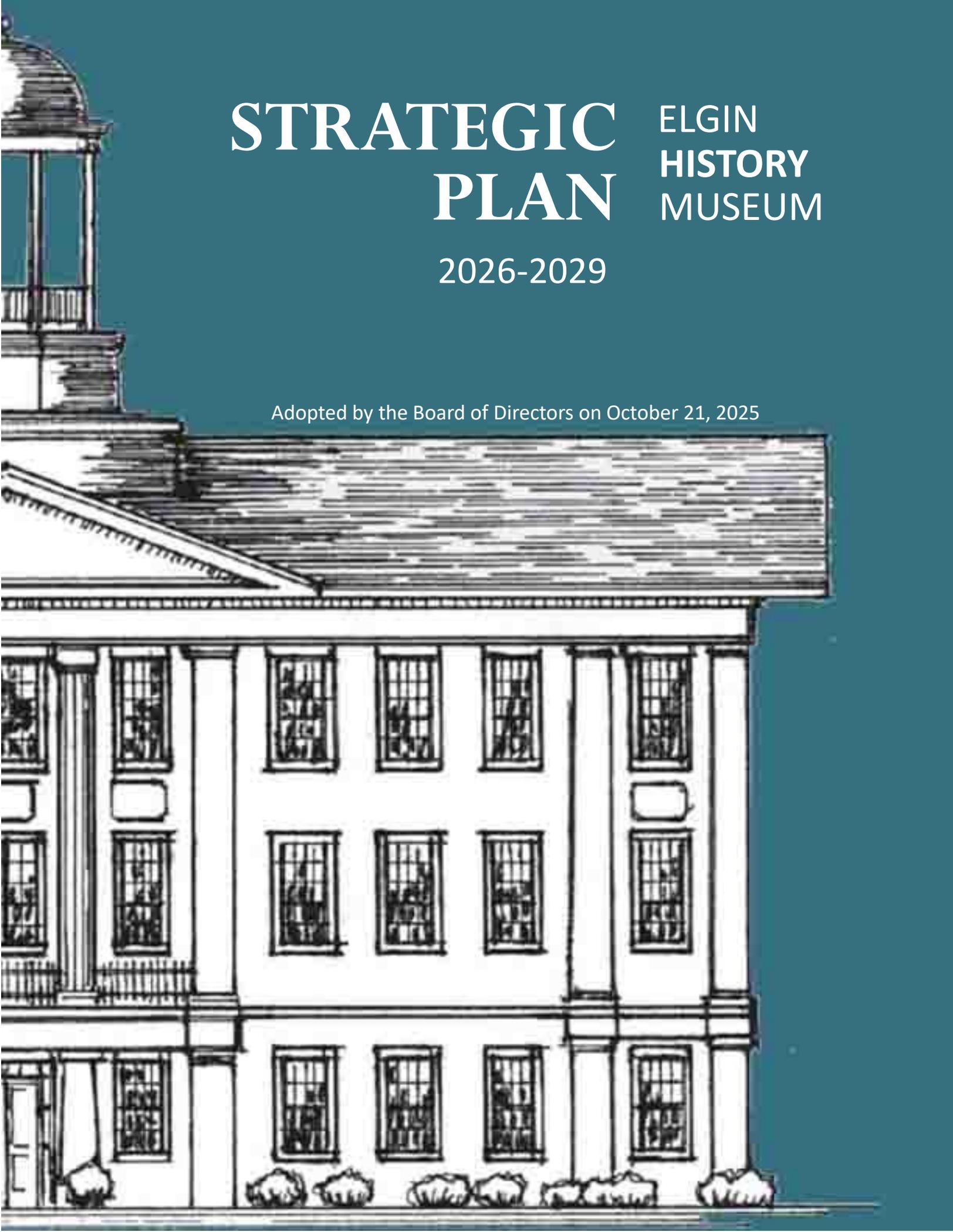


# STRATEGIC PLAN

ELGIN  
HISTORY  
MUSEUM

2026-2029

Adopted by the Board of Directors on October 21, 2025





## *Executive Summary*

The Elgin History Museum, located in the 1856 Greek Revival landmark Old Main, serves as a hub for preserving and sharing Elgin’s heritage. Operated by the Elgin Area Historical Society (founded in 1961), the Museum offers permanent and rotating exhibits highlighting the city’s history, including the Elgin National Watch Company, the Elgin Road Race, and the Elgin River to Rails story. The staff welcome visitors, support research, and provide educational programming.

In May 2025, the Museum initiated a strategic planning process led by a board–staff subcommittee and facilitated by Board Member Tricia Grosser. After five meetings, the updated plan was presented and formally adopted by the Board of Directors on 10/21/2025.





## Guiding Principles

### *Mission*

Preserve Elgin’s diverse heritage and sense of place while striving to be equitable, accessible, and relevant in our interactions with the community.

### *Vision*

Inspiring historical discovery by preserving and sharing Elgin’s heritage

### *Values*

The Elgin Historical Society believes **history matters**, connecting people to each other and to something larger than themselves. People of all backgrounds and generations need history to understand the world around them and to develop solutions for the future.

We believe **everyone makes history**. Relevant history is inclusive history. Creativity and innovation inform the Museum’s work as an organization. Collaborative partnerships and practices are key to advancing the mission in the community.

**We value** the investment of time and experience of **our volunteers** and are transparent in how we connect to the community as an association and as historians.

**We are accountable** to the fiscal policies of the organization by balancing efficiency and flexibility with budgetary discipline. We also seek sustainable resources while practicing financial oversight with long term planning.



## *Strategic Plan - Goals*

The mission and vision of the Elgin History Museum align with these six goals. They are part of a continuing multi-year plan.

### **OUTREACH & VISIBILITY**

Increase the Museum's outreach and visibility in the local community. This will result in making resources and programming well known and readily accessible. Accurately convey Elgin's history so that it is inclusive and provides perspective and context to past and present events. Seek partnerships with other local organizations, institutions, and individuals.

### **PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS**

Improve the Museum's overall operation by adherence to professional standards. This will be accomplished by participating in the STEPS self-assessment program issued by the American Association for State and Local History.

### **ENHANCE COLLECTIONS**

Enhance collections management and stewardship by improving storage, and indexing systems. Accelerate work on digitization of images and other holdings. Support the collection management with upgraded information technology.

### **INCREASE REVENUE**

Seek opportunities to increase revenue from diverse sources. Operate on a sound financial basis and pursue long-term financial resiliency through the steady growth of the endowment fund.

### **TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES**

Adopt technological advances to improve museum management accessibility to collections. This extends programming to larger audiences to enhance communication and outreach.

### **EQUITABLE PRACTICE**

Through governance, staffing, training, collecting, programming, investing and all other aspects of operations, be inclusive of diversity, mindful of conscious and unconscious bias, evaluative of environmental implications and demonstrate fair and just treatment of all community members.

# Goals & Objectives

In the table below each objective is highlighted when it falls within the realm of that particular Museum goal.

Objective	OUTREACH & VISIBILITY	PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS	ENHANCE COLLECTIONS	INCREASE REVENUE	TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES	EQUITABLE PRACTICE
Partnerships	Yes					Yes
Old Main Improvement		Yes			Yes	
Nancy Kimball House	Yes			Yes	Yes	
Educational Programming	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
STEPS		Yes	Yes			Yes
Content Development/ Multi-Media	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
Collections Management		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Fundraising	Yes			Yes	Yes	
Museum Store				Yes	Yes	Yes
Exhibits	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Interpretive Signage	Yes					
Hispanic Heritage Project	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Succession Planning		Yes				Yes



## Partnerships

Cultivate and maintain relationships with local organizations to reach wider demographic groups.

**OUTREACH & VISIBILITY** • **EQUITABLE PRACTICE**

ACTIONS	WHO	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Couple the museum’s programs with Gail Borden Public Library outreach. This could include the Book Mobile and “Museum in a Box.”</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasize outreach on the far west side with programs and collections.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue partnering with car enthusiasts for car show.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Annually
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with Elgin Township, City of Elgin, the Museum community, New Citizens, EPMA, Explore Elgin, Enhancing Elgin, and other groups.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Ongoing



## *Old Main Improvement*

**Address the future needs in Old Main.**

**PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS • TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES**

<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHEN</b>
• Replace carpeting on first and second floors.*	STAFF/DIR	2027
• Paint exhibit areas on first and second floors.	STAFF/DIR	2026
• Repair meeting room floor.	STAFF/DIR	2027
• Replace meeting room furniture.*	STAFF/DIR	2027
• Repair front step exterior limestone.	STAFF/DIR	2026
• Install a lightning rod system.	STAFF/DIR	2028
• Install an automated handicap accessible back door.	STAFF/DIR	2027
• Install historically appropriate windows on façade.*	STAFF/DIR	2027
• Update sound system addressing the needs of the hearing impaired. Improve internet service.	STAFF/DIR	2026
• Write 2 grants to fund improvements. Request City funds for Improvements.	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Annually

*\*Subject to Budgetary Considerations*



## *Nancy Kimball Cobblestone House*

**Increase use of the facility.**

**OUTREACH & VISIBILITY • INCREASE REVENUE**

**TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES**

<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHEN</b>
• Increase the use of the building with 10% more rentals, meetings, and/or programming.	STAFF/DIR	Annually
• Maintain the building and grounds in cooperation with the City of Elgin and the Wild Ones.	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Quarterly
• Complete the lower level floor with a layer of epoxy.*	STAFF/DIR	Q3 2026
• Outfit office spaces on the third floor.*	STAFF/DIR	Q2 2026
• Increase public open hours to 4 hours a week.*	STAFF/DIR	Q3 2026
• Improve technology through consistent internet access, printer and one laptop.*	STAFF/DIR	Q2 2026
• Work with the city to maintain lift, HVAC, lighting and alarm system.	STAFF/DIR	Ongoing
• Nominate the Cobblestone for the National Register of Historic Places.	BOARD/DIR	Q4 2026

*\*Subject to Budgetary Considerations*



## *Educational Programming*

**Continue to offer student engagement through curriculum-based programming.**

**OUTREACH & VISIBILITY • PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS • INCREASE REVENUE**

**TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES • EQUITABLE PRACTICE**

ACTIONS	WHO	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase U-46 and private/parochial/charter field trips and Scout/home school groups by 10 percent.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand the programs to include middle school curriculum with one new program.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	2027
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organize 3 drop-in presentations at Tefft Farm and Lords Park Zoo during each summer.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase Saturday drop-in activities to 3 each year at Old Main.</li> </ul>	STAFF	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a U-46 teacher awareness campaign for the “Story of Our Towns” publication.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	2026



## STEPS

Continue to use the STEPS process to maintain high level of professional standards for Museums.

**PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS • ENHANCE COLLECTIONS**

**EQUITABLE PRACTICE**

ACTIONS	WHO	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate the re-assessment process from AASLH for the Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations (STEPS)</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Q1 2027
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review policy revisions, Strategic Plan, and By-Laws.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	Q1/Annually



## Elgin History Museum

7.2K followers • 228 following

### *Content Development and Multi-Media*

Develop new content and use across all platforms: newsletter, email, website, WRMN, exhibits, programs, lectures, events, social media, and podcasts.

**OUTREACH & VISIBILITY** • **INCREASE REVENUE**

**TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES** • **EQUITABLE PRACTICE**

ACTIONS	WHO	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Redesign the <i>Crackerbarrel</i> newsletter to align with current institutional branding. Solicit 2 new writers.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Q2/2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Solicit 1 new volunteer for the Speakers' Bureau</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase use of collections images in social media posts. Develop a baseline for quantitative analysis.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore making content available in languages other than English, starting with the newsletter.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use an annual theme or catch phrase for content.</li> </ul>	BOARD/DIR/STAFF	Q1/Ongoing



## Collections Management

Collect and preserve Elgin history through material culture including objects, archival material, photos, and digital media.

- PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS • ENHANCE COLLECTIONS
- TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES • EQUITABLE PRACTICE

ACTIONS	WHO	WHEN
• Return 100% of probate records to Kane County.	STAFF/DIR	Q2/2026
• Utilize 10% of storage areas shelving space more effectively in the artifact object room.*	STAFF/DIR	Annually
• Digitize 600 images and upload to the Museum's website.	STAFF/DIR	2028
• Continue to review the collection for items no longer appropriate for use.	STAFF/DIR	Annually
• Collect artifacts from far west Elgin and of underrepresented people from at least 1 donor.	STAFF/DIR	Annually
• Increase website access for postcard collection.*	STAFF/DIR	Q4/2026
• Continue digital collecting of photos.	STAFF/DIR	Ongoing
• Connect collections to enhance historical concepts in exhibits and programs.	STAFF/DIR	Ongoing

\*Subject to Budgetary Considerations



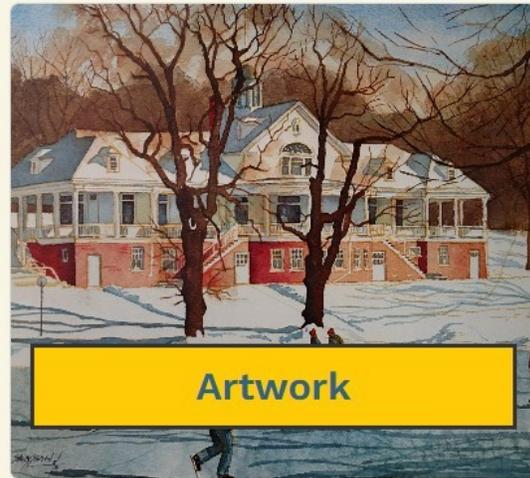
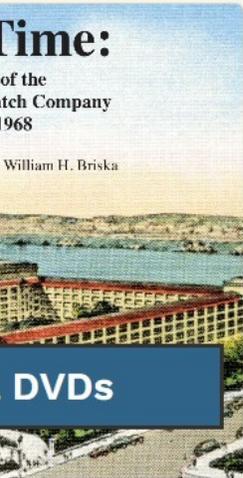
## *Fundraising*

**Enhance relationships with donors to fund Museum events and projects, and explore different revenue streams.**

**OUTREACH & VISIBILITY • INCREASE REVENUE • TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES**

<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHEN</b>
• Implement 4 major development campaigns.	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Annually
• Continue with 2-3 smaller fundraising programs.	PROGRAM	Annually
• Develop 1 or 2 new income generating partnerships.	BOARD	Annually
• Promote the concept of planned giving to the membership through <i>Crackerbarrel</i> and on website.	DIR/BOARD	Ongoing
• Write 2 grants to fund projects and/or collections.	DIR/STAFF	Annually

# Visit the Museum Store



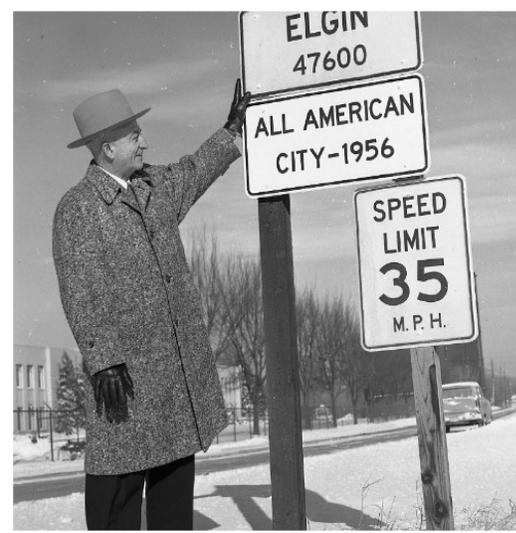
## Museum Store

Provide merchandise that tells the story of Elgin and engages the public.

**INCREASE REVENUE** • **TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES** • **EQUITABLE PRACTICE**

ACTIONS	WHO	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research 3 new store items that complement the collection and the exhibits.</li> </ul>	STAFF/BOARD	Annually
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Redesign store with new shelves and display spaces.*</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Q3 2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create and sell 2 new Elgin branded products.*</li> </ul>	STAFF/BOARD	Annually
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look for 1 new local event and/or marketing venue.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate the digital book market for 1 current book.*</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	2027

*\*Subject to Budgetary Considerations*



20th Century City

Elgin: A City Run on Time

Elgin Road Race

## Exhibits

Create dynamic history exhibits at Museum facilities.

- OUTREACH & VISIBILITY** • **PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS** • **ENHANCE COLLECTIONS**  
**TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES** • **EQUITABLE PRACTICE**

ACTIONS	WHO	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update first floor exhibits while planning for future renovations of the Elgin timeline: “The Development of the City from 1835-2000.”*</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	2028
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install 2 traveling exhibits at local museums and libraries.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	Annually
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit 2 local artists for changing exhibits at the Nancy Kimball House.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Annually
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open “Sports History” in the Temporary Exhibit Gallery.*</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Q1 2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include accessibility modifications in new exhibits.*</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update selected permanent and temporary exhibits.*</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	Annually
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use the outside log cabin installation 2 times a year.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	Annually

\*Subject to Budgetary Considerations



## *Interpretive Signage in the Community*

**Provide historical expertise for public signs.**

### **OUTREACH & VISIBILITY**

<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHEN</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partner with the Elgin Parks Department, Bluff City Cemetery, Elgin Heritage Commission, neighborhood groups, and private businesses to create and install signs that highlight local history.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR/BOARD	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain and replace 2 existing signs.*</li> </ul>	DIR/BOARD	2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install 3 new signs in areas such as Festival Park, River Trail Parkway, Lords Park, Foundry Park, Walton Island, Wing Park, Pioneer Memorial and Elgin’s Far West Areas.</li> </ul>	STAFF/DIR	2029

*\*Subject to Budgetary Considerations*



## *Hispanic Heritage Project*

**Continue partnering with the Elgin Hispanic community and project advisory group to cultivate relationships with the Hispanic community.**

- OUTREACH & VISIBILITY** • **PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS** • **ENHANCE COLLECTIONS**  
**TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES** • **EQUITABLE PRACTICE**

<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHEN</b>
• Research local Hispanic history creating exhibit text.	STAFF/DIR	Q1/2026
• Fundraise for sponsors and donors to fund the project.	DIR/BOARD	2026
• Create a documentary film and traveling exhibit: <i>Hispanic Heritage Project: Celebrating Culture and Community</i> .*	DIR/BOARD	Q2/2026
• Collect artifacts and archival materials illustrating the Elgin area Latino culture.	STAFF/DIR	Annually

\*Subject to Budgetary Considerations



## *Succession Planning*

**Plan for upcoming changes in volunteer and professional staffing.**

### PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS • EQUITABLE PRACTICE

ACTIONS	WHO	WHEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for the transition of Board leadership.</li> </ul>	NOMINATING	Q1/2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan for the transition of staff positions.</li> </ul>	HR COMM	Q1/2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review organizational chart for possible re-structure.</li> </ul>	DIR/BOARD	Q1/2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update job descriptions for board and staff.</li> </ul>	HR COMM	Q1/2026



## *Board of Directors and Staff*

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**Vice President** – John Devine

**Secretary** – Christen Sundquist

**Corresponding Secretary** – Tricia Grosser

**Treasurer** – Bill Briska

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**Museum Educator** – [Rebecca Miller](#)

**Media Coordinator** – [Trish LaFleur](#)

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