Five Year Strategic Plan

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A unique institution

The American Writers Museum is a unique institution in the United States, the only museum of its kind celebrating the impact of writers and their work on the history and culture of the country. In an era when artificial intelligence tools are writing, and information flows across the world with greater density and speed every day, it is incredibly important that we consistently reflect on the power of those words and the people who craft them to change and influence history. The American Writers Museum does that every day through exhibits, online initiatives, programming, and educational work.

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.”
- Audre Lorde

“We found this little gem just walking down Michigan Avenue on our recent trip to Chicago. It is extremely well done and appropriate for anyone who loves American literature. Very interactive, professionally done and has things for kids and adults. Highly recommend.”
Our Strategic Plan

Starting in 2022 a special board task force was convened to begin the process of addressing the creation of a new five-year strategic plan that would look to guide the institution out beyond its ten-year anniversary. With input from multiple stakeholders, from trustees, staff, advisors, and visitors an in-depth strategic planning process began that included:

- An overhaul of the institution’s Mission to better address what the museum has become since the original mission was conceived before the museum had become a reality
- The development of a strong Vision for what the institution is striving to become
- The identification of a strong set of core Values built off the existing DEAI initiatives
- An in-depth market research study from Slover-Linnet to look at the perceptions of the institution from both its visitors and the people who have not visited yet
- Multiple meetings of the board task force and AWM staff to refine the objectives and goals that would guide the institution to realize its vision over the next five years

“Readers and writers will thoroughly enjoy this interactive, “easy to pace yourself” museum. So well displayed and easy to navigate and enjoy. The exhibits bring a smile or a thought or a memory of a writer, book, or favorite quote. Well worth 2 hours or more. Highly recommend for teen age and above. Stools are located for relaxed time at the different exhibits. A wonderfully conceived and created museum!”

“Our Goals & Aspirations

As an outcome of this work, a set of aspirational goals were developed:

- Reach students in every state in the U.S.
- Create programs with writers that draw a national audience and media coverage
- Increase in-person, online, and social media visitation/engagement by 50% over FY2022
- Cultivate 10,000 annual members
- Grow earned revenue to 1/3 of annual income, and reduce gift revenue to 2/3
- Increase annual gift revenue to 50% over the level of FY2022

What follows are the results of that work to look at how the revised mission and vision are supported by a set of core values and three strategic pillars which will shape the work of the museum over the next five years to achieve these aspirational goals.

“Diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.”

- Maya Angelou

“I loved exploring the interactive exhibits and learning more about so many American authors. I only wish I had more time to spend to read about them all! This was definitely a worthwhile way to spend part of an afternoon.”
Vision
To become the recognized center for the celebration of American writers and writing.

Mission
To excite audiences about the impact of American writers—past, present, and future—in shaping our collective histories, cultures, identities, and daily lives.

Values
The American Writers Museum is committed to a set of core values that shape its work, all growing out of our foundational commitment to Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion.

“Exceeded all of our expectations. Fun for readers AND writers. So interesting and interactive, plus places to sit and read or contemplate or learn more.

Our Values
The American Writers Museum strives to be:

Inspirational — To achieve our most important outcome we consistently work to inspire individuals to open their minds to the power of writing.

Innovative — We continually strive to find and test new ways to elicit moments of inspiration and excitement for all our constituents, from visitors, students and members to our own staff, board, and partners.

Engaging — We recognize that fostering connection is essential, and so we must always be listening and in dialogue with all of our audiences and stakeholders, to facilitate their engagement with the writers of the past, present and future.

Provocative — To create engaging and innovative moments of inspiration we need to be willing to invoke debate and dialogue from the great breadth of American writing past and present.

Honest — We are always honest with ourselves and with all of our audiences, internal and external, because writing is a means of seeking and illuminating truth and that requires first that we embrace honesty.

Representational — We recognize that America is a broad and diverse country that holds high the ideals of equality, but has struggled to be equitable and inclusive to all—which are issues that we engage through our content and our work. The institution’s full statement on Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion can be found on our website at www.AmericanWritersMuseum.org.

“One of the best museums in Chicago! This is an extraordinary museum. A rich, full experience that had us back twice in our 5 day visit to Chicago. If you love to read, you will love this museum. It is interactive in its layout, is thoughtful and exciting.”
Strategic Pillars

In the process of looking for an overarching structure to the museum’s strategy to achieve its Vision, three primary Strategic Pillars have been identified.

I. Deliver on our Mission
II. Strengthen our Capacity
III. Reinforce and Grow

As illustrated here, these pillars are not separate columns of goals and objectives, but rather are three interlinked areas of activity that each support and enhance the other. This was best represented as an interlinking circle that illustrates how each feeds into the other, and the essential nature of staying focused on all three areas to move forward as an institution.

Following are more detailed explanations of each pillar, with a set of identified objectives and tactical areas for development, along with recommendations for identifying measures of success.

With this roadmap the staff will be responsible each year of the next five years for presenting the board with a series of strategic initiatives and a dashboard of criteria for measuring success of those initiatives. The data will be used each year to assess the value of each initiative, modify existing and/or develop new initiatives, and set new benchmarks for the following year.

The purpose of the plan should be to continually advance the Mission of the institution in line with its Values in pursuit of achieving its Aspirational Goals and the longer-term Vision “to become the recognized center for the celebration of American writers and writing.”

“Don’t miss this hidden gem. Amazing find! If you love literature, this place is for you!! The exhibits have unique ways of sharing info”.
1. Deliver on Mission:
Enhance our visitor experiences, adult/student programming, and our virtual and in-person learning experiences through analysis and feedback. Through these processes, continue to identify where strengthening our capacity is needed to better deliver on our mission in pursuit of our vision.

1. Visitor Experiences:
   a. Create new visual and interactive tools to improve visitor engagement throughout the museum
   b. Enhance and expand online content with new podcasts, special online exhibits, and unique online experiences
   c. Use qualitative and quantitative assessments of visitors and their experiences to better understand, refine and improve the in-person experience, and online metrics to better understand, refine and improve the experience of online visitors

2. Program Initiatives:
   a. Build programming for all genres and media of writing with a goal of broadening audiences and creating new experiences
   b. Create programs that expand interactivity and engagement for participants and help to increase the number and diversity of visitors across all ages and demographics

“Good for all ages! This museum is hands down the most fun! Everything is educational and there are interactive games to play!”

c. Develop a significant annual event that cements the museum’s reputation as the center for celebrating American writers and their works

d. Use qualitative and quantitative assessments of program participants and their experiences to better understand, refine and improve programming

3. Educational Initiatives:
   a. Develop tools for AWM curriculum to serve more schools by integrating directly with common classroom/learning management systems (CMS/LMS)
   b. Expand our intensive curriculum offerings to more grade levels to inspire more students about the power and fun of writing
   c. Grow the volume and reach of the National Student Writing Competition
   d. Use qualitative and quantitative assessments from students and teachers to improve materials and methods for creating impact
   e. Develop and activate student and teacher advisory boards to continue regular ongoing input from major stakeholders
II. Strengthen our Capacity:

Develop, diversify, and grow our staff, our board, our partnerships, and our infrastructure (both physical space and online platforms) to meet the Vision. In this process identify the resources needed to reinforce and grow the organization.

1. Staff:
   a. Develop staff by creating opportunities for growth and cross departmental learning
   b. Improve communications and foster an environment for ideation and engagement
   c. As opportunity arises, look to continually increase diversity to build a passionate team environment with a wide breadth of professional and lived experiences
   d. Use retention, advancement, growth, and productivity as measures of success

2. Board:
   a. Engage all board members so that each can help support the institution with their greatest strengths
   b. Increase and improve engagement with and communications to the board to ensure their understanding of the strengths and challenges of the institution
   c. Seek new members to join the board who enhance the board’s diversity in skills, life experience, and capacity to support and advance the mission
   d. Use retention, engagement, and diversity to assess board development

3. Infrastructure:
   a. Improve the physical facility for engagement and access by larger and more diverse audiences
   b. Upgrade and improve online presence to increase engagement and increase time spent on sites

4. Partnerships:
   a. Increase relationships with writers through our National Advisory Council
   b. Launch a volunteer docent program to make partnerships with more individual members of the literary and cultural community
   c. Expand partnerships with community organizations aligned with our mission (e.g. 826Chi, StoryStudio, GetLitLA, etc.)
   d. Maintain and grow active partnerships with local and national cultural institutions with complimentary audience and missions (e.g. Libraries, Museums, Literary Organizations, Theaters, etc.)
   e. Use program increases, audience growth, and increase in exposure metrics to gauge success

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
- Dr. Martin Luther King
III. Reinforce and Grow:
Reinforce the institution’s current support by cultivating visitors, members, corporate partners, and donors. Reach to potential new connections through targeted outreach to grow our base of support. Increase our resources to strengthen and expand capacity, while continuing to deliver on our mission to larger national and international audiences.

1. Visitors:
   a. Create experiences that draw and engage larger and more diverse audiences
   b. Develop more opportunities for visitor engagement that generate additional revenue in retail, space rental and other channels
   c. Measure success through growth in visitation and revenue

2. Members:
   a. Find more opportunities to create special experiences and connections for members both in-person and online
   b. Ensure that member benefits are consistently communicated to all visitors
   c. Measure success through retention and growth in membership numbers and revenue

3. Corporate Partners:
   a. Create more incentives for corporate involvement at a variety of levels
   b. Leverage broad writing content and larger themes in the museum to connect with current corporate initiatives
   c. Promote relevant programs to potential corporate partners
   d. Measure success through the growth of revenue from and number of corporate partners and sponsors

4. Supporters:
   a. Create more opportunities for supporters and potential supporters to engage with mission related activities
   b. Grow the donor base through targeted outreach, with a clear message of the value of the institution and its need for support
   c. Explore the feasibility of a capital campaign and other fundraising strategies to accomplish the goals articulated in this plan
   d. Measure success through the growth of annual operating support, which when combined with earned income exceeds the fiscal needs required to deliver on mission and achieve the vision of this plan
“A place, a space, a magical energy, where a true lover of writing gets lost, flows with the deepest inspiration, joy, and resilience that lies within you. This museum is a treasure to protect and persevere. The interactive elements and creativity of all different ways it can engage a visitor is mindblowing, heartmelting, and mesmerizing. So many spaces to tap into different writing styles in history so far and within you as a writer, reader, and lover of ideas.”