

# **INTRODUCTION TO THE MASTER PLAN FOR THE CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM “GUIDEPOSTS FOR THE NEXT QUARTER CENTURY”**

**Every effective non-profit must find ways to balance current needs and long-term sustainability. In doing so, a master plan is a powerful tool.**

**The Master Plan for the Chicago History Museum looks ahead over 25 years and records key decisions, guiding principles, and goals. This is not a detailed description of all our continuing operations or our departments, nor is this our next five-year strategic plan. Instead, the Master Plan sets forth some moves on the chessboard that we intend to make over the next generation so that we can achieve the financial, programmatic, and staffing capacity that we need. These include decisions about the future use of our facilities, as well as fundamental decisions about other elements of our organization. Some of the Master Plan’s guiding principles record fundamental insights about our Museum and call for a recommitment to certain enduring principles.**

**The Master Plan for the Chicago History Museum was adopted by the Board of Trustees on October 22, 2014 after a long-range planning year that involved board and staff, the museum profession, and the community. We thank all the participants, and we thank all of our communities of support.**

**Founded in 1856, Chicago's oldest cultural organization looks forward to sharing Chicago's stories during another quarter century – and beyond – so of service.**

**T. Bondurant French, Chairman  
Gary T. Johnson, President**

**Long-Range Planning at the Chicago History Museum is underwritten by a leadership grant from the Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust with additional support from Fidelity and Adams Street Partners.**

**The Chicago History Museum gratefully acknowledges the support of the Chicago Park District on behalf of the people of Chicago.**

## **Master Plan for the Chicago History Museum “Guideposts for the Next Quarter Century”**

### **The power of an authentic visit.**

- **Experiencing our collections is the heart of the visit.**
- **We will continue to welcome students, scholars, and lifetime learners to use primary sources in our Research Center, even as we also expand our online research guidance and resources.**
- **Programs, events, and rentals reveal the Museum as a place of wonder and are an integral part of our operations.**

### **Be a destination and a center of civic engagement.**

- **Expand the outdoor footprint and enhance the Museum’s visibility, but without adding a new museum building or wing. Even passersby should be able to experience the Museum as “Chicago’s Place.”**
- **Transform the auditorium into a multi-purpose theater that also offers film experiences; “activate” the adjoining first-floor gallery.**
- **In addition to offering new exhibitions, enliven and refresh exhibitions and galleries on an on-going basis with engaging additions and updates.**

### **Make meaningful connections.**

- **Our brand of service is “welcoming, fun, meaningful, and social.” Our brand for exhibitions is “immersive, unique, and everybody’s welcome.”**
- **Be present around the city.**
- **Commit to a strong social media and web presence; be a leader in bold innovations.**

### **Inspire students and develop teachers.**

- **Use history stories and primary sources to help meet educational goals across the curriculum.**
- **Create a best-in-class school outreach program using stories to teach skills and to connect students with civic life.**
- **Offer field-trip, classroom, and tech-based learning, and search for new and dynamic ways to integrate all three.**

### **Connect with collections.**

- **Digitize our vast collection of 23 million holdings on an as-needed basis, with a fast track for high-value material for mission and revenue.**
- **“Paint” the town with Chicago-story virtual content, working with partners whenever possible. Periodically evaluate revenue opportunities, such as paywalls, based on offering digital-content solutions.**
- **Implement state-of-the-art technologies for managing and facilitating access to CHM’s collections and associated digital assets, and always have in effect an on-going Master Plan for Modernizing Collection Access, Storage, and Management (see Appendix A for the current plan).**

### **Finance and development.**

- **Grow the endowment over time to provide 50% of annual support, and build up reserve funds to bolster the funding of projects such as exhibitions.**
- **Pay off debt by the scheduled 2036 due date without planning to roll it over.**
- **Develop a best-in-class planned giving program, as befits a museum that was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire but was reborn thanks to the Gilpin Fund -- a generous bequest that continues to offer annual support.**

### **Branding, marketing, and business planning.**

- **Chicago is the brand. What the Museum offers are ways to share a passionate commitment to the city’s past, present, and future.**
- **Market museum activities as something to believe in – a “cause”; be seen as an innovative social entrepreneur in service to the city.**
- **All museums, including our own, must seek new revenue sources to supplement and replace old ones. For our Museum, however, the key revenue driver is our ability to gain support by building loyalty. This means offering the public different ladders of engagement and constantly finding ways to move individuals up to the next level. There are lessons to be learned from experience with relevant business models, both in the business and the nonprofit sectors.**

**Approved by the Executive Committee 09/10/2014; approved by the Board of Trustees 10/22/2014.**