



advancing
digital transformation
in museums

STRATEGIC PLAN: 2019–2021

Achieving impact through inclusion, innovation, and community building

Updated mission and vision statements, summer 2018

- To grow the digital capacity of museum professionals by connecting them to ideas, information, opportunities, proven practices, and each other.
- A world in which all museums are empowered digitally to achieve their missions.

Three years ago, in June 2015, the then-board of MCN convened in Princeton, NJ to develop a 3-year strategic plan: “Celebrating 50 Years: Advancing Transformation & Innovation in Museums” (2016-2018). MCN had operated without a strategic direction for over eight years, and it had become necessary to get back on track.

Investing in this process proved highly worthwhile. Besides focusing and guiding the work of MCN around five key areas, the plan also helped increase the level of collaboration and cohesion of all tasked with implementing the plan, namely board members, the Executive Director (whose status was changed to full-time employee in July 2017), and trickling down to all the other MCN stakeholders: contractors, volunteers, and community members.

The four-page document was intentionally brief: it cast a vision around five strategic priorities each with a set of non-exhaustive success criteria designed to give future board members buy-in, agency, and creativity to develop a series of tactical tasks under each of the plan’s larger objectives. These tactical tasks were documented in three successive annual “Work Plans” that also served as a tool to track progress. Much was accomplished over the past three years: increasing year-round professional development opportunities with the launch of MCN’s mentorship program (now in its second year), growing the SIGs, and improving MCN’s governance and operations, culminating in 2017 with the celebration of MCN’s 50th anniversary, which galvanized our community and resulted in many inspiring community-led projects such as MCN50 Voices.

Going into this year’s strategic development process, we started by looking at what was achieved and what wasn’t, before identifying the most urgent challenges and risks that MCN currently faces. We found ourselves asking many of the same questions we had three years earlier: What is MCN’s core purpose? How do we best serve the needs of our community? How do we ensure that we have adequate resources to support and deliver on our mission? And perhaps, more fundamentally, how do we ensure MCN’s long-term sustainability?



To respond to these questions, we developed five key strategic priorities to focus MCN's work and frame our decision-making from 2019 through 2021:

1. Mobilize members of the MCN community
2. Refine our products and value
3. Achieve long-term sustainability
4. Transform MCN's online platforms
5. Embed diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion in everything we do

A last word: in spite of many recent improvements in governance and operational principles that give MCN the support it needs to run effectively, we noticed a few issues calling for our attention. Among them, a lack of continuity in the transfer of institutional memory from outgoing to incoming board members, at a time when the former's knowledge and experience are at their peak. So the Governance Committee will look at ways to remedy those issues. It seemed important enough to make a mention of it here while not deserving a place of its own as a distinct strategic objective.

MCN Board of Directors
October 2018



1- Mobilize members of the MCN community

Since its founding in 1967, MCN has been a community-driven organization. MCN's community is its greatest strength, which, if channeled effectively, can be a powerful force to help the organization achieve its goals. We will look at ways to leverage the goodwill of our community by offering ample opportunities to identify, connect with, and involve all who want to contribute. We aim to create a professional development framework and membership program that are designed to grow and foster members as they volunteer with MCN in a variety of capacities. Having the increased support of our community will also help MCN continue to grow and develop as an organization. If we are successful, MCN and its members will be able to help and support each other in mutually beneficial ways. We hope this model will engage members at all levels of their careers, from emerging professional all the way up to those in senior positions.

Success Criteria:

1. Broaden membership

- Explore a low-barrier to entry membership model that considers all community members as members of MCN
- Reorganize institutional membership levels, including the concept of contributing member level or levels
- Develop a multi-platform, multi-year strategy to evolve and communicate the new membership model and incorporate community feedback

2. Serve members of the community better and more efficiently

- Broaden leadership development and skill building opportunities for emerging professionals
- Offer volunteer opportunities that challenge members to take on leadership roles throughout the organization
- Develop a process for communicating incentives and opportunities to the MCN community
- Select a volunteer management system that will enable MCN to connect members with opportunities for involvement

3. Develop new ways for members to contribute to MCN

- Broaden the scale of MCN's mentorship program by exploring cross-sector opportunities with other museum sector professional organizations
- Reimagine Special Interest Groups (SIGs) as online communities of practice that serve as hubs for learning and project development
- Explore ways to share content and skill-development resources more effectively

2- Refine our products and value

*"A clear vision should be expressed clearly."
Nicolas Boileau*

MCN's mission is to offer products and services that enable our members to make connections, collaborate, and grow their skills. For a long time, MCN has struggled to articulate this value to its members. Over the summer, the board refreshed MCN's vision and mission statements, laying the



groundwork for the organization to reconsider what we do, how we do it, and how we communicate our services and products to our community. If we are successful, all aspects of MCN's products and messaging will continually reinforce one another and reflect MCN's core value to the community.

Success Criteria:

1. Align all products to MCN's mission

- Ensure MCN's annual conference is valuable to, and clearly understood by, the MCN's members and the wider community
- Assess current products to ensure they match the mission and community membership model; have utility and relevance for members and the organization; and provide an overall return on investment
- Retire products that don't pass the assessment, and work with product owners of remaining, core programs—the annual conference chief among them—to refine their alignment as needed
- Identify gaps in our remaining product line for possible development
- Make the mission our mantra, and empower future staff and volunteers to ensure new and continuing offerings stay aligned

2. Design and implement an organizational content strategy to capture and make accessible the knowledge produced by MCN's community

- Conduct comprehensive content audit
- Develop a content architecture (themes, tagging, target audience, etc.) that reflects the community's content and MCN's mission
- Design editorial policy and content guidelines
- Collaborate with technology infrastructure, marketing, and program teams to implement the new strategy online

3. Effectively communicate the value of MCN

- Develop a campaign to proactively communicate MCN brand and products to key audiences
- Develop a year-round approach, using the conference as a platform and springboard for all other offerings
- Clarify and standardize messaging on all online platforms, including the website, social media, and newsletters
- Leverage the MCN community and their connections to amplify our communications efforts

3- Achieve long-term sustainability

Going back over a decade, MCN has almost exclusively relied on two main sources of revenue to fund its year-round operating budget: conference revenue (composed of registration, booth, and sponsorship fees) and membership dues, which are often renewed to get a discount on conference registration. This model renders MCN extremely vulnerable. One bad year for the conference could spell financial ruin that threatens the organization's ability to survive. Additionally, while over the past three years annual conference attendance has steadily grown to an average of 600 attendees and booth sales have



remained strong, sponsorship revenue has steadily declined due to changes in many vendors' sponsored event strategies.

This model is unsustainable over time. MCN recognizes that it must diversify its revenue streams as well as leverage MCN's non-profit status in order to mitigate risks and increase its long-term financial sustainability. This focus will demand an organization-wide effort over the next three years of this strategic plan.

Success criteria:

1. Achieve diversity in revenue streams

- Membership: build a membership model that leverages MCN's thriving community and resonates with the aspirations of its members while continuing to be a source of income.
- Conference sponsorship: undertake a comprehensive review of our vendor community to maximize income and minimize staff and volunteer effort
- Fundraising: simplify our vision, mission and various offerings, actively research funding opportunities and pursue those that are aligned with our strategic direction in order to diversify our revenue streams and spread our exposure to risks
- Develop new mechanisms—such as evaluating potential mergers and acquisitions—to improve long-term organizational sustainability

2. Formulate a standard approach to financial management and fundraising, including securing, allocating or outsourcing necessary resources

- Maintain and, where possible, increase the reserve fund to weather potential financial disruptions
- Budget annually to build and replenish, if necessary, MCN's reserve fund
- Obtain grant writing and sponsorship support where appropriate

3. Have mechanisms and policies to support organizational sustainability

All of MCN's activities must be designed with community relevance, digital outputs, and ongoing sustainability in mind. As such, we must:

- Ensure new and existing policies and practices align with our strategic priorities
- Ensure all programs, products, and services are sustainable and profitable

4- Transform MCN's online platforms

Three years ago, objective 5 of MCN's 2015–2018 strategic plan called for integrating systems infrastructure and improving digital presence. We fell short of our goal; most of the work done in the past three years has been centered around integrating back-end systems to the detriment of our user experience. Over the next three years, we're committed to improving our online tools in service of supporting our 2019–2021 strategic goals. Additionally, we want MCN's digital presence to set a standard for efficiency and effectiveness across the sector.

Success Criteria:

1. Create an outstanding, user-centered online presence

While MCN's website will always be a work in progress, it should be more than a showcase of



content and resources. It should be an effective and useful example of powerful digital tools and well-designed infrastructure in action

2. Revamp and consolidate backend infrastructure

- Integrate current platforms under a single destination with a single-user login
- Explore online tools to support our new contribution/volunteer-based membership model
- Explore content management systems for publishing/archiving MCN community-produced content

3. Ensure website and social media demonstrate modern, effective web accessibility practices

4. Increase the number of community members who are actively supporting MCN's systems

5- Embed diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion in everything we do

Over the past few years, MCN has begun to take steps to make the annual conference more diverse and inclusive. We believe that driving diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) in museums and our sector matters because the integration of diverse perspectives makes the museum technology community more open and responsive. We now need to weave our commitment to DEAI into the organizational fabric of MCN. MCN is committed to putting resources behind advancing real practices around these fundamental principles over the next three years and beyond.

Success Criteria:

1. Have a clear policy and vision that articulates the role of DEAI in MCN's operating procedures

- Communicate the purpose and guiding principles for DEAI efforts and initiatives
- Review existing MCN policies to ensure they are equitable and inclusive of underrepresented groups

2. Establish MCN's DEAI goals and implementation strategy

- Create a plan to ensure DEAI is part of the decision making for every internal role and function of the organization
- Identify who will lead DEAI initiatives and how to create diverse teams to support them
- Appoint a DEAI Advisory Committee of MCN members that will provide feedback on MCN's ongoing and proposed initiatives
- Construct a plan for iterative development, experimenting with programs, measuring success, and improving our offerings
- Identify barriers in our volunteer efforts that may be preventing the participation of individuals from traditionally underrepresented groups
- Create a plan to support grassroots organizing within the MCN community

3. Communicate the progress of these efforts to the MCN community in the most transparent and open way possible

- Set up a strategy for regularly communicating progress with the community and provide mechanisms for feedback
- Ensure that we hold ourselves accountable not only by showing progress but also by sharing what hasn't worked