

AAMC & AAMC Foundation Strategic Plan 2009-2012

#I. Introduction/ Executive Summary

The Board of Trustees of the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC) and AAMC Foundation is pleased to present the AAMC's 2009 - 2012 Strategic Plan. The worldwide financial crisis has proven extremely challenging to art museums and their staffs as well as to the AAMC. Responding to this extraordinary set of circumstances, the AAMC has drafted this strategic plan with specific attention paid to persuasively articulating the role and importance of art museum curators for both the institutions and the audiences they serve.

a. Background

About the AAMC

Curators have a primary responsibility for the acquisition, care, display, and interpretation of works of art. The Association of Art Museum Curators was founded in 2001 to support the role of curators in shaping the mission of art museums in North America. A history of the organization may be found at www.artcurators.org.

Mission of AAMC & AAMC Foundation

The mission of the Association of Art Museum Curators is to support and promote the work of museum curators by creating opportunities for networking, collaboration, professional development, and advancement.

In support of these aims, the AAMC Foundation seeks to heighten public understanding of the curator's role in art museums through professional development programs, awards, and grants.

Vision Statement

By providing a dynamic forum in which to share ideas and encourage professional development, the Association of Art Museum Curators will continue to attract membership, increasing its visibility and importance to American art museum curators and to the larger arts community.

Record of Accomplishment

Since 2001, the organization has seen its membership grow to just over 900 members. Our many accomplishments and member benefits (See Appendix A) have increased each year. Among these, the AAMC has:

- Organized eight Annual Meetings including our first west coast meeting in 2008. The average attendance for these meetings has ranged between 200-270 members/year
- Awarded over \$40,000 in travel grants for curators to attend the AAMC Annual Meetings and other professional development conferences around the country with special funding assistance from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and Henry Luce Foundation
- Awarded over \$20,000 in 2005-06 in emergency grants to curators affected by Hurricane Katrina
- Organized two highly successful regional programs, one in Chicago in 2004 and one in St. Louis in 2008, with a combined attendance of over 120 members
- Published and distributed the 2007 Professional Practices for Art Museum Curators handbook
- Created a dynamic website in 2005 with a section exclusively for members featuring a searchable directory, an online discussion forum, and traveling exhibition postings, as well as a public area for employment opportunities
- Produced a compensation review in 2006 covering 23 years of salary data that compared curatorial salaries as well as those of other museum professionals (including directors, development and marketing personnel, conservators, etc.)
- Awarded annual prizes since 2003 for excellence in publishing including outstanding permanent collection and exhibition catalogues, outstanding essays or extended catalogue entries, and established an exhibition & installation award voted on by the membership of the AAMC
- Established the quarterly distribution of an e-newsletter for all members, affiliates, and supporters
- Worked in tandem with the Center for Curatorial Leadership, co-founded by Elizabeth Easton and Agnes Gund, to provide curators with leadership training, an initiative prompted by the 2005 Annual Meeting

b. Process

In early November 2008, the Board of Trustees of the AAMC met in St. Louis to participate in a day-long strategic session aimed at mapping out the goals and priorities of the organization for the next three years. This strategic plan integrates the conclusions from that session and incorporates input from AAMC staff, standing committees, and the membership of the organization at large.

The drafting and editing of this document was carried out by AAMC Director, Sally Block and members of an ad-hoc Strategic Planning Committee including: Chair, Judith Dolkart, Brooklyn Museum; Cynthia Burlingham, UCLA, Hammer Museum; George Keyes (retired), Detroit Institute of Arts; Jordana Pomeroy, National Museum for Women in the Arts; and Stephan Wolohojian, Harvard Art Museum.

c. Key Priorities of Strategic Plan

As museums face new and challenging realities, curators must work with their institutions to develop programs that maintain the integrity of collections and exhibitions, foster community support, and generate revenue. The AAMC seeks to provide professional development and networking opportunities, which will enable its members to play an active and meaningful role in these broader institutional priorities.

The Board of Trustees and the standing committees of the AAMC have identified six main priorities for this strategic plan to best serve the membership and strengthen the organization:

1. Support and promote the curatorial profession
2. Retain existing members and target new members
3. Support professional development
4. Reevaluate internal AAMC governance and staffing structures
5. Build and implement a sustainable fundraising plan
6. Respond to the changing economic climate and its impact on museums and the curatorial profession

#II. Values & Goals

The AAMC values, supports and promotes:

- Professional development and advancement
- Recognition of excellence within the field
- Research and scholarship
- Ethical and professional standards
- Collaboration among members and across professional organizations
- Dissemination of information and resources pertinent to the advancement of curatorial practice and expertise

The goals of the AAMC are to:

- Provide an open forum for discussion about museum issues in North America
- Articulate professional standards and best practices

- Promote research, scholarship, networking, and mentoring opportunities through travel grants
- Use the website to exchange scholarly and procedural information as well as traveling exhibition and employment opportunities
- Recognize distinguished achievement in the field through annual awards
- Promote best practices and professional relationships through Annual Meetings and educational programs on selected themes held at venues throughout North America
- Serve as an advocacy group for the curatorial profession
- Accomplish these goals in cooperation with museum directors, trustees, and other staff as well as other national cultural and arts advocacy organizations

#III. Priorities and Actions

Priority I: Support and promote the curatorial profession

Strategy I: Define and articulate the many roles and responsibilities of the curator to a wider audience both within and external to the museum community.

Strategy II: Identify other organizations, associations, or programs with which the AAMC can participate to increase exposure and cultivate a clearer understanding of the profession for the public at large.

Strategy III: Look to other organizational models to encourage better institutional priorities for the promotion and advancement for curators.

Priority II: Retain existing members and target new members

Strategy I: Better communicate with current membership to maintain renewal rates.

Strategy II: Target specific regions or curatorial disciplines for recruitment.

Strategy III: Collaborate with other arts organizations to identify potential cross-benefits (contract-based negotiations for reduced subscription services, hotel rates, airline fares, etc.).

Strategy IV: Develop programs for undergraduate and graduate students to cultivate a new generation of curators

Priority III: Support professional development

Strategy I: Create a long-term plan for the professional development needs of our members. Align programmatic timetables and fundraising goals to these needs.

Strategy II: Work closely with the Center for Curatorial Leadership and other curatorial training programs to collaborate and broaden development opportunities across the profession. Engage other museum professionals to further learning and understanding of the comprehensive needs of the museum field.

Priority IV: Reevaluate internal governance & staffing structures

Strategy I: Revise board and staff job descriptions to create a system of orientation and evaluation for board members and staff.

Strategy II: Develop a formal system for trustee and committee recruitment and orientation including revisiting terms and rotation cycles.

Strategy III: Revise current by-laws to reflect updated governance structures.

Strategy IV: Look at the staffing needs of the organization and devise a plan to hire additional staff (paid and/or unpaid) to fulfill these needs.

Priority V: Build & implement sustainable fundraising plan

Strategy I: With the creation of a three-year fundraising plan for the organization, distribute trustee responsibilities across the various plan priorities and develop a system for scheduling and evaluating fundraising initiatives.

Strategy II: Encourage and promote board and member involvement in fundraising goals by setting reasonable timetables and commitment levels.

Priority VI: Respond to changing economic climate and its impact on museums and the curatorial profession

Strategy I: Communicate and collaborate closely with local, national and international arts initiatives to address the consequences (both immediate and long-term) of the economic downturn.

Strategy II: Create a system for gathering budgetary or retrenchment updates from members, including those that can be made confidentially. Information collected will serve to help shape future programs and keep the organization apprised of structural changes affecting museums.

Strategy III: Identify outlets (media, other arts organizations, government watch groups, public forums, etc.) with which the AAMC can communicate, compile, and share information and resources.

#IV. Conclusion

With its 2009-2012 Strategic Plan, the Board of Trustees of the AAMC renews its commitment to the membership by advocating for the importance of the art museum curator to the museum profession and to the public through ongoing annual and regional meetings; the development of new programs to target future members of the profession; and an enhanced website presence. The proposed focus on internal governance and staffing structures will permit the AAMC to prepare effectively for the succession of elected and appointed officers and to further the work of committees as well as critical fundraising efforts.

#V. Appendix A: Member Criteria & Benefits

Appendix A: Member Benefits

Individual Membership

AAMC individual membership is open to all curators (curatorial assistant through senior or chief) with direct responsibility for works of art at any member museum of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD). Curators with similar responsibilities at non-AAMD institutions may apply for membership to the AAMC Membership Committee.

Dues are proportional to annual salary (Note: Dues reflect May 2009 increases):

- \$30 for members earning up to \$50,000
- \$75 for members earning between \$50,000 and \$80,000
- \$150 for members earning over \$80,000

AAMC individual membership provides:

- A dynamic website, with a section exclusively for members, including
 - an active and private discussion board
 - the only extant directory of North American curators
 - access to classifieds for jobs, upcoming symposia, travel tips and exhibitions available for travel
 - access to sample exhibition planning documents
 - a digital archive of past publications including all AAMC newsletters and the 2006 Compensation Review
 - a listing of past publication & exhibition awards recipients and nominees
 - a listing of upcoming professional travel grant opportunities & resources
- An instrument for leadership in the profession
 - regional workshops
 - professional standards handbook
- An annual conference free to all members
 - discussion of major issues key to the curatorial profession
 - unique opportunity for national networking

- a unified voice for curators in response to major issues affecting the profession

Institutional Membership

AAMC institutional members contribute to the organization by providing the central funding we need to continue our programming each year. We are confident that the growth of the AAMC will continue to reflect the support and desire of museum directors across the country to see the curatorial profession flourish and serve both our institutions and the larger museum community. Our sliding scale dues structure is based on an institution's budget, following the AAMD guidelines, but at a significant reduction in the contributions.

AAMC institutional membership provides:

- Free posting for jobs, symposia, fellowships and exhibitions available for travel on the AAMC website
- Free conference registration for your curators to attend our Annual Conference and regional programs
- Museum acknowledgement and a link on the AAMC website
- A copy of the 2007 handbook, Professional Practices for Art Museum Curators
- Acknowledgement in the Annual Conference program