



Seattle Art Museum

Strategic Plan

Executive Summary

EMBRACING THE FUTURE

Updated for 2018–2021

June 2018

Introduction

This strategic plan updates the museum's 2014–2017 plan, *Embracing the Future*.¹ In 2017, the museum board and staff determined that the 2014–2017 plan's seven strategic directions are still relevant and require the museum's continuing attention. We also determined that two important aspects should be highlighted and treated with special focus: developing technology to support all of the goals, and focusing more purposefully and strongly on racial equity.

The 2018–2021 update is meant to be read and used in conjunction with the 2014–2017 plan, which provides important context and background. The racial equity focus was developed from work the museum staff and board did with the City of Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative beginning in 2015, which included comprehensive education and training, as well as strategies and support to build racial equity at traditional institutions like SAM. The technology focus will be further developed and refined with the leadership of the museum's new Chief Technology Officer.

Mission

SAM connects art to life.

Through art, the Seattle Art Museum fosters creativity and builds community.

As a leading visual art institution in three unique locations, SAM shares its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to engage, educate, and inspire.

Core Values

- ***Creativity***
We bring art into people's lives and help them understand its unique power to inspire creative thinking, which is crucial to understanding and solving our world's complex problems.
- ***Excellence***
We build and create collections, exhibitions, and public programs of the highest quality and excellence.

¹ The 2014–2017 plan was the result of a planning process undertaken by the Board of Trustees and the museum's director, staff, and community partners in 2013–14. It replaced the museum's 2010–12 Sustainability Plan, which focused on financial stability during a time of significant financial challenges and interim leadership.

- **Equity**
We are responsive to cultural communities and experiences, and we think critically about the role art plays in empowering social justice and structural change to promote equity in our society.
We are dedicated to racial equity in all that we do.
- **Engagement**
We engage our audiences through dialogue that is mutually beneficial, inclusive, and enlightening in a spirit of mutual respect.
- **Diversity**
We invite and respect many viewpoints and experiences, as we develop and sustain a diverse staff, board, and audience, and showcase art from the world's diverse cultures.
- **Accessibility**
We work to lower economic and physical barriers as well as barriers to understanding, so that art is accessible to everyone. We recognize the importance of excellent customer service in making art accessible to all.
- **Stewardship**
We are transparent and careful stewards of resources, including collections, staff, volunteers, facilities, investments, and institutional records. We share SAM's collection, our greatest resource and legacy to the future, with the public through scholarship and interpretation, creative installation, conservation, and programming.

Vision

Seattle Art Museum is a welcoming community where people find inspiration and discover our common humanity. We are committed to equity, exceptional art, and dynamic programs. At our three sites we offer enriching, fun, and rewarding experiences for all.

Strategic Directions 2018–2021

Note: The goals in each category are meant to focus and expand upon the goals expressed in the 2014–2017 plan, which are listed below the new goals. The previous goals are in most cases still relevant, and some have been largely achieved; the new goals articulate the greatest unmet priorities.

Strengthen and enhance collections and exhibitions, consolidating SAM's position as a leading comprehensive collecting institution

2018–2021 Goals:

- Develop a strategy for expanding online content, considering SAM’s global and local online audiences and what we can uniquely offer.
- Create in-gallery engagement assisted by technology as appropriate to better engage audiences and deliver relevant content.
- Hire a curator of South Asian art.
- Create innovative pan-Asian installations and interpretation for the Seattle Asian Art Museum.
- Establish enhanced conservation and collections care presence at the Seattle Asian Art Museum, including an Asian Paintings Conservation Center.

2014–2017 Goals:

- Build and shape SAM’s collection strategically through acquisitions and deaccessions. (ongoing)
- Create collection installations that demonstrate new scholarship and interpretation in ways that actively engage audiences. (ongoing)
- Develop comprehensive strategy for the integration of promised gifts of art into SAM’s collection and for expanded storage needs. (ongoing)
- Work to complete and maintain up-to-date online collection records. (ongoing)
- Develop and travel more SAM-organized exhibitions, including risk-taking projects, using the strengths of our collection and curators to serve our audiences and create new knowledge and scholarship. (ongoing)
- Involve and support artists and the local creative community to enrich our collection, exhibitions, and programs. (ongoing)
- Develop conservation program, including sufficient resources, to responsibly store and care for SAM’s growing and diverse collection. (ongoing)
- Share compelling collection and conservation scholarship and outcomes with our audience, students, and the field. (in process)

Engage all audiences more deeply, with special attention to the focus audience of younger museum-goers, and to our commitment to equity and inclusion

2018-2021 Goals:

- Develop better understanding of current audience engagement via increased data and technology.
- Increase diversity of docent corps.
- Continue to partner with city and state arts initiatives such as Access for All and Creative Advantage to supply funding support for programs.
- Foster community with other museums and arts organizations doing racial equity work.

2014–2017 Goals:

- Sustain effective programs for all audiences, including underserved audiences. Maintain SAM’s position as a national leader in arts education. (ongoing)

- Ensure that SAM’s Education and Community Engagement Committee remains a vital resource and connection to the broader community. Strengthen committee’s role in ensuring engagement with all key audiences through involvement in program development and participation. (ongoing)
- Develop effective interpretive material for collection displays and special exhibitions, with greater use of digital media. (ongoing)
- Build on programming that integrates the social with the intellectual. (ongoing)
- Highlight programs that touch various aspects of the focus audience’s family lives (e.g. their sibling, parents, grandparents and children), social, and professional lives. (ongoing)
- Consider development of a loyalty program to encourage visitation and engagement, as a complement and/or alternative to traditional membership program. (revised)
- Develop a digital communications strategy that encourages use of social media to share the museum experience and facilitate dialogue. (ongoing)
- Draw on experience of younger staff members to better understand and engage the focus audience. (ongoing)

Improve the end-to-end visitor experience

2018–2021 Goals:

- Provide better connection between the Seattle Art Museum and Olympic Sculpture Park (during Seattle Asian Art Museum closure).
- Continue to further activate Olympic Sculpture Park to engage new audiences.
- Improve Visitor Services Officer (VSO) customer service training and performance.
- Build environment and practices (outreach, volunteers) that are inclusive and welcoming to visitors.

2014–2017 Goals:

- Enhance engagement prior to and after visiting SAM through redesigned website, e-communications and apps of consistent and effective design and style. (ongoing, except for app strategy)
- Provide more welcoming and comfortable public spaces, expressive of an art museum but less institutional. (ongoing)
- Sharpen our focus on sales and customer service, including ease of ticket purchase and customer service training. (in process)
- Initiate large-scale visible promotions of upcoming shows and cross-promote SAM’s three sites effectively. (ongoing)
- Assess and address needs of families visiting with children. (in process)
- Enhance accessibility for special-needs audiences. (ongoing)
- Provide better, more prominent way finding, particularly in Forum and South Hall. (ongoing)

Sustain and enhance our three unique sites, and build deeper connections between them

2018–2021 Goals:

- Complete Seattle Asian Art Museum renovation and expansion in Volunteer Park.
- With the reopening of the Seattle Asian Art Museum, develop strategies for strong connections between all sites.
- Develop onsite leadership strategies/staff at both Olympic Sculpture Park and Seattle Asian Art Museum.

2014–2017 Goals:

- Cross-promote our three sites systematically, and facilitate multi-site visits. (ongoing)
- Develop and promote site-specific activities and programs as well as collections and programs across the three sites. (ongoing)
- Develop thorough understanding of maintenance needs and costs, ongoing and deferred, across all sites. (in process)
- Plan, fund, and begin needed renovations at the Seattle Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park. (ongoing)

Build technology capacity and infrastructure to better serve our audiences and enrich their understanding of art

2018–2021 Goals:

- Implement new CRM-based system as first technology priority.
- Implement Digital Asset Management system.
- Enhance website development platform.
- Consistently employ interpretive technology in collection galleries as well as exhibitions.
- Increase accessibility via technology.
- Secure resources and staffing to support key priorities.

2014–2017 Goals:

- Build and maintain an effective and up-to-date website and digital apps/mobile experiences. (ongoing)
- Create and maintain effective in-gallery digital resources. (ongoing)
- Create high quality content for digital uses. (ongoing)
- Develop a SAM digital strategy that encourages visitation/involvement, and enhances the museum experience. (ongoing)
- Create crowdsourcing and on-line philanthropic experiences that promote engagement and sharing. (ongoing)
- Conduct a needs assessment on current infrastructure and systems (i.e. customer relations management [CRM], databases, etc.) so that needed resources and staffing can be articulated and sought. (not done)
- Research potential technology/digital grants to realize key projects in the immediate term. (ongoing)
- Leverage current and new partnerships with technology companies (e.g. Microsoft). (ongoing)

Deepen and broaden support base

2018–2021 Goals:

- Capitalize on opportunities with younger members and potential members: how to retain and grow.
- Long-term engagement of new supporters in SAM Forward Campaign, including possible support groups focused on Olympic Sculpture Park and Seattle Asian Art Museum.
- Revitalize Planned Giving program.
- Strengthen data management and analysis.
- Continue to diversify member and donor base.
- Continue to diversify Board of Trustees.

2014–2017 Goals:

- Increase and strengthen engagement opportunities for donors and prospective donors to SAM. (ongoing)
- Develop and implement a plan for tracking success in these areas, including short and long-term analysis of contact activity and overall impact on giving. (not done; needs better technology)
- Continue ongoing review of membership program and its role in engaging audiences and providing critical financial support, in light of industry trends and changing demographics. (ongoing)
- Review and analyze all levels of membership and consider increasing giving requirements at each level. (completed)
- Develop programs to better engage focus audience embedded in membership and events, while also exploring how such programs could be tied to a broader SAM loyalty program. (revised)
- Strengthen data management and analysis. (not done; needs better technology)
- Execute capital campaign for the Seattle Asian Art Museum.
- Plan and implement an institution-wide comprehensive campaign to be well underway by the end of Phase Two of the Fund for Special Exhibitions. (ongoing)
- Revitalize and develop Planned Giving program. (ongoing)
- Anticipate and respond to changing volunteer demographics and expectations, including those of focus audience, while also meeting organizational needs and maintaining an engaged corps of volunteers. Provide opportunities for volunteers to support the museum at a variety of levels. (ongoing)
- Enhance and grow community partnerships as essential part of support base. (ongoing)
- Support Board of Trustees in their key role as evangelists for institution and recruiters of new supporters. (ongoing)

Align organization and resources

2018–2021 Goals:

- Continue to focus on annual operating budget challenges.
- Develop more accurate long-range financial projections.
- Build an environment that is inclusive, equitable, and welcoming to SAM staff.

- Continue to develop more equitable recruitment practices.
- Build effective pathways for people of color to careers in museums and the arts.
- Increase career development opportunities for employees.
- Assess and respond to Seattle’s competitive labor market and commitment to a living wage.
- Develop funding to support equity initiatives.
- Build Board commitment to SAM’s equity work.

2014–2017 Goals:

- Improve organizational culture and staff morale. Invest in staff development and enhance merit pay program. Create more pleasant work environment. (ongoing)
- Review traditional staff organization model and consider its relevance to future goals, with special consideration given to project-management models, more cross-departmental engagement, task-oriented teams, focus on visitor engagement and customer service needs, the curatorial-education interface, and the need to greatly enhance digital and IT bandwidth to serve a variety of goals. (ongoing)
- Continue to review board composition with eye to appropriate diversity, representation of key stakeholder groups, capacity to advise and support SAM. (ongoing)
- Continue to consider key governance issues such as size of board, board expectations and engagement, careful stewardship of Honorary Trustees, and other issues. (ongoing)
- Clearly articulate the resources needed for key initiatives necessary to fulfill plan (such as increased digital and IT capability) and identify sources of funding. (ongoing)
- Continue to work toward closing budget gap through combination of increased contributions, increased earned income, and careful management of costs. (ongoing)

Conclusion

The key aspects of this plan concern technology and equity, two areas where SAM is resolved to move forward. SAM is behind the curve in implementing new technologies to help us achieve our mission, and the institution is determined to make significant progress. SAM is also determined to make significant progress in becoming a more equitable and inclusive organization, and embracing the challenges and changes that true progress on this front will require. Both areas will require new resources, which we are determined to provide through our comprehensive campaign efforts. SAM trustees and staff are resolved to work together to leverage resources, support, and knowledge as effectively as possible so that the goals of the 2014–17 and 2018–21 plans can be realized, in support of our mission to enrich lives through art, as an essential part of a healthy and vibrant community.

Implementation Plans

As part of the 2014 strategic plan, SAM staff created implementation plans for each strategic direction. We will continue to update those plans to guide us in detail through the 2018–2021 period.

Strategic Plan Leadership

This planning process was led by SAM’s Board Officers, Executive Committee, and Director’s Advisory and staff leadership team, with input from the entire Board and staff.

SAM Officers and Executive Committee

Susan Brotman, Vice President
 Michael Corliss, Vice President
 Barney Ebsworth, Vice President
 John Frank, Past Chairman, *Ex Officio*
 Steve Kutz, Treasurer
 Stewart Landefeld, Chairman
 Jon Shirley, Vice President
 Winnie Stratton, President, Chair
 Maggie Walker, Past President
 Charles Wright, Secretary

Margaret Allison
 Cliff Burrows
 Sheila Edwards Lange
 Aya Hamilton
 Carla Lewis
 Scott Morris
 Christine Nicolov
 Catherine Roche
 Gursharan Sidhu
 Mary Snapp
 Robert Strong
 Mandira Virmani

SAM Trustee Drafting Committee

Charlie Nolan
 Mandira Virmani

SAM Director’s Advisory and staff leadership

Richard Beckerman

Cindy Bolton
Marie Bouvet
Alice Bruce
Elizabeth Detels
Nicholas Dorman
Zora Foy
Chiyo Ishikawa
Christopher Landman
Cindy McKinley
Lauren Mellon
Domenic Morea
Regan Pro
Kimerly Rorschach