

Strategic Transition Plan For the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum

Introduction

The Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum in Wethersfield, Connecticut is a museum including three furnished historic houses, a new education center and period outbuildings on an 8-acre site that includes a colonial revival garden.

For 101 years, the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Connecticut has owned and operated the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum. At the Museum, they have successfully preserved and furnished two National Historic Landmarks, the Joseph Webb House and the Silas Deane House and a house listed in the Wethersfield Historic District, the Isaac Stevens House. They have maintained the Webb Barn for community gatherings. Perhaps most importantly, they have educated countless students, both young and young at heart, about the importance of our early American history and its legacy in American culture. Most recently, the Society successfully raised the funds for and built the Holcombe Education Center, a 9,200 square foot modern building, to expand the programmatic potential of the Museum.

The Museum is now at a significant, and exciting, crossroads. Its historic structures are well preserved; it has a new building to further its educational and programmatic goals; and the addition of a new archaeological collection, discovered during building construction, brings new understanding about the history of the site. However, while its finances are strong, there are additional costs associated with operating a new building. The staff includes only two fulltime employees, but the Museum's ambitions suggest more are needed. The Museum requires the digital infrastructure needed to make its collections more readily available to wider audiences. The Museum must do further research to understand the diversity of peoples that lived on the site. Most importantly, like most historic sites, the Museum must seek ways to remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary audiences. These challenges have been amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic during which the Society finished the construction of the Holcombe Education Center, elected a new president and hired a new Museum executive director.

Against this backdrop, the Museum has committed itself to this Strategic Transition Plan crafted to guide the Museum over the next two years. Research and interpretive planning are key components as well as digitizing the collections. Including outside perspectives in the development of the Museum's planning is critical. Continuing and enhancing the preservation of its historical assets, including the site, is balanced by new programs to keep the Museum relevant to a growing constituency. Including and engaging with the region's diverse population in the development of the Museum is critical. This transitional strategic plan positions the Museum to operate from a strategic perspective where planning is ongoing, current and woven into the operations of the Museum.

The most critical commitment made during this process is to become an organization that operates from a strategic perspective. This commits the Museum to utilizing the strategic planning process as a guide for the next two years during which the Museum will revisit their mission statement and develop a new vision, one that creates a vibrant and sustainable future for the organization.

Historical Significance

As the anchor property in the Old Wethersfield Historic District, the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum is treasured as both a local landmark, a place for community gatherings and as the caretaker of buildings where events took place that helped shape the Nation. As a preserved 8-acre site, the Museum is also enjoyed as a place for community gatherings, recreation and cultural enrichment. Thousands of guests enjoy the Museum's environs, instilling within the community a deep sense of place. Perhaps the true significance of the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum lies in its education mission. Its authentic spaces offer experiences that are needed in today's digital world. Its programs convey the value of history to both the young and the young at heart, inspiring individuals to consider the complex issues we face as a nation and world.

Together, the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum three historic houses tell stories of national and state-wide significance. The Joseph Webb House served as George Washington's headquarters in May 1781 and is where he met with French commander the Comte de Rochambeau to plan the joint military campaign that led to the victory at Yorktown and the end of the American Revolution. The Deane House was the built by Silas Deane, our nation's first diplomat whose efforts in Paris led France to become the first country to recognize the United States as an independent nation. The Isaac Stevens House, owned and lived in by the Stevens family for 170 years, provides a remarkable portrait of the lives of a successful mercantile Connecticut River Valley family.

Yet equally important as the more well-known figures are the people that are less known including enslaved peoples, free Black peoples, indentured servants, the women who occupied the houses and the indigenous people who lived on the land. These combined narratives tell the fuller story of America: its opportunities, challenges and its diverse peoples, giving visitors a sense of time and place as well as an understanding of where their own story fits into the history of America.

Vision

Building upon its success and preservation efforts, the Museum will have made substantial progress towards its goals. It will be a cultural center that shares stories about our common past and sparks discussion about our future through the active use of its site, historic structures and collections. The Museum will engage in further **research** to better understand the history of the diverse peoples and events at the site. The Museum will be a well-run **organization** with the resources it needs to achieve its goals and internal processes that support committed and engaged stakeholders (board, staff and volunteers). The Museum's **programs** will provide diverse experiences that include, educate and inspire a broad range of audiences. The Museum will continue the stewardship of its **collections** through preservation as well as by making them accessible to a broader audience both digitally and in-person. The **site** will increasingly be enjoyed as a public space where elements of culture, history, landscape and the natural world merge. The Museum's **facilities** will be welcoming to guests and well maintained. Building on the Museum's recent archaeological discoveries, we will extend our knowledge of the past and the people who lived on the Museum's property. **Archaeology** will be woven into the fabric of the Museum's programs, scholarship and future plans. Annual work plans with benchmarks, reviewed on a regular basis, will support the fulfillment of this **Vision** as well as yearly strategic planning retreats.

Mission

NSCDA-CT Mission Statement

The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Connecticut actively promotes our Colonial and Revolutionary heritage through historic preservation, education, and patriotic service.

Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum Mission Statement

The Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum promotes the understanding of colonial life and its enduring influence in the Connecticut River Valley through the preservation and interpretation of the Museum's buildings, collections and grounds.

The Museum strives to fulfill its mission through educational programs, research and exhibitions geared to diverse audiences of all ages. The Museum is committed to community engagement and partnering with institutions, groups and individuals concerned with furthering the values of our country's founders.

Strategic Goals

Goal 1 Research

Broaden the Museum's research and scholarship efforts to explore four centuries of diverse people and events.

Goal 2 Organization

Enhance the Museum's resources and internal practices so it can achieve its goals and support engaged stakeholders.

Goal 3 Programs

Create diverse experiences that include, educate and inspire a broad range of audiences and communities.

Goal 4 Collections

Ensure the Museum's collections are well preserved, documented and accessible to a broad audience.

Goal 5 Site

Transform the site into an enjoyable public space combining elements of culture, history, landscape and nature while maintaining its historic integrity.

Goal 6 Facilities

Create a plan to ensure the Museum's facilities (non-collections) are welcoming to our guests and well maintained.

Goal 7 Archaeology

Integrate archaeology, and the new archaeology collection, into the fabric of the Museum's programs, scholarship and future plans.

Goals and Objectives

Goal 1 Research

Broaden the Museum's research and scholarship efforts to explore four centuries of diverse people and events.

Objectives:

- 1.1 Develop a strategy, including funding, to establish an ongoing research and scholarship program.
- 1.2 Continue researching the history of enslaved people, free people of color and indentured servants.
- 1.3 Continue researching the people who lived on the site in addition to the Webb, Deane and Stevens families.
- 1.4 Create a strategy to share broadly the research with the public.

Goal 2 Organization

Enhance the Museum's resources and internal practices so it can achieve its goals and support engaged stakeholders.

Objectives:

- 2.1 Update internal financial controls (accounting systems, policies and procedures) to ensure the organization is GAAP compliant.
- 2.2 Increase contributed income, grant funding and earned income streams.
- 2.3 Create a long-term financial plan for the institution.
- 2.4 Implement the governance framework document (vision, mission, values and strategic goals) to guide a strategic operating perspective.
- 2.5 Create a marketing plan, including a rebranding, to increase attendance and revenues.
- 2.6 Include voices from state, regional and local communities in the committee structure of the Museum.
- 2.7 Develop strategies to encourage broad participation by NSCDA-CT members in the life of the Museum.
- 2.8 Design and implement a staff development plan.
- 2.9 Design and implement ongoing audience research activities such as membership surveys, community listening sessions and program surveys.
- 2.10 Include the region's diverse communities in the development of the Museum's programs and activities.

Goal 3 Programs

Create diverse experiences that include, educate and inspire a broad range of audiences and communities.

Objectives:

- 3.1 Create an interpretative plan to guide future programs including tours, lectures, exhibitions, workshops and other programs.
- 3.2 Enhance the Museum's school-aged programs so they can be enjoyed by schools statewide (at the Museum or in a school setting).
- 3.3 Create a programming plan that balances all aspects of the Museum and which will have wide appeal to adult audiences.
- 3.4 Develop a plan to celebrate the Nation's 250th anniversary with events in Wethersfield and statewide.
- 3.5 Develop workshops and programs for teachers to help them teach US history in the classroom.

Goal 4 Collections

Ensure the Museum's collections are well preserved, documented and accessible to a broad audience.

Objectives:

- 4.1 Institute a digitization plan for the collections (including digitizing the houses) and make them available online.
- 4.2 Adopt and implement an active collections plan to guide the development and use of the Museum's collection.
- 4.3 Complete historic structure reports for the Deane House and Stevens House.
- 4.4 Create a preservation and maintenance plan for the Museum's historic structures.
- 4.5 Create a collection's conservation plan for the Museum.
- 4.6 Rehouse the collection into its new collection storage areas.

Goal 5 Site

Transform the site into an enjoyable public space combining elements of culture, history, landscape and nature while maintaining its historic integrity.

Objectives:

- 5.1 Find funding and commission a cultural landscape report and master plan to guide future uses of the site including but not limited to lighting plan, pedestrian walkways, parking and trails.
- 5.2 Create a plan for the ongoing maintenance and preservation of the colonial revival garden.
- 5.3 Create and implement a wayfinding and interpretive signage strategy for the landscape.

Goal 6 Facilities

Create a plan to ensure the Museum's facilities (non-collections) are welcoming to our guests and well maintained.

Objectives:

- 6.1 Study the feasibility of introducing a humidity climate control system into the Holcombe Education Center.
- 6.2 Consider ways to maximize the use of space in the Holcombe Education Center.
- 6.3 Create and implement a maintenance plan for the Holcombe Education Center and the Webb Barn.
- 6.4 Study ways to improve the Webb Barn to facilitate its dual use as a rental and performance venue.
- 6.5 Consider ways to make the front façade and courtyard more inviting to potential guests.

Goal 7 Archaeology

Integrate archaeology, and the new archaeology collection, into the fabric of the Museum's programs, scholarship and future plans.

Objectives:

- 7.1 Clearly define and state the significance of the archaeological discoveries and how they broaden our understanding of New England history.
- 7.2 Develop a plan, including funding, for future archaeological digs at the Museum.
- 7.3 Develop strategies to incorporate archaeology into the Museum's programming.
- 7.4 Consider collaborations with similar organizations to maximize the impact of the archaeological collections.

Strategic Transition Plan Implementation Outline

Goal 1 Research	Objective	Priority	Year	Funding	Who
Broaden the Museum's research and scholarship efforts to explore four centuries of diverse people and events.	1.1 Develop a strategy, including funding, to establish an ongoing research and scholarship program.	H	1	O	C
	1.2 Continue researching the history of enslaved people, free people of color and indentured servants.	H	1	G	C
	1.3 Continue researching the people who lived on the site in addition to the Webb, Deane and Stevens families	H	1	G	C
	1.4 Create a strategy to share broadly the research with the public.	H	1	O	TEAM
Goal 2 Organization	Objective	Priority	Year	Funding	
Enhance the Museum's resources and internal practices so it can achieve its goals and support engaged stakeholders.	2.1 Update internal financial controls (accounting systems, policies and procedures) to ensure the organization is GAAP compliant.	H	1	O	A
	2.2 Increase contributed income, grant funding and earned income streams.	H	1	O/G	A
	2.3 Create a long-term financial plan for the institution.	H	1	O	A
	2.4 Implement the governance framework document (vision, mission, values and strategic goals) to guide a strategic operating perspective.	M	2	G	M C/C
	2.5 Create a marketing plan, including a rebranding, to increase attendance and revenues.	H	1	O/G	A
	2.6 Include voices from state, regional and local communities in the committee structure of the Museum.	H	1	O	M C/C
	2.7 Develop strategies to encourage broad participation by NSCDA-CT members in the life of the Museum.	H	1	O	M C/C
	2.8 Design and implement a staff development plan.	H	1	O/G	A
	2.9 Design and implement ongoing audience research activities such as membership surveys, community listening sessions and program surveys.	M	1	O/G	TEAM
	2.10 Include the region's diverse communities in the development of the Museum's programs and activities.	H	1	O/G	TEAM

KEY:

Priority- High (H), Medium (M) and Low (L)

Funding: Operating Budget (O) or Grant (G)

Year-Year 1 (1) or Year 2 (2)

Who: Admin (A), Curatorial (C), Education (E), Facilities (F), all departments (TEAM) or Museum Committee and/or Council (M C/C)

Strategic Transition Plan Implementation Outline

Goal 3 Programs	Objective	Priority	Year	Funding	Who
Create diverse experiences that include, educate and inspire a broad range of audiences and communities.	3.1 Create an interpretative plan to guide future programs including tours, lectures, exhibitions, workshops and other programs.	H	2	G	TEAM
	3.2 Enhance the Museum's school-aged programs so they can be enjoyed by schools statewide (at the Museum or in a school setting).	H	1/2	O/G	E
	3.3 Create a programming plan that balances all aspects of the Museum and which will have wide appeal to adult audiences.	H	1	O	E
	3.4 Develop a plan to celebrate the Nation's 250 th anniversary with events in Wethersfield and statewide.	H	2	G	TEAM
	3.5 Develop workshops and programs for teachers to help them teach US history in the classroom.	M	2	O	E
Goal 4 Collections	Objective	Priority	Year	Funding	Who
Ensure the Museum's collections are well preserved, documented and accessible to a broad audience.	4.1 Institute a digitization plan for the collections (including digitizing the houses) and make them available online.	M	2	G	C
	4.2 Adopt and implement an active collections plan to guide the development and use of the Museum's collection.	H	1	G	C
	4.3 Complete historic structure reports for the Deane House and Stevens House.	M	2	G	C
	4.4 Create a preservation and maintenance plan for the Museum's historic structures.	H	1	O	C/F
	4.5 Create a collection's conservation plan for the Museum.	L	2	O	C
	4.6 Rehouse the collection into its new collection storage areas.	H	1	O	C/F

KEY:

Priority- High (H), Medium (M) and Low (L)

Funding: Operating Budget (O) or Grant (G)

Year-Year 1 (1) or Year 2 (2)

Who: Admin (A), Curatorial (C), Education (E), Facilities (F), all departments (TEAM) or Museum Committee and/or Council (M C/C)

Strategic Transition Plan Implementation Outline

Goal 5 Site	Objective	Priority	Year	Funding	Who
Transform the site into an enjoyable public space combining elements of culture, history, landscape and nature while maintaining its historic integrity.	5.1 Find funding and commission a cultural landscape report and master plan to guide future uses of the site including but not limited to lighting plan, pedestrian walkways, parking and trails.	H	1	O	A/F
	5.2 Create a plan for the ongoing maintenance and preservation of the colonial revival garden.	L	2	O	F
	5.3 Create and implement a wayfinding and interpretive signage strategy for the landscape.	H	1	G	TEAM
Goal 6 Facilities	Objective	Priority	Year	Funding	Who
Create a plan to ensure the Museum's facilities (non-collections) are welcoming to our guests and well maintained.	6.1 Study the feasibility of introducing a humidity climate control system into the Holcombe Education Center.	M	2	G	F/C
	6.2 Consider ways to maximize the use of space in the Holcombe Education Center.	M	1	O	TEAM
	6.3 Create and implement a maintenance plan for the Holcombe Education Center and the Webb Barn.	H	1	O	F
	6.4 Study ways to improve the Webb Barn to facilitate its dual use as a rental and performance venue.	L	2	G	F/E
	6.5 Consider ways to make the front façade and courtyard more inviting to potential guests.	H	1	O	A/F

KEY:

Priority- High (H), Medium (M) and Low (L)

Funding: Operating Budget (O) or Grant (G)

Year-Year 1 (1) or Year 2 (2)

Who: Admin (A), Curatorial (C), Education (E), Facilities (F), all departments (TEAM) or Museum Committee and/or Council (M C/C)

Strategic Transition Plan Implementation Outline

Goal 7 Archaeology	Objective	Priority	Year	Funding	Who
Integrate archaeology, and the new archaeology collection, into the fabric of the Museum's programs, scholarship and future plans.	7.1 Clearly define and state the significance of the archaeological discoveries and how they broaden our understanding of New England history.	M	2	O	TEAM
	7.2 Develop a plan, including funding, for future archaeological digs at the Museum.	L	2	H	C/F
	7.3 Develop strategies to incorporate archaeology into the Museum's programming.	M	1/2	O	TEAM
	7.4 Consider collaborations with similar organizations to maximize the impact of the archaeological collections.	L	2	O	TEAM

KEY:

Priority- High (H), Medium (M) and Low (L)

Funding: Operating Budget (O) or Grant (G)

Year-Year 1 (1) or Year 2 (2)

Who: Admin (A), Curatorial (C), Education (E), Facilities (F), all departments (TEAM) or Museum Committee and/or Council (M C/C)