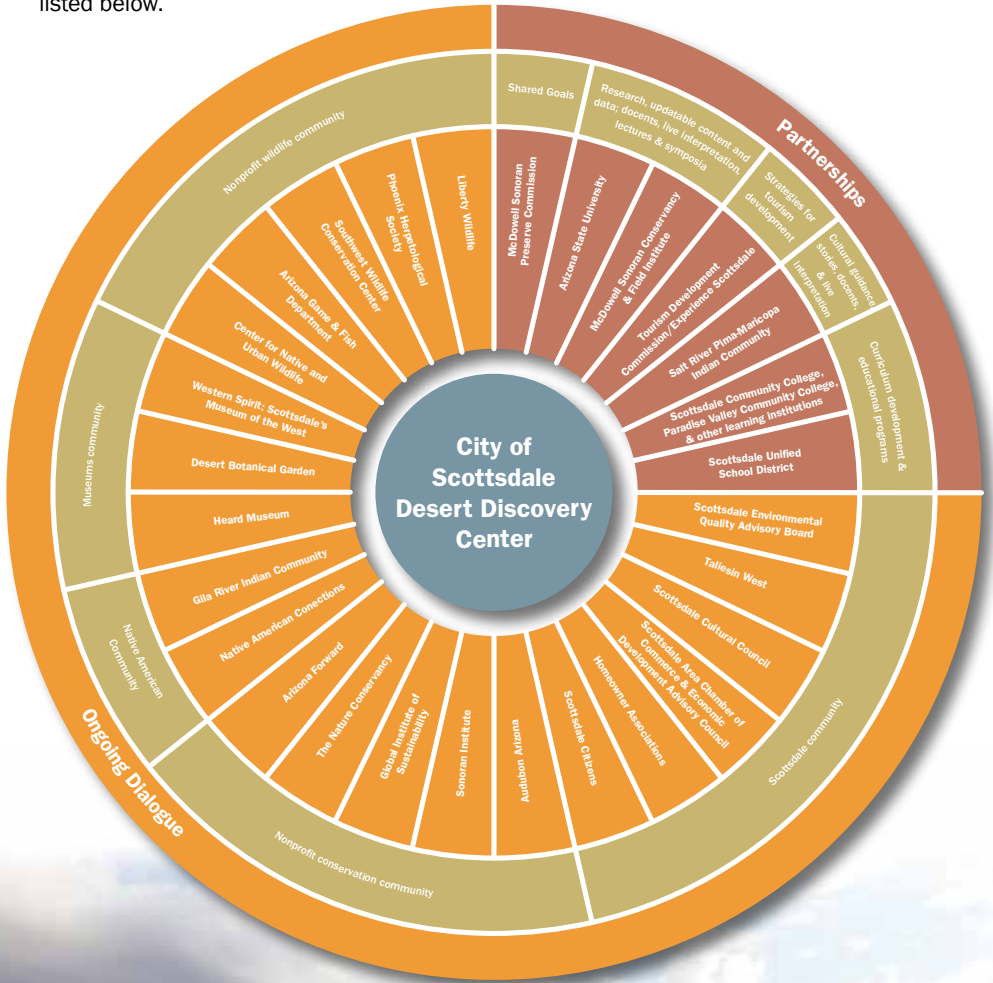
*See everything that happens here*



*Thrive and love the desert*

# COLLABORATION

The City of Scottsdale Desert Discovery Center will be a hub for local organizations that will collectively provide a wealth of research, knowledge and practical assistance for the operations of the Center. Many of the partners will also play a critical role in the design process itself. Over August and September 2016 the Thinc Team met with and garnered input from the organizations listed below.



*The Desert Discovery Center is positioned to inspire generations of local residents and tourists to see the desert with a fresh perspective: not as a separate, uninhabited landscape, but as the ground beneath our feet*

The Desert Discovery Center Scottsdale's board of directors, staff and consultants are committed to a Desert Discovery Center that rests on a small footprint and delivers on a big vision. Visit our website to review the entire Project Definition Report.

