

**VISION 2015: A STRATEGIC PLAN
FOR THE PROVIDENCE ATHENAEUM**

Approved by the Board of Directors June 16, 2010

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THE BOARD PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

The Athenaeum is both an exceptional library and a vibrant cultural center. The Athenaeum has become an increasingly important part of the Providence cultural community. The strategic plan we present here reflects our vision that this should continue and that we serve not only Athenaeum members but the community at large. *Vision 2015* provides the framework for our activities in the next five years. The goals recognize that we must expand our efforts to involve various segments of the community in order to attract more people as members and participants. We also must increase our collaborations with other cultural and educational organizations and further our pivotal role as a promoter of local arts and culture. The Athenaeum will remain committed to fostering animated discussion and lifelong learning, offer access to new technologies, and preserve our historic building.

Vision 2015, along with an action plan for the first year, lays out an ambitious but practical agenda. In this time of rapid change and economic uncertainty, we will concentrate on those strategic tasks that will produce the best results. We know that we will have to be realistic, flexible, and innovative.

I am indebted to all those who contributed to the strategic planning process, and I look forward to exciting years ahead at the Athenaeum.

- Deming Sherman

THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

This is an exhilarating moment for the Athenaeum. After a rigorous year-long planning effort, we have outlined a plan for the future. *Vision 2015* sets a strategic course of action that recognizes our distinguished past and builds on our current successes. It incorporates substantive input of board, staff, members, and community stakeholders; takes into account the changing nature of libraries and new technologies; and recognizes the Athenaeum's evolving position in the community. We conducted board and staff assessments, evaluated the external environment, surveyed the membership and other membership libraries, and sought the views of representatives and experts. This has been an opportunity to hear many voices as well as make new connections.

As one of Providence's oldest cultural institutions, the Athenaeum is a model of resilience, maintaining its relevancy while remaining true to its original mission and the spirit of its founders. Established by talented, dedicated, and visionary individuals, the Athenaeum is a living example of democracy, resourcefulness, and ingenuity. We are sufficiently interconnected to know that an Athenaeum experience extends beyond our own immediate gratification . . . to an understanding of human dignity and conviction about our obligations to each other and to the larger community. These strengths have sustained the Athenaeum throughout its history and make possible the ongoing, thoughtful change that is the institution's hallmark.

We have made significant progress since our previous plan and are ideally positioned to move forward to accomplish the mission, vision, and goals of our new plan. The next several years offer great opportunities – and challenges. How we respond to these will determine whether or not the Athenaeum will become a catalyst among its peers. The realization of this vision will require vigorous investment of resources. With *Vision 2015* and our first year Operations Plan, we are pressing ahead to ensure the Athenaeum's future.

- Alison Maxell

MISSION

The Providence Athenaeum, a unique library and cultural center, welcomes and enriches the educational and cultural pursuits of its members and the community and encourages a diverse public to engage in spirited conversation. It offers a wide range of experiences by providing and conserving extraordinary collections, offering innovative and compelling programs, promoting and collaborating with the community's vibrant cultural sector, and highlighting and preserving its historic building.

CORE VALUES

The Athenaeum believes that:

- Culture, humanities, history, and the arts are important to human understanding.
- Civic exploration and lively discussion with the active participation of a broad and diverse population, are critical in fostering a democratic society.
- Different points of view are respected.

- The arts and culture of the city and state are valuable contributors to community vitality.
- Collaboration builds stronger and more efficient programs and institutions.
- All members, visitors, participants, Board, volunteers, and staff are valued and respected.

VISION

By 2015, the Providence Athenaeum will:

- Be recognized as a vital center for exploration and interchange of compelling ideas and issues, past and present;
- Serve as a forum where participants from diverse disciplines and backgrounds engage in wide-ranging conversation and compelling programs;
- Be distinguished as a library that has cherished traditions, celebrates the unique qualities of the printed word, and offers technological amenities;
- Help advance life-long learning by providing a setting where students, artists, scholars, members, and the public have access to resources that enlighten and inspire;
- Provide a stimulating and comfortable environment for children to interact and offer educational tools that meet state requirements;
- Champion Providence and Rhode Island as significant cultivators of the arts and humanities and foster collaboration with local, regional, and national groups;
- Be a welcoming facility that fuses an appropriately restored historical structure with environmentally sustainable features that contribute to the preservation and enjoyment of its collections and enhance cultural experiences;
- Be considered a steward of its assets and resources through its commitment to excellence and best practices.

GOALS & STRATEGIES

The Providence Athenaeum aspires to be an exemplary cultural institution. The strategic planning goals reflect the Athenaeum's progress to date, recognize the importance of excellence in all its endeavors, and acknowledge the views of both its internal and external stakeholders.

GOAL I: EXPERIENCE

The Athenaeum will offer stimulating and enjoyable intellectual, educational, and cultural experiences for members and the larger community.

Strategies:

- Be an outstanding library for the membership;
- Be a comfortable library resource for the community;
- Present exceptional, creative, thought-provoking programs that engage its members and the public;
- Highlight the Athenaeum's unique character through the interaction of its collections and programming;
- Interest and engage members, scholars, writers, artists, teachers, students, and the general public through the use of its special collections;
- Offer life-long learning opportunities to members and the general public.

GOAL II: ACCESS

The Athenaeum will increase accessibility to its collections and programs.

Strategies:

- Reach out to, engage, and be an accessible resource to diverse audiences;
- Make available and broaden use of its special collections on site and virtually through online cataloging and promotion;
- Promote use and participation as a library and cultural center;
- Expand offsite presence in programming for adults and children;
- Build technological capacity to increase virtual participation consistent with the other goals;
- Improve internal and external physical accessibility.

GOAL III: COLLABORATION

The Athenaeum will expand innovative partnerships with other groups and organizations to provide increased cultural and educational opportunities and promote the cultural vitality of the community.

Strategies:

- Develop initiatives with diverse organizations;
- Build partnerships with organizations to increase active participation that promotes diversity and intergenerational exchange;
- Be a major player in the cultural and economic revitalization of the city, state, and region;
- Promote the facility as a meeting place for scholarly, cultural, educational, historical, and other endeavors;
- Achieve efficiencies through partnering with others.

GOAL IV: AMBIANCE

The Athenaeum will create a facility that is welcoming, historically appropriate, multi-functional, environmentally responsible, efficient, and secure for both people and collections.

Strategies:

- Develop a new facilities master plan that takes into consideration the strategic planning mission, vision, and goals;
- Provide a facility that respects the structure's historical integrity and incorporates sustainable solutions and technology;
- Develop a resource that reflects space allocation priorities and provides maximum flexibility;
- Incorporate physical access features into facility and program planning to meet the community's diverse needs;
- Integrate ongoing maintenance needs into the master planning process.

GOAL V: STEWARDSHIP

The Athenaeum will further manage the Athenaeum's assets – collections, building, financial, human – to ensure an effective, efficient, and sustainable institution.

Strategies:

- Continue to define, develop, refine, care for, and conserve the collections based upon accepted policies and highest professional standards;
- Be vigilant in the preservation of the physical plant;
- Refine a long-term approach to financial planning and resource allocation;
- Pursue a long-range, comprehensive development program that specifies strategies for membership, annual fund, individual giving, endowment, earned income, and corporate, foundation, and government funding;
- Continue policies and operations that incorporate professional standards and best practices to assure an outstanding library and cultural institution;
- Develop the capabilities of, and respect for, all personnel – board, staff, and volunteers;
- Periodically review the strategic plan and evaluate the effectiveness of the Athenaeum's activities in supporting the mission and vision.

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