



Memorial Art Gallery

Strategic Plan Executive Summary

2020–2025



**THROUGH ART, MAG
CONNECTS PEOPLE
INSPIRES FUN, AND
IGNITES DISCOVERY.**



Cover images courtesy of Brandon Vick. Image left courtesy of Tom Flint/POST Magazine.

Our Story



Founded over 100 years ago, with funds donated by Emily Sibley Watson in memory of her son, James G. Averell, “for the edification and enjoyment of the citizens of Rochester,” the Memorial Art Gallery (**MAG**) is recognized as a fine regional art museum.

The permanent collection of more than 12,000 works spans 5,000 years of art history and positions it as a unique educational center committed to broadening understanding of world cultures, art, and history, as well as one’s place within these contexts. Director Jonathan Binstock has led MAG since September 2014, replacing Grant Holcomb who retired after nearly 30 years as director.

MAG is fortunate to have a talented staff, a dedicated Board of Managers, Gallery Council, over 1,100 volunteers and over 4,000 members. As Trustee of MAG, the University of Rochester (**UR**) recognizes MAG as a valued asset for both the Rochester and UR communities.

The Board of Managers (**BOM**) made a decision in the first quarter of 2018 to update the 2016–2020 Strategic Plan. A Strategic Planning Committee was formed, consisting of members of the BOM, the Museum’s Senior Staff, the Community, and a strategy consultant. During the strategic planning process, three BOM/Senior Staff workshops were held to educate participants on key museum trends and to explore topics of particular relevance to MAG. The Strategic Plan 2020-2025 was approved by MAG’s BOM on February 27, 2019.

Significant progress has been made achieving the goals described in MAG’s 2016–2020 strategic Plan, across all six major objectives:

- Engage a broader audience, with both art and social offerings
- Deepen the relationship with UR
- Improve financial sustainability
- Embrace technology
- Take care of MAG resources, human and physical
- Increase organizational efficiency

Image above courtesy of Frank Cost/Rochester Institute of Technology.

As pointed out in the 2016–2020 Strategic Plan, MAG is located in a challenging economic area. The U.S. economy has improved significantly since the current plan was developed in 2015, yet the Rochester region still faces serious economic challenges. Unemployment in the U.S. is at 3.7% as of October 2018. Unemployment in the Rochester area as of August 2018 was 4.2%, down from 4.6% in September 2015. The median household income in the U.S. is \$55,300 similar to the \$55,100 median in the five-county area (Monroe, Ontario, Wayne, Livingston, and Yates) vs. \$31,700 in the City of Rochester. The poverty rates are: 12.7% (U.S.) as compared to 13.9% (5-county area) and 32.8% (City of Rochester).

Education tells a similar story. In the U.S. overall, 87% are high school graduates and 30.3% have a bachelor's degree or higher. This compares to 90% and 34% in the 5-county area and 81% and 24% in the City of Rochester, respectively. Although the Rochester Central School District (RCSD) improved its graduation rate in 2017 by 4.2 percentage points to 51.9% (57% if August graduates are counted), its graduation rate remains the lowest among New York State's large urban districts and one of the lowest in the U.S.

The global museum world and art market continue to undergo significant, disruptive change. Changes include perceptions of the very concept of a museum and of culture itself, evolving expectations of cultural consumers, uses of technology, data analytics, social media, innovative ways of connecting with audiences and of achieving more diversity, and the impact of the art world on museums. Museums are responding to industry trends in many different ways, attempting to maintain and grow relevance, increase diversity, and engage visitors and communities more broadly. Museums are viewed positively, yet economic challenges persist.

“Each year, more than 850 million visits are made to U.S. museums from all across U.S. society, and that number continues to grow.” (Source: AAM's 2018 “Museums as Economic Engines”, p. 5) Nonetheless, the percentage of U.S. adults who visit an art museum or gallery at least once a year has declined steadily since 1982. (Sources: “A Decade of Arts Engagement: Findings from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts”, 2002 – 2012, p. 21; NEA “Survey of Public Participation in the Arts”, 2002, p. 2)

Why? When this question was researched during the development of the current MAG Strategic Plan in 2015, there were numerous theories, but little solid data. That has changed; there is now a great deal more data about who goes to museums, who does not, and why. Two particularly useful sources, Culture Track 2017 and Know Your Own Bone, as well as many others, have been studied carefully during the strategic planning process. Arthur Cohen of Culture Track and Colleen Dilenschneider of Know Your Own Bone each led a BOM Workshop, providing valuable data and insights, and facilitating discussions with the BOM and Senior Staff.

In Fiscal Year '18, a total of 238,000 non-unique visitors came to MAG. Of the total visits, approximately 178,000 visits, or 75%, were for social, art classes or event purposes and nearly 60,000, or 25%, involved the art collection, of which nearly one-third were educational tours. Fiscal Year '18 operating revenue was \$7.5 million, an increase of \$200,000 over Fiscal Year '17. The budget was balanced without unplanned use of reserves, while the endowment spend rate was reduced as planned.

MAG continues to build on its strengths, and to recognize and address weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. Strengths identified include the permanent art collection, facilities, programming, and loyal staff, BOM, Gallery Council, volunteers, donors, members, and docents. Opportunities for growth include focusing more on fun and entertainment, in addition to education; using data analytics and creative marketing to identify and engage a broader audience, including High Propensity Visitors (see page 16) and continuing to improve financial sustainability.

As part of the planning process, the Strategy Map was updated including the mission, vision, values, and strategy. During the 2020–2025 Strategic Plan, MAG intends to counter threats and capture opportunities, leveraging the research and analysis conducted during the strategic planning process and building on the significant progress made executing the current plan.

Image below courtesy of J. Adam Fenster.



The Strategic Path Forward

MAG will expand upon the accomplishments of the current Strategic Plan to advance its mission and focus particularly on broadening its reach to a more diverse audience, using innovative marketing, visitor engagement, and programming. In the course of considering the strategic path forward for MAG, three high-priority objectives and eight associated Strategic Initiatives have been developed. Details, including specific owners, measures, and timeframes for the Strategic Initiatives, are provided in Section V.

- MISSION:** Through art, MAG connects people, inspires fun, and ignites discovery.
- VISION:** As the center of the conversation on creativity, MAG builds community and enriches the way we see ourselves and the world around us.
- VALUES:** MAG stands for: Art and Culture; Learning and Joy; Accessibility and Inspiration; Stewardship and Integrity; and Community and Sociability.
- STRATEGY:** MAG offers spaces, places, and opportunities for learning and fun, and cares for, interprets, and shares art from ancient times to the present.



Objective 1

Engage a broader, more diverse audience with art, social, and educational offerings.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1: Cultivate new and existing audiences by using art and programming to engage High Propensity Visitors and to deliver experiences that captivate guests and inspire them to return.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2: Encourage a sense of welcome, belonging, and ownership to elevate MAG's profile locally.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 3: Expand MAG's elementary school outreach and academic programs by collaborating or partnering with other Rochester cultural and educational organizations to support the Rochester-Monroe County Anti-Poverty Initiative. Build on the success of the RCSD Expanded Learning Collaboration.

Objective 2

Reach and maintain financial sustainability by building on the progress achieved in executing the 2016–2020 Strategic Plan.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 4: Strengthen advancement operations and outcomes.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 5: Leverage progress made establishing financial policies, practices, and tools to track and manage MAG financials.

Objective 3

Care for MAG physical resources and nurture its human resources.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 6: Maintain and upgrade facilities and technology to meet the needs of MAG's larger, more diverse audience.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 7: Develop and diversify MAG human resources.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 8: Evaluate and allocate human and financial resources and improve processes to increase organizational efficiency.





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