



THE ATHENÆUM OF PHILADELPHIA

A Strategic Plan for Growth

2021-2025

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MISSION

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia nurtures curiosity in members and neighbors, strengthening community through learning, discourse and meaningful engagement.

VISION

We are an historic and vibrant Philadelphia-centered and member-supported circulating library, research archive and cultural forum dedicated to harnessing our resources—our expert staff, our collections of books, art and architecture treasures and our National Historic Landmark building—to strengthen our growing community through ideas, cultural engagement and fellowship.

HISTORY

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, an historic, member-supported library, was founded in 1814, decades before the advent of free public libraries. Its purpose, then as now, is to provide access to “general knowledge” through books, archival material and special collections for research and exhibits, public forums and lectures, as well as a congenial space for conversation and learning. Since the 1980s, the Athenaeum has also been celebrated for its world-renowned architectural archives which provide opportunities to examine the rich history of our city and world.

After outgrowing several locations, including inside the American Philosophical Society, the Athenaeum moved into its own building on Washington Square in 1847. The building was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1977. Our location in the midst of historic Philadelphia opens the doors to rich conversations and partnerships.

Today, the Athenaeum continues to foster learning and conversation, focusing its strengths and resources on the needs and interests of a community that is increasingly diverse and ever more vibrant.

VALUES

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia is committed to:

Looking Outward – We focus our resources on enriching the lives of members, visitors and the community.

Learning – We foster the pursuit of knowledge and lively conversation, which are indispensable to a rewarding life and a vibrant, well-functioning community.

Diversity – We seek a diverse membership and diverse points of view in keeping with our ever-changing community and world.

Culture – We promote engagement with great literature, art and architecture, history and the pressing issues of contemporary life.

Collaboration – We magnify our own vitality and that of our city through collaboration with other groups and institutions.

Creativity and Innovation — We believe new experiences and new perspectives deepen knowledge and understanding while strengthening community bonds.



STRATEGIC PILLARS

By pursuing four intertwined strategic goals using thoughtful stewardship, we ensure a strong, sustainable future for The Athenaeum.

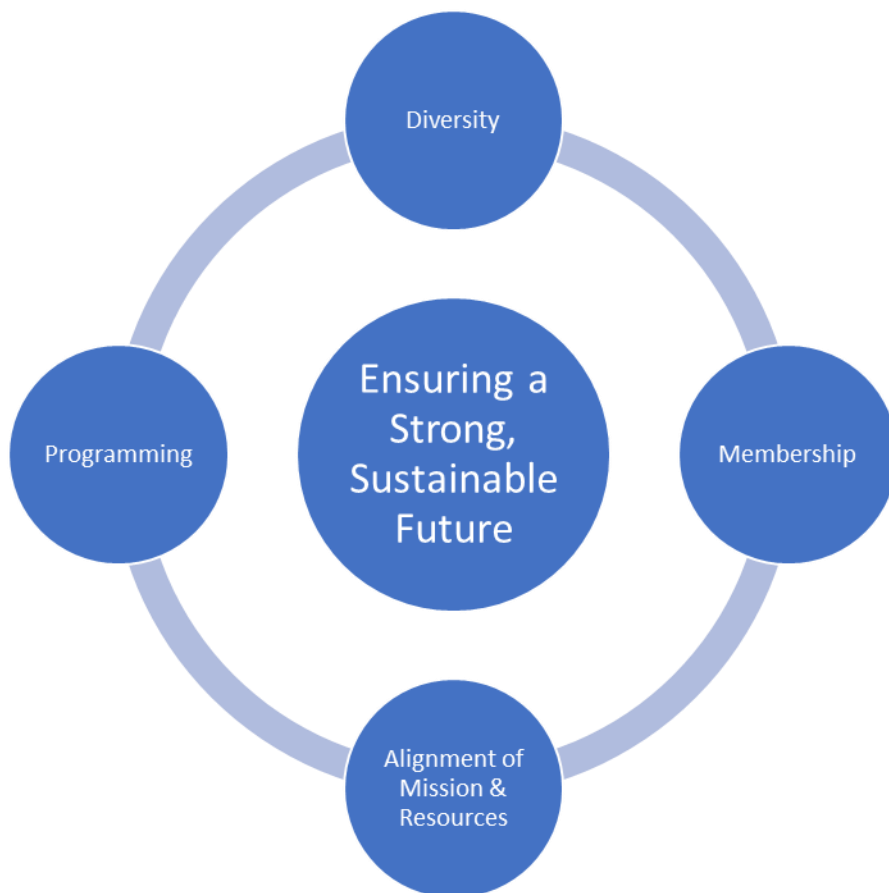
We are:

Prioritizing our commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion.

Actively increasing our membership base while serving and retaining existing members.

Expanding and engaging audiences with compelling and creative programming and by better activating our collections.

Aligning our financial, material and intellectual resources with our mission and our vision.



◆ DIVERSITY

Becoming a more diverse, equitable, accessible and inclusive institution is essential — in reflecting our community; in creating meaningful experiences for members and visitors; and in fostering engagement with one another.

- ◆ Develop a strong framework and process to evaluate our work through a lens of diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion.
- ◆ Engage and train Board, staff and volunteers to create a warm and welcoming environment for a diverse range of members, guests and visitors.
- ◆ Through research, education and programs, understand and acknowledge The Athenaeum’s own history in the context of Philadelphia’s long struggle with structural and institutional racism.
- ◆ Commit to programming that reflects greater diversity—from the books available in our circulating library and the use of other collections to lectures, music, exhibits, film and discussion groups.
- ◆ Diversify and build more representative circulating and permanent collections to better represent the needs and interests of members, prospective members and the broader community, including books, archival holdings in art and architecture, exhibits and objects on display. Update our collections policies and procedures to advance these goals.
- ◆ Pursue strategic partnerships for programming and outreach.
- ◆ Recruit Board and staff that reflect the audience we seek.
- ◆ Use internships, fellowships and Athenaeum prize programs to attract and acknowledge diversity and innovation in their respective fields.
- ◆ Communicate The Athenaeum’s efforts in diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion to members and the greater community.

◆ MEMBERSHIP

The Athenaeum's long-term vitality depends upon attracting and retaining members and supporters by emphasizing hospitality, accessibility and strong relationships.

- ◆ Enhance the Athenaeum's brand, image and internal culture to be outward-facing, member- and community-focused and more broadly appealing. Ensure The Athenaeum's new website reflects the new strategic plan and telegraphs a culture of change. Rebrand membership, fundraising and marketing communications accordingly.
- ◆ Reconfigure The Athenaeum's hours to increase accessibility of services to a more diverse population.
- ◆ Enhance the building's interior for increased hospitality, comfort and usability by members and visitors in accord with Phase I of the Master Plan.
- ◆ Improve the building's exterior and entry experience through the addition of outdoor lighting and signage; plus, a better lobby configuration to facilitate welcome and engagement.
- ◆ Improve member experience and promote brand loyalty through meaningful interactions with staff and Board.
- ◆ Develop practices to proactively convert visitors, researchers, scholars and other users into members.
- ◆ Explore alternative membership models to encourage joining.
- ◆ Build membership through direct outreach and marketing to targeted neighborhoods.

◆ PROGRAMMING

Good, creative programming engages audiences, drives membership and ensures The Athenaeum's ongoing relevance. Our programming includes lectures, classes, discussion groups, receptions and a broad range of services—from use of our circulating library, exhibits, and film and music series to the trips we organize to other cultural sites and the many ways we use our archival collections to inform and enlighten members and visitors.

- ◆ Design mission-centric, wide-ranging and meaningful programming in order to attract more diverse audiences and encourage deepened interaction.
- ◆ Activate The Athenaeum's collections in interesting, unexpected ways that leverage their unique value.
- ◆ Harness our digital resources to make archival collections more accessible.
- ◆ Improve our collections in alignment with goals for diversity and membership growth.
- ◆ Emphasize small, intimate gatherings in addition to larger events in order to more deeply engage participants and promote loyalty.
- ◆ Prioritize staff focus on personal interactions and service with members and guests.
- ◆ Develop marketing resources to promote programs and services of particular interest to specific member segments, membership prospects and outside interest groups.

◆ MISSION & RESOURCE ALIGNMENT

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia was founded in 1814 by shareholders seeking access to “useful information”—whether from periodicals, instructional and trade manuals or great literary works. Our future strength and vitality will depend on our ability to manage The Athenaeum sustainably and with sensitivity to member (and prospective member) needs and desires.

- ◆ Align resource allocation with mission, strategic plan and prioritized goals. Staffing, budgeting and time management must all affirm and reflect those principles.
- ◆ Increase each staff member’s outward-facing and outward-reaching activities, with measurable performance indicators and outcomes.
- ◆ Keep this strategic plan at the center of all prioritizing, planning and decision-making at Board, staff, committee and working group levels.
- ◆ Strengthen Board by enforcing good governance procedures, including updated bylaws, code of ethics and conflict of interest, term limits and ongoing Board education.
- ◆ Employ new and existing Board committees and task forces to address strategic plan goals.
- ◆ Recruit a diverse Board of Directors to better reflect our diverse community and desired skill sets, experience and networks.
- ◆ Foster strong relationships among Board, staff, committees and working groups.
- ◆ Expand development program with emphasis on: 1. Increased annual giving; 2. Formalized planned giving program; 3. Cultivation and stewardship of major gifts; 4. Pursuit of more institutional funding; 5. Energized endowment programs; 6. Engagement with other revenue sources consistent with The Athenaeum’s mission, vision and strategic plan.
- ◆ Maintain responsible and future-focused/mission-focused stewardship of The Athenaeum’s financial resources, its National Historic Landmark building and its collections.