



# Strategic Plan (2026-30)

Dennos Museum Center at Northwestern Michigan College



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	3
WHO WE ARE .....	6
INTRODUCTION .....	7
AAM ACCREDITATION .....	8
INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL REVIEW.....	9
ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY.....	14
FINANCIAL OVERVIEW .....	16
STRATEGIC GOALS & OBJECTIVES .....	17
EVALUATION & COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS.....	18



Above: DMC received firrst-time Certified Autism Center (CAC) recognition in 2024.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 2019: Leadership Transition

Following over 30 years of leadership and growth under founding director Eugene Jenneman (1989-2019), the Dennos Museum Center hired its first new director in the museum's history. Craig Hadley began his new role as executive director in fall 2019. Hadley spent the previous 8 years at DePauw University, where he led the program through first-time accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and co-created a museum studies minor curriculum for undergraduates.

### Looking Back: Expansion and *The New Dennos Campaign*

The Dennos Museum Center serves many audiences through many different points of engagement. Its previous mission (2000-2021) reflects the multipurpose nature of the DMC to deliver performances, films, concerts, lectures, temporary exhibitions, and semi-permanent displays to a variety of campus and community audiences.<sup>1</sup>

As an embedded community college museum program, the DMC reaches over 62,000 visitors and learners of all ages through a wide variety of programs, exhibitions, and concerts.

Approximately 2,000 NMC students and faculty utilize the museum each academic year, while the remaining 60,000 visitors are comprised largely of residents, adult and K-12 learners, and tourists during the summer months.

Under Eugene Jenneman's leadership, the museum underwent a two-year 15,000 square foot facility expansion and was dedicated in January 2018. Thanks to leadership gifts from the Milock and Smith families along with 16 other donors who together gave nearly \$4 million, the expansion added 10,000 square feet of new semi-permanent exhibition space for the nearly 3,000 works in the permanent art collection, along with additional space for the museum's core holdings of Canadian Inuit artwork. The remaining 5,000 square feet included expanded mechanical rooms, a new classroom space for NMC audio technology courses, and expanded storage and access for Milliken auditorium.

### Looking Back: The 2000 Strategic Plan

The last strategic plan for the museum dates to 2000 and encompassed three main goals defined by a Task Force of community stakeholders and museum staff. Those goals included:

#### Goal One: Regional Ownership<sup>2</sup>

Strengthen the region's sense of ownership in the Dennos; developing an understanding of its vision, mission, and strategic plan; assuring that the region is involved in its programming, committed to its excellence, and invested in its long-term wellbeing.

#### Goal Two: Financial Position

Strengthen the Dennos Museum Center's financial position, assuring its ability to continue to provide excellence in the arts, culture, and sciences in the region through a variety of initiatives

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<sup>1</sup> 2000 Mission Statement: The Dennos Museum Center seeks to engage, entertain, and enlighten its audiences through the collection of art and the presentation of exhibitions and programs in the visual arts, sciences and performing arts.

<sup>2</sup> 2000 Vision Statement: We will be respected by our peers and appreciated by a growing audience.

to bring the Museum's fund-raising efforts to the highest standards of the profession.

### Goal Three: Collaboration

Strengthen collaboration between the Museum Center and its various audiences and constituencies, including NMC students and faculty, K-12 schools and the wide array of arts communities in the Grand Traverse region.

The previous plan created goals that are, in many respects, still relevant for the museum in 2019-2020. Several strategic initiatives were created to guide progress towards each of the three primary goals; however, the 2000 plan lacked timetables, assignment of staffing resources, budgets, and metrics for success.

### Recap: 2020-25 Strategic Plan

The Dennos Museum Center created its first NMC board-approved strategic plan in fall 2021. Nine strategic goals were initially identified during the fall of 2019 through a series of staff SWOT exercises, a priority matrix, and group discussion. In light of COVID-19 pandemic, staff revisited goals throughout 2020 and reprioritized based on operational needs and modified timelines that accounted for reduced on-site staff time and new virtual programs.

As a result, eight core priorities emerged for 2020-25:

1. Review, revise, and communicate DMC mission and vision for 2020 and beyond.
2. Strengthen care, stewardship, and access to the permanent art collection.
3. Ensure proper staff alignment with mission and support professional development opportunities.
4. Work toward first-time accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums.
5. Strengthen financial stewardship and optimize operations.
6. Create and implement facility improvement plans.
7. Build and enhance campus partnerships.
8. Build and enhance regional and community partnerships.

### Looking Forward: 2026-30 Strategic Plan

Following completion of the DMC's 2020-25 strategic plan, museum staff aligned the next phase of strategic planning with NMC's performance enhancement and sustainability review (PESR) process. Completed in spring 2025, the PESR review brought together DMC staff, NMC stakeholders and administration, and the NMC board of trustees to review and approve a financial path to sustainability for the museum. The next iteration of DMC's strategic plan builds upon the professionalization of the museum outlined in the previous plan.

DMC recognizes that a solid strategic plan includes realistic strategic objectives, alignment with campus and community resources, and is driven by a revised mission and a compelling vision statement. A new strategic plan will also provide detailed initiatives (i.e. subgoals) that define *tangible* progress towards each goal, with metrics that track success: timeline, staff assignment(s), status, funding requirements, and methods of evaluation.

The executive director and DMC staff, with feedback from the DMC exhibitions advisory committee, DMC collections committee, DMC docents and volunteers, and NMC PESR

committee, defined the following strategic priorities in alignment with the forthcoming NMC campus master plan, the new NMC strategic plan, and PRMC's communications strategy:

1. Improve financial stewardship and operational sustainability.
2. Earn first-time accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums.
3. Complete DMC rebrand and launch new marketing efforts.
4. Strengthen care, stewardship, and access to the permanent art collection.
5. Expand campus (e.g., experiential learning opportunities), community, and regional partnerships and accessibility.

AAM accreditation, while competitive and rigorous<sup>3</sup>, translates directly into tangible benefits for the many different constituents that we serve. Students, for example, will now have the opportunity to intern with an accredited museum program without leaving Traverse City—a benefit that extends beyond the classroom and into future internships and museum careers. Accreditation also builds confidence and trust in our patrons and donors who entrust us with their collections for future generations.

We look forward to the immense opportunities that strategic planning will provide for the Dennos Museum Center and its many audiences and supporters.

Sincerely,



Craig R. Hadley  
Executive Director and Chief Curator

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<sup>3</sup> 2025 AAM Accreditation statistics: 1,110 of 33,000 museums nationwide are accredited by the AAM.

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## WHO WE ARE

### MISSION

The Dennos Museum Center builds community, sparks conversation, and inspires change for audiences of all ages through its exhibitions, programs, and the collection and preservation of art.

Mission revised spring 2021 and approved summer 2021 by NMC Board of Trustees.

### VISION

The Dennos will serve as a vibrant hub for the campus and community to engage in dialogue, discovery, and connection through thoughtfully curated exhibitions and experiences.

Vision revised fall 2025.



Above: Programming for NMC students is central to the DMC's mission to build an inclusive and welcoming museum experience for all.

## INTRODUCTION



Above: Installation view from Teresa Dunn's 2023 solo exhibition at DMC.

This plan represents the second comprehensive strategic plan for the Dennos Museum Center at Northwestern Michigan College.

Dennos Museum Center staff provided created this plan by leveraging data from old plans, the Museum Assessment Program, Conservation Assessment Program, and the NMC Performance Enhancement and Sustainability Review (PESR) process. Museum staff participation included:

- Liz Celeste, Curator of Education and Exhibitions
- Megan Heater, Operations Manager
- Kim Hanninen, Registrar/Preparator
- Chelsie Niemi, Audience Engagement Manager
- Nicole Zeiler, Museum Store Manager

Campus committees—comprised of faculty, staff, student, and community representation—also offered feedback and comment on this document throughout the process:

- DMC Collections Committee
- DMC Exhibition Advisory Committee
- DMC docents and volunteers (survey form)
- NMC President's Council (PC/PESR committee)

Several of the strategic goals in this document include ongoing tasks from the previous 2020-25 strategic plan, along with recommendations from several external assessors:

- 2024 Community Engagement MAP Final Report
- 2024 Outdoor Sculpture Collection Conservation Survey
- 2022 General Conservation Assessment Program Final Report
- 2020 Organizational MAP Final Report

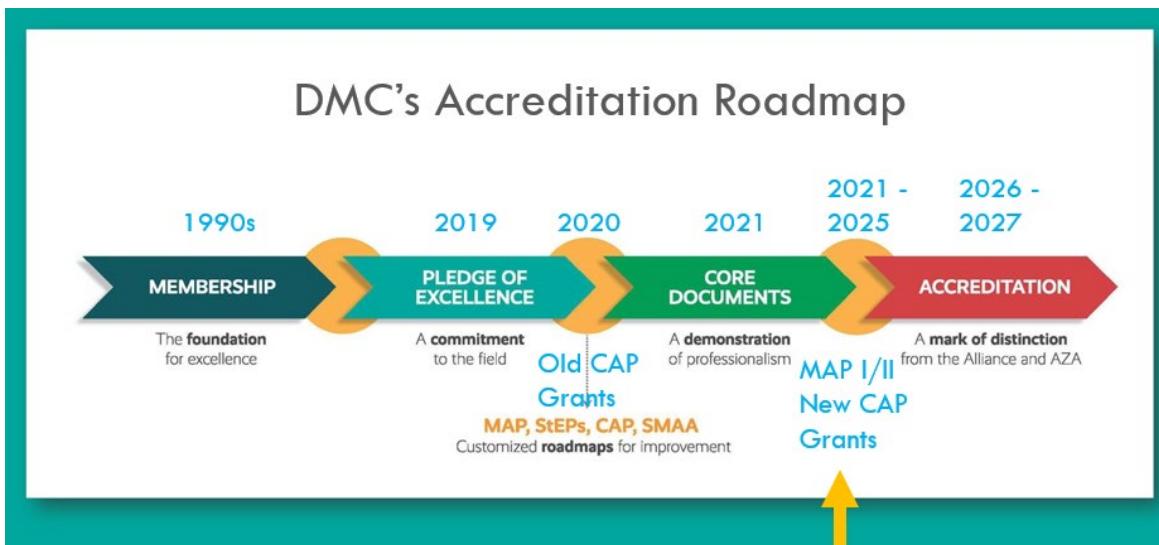
The 2026-30 strategic plan seeks to prepare the Dennos Museum Center for the AAM accreditation process by October 2026. Ideally, the MAP and CAP programs should be repeated for any reports older than 10 years.

# Why Seek Accreditation?

DMC continues to work toward accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). A core pillar in the previous strategic plan and this revised plan, accreditation conveys a number of practical and strategic benefits to the fewer than 5% of museums nationwide who complete the rigorous process:



The graphical timeline below illustrates all that DMC has accomplished toward this goal, resulting in application for accreditation in fall 2026:



## AAM Accreditation by the Numbers:

41% are art museums/centers

18% are in the Midwest

21% have approx. 6 FTE

16% operate within a college

30% have a budget of \$1-2.9M

## INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL REVIEW

DMC has fully embraced continuous improvement as part of its strategic planning process. Since 2020, the museum has undergone three external reviews: two conducted by the American Alliance of Museum's Museum Assessment Program (MAP) and one by the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation's Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP) program. Short and long-term goals and objectives from these assessments were embedded in the previous strategic plan and also appear in the current plan document.

Additionally, NMC's Performance Enhancement and Sustainability Review (PESR) process provided an opportunity for DMC to conduct benchmarking and modeling for the museum's next strategic plan. The PESR process is intended to guide college programs through a structured and thoughtful review to maximize long-term sustainability and growth.

A summary of these reviews is presented on the following pages.

## INTERNAL REVIEW: PESR

### Current Situation

DMC has historically offset operational deficits with quasi-endowment, annual fund revenue, and NMC auxiliary revenue. Recent challenges include the elimination of NMC auxiliary revenue support, the shuttering of rental partners due to the COVID-19 pandemic (TCFF, TEDx, ballets, etc.), and the addition of expansion bond interest debt. A combination of earned revenue, sponsorships, endowment growth, and expense reduction will guide the museum's PESR plan.

### Objectives

The objective of the Program Enhancement and Sustainability Review (PESR) is to develop an effective strategy and specific implementation plans for the DMC. The key objectives of the plan are as follows:

1. Develop scenarios and associated action plans to significantly reduce program deficit through increased earned revenue streams, philanthropic support, and/or expense reduction.
2. Continue offering DMC programming in alignment with the museum's BOT approved mission.
3. Ensure that plan elements align with museum best practice set forth by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) in advance of the museum's forthcoming application for first-time accreditation.

## EXTERNAL REVIEW: 2024 Community Engagement MAP

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### About MAP

Since its inception in 1981, the Museum Assessment Program (MAP) has helped more than 5,000 small and mid-sized museums of all types strengthen operations, plan for the future, and meet standards.

Through a one-year process of self-assessment, institutional activities, and consultative peer review with a site visit and recommendations, your museum emerges with:

- Greater alignment of activities, mission, and resources
- Analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities
- Prioritized roadmap for improving operations and meeting standards
- Practices benchmarked to standards
- Enhanced credibility with potential funders and donors
- Improved communications between staff, board, and other constituents
- Expert advice, recommendations, and resources
- Increased capacity for strategic planning
- Preparation for core document verification, accreditation or reaccreditation

### Highlights From the MAP Reviewer:

“Stability in leadership and clarity in reporting structures are essential for the museum to stay on course and achieve its strategic goals.”

“Expanding the team and streamlining volunteer management will be crucial steps in enabling the museum to continue its growth trajectory.”

“The museum has continually evolved to meet the changing needs of its audience. This includes the adoption of digital initiatives and interactive experiences that enhance visitor engagement and accessibility.”

“Over the years, the Dennos Museum Center has distinguished itself through its commitment to enriching the cultural life of its community.”

Petra Kralickova, Executive Director

The National Museum of Toys and Miniatures, Kansas City, MO

## EXTERNAL REVIEW: 2022 CAP

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### Collections Assessment for Preservation

The Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP) program provides small and mid-sized museums with partial funding toward a general conservation assessment. The assessment is a study of all the institution's collections, buildings, and building systems, as well as its policies and procedures relating to collections care. Participants who complete the program receive an assessment report with prioritized recommendations to improve collections care. CAP is often a first step for small institutions that wish to improve the condition of their collections.

#### **Highlights from the 2022 CAP Report:**

“The Dennos Museum Center has an incredibly knowledgeable, experienced, and engaged staff who call upon their vast and varied skills to maintain the building and collections. Executive Director and Chief Curator Craig Hadley, with a hands-on and very proactive approach, is rapidly contributing to the ongoing improvements in collections stewardship. Registrar Kim Hanninen is a veritable jack-of-all trades whose resourcefulness and dedication to collections care is the reason that the collections are so well maintained.

“The majority of the tenure of Director Craig Hadley has taken place in a particularly challenging time; however, he and staff members have taken advantage of covid-related disruptions to make great strides in fundraising, policy development, and collections storage updates, quickly addressing many of the recommendations outlined in the previous 2010 CAP report.

“Due to the dedicated efforts of current staff and college facility partners, DMC is operating at a very high-level regarding collections storage, display, and general operations. The primary objective identified by the assessment team is to: provide recommendations to further improve storage and environmental conditions, to increase outside awareness of collections conservation concerns, and to help with the development of a long-range preservation plan—all in preparation for the upcoming application for accreditation.”

These and other recommendations are summarized in the full report.

Melissa Amundsen  
Assistant Preventive Conservator  
Midwest Art Conservation Center, Minneapolis

## EXTERNAL REVIEW: 2020 Organizational MAP

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### About MAP

Since its inception in 1981, the Museum Assessment Program (MAP) has helped more than 5,000 small and mid-sized museums of all types strengthen operations, plan for the future, and meet standards.

Through a one-year process of self-assessment, institutional activities, and consultative peer review with a site visit and recommendations, your museum emerges with:

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## Highlights from Our MAP Reviewer:

I found the Dennos to be a **multi-faceted, strong** institution; yet ... the attainment of **accreditation**, this institution will be *truly* great!

I witnessed strong **alliances** between [DMC and NMC]; these individuals share a common trust, understanding, and desire to advance the DMC.

A larger **endowment** will mean **improved** **sustainability** and amplified capacity for creative exhibitions, instruction, programs, and partnerships.

In the Mission statement review, acknowledge your **collections stewardship** obligations

Linda Steigleider, former CEO  
Hancock Shaker Village, Pittsfield, MA



## ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

The Dennos Museum Center is a fine art museum and cultural center located in Traverse City, Michigan on the campus of Northwestern Michigan College (NMC). Most notable for its permanent collection of Inuit art, the Dennos Museum opened in 1991 and features rotating exhibitions of modern and contemporary art.

The museum consists of three changing exhibit galleries, a sculpture court, an Interactive Discovery Gallery for children and adults, and semi-permanent galleries for Inuit art and the museum's permanent collections. The museum has a permanent collection of 3,100 works, of which nearly 2,000 are Inuit art prints and sculptures. The museum is home to three temporary exhibition galleries that cover 8,000 square feet combined with an additional 12,000 square feet of semi-permanent exhibition space for the museum's permanent collection.

As a cultural center, the Dennos Museum Center also provides exhibitions and programs in the sciences and performing arts. It includes the Milliken Auditorium, a 367-seat concert hall that hosts an annual concert series emphasizing world, jazz and blues music along with NMC and community events. The museum also oversees a collection of 14 outdoor sculptures by international and Michigan artists on the grounds of the college campus. In 2000, the museum was recognized by ArtServe Michigan with the Governor's Award for Arts and Culture.

The Inuit art collection was started in 1960 by Northwestern Michigan College librarian Bernie Rink, who began collecting sculptures and prints for a library exhibition fundraiser. Rink organized the event as an annual sale of Canadian Inuit Art. Many of the items sold by Rink were prints. He retained some of the items each year, both prints and sculptures, resulting in the gradual growth of the Inuit art collection to 500 pieces by 1991, and 1500 pieces by 2015.

A need for an art collection and cultural center in Traverse City was identified in the 1980s. Barbara and husband Michael Dennos, then an executive with Chef Pierre (Sarah Lee Corporation), were both instrumental in the formation and funding of the museum. In 1988, founding director Eugene Jenneman was hired by Northwestern Michigan College to work with architect Bob Holdeman to design and oversee the building of the museum. After a \$6.5-million community campaign, the museum, named for Michael and Barbara Dennos, was opened in July 1991. The Barbara and Michael Dennos Museum Center was one of the first collections of Inuit art open to the public in the United States.

Following fundraising efforts which began in 2015, the museum received significant funds from local benefactors, including a \$1 million gift from Barbara and Dudley Smith for the Inuit art gallery expansion and a \$2 million gift from Diana and Richard Milock, the museum expanded its Inuit Gallery and added an additional 10,000 square feet of semi-permanent exhibition space as part of a \$5 million building expansion that opened in 2018. The addition for the Inuit Collection was named the Barbara and Dudley Smith Wing for Inuit Art.

## Looking Back: Collecting<sup>4</sup>

The Dennos Museum Center's collection houses one of the largest Inuit art collections in the United States. As it exists today, the collection and gallery spaces owe much to a dedicated group of collectors and supporters.

The Inuit art collection was established in the 1960s by Bernie Rink, then director of the Osterlin Library at Northwestern Michigan College. Beginning with a small group of carvings and prints gifted by Chicago businessman Wilbur C. Munnecke, Mr. Rink grew the collection to around 500 works through donations and annual purchases from the NMC Inuit (Eskimo) art sale and its proceeds. With the opening of the Dennos Museum Center in 1991, the collection was moved to its new home. In 1995, Philip Power donated over 200 works from his father Eugene's collection. The Power Family Inuit Gallery was named in recognition of this gift and Eugene Power's involvement in bringing Inuit art to the United States. The Dudley and Barbara Smith Wing for Inuit Art was built in 2017 and represents the Smith family's longtime support of Inuit art and patronage of the Dennos Museum Center.

Today, thanks to many collectors and supporters, the Inuit art collection includes works from master artists like Kenojuak Ashevak, Pitseolak Ashoona, Kananginak Pootoogook, Pudlo Pudlat, Judas Ullulaq, and Jessie Oonark. Celebrated 21st century artists include Shuvanai Ashoona, Annie Pootoogook, Ningeokuluk Teevee, and the Ruben brothers: David Ruben Piqtoukun and Abraham Anghik Ruben. With shared traditions and continually innovative approaches, these artists express the culture and experiences of the Inuit people—past, present, and future.

Throughout Eugene Jenneman's tenure as executive director of the DMC, the collections grew beyond mid-20th century Inuit art to encompass local, regional, and national and international artists. Examples include gifts from the Andy Warhol Foundation, a growing collection of American mid-20th century works on paper, and contemporary ceramics and glass by Chinese and Japanese artists. An outdoor sculpture collection was also created, which spans museum and NMC campus grounds, with approximately 13 works by notable Michigan-based artists. Additional indoor sculptures and installations have grown in recent years, primarily from local and regional artists.

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<sup>4</sup> See Collections Plan for additional details.

## FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

### DMC Financial Breakdown:

	FY22	FY23	FY24	3-Year Total	FY25 YTD
<b>TOTAL Revenue (A+B)</b>	\$1,461,774	\$927,028	\$1,423,448	\$3,812,250	\$548,141
<b>TOTAL Expenditures</b>	\$975,011	\$1,094,845	\$1,347,615*	\$3,417,471	\$545,185
<b>DMC Net Operating Surplus/Deficit</b>	\$486,763	-\$167,817	\$75,833	\$394,779	\$2,956
<b>Interest on 2016 Bond</b>	-\$133,429	-\$127,867	-\$122,076	-\$383,372	-118,176
<b>DMC Net Operating w/ 2016 Bond</b>	\$353,334**	-\$295,684	-\$46,243	\$11,407	\$115,220

NOTE: All operating deficits are covered by DMC-R and/or DMC MacFarlane Fund and do NOT draw upon the NMC General Fund.

\*Includes one-time expenditure to upgrade Milliken auditorium lighting to LED. Majority of upgrade was covered by a private gift with NMC support.

\*\*The NMC Business Office over-transferred from the NMC Foundation during FY22. The FY23 “loss” was offset by this surplus transfer in FY22.

### Simplified Financial Analysis:

- DMC earned revenue averages \$417,890 per year.
- DMC-specified endowments and annual fund performance averages \$852,860 per year.
- Annual expense averages approximately \$1,266,948 per year with wages and benefits accounting for ~\$605,658 or 48% per year.
- Average annual operating deficit is approximately -\$170,964 including the 2016 declining bond interest debt (average -\$127,791 per year for the past three years). Operating deficit + bond = -\$298,755 per year.

## STRATEGIC GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The plan outlines core objectives for the 2026-2030 plan. Each core objective has a number of supporting objectives that support the core objective. They are arranged in descending priority. Detailed work tables outlining supporting objectives and metrics for success can be found in the appendices.

### Core Objectives 2026-2030

1. Improve financial stewardship and operational sustainability.
2. Earn first-time accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums.
3. Complete DMC rebrand and launch new marketing efforts.
4. Strengthen care, stewardship, and access to the permanent art collection.
5. Expand campus and community partnerships and accessibility.

### Previous Core Objectives<sup>5</sup> 2020-25

1. Review, revise, and communicate DMC mission and vision for 2020 and beyond
2. Strengthen care, stewardship, and access to the permanent art collection
3. Ensure proper staff alignment with mission and support professional development opportunities
4. Work toward first-time accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums
5. Strengthen financial stewardship and optimize operations
6. Create and implement facility improvement plans
7. Build and enhance campus partnerships
8. Build and enhance regional and community partnerships

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<sup>5</sup> Provided for reference and comparison to 2026-30 objectives.

## EVALUATION & COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

### Evaluation

DMC staff will review the plan two times per year (spring and fall) and will make adjustments to the work plan as needed. An annual report, published on the museum's website, also summarizes plan progress and adjustments.

### Committee Assignments

#### *Collections Committee*

Co-chair: Executive Director and Chief Curator  
Co-chair: Registrar and Preparator

#### *Exhibition Advisory Committee*

Co-chair: Executive Director and Chief Curator  
Co-chair: Curator of Education and Exhibitions



Above: a floral mural created by artist Louise Jones (Ouizi) in 2024.



*Build community. Spark conversation. Inspire change.*



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