



2021 - 2023 STRATEGIC PLAN

ART GALLERY OF NORTHUMBERLAND (AGN)

JULY 15, 2021

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MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Strategic planning provides an opportunity to reflect on the past, celebrate successes, and look ahead to the future. In 2020, after a period of organizational growth and change, including navigation of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Art Gallery of Northumberland (AGN) Board of Directors began the process of developing a new strategic plan.

The AGN's Board consists of a passionate, community-driven group of volunteers, with a diverse set of talents and abilities. It is our responsibility to ensure strong governance and stewardship of the AGN.

From the outset, our Board believed it was essential to gather input directly from our stakeholders. It was important that our new strategic plan respond to the current environment and reflect the needs of our community. To ensure that we had a comprehensive understanding of our stakeholders' views, we engaged staff and partners from across the region and sector. We asked difficult questions and listened deeply. Our goal was to develop a two-year strategic plan that was based on meaningful engagement; setting the foundation for a visionary and sustainable future.

As part of the process, we undertook an analysis of the environment in which we operate. We assessed the AGN's current capacities, opportunities, and aspirations for growth. From this, we came together to map out three new strategic directions for the next two years.

We are deeply proud of our organization's successes and look forward to a future full of potential—a future where the AGN continues to inspire the community and cultivates a greater awareness of the visual arts. By doing so, the AGN will continue to demonstrate its value and build on its reputation as an important contributor to tourism, economic development, and overall growth of the region.

We extend our gratitude to everyone who took the time to share their ideas with us. Together, we will continue in our mission to elevate the understanding and appreciation for the visual arts in the region, primarily by developing, exhibiting, and preserving our permanent collection and by providing expert-curated exhibitions.

Sincerely,

Michael Maynard, Board Chair

Olinda Casimiro, ED

OUR FOUNDATION

Mission*

Elevate the understanding and appreciation of the visual arts in the region, primarily by developing, exhibiting, and preserving its Permanent Collection and by providing expert-curated exhibitions.

Vision*

The AGN will play a leading role on local, regional, and national stages through exceptional exhibitions, programs, and collaborations. It strives to be an inspiring institution that serves as an educational resource, a hub of artistic and cultural energies for local citizens, and a tourist attraction for all audiences.

* *Mission, Vision, and Value statements are currently under review.*

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Serving local residents and the active tourism community of Northumberland since first opening in 1960, the AGN plays a fundamental role in the region’s vibrant arts and culture sector. In addition to maintaining a permanent collection of over a thousand works with local, regional, national, and international significance, the AGN hosts intellectually stimulating exhibitions, programming, and educational activities—actively promoting and providing access to art for the enjoyment and education of the people of Northumberland County.

With significant growth and development over the past five years, and having recently celebrated their 60th anniversary in 2020, the AGN has much to celebrate and continue building on. The AGN looks forward to a bright, sustainable future, full of potential.

From March to May 2021, the AGN engaged Laridae, a management consulting firm, to guide the Board of Directors through a strategic planning process, resulting in the development of a two-year strategic plan.

The strategic planning approach, based on best practice for non-profit organizations, supported the Board of Directors as they championed the planning and provided oversight into the development of the final strategy.

A.1. Planning Process

The planning process involved a review of previously completed stakeholder engagement, including feedback from a total of 212 participants through focus groups, community town halls, an online survey, and key informant interviews in 2017. This review was supported by targeted engagement with selected groups to capture current perspectives, thoughts, and ideas of the AGN’s stakeholders. By taking this approach, the AGN established a strategic plan with a solid base, informed by experience, evidence, and the broadest-held perceptions of the individuals who interact with the organization on a regular basis.

A total of ten individuals participated in the engagement sessions. The feedback they shared demonstrated their commitment to seeing the AGN grow and their dedication to - and appreciation for - the collections, programs, and services provided to the community of Northumberland.

Stakeholder Group	Method of Engagement	Date/Time
AGN Staff	Focus Group	<i>April 22, 2021, 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM</i>

Eileen Lum, Northumberland Tourism	Key Informant Interview	<i>April 22, 2021, 11:00 AM</i>
Zainub Verjee, Ontario Association of Art Galleries (OAAG)	Key Informant Interview	<i>April 29, 2021, 11:00 AM</i>
Cobourg Town Council	Written Response to Questions	Responses collected between <i>April 20, 2021 and April 30, 2021</i>

From the perspective of the AGN’s most valued stakeholders, several themes emerged as areas where the organization excels or where it could grow and improve with a newly developed strategic plan. The themes helped guide the Board of Directors’ thinking leading up to and throughout the strategic planning retreat on May 5 and 7, 2021. These themes were:

- Accessibility
- Communications and Marketing
- Systems and Processes
- Engagement and Programming
- Exhibitions and The Collection
- Partnership and Collaboration
- Financial Sustainability
- Governance and Leadership
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Digital Presence

“It’s an undiscovered gem in Northumberland right now.” – Focus Group Participant

“They play a very important role, probably more than they realize.” – Key Informant Participant

The AGN identified and considered the strategic issues, data, financial picture, and overall external environmental landscape through a series of facilitated discussions to map key issues, opportunities, and challenges. The retreat culminated in unanimous agreement on three strategic directions.

B. OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The AGN is focused on continuing to support the visual arts by serving as a resource centre that promotes awareness, understanding, and encourages learning and discovery. At the core of these strategic directions is our commitment to serve as a public exhibition centre for the visual arts and to inspire an appreciation for artistic; historical; and technological artifacts, objects, and creations.

The AGN is committing to a two-year strategic plan. As such, the directions are broader and more future-oriented than an annual operational work plan, but more specific and time-limited than a five-year strategy. This allows flexibility for the organization to respond and adapt as circumstances change, while also providing clear focus and direction. The directions offer a framework for the development of internal annual operational plans with measurable goals and objectives. These operational plans, developed on an annual basis, will support the AGN in carrying out the strategic directions.

In direct response to what we heard from our stakeholders - in addition to the internal and external considerations that shaped the planning process - the following are our three directions:

- 1. Prioritizing Financial Sustainability**
- 2. Creating a Culture of Inclusivity**
- 3. Expanding Partnerships and Engagement**

1. Prioritizing Financial Sustainability

To achieve our mission, support institutional creativity, and attain program excellence, the AGN must be financially sustainable. Building on the growth and momentum of the past several years, the AGN is committed to exploring new, and furthering existing, revenue development opportunities, to achieve a more stable financial foundation.

By demonstrating our value to the community, strengthening our relationship with the Town of Cobourg, and seeking opportunities for networking, sponsorships, and diversification of our funding base, we will set the AGN up for long-term success and increase internal capacity, job security, and staff retention. Taking a proactive and thoughtful approach to fund development, in alignment with our mission and vision, will enable the AGN to continue as a local leader in the visual arts sector for years to come.

Over the next two years, we commit to *Prioritizing Financial Sustainability* through:

- **Funder Relations:** Continuing to build our relationship with the AGN’s primary funder, the Town of Cobourg, by prioritizing regular communication and demonstrating our value and impact to

the community to ensure ongoing core funding.

- **Fund Development:** Pursuing new opportunities for revenue generation and diversification—including strategic grant applications and a focus on expanding our network to explore new mutually beneficial relationships with private, public, and corporate sources—enabling the AGN to achieve sustainable increases in our annual operation budget and attract and retain high-quality staff.
- **Governance and Operational Policies:** Strengthening the AGN’s governance, operational policies, and formalizing systems and processes to position ourselves for success with funding and grant applications.
- **Scenario Planning:** Proactively identifying areas of financial risk and conducting regular scenario planning, while ensuring finances and resources are allocated in ways that support long-term continuity.

2. Creating a Culture of Inclusivity

We deeply value and appreciate the power of art and see the opportunity we have as a public art gallery to initiate positive change in the community and beyond. We recognize that we have not yet fully built a culture of inclusivity and diversity at the AGN. In the coming years, we plan to begin to embed equity, inclusivity, and accessibility at every level, ensuring these principles are present in our systems and processes, our collection, and our documentation and exhibitions, so that they become a foundational element of our identity. By authentically seeking knowledge, conducting outreach, and working in partnership with diverse populations - including our local Indigenous communities - we will better understand how we can strengthen diversity and address areas of underrepresentation in the AGN’s audiences, featured artists, and permanent collection.

As the AGN grows the collection and evolves, we are working against the legacies of systemic and institutional racism and inequalities. We will move forward with intention and invest in our learning and development.

Over the next two years, we commit to *Creating a Culture of Inclusivity* through:

- **Knowledge and Training:** Defining what inclusivity means to us as an art gallery, acknowledging the depth of the topic and recognizing that we have much to learn; seeking opportunities to increase our knowledge in ways that challenge our unconscious biases; and equip staff, leadership, and the Board with the information and tools to enact our commitments.
- **Committee:** Striking and regularly convening a committee of Board members, staff, and volunteers, who will be responsible for supporting the execution of our commitments and furthering the AGN’s inclusivity work through honest and bold discussion.
- **Systems and Processes:** Reviewing all organizational practices, systems, policies, and procedures through the lens of inclusivity and accessibility; and updating any practices that may unintentionally create or enforce existing barriers.
- **Permanent Collection:** Identifying areas of underrepresentation in the AGN’s permanent collection and forming an acquisitions strategy to address these gaps which will ensure the

AGN's content reflects the current environment and social climate.

- **Accessibility:** Ensuring the AGN's art is both physically and intellectually accessible to all audiences by enhancing visual, audio, and interpretation supports and services.
- **Outreach and Relationship Building:** Seeking opportunities to form relationships and consult with diverse community organizations and local Indigenous communities in ways that enhance our connections to and understanding of the wider Northumberland region. Applying the learnings from these relationships, diverse backgrounds and perspectives to support the AGN in delivering equal and accessible services and programming.

3. Expanding Partnerships and Engagement

Strong partnerships, collaboration, and engagement are at the core of our exhibitions, programming, and educational activities. To strengthen our work moving forward, we see an opportunity to develop a more consistent and intentional approach to our digital and in-person stakeholder outreach and partnership development. Our aim is to support the AGN in forming sustainable and healthy relationships that lead to meaningful impact.

We commit to reviewing our current partnerships and exploring new opportunities for collaboration and engagement. We will consider a diverse range of partners and stakeholders across Northumberland County and beyond, including art galleries, local businesses and entrepreneurs, visitors and tourists, community organizations, and educational institutions. To support our partnership development, we will develop clear guidelines and compelling communications that create structure and consistency. We recognize that purposeful, ongoing conversations with our community will help to build our membership, increase overall support for the AGN, and open the doors to new funding opportunities.

Over the next two years, we commit to *Expanding Partnership and Engagement* through:

- **Planning and Consistency:** Developing a clear plan with specific guidelines and language to support the AGN with outreach and relationship management. Shifting away from an ad hoc approach by creating structure and process to inform community engagement by the Board, staff, and volunteers.
- **Partnership Development:** Building and maintaining mutually supportive relationships with local businesses, industry, tourism organizations, school boards, sister institutions, and other community organizations.
- **Cross-County Engagement:** Exploring opportunities to increase engagement across Northumberland County to promote the visual arts sector and enhance the AGN's profile. Working collaboratively with community and sector partners to develop joint programs, initiatives, and events that celebrate art and culture.
- **Digital Presence:** Developing and initiating a strategy to produce compelling digital content and enhance engagement with our audience on digital platforms.
- **Stakeholder Management:** Expanding the AGN's membership and volunteer base to support growth and capacity building. Communicating clearly with AGN members and establishing well-

defined responsibilities for volunteers so that all stakeholders have an enriching and satisfying experience with the AGN.

C. NEXT STEPS

Our newly developed strategic directions provide the AGN with clear focus to guide the organization in the coming years. Together, as a Board of Directors, we have jointly recommitted to the success of the organization and to our mission and vision. Having come to the end of our strategic planning journey, we are now prepared to move forward with the strategic priorities and champion change and progress. As we take the first steps to drive the strategy forward, the Board has committed to the following action items:

1. Communicating the strategic plan, both internally and externally;
2. Developing annual organizational goals and objectives to align and further each strategic priority;
3. Providing year-end progress updates for all stakeholders; and,
4. Seeking regular feedback as the directions are implemented and the results are known.

D. CONCLUSION

The Board of Directors is proud of all that the AGN has accomplished to date. Through our strategic plan, we will ensure that the AGN's visitors and community remain our top priority. Our new strategic directions have been designed to provide a stable framework that will anchor us as new challenges arise and our landscape shifts over the next two years. We are committed to operating in a sustainable manner and maintaining accountability through all our initiatives.

We thank all those who took the time to contribute thoughts and feedback through our virtual engagement activities, during a particularly tumultuous year with many competing priorities. We've listened carefully and your voices have been instrumental in helping us shape a shared, exciting new future.

As we progress in fulfilling our strategic directions, the Board of Directors looks forward to sharing our accomplishments and performance with the community. We invite you to join us on this next stage of the AGN's journey.