**International Council of Museums**

**US National Committee**

**(ICOM-US)**

**Strategic Vision**

**May 2016**

**About ICOM and ICOM-US**

ICOM, the International Council of Museums, is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization, founded in 1946, dedicated to the improvement and advancement of the world’s museums and the museum profession, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage. Headquartered in Paris, France, ICOM has consultative status with UNESCO and with other international organizations, such as the World Intellectual Property Organization, and is the only international organization made up of museums and museum professionals; ICOM is similar to the United Nations.

In every country in which it operates, ICOM serves museums and museum professionals through a “National Committee” that promotes and facilitates membership in ICOM and advocates for the international museum interests of each country and its perspectives within ICOM. In addition, ICOM sponsors over 30 subject-specific international committees for museum professionals and over 200 professional gatherings each year. ICOM currently represents over 34,000 members worldwide.

The US National Committee is called ICOM-US and has functioned most recently as an independent, nonprofit organization; ICOM-US is one of 120 national committees and regional alliances of ICOM.

ICOM-US currently has some 1,400 members, with a high participation rate in the subject-specific committees. Twenty-eight (28) members of ICOM- US currently serve in leadership roles in the central organization and its subject specific committees. Among its activities, ICOM-US co-sponsors and hosts international conferences and meetings of the ICOM subject-specific committees. In 2015, for example, ICOM-US co-sponsored with Germany and Russia an international conference and hosted in Washington two meetings of subject-specific international committees.

**PREFACE**

The world of museums in 2016 bears little resemblance to that of 1946 when the International Council of Museums was established, uniting museums in the US and in Western Europe to assist in the post-war recovery of the European cultural sector. Today—in this interdependent world facilitated by technology—museum conversations, exchanges, and collaborations regularly extend well beyond national boundaries.

The materials we display, the issues we address, the audiences we seek, and the expertise we foster are global in source and scope. So many of the challenges and problems we face in our institutions are universal in nature. We have much to share and to learn from one another. We recognize that the global natural and cultural heritage we all share is a precious asset, that it is under current and constant threat from natural disasters, social and political upheaval, violence and war, and that it is our collective responsibility to safeguard and to preserve.

Being fully informed about and engaged in the global museum community is of critical and growing significance to US museums and professionals. The US national committee of International Council of Museums, ICOM-US, is well-positioned to be an essential resource in meeting these international needs and interests.

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The strategic vision that follows is the product of interviews with 20 members of the Board of Directors of ICOM-US, conversations with key stakeholders, and two full-day meetings of the Board in early December 2015 and March 2016. The ideas created in this vision can serve to frame specific strategies and tactics as ICOM-US seeks to serve the members and museum field it represents.

**ICOM-US VISION**

ICOM-US will serve US museums and US museum professionals as a primary resource for information and education on international issues as well as guidance on ethical concerns. It also serves as a portal to the global museum community, creating access to international colleagues and communities of professional engagement.

ICOM-US and its members are leaders in creating a world in which natural and cultural resources and heritage are universally understood, valued, and protected.

**ICOM-US MISSION**

The mission of ICOM-US is to facilitate and to increase US museum professionals’ participation in the worldwide cultural community as well as to represent and to advocate for US museums' international interests and perspectives within ICOM.

ICOM-US serves US museums and museum professionals in promoting their engagement in ICOM and in the global cultural community. It functions as:

* A trusted source of information, knowledge, and resources
* An active broker of exchange and collaboration among museum colleagues worldwide
* An articulate advocate and representative of the international interests of US museums

**ICOM-US VALUES**

ICOM-US supports and subscribes to the values that ICOM has espoused in its Strategic Plan 2016–2022: Independence, Integrity, and Professionalism.

As drawn from the ICOM Strategic Plan …

Independence

“ICOM is organized on democratic principles and conducts its business in an open, transparent manner. ICOM is a nongovernmental body which has formal relations with governments, intergovernmental bodies, and agencies. It works internationally and independently of governments and has no biased political, financial, or other interests. Its independence is a fundamental principle and value. It is ICOM’s most valuable asset.”

Integrity

“ICOM conducts its business in accordance with its *Code of Ethics* (attached), its most influential and lasting contribution to museum professionalism. It encourages museums and museum professionals to adopt it into their practice if they wish to be members of ICOM.”

Professionalism

“Through its National and International Committees, its Code of Ethics, training, publications, annual conferences, and other projects of International Committees and the work of National Committees, and alliances with like-minded bodies, ICOM supports museum professionalism in all its aspects and recognizes the growing practical scope of that professionalism. Its most recent collaboration has involved taking a leadership role in the recently ratified UNESCO *Recommendations on Museums* (attached).”

Diversity

In addition, ICOM-US has embraced “diversity” as a core value.

ICOM-US recognizes that diversity, in many dimensions, offers a core strength of the US museum community and museums around the globe. ICOM-US acknowledges that the focus, size, audience, style, and circumstances of museums worldwide vary widely and that museums offer learning opportunities through such vast variety. We welcome all museum professionals into our membership, and we seek to diminish barriers to participation. In carrying out its work, ICOM-US honors diversity as it seeks to serve and to learn from its members and from our international colleagues.

**SUBSTANTIVE FOCUS**

The key to ICOM-US being of significant value to US museums and museum professionals will be its ability to address those issues and topics that are of greatest concern and interest to its members. Going forward, the Board is committed to a process that engages its members on identifying those issues and topics and to focusing its energies and programs on that agenda. On a regular basis, the Board will gather information from members about their substantive priorities; assemble relevant expertise and resources; define a program of information, activities, and advocacy around those priorities; and develop the appropriate channels and outlets for delivering that program.

Program possibilities may include, for example, briefing documents in print and online; meetings and conference sessions; online seminars and training; collaboration with ICOM and its committees and other museum professional organizations, such as AAM; consultation with US Congress, the US Department of State, and international agencies; and media relations.

In its strategic planning meetings, the Board discussed a number of substantive matters and identified four priority areas: threats to cultural and natural heritage, audience and civic engagement, cultural diplomacy, and working in the global museum community. Each is briefly described below.

* **The threats to/destruction of cultural and natural heritage** resulting from natural disasters, social unrest, and war are a matter of unanimous concern for the Board of ICOM-US. The preservation of our collective heritage and the safety of our colleagues worldwide are uppermost in our minds along with the question: “What can we do?” ICOM-US and ICOM have among their members leading experts in this area with deep, first-hand knowledge and track records of activity in the field and advocacy worldwide. It is incumbent upon ICOM-US to inform and educate its members and US museums about the complexities of these situations and to consider options for action, such as the creation of “safe havens” in more stable environments and the prevention of illicit trafficking of stolen artifacts.
* Museums worldwide are responding to **the changing nature of audiences and museums’ increasing roles in civic engagement.** Museums are working to meet the needs of those traditionally underserved in their communities and the influx of new populations into their communities as a result of immigration or migration. Countries are building new museums where there may be no existing audience or tradition of museum-going. Museums are looking increasingly to technology to reach younger audiences, to expand their audiences beyond those who come through their doors, and to augment the museum experience. At the same time, audiences are coming to museums with new expectations for service, programming, and participation. Increasingly, museums are being called upon to play a more prominent role in civic engagement, i.e., making a difference in their communities, contributing to the overall quality of life, and providing a platform for civic discourse. These challenges, while varying in kind by community, are fertile ground for international discussion and exchange. ICOM-US will function as a source of information and worldwide resources, facilitate the sharing of experiences, and serve as a catalyst for collaboration with colleagues around the world.
* **Cultural diplomacy**, the exchange of ideas, information, and artifacts among nations, is, in effect, being practiced by any museum operating on the global scene. The role of cultural diplomacy in US international relations is a regular topic of debate among policy- and decision-makers, but practitioners seem to spend little time exchanging knowledge or discussing experiences with those responsible for diplomacy or international relations. ICOM-US will explore playing a role in engaging its members in their role in cultural diplomacy, the opportunities and challenges it presents, what constitutes best practices, and the value and efficacy of museums’ efforts. ICOM-US will also encourage and sponsor dialogue with decision- and policy-makers about cultural diplomacy and policies and regulations that affect cultural exchange.
* Many US museums, particularly small and medium-sized museums, are interested in becoming more active in the international community: loaning artifacts/receiving loans, partnering on exhibits and programs, meeting with counterparts, engaging in professional exchanges, participating in policy conversations, and voicing their concerns about cultural heritage and other policy and global issues. Because research for such employers may be scant, ICOM-US believes it will be useful to have basic **“how to” information and guidance on working globally.** Information and technical assistance could focus on a range of matters: contacts, best practices, opportunities and challenges, country- or region-specific issues, and a place to turn for advice and problem-solving. A wealth of expertise and experience is available in the US museum community and among ICOM-US members that could inform the efforts of those hoping to work internationally. ICOM-US, its members and its partners, could investigate and develop such collaboration as a joint effort of checklists, references, a database of member interests and expertise; an exchange in which international queries and available resources are posted; and training or online seminars on a variety of topics.

Two priorities will be a part of any program or activity. One is **professional ethics**; the other is **international standards and best practices**. The ICOM *Code of Ethics* and the recently adopted UNESCO *Recommendations on Museums and Collections* (drafted by ICOM) are fundamental resources (attached). ICOM-US will play an important role in their dissemination and the promotion of their review, adoption, and application within the US museum community.

**Strategic Goal and Objectives**

Consistent with the vision and mission outlined above, ICOM-US sets forth the following goal:

To identify and act on the international interests and concerns of its members and, to make a difference in their professional lives, their institutions, and the profession worldwide.

To achieve this goal, ICOM-US will pursue the following objectives:

1. Build and sustain a growing community of US museums and professionals who are actively engaged with cultural institutions and colleagues worldwide;
2. Inform and support the professional development of US museums and their staffs in their efforts in the international arena;
3. Serve as a two-way portal with museums worldwide, promoting dialogue and collaboration through ICOM and other means;
4. Give voice and advocacy to the US museum community in the international arena and on matters of global concern; and
5. Continue to build a high-performing, transparent, member-driven, and sustainable organization.

**Measuring Effectiveness**

Gathering information about performance on an ongoing basis is important to the success of any organization: to learn from its experience, to keep its agenda fresh, and to inform its policy and practice. It is particularly essential for a membership organization that is highly dependent on the volunteer efforts of its members and their dues. To that end, the Board of ICOM–US is committed to establishing a set of metrics, regularly soliciting feedback from its members, and evaluating the impact, reach, and effectiveness of its activities in relationship to its mission, goals, and objectives.

**Implementation**

Based on this Strategic Vision, the outlined goals and objectives, and the annual operating budget, the Board will develop a work plan for the next three to five years. The first full operating year of the plan will be 2017. The yearly work plan will be reviewed by the Board on an annual basis. At this stage in its development, ICOM-US is a volunteer organization, and the Board will remain mindful of what can be realistically accomplished, primarily by volunteers on an annual basis. Pursuing additional resources will be important to the growth and sustainability of ICOM-US.

**Attachments:**

-Code of ethics: <http://icom.museum/the-vision/code-of-ethics/>

-UNESCO Recommendation: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/museums/recommendation-on-the-protection-and-promotion-of-museums-and-collections/>