

Museum Management Consultants

Recommendations for Riverside Metropolitan Museum

From 2017 Assessment Report

- 1: When hiring the next RMM Director, seek out candidates with a depth of experience in the museum field. In specific, recruit visionary leaders who are experienced in implementing change and establishing a vision that is relevant to target audiences.
- 2: Once a new Director is hired, engage in a strategic planning process that builds on the current *Institutional Plan* to establish a broader context for Museum activities. The updated plan should include a vision statement as well as a brief context for each goal that speaks to the vision in individual areas of operations, followed by objectives with accountabilities attached. In defining the future vision, the planning process should result in a clarification of target audiences so that exhibits and programs can be developed in response to their particular needs. Given the need to better understand RMM's value and place in the community, the planning process would benefit from the participation of all stakeholder groups including representatives of target audiences, Museum staff, City Administration, Board, RMA, and community leadership. MMC spoke with many people who have high hopes for the Museum and their ideas and enthusiasm should be tapped in developing a future vision.
- 3: Contract with exhibit designers and architects to develop a *Visitor Experience Plan* that rethinks the Main Museum in terms of permanent exhibits, changing exhibitions, program space, retail space, café or other gathering space, and a more logical distribution of staff offices. As part of the planning process, consider opportunities for expansion to determine their viability. Work with the City Manager's office to determine the City's potential financial support for this project and develop and implement a capital campaign to raise remaining funds.
- 4: Establish an exhibitions calendar that formalizes changes in exhibits on a regular basis to create something new to see at the Museum. Temporary exhibitions and rotations in the permanent exhibit space can pull from the RMM collections while bringing in loans from the Smithsonian Affiliate program more often. Consistent marketing through free channels, and targeted paid channels as funds allow, should be used to promote these changes more vigorously.
- 5: As part of an overall revamping of the organizational chart (discussed further in the section entitled, Organizational Structure), hire a staff member who will focus on exhibition development and implementation to aid in RMM's renewed focus on changing exhibits more often.
- 6: Launch an experimental space within the Museum to test new ideas with visitors. This will be most helpful while RMM is in the process of planning for its future visitor experience, as it provides valuable formative evaluation feedback prior to committing to fabrication and installation.
- 7: Establish a formal evaluation program for exhibits and programs. Evaluation options range in complexity, and given RMM's staffing levels and resources, highly complex evaluations might not be realistic in the short-term. But this is an area in which volunteers can be highly useful, and in

MMC's experience, an area that many volunteers find interesting. Evaluation efforts can increase over time, but basic information gathered on a consistent basis will help the Museum to understand whom it serves and how they feel about their experience.

- 8: Create an advisory group of community members, representing the diversity of the population, to give feedback to the Museum on its current visitor experience and future plans for changes to that experience.
- 9: Place new emphasis on collaboration and pooling of resources with local organizations to get greater "bang for the buck." Through MMC's conversations, the Riverside Arts Council expressed enthusiasm for the idea of leading efforts to convene the cultural organizations in Riverside (i.e. ARTSblock, Riverside Art Museum, Center for Social Justice and Civil Liberties) and brainstorm ways in which they can work together. Ideas generated in MMC's discussions with community leaders include pooling resources for marketing, social media, and fundraisers. Another compelling idea is to work on a theme together, with each organization developing programming around that theme. There are a number of small nonprofit, cultural organizations in Riverside who face the same issues as RMM and could benefit from working together toward a common goal.
- 10: Seek out marketing expertise to redevelop the RMM brand, based on its vision for the future of the Museum. This brand should consider how best to position the Museum umbrella as well as all of its component parts. The exercise should also consider the Museum name. Changes should be reflected in signage, a revamped website, and all collateral materials.
- 11: As part of the Museum's efforts to grow the budget, commit funds and staff to marketing and communications campaigns to build awareness about the Museum in general and the vision for the future in specific.
- 12: Implement the plan RMM sent to AAM in response to the concerns outlined in the *Reaccreditation Letter*. The Collections Committee of the RMM Board should take a strong role in holding the Museum accountable for implementation of this plan, as well as the action plans detailed in the *Institutional Plan*.
- 13: With inventories complete, evaluate the collections for deaccessioning. The RMM Collections Management Policy outlines the process by which deaccessioning should occur, from staff recommendation to approval by the Board Collections Committee, approval by the full RMM Board, and final approval by the City Council. As per museum industry standards for ethics, any proceeds derived from deaccessioning should be used to further the Museum's collections; funds should not be used for Museum operations.
- 14: In collaboration with the RMA, develop a long-range plan to enhance the Museum's volunteer program, including proactive outreach to new, younger, and more diverse demographics; diversifying the volunteer opportunities available; and ensuring volunteers feel appreciated and invested in the Museum's future.

- 15: After gathering feedback from the Harada family and key supporters, restore Harada House in a way that makes it accessible to the general public, even if this means losing National Historic Landmark status. Conduct due diligence through long-range planning and the hiring of fundraising counsel, and develop a *Visitor Experience Plan* for Harada House that will provide a dynamic visitor engagement with the site, the story of the Harada Family, and the larger story of immigration and civil rights. Given that “the story is the thing,” interpretation should focus on that story, but there is also an opportunity to open Harada House to other nonprofit organizations as a community meeting place. Nonprofits are lacking in places to meet in Riverside and dedicating a piece of the Harada House function to this role would reflect the fundamental story of inclusion and community that is woven throughout the Harada narrative. This is not to say that Harada House should be a meeting place first and foremost, but rather that it could be a purposeful element of the overall experience.

In developing a *Visitor Experience Plan* for Harada House, consider the future of Robinson House through a cost-benefit analysis. If Harada House becomes fully accessible, Robinson House may not be necessary for interpretive space. In that case, sale of Robinson House should be considered.

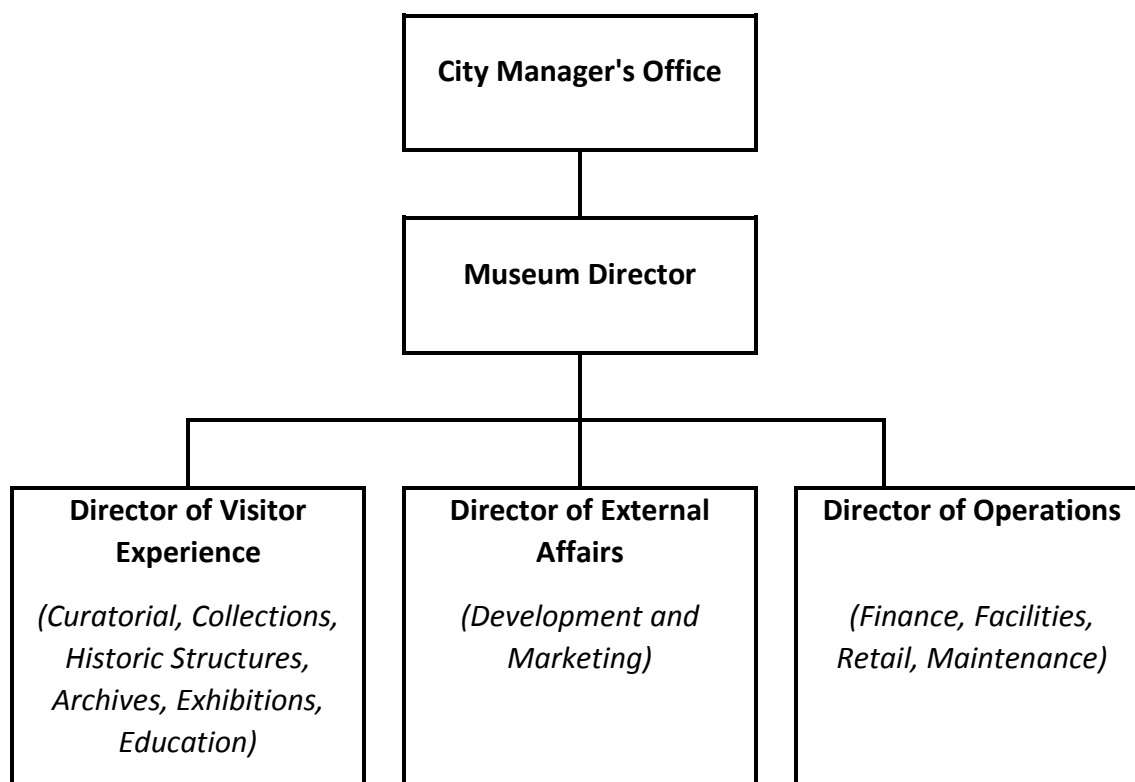
- 16: As part of a strategic planning process, develop business plans for RMM’s historic structures and other satellite facilities. The satellite facilities are true assets to RMM, but as stewards of these sites, the Museum must maintain them and ensure their accessibility to the public. This is a fundamental role of museums in general, but as a municipal museum that is funded almost entirely through public funds, this obligation must live up to public scrutiny. If RMM cannot operate these facilities, long-term discussions need to be had about the future of each site. For example, the Nature Center is a valuable asset for RMM and receives wonderful reviews, but if it cannot be sustained by RMM, the Parks & Recreation Department might be better suited to fully operate the program. It is not MMC’s position that facilities should be shed, but rather that a culture of planning and operational sustainability must begin to infuse the organization.

- 17: Divide the role of MCAD Director to dedicate a full-time staff position to leading the Museum. This does not require the Department to be dissolved; the Museum can continue to function within MCAD, but either way, the RMM Director should report directly to the Assistant City Manager.

It is worth noting that some interviewees were concerned about the logistical support provided by Arts & Culture to the Museum’s programs and activities and what might happen if MCAD is split. On the contrary, MMC also heard that Arts & Culture provides these services to other departments, and as such, would continue to do so if the Museum is not directed by the MCAD Director. One exception is marketing for the Museum, which is provided through a staff member from the Arts & Culture side of MCAD; this is an area that the Museum needs to improve and dedicate more funds to whether or not MCAD remains one staff. In general, these issues must be studied further to ensure that the Museum is not burdened with significant costs if separated from Arts & Culture.

- 18: Rethink the RMM organizational chart to better reflect contemporary, visitor-centered operations. Such a re-organization might look like the chart below, creating Museum departments around the visitor experience, external affairs, and operations.

RMM Proposed Organizational Structure



Work with the City Manager's office to consider the implications of restructuring curatorial staff, with the goal of having fewer content-based curators, and more generalists. Prior to staff reductions, the Museum had full-time staff dedicated to collections, and doing so again would address the collections stewardship issues described previously. While maintaining some content curators might be desirable, greater emphasis should be placed on the visitor experience by hiring staff dedicated to exhibitions, registration, and the visitor experience, and utilizing contract curators when needed.

- 19: As part of any facility changes that result from the *Visitor Experience Plan* (see Recommendation #3), bring staff offices into closer proximity to one another to encourage creativity, collaboration, communication, and collegiality.
- 20: The next RMM Director should manage the staff with a greater sense of transparency, accountability, and collaboration, with open communications at its core. In searching for the next Director, the City should prioritize experience in managing teams and breaking staff out of silos to ensure they are working most effectively as a team toward the Museum's future vision.

- 21: With a new or updated *Institutional Plan*, establish an Oversight Committee of Board and staff members to increase communication about organizational priorities and hold personnel accountable for meeting deadlines and completing objectives. Include more than senior staff in this committee to create a greater sense of investment and a greater sense of appreciation with the whole staff.
- 22: Ensure full implementation of expense tracking by staff to better understand the Museum's costs and to ingrain a culture of financial responsibility at every staff level.
- 23: Build a robust public-private partnership by establishing a Foundation to provide significant financial support for the RMM. MMC's recommendation is to utilize the RMA's 501(c)(3) and rename it as the RMM Foundation, maintaining the RMA as a committee of the Foundation focusing on Heritage House. In no way does the Museum want to lose the RMA, and those in the group who would like to step into a more dynamic fundraising role could serve beyond the RMA (or Heritage House) Committee; this approach is intended to preserve the passion of the RMA while acknowledging the need for new individuals to spearhead fundraising. Another option is to create a separate 501(c)(3), but that merely creates another entity and the Museum should endeavor to consolidate efforts and increase communication and collaboration. Either way, a *Memorandum of Understanding* should be developed between the City and the 501(c)(3) to formalize the partnership and outline the specific roles and responsibilities of each party.

The Foundation should be tasked with developing a fundraising program to benefit the Museum, including annual giving, major gifts, sponsorships, grants, planned giving, and long-term goals of raising an endowment or reserve fund, and possibly conducting a capital campaign to fund future projects. As part of this program, the Foundation should work with the Museum to rethink the membership program as a Museum membership (instead of an RMA membership), developing financial incentives for membership such as discounts on admissions and programs, and other attractive benefits that will provide an economic driver for becoming a member as well as joining to support RMM in general. The table below provides an overview of membership data from the Benchmark Museums. Although these are not direct parallels, it offers a glimpse of the potential membership provides.

RMA Membership Program Compared to Benchmark Museums

	RMA	Bowers	Longmont	Pacific Grove	Whatcom
Member Households	460	7,500	650	550	2,000
Basic Membership Fee	\$30	\$50	\$40	\$45	\$50
Total Member Revenue	\$7,998	\$522,265	\$13,000	\$36,050	\$121,272
Average Revenue per Member	\$17	\$70	\$20	\$66	\$61

Museum fundraising efforts should be led by professional staff and supported through the recruitment of Foundation Board members who have the financial capacity or connections to build significant financial support. The next Museum Director is expected to have experience in raising contributed revenue, and this should be supplemented by hiring additional staff dedicated to fundraising. The Museum has discussed the idea of hiring a Development Officer for some time, but it has never happened. MMC recommends channeling these funds into hiring a Development Director for the new Foundation to work in tandem with the Museum Director at a high level to establish a fundraising program.

- 24: Study potential areas of earned revenue for the Museum, striking a balance between accessibility and financial responsibility. Areas of opportunity for RMM earned revenue include charging a fee for:

- Admission to the Museum
- Special exhibitions
- Programs
- Traveling exhibitions developed by RMM
- Loans of RMM collections to other museums
- Rights and reproductions
- Facility rentals
- Food service

Admissions Data: RMM Compared to Benchmark Museums

	RMM	Bowers	Longmont	Pacific Grove	Whatcom
Attendance	51,631	150,000	62,652	50,000	71,900
Basic Admissions Fee	Free	\$13 weekdays \$15 weekends	Free	\$8.95 (Free to County Residents)	\$10
Special Exhibition Admission Fee	N/A	\$23 weekdays \$25 weekends	\$8	N/A	N/A
Total Admissions Revenue	N/A	\$571,643	\$97,371	\$45,130	\$70,700

Most notable among these is charging a fee for admission to the Museum. An admission fee does not need to be exorbitant; for example, the Riverside Art Museum charges \$5 for general admission, \$3 for students and seniors, and offers free admission for members, military, and children under 12. The table below shows admission fees for the Benchmark Museums as a point of reference. A modest admission fee should be introduced when the Museum has new and

different experiences for the public. The community is accustomed to the Museum being free, and as long as the visitor experience remains the same, there is no logical messaging to the public about a change in admissions. But with a new visitor experience, the introduction of an admission fee can reflect an upgraded experience.

Another key earned income source worth considering now is charging for programs. The RMM Education

Policy calls for at least 75% of programs to be free of charge, and adhering to this policy would allow the Museum to begin charging for some programs. The percentage indicated in this policy should be reviewed, but even beginning with fees that allow 25% of programs to break even or have a surplus, would be a building block for the Museum's financial sustainability.

- 25: The Board has the opportunity to play a central role in the future of the Museum, but to do so, must shore up its foundation. Toward that end, revisit and further define the responsibilities of Board members and officers in written job descriptions and ensure this information is part of a formal Board orientation program for new members. As part of that orientation program, consider developing a mentorship program for new members with established members to guide them through the start of their term.
- 26: As noted in AAM's "Characteristics of Excellence," "A governing authority is expected to...reflect the diversity of the communities it serves,"¹ and the RMM Board could improve in this regard. Riverside and its surrounding region are quite diverse, and this should have a stronger reflection in Board representation. Given that Board members are appointed, there is less control over recruitment, but MMC recommends working with the City to formalize diversity (ethnic, socioeconomic, geographic, etc.) as a key criteria for Board appointment.
- 27: The RMM Director should work with the Board to strategize their advocacy work in the community, identifying meetings or other opportunities for Board and/or Museum staff to create a higher profile in the community through regular presentations, networking, and attendance at community events.
- 28: In partnership with the Museum Director, the Board should develop a plan to reach out to Council Members more consistently and effectively. This approach is similar to developing a cultivation plan for prospective donors; cultivating the Council through greater outreach will establish greater rapport and a stronger image of the RMM within the Council.
- 29: As another way to strengthen the groups affiliated with RMM, build a relationship between the RMA (or Foundation, in the future) and the Board. There is almost no interaction between the

1 American Alliance of Museums, "Characteristics of Excellence: Standards Regarding the Composition of the Governing Authority," accessed at <http://www.aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/leadership>

groups; not all Board members are members of RMA and not all participate in their fundraisers. This level of participation has not been expected until now, but it makes no sense, as the RMA and Museum Board are the two groups in a position to serve as champions of the Museum, so they should be speaking the same language and strategizing together. The President of the RMA attends Museum Board meetings, but the groups should brainstorm ways to enhance the relationship, such as requiring RMA membership of all Board members, requiring attendance at one RMA event per year, creating a joint committee between the two groups to keep each other informed, and/or designating a Board officer to attend RMA meetings.
