

## **Boston Athenæum Strategic Priorities 2012-2015**

### **January 15, 2015 Progress Report**

In the text that follows, the Strategic Priorities appear in Roman letters; information about the Athenæum's progress to date in meeting those priorities appears in italics.

#### **Mission:**

The mission of the Boston Athenæum is to serve its members, the broader community, and scholars throughout the world by preserving and augmenting its collections of books and art, by providing library services and cultural programs, and by preserving and enhancing the unique atmosphere of its landmark building.

*The 2012-2015 strategic priorities guided the Athenæum during a period of transition. The retirement of Stanford Calderwood Director Paula Matthews in mid-2013 was followed by fifteen months of interim management by a four person senior administration team, leading to the hiring of a new director, Elizabeth Barker, in October 2014. The change in leadership provides the Athenæum with the opportunity to build on the achievements cited in this document.*

*Among the central achievements of this strategic plan are initiatives to enhance engagement with the collections by members and scholars. There were major advances in cataloging, conservation, exhibitions, website, and digitization. Actions taken from 2012-2014 provided a steadily improving financial outlook, with strict financial controls and major gains in fundraising resulting in balanced budgets each year. There was significant growth in all forms of revenue, including endowment, annual fund, and membership income.*

#### **I. Use the Boston Athenæum's collections to further intellectual engagement, visibility, and financial support.**

- Enhance the appreciation, understanding, and use of the collections through services for members and scholars
- Maintain and preserve collections through a robust conservation program
- Provide signature events based on the collections
- Augment all collections through endowed funds for acquisitions in all media
- Increase access to our collections through cataloging and digitization

*The central imperative of the 2012-2015 strategic priorities was to expand access to the collections. The exhibition program became more focused on our collections with exhibitions such as "Chromo-Mania! The Art of Chromolithography in Boston, 1840-1910," and "Brilliant Beginnings: The Athenæum & the Museum in Boston." A series of exhibitions was developed showcasing acquisitions made during the 21st century in order to ensure that our living and growing collections are seen by a wider audience. The publication of *With Éclat: The Boston Athenæum and the Origin of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* revealed the prominent role that the Athenæum played in the history of American museums.*

*A re-configured conservation program resulted in the hiring of a new chief conservator and new associate conservator. A series of lectures featuring Athenæum conservators and outside professionals was held*

*throughout 2013 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the conservation laboratory. Two grants funded fellowships for conservators. Workflow between the conservation laboratory and the digital laboratory was integrated and streamlined during the \$150,000 grant project to catalog, conserve and digitize the Confederate Imprints Collection. The Athenæum began using Google Analytics to track users of digital collections, revealing that 50-120 unique visitors view the collections each day. A \$50,000 NEA grant project resulted in the photography of the entire paintings and sculpture collections. The digital laboratory added the capacity to image flat documents up to 40" x 60" in size, and seventeen new digital collections were added to the website. Technical Services introduced a new cataloging system called Resource Discovery and Access, and the Library is now a Name Authority Cooperative Program contributor. The initiative to augment all collections through increased endowments remains an important goal but was postponed until a capital campaign in the future.*

## **II. Offer diverse programs and services delivered within the Boston Athenæum's iconic building as well as via interactive and dynamic online access.**

- Present events that incorporate intellectual curiosity with opportunities for social interaction
- Develop programs that more fully utilize collections, reflect the interests of different member segments, and leverage available multimedia technologies
- Offer online access to programs and services via the Boston Athenæum website

*The lecture program broadened in depth with the addition of collaborative events with peer institutions to explore literary and cultural issues, and the range of the concert program was expanded to include a greater diversity of musical forms and styles. The Athenæum website was entirely re-designed, with a new look and feel, greater ease of navigation, enhancements to online event registration, and expanded content focused on collections. Online access to lectures has seen advances, with improvements to the video system implemented in 2014 and the "Future of Museums" programs streamed live. The docent program was expanded as the number of tours of the Library increased to more than 250 per year.*

## **III. Recruit, attract and retain members of diverse backgrounds.**

- Increase membership 5-10%
- Strengthen retention for all membership categories especially among Young Patrons
- Recruit Board members who more fully reflect diverse backgrounds
- Enhance the collection of demographic data on members
- Utilize social media technology as a public relations and marketing tool to increase visibility among target audiences

*The increase in membership was below the 5-10% goal. A demographic profile of the membership was completed. A member survey was utilized to evaluate services, resulting in an increased focus on customer service and expanded hours. The Athenæum is now open seven days a week. We offer members discounted parking and free or discounted access to peer museums and libraries. We achieved a 28% increase in Twitter followers and a 19% increase in Facebook followers since January 2013. The goal of a more diverse Board of Trustees remains to be addressed.*

#### **IV. Focus financial efforts on endowment growth, stability, and financial equilibrium.**

- Demonstrate prudent stewardship of the current endowment
- Increase income from planned giving, major and special gifts, and annual giving
- Investigate the feasibility of increasing the endowment
- Provide clarity to members and staff about current and future financial needs
- Prepare and test a case statement for a capital campaign

*Although the capital campaign was postponed due to the change in leadership, this has been a period of sustained fiscal stability. The annual fund topped \$1,000,000 for the first time in FY14. A planned giving program was introduced through a new website in early 2014. An expanding endowment now stands at slightly below \$90 million. There is regular reporting on the endowment to the Trustees. The investment policy was adopted by the Trustees, with regular quarterly oversight of the endowment by an Investment Committee of Trustees and other Proprietors who are professionals in the field of investments. The Athenæum receives regular oversight and advice from Cambridge Associates, a nationally recognized investment and endowment advisory firm. The annual audit of the Athenæum financial statements focuses on investments and endowment, with a particular focus on alternative investments, including hedge funds of funds.*