

Fitchburg Art Museum Strategic Plan, 2016-2020

Approved by the Board of Trustees of the Fitchburg Art Museum
March 17, 2016

Strategic Plan Steering Committee

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Introduction

This five-year institutional strategic plan, which includes new mission and vision statements and a declaration of foundational principles, has been designed to meet the overarching goals of the Trustees and administration of the Fitchburg Art Museum: to be vital in our exhibitions and programs, to emphasize education, to embrace community service, to align with best professional practices, and to insure our sustainability. In brief, this plan is the foundation for this Museum's health and relevance as we move further into the 21st century.

This plan is ambitious but achievable: it links our aspirations to the Museum's demonstrated strengths and considerations of sustainability inform every articulated objective. FAM has forged strategic partnerships with other institutions – especially Fitchburg State University and New Vue Communities (formerly the Twin Cities Community Development Corporation) – to advance mutual goals. While work towards many of the objectives and action items in the plan is already well underway, many new initiatives will only be made possible by increasing both staff capacity and fundraising. This will involve a modest increase to our operating budget, and aggressive work to identify and secure major project support. We are confident that wise leadership, hard work, and prudent choices will enable the Museum to fully implement this plan.

Many strategic plans for museums reflect the traditional organization of museum departments: goals are written specifically for Education, Development, Curatorial, Marketing, etc. The goals in FAM's strategic plan look outward or across/among departments. This approach recognizes that this Museum exists to serve people and the community and that our institutional goals can only be achieved with the coordination and cooperation of all departments, especially given our small professional staff.

This plan was carefully crafted over the bulk of calendar year 2015. Significant input was received from FAM Trustees, Advisors, Members, staff, docents, volunteers, key external stakeholders, museum professionals, educators, artists, and community members via multiple interviews, retreats, meetings, and focus groups. Members of the Strategic Plan Steering Committee carefully listened to the concerns and desires of hundreds of individuals who care deeply about the Fitchburg Art Museum and its place in the City of Fitchburg and in the North Central Massachusetts region. The Committee, with the guidance of planning consultant Laura Roberts, then distilled and prioritized all this information, and wrote the final Strategic Plan.

Mission

The Fitchburg Art Museum is a catalyst for learning, creativity, and community building. We accomplish this mission with art historical collections and exhibitions, special exhibitions of contemporary New England art, education programs, public art projects, community partnerships, and creative economy initiatives.

Vision

All decisions, initiatives, projects, and programs at the Fitchburg Art Museum reflect our commitment to education and the greater community.

Foundational Principles

- We believe in the transformative power of direct, personal engagement with art.
- Art is a fundamental form of human intelligence and expression, an essential component in the core development of children and in lifelong learning for adults.
- FAM's collections, exhibitions, and interpretive philosophy present unique educational opportunities to connect the past with the present and to provide global cultural perspectives.
- The art of our time in New England needs and deserves a first class venue for exhibition and exploration.
- FAM plays a critical role in the creative economy of North Central Massachusetts.

Strategic Goal I

Every visitor to FAM will discover meaningful and personal ways to engage with art.

Objectives

I. Enhance our service and accessibility to all visitors.

Actions

Provide customer/visitor service and exhibition content training to front-line staff to help enable a seamless experience for museum visitors.

Improve information delivery and wayfinding with clear signage.

Redesign the Simonds Building second floor elevator lobby.

Enhance accessibility for visitors with physical, cognitive, and linguistic challenges.

Continue to provide interpretive and educational information free of museum and academic jargon.

Provide substantial access to information about FAM's permanent collection on our web site.

2. Create an explicitly educational environment throughout the Museum.

Actions

Continue to provide Learning Lounges and interpretive materials for all ages throughout the Museum to accompany both permanent collection and New England contemporary art exhibitions.

Design and implement bilingual universal branding/signage for in-gallery educational materials, programs, and activities.

Explore and implement appropriate uses of technology for information delivery and interpretation.

Develop new family/intergenerational learning programs.

Recruit and train new docents, and maintain the excellence of this program.

3. Improve and expand upon our program of art-making classes and workshops for children and adults.

Actions

Conduct market research and develop/implement a marketing plan for classes and workshops.

Update studio facilities and equipment.

Strategic Goal 2

FAM will partner with educational institutions and civic leaders to create and sustain a livable and vibrant city and region for residents and visitors.

Objectives

- I. Provide educational enrichment to elementary and secondary school students.

Actions

Research, pilot, fund, and implement a free arts-based after school program for Fitchburg students.

Continue to secure funding for public school field trips to FAM.

Working with teachers, develop teacher training programs and resource materials based on FAM collections and exhibitions.

With school administrators, devise methods to deliver information about FAM exhibitions and programs to area schools.

Continue to serve the administration, faculty, and students at Fitchburg's McKay Arts Academy (K-8), as per the Memorandum of Understanding between the Fitchburg Art Museum and the McKay Arts Academy (November 21, 2013).

Continue the Community Gallery, and encourage local public and private schools to participate.

2. Continue to strengthen our relationship with Fitchburg State University, as articulated in the Memorandum of Agreement between Fitchburg State University and the Fitchburg Art Museum (April 29, 2015).

Actions

Continue to develop a strong and positive working relationship with the Fitchburg State University President and leadership.

Further develop action items in the Memorandum of Agreement "to directly benefit Fitchburg State students and FAM audiences, as well as communities in the City of Fitchburg and North Central Massachusetts."

3. To more inclusively serve our community, continue outreach to individuals, families, and organizations in the diverse communities in our region.

Actions

Complete the Bilingual Museum Initiative by translating texts in the Ancient Egypt Gallery.

Create Spanish language printed informational and educational materials.

Work with the United Neighbors of Fitchburg (formerly the Cleghorn Neighborhood Association), and other organizations, on collaborative cultural and educational programs.

Exhibit and collect artworks by Latino artists in New England.

Recruit museum staff, volunteers, and FAM Trustees from the diverse communities in our region.

4. Partner with New Vue Communities to help create a campus of affordable artist live/work space in the B.F. Brown building and adjacent properties.

Actions

Engage in advocacy for the project.

Help to develop a marketing plan for prospective artist/tenants.

Work with architects on project design.

Devise system to vet artists.

5. Continue to support appropriate creative economy and economic development efforts in Fitchburg and North Central Massachusetts.

Actions

Partner with MassCreative, the Fitchburg Plan, and other organizations to educate and advocate for arts, culture, and the creative economy.

Institute and lead a Creative Economy Task Force to support economic redevelopment in Fitchburg.

Work with the Fitchburg Cultural Alliance to create a downtown cultural district in Fitchburg.

Initiate a series of exhibitions of New England contemporary art that reflect this region's industrial history (Fitchburg/paper, Leominster/plastics, Gardner/furniture).

Strategic Goal 3

FAM will preserve, expand, and actively exhibit our permanent collection.

Objectives

- I. Fully update and professionalize the planning, documentation, and care of our permanent collection.

Actions

Complete the accurate and precise digital and paper documentation of the permanent collection.

Conduct a full location and condition inventory of the permanent collection.

Prioritize and maintain the position of collection manager, and expand this position to Collection Curator/Registrar.

Update Collection Management Policy.

Update Collection Plan to focus on the strengths of our permanent collection: American Art, African Art, and photography.

2. Improve the overall condition of FAM's permanent collection with professional storage, maintenance, and conservation.

Actions

Conduct planning, research, and design for comprehensive climate-controlled on-site storage for the entire permanent collection, with room for expansion.

Clean out and reorganize the Simonds Building basement.

Make final determinations about the disposition and disposal of unaccessioned objects.

Design and implement comprehensive climate-controlled on-site storage for the entire permanent collection, with room for expansion.

Begin a process to repair, conserve, or de-accession damaged artworks.

3. Organize vibrant and changing exhibitions of artworks from our permanent collection.

Actions

Create changing exhibitions of American Art, African Art, and photography to educate students and the general public about art, art history, the humanities, visual literacy, 21st century skills, and appropriate subjects from other disciplines.

Create changing exhibitions that bring together historical artworks from the permanent collection with artworks by contemporary New England artists to create unique educational opportunities by directly connecting the past with the present.

Acquire works of art in support of permanent collection exhibitions.

Strategic Goal 4

FAM will work with our extensive network of artists in New England to distinguish and strengthen the Museum and its mission.

Objectives

1. The exhibition of artworks by contemporary New England artists will remain a major component of FAM's curatorial program.

Actions

Continue to program the upstairs galleries of the Simonds Building with exhibitions of contemporary New England art, including the annual *Regional Exhibition of Art & Craft*.

Acquire appropriate artworks by New England artists for the Permanent Collection.

Continue to work with classes at Fitchburg State University to create exhibition catalogues and other educational and marketing materials.

Exhibit or commission outdoor sculpture, and works of community-based public art from New England artists.

Aggressively market FAM's commitment to the New England visual arts community.

2. FAM staff will remain active participants in the New England arts, culture, and museum communities.

Actions

Participate in art juries, symposia, grant award panels, professional conferences, networking, etc.

Collaborate with other arts institutions.

Strategic Goal 5

FAM will strengthen and expand our service to audiences in North Central Massachusetts, greater Boston and beyond.

Objectives

1. Seek to increase visitation and support from outside North Central Massachusetts, particularly in Boston, MetroWest, Worcester, and New Hampshire's Monadnock Region.

Actions

Formalize efforts to understand our audience and use data to inform decision making.

Direct advertising and social media to these markets.

Work with New England artists and galleries to increase FAM visibility in these markets.

Collaborate with regional tourism programs and initiatives.

2. The Museum's brand must reflect FAM's new mission and vision, and its vitality in the 21st century.

Actions

Pilot a full FAM rebranding with the Communications/Media Department at Fitchburg State University.

Fully re-brand FAM, with a new logo.

Design and implement a new website.

Utilize emerging social media outlets.

Create comprehensive print collateral.

Replace and improve directional signage along street approaches.

Strategic Goal 6

FAM will further improve the responsible, accountable, and well-managed stewardship of all our assets.

Objectives

1. Strengthen and diversify our financial position and management by investing in a professional fundraising office to significantly increase philanthropic contributions and grants in support of this five-year Strategic Plan.

Actions

Hire appropriate staff.

Purchase necessary software and equipment.

Invest in fundraising program and activities.

Plan and implement a comprehensive fundraising strategy.

2. Increase and diversify other revenue streams.

Actions

Expand and improve Corporate, Individual, and Family Membership Programs.

Expand and improve retail operation.

Expand event rental income by developing a business plan and marketing strategy and materials.

3. Increase staff capacity to operate the museum in accordance with professional standards and best practices, and to carry out the initiatives in this five-year Strategic Plan.

Actions

Maintain competitive compensation and benefits.

Invest in professional development.

Hire/establish the following staff positions:

- Director of Development (FT)
- Development Associate (FT) to upgrade current Development Assistant (PT)
- Education Assistant (FT) or Education Fellow (FT, annual stipend)
- Collection Curator/Registrar (FT) to upgrade current Collection Manager (PT)
- Museum Preparator/Technician (PT)

4. Strengthen our leadership.

Actions

Continue to recruit multi-talented Trustees who are committed to our mission, connected with like-minded individuals, and possessed of sufficient financial capacity.

Continue to expand the diversity of the Board of Trustees to represent the people of North Central Massachusetts, Worcester, MetroWest, and the Monadnock Region.

Create a cohesive and practical purpose and program for the Board of Advisors.

5. Maintain the physical integrity, function, and appearance of our entire campus.

Actions

Institute an annual documented review of current, imminent, and forecasted maintenance, repairs, and upgrades.

Perform maintenance, repairs, and upgrades in a planned and timely manner.

6. Sustain an institutional culture of professionalism, collaboration, mutual support, mentoring, and compassion.

Actions

Update FAM professional policies and procedures.

Update manuals and codes of ethics for personnel, Trustees, and Advisors.

Continue to provide quality internship and fellowship experiences.

Maintain a caring and humane work environment.

7. Consistently review the implementation of this Strategic Plan over the next five years, and revise the Plan as necessary.

Actions

Schedule a regular review of the Strategic Plan and its implementation at business meetings of the Board of Trustees.

Use the Strategic Plan to create annual work plans and evaluations for staff and standing committees.