HMSC Strategic Plan

FY 2019-2023
INTRODUCTION

The Harvard Museums of Science & Culture (HMSC) is a groundbreaking partnership of Harvard’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) museums. Together these museums are the stewards of more than 28 million objects that reflect Harvard’s ongoing commitment to discovery, scholarship, and education. The goal of HMSC is to advance new models of collaboration and programming that provide a window into these extraordinary collections; to integrate the public activity of the FAS museums, advance collaborations across the University, and foster partnerships with the wider community.

The first strategic plan identified initiatives to establish HMSC as a vibrant part of the community both on and off campus. We aspired to create innovative and engaging exhibits, distinctive educational programs, and unique student experiences. We also sought to advance activities in areas that sit across traditionally distinct subjects by promoting cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary programs.

Over the last five years museum attendance has increased by 34 percent to more than 300,000 visitors annually and attendees at public programs have doubled. Close to 1,000 educators took part in K-12 professional development activities that ranged from in-school visits by our staff to multi-day institutes. We opened twenty-one exhibitions, including four new permanent galleries.

More than 150 faculty from across Harvard have been directly involved in HMSC activities, acting as exhibit curators, presenters, and advisers on program development. Harvard students participate on the newly established HMSC Student Board, carry out curatorial research, train as docents to give museum tours, and create and teach public programs. Collaborative programs such as the Harvard Museums’ Seminar on Innovative Curatorial Practice and Native American Running: Culture, Health, Sport afforded opportunities for students and the public to explore new scholarship together. Our social media presence grew exponentially and we introduced online adult lectures and K-12 programs. The annual Summer Solstice outdoor evening festival has delighted thousands of people with performances, demonstrations, craft activities, food trucks, and free admission. These, and many other significant accomplishments, provide the foundations for HMSC’s vibrant future.
OUR VISION

As we look forward we want to focus on issues that matter to our communities. As the public face of the FAS museums we will convey the excitement of research and discovery, and create learning experiences that focus on the University’s scholarship. We want to advance discussions on the vital questions of our time, to provide a meeting point for scholars and the general public, and encourage dialogue. We will help FAS deliver an outstanding student experience using Harvard’s collections and galleries for unique educational opportunities that prepare students to communicate to wide audiences and to be global citizens. And we will continue to further Harvard’s priorities, especially those around inclusion and sustainability. In all these ways HMSC will make an important contribution to the University’s purpose – to advance knowledge and serve society.
OUR APPROACHES

HMSC benefits from exceptional resources that we can use to achieve the ambitious goals in this plan. Most notable are the holdings of the six research museums. These unparalleled collections enable us to center our programs on object-based learning. In addition, our position at the heart of an academic community dedicated to being at the forefront of research, teaching and learning affords us the opportunity to connect to cutting-edge research and scholarship.

Innovation and experimentation will be a hallmark of our activities. Leveraging our position as a partnership of museums from many research areas, we will continue to expand cross-disciplinary programming, and engage scholars from across Harvard and beyond. We will leverage Harvard’s growing digital collections and partner creatively on digital initiatives generated by the Harvard community.

To ensure our programs are audience-centered and foster authentic connections between the Harvard campus and the public, we will build partnerships with a variety of groups and communities. We will cultivate a learning and data-driven attitude in all areas of our activities, using new tools to enhance our operations, understand the needs of our audiences, and improve our programs.
OUR VALUES

Collaboration
HMSC values a way of working that encourages broad participation, respect for people and their ideas, and the alignment of efforts around a defined goal. Effective collaboration requires trust in partnerships, consistent communication, transparency, and clear expectations for process and outcomes.

Inclusion
HMSC strives to make all people feel welcome and supported in our museums. We embrace Harvard’s recent report “Pursuing Excellence on a Foundation of Inclusion” and, through deliberate intention and effort in all areas, will make diversity, equity, and accessibility integral to our work.

Relevance
HMSC offers evidence-based learning experiences to support a deeper understanding of science, culture and the natural world, and to enable our audiences to reflect and make decisions on the most important challenges that face society in the 21st century.

Sustainability
HMSC champions Harvard’s commitments to addressing environmental sustainability through its support of campus-wide operational initiatives and by advancing understanding of this issue by wide-ranging audiences both on and off campus.
OUR PLAN

This strategic plan embodies a collaboration of ideas and objects, people and institutions. It represents the efforts of many people who shared their experience, talents, expertise and creativity to generate ideas that further the vision for HMSC’s future.

Strategic Initiatives

1. Create and communicate a welcoming & inclusive environment for multi-generational and diverse audiences.
   a. Provide visitor-focused information onsite and through our web sites to support independent, accessible, and confident navigation between and within museum spaces.
   b. Provide visitor service information and gallery interpretation in multiple languages.
   c. Prioritize the use of inclusive practices within all program design and delivery via strategies such as partnerships with community groups, attracting speakers from a broad range of disciplines and backgrounds, use of universal design principles, and multi-sensory elements to support different learning styles.
   d. Cultivate participation in our programs by under-represented audiences through focused marketing and promotion efforts and building perceived value of existing initiatives.
2. Strengthen our commitment to a broad public through an emphasis on relevant experiences that are valued by both existing and new audiences.

   a. Prioritize programming that contributes to public engagement, knowledge and understanding of critical issues facing society.

   b. Expand and deepen relationships with K-12 teachers, schools and districts.

   c. Articulate and implement a nimble process to deliver programs that respond to contemporary issues in a timely way.

   d. Encourage and facilitate audience engagement and reflection in all programming, including in exhibit development.

   e. Extend the reach of our programs through expansion of online and social media content to enhance access by wide-ranging audiences.
3. Design an exceptional experience for onsite visitors that supports successful lifelong learning.

a. Prioritize excellence in customer service through a commitment to strong personal interactions, information availability, and staff and volunteer training.

b. Facilitate meaning-making for general visitors by supporting different “ways” of accessing information through (among others) volunteer-led activities, different modes of exhibit interaction, and arts-related activities.

c. Develop low-cost, ‘un-facilitated’ activities for general audiences that leverage pop culture and social trends and encourage personal connections and an active, social and enjoyable visit.

d. Deepen our understanding of visitor expectations through regular evaluation of exhibits, programming and the general visitor’s experience.
4. Foster cross-disciplinary & cross-museum collaborative projects and strengthen connections across campus.

a. Grow campus engagement through partnership and co-creation of programs with the Harvard community, especially faculty and students.

b. Prioritize cross-disciplinary exhibition projects including collaboration with other Harvard entities such as the Harvard Art Museums, libraries, and international centers.

c. Continue large public festivals that feature two or more research museums, and increase proportion of multi-museum and/or cross-disciplinary activities in our program calendar.

d. Leverage research museums’ digital assets for multi-museum projects that advance access to collection databases for K-12 and non-specialist audiences.

e. Expand social media output and deliver more original content in partnership with students, research museums, and the broader Harvard community.
5. Enhance financial and organizational capacity to achieve our mission and support Harvard’s sustainability goals.

a. Establish a robust financial plan for the next five years to include a new financial model, enhanced development activities, and increased earned income.

b. Review and implement, in collaboration with appropriate FAS departments, physical and technical infrastructure plans including the move to new HMSC-wide space and new digital systems to improve operations.

c. Establish HMSC cross-departmental planning and workflow processes to align efforts, improve efficiency, and ensure ‘right-time’ communication.

d. Identify and establish hiring practices, staff training opportunities, and targeted volunteer recruitment activities to support our strategic initiatives.

e. Develop performance metrics and use existing and new data collection efforts to more effectively evaluate outcomes and improve programs.

f. Support Harvard’s sustainability goals through our public activities and by modeling sustainable practices in all areas of HMSC operations.