

## Executive Summary

For more than a century, volunteers have played a vital role in the Denver Art Museum's mission to enrich the lives of present and future generations through the acquisition, presentation, and preservation of works of art, supported by exemplary scholarship and public programs related to both its permanent collections and to temporary exhibitions presented by the museum. Now, guided by its Vision 2021 and the impending opening of the Martin Building, museum leadership recognized that they could not achieve the DAM's bold goals without further engaging the talents and skills of those who share a passion for art. This plan provides the path to leveraging community members as current and future volunteers in this work.

By focusing on the following three critical issues, Denver Art Museum will achieve its vision:

1. Nurture a collaborative and unified workforce of volunteers and staff.
2. Broaden the diversity<sup>1</sup> of volunteers and improve our ability to leverage their skills, talents, and uniqueness.
3. Empower volunteers and staff for maximum effectiveness.

For each issue, specific goals guide our work and objectives define how we will achieve those goals. By taking these actions, we will gain access to skills, talents, networks, and resources of a community of volunteers committed to inspiring creativity and enriching lives through art.

## Overview of the Planning Process

In preparation for the reopening of the newly-renovated Martin Building, and in pursuit of realizing Vision 2021, its strategic plan, the Denver Art Museum (DAM) engaged the services of VQ Volunteer Strategies first in an assessment and discovery of its current volunteer engagement practices and then in a strategic planning process that will set the museum up for success as it seeks to best engage the talents and skills of volunteer to increase its impact to the community.

The strategic planning process began with a full-day retreat with representatives from all four volunteer councils, along with staff from a broad range of departments (including curatorial, security, learning and engagement, visitor services, and others) and two members of the DAM's board of trustees. At the retreat, participants reviewed the report from the assessment, developed a vision for engagement, and identified draft issues, goals, and objectives for this plan.

Following the retreat, participants worked in sub-groups each focused on finalizing relevant goals and objectives for one critical issue of the plan. The strategic plan that has resulted will serve as a roadmap to DAM achieving its vision for volunteer engagement over the coming three years.

## DAM Mission

The mission of the Denver Art Museum is to enrich the lives of present and future generations through the acquisition, presentation, and preservation of works of art, supported by exemplary scholarship and public programs related to both its permanent collections and to temporary exhibitions presented by the museum.

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<sup>1</sup> Understanding and honoring that each individual is unique, and recognizing and celebrating those individual differences regardless of how large or how small.

## DAM's Volunteer Engagement Vision and Values

DAM's vision for volunteer engagement:

**Staff and volunteers working collaboratively to unlock the power of art and inspire creativity.**

The museum's five values are:

- Dynamic
- Respectful
- Inclusive
- Creative
- Curious

Each applies to engaging volunteers:

- **Dynamic**
  - Evolving to meet the ever-changing needs of the museum.
  - Applying energy and excitement to the work that we do in support of the museum's mission and in pursuit of the vision for volunteer engagement.
  - Embracing the belief that diversity of ideas and experiences makes us stronger.
- **Respectful**
  - All volunteers and staff communicating effectively, honestly, and with kindness.
  - Valuing and appreciating every team member's contributions.
- **Inclusive**
  - Actively engaging and supporting meaningful collaboration with staff.
  - Participating and sharing personal experiences and perspectives.
  - Being open to the experiences and perspectives of others.
  - Leveraging the ideas of others to support the best possible outcomes.
  - Supporting an environment where everyone can thrive.
- **Creative**
  - Maintaining an open mind.
  - Being willing to experiment.
  - Looking at things with new energy and ideas.
- **Curious**
  - Being eager to contribute.
  - Always learning.

## Critical Issues

Three issues around volunteer engagement efforts will be addressed in order to move forward over the next three years to achieve the vision for volunteer engagement. They are:

1. **Nurture a collaborative and unified workforce of volunteers and staff.**
2. **Broaden the diversity of volunteers and improve our ability to leverage their skills, talents, and uniqueness.**
3. **Empower volunteers and staff for maximum effectiveness.**

### 1.) Nurture a collaborative and unified workforce of volunteers and staff.

#### a) Clarify expectations and behaviors for staff and volunteers.

- i) Re/write position descriptions for all volunteer roles, council board, and leadership positions.
- ii) Clearly define and communicate staff roles required for coordinating and managing volunteer activities and experiences at the DAM; incorporate into job descriptions.

- iii) Clarify expectations with regards to proper conduct for both staff and volunteers.
- iv) Evaluate, re/define, and communicate the role of volunteer councils and the VEB.
- v) Update and streamline bylaws, handbooks, volunteer manuals, and procedure documents and store in a single online location accessible to all.

**b) Better match volunteer skills and interests with evolving institutional needs.**

- i) Populate a searchable database that identifies and catalogs volunteer skills and interests.
- ii) Regularly conduct needs assessments to identify volunteer roles and address critical needs.
- iii) Pilot new volunteer roles, evaluate effectiveness, and determine how to build on those results in the future. Examples include: short-term, flexible, and/or skills-based volunteer positions.
- iv) Evaluate current volunteer roles and review service requirements for each council and for staff aides; revise, where appropriate, to increase impact and accessibility.
- v) Investigate successful models and develop opportunities for corporate volunteering.

**c) Foster a more unified culture through shared trainings, celebrations, and communications.**

- i) Identify ongoing ways to build on the spirit of the strategic planning retreat.
- ii) Identify and experiment with opportunities around Martin Building opening activities, training, and events.
- iii) Integrate volunteers into new general museum orientation and refresher trainings that are provided to staff.
- iv) Experiment with joint trainings for volunteers and staff.
- v) Explore ways of increasing staff and volunteer interaction.
- vi) Experiment with ways to give all staff and volunteers greater insights into each other's work.

**d) Define, measure, and jointly celebrate volunteer impact.**

- i) Review existing, and identify new, measures to better capture volunteer impact.
- ii) Increase staff, volunteer, and trustee awareness of the critical work we do together.
- iii) Develop a system to review and refresh the strategic plan in response to any emergent issues.
- iv) Celebrate success by piloting new incentives or rewards.

**2.) Broaden the diversity of volunteers and improve our ability to leverage their skills, talents, and uniqueness.**

**a) Develop an actionable understanding of motivations for and barriers to volunteering at the DAM.**

- i) Research the motivations of current and potential DAM volunteers and also identify barriers to volunteering at the DAM.
- ii) Respond to identified barriers by adjusting DAM practices thereby increasing accessibility to volunteering at the DAM.
- iii) Respond to identified motivations by crafting/modifying volunteer opportunities that motivate the desires of volunteers while also meeting a DAM-identified need.

**b) Develop and implement a volunteer recruitment plan to attract a wider diversity of volunteers.**

- i) Research best practices and successful case studies from other museums and cultural organizations.
- ii) Establish DAM's benchmarks for success regarding volunteer diversity (i.e., defining diversity and goals for key audiences, such as under age 50, full-time workers, and Volunteers of Color).
- iii) Assess current recruitment and collateral and/or website copy for any inadvertent biases and revise as needed.
- iv) Identify key partners, new communication networks, and strategies for proactively recruiting beyond our established circles.

**c) Nurture an inclusive culture so that volunteers are welcomed, supported, and fully engaged.**

- i) Develop and articulate a shared language around diversity and inclusivity to ensure everyone is working within the same framework and understanding.

- ii) Research practices that support or undermine inclusiveness. Identify and experiment with two to three new directions.
- iii) Incorporate ongoing inclusivity and/or cultural responsiveness into trainings for all staff and volunteers. Emphasize both volunteer culture and how we create an even more welcoming environment for all visitors.
- iv) Liaise with staff Diversity & Inclusion committee for enhanced collaboration between staff and volunteers.
- v) Work with well-established external resources to infuse new ideas into and/or vet our existing ideas around our plans for diversity and inclusion as well as our plan for engaging volunteers.

### **3) Empower volunteers and staff for maximum effectiveness.**

- a) Provide training that equips volunteers and staff to successfully meet the expectations of their positions.**
  - i) Develop and implement a training plan for staff on how to engage and support volunteers.
  - ii) Provide training and information necessary to perform defined role well.
  - iii) Ongoing review and revise training content, mechanisms, timing, and frequency.
  - iv) Develop a system for assessing an individual's readiness to transition from trainee to active volunteer.
- b) Develop systems that support two way feedback and accountability.**
  - i) Develop and implement feedback/review mechanisms that support expected impacts and outcomes.
  - ii) Clarify expectations regarding how staff and volunteers should engage with one another, including "chain of communication." Incorporate into job/position descriptions, communicate during general museum orientation, and reinforce through ongoing trainings.
- c) Invest in technology to facilitate implementation of strategic plan and management of volunteer activities.**
  - i) Conduct a needs assessment to fully understand deficits and advantages of the tools currently used.
  - ii) Provide adequate training to staff and volunteers who are required to use software tools.
  - iii) Work cross-departmentally to leverage existing platforms to meet identified needs.