



SCENECTADY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2019-2021 Strategic Plan

The Schenectady County Historical Society strengthens the community by sharing stories, inspiring dialogue, and encouraging an understanding of the history, people, and cultures of Schenectady County.

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Introduction

Gone are the days in which historical organizations simply reflected and supported the interests of the most deep-rooted and privileged members of their communities. Communities today are far more complex and diverse than they were at the turn of the twentieth century, when many historical institutions, including the Schenectady County Historical Society, were founded.

Twenty-first century communities consequently demand more from their museums, historic sites, and historical societies than nostalgic and detached recitations of past glories and triumphs. History is now as much about the future as it is the past, and, in the words of Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Michael Wallace, it is today the “fundamental mission” of every historical organization to assist people in becoming “historically informed makers of history.” This is no small task; it requires vision, determination, skill, and commitment in order to succeed.

In recent years, the Schenectady County Historical Society’s Board of Trustees has been actively adapting to twenty-first century realities, and has made the SCHS one of New York’s most successful historical organizations. Thanks to the Board’s continuing efforts, SCHS now stands on solid financial ground, its physical resources have grown well beyond anyone’s expectations, and it has come to employ an outstanding professional staff that has developed innovative and popular programming that has become the envy of other sites and museums across the region.

Beyond that, the Trustees have recognized that the Society cannot simply rest on its laurels. In 2016, SCHS benefited substantially from an informed and professional review of its operations by Professor Gretchen Sorin and a small army of young professionals from the Cooperstown Graduate Program; their report has laid the groundwork for this Strategic Plan.

The incomparable Susan Weinrich of the New York Council of Nonprofits guided the Trustees through the rigorous process of completing this report; the process involved seeking candid and critical input from community members and stakeholders through surveys, public meetings, and one-on-one conversations. Board members, staff, and volunteers also met on numerous occasions, including an all-day retreat, to conceptualize and finalize the plan; their collegiality was unparalleled throughout.

I believe this plan is both exceptional in its formation and ambitious in its goals. I am confident that it will help SCHS become a model for other historical organizations in New York and elsewhere.

I want to thank the Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York State for its generous financial support, and everyone at SCHS and within the community who made the plan possible. In particular, I want to express my gratitude to the members of the SCHS Strategic Planning Committee: Marianne Blanchard, Tom Dunn, Ellen Fladger, Richard Lewis, and Mary Zawacki.

- Robert Weible, President, SCHS Board of Trustees

Overview of the Planning Process

In 2017, the Schenectady County Historical Society made several key decisions. First, the Board of Trustees hired the organization’s first executive director. Second, the board decided to embark on a strategic planning process. The SCHS board engaged the New York Council of Nonprofits to facilitate the strategic planning process, and applied to the Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York State to fund part of the planning process. Once awarded the grant, SCHS established a strategic planning committee (comprised of board members Robert Weible [chair], Marianne Blanchard, Tom Dunn, Ellen Fladger, and Richard Lewis, and ED Mary Zawacki) to plan, coordinate, and

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oversee the planning process. This committee met numerous times and played a leadership role in finalizing the document for board approval.

The SCHS Planning Committee recognized early on that strengthening community engagement was a key strategic issue, and decided to incorporate into the planning process numerous opportunities for input and dialogue. Planners developed a community study, which 350 people completed. Planners also developed an additional, more extensive survey that was distributed to the board, staff, and core volunteers of SCHS. After the committee reviewed the results of the survey, planners held a series of focus groups in public libraries in Schenectady, Glenville, and Duanesburg and at the SCHS 2018 Annual Meeting.

In June 2018, the Board of Trustees, staff, and several key volunteers met for an all-day retreat to review the data and develop a strategic vision and action plan. This document reflects the recommendations that emerged from the planning retreat, and will serve as a guiding document for setting organizational priorities and decision making in the years to come.

Mission, Values, and Vision

Mission Statement

The Schenectady County Historical Society strengthens the community by sharing stories, inspiring dialogue, and encouraging an understanding of the history, people, and cultures of Schenectady County.

Cross-cutting strategies and or values

Moving forward, the SCHS is committed to diversity, professionalism, and community engagement in its endeavors.

Vision

Working with community members, SCHS educates residents and visitors and enables them to become better-informed history makers.

SCHS provides a destination for exploring history and connecting people to the past, present, and future of Schenectady County and its environments.

Executive Summary

Strategic Issue 1: Programs and Services

Goal: Continue to expand and strengthen programs that engage and diversify audiences, maximize the use of our facilities and collections, and meet professional standards.

Strategies

1. Enhance in-house and community-based exhibits and events that emphasize hands-on community experiences that educate, engage, and inspire people of all ages, from diverse communities.
2. Continue to professionalize staff and operations.
3. Develop and execute a plan for the use of the Brouwer House.
4. Ensure that SCHS has the facilities needed to effectively acquire, preserve, store, and deaccession collections.

Strategic Issue 2: Collaborations, Community Engagement, and Communications

Goal: Expand and strengthen our working partnerships and community engagement to better achieve our mission, and to position SCHS as a vibrant, outward facing organization.

Strategies

1. Build mutually supportive relationships within the community.
2. Serve as a convener and resource for history advocates in the Schenectady County region.
3. Promote SCHS' resources and activities.

Strategic Issue 3: Governance and Community Leadership

Goal: Align board development and governance practices with those of a professionally run nonprofit organization.

Strategies

1. Reduce the size of the board incrementally, while focusing recruitment efforts on diversifying representation.
2. Restructure committees and replace operational committees with working groups that support staff.
3. Continue to redefine board roles and expectations in alignment with the strategic needs of the organization.

Strategic Issue 4: Fund Development

Goal: Create a fund development plan that builds a base for long-term sustainability.

Strategies

1. Improve board leadership in fund development.
2. Strengthen, diversify, and expand the membership base.
3. Create and implement fund development plan.