

IDEA - Vision & Process



Vision: As the Museum of the City of New York approaches its second century, we commit to fostering understanding through exhibitions, collections, and programs, by representing this great metropolis in our staff and leadership.

The Museum of the City of New York, founded in 1923 and located at the top of the city's "Museum Mile," is a world-class museum and vital resource for life-long learning for New Yorkers from every borough and visitors from around the world. Through its exhibitions, collections, public and education programs, and digital resources, the Museum is a welcoming space where people of every background learn about the city's past, present, and future.

To that end, the Museum has devised an institutional action plan based not only in its audience-driven mission, but in its committed values regarding inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA). In order to fulfill this vision of a place that wholly reflects and fosters understanding of the manifold diversity of New York City, the Museum is committed to growing a culture of inclusion; working to diversify its internal community of staff, board, volunteers, and contractors

The Museum's commitment to New York City's communities of all backgrounds, identities, orientations, and abilities is steadfast, and the plan's goals, along with its strategies and tactics, will be consistently evaluated as the Museum learns and evolves. Throughout this process, the Museum will be held accountable by staff and board leadership, the audiences and communities it serves, and the City of New York as a member of the Cultural Institutions Group (CIG). The Museum's staff and Board leadership, in tandem with a committee of staff, have undertaken this work as transparently as possible to develop a plan that will provide a roadmap to bolstering what is positive and affirming for the Museum's internal and external communities. It will seek to remove barriers to access for communities who might not traditionally see themselves as participants in cultural institutions, address systemic inequity and enhance systems of accountability for instances of bias or misconduct.

Institutional History and Profile:

The Museum of the City of New York was founded in 1923 by Henry Collins Brown, a writer with a vision for a populist approach to interpreting and engaging with the city. The Museum was originally housed in Gracie Mansion, the future residence of the mayor of New York. As stated in the first annual report published in 1927, the Museum's goal was "to make visual in a comprehensive and arresting manner the story of the city's development and to awaken in the schoolboy and immigrant an understanding and pride in his citizenship."

Hardinge Scholle, an experienced curator, succeeded Brown in 1926 and began planning a new home for the Museum. The City of New York offered land on Fifth Avenue between 103rd and 104th Streets; construction of the Georgian Colonial-Revival building designed by Joseph H. Freedlander started in 1929 and was completed in 1932.

The Museum's foundational collection came as a single gift in 1929 by J. Clarence Davies, a prominent real estate businessman in the Bronx. The gift contained thousands of prints, photographs, and ephemera documenting the city's built environment. In its initial decades, the Museum saw itself as a civic institution dedicated to educating new immigrants to the city on its history and culture. Because the Museum's permanent home opened during the throes of the Depression, wealthy supporters took the opportunity to divest themselves of their more weighty possessions and donated the contents of their mansions to the Museum.

The result significantly increased the Museum's holdings, but also skewed the collection toward preserving the legacy of upper-crust New York. Over the last decade the Museum has been intentionally addressing that imbalance when considering new acquisitions, so that the approximately 750,000 object collection - which includes prints, photographs, decorative arts, costumes, paintings, sculpture, toys, and theatrical memorabilia - becomes more representative of New York City's entire population, past and present.

The Museum's building was left largely unaltered since it was completed in 1932, causing the institution to become out of step with evolving standards in museum practice, out of compliance with current building and fire codes, and increasingly unable to meet the needs of its constituency. In 2006, the Museum embarked on a bold, three-phase, 10-year expansion and modernization of the entire facility. The \$97 million project provided three contiguous stories of climate-controlled galleries and modern amenities and brought the Museum into full compliance with building codes and regulations established by the American Alliance of Museums, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and LEED Silver energy efficiency standards.

With the completion of building renovations and addition, the Museum reintroduced itself to the public with *New York at Its Core*, a multi-media exhibition that tells the compelling story of New York's rise from a striving Dutch village to today's "Capital of the World." Across three galleries—*Port City, 1606-1898*; *World City, 1898-2012*; and the *Future City Lab*—the exhibition captures the human energy that drove New York to become a city like no other through more than 400 objects and state-of-the-art digital technology, including interactive kiosks where visitors meet 70 iconic New Yorkers from the Lenape to today's global population.

The Museum also increased its public reach with the launch of an online Collections Portal in December 2010, which now hosts nearly 205,000 digital images of collection objects. Information on these objects is freely discoverable to anyone in the world with Internet access.

Recent surveys show that the Museum is reaching a wider audience than ever before. Due to these transformational projects, the Museum's profile on New York City's cultural landscape has been heightened and there have been significant increases in attendance. Last year, the Museum welcomed more than 320,000 annual visitors—the highest visitorship in its history, a 15% increase over the previous year, and triple the attendance of a decade ago. The proportion of visitors living outside New York City who visit the Museum increased from 44 to 51% from 2016 to 2017. While income and gender demographics did not significantly change in 2017, 32% of visitors described themselves as other than white in 2017, up from 25% in 2016. This gain was mostly among those of Hispanic or Latinx family background, accounting for 12% of all (U.S.) visitors and 15% for first-time visitors, compared to 7% in the previous year.

While the Museum has a suggested admission policy, free admission is given to anyone who lives, works, or attends school in the East Harlem community through the *I'm a Neighbor* program. The Museum is expanding an initiative to provide free field trips to underserved Title 1 public and charter schools in all five boroughs. All students who attend the Museum's field trips also receive free family admission passes to return to the Museum—expanding the impact of these programs beyond the gallery and classroom to the community at large.

Institutional growth has been rapid but sustainable, brought about through careful expense planning and cost control. The Museum's annual operating budget has increased by an average of about 5% annually from FY2013 through FY2019, from approximately \$14.5 million to \$16 million. The Museum employs 89 full-time and 41 part-time staff, is supported by 70 volunteers, and is governed by a 43-member (max. 50) Board of Trustees.

In addition to ongoing exhibitions like *New York at Its Core* and *Activist New York*, which focuses on the city's tumultuous and often contentious history of dissent and social protest, the Museum also mounts special exhibitions each year on an extraordinary variety of subjects, such as *Muslim in New York* (2017); *Beyond Suffrage: A Century of New York Women in Politics* (2017-18); *Interior Lives: Contemporary Photographs of Chinese New Yorkers* (2018-19); *In the Dugout with Jackie Robinson: An Intimate Portrait of a Baseball Legend* (2019); and the upcoming *City of Workers, City of Struggle: How Labor Movements Changed New York*; and *New York's Got Game: Basketball in the City* (2020) and the Museum's first fully bilingual exhibition, presented in both Spanish and English, *Rhythm & Power: Salsa in New York* (2017).

The Museum's distinguished Frederick A.O. Schwarz Education Center offers a broad array of programs, including standards-based education programs, field trips, out-of-school-time programs, and professional learning workshops. During FY18, the Center served over 54,000 K-12 students, teachers, and caregivers (a 19% increase over FY17), addressing the persistent citywide problem of student underachievement in Social Studies and nurturing participants' interest in history and creative expression.

Each year, an ambitious roster of some 60 public programs brings to life the subjects and ideas portrayed in the Museum's exhibitions. In FY2018, we welcomed more than 12,000 attendees to our frequently sold-out offerings, including lectures, panel discussions, films, tours, tastings, and performances—as well as nearly 5,500 virtual attendees who watched broadcasts of our *Future City Lab* programming on Manhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN), a public access cable channel.

Web-based services have become a powerful means of extending the Museum's impact. Our broad constituency includes a digital audience taking advantage of our rapidly expanding online content, which includes our Collections Portal, virtual exhibitions, and extensive materials and resources for K-12 classroom educators. The Museum has also begun key partnerships with mobile app Urban Archive and LinkNYC, presenting daily historical or current facts and themed campaigns on 1,800 kiosks throughout the five boroughs.

As the Museum nears its centennial, it is critical to acknowledge the first 100 years in order to imagine and take steps toward the next century and beyond.

Process:

This IDEA Action Plan was developed by a committee of staff that was convened in April 2018. The work was initially facilitated by the Museum's Director of Special Projects and subsequently, from September 2018, by consultants Peoplmvr, both supported but a capacity building grant from the Altman Foundation.

Membership of the committee was established by soliciting staff to self-nominate themselves via email and at an all-staff meeting, with additional recommendations made on the composition of the Committee and reaching out individually to some staff.

Through the spring and summer of 2018, the Committee met bi-weekly and focused on developing a shared vocabulary and a greater understanding of the timeline and scope of the plan. The Committee participated in an Unconscious Bias seminar offered by Mount Sinai Hospital in June 2018.

Over the summer, Committee members paired up to lead discussions on the areas of the City's CreateNYC plan and proposed outlines for the IDEA plan. Presentations were made at the June and November 2018 all-staff meetings to share wide awareness of the Committee's work.

In December 2018 Working Groups on specific areas highlighted in the plan or based on the Museum's specific work and needs to inform the values, goals, timeline, and measurement of the

IDEA plan were established and stakeholders from across staff invited to participate. The six working groups were:

- Ground Setting (value statement, history, process, and measurement)
- Personnel (Hiring, Recruitment, Retention, Promotion, Exits, and Governance)
- Inclusive Organizational Culture – Staff Development
- Inclusive Organizational Culture – Visitor Experience
- Exhibitions + Collecting principles
- Community Engagement (Public + Education Programming)

The Committee used working groups, individual conversations, a brief staff-wide anonymous survey on IDEA values at the Museum and what is both working and could be improved about that experience, reviewer feedback on drafts, and anonymous suggestion boxes to ensure that as many voices as possible became part of the final plan.

The plan was compiled by Peoplmovr and reviewed by the IDEA Committee in mid-January 2019 then submitted along with contextual notes to the Executive Team (Director, Deputy Director, officers, and VPs.) An Overview framework for the plan was then submitted to the Board of Trustee's Executive Committee on January 31, 2019. The Framework and timeline for completion was submitted to the DCLA in February.

Work on refining the plan following submission has continued resulting in the attached document.