

Strategic Plan

2024-2026

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Executive Summary

The Museum of Danish America, in 2019, created new Mission, Vision, and Values statements (Appendix 1). These are the guiding principles for the museum's practice, and the Vision offers the aspirational long-term goals for the museum: to be the foremost Danish-American museum and cultural center in the nation, to be a model for ethnic heritage museums in how to remain relevant in a changing world, to be a showplace for Danish innovation and its importance to American progress, to be engaging and relevant to people both with and without Danish ancestry, and to help visitors connect past Danish immigrants' experience with the experience of today's Danish and non-Danish immigrants to the United States.

In October 2020, the Museum approved its 2021-2023 Strategic Plan. Over the three years, the plan helped the museum evaluate both current and potential audiences, expand outreach efforts, and examine and address needed skill sets at the staff and board level. One of the biggest accomplishments of the past Strategic Plan was the launch of a new membership structure, including new tiers, benefits, and promotions.

Each Strategic Plan operates with the goal of bringing us ever closer to achieving the museum's vision, being cognizant of the fact that we must constantly learn and grow as our audience and the field changes. In order to continue progressing towards the museum's vision, the Strategic Plan has been divided into five key strategic pillars, each with its own major goal. These are further broken down into individual strategies; objectives within those strategies reflect the tasks that need to be done to accomplish those, as well as the success measures that allow for measurable evaluation of progress.

The first three pillars are directly tied to the museum's public-facing activities, while the last two lay the groundwork and build the organizational capacity to enable everything to happen successfully.

The strategic pillars and commitments are as follows:

Interpret and Engage: We will continue to explore new modes of interpretation and display to create an engaging, inclusive visitor experience for both in-person and virtual interactions. Our programmatic and exhibition offerings will build connections with marginalized communities and non-traditional museum audiences.

Preserve and Share: We will amplify the impact of our artifact, archival, and library collection and create new models for acquisition, exhibition and interpretation.

Place and Space: We will develop and grow the capacity of our buildings and grounds for programming and education. In particular, the development of a Jens Jensen Prairie Landscape Park Master Plan will guide and shape the prairie and its uses for community recreation, education, and events.

Sustainability and Growth: We will create a diverse and stable funding model, while also pursuing new fundraising and grant opportunities.

Organizational Capacity: We will explore new modes of recruitment for board and staff talent, further building an atmosphere where different skills, backgrounds, and experiences are shared and valued.

Framework for Strategic Planning

In 2022, the Board of the Museum of Danish America embarked on a planning process for the 2024-2026 Strategic Plan. The Strategic Planning Assessment Committee, formed after the 2021-2023 Strategic Plan was approved, morphed into the new planning committee, allowing for continuity. Comprised of board and staff members, the Committee laid out many of the museum's major challenges as it strives for sustainable growth and longevity.

An increasing number of Danish Americans, particularly youth, are less connected to their Danish heritage and the immigrant generation. However, the interest in broader immigration narratives remains strong.

The Museum needs a more robust and diversified source of revenue to continue to support its activities in Elk Horn and across the country.

The Museum's rural location, combined with an aging population, means that programs and marketing need to be adapted to both serve the needs of a shifting immediate community while also connecting with new and non-traditional museum audiences.

The Museum's previous 2021-2023 Strategic Plan had begun to address some of these major concerns, but the understanding was that a greater step needed to be taken towards creating achievable goals with measurable outcomes that would help the museum grow, in all senses of the word.

In addition, the Museum is up for reaccreditation in 2026. Therefore, a major consideration entering the drafting process for the new strategic plan was understanding the American Alliance of Museums' expectations and potential changes to the accreditation process. The Excellence in DEIA report released in Summer 2022, along with ongoing communication from AAM, indicated that Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility would be part of new standards. It was important for the Museum to explore ways to meaningfully incorporate those principles into our work.

Using the Museum's Vision statement as aspirational goals and factoring in short- and long-term challenges, the new Strategic Plan was drafted. The organizational structure was changed to better reflect the interconnectedness of departmental work and major thematic areas of operations.

Strategic Pillar: Interpret and Engage

GOAL: We will continue to explore new modes of interpretation and display to create an engaging, inclusive visitor experience for both in-person and virtual interactions. Our programs and exhibitions will offer ways to broaden the museum's audience, especially for local and regional populations.

Strategy 1: Incorporate accessibility standards into exhibits and public programs.

Objective 1: Create baseline accessibility standards for all programs and exhibits.

Success measure: Utilizing existing guides and checklists, create baseline accessibility standard checklist that can be applied to every public program and exhibit by end of 2024.

Objective 2: Develop accessibility materials that can be made available through visitors in person and online.

Success measure: Exploration of guides and materials and best practices, creation of materials such as story guides for visits, sensory kits, through 2024. Exhibition accessibility standards such as large format labels and audio guides will be explored and codified by summer 2025.

Success measure: Refine and update accessibility page on website to inform visitors of what is available by end of 2024.

Strategy 2: Gather metrics on audience engagement and satisfaction.

Objective 1: Create baseline for audience evaluation methods and metrics.

Success measure: Explore surveys, observational data collection, and other audience data gathering methods, as well as incentive-based participation, to determine the best way to gather responses. Create a template that can be used for programs moving forward. Study of data collection through 2024, baseline template implemented by summer 2025. Improve tracking system for visitor passes to better document use and repeat visits.

Strategy 3: Foster local and regional participation and engagement through the museum's exhibitions and programs.

Objective 1: Create new paid and free programming opportunities.

Success measure: Creation of at least one free program for every exhibit, and at least one paid exhibit-related program each year, beginning in 2024.

Objective 2: To increase youth engagement, create school materials/youth-focused materials to accompany every major exhibit.

Success measure: Creation of teacher's guide for major exhibits by late 2025.

Success measure: Creation of youth-focused material at the front desk to better engage with exhibition content.

Strategy 4: Use exhibitions and programs to create a more inclusive environment for visitors, regardless of background, to learn about the Danish immigrant and Danish-American experience.

Objective 1: Address gaps and conflicts in the core exhibition to ensure that it provides a complete and nuanced story of Danish and Danish-American history, within the context of broader American history, specifically immigration history.

Success measure: Evaluation of core exhibit content by end of 2025, changes are incorporated by end of 2026.

Objective 2: Create more visible connections to modern immigration stories to foster understanding and empathy.

Success measure: At least two programs around the Art Quilt show that address broader discussions of culture and immigration (before May 2024).

Success measure: Addition of a 'contemporary immigration' discussion within the core exhibit.

Strategy 5: Improve digital outreach to promote museum activities, programs, membership, and planned giving.

Objective 1: Grow social media presence to create regular, varied content across a variety of platforms.

Success measure: Creation of a 'social media guide' to ensure content standards across platforms by end of 2024.

Success measure: Grow Facebook followers to 15,000, Instagram followers to 3,000, YouTube subscribers to 1000, and TikTok followers to 1,000 by end of 2026.

Objective 2: Using existing metrics about YouTube viewership and preferences, develop a plan for continued and increased engagement on the platform.

Success measure: Evaluate current viewership trends and develop a plan to capitalize on current audience desires as well as broader YouTube viewership trends by end of 2024, including increased views, watch time, and engagement metrics (likes/comments).

Strategic Pillar: Preserve and Share

GOAL: We will amplify the impact of our artifact, archival, and library collections and create new models for acquisition, exhibition, and interpretation.

Strategy 1: Strengthen the museum's collections by filling gaps in current collecting practices, identifying redundancies, and refining current holdings.

Objective 1: Identify key gaps in current permanent collection.

Success measure: Updated Collections Plan by early 2025.

Objective 2: Identify and cultivate potential donors to fill gaps in the permanent collection.

Success measure: Creation of a list of potential donors and increased outreach and engagement with them.

Objective 3: Evaluate storage areas and future storage needs for the permanent collection

Success measure: Creation of a broad storage plan, including evaluation of potential options to address collection growth by 2025.

Objective 4: Review the GEC collection in light of relevant research resources and potential overlap with DAAL.

Success measure: Refinement of GEC collection and creation of a guiding plan for the library and archival collections held in the space by end of 2025.

Strategy 2: Increase access to and visibility of collections through use of digital media.

Objective 1: Create collections-focused digital content to share behind the scenes work.

Success measure: Four pieces of digital content per year by 2024.

Objective 2: Create social media plan for building visibility and excitement around new Visual Storage and major theme areas of the permanent collection.

Success measure: Written plan with timeline, new social media posts/digital content around the installation by early 2024.

Objective 3: Build relationships with institutions with decorative arts holdings for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Success measure: Using the Danish Ceramics: Beyond Blue and White exhibit as a vehicle for conversation, reach out to institutions across North America. The majority will be contacted by the end of 2023/early 2024; however, this will be ongoing.

Objective 4: Continue digitization of unique museum assets, including family files and Danish Sisterhood ledgers.

Success measure: Successful digitization of the Sisterhood Ledgers by end of 2024.

Success measure: Successful digitization of the vertical files, including family files and Wall of Honor files, in the GEC by 2026. Expansion of volunteer capacity to scan the materials.

Success measure: Increased social media outreach regarding the digitization projects, particularly around the Sisterhood. Goal of four videos and/or presentations regarding the content and project before the end of 2024.

Strategy 3: Improve local access to and visibility of collection through increased object-based education.

Objective 1: Create an educational object plan to specify appropriate levels of use, handling guides, borrowing possibilities, as well as areas for potential growth, etc.

Success measure: Identify gaps in educational collection & potential donors to fill those in 2024, with conversations ongoing as new opportunities arise or new educational programs are explored.

Success measure: Guiding documents for collections, curatorial, and education staff by late 2025.

Objective 2: New educational programming for different audience groups incorporating object-based learning objectives.

Success measure: Incorporation of object-based discussion and learning objectives into SPARK! Programming by early 2024.

Success measure: Evaluation of and changes to the trunk program collection to improve experience and for object safety by 2024.

Success measure: Creation of lending kits with objects and discussion guides for educators that can be 'checked out' for people who want independent learning opportunities by 2026.

Strategic Pillar: Place and Space

GOAL: We will develop and grow the capacity of our buildings and grounds for programming and education. In particular, the development of a Jens Jensen Prairie Landscape Park Master Plan will guide and shape the prairie and its uses for community recreation, education, and events.

Strategy 1: Improve use of Bedstemor's House as an attraction and community asset.

Objective 1: Create new programming around Bedstemor's House.

Success measure: Host 2-3 youth and adult events per year at Bedstemor's House, including one paid event, by end of 2024.

Objective 2: Explore cost-benefit of future Bedstemor's House-centric programs.

Success measure: report on cost v. results by end of 2024.

Strategy 2: Create a Museum Grounds Master Site Plan to guide use and development of the space, including the Jens Jensen Prairie Landscape Park.

Objective 1: Explore perspectives on use of the space and ideas for improvement from stakeholder parties.

Success measure: Focus groups with different stakeholders resulting in report by end of 2024.

Objective 2: Building upon results of focus groups, community input, and resource inventory, develop a site plan that reflects community need, museum capacity, and long-term goals.

Success measure: Formal Museum Grounds Master Site Plan completed by end of 2025, implementation on immediate action points by end of 2026.

Strategy 3: Improve visibility and use of Jens Jensen Prairie Landscape Park as an educational tool and recreation asset.

Objective 1: Identify and connect with key partners who would have interest in use of the site and educational offerings.

Success measure: Identify and connect with key partners who would have interest in use of the site and educational offerings, including local educational institutions, hobbyist groups, Boy/Girl Scouts, and other groups and institutions by 2024.

Objective 2: Improve the use of the prairie by local educational institutions.

Success measure: Promote the JJPLP as a resource for K-12 science education. Connect with teachers in other disciplines to discuss use of the prairie for other subjects, including literature, art, and more, by end of 2024.

Success measure: Formation of relationships with nearby colleges and universities and one page prospectus with potential research possibilities by early 2026.

Strategy 4: Evaluate the Genealogy and Education Center to identify opportunities and areas for growth and engagement.

Objective 1: Explore new program opportunities and identify facility's needs for future program and educational growth.

Success measure: Development and implementation of 2 GEC-based programs per year by 2024.

Success measure: Safety and security audit of the GEC completed by 2024, recommendations addressed by 2026.

Objective 2: Promote education and research resources of the GEC to assess future priorities of use of the space and collections.

Success measure: Increased social media visibility for the space and collections, with goal of at least one GEC-related post per month, beginning in summer 2024.

Success measure: Creation of a tracking system to document what resources are being utilized in the space by staff, visitors, or other groups, as well as what types of materials generate the most interest by end of 2024.

Success measure: Based on results of usage study and evaluation of resources, create a plan to guide future use of the space and collections by 2026.

Objective 2: Evaluate audiences using the space and what attracts them to visit.

Success measure: Creation and use of a survey for visitors to the GEC by summer 2024. Data collection will last about 6-8 months to capture both peak season as well as those who visit during off-season months.

Strategy 5: Evaluate and address barriers to accessibility throughout the museum campus.

Objective 1: Create a more accessible experience for Bedstemor's House through the use of digital media.

Success measure: Provide on-site access to a Virtual Tour of Bedstemor's House for visitors who cannot easily navigate Bedstemor's House by May 2024.

Success measure: Creation of a new Bedstemor's House video introduction and tour that can be accessible on YouTube and on-site for visitors by 2025.

Objective 2: Meet or exceed standards for accessibility in museum spaces.

Success measure: Complete an accessibility audit, generating a report outlining current barriers to access for museum facilities, particularly the GEC and the main museum building, and what can be done to remedy them by end of 2024.

Success measure: Act upon recommendations in written document by end of 2025.

Strategic Pillar: Sustainability and Growth

GOAL: We will create a diverse and stable funding model, while also pursuing new fundraising and grant opportunities.

Strategy 1: Pursue funding for institutional priorities through targeted donor identification and recruiting.

Objective 1: Engage donors around major campus projects, including the drain system and the Jens Jensen Prairie Landscape Park.

Success measure: Raise \$100,000 to support the costs of addressing the French drain and JJPLP projects by the end of 2024.

Objective 2: Explore donor opportunities around collections care and growth.

Success measure: Contact with at least 10 donors with interest in collections care or with significant holdings of important collections.

Success measure: Report on donors with interest in collections and increased engagement with them around collections growth and conservation opportunities by 2026.

Objective 3: Commitment to ongoing endowment growth, with the long-term goal of a \$12 million endowment.

Success measure: Invest an additional \$1 million in the endowments by 2026.

Strategy 2: Diversify donor base to create a more sustainable funding model that acknowledges the changing demographics of current audiences.

Objective 1: Identify key target groups and audiences for museum membership and evaluate barriers to participation.

Success measure: Report on organizations, groups, regions, etc. that have significant potential for member growth and explanation of why current membership is not at potential levels by 2025.

Success measure: Using report to guide next steps, increase membership of key groups by 25% by 2026.

Objective 2: Incorporate membership discussions into public programming.

Success measure: Creation of a basic 'benefits of membership' elevator speech and slide that can be incorporated into public programs reaching a non-member audience by early 2024.

Objective 3: Evaluate successes and areas of improvement for new membership program, launched in 2023.

Success measure: Written report on implementation of new membership program and results by end of 2024, including renewals, new memberships, feedback, and staff time requirements. Initial report on gift membership drive as part of this report, a second report on gift membership renewals and longer-term impact by end of 2025.

Strategy 3: Use ticketed special events to engage existing donor base and connect with non-traditional donors.

Objective: Successfully organize and implement annual regional and national events that act as fundraisers for the museum.

Success measure: Report on 40th anniversary outreach by 2024, studying attendance, revenue, return on staff time, and other key metrics to understand what made events successful.

Success measure: By 2025, implement annual events that generate a net profit.

Strategic Pillar: Organizational Capacity

GOAL: We will explore new modes of recruitment for board and staff talent, further building an atmosphere where different skills, backgrounds, and experiences are shared and valued.

The Museum of Danish America is an *equal opportunity employer*: we do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or disability. *Employment decisions* are not based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age or genetic information. We believe in *equal pay* for substantially equal work.

We endorse and model our workplace policies and practices on federal laws which prohibit employment discrimination. Discrimination is federally prohibited when it involves:

- Harassment by managers, co-workers, or others in the workplace, because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability.
- Denial of a reasonable workplace accommodation the employee needs because of religious beliefs, disability, or pregnancy, childbirth, or other medical conditions.
- Retaliation because the employee complained about job discrimination, or assisted with a job discrimination investigation or lawsuit.

The federal laws which frame these behaviors: Equal Pay Act of 1963; Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII); Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978; Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967; Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Sections 501, 505); Rehabilitation Act Amendment of 1973 (Section 504); Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Titles I and V); ADA Amendments Act of 2008; Civil Rights Act of 1991 (Sections 102, 103); Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (Title II); Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Pregnant Workers Fairness Act 2022.

Strategy 1: Evaluate strengths and gaps in museum staff and board knowledge and skills and take steps to address/remedy those gaps.

Objective 1: Evaluate current board member skill sets and identify gaps.

Success measure: Template/rubric of board member skills; list of desired skills for consideration for future board members by October 2024.

Objective 2: Explore non-traditional recruitment for board member and staff member hiring.

Success measure: Explore and join professional groups to gain access to resources and best practices in making opportunities available to a diverse audience.

Success measure: By start of 2024, cultivate potential board members whose professional experience and interests make them suitable candidates but may not identify as Danish or Danish-American.

Success measure: Explore methods to address financial barriers to board participation through tools such as board sponsorship. Written document outlining the results of exploration and conversations by end of 2025.

Objective 3: Foster support for professional development opportunities that allow staff and board to remedy knowledge and skill gaps, while also developing new skills that are important for a changing museum field.

Success measure: Ongoing commitment to professional development opportunities. Offer specific opportunities related to board and staff professional development. At least 3 hours of professional development completed per member by end of 2024.

Strategy 2: Strengthen organization-wide commitment to Equal Opportunity Employment (EOE) principles, and consideration, evaluation or removal of existing and possible barriers to the widely varying public visitor experience.

Objective 1: Improve internal competency around EOE-related topics.

Success measure: For staff, creation of a scheduled professional development/discussion series around EOE-related topics, implemented by summer 2025. For board members, inclusion of EOE commitments as part of orientation and annual training on relevant topics beginning in October 2025.

Success measure: Increased offerings of EOE trainings and development opportunities from a variety of sources for both staff and board by end of 2025.

Objective 2: Recognize, formalize and reinforce organization-wide goals and commitments in this area of practice related to the prospective visitor experience.

Success measure: Form working group to establish plan laying out milestones and measurable objectives by end of 2025.

Success measure: Joining the Museums for All network by early 2024, with outreach efforts through newspapers and local assistance programs through the end of 2024.

Objective 3: Building upon past land acknowledgment work, develop a land acknowledgment in partnership with relevant indigenous communities and utilize it for programs and in signage.

Success measure: Completion of land acknowledgment process by end of 2025, use and signage by early 2026. Relationships with Native communities will be ongoing.

Strategy 3: Revise board committee structures to better reflect the role of the board in supporting institutional goals.

Objective 1: Develop a new framework for committees and implement the new board structure.

Success measure: Implementation of new structures and committee by February 2024.

Success measure: Create process for sharing and evaluation new proposals from board members and constituents by February 2024.

Objective 2: Update board recruitment and orientation materials to better reflect and communicate board roles and expectations.

Success measure: All changes approved and new materials distributed to board members by October 2024.

Conclusion

Guided by the Strategic Plan, the Museum of Danish America will seek to be a model among ethnic heritage museums, sparking interest, inspiring creativity, and leading with compassion and empathy. The Museum is poised to capitalize on the experiences gained and lessons learned over the past three years. From resiliency through the pandemic to the outreach and fundraising of the 40th anniversary year to the launch of a new membership program – the museum is positioned to bring those lessons and knowledge to the next three years. The Strategic Plan represents the intersection of the museum’s vision for the future, the desire to address challenges head-on, and the goal of sustainable future growth. The core of this plan is the museum’s Mission, Vision, and Values, which serve as guiding tenets and push the museum ever-forward towards being a welcoming space for everyone to gather and learn.

Appendix 1: Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission

The Museum of Danish America explores the Danish-American experience, the historic and modern influences of Denmark on the United States, and the continuing story of how a nation of immigrants shape American identity.

Values

We are:

Inspirational: We honor the contributions of Danish-Americans to the complex fabric of American history and culture.

Innovative: We present visitors with experiences that challenge and enlighten. We experiment with new ways of engaging audiences locally, regionally, and nationally.

Authentic: Using primary sources, we tell the story of Danish immigration in all its complexity, including success and failure, accomplishment and discouragement, longing for what was left behind and hope for a new life.

Visitor-centered: We educate and entertain visitors of all backgrounds and engage them in a dialogue about American identity through the lens of the Danish immigrant experience and the influences of modern Danish society and culture.

Promoting tolerance and respect: We build appreciation for the United States as a nation of immigrants, past and present.

Focused on preservation: We collect and preserve artifacts, documents, and stories for current and future education and scholarship.

Stewards: We focus on responsible management of human, financial, and facility resources, sustaining the museum and its mission for future generations.

Vision

To be the foremost Danish-American museum and cultural center in the nation.

To be a model for ethnic heritage museums in how to remain relevant in a changing world.

To be a showplace for Danish innovation and its importance to American progress.

To be engaging and relevant to people both with and without Danish ancestry.

To help visitors connect past Danish immigrants' experience with the experience of today's Danish and non-Danish immigrants to the United States.