



Strategic Plan 2019-2022

Adopted July 16, 2019

I. Introduction

The League of NH Craftsmen embraces a vibrant community of makers, collectors, and patrons who represent a diverse array of interests and viewpoints. This document seeks to distill core ideas that emerged from months of animated meetings and discussions about how the League can best advance craft in the context of the organization's capacities and current social, economic, and cultural trends. It provides a framework for eliciting ideas, responses, and comments from our membership and supporters at large.

Here are some of the background factors and questions lending urgency and weight to the planning process:

- The value of craft and craft as a profession is in danger of being eclipsed by contemporary culture's focus on all things digital and virtual. Where and how can we effectively advocate for craft as a relevant and important contemporary expression?
- League activities now return over \$4 million per year in sales to juried members. Our corner of NH's creative economy (and hundreds of livelihoods) depend upon the League's effectiveness.
- Internet commerce is challenging traditional marketplaces (such as the Fair and our affiliated brick-and-mortar galleries) and represents both a vulnerability and potential opportunity.
- The League's dependence on the Fair for more than half of the organization's annual income is an operational vulnerability; fiscal prudence calls for complementary income streams.
- The League now operates on an annual budget of \$1.4 million, and the organization needs a commensurate level of governance and business savvy.
- The League's current membership and contributor structure (which includes juried members, supporting members, and several categories of contributors) confuses would-be donors, compromising fundraising potentials.
- Many of the League's juried members are aging out of the field. How do we engage young makers and a wider demographic with the profession of craft?

- New production technologies and the softening of boundaries historically separating craft and art raise questions about media and the League's proper purview. How is the League to define its territory and standards in this changing landscape?
- As it approaches its 90th year, the League enjoys a national reputation for excellence in the craft field, yet historically has focused narrowly on NH. Could a more proactive regional and national presence advance the field and the organization?

The Strategies and Goals section (III, below) reflects participants' responses to these and related concerns.

II. Mission, Vision, and Values

The mission, vision and values we subscribe to are the touchstones for determining how to allocate the organization's limited resources; Strategies and goals are meaningful only in relation to ultimate aims.

Conversations to date yielded the following re-articulation of the League's mission, vision, and values. We regard this expression not as static, but rather as a stimulus for ongoing conversations about what the heart of our work is and why it is fundamentally important.

Mission

To advance, cultivate, and champion excellence in fine craft.

We pursue that mission through educational programming, leadership initiatives, marketplace strategies, and support services.

Vision

We envision that through our work:

- People regard craft as inspirational, meaningful and relevant to their lives as individuals and as community members.
- Makers of fine craft are inspired, enriched, supported and honored.
- The League is widely respected across New England and the country as a leader in craft.

Values

Craft is an essential human expression.

Craft contributes to the language and culture of our times.

Craft inspires, enriches, and builds community.

III. Advance, Cultivate, and Champion: Strategies

The strategies here are organized under three broad headings from the mission: *To advance, cultivate and champion excellence in fine craft*. Many of the strategies and steps affect multiple headings, but are placed where their principal emphasis lies. For instance, effective governance (under Advance) supports the full range of strategies and activities. Similarly, marketplaces are integral to the League's business model but are also a powerful way to promote makers of craft and their work, and thus they appear under both Advance and Champion.

Advance (v.: to move forward, develop, facilitate, further)

A. Governance: Increase the Board's capacity to implement effective governance, skillful fundraising, and strategic fiscal oversight.

- a. Develop a Board Agreement that outlines trustee roles, responsibilities, and commitments.
- b. Systematically review and update by-laws.
- c. Adopt recruitment practices that address strategic aims and support best practices.
- d. Assess the quality of the CEO evaluation process with the executive director and adapt the process based on feedback and best practices.
- e. Evaluate committee functions and effectiveness and then revise as appropriate.
- f. Provide regular training and self-assessment for trustees.

B. Business model: Ensure that the League sustains diverse and dependable revenue streams.

- a. Assess the Annual Fair business model in relation to finances and internal capacity of the organization.
- b. Explore development of complementary sales events to supplement Fair revenues.
- c. Undertake a thorough analysis of the affiliated gallery model and make changes as warranted.
- d. Explore development of an online platform for sale of all juried members' work, whether or not they show at the Fair and in the League's galleries.
- e. Look for alliances with businesses and other organizations that could open new earned and/or contributed revenue streams.
- f. Look for ways to more effectively attract contributed income; redesign the supporting member/donor structure to eliminate the current confusion of categories.

C. Professional development: Provide resources and services that support professional and business growth.

- a. Determine perceived and actual needs of members and other professionals in the field.
- b. Develop offerings in line with needs, demand, and the organization's resources.
- c. Explore partnerships with other organizations to develop and deliver professional development services.

Cultivate (v.: to nurture, foster, encourage)

D. Education: Cultivate public awareness, appreciation, and demand for craft through a range of engaging educational activities.

- a. Sustain a staff position dedicated to education and outreach.
- b. Build relationships with other organizations and institutions to amplify the reach of the League's education activities.
- c. Position the League as a resource to educators and schools.
- d. Look for new opportunities to connect the public with craft and its makers in substantive ways.

E. Juried Membership: Explore augmenting the juried membership structure to recognize a range of career stages, encourage lifelong artistic growth, and build community among craftsmen.

- a. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current membership policies and structure.
- b. Explore creation of categories that will increase and diversify membership and recognize multiple levels of career and artistic development.
- c. Work with arts organizations and educational institutions to develop pathways to juried membership.
- d. Explore opportunities for involvement of nationally recognized master craftsmen.
- e. Develop a broader system of communication with current and prospective juried members.
- f. Encourage communication and connections within the juried membership.

F. Standards: Re-examine the League's jurying process, standards, and categories, taking into account new media and production technologies.

- a. Devise criteria and protocols for consideration of new media and technologies.
- b. Create an internal forum to explore and articulate the League's relationship to fine art.
- c. Engage outside expertise as needed in the above.
- d. Nurture career-long artistic and technical development through periodic feedback opportunities and jury reviews.

Champion (v.: to fight for, advocate, promote, campaign)

G. Advocacy/Branding: Develop communications content and strategies that promote a contemporary image of craft and the League.

- a. Explore rebranding the organization (potentially including a new name and tagline).
- b. Hire a marketing firm to facilitate a rebranding process.
- c. Develop local, regional and national social media/ marketing campaigns to promote rebranding.
- d. Advocate for craft and the creative economy to local and state government and policy-makers.
- e. Frame craft in the broader context of contemporary making and art.

H. Marketplaces: Present juried members and their work to the widest possible market through professional-level events, galleries and web portals.

- a. Build on the Fair's reputation as one the nation's most venerable craft events.
- b. Develop complementary sales events. (see also B. Business model)
- c. Explore development of a League-operated online sales platform. (see also B. Business model)
- d. Increase the level and effectiveness of the affiliated gallery network. (see also B. Business model)
- e. Present members' work to the public through museum-quality exhibitions and traveling shows.

I. Field Leadership: Assume a stronger and highly visible leadership role in the craft field.

- a. Re-examine the League's geographic footprint and potential contribution to the national field.
- b. Work toward establishing a network and platform for members, trustees, and staff to speak publicly about the League and craft.
- c. Instigate articles for wide circulation on the impact, relevance, and future of craft.
- d. Explore the development of a regional or national craft summit.
- e. Explore creating and producing a national podcast.