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Where the power of art engages the spirit of community.
An open letter to our friends...

In the following pages, you are invited to explore the aspirations and assumptions that will, we believe, move The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art to new heights. The document has been thoughtfully shaped by many...staff, volunteers, consultants...who have looked realistically at the museum’s challenges and opportunities with a high sense of purpose. They have discarded out-worn ideas and protected historical success, always with hope that this much-loved institution will be ever more meaningful in the lives of many, that the community benefits we espouse will be embraced by those we strive to serve.

Although the document seems a slender volume, it is, in truth, a refinement, a distillation of untold hours, a work of remarkable intensity. On these pages you will find, again and again, the museum’s newly-minted vision statement, the banner we’re flying from our star-bound wagon. The statement is concise and clear, noteworthy for brevity, and like the stars, limitless in possibility. It is this...

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: *Where the power of art engages the spirit of community.*

The museum’s vision threads through and binds together each strategy, every goal. It brings civility and reason to civic discourse, tempers conflict and breeds understanding. These are the underpinnings of the messages in this plan. We believe this document will clarify and underscore this vision.

The museum can and must become the place described here, a place of increasingly powerful art and growing community of spirit. We submit to you our renewed commitment to this greater good. We invite you to be part of that commitment.

With gratitude,

Sarah Rowland
Chair, Board of Trustees
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
Welcome
The Collaboration: In Gratitude to a Dedicated Team

In developing this five-year Strategic Plan, I was joined by a team of highly committed internal and external collaborators in an 18-month process of research, discovery and planning. Critical funding was provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, who were early advocates and their support was essential in enabling us to take an extensive, thoughtful and methodical approach from the project’s inception.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to our Trustees for their dedication, vision and encouragement throughout this process; to our talented staff and volunteers for their expertise, insight and relentless quest for excellence; and to a number of external advisors whose presentations and dialogue helped us clarify and articulate our shared future vision as we were experimenting with the new possibilities that this Plan now captures. As we crafted the Plan, it was essential to experiment, model and test some of the ideas. The lessons learned from that process are now reflected in the Plan and they will be even more evident as we move forward. As we sought fresh perspectives and engaged a wider constituency, we were enriched by the input of those advisors and thankful to the many people who provided valuable feedback all along.

I am indebted to a number of exceptionally committed individuals including veteran COO Karen Christiansen and the Strategic Leadership Group (SLG)—an interdisciplinary team of leaders representing all of the museum’s departments and including: Elisabeth Batchelor, Tammy Bluhm, Margi Conrads, Catherine Futter, Judy Koke, Kim Masteller, Matthew Naylor, Kelly Summers, Steve Waterman, Toni Wood and Mark Zimmerman. This team also worked with two external resources: a team of consultants from the Executive Education Center at the Henry W. Bloch School of Management, and the strategic marketing and communications firm LaPlaca Cohen. The Bloch consultant team conducted workshops throughout the planning process with museum staff, volunteers and the SLG, led community focus groups, and helped guide the development of the Plan. LaPlaca Cohen conducted interviews, extensive qualitative and quantitative audience research, peer benchmarking, and crafted research-based institutional messaging to help direct the positioning of the museum and the writing of the Plan.

Reaching out to this wide range of current and prospective visitors and donors was a crucial part of the process, echoing an emphasis on community engagement and collaborative visioning that connects this Plan to the core principles upon which The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art was founded. We are proud to advance the path of an extraordinary legacy. Together we make a great museum greater still—for generations to come.

Julián Zugazagoitia
Menefee D. and Mary Louise Blackwell Director & CEO
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
“Art deals with things forever incapable of definition and that belong to love, beauty, joy and worship; the shapes, powers and glory of which are ever building, unbuilding and rebuilding in each man's soul and in the soul of the whole world.”

— Plotinus (205–270 A.D.)

as inscribed in the north façade cornice of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MISSION STATEMENT

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art is where the power of art engages the spirit of community.

We welcome and provide free admission to all, and deliver unparalleled opportunities to enjoy, appreciate and understand the finest visual arts and the varied cultures they represent—on our campus, online, and throughout Kansas City.

As an institution of national and international renown, we establish and adhere to the highest professional standards and practices in research, scholarship, presentation, interpretation, and care of our collections.

We serve as a vital partner in the educational, social, and cultural life of our community, using our collections and programs to build an environment where people can gather, share, and contemplate the greatest creations of humankind.

Every day, in all we do, the Nelson-Atkins is committed to nurturing excellence, inspiring creativity and building community through the power of art.
"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

—Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)

THE BEGINNING  Creating a Legacy of Excellence and Public Service

The vibrant connection between museum and community has been at the heart of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art’s mission since its founding almost a century ago. The museum began as a convergence of visions, created as a result of public-minded aspirations shared by two members of the Kansas City community. In 1915, William Rockhill Nelson, founder of The Kansas City Star, designated the bulk of his estate “for the purchase of fine works of art...which will contribute to the delectation and enjoyment of the public generally.” Local schoolteacher Mary McAfee Atkins later provided the city with a substantial portion of her estate “for the creation of a building to be maintained and used as a Museum of Fine Arts for the use and benefit of the public.” Throughout its history, as the Nelson-Atkins has evolved into one of the world’s greatest and most admired cultural institutions by—in Plotinus’s words—“forever building, unbuilding and rebuilding,” its aspiration has always focused on this fundamental commitment to community.
THE CONTEXT  Connecting with Community

At the core of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art’s vision of the future is the goal of playing a central role in Kansas City life by catalyzing connections to neighbors; an ever-expanding range of visitors; and community, civic, and cultural partners in the city and the larger region. Kansas City has a wealth of cultural resources with an increasing local presence and global influence. Together, along with the Nelson-Atkins, they have fueled a cultural renaissance in the city. The past few years have witnessed the creation of a new performing arts center designed by Moshe Safdie, the opening of the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art on the Johnson County Community College campus in Overland Park, Kansas and the burgeoning success of Union Station, a multi-disciplinary entertainment venue that plays host to many of the region’s most popular and wide-reaching exhibitions. The opening of Legoland and a new aquarium have also added to the visibility and energy of downtown Kansas City.

This unprecedented critical mass of local cultural activity provides an opportunity for the Nelson-Atkins to assume a leadership role as innovator and catalyst, connecting with traditional and new audiences and differentiating itself through the great art collections in its care. It is a moment for the museum to become a transformational force; a place both for individual contemplation and social interaction, and one that provides life-transforming encounters with original works of art. At a time in which digital technology is pervasive, the Nelson-Atkins becomes an oasis of face-to-face experiences; at the same time, the museum embraces the new possibilities that digital tools create to share our collections beyond our walls and enhance the experience inside the museum.

The Nelson-Atkins is a defining component of any visit to Kansas City and a dynamic partner in the region’s educational, social and cultural life. The museum will occupy a special safe place – the new town square – and will be open and free for all to engage with the greatest art and scholarship while providing a place for self-discovery and civic discourse.

THE OPPORTUNITY  Realizing our Potential

We now have the opportunity to realize this aspiration as never before, serving our communities around Kansas City and across the globe in ways unimaginable even a generation ago. Envisioning the next five years for The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art begins by building upon the strong foundation created through the last Strategic Plan (1999–2010), which guided the most recent phase of the museum’s evolution into a world-renowned destination and Kansas City’s cultural icon—a dynamic, multi-faceted campus that is free and engaging to all. The Bloch Building expansion, completed by Steven Holl Architects in 2007, was the fulfillment of many of the goals of that Plan, and further defined and elevated the museum’s standard of excellence.

Through this new Strategic Plan, while continuing an extraordinary legacy of achievement, we now navigate a changing environment in which the opportunities for audience engagement are ever-increasing and the challenges ever more complex. With the majority of the Nelson-Atkins’ physical transformation successfully achieved, we must now define how to invigorate this great legacy for audiences of tomorrow by addressing two essential questions:

• What does it mean to be an essential point of connection between art and community in the 21st century, both for Kansas City and the world?

• How can the museum activate its collections, buildings, staff and volunteers to better serve as the anchor of the midtown Kansas City cultural district—a residential area comprised of two vibrant neighborhoods (Rockhill and Southmoreland), great parklands, and dynamic community colleagues such as the Kansas City Art Institute, MRIGlobal, the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, the University of Missouri Kansas City, the Muriel McBrien Kauffman Foundation, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Stowers Institute, Brush Creek Community Partners and Country Club Plaza?
The Plan: Six Strategic Goals for the Future

The following is a summary of the six key strategies and goals that the Nelson-Atkins will advance its commitment to excellence in the arts, art history, scholarship, continued learning and community engagement. By expanding upon the core activities of exhibiting and educating to now include ongoing opportunities for real and meaningful engagement, audiences can experience what it is, in Franklin’s words, to “involve me and I learn.”
I
Connecting Through Experiences

There is no greater or more transformational experience that the museum can provide to the visitor than to deliver engaging experiences that unleash the power of art. By innovative use of our collections and presentation strategies, the Nelson-Atkins will provide a constant stream of fresh perspectives and authentic, powerful moments of connection accessible to visitors of all backgrounds, and in so doing, become more central to people’s lives.

II
Engaging Constituents

We will strengthen our relationship with our communities by promoting deeper dialogue with the museum. With more focused and effective communications, outreach, partnerships and collaborations—all informed by a better understanding of our audiences—the museum will ensure that it is a “must-see and often” destination.

III
Activating Our Collection

Just as the Nelson-Atkins has achieved global leadership status for the quality of its art collections and library, so too will it come to represent the best practice in its stewardship and activation. The museum will foster excellence and innovation in collections-related research, interpretation, publications and conservation. Further, we will pioneer new and dynamic ways to curate and present art, unleashing the full potential of this glorious resource locally, nationally, internationally and virtually through digital applications.

IV
Strengthening Our Team

Because we can only realize our goals by working together, the Nelson-Atkins will nurture a unified, inspiring and more effective internal culture, both among existing volunteers and staff members and those newly recruited. This evolved organizational culture will be characterized by open communication, collaboration, mutual respect and personal accountability.

V
Nurturing Excellence in Governance

To promote excellence in leadership, fiduciary responsibility, and fiscal stability, the Nelson-Atkins will continue to engage and evolve the roles, responsibilities and expertise of Trustees and standing committee members through clear and consistent governance practices. We will also strategically cultivate and recruit candidates for new Trustee and standing committee positions.

VI
Envisioning A Cultural District

We will continually evaluate the short- and long-term usage of our facilities, and ensure that the buildings, grounds and signage are as accessible and user-friendly as possible to meet the growing needs of the collection and the community.

As a leader in the Kansas City cultural community, the Nelson-Atkins is uniquely positioned to build connections among its midtown colleagues with the goal of developing a cultural district. We are an integral component of this district and our campus can play a greater role by building connections with public art in the midtown area and serving as a central hub.
These six goals of the Strategic Plan will help us create experiences that inspire all visitors. We will unleash the full potential of a collection comprised of many of the world’s greatest examples of artistic achievement. And in all that we do, we commit to building upon a renowned legacy of achievement, excellence and public service that will come to define The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art as the place

*where the power of art engages the spirit of community.*
STRATEGIES & GOALS
STRATEGY 1  Connecting Through Experiences

There is no greater or more transformational experience that the museum can provide to the visitor than to deliver engaging experiences that unleash the power of art. By innovative use of our collections and presentation strategies, the Nelson-Atkins will provide a constant stream of fresh perspectives and authentic, powerful moments of connection accessible to visitors of all backgrounds, and in so doing, become more central to people’s lives.

GOAL 1  Deepen the connection between art and communities through exceptional programming and experiences

OBJECTIVE 1.1  Offer opportunities for our audiences to gain greater understanding about art, themselves and their world by engaging with the museum’s collections

OBJECTIVE 1.2  Provide multiple levels of experiences to attract a varied and broad range of audiences

GOAL 2  Offer approachable and rewarding personal experiences through exhibitions, programs and a welcoming environment

OBJECTIVE 2.1  Ensure that first-time audiences of diverse ages and backgrounds have satisfying experiences

OBJECTIVE 2.2  Create opportunities that result in return visits, increased membership and a continuum of progressively invested stakeholders

GOAL 3  Engage and support audiences on their own terms considering their art knowledge, motivation and comfort level of participation, while providing growth opportunities to create an increasing spiral of knowledge

OBJECTIVE 3.1  Ensure that audiences can access and learn about art based upon their individual levels of knowledge and experiences so that they can achieve a greater depth of understanding

OBJECTIVE 3.2  Consistently use comprehensive audience evaluations and gather audience insights through the use of systematic metrics, processes and tools and rigorously use the data to create action plans and to build engaging programs

OBJECTIVE 3.3  Connect with audiences based on their needs and lifecycle

OBJECTIVE 3.4  Provide the necessary platforms and resources for audiences to customize their museum experiences
STRATEGY II Engaging Constituents

We will strengthen our relationship with our communities by promoting deeper dialogue with the museum. With more focused and effective communications, outreach, partnerships and collaborations—all informed by a better understanding of our audiences—the museum will ensure that it is a “must-see and often” destination.

GOAL 4
Ensure that the Nelson-Atkins is a “must-see and often” destination and reduce any emotional and physical barriers for new and existing audiences

OBJECTIVE 4.1
Communicate with clear, bold, benefit-driven messaging to make it easier for audiences to see themselves at the museum and value the experience

OBJECTIVE 4.2
Provide user-friendly technology platforms to engage audiences virtually as a way of sharing resources with local constituents and the world

GOAL 5
Continue to build audiences in order to deepen relationships and extend the museum’s reach

OBJECTIVE 5.1
Deepen and broaden core audiences by identifying stronger programs and connections with the greatest potential for growth

OBJECTIVE 5.2
Identify and reach new and untapped audiences to build relationships and expand involvement

OBJECTIVE 5.3
Maintain a lively membership benefit structure to deepen the museum’s relationship with existing members, increase repeat visitation and attract new members

GOAL 6
Strengthen the museum’s external relationships through partnerships and increased involvement with the Kansas City community, civic and cultural organizations, and the national and international arts community

OBJECTIVE 6.1
Identify and establish partnerships with local community groups that align with the museum’s mission and that enable the Nelson-Atkins to connect and serve existing and new audiences

OBJECTIVE 6.2
Become a leader in area civic and cultural issues that affect Kansas City and the region

OBJECTIVE 6.3
Strengthen ties to audiences within the national and international community
STRATEGY III  Activating Our Collection

Just as the Nelson-Atkins has achieved global leadership status for the quality of its art collections and library, so too will it come to represent the best practice in its stewardship and activation. The museum will foster excellence and innovation in collections-related research, interpretation, publications and conservation. Further, we will pioneer new and dynamic ways to curate and present art, unleashing the full potential of this glorious resource locally, nationally, internationally and virtually through digital applications.

GOAL 7  Research, display, interpret and preserve the collection for our visitors, digital audience and future generations

OBJECTIVE 7.1  Adhere to the best professional practices for the storage, display, presentation, interpretation, research, installation and the protection of the collection

OBJECTIVE 7.2  Conserve the collection through review and the establishment of treatment priorities

GOAL 8  Continue growing and expanding the use of the collection to a worldwide audience through broad access, research and publications

OBJECTIVE 8.1  Provide broad access to all of our collections through in-person visits, publications, traveling exhibitions, and online to further research and dissemination

OBJECTIVE 8.2  Continue to strengthen the library’s collection and increase access by in-person visits and online

GOAL 9  Encourage increased appreciation for collecting and collection growth through enhanced art and library relationships with collecting groups, donors and an estate planning initiative

OBJECTIVE 9.1  Coordinate with curatorial, conservation, advancement and education for organizing programs to promote appreciation and collecting

OBJECTIVE 9.2  Communicate with Trustees, Development Committee members, donors and any collecting groups regarding the museum’s collecting desires for all areas

OBJECTIVE 9.3  Encourage long-term loans to the museum from institutions and individuals to complement and/or enhance existing collections
GOAL 10
Maintain museum-quality security and fire and life safety systems throughout the campus, ensuring the safety of both people and the collection

OBJECTIVE 10.1
Continue to refine, implement and test emergency preparedness and disaster mitigation programs and procedures

OBJECTIVE 10.2
Continue to monitor, evaluate, and upgrade campus buildings and equipment to provide safe, cost-effective and efficient facilities

GOAL 11
Continue refining and upgrading record keeping and collection management policies and systems based on best practices and technology for accountability and dissemination

OBJECTIVE 11.1
Develop, review and periodically revise the Collection Management Policy and Handbook

OBJECTIVE 11.2
Create comprehensive and accurate collections database with updated images that allow staff and visitors to access the entire art and library collection digitally
STRATEGY IV  Strengthening Our Team

Because we can only realize our goals by working together, the Nelson-Atkins will nurture a unified, inspiring and more effective internal culture, both among existing staff members and those newly recruited. This evolved organizational culture will be characterized by open communication, collaboration, mutual respect and personal accountability.

GOAL 12
Foster a strongly collaborative culture with informed stakeholders (including the Board of Trustees, standing committee members, staff, volunteers and members)

OBJECTIVE 12.1
Empower stakeholders with information and responsibilities that instill a sense of ownership

OBJECTIVE 12.2
Implement formal and informal systems to drive performance toward the stated strategic goals

OBJECTIVE 12.3
Uphold a culture of excellence, innovation, experimentation and evaluation

GOAL 13
Develop multidirectional internal communications platforms that align with institutional strategy

OBJECTIVE 13.1
Ensure communications of institutional priorities and shared information is consistently delivered to all stakeholders in a way that will help the museum become a recognized leader for exceptional programming

OBJECTIVE 13.2
Ensure that individuals/departments/work groups within the institution have access to the most current information available in order to make informed, collaborative decisions and to maximize productivity (e.g. strategic priorities, available budget, required fundraising, etc.)

OBJECTIVE 13.3
Equip each employee, volunteer, trustee and other stakeholders with tools to assist them in representing the Nelson-Atkins brand and core messaged

GOAL 14
Attract, retain and develop an engaged, diverse and mission-focused stakeholder community that embraces flexibility, agility and innovation

OBJECTIVE 14.1
Design and implement a robust program to familiarize stakeholders with backgrounds about the Nelson-Atkins as well as its strategic priorities

OBJECTIVE 14.2
Review and enhance performance management measures and incentives to improve the ability to tie performance to both individual and organization-wide goals
GOAL 15
Clarify structure, roles, responsibilities and processes to align with the organizational values, mission and goals

OBJECTIVE 15.1
Develop and support an institutional planning process that establishes museum-wide priorities and is consistent with museum resources

OBJECTIVE 15.2
Undertake a review of organizational design to ensure functions and responsibilities best support the Strategic Plan

GOAL 16
Provide fiscal stability through ongoing fund and endowment development as well as annual fundraising opportunities

OBJECTIVE 16.1
Create a multi-year fundraising plan incorporating annual needs, endowments and naming opportunities to provide stable funding of programs, positions and art acquisitions

OBJECTIVE 16.2
Structure and staff an advancement team and process to anticipate funding needs and expanded involvement
STRATEGY V  Nurturing Excellence In Governance

To promote excellence in leadership, fiduciary responsibility and fiscal stability, the Nelson-Atkins will continue to engage and evolve the roles, responsibilities and expertise of Trustees and standing committee members through clear and consistent governance practices. We will also strategically cultivate and recruit candidates for new Trustee and standing committee positions.

GOAL 17
Continue to clarify roles and responsibilities of Trustees, standing committee members and staff through clear and consistent governance practices

OBJECTIVE 17.1
Continue to improve communication with Trustees and standing committee members

OBJECTIVE 17.2
Jointly establish (among Trustees and Director) clear strategic direction and goals for the museum to ensure effective communication and operational success

GOAL 18
Adhere to best practices to ensure appropriate fiduciary responsibility

OBJECTIVE 18.1
Monitor and review standing committee structure for best practices and effective governance

OBJECTIVE 18.2
Utilize current methodology to ensure a strong and inclusive nominating process for assessing Trustees and needs for future committee members and Trustees

GOAL 19
Trustees will participate and assist in creating fiscal stability through giving and assistance in fundraising
**STRATEGY VI  Envisioning A Cultural District**

We will continually evaluate the short- and long-term usage of our facilities and ensure that the buildings, grounds and signage are as accessible and user-friendly as possible to meet the growing needs of the collection and the community.

As a leader in the Kansas City cultural community, the Nelson-Atkins is uniquely positioned to build connections among its midtown colleagues with the goal of developing a cultural district. The museum is an integral component of this district and the museum campus can play a greater role by enhancing links with public art in the midtown area by serving as a central hub.

**GOAL 20**
Develop a comprehensive land and building use plan for all museum property to determine best short-term use and evaluate long-term direction

**OBJECTIVE 20.1**
Determine use requirements for short-term and long-term needs

**OBJECTIVE 20.2**
Reconcile use requirements with current availability and restrictions

**OBJECTIVE 20.3**
Monitor and refine facility and equipment needs as well as document maintenance or replacement requirements

**GOAL 21**
Evaluate building, grounds and signage to determine how well we communicate and welcome visitors

**OBJECTIVE 21.1**
Determine and develop signage to express the values of the Strategic Plan, inviting accessibility, openness and excitement

**OBJECTIVE 21.2**
Evaluate and enhance outdoor signage to increase communication of activities and create excitement about entering the museum

**GOAL 22**
Assume a leadership role in the midtown area to create and brand a cultural district

**OBJECTIVE 22.1**
Develop work teams to create a vision of and direction for the cultural district

**OBJECTIVE 22.2**
Create an active coalition of institutions and neighbors to raise funds and implement vision

**OBJECTIVE 22.3**
Participate in the city planning department’s midtown plan
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: Where the power of art engages the spirit of community
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