

FULL STEAM AHEAD:

Igniting the Future
of Great Lakes
Storytelling

***Great Lakes Museum Strategic Plan
2026-2030***



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Riding the momentum of success, this strategy is the direct evolution of the ambitious 2020–2025 Strategic Plan, which fueled our radical transformation and established the dynamic foundation we stand upon today. This 2026–2030 Strategic Plan marks the next great voyage, guiding the Great Lakes Museum to achieve its highest organizational goals and fully realize its potential as a preeminent tourist destination. The successful acquisition and 2024 opening of the S.S. Keewatin, a landmark event followed by its 50th anniversary in 2025, instantly elevated the Great Lakes Museum. We are now recognized as a premier Kingston attraction and an essential cultural asset for all of Canada.

The Great Lakes Museum functions as both a cultural steward and a community hub. To fulfil these roles effectively, we must act with purpose, adapt to change, and focus on the future. This Strategic Plan provides the framework to achieve these ends, to chart the course and guide decisions around programming and activities, acquisitions, partnerships, and outreach to remain relevant and ensure continued trust.

This Strategic Plan was developed by the Museum with input and assistance from TCI Management Consultants and made beautiful by John Charrette. Interviews and surveys of staff and volunteers were conducted. Surveys of visitors and the general public were deployed, and benchmarking assessments of other local attractions and other maritime museums were done.



VISION, MISSION, VALUES

VISION:

To be Canada's premier museum for experiencing and preserving the maritime legacy—past, present, and future—of the Great Lakes.

MISSION:

To inspire an enduring connection to Kingston and Great Lakes maritime heritage.

CORE VALUES:

Exploration, sustainability, leadership, integrity, accountability, diversity and inclusivity.



STRATEGIC PILLARS

We stand today at a pivotal moment, not just of development, but of destiny. The Great Lakes Museum (GLM) is making a monumental shift—transforming from a beloved community institution to an essential, exhilarating destination. We are forging a new identity, one that offers vibrant, varied experiences rooted in the profound natural and maritime history of the Great Lakes.

Our strategic vision is defined by four fundamental pillars of action, all deliberately focused on creating an exceptional visitor experience supported by unwavering financial and operational strength.

The Foundation: We begin with our **Collections and Research**, recognizing this as the primary and proper concern of any museum, ensuring the integrity and depth of our core assets are preserved and accessible.

The Connection: Next, we pivot to transforming these collections and research into authentic and compelling **Visitor Experience**, creating engaging content and exhibits that resonate deeply with our audience.

The Reach: The third pillar focuses on audience development through dynamic **Promotion, Branding and Outreach** initiatives, ensuring our potential audiences are not only aware of but enthusiastically drawn to the Museum's offerings.

The Anchor: Finally, and critically, the Plan culminates in actions to guarantee **Financial and Operational Sustainability**, the essential anchor that allows the Great Lakes Museum to thrive, undertake its vital work, and consistently offer these exceptional experiences for generations to come.



STRATEGIC PILLARS *CONT.*

These four pillars are shown graphically below:



STRATEGIC PILLARS CONT.

Exceptional Visitor Experience

We will transform our facilities, assets, and stories into compelling, unforgettable journeys. We are not just displaying artefacts; we are curating moments of wonder, sparking deep curiosity, and creating a meaningful connection between every visitor and the Great Lakes maritime saga.

Key priority: Creating a welcoming, accessible, and engaging environment for all stakeholders.

Goals: Create hands-on, inclusive exhibits, launch new learning programs, expand visitor amenities, improve accessibility for the Keewatin and museum, and develop an events strategy. Expand community outreach programming including schools.

Stewardship of Collections and Stories

We dedicate ourselves to the meticulous preservation of the buildings, artifacts, and archives in our care. Simultaneously, we will undertake vital research to unearth and articulate the powerful, often-untold stories of Great Lakes maritime history, ensuring our collections become an illuminating source of knowledge for the world.

Key priority: Address collections care and storage risk.

Goals: Address space and collections management issues, strengthen conservation, digitize assets, research Great Lakes stories and ensure accessibility of the collection.



STRATEGIC PILLARS CONT.

Sharing our Story

We will boldly proclaim the extraordinary experience we offer. Through powerful promotion, intentional branding, and expansive outreach, we will ensure our compelling stories and experiences resonate far beyond our walls, inviting the world to participate in our journey.

Key Priority: Clarity of identity with community; expand ownership, connection, and affinity with GLM (first Kingston, then Ontario).

Goals: Optimize promotional efforts, promote National Historic Site status, utilize digital outreach, and deepen relationships with schools, tourism partners, and local businesses. Improve signage and welcome experience.

Securing our Impact and Excellence

We commit to operating the museum with progressive, responsible principles. By embracing sustainable operations and pursuing financial and organizational mastery, we ensure our institution remains a resilient and enduring platform for history, education, and inspiration well into the future.

Key priority: Build off existing efforts to improve efficiency and optimize operations through systems improvements and integration.

Goals: Ensure fiscal health, develop succession planning and training, ensure staff satisfaction, enhance volunteer management and recognition, and invest in physical and information technology infrastructure.



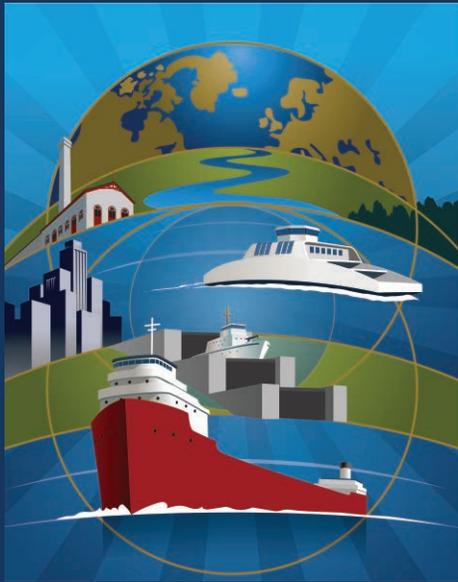
CONCLUSION

Under each of these four pillars, specific initiatives and action plans are developed with suggested timing and priorities, ensuring ongoing review and flexibility to adapt to changing conditions. Key performance indicators are established for financial management, visitor engagement, volunteer success, asset preservation, accessibility, and program innovation. Annual reporting to the Board, succession planning, and regular staff training and satisfaction surveys are undertaken to sustain momentum and measure outcomes.

Our vision and challenge is a dual call to action: to remain the vital community museum at our core, while simultaneously rising to become a global destination that inspires local, national, and international audiences alike.

Our values are the unwavering compass directing our daily choices and defining our long-term legacy. We are dedicated to honouring the past with deep reverence, celebrating the present with vitality, and securing a thriving future that will enrich generations to come.





GATEWAY



DYNAMIC



HISTORIC



NATURAL