

Fitchburg Art Museum  
**FY2024-FY2028 Strategic Plan**  
Ratified by the FAM Board of Trustees  
May 15, 2023

## Introduction

We are pleased to present the Fitchburg Art Museum's FY2024-FY2028 Strategic Plan. This Plan reaffirms the mission and direction of FAM over the last decade, while emphasizing the need to sustain and improve our work and meet the challenges of the day.

This Plan is ambitious. We aspire to improve everything here at FAM: our collection, exhibitions, education programs, communications, equity work, financial management, business practice, physical plant, fundraising, partnerships, and community and economic development work. Yet we are mindful of the human and financial resources required and will use this plan to guide and prioritize our work.

We cannot do this successfully without our community. In developing this plan, we listened to our leadership, staff, members, friends, donors, neighbors, artists, and interested public. We heard encouragement to continue as a leader and partner in advancing the arts and culture in Fitchburg and our region. We were also humbled to identify areas for improvement, like self-assessment, communications, and equity work. With this plan, FAM endeavors to reflect and develop, with a spirit of connection and collaboration.

When we say, "FAM is for Everyone," we mean it. Fitchburg is a richly diverse city, with people of many races, ethnicities, incomes, abilities, gender identities, and backgrounds. Everyone is entitled to enjoy FAM, to feel welcome and included here, to join in and co-create our programs, and to help plan and benefit from our work.

## Background

In March of 2016, the Trustees of the Fitchburg Art Museum (FAM) ratified our last five-year strategic plan for calendar years 2016-2020, including new mission and vision statements. In 2020, due to the uncertainties of the pandemic, this plan was extended through 2022 with an addendum of additional goals, objectives, and actions.

The overriding purpose of that last plan was to transform the Museum to reposition FAM for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: to embrace education and community service as fundamental parts of our mission, to center community partnerships in our practice, and to better steward and strengthen our assets.

By all accounts, the implementation of the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan and its Addendum was a great success. We clarified – and grew – our collection by emphasizing our key strengths: American Art, African Art, and photography. We revitalized our changing

exhibition program with a new mission-based focus on the contemporary art of New England. We developed high-impact education programs with multiple partners, especially Fitchburg State University and the Fitchburg Public Schools. We re-branded the Museum with a dynamic new look and logo. We became one of this country's few bilingual art museums for our region's growing Latino community. We worked in partnership with the City of Fitchburg and many other entities to help reposition Fitchburg as the regional center for arts and culture, attracting millions of dollars in investment (including the Fitchburg Arts Community, sixty-eight units of artist-preference affordable housing and studios, right across the street from FAM). We established a Development Department which raised funds to allow our annual operating budget to grow from \$850K to \$1.6M/year and laid the groundwork for future funding, supported by the excellent financial management of our Budget and Finance Committee. We professionalized our business practice and began to diversify both our Staff and Board of Trustees to reflect the makeup of our community. And in a time of great need and trauma occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, we deepened our mission with the Fitchburg Families First program to help with the delivery of basic human needs in our city.

### The New Plan

FAM's FY2024-FY2028 Strategic Plan is designed to build upon the Museum's success over the last seven years, to further improve our mission delivery, and to sustain our good work well into our second century.

We intend to advocate for the arts as an essential component in community health and economic development, and strengthen our position as an anchor institution in Fitchburg and North Central Massachusetts. We will continue to be innovative leader in the museum community. And we will work in partnership with institutions and individuals to provide leadership grounded in compassion, humility, and the desire to improve the quality of life for all the people of our city and our region.

This new five-year Plan is animated not only by the recent transformation of the Museum, but also by the intentions of our founder, Eleanor Norcross. The new plan period roughly coincides with the Museum's centennial (FAM was incorporated in 1925 and opened to the public in 1929), and we look forward to celebrating our 100-year history as an essential part of Fitchburg's history, culture, and identity. American painter and Fitchburg native Eleanor Norcross (1854-1923) provided in her estate money, her own paintings, and the artworks she collected over her forty-year career in Paris to establish an art museum in her beloved hometown. She was motivated to do this by her deeply held value of community service in a life "devoted to others." Like many American philanthropists born in the nineteenth century, she strongly believed that great cities were supported and enhanced by great institutions, and that the fine arts hold a power, both spiritual and practical, to transform and improve the lives of everyday people. Specifically, Eleanor believed that the then-prosperous City of Fitchburg needed an art museum to match its state university and public library, its spectacular architecture and impressive public monuments, and its economic and political

ambitions. She also wanted this art museum to enrich the lives of Fitchburg’s many millworkers – at that time recent immigrants largely from Europe and Canada. Almost one hundred years later, we recommit the work of FAM to align with Eleanor’s ideals.

The FY2024-FY2028 Strategic Plan also reflects lessons learned from a changing country and world. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many of our nation’s financial, social, and political weaknesses. Our country is deeply polarized, and in some places, democracy is under attack. Racial and economic inequities persist, and the movement to address them has taken on a new urgency. As we write this plan, inflation, a challenging labor market, and a possible recession make for an uncertain economic environment. Museums and other arts and culture non-profits are increasingly called upon to respond, and to help. FAM’s work going forward must address these challenges.

Our 2016-2020 Strategic Plan articulated several Foundational Principles, to which we still ascribe. Now, given all that we have learned, we are updating and expanding these principles by articulating the Core Institutional Values of the Fitchburg Art Museum. This Strategic Plan, and its implementation, are guided by these Values, which proceed directly from our Mission:

Mission:

The Mission of the Fitchburg Art Museum is to inspire creativity and learning, and to contribute to the well-being of our diverse communities in Fitchburg, North Central Massachusetts, and New England.

To accomplish this mission, we organize exhibitions of the work of New England contemporary artists and artworks from our art historical collections, offer programs for learners of all ages, support public art projects, invite community participation and partnerships, and stimulate the local creative economy – all in the spirit of inclusivity.

Core Institutional Values:

We believe in the transformative power of direct, personal engagement with art.

Art is a fundamental form of human intelligence, expression, communication, and the built environment; an essential component in the core development of children and in lifelong learning for adults; and a source of meaning and joy.

The arts are essential for healthy communities. FAM is a strong positive local social determinant of health, through our work in education, and community and economic development.

We believe that partnerships within our community are essential to our success. Working collaboratively with our partners, we share resources and decision-making, and we co-create programs.

FAM's staff is a primary asset of this institution. We provide our staff with the support, structure, and training to succeed within a compassionate and equitable workplace.

FAM's collections, exhibitions, and interpretive philosophy present unique educational opportunities to connect people with the past and the present, and to provide multiple cultural perspectives.

We work collaboratively with the artists of our time in New England, who need and deserve an exceptional venue for exhibition and exploration.

Museums provide safe physical, emotional, and cognitive spaces for personal transformation, learning, creativity, self-expression, healing, and connection with self and others.

Museums are essential institutions for promoting and sustaining democracy and a more just and equitable world for all people.

In brief, this new five-year Plan reaffirms our mission and the direction of FAM over the last decade, while stressing the need to find ways to sustain and improve our good work and meet the challenges of the day. Clear communications, expanded fundraising, improved business practice, and strengthened human capacity will all be essential to our success. The Plan calls for multiple sub-plans (collection, education, marketing, development, facilities, Fitchburg Arts Community), which reflect our desire to carefully shape, organize, and integrate our departments and our work. FAM Staff and Trustees will work together to ensure that these sub-plans will be carefully aligned with our Mission and Institutional Core Values.

Certain ongoing goals from the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan and Addendum are included, particularly the completion of the Fitchburg Arts Community project, the digitization and storage of our collection, and the creation of business plans for earned income. Our upcoming centennial will be leveraged for awareness, outreach, and fundraising.

In order for us to faithfully deliver our mission, our Staff and leadership Boards must be populated with people who reflect the demographics of Fitchburg, to do the work and to have a voice in the rooms where our decisions are made. Our ongoing equity work is an institutional priority, and will be conducted with openness, compassion, and transparency.

This plan was carefully crafted over the bulk of calendar year 2022. Significant input was received from FAM Trustees, Community Advisors, individual and corporate members, staff, docents, and a broad array of community members including museum

and other non-profit professionals, educators, artists, philanthropists, business leaders, elected officials, and community partners via multiple interviews, retreats, meetings, and focus groups. This Plan incorporates the concerns and desires of hundreds of individuals who care deeply about the Fitchburg Art Museum and the multiple roles that it plays in the City of Fitchburg, the North Central Massachusetts region, the New England visual arts community, and the national museum field.

The FY2024-FY2028 Strategic Plan is accompanied by a five-year Strategic Financial Plan for internal use. The Strategic Plan, and the Financial Plan will now synch with our fiscal year, which begins July 1. Thus, the effective calendar dates for this plan are July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2028.

All of the goals, objectives, and action items in the Plan are mutually reinforcing, and their order and numeration imply neither priority nor hierarchy. Everything in the Plan is important and will guide the work of the Fitchburg Art Museum over the next five years. Also, for brevity's sake, action items which could reasonably appear in support of multiple objectives are cited only once, and there is no complicated cross-referencing.

Ratified by the Board of Trustees of the Fitchburg Art Museum, June 15, 2023

## **Strategic Plan Steering Committee**

### Trustees

Robert Gallo, Chair  
Nadine Price, President  
Holly Elissa Bruno  
Daniela Rivera  
Susan Roetzer  
Susan Cunio Salem

### Staff

Nick Capasso, Director  
Susan Diachisin, Director of Education  
Lauren Szumita, Curator  
Rebecca Wright, Deputy Director for Advancement and Administration

## **Planning Consultants**

### Empower Success Corps (ESC):

Myran Parker-Brass  
Kate Berseth  
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## **Funding**

The FY2024-FY2028 Fitchburg Art Museum Strategic Plan has been funded by generous grants from the Barr-Klarman Massachusetts Arts Initiative, the George R. Wallace, Jr. Foundation, and the Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts.

## PART 1: MISSION

### Strategic Goal 1

#### Further strengthen the excellence and vitality of FAM's curatorial programs.

*Our collections and exhibitions are the heart of our mission and practice. The art that FAM preserves and displays, from many different cultures and individual perspectives, is an essential expression of our humanity, and is vital to creating meaning in our lives.*

#### Objectives

1. Improve the storage, documentation, visibility, and stewardship of FAM's permanent Collection

#### Actions

Design and build a comprehensive climate-controlled on-site storage facility for the FAM permanent collection in the basement of the Simonds Building.

Complete the inventory and digital documentation of the permanent collection.

Make significant information about the FAM permanent collection available to the public on the FAM website.

Update our Collection Management Policy and Collection Plan, to refine our collection policies and priorities, in accordance with AAM reaccreditation. The Collection Plan should specifically address FAM's endowed acquisition funds.

Create a plan for the long-term care and management of FAM's collections of African, Oceanic, and Native American arts.

2. Sustain and enhance the excellence of the FAM exhibition program.

#### Actions

Articulate a vision, with guiding principles and evaluation methods, for FAM exhibitions going forward, with input from the community.

Create exciting, stimulating, thought-provoking, and beautiful exhibition experiences throughout FAM's galleries and alternative platforms.

Continue FAM's ongoing, mission-based program of solo and group exhibitions of contemporary New England Art, inclusive of the diversity of artists and artistic practices in our region.

Create innovative exhibitions from FAM's permanent collection, and exhibit historical artworks together with contemporary artworks when thematically appropriate.

FAM Curatorial and Education Departments will collaborate to ensure the physical and intellectual accessibility of FAM exhibitions, collections, and interpretation; and strengthen the Bilingual Museum Initiative.

### 3. Create necessary curatorial staff positions.

#### Actions

Transition the current Assistant Curator contract position to a full-time permanent position.

Transition the current part-time contract Preparator position to a full-time permanent position.



## Strategic Goal 2

### **Creatively reimagine the work of the FAM Education Department to best reflect our Mission and Core Values.**

*The arts are essential to the core development of children, life-long learning, and the health of our community. As Fitchburg increasingly identifies as the regional center for arts and culture, the people of our region deserve access to and learning experiences with art in a way that is meaningful for their personal growth.*

#### Objectives

1. Plan for the future of the FAM Education Department.

##### Action

Create a philosophy and plan, with evaluation methods and community input, for the FAM Education Department.

2. Prioritize our collaborative partnerships with educational institutions and community organizations.

##### Actions

Maintain and grow our programmatic relationship with the Fitchburg Public Schools, understanding that their diverse student body will build the future of our city and region, and participate in civic life increasingly centered on arts and culture.

Strengthen our partnerships in higher education, with Fitchburg State University and Mount Wachusett Community College, to benefit our audiences, their students, and the community.

Expand FAM's community education relationships to foster collaborative programming with local institutional partners for the benefit of their clients, as a commitment to the health and well-being of our community, and as outreach to demographic groups who are unfamiliar with FAM.

### 3. Build the Education Staff.

#### Actions

Transition the current contract Education Program Manager position to a full-time permanent position.

Develop and initiate a plan for building staff capacity and expanding a diverse team of staff, docents, volunteers, and students to interact with children and adult audiences for learning and creative opportunities.

### Strategic Goal 3

#### **Strengthen our leadership and partnership work for economic and community development in Fitchburg and neighboring cities and towns in North Central Massachusetts.**

*The Fitchburg Art Museum has been a local and regional anchor institution for almost 100 years, and we bear a responsibility for helping to create a thriving and healthy community for all. The best approach to this work is through partnerships based on trust and reciprocity.*

#### Objectives

1. Work with NewVue Communities and other interested partners on the development of the Fitchburg Arts Community, and work with the artist residents to help nurture and sustain a vibrant local creative community.

#### Actions

Assist NewVue Communities with pre-development issues: design, outreach, marketing, branding, advocacy, fundraising, etc.

Organize and implement the certification process for prospective artists/tenants.

Create a plan for collaborative programming in partnership with the artists/tenants in the Fitchburg Arts Community.

2. Participate in the leadership of partnership teams to re-establish Fitchburg as the regional center for arts and culture, stimulate the local creative economy, and revitalize our city and region.

#### Actions

Serve on the leadership team of InTown Fitchburg to help stimulate investment in downtown Fitchburg.

Lead Creative Cities Fitchburg, a two-year project of MassDevelopment investing in local arts and culture programming, training, and leadership development.

Assist local partners with public art initiatives.

3. Work with local and state partners on tourism initiatives for our city and region.

Actions

Partner with the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce and its affiliate, Visit North Central Massachusetts.

Participate in programs and initiatives developed by the Massachusetts State Office of Travel and Tourism.

4. Welcome the community to utilize FAM's spaces.

Actions

Make FAM event spaces available for community meetings, conversations, and events, as space and capacity allow.

Offer performing and participatory arts programs at FAM, in partnership with other arts and culture non-profits, as space and capacity allow.

## PART 2: SUSTAINABILITY

### Strategic Goal 4

**Improve messaging, marketing, and communications at FAM, with emphases on clarity, consistency, and transparency.**

*For maximum impact, our mission-driven work must be shared widely. Quality communications are necessary to reinforce the alignment that will enable this Strategic Plan to succeed.*

#### Objectives

1. Improve the quality and reach of FAM's external communications.

#### Actions

Create a Strategic Marketing Task Force of Trustees, Community Advisors, Members, and Staff to create a plan to improve all of FAM's external communications platforms: print mailings, email, social media, press, advertising. The work of this Task Force must be supported by community and audience input.

Create messaging to inform the public and generate excitement about FAM, our programs, and our work with the community.

Inform and attract audiences and markets beyond Fitchburg and North Central Massachusetts, especially Boston, MetroWest, Worcester, and Southern New Hampshire.

Share messaging about FAM's institutional achievements and innovations targeted with the national museum field.

Develop relationships and purchase advertising with the local Spanish language media.

2. Improve the quality of FAM's internal communications

#### Actions

Ensure that all FAM Staff, Trustees, Community Advisors, and volunteers are apprised of important information and updates in a timely and consistent manner.

Develop ways to better communications and strengthen bonds among FAM Trustees, Community Advisors, the Director, Senior Staff, all Staff, and museum departments.

Work to improve the content and quality of Staff meetings.

Assign Staff, Trustees, and Community Advisors to work together on Task Forces and Working Groups

Ensure that FAM is a safe space for feedback, input, suggestions, and constructive critique.

## Strategic Goal 5

### Steward and grow FAM's financial assets.

*FAM's mission delivery and the expression of our Core Institutional Values depend on our financial stability and resources. Our community has come to depend on FAM in many ways, and we must sustain our commitments to the people of our city and region long into the future.*

#### Objectives

1. FAM will further improve the responsible, accountable, and well-managed stewardship of our financial assets, especially our endowment, our foremost asset.

#### Actions

Issue RFP for external endowment managers. Conduct interviews and hire endowment managers.

Update 5-year financial projections as part of the annual operating budget process, with analyses of revenues, expenses, and projected cash flows.

Create business plans for earned income lines: retail, and event rental.

Deploy unrestricted operating funds from the Barr Klarman Massachusetts Arts Initiative and the Cathedral Fund to support annual operating budgets while additional sources of revenue are identified and developed.

Participate in financial trainings offered by the Barr Klarman Massachusetts Arts Initiative.

Perform a review of FAM's insurance and risk management policies and coverage.

2. Increase philanthropic giving to FAM.

#### Actions

Create a Development Plan for FAM. This plan should analyze and make recommendations for:

Strategies and actions for substantially increasing unrestricted operating support, as dictated by 5-year financial projections.

Staffing and structure of the Development Department.

Leveraging FAM's centennial period (2025-2029) to build awareness, expand our base of support, and fund the on-site collection storage project and endowment growth.

A capital campaign feasibility study.

Strategies and actions to engage with new business, growth industries, and a growing middle class in Fitchburg and North Central Massachusetts.

Articulating and communicating value propositions for philanthropy to FAM, based on our Core Institutional Values.

Explore and develop relationships with national grant sources for art museums and cultural non-profits.

Explore, develop relationships with, and identify projects of mutual interest with grant sources for community health, education, and placemaking.

Further engage the Board of Trustees, Board of Community Advisors, and Staff in a culture of philanthropy and fundraising.

Improve and expand FAM's membership programs.

### 3. Increase the short-term capacity of the Development Department

#### Actions

Increase the Staff capacity of the Development Department.

Hire contractors as appropriate for grant-writing, research, data entry, special projects.



## Strategic Goal 6

### Sustain and Build FAM's Institutional Capacity

*We must tend to our institutional health in order to continue to contribute meaningfully to the health and vitality of our community. We must aspire to the highest professional standards, equitably invest in our staff, diversify our leadership, and steward and strengthen our physical resources.*

#### Objectives

1. Achieve institutional re-accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums.

#### Action

Update and submit required core documents and Re-Accreditation Self Study, an host required site visit.

2. Ensure that everyone who visits, works at, works with, or leads FAM is treated in a fair and equitable manner, and that FAM continues to grow as an anti-racist, inclusive, and welcoming organization.

#### Actions

Create a working group of Trustees, Community Advisors, and Staff to assess, prioritize, and evaluate our equity work, develop a FAM Racial Justice and Equity Policy, and ensure the implementation of the Policy.

Build and diversify the Board of Trustees, Board of Community Advisors, and Staff to represent the demographics of our community and the people we serve.

Improve overall accessibility for visitors by improving and maintaining our safe and welcoming environment.

Engage all staff in customer service training.

3. Strengthen the capacity of the FAM Board of Trustees

#### Actions

Conduct a self-evaluation of the FAM Board of Trustees.

Employ and refine a strategic board composition matrix to build the FAM Board's capacity, philanthropy, professional experience, and networks.

Diversify the Board of Trustees to represent the full demographics of Fitchburg and North Central Massachusetts.

#### 4. Strengthen the capacity of FAM's Staff.

##### Actions

Improve our human resource practice by updating all position descriptions, instituting a system of annual performance reviews, maintaining compliance, and providing management training for all FAM Staff who supervise others.

Invest in competitive and equitable compensation and professional development.

Maintain and improve our caring, humane, and equitable workplace and organizational culture. Offer opportunities for participation, engagement, creativity, and decision-making, and ensure that all Staff members feel appreciated for their contributions. Remain mindful of the capacity and morale of our Staff.

Provide quality volunteer internships, and explore opportunities to provide paid internships.

#### 5. Steward FAM's physical infrastructure.

Create a Facilities Master Plan for the maintenance, improvement, accessibility, and future uses of FAM's buildings and grounds, with special attention to the care of our historic buildings.

Complete the HVAC upgrade and replacement project.

Create a more welcoming environment by softening our lobby, improving outdoor directional and on-campus signage, and creating additional handicap parking.

Explore options for environmental sustainability, including but not limited to recycling, solar energy, electrification, car charging stations, and other emerging technologies.

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

Actions

Regularly review the implementation of the Strategic Plan at meetings of the Board of Trustees.

Regularly review the implementation of the Strategic Plan with Staff.

Use the Strategic Plan to create annual work plans and evaluations for Staff and standing committees of the Board of Trustees.