

Biggs Museum of American **Art**

Biggs Museum of American Art

406 Federal. St.

Dover, DE 19901

STRATEGIC PLAN

FY 2022 - FY 2025

Approved by the Biggs Museum Board of Trustees on: June 14, 2021

Members of the Strategic Planning Task Force:

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INTRODUCTION

The Biggs Museum of American Art's strategic plan is a framework for decision making, resource development, and resource allocation from FY 2022 through FY 2025, a period of continuing uncertainty. The plan has been designed to enable the Museum to operate successfully and serve its stakeholders whether the Museum:

- rebounds to its pre-pandemic circumstances,
- continues to operate within current constraints, or
- must adapt to a new normal

The goals identified in the plan have value to the Museum whether the operating environment is expansive, or it dictates working on a smaller scale and at a slower pace. Some goals are imperative whatever the environment. The Museum is dedicated to using every available opportunity to become a more inclusive organization, committed to a more diverse staff, board and volunteer roster; to embracing new voices and new histories; and widening the lens in presenting exhibitions, programs and research. Other goals have unusually high long-term value to the Museum—for instance, becoming more adept at using technology to extend the Museum's reach; engaging in a broader range of stakeholders; and gathering data essential for good decision making. Implementing the plan will require a mix of new and existing resources and the reallocation of current resources to reflect new priorities. Some projects cannot be implemented until all funds are in hand, others can be implemented more slowly and expand as funds become available.

PARTICIPATING IN A NATIONAL DIALOGUE

As noted above, the Biggs' new strategic plan reflects a major assessment within the field of the role museums can play in addressing structural racism; engaging with historically underserved audiences; and recognizing the cultural legacy and contributions of women, people with disabilities, LGBTQA communities, and people of color.

The Biggs has been engaged for a number of years in looking at its collection, research, exhibitions and public programs through a wider lens. The strategic plan is explicit about the Museum's intention to be more inclusive and equitable in every aspect of its work. Diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (DEAI) is a through-line in the plan. Rather than consolidating the strategies for achieving DEAI into a single goal, each goal in the plan includes strategies and activities that make the Museum's commitment clear and increase the Museum's accountability for achieving results.

Early in the planning process, the discussion of how to achieve the broad goals of diversity, equity, access and inclusion surfaced the potential value of using different words to signal the Museum's intent to be more inclusive and consider everyday transactions as opportunities to build relationships. There is a shift in how the Museum will see visitors and how visitors will see

themselves when they are thought of as stakeholders rather than one-time visitors or as a more impersonal “audience.” Something similar happens when members, even entry level members, are thought of and see themselves as patrons who identify with and support the Museum’s mission and values.

The Museum’s educational programs and approach to the presentation and interpretation of objects in the collection and exhibitions uses a new vocabulary to signal a shift in how the Museum perceives its role and values the part others play in enriching the Museum’s work. The Museum seeks new voices and new histories as it presents and interprets the works in the collection and temporary exhibitions. Educational activity is thought of as collaborative and inclusive; the Museum facilitates rather than teaches, fosters dialogue rather than lectures.

A change in vocabulary is not intended to be a superficial adjustment. In the plan, it serves as a way to express a genuine effort to communicate in a small but significant way the Museum’s intention to be inclusive and accessible, a part of and not apart from the broader community.

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PURPOSE

The Biggs Museum of American Art shares with Delaware's diverse communities the arts and cultural legacy of the Mid-Atlantic region.

VISION STATEMENT

The Biggs Museum aspires to be one of the most prominent art museums in the Mid-Atlantic region—respected and valued for its collections and programs, and admired for the diversity and commitment of its audience. It will be a leading advocate for the importance of art and creativity in education and in the daily life of the community.

MISSION

The Biggs Museum of American Art preserves, celebrates and advances the fine and decorative arts and encourages greater public engagement with the cultural heritage of Delaware and the Mid-Atlantic region.

To fulfill its mission, the Museum:

- reaches out to its community, listening and learning from diverse voices
- endeavors to make the Museum accessible to all
- develops exhibitions and programs of the highest quality to share with visitors, teachers, students, families, and other stakeholders
- provokes a deeper understanding of objects in the collection through scholarship and by presenting their full histories
- forms partnerships with local and regional organizations to serve a broader range of stakeholders
- collaborates with artists to support their individual creativity and to inspire creativity in others
- makes a forceful case for the value of art and culture to a flourishing nation
- commits to caring for its collection, conducting research on it, and adding to it for future generations

CORE VALUES

Excellence

Inclusion

Commitment to Community

Discovery

Respect

The Museum's core values inform every aspect of the Biggs organizational life and its engagement with stakeholders and the broader community.

- The Museum is committed to achieving diversity and inclusion in its hiring practices, governance, programming and engagement with the community.
- The Museum believes creativity has the power to improve individual lives and the well-being of a community.
- The Museum strives to:
 - welcome and respect all visitors;
 - eliminate barriers to access and engagement;
 - offer relevant exhibitions and programs;
 - pursue scholarly excellence in the interpretation and presentation of the collection and special exhibitions;
 - adhere to ethical and transparent practices to preserve the public's trust;
 - ensure a safe, productive and rewarding place to work and volunteer; and
 - work collaboratively with cultural and educational organizations in the Mid-Atlantic region and the State

GOALS

1. Reimagine how exhibitions and the permanent collection can be experienced and interpreted
2. Heighten the Museum's centrality to Dover and the Mid-Atlantic region
3. Enhance the Museum's presence on The Green, assuring its role in the Nation's rich history
4. Strengthen the Museum's virtual presence
5. Increase financial capacity and broaden the base of support
6. Strengthen the Museum's organizational capacity

GOALS + STRATEGIES

1. Reimagine how exhibitions and the permanent collection can be experienced and interpreted

The Museum's ongoing efforts to deepen its understanding of the collection are a strong basis for creating more meaningful personal encounters with objects in the collection, whether experienced in the galleries or online. The Museum's commitment to special and temporary exhibitions enables the Museum to pursue an important goal—increased opportunities for new interpretations and fresh comparisons of artists and objects as well as enabling visitors to experience a diversity of arts and art forms. The greater reliance on technology to engage the public, pushes the Museum to innovate in its approaches to enriching and enlivening the presentation and interpretation of the collection as well as the presentation of temporary exhibitions. As the Museum continues to take a deeper look at its collection and focuses on facilitating more meaningful personal experiences, the Museum will also increase and prioritize additions to its collection that broaden its diversity and representation. Reimagining how the Museum connects visitors with new knowledge and increases the enjoyment of seeing objects in a new light or different context are essential to the future of the Biggs and its perceived value.

2. Heighten the Museum's centrality to Dover and the Mid-Atlantic region

The Museum is a cultural asset for the local community and for the state of Delaware. It is also a citizen of Dover and can play multiple roles as a citizen—a partner with strong outreach and educational value, a business contributing economically to its community, a valued civic organization and a good neighbor. The Museum is committed to enhancing the quality of life in its immediate community and to increasing a sense of ownership among local residents. The Museum serves as a portal to creativity in the State Capital through its relationships with Delaware artists and presentations of their work. Its temporary exhibitions connect those in the Mid-Atlantic region with art, artists and stories from Delaware, the region, the nation and around the world. The path to heightening the Museum's centrality to Dover will require the Museum to form new partnerships that help build a thorough understanding of the Museum's civic role and value. The path to heightening the Museum's centrality to the Mid-Atlantic region will require a better understanding of the demographics of the area and increasing awareness of the Biggs as a first-class art museum and destination.

3. Enhance the Museum's presence on The Green, assuring its role in the Nation's rich history

The Museum will expand its footprint in the State Capital when it occupies two historic structures on The Green, thereby placing the Museum in context with Delaware and the Nation's history. With its expansion to The Green, the Museum joins the web of events and relationships that make The Green historically significant to the state and the Nation. The

Museum will use the collection and temporary installations to tell a story about Delaware's history including the role of indigenous and enslaved people. The Museum has enhanced opportunities to enter new relationships with the National Park Service, and state and federal programs that support and promote history.

4. Strengthen the Museum's virtual presence

The Museum will grow and improve its virtual doorstep. The Museum has become more adroit and imaginative at presenting exhibitions, works in the collection, educational activities and lectures to people in the region and also nationally through the use of the Internet and social media. This way of introducing people to the Museum and giving them access to the Museum's activities has proved to be invaluable and should be expanded. This will require investments in staff, the technology and tools needed for consistent production values and quality content.

5. Increase financial capacity and broaden the base of support

The Museum weathered the first year of the pandemic, retaining its staff and offering its programs online. Over the last year, the Museum has been aware of the potential impact of prolonged closures on earned income, the cultivation of prospective major donors, and the ability to attract and retain members. The Museum will explore possible business models that build a reliable stream of income from virtual programming and encourage participants to support the Museum by becoming donors and members. This will provide the Museum with the opportunity to explore new mechanisms for fund raising, including planned giving, and gauge their promise for the Museum's long-term financial well-being. Changes and experiments in resource development designed to navigate the current financial environment may demonstrate continued promise for the Museum as the environment for contributed income improves.

6. Strengthen the Museum's organizational capacity

The Museum benefits now more than ever from its ability to cultivate and retain a strong, talented team of staff and board that considers itself part of the Museum's future. The Museum is committed to building diversity at every opportunity—for board and staff but also for interns, volunteers, and temporary positions. The Museum staff has grown and for the plan to succeed the Museum needs to assure that the staff has a unified vision of the Museum's goals and priorities and is working together to achieve them. A greater understanding of how teams function effectively will help clarify each person's contribution to the successful completion of a project and support mutual accountability for performance. In considering how to implement the strategic plan, the Museum will need to evaluate whether the new or expanded activities envisioned in the plan require re-balancing current capacity or increasing it.
