Making History
A Strategic Plan for 2015-2020

THE RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The Rhode Island Historical Society

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ALDRICH HOUSE
110 Benevolent Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02906
401.331.8575

JOHN BROWN HOUSE MUSEUM
52 Power Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02906
401.273.7507

LIBRARY
121 Hope Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02906
401.273.8107

MUSEUM OF WORK & CULTURE
42 South Main Street
Woonsocket, Rhode Island 02895
401.769.9675
Our Mission:
Honoring, interpreting and sharing Rhode Island’s past to enrich the present and inspire the future.

The RIHS is:

The only state-wide history organization in Rhode Island

Two museums, a research center, two historic houses, and steward of four pieces of land related to King Philip’s war

More than 30 staff members and 145 volunteers

25,000 objects, 5,000 manuscripts, 100,000 books and printed items, 400,000 photographs and maps, and 9 million feet of motion-picture film

Serving 25,000 in-person visitors and 130,000 virtual visitors annually, and

A leading contributor to both the education and tourism sectors of Rhode Island’s economy.
Statement of Purpose:

As an important cultural institution in Rhode Island, we use materials and knowledge of the past to explore topics of timeless relevance and current public interest and benefit.

Inside and outside of the walls of our buildings, the RIHS encourages broad engagement in the diversity of experiences we offer.

We develop and deploy our collections, knowledge, connections, and expertise to build relationships between individuals, organizations, and communities to enhance understanding and empathy, and to engender a pride of place.
Our Vision:

As the sole history organization whose purview encompasses the entire state of Rhode Island, we seek to:

- Demonstrate excellence and share expertise in collections management and educational programming.
- Cultivate a collaborative network to advance and revitalize the history and heritage sector in Rhode Island.
- Deliver high quality programming to our current audiences, while expanding reach to underserved groups, through increased attention to our facilities and more effective use of technology.
- Exemplify mission-based financial sustainability, economic transparency, community engagement, and ethical leadership at all levels of staff, board, and volunteers.
- Consistently communicate our mission and actions through traditional and new media.
- Advocate for the role of history education in our K-12 system as a way to develop empathy, 21st-century skills, and sense of pride in RI.
Core Values:

The RIHS encourages a passion for history and seeks to inspire and welcome patrons, staff, and volunteers of all ages and backgrounds.

The RIHS is committed to providing a Society-wide culture that reflects respect for all staff, volunteers, patrons, and their work.

The RIHS embraces a visitor-first philosophy.

The RIHS endeavors to engage and document all of Rhode Island’s diverse communities and is dedicated to being the conduit for Rhode Island’s past to researchers, scholars, teachers, and the public.

The RIHS aims to connect people to their personal past, as well as to our shared history, as a way to better understand and appreciate differing points of view in the past and present, and to make more informed choices for our common future.

The RIHS fosters an exchange of ideas through dynamic and welcoming exhibitions, displays, and programs, as well as cultivating mutually beneficial collaborations.

The RIHS shares and showcases the unique treasures of the state of Rhode Island and celebrates the work of individuals and organizations that share the Society’s values.

The RIHS values integrity, transparency, and the highest standards of excellence in all aspects of its work, through which it seeks to earn and maintain the public’s trust.

The RIHS pursues excellence and accuracy in its interpretation of history through extensive research and balanced points of view.

The RIHS pledges to practice fiscal responsibility and to build its fiscal strength to sustain its mission of providing avenues for preserving and appreciating Rhode Island history.

The RIHS seeks to attract and retain a board of trustees who will be stewards of our mission, be engaged in our vision, and exemplify excellence in governance.
Informed by our mission, vision and core values, the RIHS will explore ways to respond to new potential opportunities.

We will:

• Seek to enhance our reputation in the community.
• Position ourselves as leaders in the field of history and heritage.
• Strengthen collaborative partnerships.
• Increase access for underserved audiences.
• Act on opportunities that are sustainable and do so in a fiscally responsible manner.
Deepening our Engagement in the History and Heritage of Rhode Island:

As the RIHS looks toward its 200th anniversary, we must stop and reflect on the ways we invest our current assets: staff, collections, funds, and time.

Seeking to better serve our mission, vision, members, and neighbors, the staff and board have sought innovative ways to not only broaden our reach, but also to deepen our connections to the communities around us.

Over the next five years, we will seek to do this through enhancing the Rhode Island Online Directory Initiative Project network; supporting and strengthening history education in Rhode Island; investing in our facilities, technology, and staff; and using our membership format to promote the exploration of our state’s vast and varied past.
As our collections are the basis of our educational programs and exhibits, the RIHS will:

- Work toward annually-set cataloging goals to make collections more accessible to the public.
- Digitize collections in accord with the RIHS’s annual interpretive theme, museum tours and programs, and educational initiatives.
- Provide training and resources in the areas of collections care to assist the history and heritage sector, as well as private collectors, to preserve and protect RI’s tangible and oral history.
- Work with the Newell D. Goff Center for Education and Public Programs to interpret our collections for the public.
To help transform Rhode Island’s ailing History & Heritage sector, the RIHS will:

- Foster a culture of co-creation with partner sites using online formats such as Rhode Tour to expand the offerings of RHODI.

- Cultivate Community Anchor sites by shining a spotlight on the extraordinary work of partners throughout the state.

- Work with these Community Anchors to provide professional development training sessions for History and Heritage sites across Rhode Island.
To better serve all of our users, the RIHS will:

- Begin an internal and external overhaul of the RIHS headquarters, the Aldrich House, to restore this beautiful home in a manner that reflects our mission to preserve Rhode Island’s history.

- Create a new use-plan for the Aldrich House with the expressed desire of creating a collections-based, educational “Collaboratory.”

- Be a standard bearer for collections care in RI’s history and heritage sector and respond to the needs of other sites to better care for their library and museum collections through one-on-one interventions, disaster preparedness training (Protecting the Past), and collections care workshops.

- Build capacity and leadership in digital thinking within the field of public history.
To achieve these ends and more, while committed to financial stability, sustainability, and transparency, the RIHS will:

- Integrate operational plans with our annual budget.
- Create, maintain, and improve financial reporting processes.
- Uphold a prudent draw on our investment holdings.
- Provide all necessary resources for our professional staff to support retention rates for talented employees.
Because the foundation of any successful non-profit is a strong and nimble business model, the RIHS will:

Seek to expand its current revenue streams, including, but not limited to:

- Annual fundraising appeals,
- Invigorated memberships models,
- Program-based grant revenue,
- Sponsorships, and
- Site rentals.
To communicate our efforts, the RIHS will:

Allocate financial resources to support the positions of a communications manager.

Create a consistent process of informing the media, members, and the general public about all RIHS programs and accomplishments.

Stay abreast of advances in social media to take advantage of new ways to reach a broader audience in more meaningful ways.
To strengthen history education in our state, the RIHS will:

- Continue developing RI history and civics curriculum with the Rhode Island Department of Education and local school districts.

- Expand online resources through the continued digitization of primary sources and explore the potential of an online RI history textbook.

- Grow the All-Ability Inclusive Program at the Museum of Work & Culture to include the John Brown House Museum, as well as implementing programming for those with visual and hearing impairment.

- Create an Anchor Schools Program in which a new district is chosen each year to be the RIHS School District—with an accompanying suite of resources for students, teachers, and local historic sites.