



Strategic Plan 2018 - 2022

Board approved November 20, 2019

Introduction

The Milwaukee Public Museum (MPM) is at a crossroads as an organization. The building we occupy, owned by the County, is inadequate to take us into the future. With about \$100 million in deferred maintenance, our collections are at risk and our visitor experience is compromised. Additionally, our 150,000 square feet of exhibits are outdated for the most part, and do not tell an inclusive, accurate story of the cultures of this world and their connection to nature. This Strategic Plan lays out the path to preserving and strengthening the Museum's role in the community through the process to build a new museum that is community-oriented and inclusive in its presentation.

This Strategic Plan has, however, undergone change. It was started under the direction of then-President Dennis Kois in 2017, revisited in 2019 and slightly modified under the guidance of current President Ellen Censky, and finally, again modified because of the pandemic of 2020.

At the end of business on March 14, 2020, the Milwaukee Public Museum closed its doors to the public just one day after the President of the United States declared a national emergency concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) outbreak. For the first time since the Spanish Influenza in 1918-1919, the Museum closed its doors for an extended period of time.

Given the difficulty of planning for the long term while in the midst of a pandemic that creates uncertainty in the near term around financial viability and expectations for how and when to return to "normal operations," MPM has adapted its Strategic Plan's strategies and tactics to be a rolling 12-month plan that will allow us to adjust as needed. This allows us to keep the original goals in mind, but adapt at the tactical level as necessary.

Mission

The mission of the Milwaukee Public Museum is to inspire curiosity, excite minds, and increase desire to preserve and protect our world's natural and cultural diversity through exhibitions, educational programs, collections, and research.

Vision

To strengthen the connections between people and nature by telling the intimate stories of how the planet began, how it works, and how our natural surroundings influence the way we develop as individuals, as cultures, and, in turn, how people shape and influence the natural world.

MPM's Core Values

RESPECT - We honor diversity and recognize the worth and dignity of every person.

INTEGRITY - We behave ethically, act openly, and take responsibility for our actions.

AUTHENTICITY - We use facts and are accurate and reliable.

COURAGE - We have the courage to face change in a positive way.

Organizational History

Although it was officially chartered in 1882, MPM's existence can be traced back to 1851, to the founding of the German-English Academy in Milwaukee. The Academy's principal, Peter Engelmann, encouraged student field trips, many of which collected various specimens—organic, geological, and archaeological in nature—which were kept at the Academy. Later, alumni and others donated various specimens of historical and ethnological nature to the collection. By 1857, interest in the collection had grown to such an extent that Engelmann organized a natural history society to manage and expand the collection. Eventually, the collection—which had come to be informally called "The Museum"—grew to exceed the Academy's ability to accommodate it. In 1882, August Stirn, a City alderman and member of the natural history society, obtained legislation from the State for the City of Milwaukee to accept the collection and take the measures necessary to establish "a free public museum." The Milwaukee Public Museum opened to the public on May 24, 1884.

The Museum was managed as a department of the City of Milwaukee from its inception. Periodically, there were discussions to move the Museum to a governmental jurisdiction with a broader tax base, either the County or the State, because the Museum served a much broader visitorship than the City alone. In 1976, the Museum was officially transferred to the County. The Museum was part of the County government until 1993, when the Museum separated from the County to become a separate 501(c)3 entity. However, the County retained ownership of the collections and the building. MPM has a Lease and Management Agreement with the County to run the Museum and care for the collections. In return, the County provides the Museum with \$3.5M annually, which is about a quarter of its budget.

The Museum has had three homes since it opened in 1884. The Museum rented space in the Exposition Building from 1884 until 1898, when it vacated the space for larger quarters. In 1889, the City obtained approval from the State for a bond issue of \$250,000 to purchase land and erect a building to be used jointly by the Museum and the library. The Museum moved in 1899 and eventually outgrew its shared space. In 1960, ground was broken for construction of the standalone Milwaukee Public Museum. As the building neared completion in 1962, staff prepared for the move. It took until 1965 for the first exhibit to open to the public and several more years for all exhibits to be completed. Since then, MPM has grown considerably, with current collections containing more than 4 million specimens and objects. Permanent exhibits are housed on three and a half floors with additional space for traveling and temporary exhibits for a total of 150,000 square feet of exhibit area.

MPM is a natural history museum with about 3+ million specimens of invertebrates, vertebrates, plants, and fossils. The other nearly 1 million objects include cultural and history collections as well as an extensive library. The history collection is a reflection of Milwaukee collectors through time, whereas the natural history and cultural collections reflect the research of the institution. The ethnology and archaeology collections are sizable and important, especially the Native American collections. The history collection is broad but not deep.

Facilities

MPM is at a historic tipping point in its nearly 140-year history. It has become clear to leadership through research, analysis, and experience that the Museum is fundamentally unsustainable in the nearly 500,000 square-foot, County-owned building. The 1960s concrete block building, constructed without a moisture barrier or insulation, has not stood the test of time. Over the years, as County needs grew and taxes in the community leveled off or declined, funding to the Museum dropped and maintenance was deferred. A study done in 2015 and then updated in 2018 reported nearly \$100M in deferred maintenance on the Museum building.

Unfortunately, this deferred maintenance has put the collections that we hold in trust for this community at risk. Each year, the staff deal with leaks from pipes, water infiltration from rainstorms through the roof and walls, temperature swings, and humidity concerns. While we have not had any permanent damage to the collections, there is always the chance with the next disaster. In addition, the visitor's experience is compromised. Exhibit areas are routinely closed because of leaks or other problems. The 55-year-old escalators are at risk of long-term or permanent shutdown because parts are no longer available and need to be custom made. One escalator was not operating for almost a year as a part was being made. And there are often long lines of visitors waiting for the two small passenger-elevators that can barely fit one double-wide stroller or more than one wheelchair. The amount of time staff spend dealing with building-related issues, and the amount of money it takes to heat and cool the building, are ever-growing expenses that prevent MPM from investing in its mission.

With little capacity to raise private dollars for repairing the government-owned building, the MPM Board chose to explore building a museum that is not owned by the County. The Museum's leadership believes that MPM's longstanding and complex financial challenges can be traced back to a single, simple fact: The current facility, built in the 1960s, was too large for Milwaukee (and indeed for Wisconsin), and thus has never been—and never will be—financially sustainable. When the Strategic Plan is fully implemented, MPM will be ready to break ground on a new museum facility that will provide 21st-century inclusive learning experiences for generations to come.

Planning Process

The Strategic Planning process was done in three phases: We began the process under the direction of Dennis Kois, President of MPM until August 2018. It continued under Ellen Censky, interim and then President of MPM from September 2018, and finally was amended because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under Kois, extensive work with Gallagher & Associates, a Washington, DC-based museum design and consulting firm with a global reputation, was undertaken in 2015-16 to evaluate the feasibility of staying in the current building, repairing it, and updating exhibits, versus building a new facility. After extensive research, it was clear that a new right-sized building would provide a sustainable future for the Museum. In addition, the Museum reached out across the community through visitor surveys to assess what the community thought of the Museum. The goals and strategies were developed by the Leadership Team and approved by the Board. Teams from within the Museum then developed tactics to achieve the goals.

In 2019, after Censky became President of MPM, the leadership team revisited the Strategic Plan to realign and refocus it. One of the major changes was to improve and clarify Goal #2 and its strategies. One of the first things that was done was engaging the staff and community through workshops, town halls, and interviews which lead to a visioning and statement-of-purpose process that produced foundational documents that will guide future planning for exhibits, architectural plans, and educational programming. This revised document was approved by the Board.

In 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic having shuttered the Museum for five months, the Leadership Team and Board once again opened up the Strategic Plan for review. We have decided that the best course forward is to retain all Goals, but modify the Strategies and Tactics on a 12-month rolling plan. Each department was engaged in determining which tactics could be undertaken. A Strategic Team of MPM leaders determined the final tactics based on effectiveness and finances. This will allow us to navigate the tumultuous times in the short-term while focusing on the long-term goals. That document is presented as the Strategic Roadmap (Appendix 1).

MPM's Goals

MPM leadership believes the vision for the future can be realized with a dedicated focus on **five long-term goals**. They are:

1. Ensure MPM serves as a “think-tank” for scientific and cultural intercourse for the benefit of the community.
2. Deliver on the mission of the Museum through reimagined programming and exhibits that align and focus on the intersection of nature and culture.
3. Strengthen the scientific stature and output of the Museum to advance scientific literacy in Wisconsin and participate in meaningful scientific research and discoveries worldwide.

4. Achieve long-term financial health with little to no reliance on long-term debt.
5. Building a new, world-class Museum for future generations of Wisconsinites that is right-sized for the community, fiscally sustainable, meets or exceeds the standards for collection care, and is able to continually reinvest in its core mission.

This plan for 2018-22 advances our effort to meet those long-term goals by articulating **six near-term Museum goals**:

1. Achieve near-term financial stability using a clear, articulated action plan.
2. Advance both the future Museum and collections storage projects.
3. Strengthen the scientific stature of the Museum.
4. Grow organizational capacity to achieve excellence.
5. Increase awareness of the importance and relevance of MPM across Wisconsin.
6. Increase visitors' satisfaction with and affinity for MPM.

Goal 1: Achieve near-term financial stability using a clear, articulated action plan.

MPM will achieve financial stability by changing its operational model to generate additional revenue and raise additional philanthropic dollars. The new model will reduce reliance on the Endowment Fund and working capital loans while increasing unrestricted net assets.

Goal 2: Advance both the future Museum and collection storage projects.

MPM will advance the new Museum project by connecting with key stakeholders to secure funding from potential donors as well as secure funding and/or commensurate investment from the City, County, and State of Wisconsin in support of a new building and off-site collections storage facility.

Goal 3: Strengthen the scientific stature of the Museum.

As Wisconsin's Natural History Museum, MPM's public face (exhibits and programming) is reliant on current and accurate scientific information as a foundation for all we do. Over the next two years, MPM will continue to grow the reputation of the Museum as a scientific institution, both in the public's eye and within the scientific community.

Goal 4: Grow MPM organizational capacity to achieve excellence.

Align staffing and build resources, expertise, and technology to support and ensure advancement of a new Museum.

Goal 5: Increase awareness of the importance and relevance of MPM to all our audiences.

Through its actions and strategic communications, the Museum will share a more compelling story of the Museum's purpose, relevance, and work in ways that resonate statewide.

Goal 6: Increase visitor satisfaction with, and affinity for, MPM.

Create the best possible experience for visitors of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities, both in the current building and as we plan for the future.