



# PRE-READING DOCUMENT

ART GALLERY OF NORTHUMBERLAND  
(AGN)

APRIL 6, 2021

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The following document is intended for the Board of Directors in advance of the strategic planning kick-off meeting on **Wednesday April 14, 2021**. The purpose of the document is to provide you with some information and questions to consider, to start your thinking and strengthen our conversations. With your insight, thoughtfulness, and hard work, we will ensure that you have a final strategic plan that is actionable, responsive, and mission-driven.

At this point in the process, we have met with your Executive Director and conducted a review of key documents to understand past performance and your current state.

The upcoming kick-off meeting is an opportunity to introduce the Board to the strategic planning process, and to gather feedback and direction to guide us as we move forward with planning.

This document includes:

1. The AGN's mandate;
2. An overview of the process;
3. A summary of stakeholder engagement (completed in 2017); &
4. A series of "homework" questions.

Take your time to review the following document, to consider the organization's past successes and challenges, current state and capacity, and to reflect on your reactions to various comments, ideas, compliments, and critiques that have been offered by stakeholders. And then, take the rest of the time before our kick-off meeting to think with a strategic lens about your vision for the AGN over the next several years.

With a little preparation, it is our hope that we can use our time together over the next several weeks in the best possible way—defining clear strategic directions that will guide the AGN in delivering its mandate of promoting and providing access to art and related programs as a community gallery for the enjoyment and education of the people of Northumberland County.

## 2. THE AGN'S MANDATE



The mandate of the Art Gallery of Northumberland is to promote and provide access to art and related programs as a community gallery for the enjoyment and education of the people of Northumberland County.

We exist to serve all of Northumberland County as a public gallery. We present intellectually stimulating exhibitions and programming, as well as maintain a permanent collection of visual arts. Along with exhibitions we fulfill our mandate through educational activities which encourage active dialogue between the Gallery audience and the visual arts; including lectures, films, workshops, artist talks and tours.

# 3. REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

- **Pre-Reading Package:** To prepare the Board for planning, including an overview of the process, a top-line summary of stakeholder engagement conducted in 2017, and a series of questions for reflection.
- **Kick-off Meeting with the Board:** To gather views and preliminary thoughts and ideas for the strategic plan, surface priority issues, understand the current landscape, enable contributions to the design of the Retreat, etc.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:**
  - Staff Focus Group
  - Key Person Interviews (2)
- **Strategic Planning Retreat** (two 3-hour sessions): A planning retreat on **May 5<sup>th</sup> and May 7<sup>th</sup>** with the Board of Directors, including a discussion of the latest information gathered, a SWOT analysis, and a strategic 'deep dive' with facilitated activities, strategic discussion, and development of strategic directions.
- **Draft Strategic Plan:** Following these sessions, a draft strategic plan will be made available for review and comment, after which point the final plan is scheduled to be approved.

## 4. SUMMARY OF 2017 ENGAGEMENT

To ensure the voices of AGN's community stakeholders were captured meaningfully in the strategic directions, we've summarized a number of key themes and priorities that emerged as a result of engagement conducted in 2017. The results from this previously conducted stakeholder engagement, in combination with other components—such as the current opportunities, environmental conditions and risks facing the AGN— play an important role in informing decisions for the organization's future.

### 4.1. Context

In 2017, with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Art Gallery of Northumberland (AGN) gathered community input to assess interest in and support for AGN activities. The intent was to:

- Position the AGN for success as they planned programs and outreach activities, and to support the development of a strong case for support.
- “Re-set” the public perception of the AGN following a period of significant financial challenges, while generating awareness and providing information to support evidence-based decision making and sustainable fund development.
- Help the AGN prepare for a municipal cultural planning initiative in 2018.

### 4.2. Engagement Process

A variety of stakeholder groups were engaged, including:

- AGN Board and staff members
- Artists

- Community partner organizations
- Community members
- Volunteers
- Donors
- Funders

Engagement strategies used to solicit input included:

- Two focus groups (11 participants)
- Three community town halls (53 participants, plus Board members and staff)
- An online survey (123 responses)
- 25 key informant interviews with funders and donors

## 4.3. Overview of Engagement Results

### Focus Groups and Community Town Halls

Key takeaways include:

#### **General**

- Some reputational concerns expressed. Suggested that the public may not be confident in the AGN's long-term financial viability or management.
- Areas of priority:
  - Leadership
  - Marketing and communications (be more visible, raise profile, increase social media use, and use consistent branding)
  - Inclusivity and innovation
  - Sustainable fund development
  - Partnerships (via presentations to service clubs, collaborations)
  - Increased attendance
- A call for the AGN to apply for more grants and do more fundraising, to increase their operating budget.

#### **Mandate and Governance**

- Artists noted that part of the mandate of the AGN is/should be support for artists.
- Some questioned the mandate to serve all of Northumberland County, when there is no ongoing funding from the County.
- To attract and retain funders and donors, a need to demonstrate the presence of a strong governance model, a strategic plan, and a sound business plan. The AGN needs to be able to demonstrate community impact, and how it contributes to drawing visitors (and anything built for tourists also benefits local residents).
- Some felt that the governance structures of the AGN were in need of review and that new governance policies were needed to ensure executive limitation and accountability (governance training was also suggested).

#### **Permanent Collections, Exhibitions and Local Artists**

- Calls for the AGN to be inclusive in different ways to attract new audiences:
  - In the definition of art (paintings versus other forms, such as digital, mixed media, etc.).
  - Culturally.
  - In terms of demographics.
  - In types of art (different techniques, 3D, and installation art— broadening the focus from framed paintings).
- Calls for more experiential and experimental art, with target audiences such as seniors, youth, and adults. Notes that the gallery catered to traditionalists and should focus more on contemporary art.
- Some debate about the need for a curatorial vision and showing more local art vs. attracting artists of national and international prominence.
- Encouragement to incorporate more local art into their offerings and consider supporting local artists with their careers through professional development and workshops.

#### **Communications and Community Presence**

- Suggestions to improve marketing, communications, and engagement included:
  - Improve signage inside and outside Victoria Hall.

- Create a dedicated AGN board with posters.
- Improve the website.
- Collaborate on marketing with the concert hall (e.g., market a pre-concert visit to the AGN, and be open for those hours).
- Engage students in art activities and sponsor student competitions.
- More evening and weekend programming.
- Bring activities outside the gallery, e.g. art classes in the communities.
- Programs for seniors.
- Improve the speakers program.
- Offer more than visual art (i.e. musical, dance, performance).
- Offer concerts in the gallery.
- Start an art rental program.
- Include artists' input.
- Working with tourism (representatives of other local museums expressed an interest in working more closely with the AGN, especially regarding tourism marketing)
- Become more accessible to those who might feel intimidated about visiting.

## Online Survey

Survey responses were received from the following:

- Visitors/Interested residents (50%),
- Members (41%),
- Artists (27%),
- Donors (16%),
- Board members (9%),
- Staff (3%),
- Representatives of other community organizations (3%) and
- Other (16%).

Key takeaways included:

- High community awareness of and support for the AGN – 90% “understand” or “somewhat understand” what the AGN does.

- Opportunity to increase visibility in the community.
- 86% see the AGN as important to arts and culture in the community.
- 82% of survey respondents had visited the AGN in the last six months and 51% had visited in the last month, indicating strong familiarity and high engagement.
- Overall impressions of the AGN were slightly positive – 53% chose “good” and 15% chose “excellent.”
- Top four choices for potential roles of the AGN included:
  - Stimulating, expanding, promoting local arts and culture (78%)
  - Showcasing regional artists (56%)
  - Educating (lectures & workshops) (53%)
  - Showcasing national artists (31%)

## Key Informant Interviews with Funders and Donors

Key informant interviews were conducted with government, corporate, and individual stakeholders to gauge the number of potential funders and the level of funding available through sponsorships, grants, and donations. Questions asked touched on attitudes towards the organization, fundraising feasibility as well as willingness to give/invest.

Key takeaways included:

### General

- Current municipal funders value the AGN and believe it has great potential to be a community asset to local residents and visitors.
- Potential to contribute to regional economic development and tourism efforts and collaborate with organizations in these sectors (e.g., RTO8).
- To ensure continued investment and success in the AGN, it was identified that it’s important for funders to have confidence in the vision, strategies, and governance of the art gallery (some concerns were raised).

### Financial Sustainability

- Area for improvement: budgeting and long-term financial sustainability.
- Alternative business models (e.g., being incorporated into a municipal structure or hybrid models) were mentioned as a possible avenue to long-term stability.
- Emphasis on partnerships and relationship building with public funders in advance of making specific applications.
- Importance of being mindful of funding competition.
- That strengthening communications and marketing would increase local grant support, among other benefits.

### **Northumberland County**

- Noted that there are certain structural constraints at the County level, but it was identified that County staff do have some discretion to direct funds toward specific projects that benefit the whole County and support other priorities (e.g., economic development and tourism).
- Recommended that proposals should be framed around the county's areas of strategic focus.

### **Private Sector**

- Corporate policies and applications for donations from large corporations (e.g., banks, Walmart, and Cameco)
- Smaller businesses generally provided supportive comments about the AGN, recognized its value to the community, and expressed a willingness to be contacted for donations in the future.
- Some businesses provide support through in-kind donations, but have not been open to financial contributions (i.e. train tickets from VIA Rail and gift certificates from Best Western).

# 5. HOMEWORK QUESTIONS

Please complete the following questions prior to the kick-off and bring them with you.

1. What size do you think the AGN should be in five years? (i.e. attendance, catchment area, revenues, programs/services, facilities/locations) Why?

A - a bit bigger - 10%

B - a lot bigger - 50%

C - the same

D - smaller

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2. Does the AGN face any risks in the next 3—5 years? If so, what are they?

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3. Does the AGN face any opportunities in the next 3—5 years? If so, what are they?

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