

CONNECTICUT LEAGUE OF MUSEUMS

Uniting museums, enriching lives.

Strategic Plan

Goals and Strategies

2024–2026

13 November 2023

Preamble

In the heart of Connecticut's diverse and vibrant landscape lies a rich tapestry of museums and cultural centers, each playing a vital role in preserving our state's heritage, fostering education, and inspiring communities. Since 1950, the Connecticut League has been serving many of these organizations—first as the Connecticut League of Historical Societies, then as the Connecticut League of History Organizations—with meaningful support and collegueship, primarily in the history field, but increasingly beyond its margins. As we have entered the third decade of the twenty-first century, we have come to embrace our role as a resource to a larger museum community. Now, as the Connecticut League of Museums, we embark on this strategic plan to enhance and leverage the collective impact of our state's museums and the people who staff and support them, and to ensure the flourishing cultural ecosystem that makes our state a rewarding place to live, work, and play.

Museums are not merely repositories of history, art, culture, nature, and technology. They are living platforms that engage, educate, and connect people from all ways of life and that serve our shared society. They are spaces for dialogue, reflection, and transformation, sites of memory and imagination, stages for enacting social change, and places for people to come together in meaningful encounters with themselves and with their culture. They are places where individuals and communities can understand their shared humanity and culture, examine the past, explore the world around them, contribute to social and civic life, and imagine a shared future. Museums need not be buildings or structures—they may be community groups or

virtual spaces for stewarding heritage, art, or memory. Our league is for all who further the work of museums, broadly conceived.¹

Museums are economic engines, supporting a vital economy that includes museum services, local business development, and tourism. Museums create jobs, hire contractors, and employ independent professionals. They support area businesses, create meaningful volunteer opportunities, and partner with community groups to enhance their value and impact in their towns.

Adapting and innovating to remain nimble and relevant is paramount in today's rapidly changing world. This strategic plan, therefore, represents a collaborative roadmap to guide our efforts in the years ahead, and to help us remain responsive to the wide community we serve. Developing this plan was inclusive and thoughtful, involving input from members, stakeholders, partners, and the broader community. Through workshops, focus groups, surveys, and consultations, we have identified core values, aspirations, and actionable strategies that align with our mission and vision.

We dedicate ourselves to the following strategic imperatives:

- **Belonging:** Fostering connection among our members, giving everyone a meaningful voice, and making museums places where all feel welcome and at home.
- **Unity:** Building a collective community for Connecticut's diverse museum sector.
- **Sustainability:** Ensuring a stable future for ourselves and our members through environmental stewardship which informs our broad, diverse, and coordinated funding and revenue streams, and through investment in people.

Our work has been enabled, sustained, and enhanced by longstanding partnerships. As we build our capacity to serve the whole of Connecticut's museum community, we will continue to work collaboratively with our partner organizations at the state, regional, and national levels to achieve our shared goals. We look forward to

¹ Our thinking about museums has been informed by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) definition, adopted in 2022: "A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing."
<https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>

deepening our relationships with those we work with now, and developing the new and exciting partnerships to which we know our work will lead.

Every challenge is an opportunity. With determination, creativity, and a shared sense of purpose, we embark on this journey to shape a future where our museums are strong, inclusive, responsive, and thriving. We invite you to join us in this vital endeavor.

Mission

The Connecticut League of Museums unifies and strengthens our state's museums and cultural resources to expand their capacity and community impact.

Vision

The Connecticut League of Museums is the premier destination for Connecticut's museum community, functioning as a hub and catalyst for learning; a source of inspiration, ideas, and assistance; a supportive and welcoming peer network; and a leading advocate for museums and voice for the public trust.

Values

- **Belonging:** Building a culture of unity and elevating voices across all museum fields to create an environment where every museum employee, volunteer, and visitor sees themselves and is part of Connecticut's cultural landscape
- **Connection:** Bringing together museum staff, volunteers, leaders, and the public in an effective network of meaningful, reciprocal communication to learn from and engage with one another, and have fun
- **Professionalism:** Promoting, demonstrating, and sharing standards of excellence to improve the quality of Connecticut's museums and the visitor experience at all sites
- **Stewardship:** Inspiring shared responsibility for Connecticut's environment, culture, and future

Goals and Strategies

Belonging

The Connecticut League of Museums elevates all voices in the museum community and ensures a seat at the table for our broad and diverse membership. We will:

- Create and nurture a museum community in Connecticut that reflects the state's diversity, foster relationships among our members that create a sense of belonging and common purpose, and encourage communication and networking.
- Be a voice for progress and equity in the museum sector, and serve as an example for other organizations to follow.
- Facilitate connections with the museum services sector in Connecticut and the region, including businesses and independent professionals serving the museum community, in ways that enhance the value of membership for all.
- Provide programs and professional development opportunities for our members and constituents that span the full range of museum experiences, disciplines, and organizational sizes and capacities.
- Work with our state and regional partners to create and support existing networks that serve the entire sector.

Unity

The Connecticut League of Museums unites and advocates for everyone in the state's museum field and works for a strong and vital museum and cultural community in Connecticut. We will:

- Cultivate and sustain a wide, active, and inclusive membership base of organizations and individuals that reflects the range and diversity of our state and its museums and that draws on the strengths of our many disciplines.
- Work with our partner organizations at the local, state, regional, and national levels to gather and disseminate data about museums, coordinate digital strategy, and build a network of museums as cultural destinations across the state.

- Inspire and mobilize the museum sector in Connecticut through an active communications strategy that capitalizes on the strength of our network.
- Build the capacity of our members to be effective advocates on behalf of their own organizations and the wider museum field by telling their stories and articulating their value.
- Strengthen relationships with legislators, keep them informed about our work and the work of our members, and support efforts to increase state and federal funding for museums.

Sustainability

The Connecticut League of Museums ensures a stable future for itself and its members through environmental stewardship, sound financial planning, and investment in people. We will:

- Promote policies and practices that are environmentally sustainable and that enhance our resilience, both as an organization and as a museum community.
- Develop our board of directors to both represent our wide membership base and to ensure the necessary skill sets within our leadership to support our increased capacity.
- Invest in the professional development of our staff, provide equitable pay and benefits, and do right by our employees to make the League a great place to work.
- Diversify our sources of funding to ensure a secure financial footing for our organization, and increase our revenue with a focus on ensuring that the major phases of our operations are self-sustaining.
- Connect our members to funding opportunities that help them realize their missions.

Background and Process

This strategic plan has been the result of a year and a half of work, and has involved stakeholders from across Connecticut's museum and cultural sector. It was made possible through a partnership grant from Connecticut Humanities, which allowed us, among other things, to engage Laura B. Roberts of Roberts Consulting to assist and guide us. We are incredibly grateful to CTH for their unstinting support of the League and their investment in our common future.

The process informing this document has involved research, outreach, analysis, feedback from members and key stakeholders, and multiple rounds of board revision and refinement. Since we began our work in June 2022, we have:

- Heard from our members and key stakeholders in informal conversations at the 2022 League conference, and invited their feedback in the conference evaluation form
- Spoken and brainstormed with over 100 of our members and constituents at six focus groups across Connecticut to better understand what they value about the League, what opportunities they see for us, and what questions they have about our trajectory
- Sent out a survey (completed by 93 individuals) to our members and constituents to gather feedback and ideas from those who were unable to attend our focus groups
- Gathered data—on our own, and in collaboration with our partners—about the makeup of both our existing membership and the broader museum sector in Connecticut
- Conducted online focus groups with representatives of museums in other disciplines to better understand the needs and opportunities across our state's museum community
- Visited over 20 member and non-member museums across Connecticut to better understand the realities on the ground
- Spoken with representatives from other state and regional museum associations to understand our place in the organizational landscape, both here in New England and nationally
- Participated in an NEH-funded study through COSMA, the Coalition of State Museum Associations, on the characteristics of strong and successful state museum associations, which produced a [Common Service Model](#) that will guide our work

As a membership organization first and foremost, we have worked continuously to articulate our direction to the community of individuals and organizations we serve. We were incredibly gratified when, in a special meeting of the membership at the 2023 League conference, our members unanimously approved revisions to our bylaws that has allowed us to move forward as the Connecticut League of Museums.

The same learning, outreach, and iterative feedback that has been central to our process will be critical to achieving the aims set forth in this plan. We will continue to maintain open communication with all our stakeholders, and we welcome ideas and feedback as we move forward.