

STRATEGIC PLAN



2021-2025

Dacotah Prairie Museum, and
Dacotah Prairie Museum Foundation

Reviewed, approved 12.31.2021



Executive Summary

The Museum as a Community Partner

Background:

The Dacotah Prairie Museum (DPM) is a county-supported history and cultural institution with the additional backing of the Dacotah Prairie Museum Foundation (DPMF). It is a touch point of the Aberdeen community and the county at-large for research, exhibition, education, preservation and community partnership.

Established in 1969, and finding a permanent home in the historic Northwestern Bank building in 1970, the DPM has been a storehouse for the county's collective memory for over 50 years. This commitment to the people of Brown County has guided the museum's decision making over the decades. The DPM staff has overseen many improvements to the building, collection and programming since its inception.



Projected:

In the next five years the DPM must continue to play a pivotal role in the history, arts and culture of Brown County and maintain its unique position. It must contribute in meaningful ways to the growth and empowerment of our community by sharing new knowledge and embracing dialogue. It must push forward its purpose as an integral part of the history keeping of the county and promoting the arts. The Museum must remain an active partner with other community cultural institutions and at the same time continually reach beyond its walls to enhance the cultural experience of Brown County residents of all ages and demographics.

Plan:

This strategic plan is devised to continue moving the DPM into the future. It will provide a foundation of intent required to apply for grants, create endowments and to create a multi-year plan of action. This includes building/infrastructure plans, programs and staffing plans.

Process:

Multiple stakeholders were asked to review the key priorities listed here for the future momentum of the DPM. Stakeholders include: staff, volunteers, board members, patrons and community members.

Future:

This plan is created to be a flexible, fluid document. It will adapt to changing needs and new opportunities as they arise. It will be a living blueprint on how to address issues and make decisions as opposed to a static disposition. The key priorities listed in this document will be reevaluated on an annual basis.

Vision, Values & Mission Statement

Our Mission

The *Dacotah Prairie Museum's* mission is to facilitate conversation of the prairie and its people, cultivate insight, and curate its collections as a catalyst for inter-generational exchanges to inspire children, connect families, and build community through education, programming, exhibits, and its collections.

Our Purpose:

*To preserve and share the stories of the
Dakota Prairie and its inhabitants.*

Our Vision

The Dacotah Prairie Museum, a non-profit, permanent learning center in service to all people, is committed to the continued growth of its collection of material evidence representing the ongoing history of its region. This collection will be used by present and future generations to study and interpret the lives and accomplishments of previous generations inhabiting the Dakota Prairie. Through these endeavors the Museum will continue to advance itself as a cultural, educational and economic asset to South Dakota.

Our Values

Fairness: In judgment and decision making

Integrity: In preservation and presentation

Respect: For people, their stories, their artifacts

Excellence: In personal and institutional performance

Achievement: Through timely accomplishment of stated goals

Responsibility: To ourselves, to each other, to the institution and to the public

The Plan

Five Strategic Points for Forward Planning

- Engage with our Community
 - *Improve communication with our patrons and community partners*

- Enhance the Patron Experience
 - *Create a welcoming visitor atmosphere through strategic improvements to exhibits and public spaces*

- Upgrade Facilities
 - *Make improvements to the Museum building*

- Improve Collection Access & Storage
 - *Create a comprehensive collections plan for artifact preservation and storage with improved access for staff and public use*

- Expand Programming
 - *Create memorable and meaningful content for both youth and adults*



Engage with our Community

Improve communication with our patrons and community partners

To contribute meaningfully to life of the downtown district, Aberdeen community, Brown County and beyond; promoting the preservation of history, arts and culture.

We will cultivate existing and new audiences for the museum's next half century, strengthening and sharpening the DPM's brand identity, creating awareness and visibility of its collections, exhibits and programs, and driving increased participation, engagement and investment.

In addition to this engagement, an active effort to create and communicate a culture of belonging, to invite people to the museum and to overcome the misconception that visitors must be "museum people" by promoting inclusion in our cultural community regardless of education level, ethnicity and other general or specific demographics.

Maximize board membership through recruitment that reflects community demographics.

Key Point: Communication & Belonging

To accomplish this Strategic Point, the DPM will address these key initiatives:

- Hiring and retaining a seasonal marketing/communication intern
- Regular newsletter postings/mailings
- Increase radio appearances, television and statewide tourism advertising
- Encourage employees to join local civic organizations to represent museum interests
- Look to cultivate personal relationships with donors
- Increase engagement with local artists with collaborative exhibitions
- Seek out and increase community presentations with diverse groups
- Create focus groups for increased awareness of cultural needs of the community.
- Look for ways to cooperatively work with other local and regional cultural institutions
- Expand both Museum and Foundation board of directors to maximum capacity

Enhance the Patron Experience

Create a welcoming visitor atmosphere through strategic improvements to exhibits and public areas

Create a positive first impression and ensure the museum is welcoming and easy to navigate upon arrival. This will involve developing a schedule of exhibit refreshes and updates that will include: multimedia interactive displays, virtual and audio tours, broadening the history narrative to include the diverse groups in Brown County's past and present, create teaching opportunities within exhibits for all ages and learning abilities, and provide patrons spaces to reflect and recharge during their visit. Create outreach exhibits that grow and diversify our audience, and meet them where they are.

The Mercantile, the DPM's gift shop, and the reception area, are the first and last impressions of a patron's museum-going experience and will benefit from a new, refreshed, visitor-friendly layout and fixtures.

Key Point: Experiential

To accomplish this Strategic Point, the DPM will address these key initiatives:

- Create and execute a systematic schedule for exhibit updates
- Increase attendance by diversifying content and ways to access information
- Improve visibility of the main entrance, including a new, welcoming entrance mural to better define the space and ease of first-time visitors orientation
- Create cozy recharge stations where patrons can chat, refresh and reflect
- Refresh and update gift shop and reception area
- Make improvements to navigational aspects of the museum's public spaces through evaluation of printed materials, way finding signage, multimedia, etc.

Upgrade Facilities

Make improvements to the Museum building

Address deferred maintenance and upgrade facilities through a detailed plan and timeline, consisting of small to medium scope projects.

Evaluate use of space throughout the museum, identifying current and future requirements and addressing front and back of house issues in all areas, including parts of the museum open to the public, staff offices and on and offsite storage and implement desired improvements.

Prepare more usable spaces for a wider variety of traveling exhibits from accredited cultural institutions.

Projects will require grant writing, fundraising efforts and DPMF matching funds to varying degrees.

Upgrades will culminate in remodeling the 3rd floor storage and staff offices to be efficient, safe, museum standard collections work and storage spaces. Only after all of these issues have been addressed can the DPM consider a major capital project of an addition to the existing museum building in the next 5-year strategic plan timeframe.

Key Point: Infrastructure

To accomplish this Strategic Point, the DPM will address these key initiatives:

- Create a timeline of projects, addressing smaller to medium projects to include but not limited to:
 - Awning replacement
 - Tuck point and masonry repair on east and north facing walls
 - Move fine art storage from the Lamont Gallery to 3rd floor storage and removing art storage closet, thereby increasing the gallery exhibit space
 - Evaluate current exhibit spaces to identify needs for improvement and future exhibit development and to expand traveling exhibit options
- Address basement storage mold remediation
- Execute 3rd floor storage and staff work spaces remodel

Improve Collection Access & Storage

Create a comprehensive collections plan for artifact preservation and storage with improved access for staff and public use

In order to prepare for an upgraded collections and archival storage space, the DPM will develop a long-range collections development plan with special attention to inventory assessment, conservation and storage solutions. It will also coordinate an outreach effort to request missing parts of Brown County history through artifacts and document donation, while at the same time deepening relationships with existing artifact donors.

A priority will be placed on digitalizing archival materials for public reference. A database of scanned materials will be linked from the existing PastPerfect museum database to the DPM websites for researchers and other institutions. This works hand-in-hand with our purpose of sharing the stories of the inhabitants of the Dakota prairie.

With upgraded standards and improved materials available for collections storage solutions, research will be done for content and quantity of appropriate storage units for a future remodeled collection storage spaces on the 3rd floor.

A Collections Assessment Program (CAP) will be conducted by professional assessors to determine a forward plan of action to include many of these goals.

In order to prepare and accomplish these goals, additional qualified staff support is needed in the form of a part-time professional curatorial assistant and as well as volunteer assistance for the many manual tasks.

Key Point: Preservation

To accomplish this Strategic Point, the DPM will address these key initiatives:

- Hire a curatorial assistant for the Collections Department
- Create a public research space
- Purchase a high resolution, large format scanner
- Determine gaps in collection, pertaining to eras, in photography, 3-D artifacts, etc. and systematically solicit items from communities within the county
- Apply for Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant for CAP program
- Devise a proposal/plan for collections recruitment, assessment and storage

Expand Programming

Create memorable and meaningful content for both youth and adults

Develop and implement an education, exhibition and program schedule that increases the Museum's reputation as a thought leader, generates opportunities for creativity and scholarship of staff and colleagues, deepens philanthropic support, expands audiences and strengthens our commitment to access for all. To include maintaining our obligation to keep artifacts of the collection and archival materials accessible and visible to the public. Prioritize heritage arts and local cultural diversity and history.

Make connections for patrons that illustrate Brown County's place in the economic and social fabric of interconnecting touch points through educational programming and exhibits.

Continue to expand the Education Department's commitment to be accessible to all county schools and to expand into middle and high school grades with the eventual need of increased staffing.

Establish collaborations with key local, state, and other academic and cultural institutions as well as with civic agencies and city-wide initiatives. Revitalize children's creative workshops, history and art camps and create new multi-disciplinary and multi-generational events.

Expand the Dakota High School Arts Exhibition (formerly the All Dakota High School Fine Arts Exhibition) to provide more in-depth art programming, increase the number of schools and increase

Key Point: Programming

To accomplish this Strategic Point, the DPM will address these key initiatives:

- Educate both youth and adults in heritage arts and hands-on history
- Engage more middle and high school students
- Bring in additional book/author presentations and STEM events
- Take the museum on the road to help patrons explore other local and regional cultural institutions
- Expand family camp opportunities to create multi-generational events
- Remodel the existing children's exhibit for an updated, refreshed experience
- Expand classroom visits to all schools in the county
- Increase visibility of artifacts, photos from the collection, and archival history through exhibit and program development

Metrics & Measuring Success

Benchmarks

- Increase in:
 - Visitor attendance
 - Repeat visitors
 - Number of home states and countries of visitors
 - Donor activity, both artifact donation and financially
 - Annual membership numbers
 - Gift shop sales
 - Social media reach
 - Meeting space use by the public
 - Number of outreach programs and exhibits
 - Number of workshops and camps for both adults and youth
 - Number of school classroom visits throughout the county
- Ability to fit into grant request parameters with prepared and established plans and documents
- Readiness for the next 5-year strategic plan to include capital improvement in the form of building expansion



Five Year Timeline

Tentative Five Year Timeline for Goals/Tasks

**Some items are more general with detailed plans to follow due to space constraints and tentativeness of timeline items.*

2021

- *Create Strategic Plan*
- *Hire Curatorial Assistant for Collections*
- *Apply for IMLS CAP grant program for collections assessment*
- *Create a space plan for fine art, photographs and large format documents in collection storage*
- *Remove art storage closet from Lamont Gallery space*
- *New entrance mural*
- *Create a comprehensive traveling exhibit schedule that appeals to a wide demographic*
- *Create annual program/event schedule and marketing plan template*
- *Establish new biennial collaborative artist show*
- *Create a fundraising template for project funding needs*

2022

- *Gift Shop refresh*
- *Systematic exhibit update/refresh/repair/remodel plan*
- *Collection assessment plan development*
- *Compile needs and solicit for artifacts and photographs for the collection*
- *Improve electrical and digital infrastructure for power access, multimedia, wifi, etc.*
- *Railroad exhibit expansion*
- *Remodel Children's Exhibit*
- *Improve outdoor signage and building identity*
- *Revise lobby/entrance traffic flow for better visibility and accessibility*
- *Expand high school art show*
- *Establish board recruitment plan*
- *Create regular membership events and fundraisers*

2023

- *Awning replacement*
- *Exterior building tuck point and masonry repair*
- *1st floor gallery space redesign*
- *Increase educational staff hours and classroom visit outreach efforts*
- *Expand multi-generational and adult museum programming and camps*

2024

- *Basement mold remediation and storage space remodel*
- *Execute 3rd floor storage and staff work space remodel*
- *Assess all newly established education, exhibit and event programming for retooling as necessary*

2025

- *Evaluate past 5-year plan*
- *Create Strategic Plan 2026-2030*
- *Begin plans for capital project/building addition*

Financial Sustainability

Dacotah Prairie Museum (Brown County)

Meticulously manage public funds through Brown County taxpayer allocations. Responsibly distribute budget funds to meet the needs of the five-year plan to include: adequate staffing at reasonable compensation, provide for routine and necessary building maintenance in coordination with county maintenance department, and provide for basic supplies to maintain day-to-day operations as a department of Brown County government.

Within this strategic plan, the DPM county budget will be maintained at annual increases not exceeding the cost of living increase and/or county-wide staff raises, whichever is approved by the Brown County Commission.

The exception being, any major building maintenance issues/projects will be addressed as they arise in coordination with the county maintenance department and any budget adjustments may be made at that time.

Dacotah Prairie Museum Foundation

Develop a financial and budgetary model that is responsive to changing external conditions and the priorities established by the Strategic Plan.

Plan and initiate fundraising strategies that will create deeper loyalty among existing supporters, develop new donors and funding sources and clearly communicate realized goals and projects that have benefitted from contributed funds to promote transparency and donor confidence. Conceptualize and plan a campaign in support of the Museum's future needs and ambitions to include: growing membership, increasing fundraising opportunities, establishing endowments for the betterment of the museum, college scholarships for Brown County students and traveling exhibits.

Grow the Mercantile Gift Shop into a destination in and of itself to continue to self-fund its inventory and upgrade the display fixtures, lighting and reception. To continue promoting and enhancing the museum-going experience of patrons through select merchandising and develop an online presence for advertising and sale of featured items.

Conclusion

The Museum as a Community Partner

Strategic planning is important for any cultural institution to achieve short and long term goals. Especially, with the uncertainty of global health issues, it has become even more important for museums to execute their strategies thoughtfully. It's important to be prepared for future changes and to be well-placed to face the challenges brought by these changes. Strategy should be capable of minimizing the threats and maximizing the opportunities which are brought by changing times.

The DPM is well-situated to accomplish a majority of the goals set in this strategic plan. It has an educated and dedicated staff; the support of community, patrons, board members and volunteers; a stable financial funding base and has the momentum to continue moving forward.

Ultimately, the DPM would like to be viewed as an integral and essential part of the county's cultural experience. It will be seen as a destination for enrichment, entertainment, research, education and self-edification... to truly be a community place.

Having this plan in place will also encourage support from the community as it sees our commitment to improving quality of life for all Brown County citizens and will make our programs all the more robust for it. Here the Museum exists, with one foot in the past, the other in the present, and eyes focused on the future.

