AKG,

2026–2031
STRATEGIC PLAN



BUFFALO AKG ART MUSEUM

AKG,

Buffalo AKG Art Museum
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MISSION & VALUES

Mission

We connect and inspire people in our community and around the world through encounters with modern and contemporary art, creative experiences, and meaningful conversations.

Values

→ We treat all with dignity and respect.

→ We champion the art and artists of our time.

→ We engage with our communities.

→ We are committed to discovery and innovation.

→ We honor our history and explore the future with curiosity.



MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

From 2015 to 2025, the Buffalo AKG Art Museum pursued its most significant metamorphosis in lived memory. Guided by a ten-year strategic plan, it transformed from a staff of 68 professionals to a talented and diverse team of nearly 200. Visitation expanded from an average of 125,000 to more than 215,000. Its budget grew from $6.7 million to $17 million. This transformative change extends the museum's sterling reputation for its collection and exhibitions—long recognized among art connoisseurs and cultural peers—into a platform of growing influence in local, national, and international circles.

At the heart of this next chapter is a simple but powerful idea: **art, artists' voices, and exhibitions are the point of origin for everything we do.** With four pillars—Art, People, Place, Resources—the plan affirms the creative nucleus from which ideas emerge, experiences are shaped, and conversations extend outward into the world. In an unpredictable and unstable global environment, art serves a critical role in strengthening the bonds of humanity. The museum's most vital responsibility, therefore, is to **engage more people with art** and to amplify the reach and impact of the ideas it generates across global networks of cultural thought and exchange. Accomplishing this while responding to the rapidly changing conditions of twenty-first-century life, including the proliferation of new technologies, the rise of artificial intelligence, and ongoing geopolitical and economic uncertainty, is central to this plan.

At the same time, the AKG recognizes that **access is foundational to impact.** Through the execution of this plan, the museum will eliminate admission fees for all visitors ages 18 and under, ensuring that the youngest members of our community encounter art, artists, and ideas without financial barriers. This commitment represents a transformative investment in the next generation, expanding who participates in the cultural life of the museum and shaping future audiences, thinkers, and creators.



The AKG has long stood at the avant-garde of visual culture. This plan extends that legacy beyond what we present to how we operate: building a museum that is as innovative and forward-looking in its operational structure as it is in its artistic program. Grounded in financial sustainability and organizational resilience, the AKG will continue to evolve as an **entrepreneurial institution—one that not only responds to change but helps define it.**

A group of researchers observed at the 2022 International Council of Museums conference, "There has never been a more important time for looking outward beyond our own comfortable boundaries … and for our museums to be central to this transformative process."*

This Strategic Plan is the AKG's response: to place art at the center, to open its doors wider than ever before, and to extend its ideas into the world—shaping not only how we experience art, but how we understand one another.

Alice Jacobs
President,
Board of Directors

Jillian Jones
Executive Director

Cathleen Chaffee
Artistic Director

OBJECTIVES

1 **Evolve as a leader in the international art world** by centering exhibition programming as the creative engine of our operations. By producing exhibitions and projects that attract national and global partnerships and media attention, we will pioneer innovative museum practices and uplift emerging and established artists and the essential stories they tell.

2 **Reinforce the AKG's role as Western New York's premier global cultural destination** by offering authentic, memorable encounters with art that connects our community to the wider world. By eliminating admission barriers for visitors ages 18 and under, we ensure that future generations can embrace the transformative power of art and exercise their curiosity without a price tag.

3 **Prioritize and plan for the proactive, long-term care of our physical campus and grounds,** ensuring through the allocation of funds the vitality of the AKG's spaces for future generations.

4 **Embrace an entrepreneurial mindset** across all operations, expanding and diversifying revenue streams to ensure a sustainable financial framework that supports the AKG's growth and vibrancy.



ART

Art, artists' voices, and exhibitions are the point of origin for everything the museum does. Stewarding and activating the more than 8,000 works in our care in ways that are both rigorous and responsive to the present moment are at the heart of our responsibility to future generations.

A sustained focus on artists and their ability to interpret and shape cultural experiences not only has defined the AKG's collection but also has enabled the museum to produce exhibitions that resonate deeply with our community. Today, roughly 67% of visitors come from the immediate surrounding counties, reflecting the museum's role as both a cultural anchor and a point of access to global ideas. At the same time, recent years have demonstrated growing national and international interest in the AKG's curatorial approach. Building on this momentum, the museum will expand its capacity to develop touring exhibitions—extending the reach of its work and strengthening its presence within global cultural networks.

The AKG will also explore new pathways by forging strategic, programmatic, and resource-sharing relationships with peer institutions locally, nationally, and internationally. Through co-organized exhibitions and collaborative programming, these efforts will expand audience reach, extend access, and reduce the costs of presenting ambitious projects. Over time, such relationships will build a more durable network of institutional collaborators, amplifying the AKG's impact while establishing a new model of creative leadership.

The AKG's Public Art Initiative, a dynamic program founded in 2013, has become integral to the museum's impact beyond its walls. The AKG is now positioned to leverage this success as a means of enriching connections with local communities and expanding its reach beyond Buffalo.

Investments in technology can help the AKG more efficiently care for and virtually share the collection, plan new and exciting experiences for members and visitors, and explore new avenues for realizing our collection's full potential.



Building and Stewarding the Collection

→ Balance caring for the collection with ensuring its sustainable growth

- Prioritize the acquisition of groundbreaking contemporary works, with a focus on courageous, forward-thinking artists who speak to current cultural moments and produce works with unique aesthetics
- Advance the museum's long-standing commitment to firsts, reaffirming the calculated risk-taking that built the current collection. As part of a regular rhythm of exhibitions at differing scales, offer a platform to emerging artists and provide established artists with their first survey exhibitions

→ Be excellent stewards of acquisition funds to effectively plan for collection growth as well as collection care, documentation, conservation, and storage

→ Establish an ongoing and iterative process of distilling the collection through deaccessioning

→ Fully integrate and harmonize the new Collection Management System (CMS) adopted by the institution



Dynamic Exhibitions

→ Pursue an ambitious touring exhibition program whereby groundbreaking shows originate at the AKG with national and international partners to expand the AKG's reputation nationally and globally

→ Leverage outstanding collection resources in exhibition programming

→ Balance exhibitions that attract the wider community with those that enhance the AKG's global, scholarly reputation so that an annual or biannual cadence includes exhibitions designed to engage the broadest possible audience and expand revenue sources

Museum Partnerships

→ Actively pursue museum partnerships with a view toward sharing resources, increasing philanthropic capacity, implementing best practices, and co-organizing exhibitions

→ Pursue joint acquisitions

→ Share best practices and intellectual resources

→ Increase philanthropic capacity

Amplifying the Public Art Initiative

→ Grow the awareness of the unique nature of the Public Art Initiative in our own communities and those beyond Western New York

→ Center Public Art in public engagement efforts, creating bridges back to the museum campus

→ Diversify output in material terms: balance mural production with other public art mediums such as sculpture, mosaic, landscape, and functional and performative projects

→ Explore earned revenue opportunities via public art consultation, collaboration, and thought leadership

→ Pursue opportunities for public art to connect with the museum's exhibition program



PEOPLE

The Buffalo AKG is a place to encounter art, and also a place to gather—where individuals and communities come together to share experiences, exchange ideas, and build relationships. Leveraging its spaces, particularly the Seymour H. Knox Building, as a shared resource for partners and peers positions the AKG as a dynamic platform for community gathering and cultural exchange.

Expanding the ways visitors connect with art through the thoughtful application of new technologies will create richer, more accessible, and more inclusive experiences. At the same time, a more focused and strategic approach to marketing will deepen relationships with existing audiences while reaching new ones, supporting both increased visitation and long-term engagement through membership and philanthropy.

Sustaining repeat visitation will require the AKG to remain nimble and responsive in its programming and communications—meeting audiences where they are and inviting them into spaces that feel welcoming, social, and alive.

Expanding and sustaining these experiences requires a continued focus on access—ensuring that more people see the museum as a place where they belong and to which they return often. As we plan for the future, the greatest impact may result from our commitment to establishing free admission for visitors ages 18 and under, creating early and lasting connections to art and the museum experience.



Community Audience Development

- → Foster deep and sustained engagement with local audiences by partnering with organizations and communities to co-create programs and events
- → Foster the next generation of museumgoers by eliminating admission fees for all visitors ages 18 and under by 2029

Visitor Experience Enhancement

- → Emphasize storytelling and meaning-making in how visitors engage with art
- → Create multiple entry points for audience engagement, including self-directed channels
- → Reinforce radical hospitality and superlative experience as core values in every visitor encounter
- → Expand the physical presence of programming across the museum's buildings and its outdoor campus

Core Programming Investment

- → Provide learning and creativity programs that inspire people to explore and express their identity, foster creativity and recognize everyone's creative potential, facilitate connections between the stories and histories that draw from both the form and the content of artworks, and connect people with each other
- → Invest in and prioritize flagship programs such as Art'scool K–12 tours, presented by Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, and M&T FIRST FRIDAYS as a way to build lifelong audiences
- → Embed and expand the AKG's museum-wide approach to learning through play, building on existing practices to create engaging, participatory experiences that deepen the connection to art for visitors of all ages

Membership Experience

- → Continually improve the membership experience with the aim of achieving retention and growth
- → Align offerings with subscription-based models
- → Design and launch a web-based member portal to give members an easier, upgraded way to access their benefits and members-only content
- → Regularly communicate the individual and collective impact of membership

IDEA Strategic Work

- → Incorporate the perspectives, insights, and recommendations of collaborative teams such as the Accessibility Team, the Inclusive Culture Team, and the Community Advisory Council into the museum's internal and external conversations
- → Ensure that collection displays and exhibition-related programs reflect the diversity and excellence of voices, regions, mediums, and practices
- → Ensure the IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility) strategic framework is integrated into each department's annual objectives and reflected in the institution's annual goals
- → Increase community-led programs and "takeovers" in the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Town Square

Communications and Marketing

- → Communicate the Buffalo AKG as an unparalleled museum of modern and contemporary art as widely as possible
- → Promote the museum as a fun and educational destination for people from all walks of life
- → Create a holistic, comprehensive digital strategy to upgrade the internal and public-facing platforms that connect members and audiences to the museum and its resources
- → Expand marketing campaigns with the goal of growing the six main earned-revenue streams: admissions, membership, food and beverage, retail, facility rentals, and group tours

PLACE

The Buffalo AKG's renewed and expanded campus has generated pride in our region and garnered acclaim around the world. Its buildings and grounds are the stage and set on which the museum's key activities unfold—illuminating artists, uncovering new ideas, and gathering people in exploration of those ideas. Actively planning for the entire campus's long-term care and maintenance will be a key component of our overarching efforts to create a more efficient and sustainable museum. Additionally, expanding and modernizing our storage capacity for the museum's ever-evolving fine art collection will allow us to continue to deliver on our foundational mission of collecting, preserving, and presenting the greatest artworks of our time.





Campus and Facilities Stewardship

- → Establish a facilities maintenance endowment
- → Conduct life-cycle and cost analyses of building systems as a means for proactively planning for and addressing short-term and long-term maintenance priorities
- → Plan for long-term maintenance in building systems and infrastructure related to technology platforms and equipment, with an eye toward efficiency

Art Storage

- → Improve the function of and allow for capacity growth in the AKG's fine art storage facilities
- → By 2029, install a high-density racking and compact storage solution that increases the capacity of the current facility for at least fifteen years of growth
- → By 2030, outline a high-level plan for expanding art storage space

Town Square Development

- → Position the Town Square as Buffalo's "cultural living room," underscoring the accessibility and vibrancy of our campus for all visitors

Grounds and Landscape

- → Establish a sustainable plan for the maintenance of our landscape, building a dedicated and experienced body of volunteers and calling upon expert guidance to maintain the lawns, plantings, and gardens of the AKG's campus

RESOURCES

The museum's primary focus at the launch of this plan is ensuring a sustainable financial future. The field remains open for visionary thinking on how to accomplish this in today's unpredictable economic climate. Embracing novel fundraising strategies and resourcing those pistons of our operations that require new capital will maintain the AKG's margin of excellence for its next generations of visitors and leaders.

To sustain and strengthen the team that delivers on the museum's mission each day, we will embed three core shifts across the institution: reinforcing a culture of collaboration grounded in shared purpose, investing in the well-being and development of our talented and ambitious staff, and continually improving operational efficiency.

Building on the international attention brought to the AKG through the museum's reopening and its first years of operations will help widen the pipeline for volunteer leadership groups and continue to draw philanthropy to Buffalo. Thinking holistically about the people who support the museum at all levels can help populate groups along the volunteer spectrum and set the stage for a lifetime of engagement with the institution.



Fiscal Sustainability

- → Develop long-term financial sustainability
- → Launch a sustained fundraising initiative titled AKG in Motion designed to grow the operating endowment, balance revenue streams, and engage donors through compelling opportunities to connect with the museum's highest-priority projects and programs
- → Significantly broaden the reach and scope of the museum's philanthropy initiatives to attract a committed base of donors who encounter an unmatched giving experience that blends fun and social connections with unique experiences and clearly delineated impact
- → Establish a formal legacy giving program
- → Continue building the scope and impact of support groups: the National Council, the Nordic Founding Patrons, Board Alumni, and the Convergence Council

Talent and Team

- → Strengthen institutional culture by evaluating, articulating, and reinforcing staff values, investing in staff training and social gatherings, and empowering staff to continue to find meaning in and belonging through their work
- → Emphasize the development of our managers and other leaders to foster a thoughtful, caring, and transparent workplace
- → Prioritize professional development and career advancement, supporting the pipeline of future arts and cultural leaders in our region and beyond

Governance and Board Development

- → Pursue the museum's board recruitment strategy that ensures community representation while continuing to develop board leadership that complements the museum's strategic growth—including those who represent geographic diversity and alignment with the museum's collecting priorities and exhibitions
- → Foster connections between the Board and our volunteer leadership groups, with a focus on strengthening our common purpose of supporting the museum
- → Build a five-year pipeline of future arts and cultural leaders and philanthropic supporters

Operational Excellence

- → Deeply engage staff teams—departmental and cross-functional—in the annual planning process so that goals, problem-solving, and successes are shared, each team member understands their contributions to the greater whole, and annual goals clearly scaffold up to the Strategic Plan
- → Encourage experimentation, innovation, and continual learning and growth
- → Embrace entrepreneurial thinking as a core element of our operational ethos

Innovation and Technology

- → Where appropriate, embrace responsible, mission-aligned adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies into museum spaces to support operational efficiency and present long-term innovation opportunities. Establish a task force comprising board and staff members charged with evaluating emerging AI technologies and their strategic and ethical implications for museum operations
- → Implement comprehensive data analytics to inform decision-making related to visitation trends, earned income streams, and resource management
- → Invest more broadly in cybersecurity and the museum's data protection infrastructure



STRATEGIC PLAN SCORECARD: KEY SUCCESS METRICS

Key Performance Indicator	Definition	Suggested Target/Measure	Tracking Frequency
Total Annual Attendance	Total visitors segmented by local, national, international	Year-over-year growth; % non-local growth	Quarterly/ Annual
Repeat Visitation Rate	% of visitors returning within 12 months	Increase annually (e.g., +5%)	Annual
Youth Engagement (18 and under)	Attendance and participation of visitors 18 and under	Growth post–free admission policy	Quarterly/ Annual
Membership Retention & Upgrade	% retained and % upgrading tiers	Retention >85%; increasing upgrades	Annual
Exhibition Performance Index	Attendance, revenue, press, travel rate per exhibition	Defined composite score per exhibition	Per Exhibition
% Exhibition Program Funded	Share of exhibition costs covered by philanthropy	Increase toward target (e.g., 75%+)	Annual
Revenue Mix Balance	Earned vs. contributed vs. endowment revenue	Balanced diversification (target mix)	Annual
Staff Retention & Engagement	Retention rate + engagement survey results	High retention + improved engagement scores	Annual
Strategic Partnerships	Number and impact of institutional collaborations	Increase # and value of partnerships	Annual
Total Engaged Audience (Measured channels only)	Combined count of on-site attendance, digital engagement, and program participation in channels the AKG can measure consistently	Year-over-year growth in total measured audience reach	Quarterly/ Annual



IMAGES

Cover: The Gundlach Building on M&T FIRST FRIDAYS. Photo: Jeff Mace

Interior cover: A visitor with Rosalyn Drexler's *Lovers*, 1963. Photo: Jeff Mace

Page 3: Visitors exploring *Let Us Gather in a Flourishing Way*. Photo: Jeff Mace

Page 5: Aerial view of the Buffalo AKG campus. Photo: Jeff Mace

Page 7: The John J. Albright Bridge. Photo: Jason O'Rear

Page 9: Visitors with Mark Rothko's *Orange and Yellow*, 1956. Photo: Jeff Mace

Page 10: View of Josef Kristofoletti's *Golden Hour*, 2021, at 201 Ellicott Street in Buffalo. Photo: Jeff Mace

Pages 12–13: Visitors with Jackson Pollock's *Convergence*, 1952. Photo: Jeff Mace

Page 15: A visitor working on a drop-in art activity during M&T FIRST FRIDAYS. Photo: Jeff Mace

Page 19: A visitor on the Sculpture Terrace with Robert Irwin's *NIAGARA*, 2012. Photo: Jason O'Rear

Page 20: Visitors with *Common Sky*, 2022, by Studio Other Spaces—Olafur Eliasson and Sebastian Behmann. Photo: Jeff Mace

Page 23: Installation view of *After the Sun—Forecasts from the North* with visitors working on drop-in art activities. Photo: Jason O'Rear

Pages 26–27: The Buffalo AKG's *Shark Girl* mascot, based on the beloved character and AKG Public Art sculpture created by artist Casey Riordan, debuted at the 2026 Borderland Festival on September 19, 2026. Photo: Jeff Mace

Page 29: An aerial view of Rockin' 2026 on June 6, 2026, featuring DEVO with special guests Soul Coughing and Shilpa Ray. Photo: Jeff Mace

* Andrew Simpson, Dorit Wolenitz, Irena Žmuc, Marta Lourenço, and Ralf Čeplak Mencin, "The Power of Museums and the Power of the Network in Transformative and Defining Times," *University Museums and Collections Journal* 14, no. 2 (2022): 73–74.

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