



The
Robert
McLaughlin
Gallery



Art, Community, and Care

The Robert McLaughlin Gallery Strategic Plan 2025-2027

Submitted to The Robert McLaughlin Gallery by Sara Udow and Seema Jethalal (Extra Cardamom Consulting).

Table of Contents

- 3 Land Acknowledgement**
- 5 Context**
- 8 Our Process**
- 10 What We Heard / What You Told Us**
- 12 Vision & Mission**
- 13 Values**
- 15 Pillar 1: Deepen Supports for Artists**
- 16 Pillar 2: Nurture Relationships**
- 17 Pillar 3: Be a Welcoming Space**
- 18 Pillar 4: Amplify Awareness and Reach**
- 19 Pillar 5: Strengthen Sustainability and Responsiveness**
- 20 Next Steps**

Land Acknowledgement



The Robert McLaughlin Gallery is in the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation. This land has been the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg and was stewarded by various communities belonging to the Haudenosaunee and Wendat confederacies. It is covered under the Williams Treaties and the Dish with One Spoon Wampum.

This area continues to be home to many Indigenous people from across Mishiike Minisi. We recognize the sovereignty of all Indigenous nations and acknowledge the cultural history of this place and its people.

We have a collective responsibility to protect and nurture the land. We recognize the continuing impacts of colonialism and have a responsibility to redress the ways it has helped shape our organization. We work to address structural inequities and amplify Indigenous voices in the gallery.

AT A GLANCE

Vision

Art cultivates caring communities.

Mission

We build relationships with diverse artists and communities to present collections, exhibitions, and programs.

Values

Care Accessibility
 Artists Collaboration
 Equity Accountability

Goals

- | | | |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Pillar 1 | Deepen Supports for artists | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen connections and care for RMG artists • Centre and amplify equity-deserving voices in planning, programs and collections |
| Pillar 2 | Nurture Relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepen our understanding of both current communities and communities not yet engaged. • Foster meaningful relationships with local organizations in Oshawa and Durham Region, including Indigenous communities and groups. • Strengthen relationships with existing supporters and build relationships with new donors. |
| Pillar 3 | Be a welcoming space | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimize our space for community gathering. • Continue meaningful equity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives policies, planning, and operations. • Enhance online and in-person visitor experiences and engagement. |
| Pillar 4 | Amplify Awareness and Reach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with partners to attract new audiences and increase impact. • Tell stories about the RMG to reach broad audiences. • Assess programming intended to attract large audiences. |
| Pillar 5 | Strengthen Sustainability and Responsiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguard and deepen the culture of care. • Integrate environmental sustainability into all aspects of programming and operations. • Ensure financial resilience. |

Context



The RMG has built great momentum over the past three years. Our last strategic plan (Connected, Creative and Caring 2022-2024) set us in motion, expanding how we support artists, build genuine community bonds, and reimagine what a gallery can be. We're ready to continue building on those efforts while finding ways to better serve our community - including those who have not yet walked through our doors.

What We're Proud Of

The RMG has been a space for community, creativity, and care. We are proud of the incredible care and energy RMG staff have invested into our gallery, team, and community. Some of the many wins over the past three years include building and launching the RMG's Backyard for outdoor events and gatherings; acquiring new artworks - particularly by Indigenous women-identified artists, Black artists, and Asian artists; advocating for and receiving a 15% operating funding increase from the City of Oshawa; deepening relationships with community partners; and allocating 75% of the gallery space to Indigenous artists in 2023-2024. We also balanced the budget and retired a long-standing deficit; developed two staff caucuses to create space for conversations about important issues; and embraced team values of care, accountability, and belonging.

Challenges We Face and the Opportunities They Present

There have been significant shifts since the development of the last strategic plan. The lingering effects of COVID-19 have transformed how people engage with cultural spaces. Durham Region continues to grow and evolve, offering opportunities to expand our audience. Climate change is an undeniable urgent priority, and we can do our small part to bring positive changes. Global, national, and local conflicts affect our staff, artists, and communities in ways that require space, thoughtfulness, and care. Emerging technologies affect artistic practices, audience experiences, and the ways we work, providing opportunities to engage in new ways, bring efficiencies to processes, and support artistic exploration. Rising affordability concerns, including the closure of community gathering spaces, have reinforced the vital role of public institutions. Those on the margins are facing acute struggles, and free admission and programs can provide much needed access. In short, cultural institutions like ours matter more than ever.



The Road Ahead

This new strategic plan - Art, Community, and Care - will chart our course for the next three years, building on our team's great work while acknowledging the opportunities to grow. Internally, the organization prioritizes community care - a practice we trust will remain in the long run. We will work to create a more sustainable, equitable, and welcoming gallery that serves as both a cultural anchor and an inviting space for the people of Durham region and beyond. The five pillars in this plan will help us stay focused on our vision that art creates caring communities and our dream of being a vital space for artistic experiences, cultural dialogue, and community connection for everyone.



“There are so many challenges right now, including a lot of austerity and funding, for people in the region. What is the role [of the RMG] in terms of revitalization, supporting people, hosting conversations, etc.? What’s the opportunity for the role the gallery to play in light of the current context and challenges in Durham region? Is it just a gallery to visit or does the institution have other purposes that it can play? I think it does.”

- Community Focus Group Participant

Our Process

The strategic planning process, led by Sara Udow and Seema Jethalal (Extra Cardamom Consulting), was an in-depth and collaborative 8-month process involving the staff and Board of Directors at the RMG, community partners from Durham region, as well as the general public. A working team of two staff and one board member was developed to delve deep into strategic questions and guide decision making. Through this process, we refined the vision, mission, and values and set new pillars (strategic priorities) and goals for the next three years.



An Overview of The Process...



1. Deep Learning and Ground Truthing

MAY - JUNE 2024

Kickoff, desk research, staff and board engagement (interviews & survey), Indigenous Cultural Workshop, public survey, project team regroup to review key insights)



2. Visioning and Priority Setting

JULY - AUGUST 2024

Board and staff retreat
July 29, 2024



3. Moving Forward

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2024

Drafting the strategic plan (Sept / Oct)

Final strategic plan (Oct / Nov)

Who we engaged

16

RMG staff participated in interviews, surveys and workshops

14

Board members participated in interviews, surveys and workshops

160

people responded to a public survey

11

people participated in a virtual community focus group

What We Heard / What You Told Us

Those who know the RMG appreciate its efforts to be a creative and welcoming community space - a place that fosters care, champions emerging and established artists, connects artists to community, and raises awareness about important issues and stories.

People consider the RMG staff friendly and accommodating; appreciate the sincere relationships the gallery nurtures with community groups; enjoy progressive and impactful gallery exhibitions as well as educational and inspiring events and programs; and love the new Backyard - a vital space for gathering.

***“The staff are so friendly,
and felt safe for me as a queer person
to engage with.”***

- Public Survey respondent



People we engaged also spoke about barriers the RMG continues to face, including awareness and visibility. Many described the RMG as a “well-kept secret” or “hidden gem.” Opportunities exist to reach broader - and particularly more equity-deserving - audiences through thoughtful partnerships and efforts to make the space even more welcoming and accessible. Suggestions include better signage, more seating, affordable event space rentals, programming to draw in new audiences, and off-site programming. We also heard that the RMG could benefit from deepening partnerships with local social service organizations and Indigenous groups, and from developing relationships with other communities underrepresented at the gallery.

***“What does art look like in 2024 and beyond, especially for Indigenous people?...
How can we bring the gallery into the reclamation piece? How can we make it
more interactive, sit in a circle to learn about the artwork?
Make it more approachable?”***

- Community Focus Group participant

Ultimately, community feedback affirmed the ongoing relevance of the RMG’s mission: to present collections, exhibitions, and programs through caring relationships in an inclusive and equitable environment. When asked to respond to the prompt below, these were some responses shared by staff and community members:

“I dream of a future where the RMG...”

“...is more well known”.

“... is a place where art is central to how we reach and build community”.

“...is a space that strengthens connection and understanding between people”.

“...draws the community together”.

Vision, Mission and Values



Vision

Art cultivates caring communities.

Mission

We build relationships with diverse artists and communities to present collections, exhibitions, and programs.

Values

Care

We believe well-being is vital and demonstrate care through compassion, kindness, and patience.

Artists

We centre artistic practices, perspectives, and voices.

Equity

We integrate anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices in all facets of the organization working towards systemic change.

Collaboration

We bring together multiple people and perspectives to learn, create, and connect with each other

Accessibility

We welcome everyone and find ways for all to participate.

Accountability

We take responsibility for our actions and communicate clearly, promoting safety and openness for all.

Strategic Pillars



PILLAR 1 Deepen Supports for Artists



Artists are the beating heart of our gallery and increasingly, they face mounting challenges in maintaining sustainable practices - from rising costs of living to limited exhibition opportunities and funding. We see the RMG as more than a space to display art; we are a creative community committed to supporting artists by providing meaningful opportunities, fair compensation, and genuine care. We intentionally prioritize underrepresented voices in our programming, acquisitions, and events to cultivate a more inclusive, relevant, and inspiring cultural landscape in Durham Region and within Canada's contemporary art scene.

We will...

- Strengthen connections and care for RMG artists.
- Centre and amplify equity-deserving voices in planning, programs, and collections.

This could look like...

- Providing better support for artist commissions.
- Organizing events to highlight and celebrate equity-deserving artists.
- Engaging artists at different stages of their career, from emerging to established.
- Developing clear guidelines for equitable collections management.
- Engaging artists early in the exhibition process.
- Improving interdepartmental collaboration as well as external partnerships for artistic programs.

PILLAR 2

Nurture Relationships



We believe that meaningful connections are the foundation of a thriving cultural institution. We are excited to deepen existing relationships with artists and local partners while collectively dreaming up long-term opportunities. We also recognize that our gallery must reach beyond our current audience to truly serve the people and artists of the Durham Region. By listening first and understanding the needs, interests, and barriers of those who have not yet ventured into the RMG, we can build new connections and expand our circle of friends. We also aim to broaden our network of supporters - from visitors to partners to donors - who share our vision for inclusive arts engagement, ensuring our gallery's community reflects our region and creates a more sustainable and vibrant cultural institution.

We will...

- Deepen our understanding of both current communities and communities not yet engaged.
- Foster meaningful relationships with local organizations in Oshawa and Durham Region, including Indigenous communities and groups.
- Strengthen relationships with existing supporters and build relationships with new donors.

This could look like...

- Conducting surveys to clearly understand audiences and visitors.
- Implementing evaluation practices to continuously gather, analyze, and integrate feedback from gallery patrons into planning and programming.
- Developing mutually beneficial, long-term partners for programming, outreach, and space.
- Engaging existing and potential donors, funders and supporters through regular invitations to openings, tours, and other events.
- Activating the Board of Directors as ambassadors to engage with and connect potential supporters.
- Sharing great work by other organizations on social media.

PILLAR 3

Be a Welcoming Space



We believe that galleries are more than spaces for art. We will foster a gathering place and cultural destination where everyone feels welcome. Through thoughtful layout and design of our interior and exterior spaces, inclusive programming and events, and a desire to create a welcoming and accessible space, the RMG will invite people from diverse backgrounds to explore, engage, and meaningfully connect. Our space should reflect the RMG's values and show everyone who enters our doors warmth, openness, and respect.

We will...

- Optimize our space for community gathering.
- Continue meaningful equity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives in policies, planning, and operations.
- Enhance online and in-person visitor experiences and engagement.

This could look like...

- Making the lobby a space for gathering.
- Increasing seating in the gallery.
- Enhancing the RMG's outdoor landscape.
- Increasing resources invested in exhibition openings and community events that engage new audiences.
- Engaging with equity-deserving communities to understand how to improve their experience at the RMG.
- Creating more opportunities for interaction with exhibitions, and new ways of engaging with art in more relaxed and inviting ways.
- Providing training and onboarding for any new Front of House staff to establish a warm and consistent approach.

PILLAR 4

Amplify Awareness and Reach



The RMG has a strong foundation for success - from thought-provoking exhibitions to joyful community events to meaningful relationships. Through strategic partnerships and authentic storytelling, we'll create new ways for people to discover and connect with art in their daily lives. We want the RMG to spark unexpected moments of delight across the Durham Region, meeting people where they are while inviting them into deeper relationships with art.

We will...

- Collaborate with partners to attract new audiences and increase impact.
- Tell stories about the RMG to reach broad audiences.
- Assess programming intended to attract large audiences.

This could look like...

- Collaborating closely with the arts and culture sector in Oshawa, Durham Region, and beyond.
- Exploring programming opportunities that extend beyond downtown Oshawa, including participation in regional events.
- Working closely with marketing teams at partner organizations to optimize efforts and maximize impact (ensuring clear timelines, expectations, etc.)
- Evaluating optimal use of marketing resources and approaches to storytelling.
- Evaluating existing events and programs in terms of audience impact and reach.
- Exploring how best to use the Backyard to welcome larger audiences.

PILLAR 5

Strengthen Sustainability and Responsiveness



We value both high-quality work and our collective well-being. By intentionally creating space for rest, reflection, and responsiveness, we can adapt to new opportunities while protecting our most valuable resource - our people. We aim to find a balance between careful planning and nimble responsiveness when opportunities emerge and community needs arise. True sustainability comes not only from balanced workloads and healthy boundaries, it also comes from responsible stewardship of all our resources - human, environmental, and financial. The RMG will evaluate the way we work, from materials used to climate-conscious policies and practices. None of this work is possible without a strong financial foundation and resilience which is central to our sustainability.

We will...

- Safeguard and deepen the culture of care.
- Integrate environmental sustainability into all aspects of programming and operations.
- Ensure financial resilience.

This could look like...

- Planning our deliverables at 80% of staff time to foster the ability to be responsive to community needs.
- Sourcing materials from sustainable suppliers.
- Replacing materials (e.g. vinyl) with eco-friendly alternatives.
- Working with the Canadian Conservation Institute on potential shifts and trends in environmental control management while retaining Category A status.
- Continuing to diversify ethical revenue streams.
- Developing a marketing and communications strategy to promote venue rentals and boost earned income.
- Increasing fundraising efforts from private donors and sponsors.
- Establishing an individual and major gift fundraising program.
- Developing strategic partnerships to share resources.

Next Steps

Based on this strategic plan, the RMG will develop an operational plan within its existing framework of setting Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) that support each pillar. OKRs are set quarterly within the staff team and are regularly assessed and reassessed. Larger projects are broken down into achievable outcomes.

During the first six months of this strategic plan, the RMG will prioritize:

- Evaluating current programming and visitor experience to better understand impact.
- Conducting research to deepen understanding of current audiences/ patrons as well as those not yet engaged in the RMG, particularly equity-deserving communities. This research will help inform decisions related to outreach, marketing, programming, facility layout, etc.
- Continuing to assess capacity, roles and responsibilities, and workload distribution as well as streamlining internal processes to improve staff capacity.
- Establishing an individual and major gift fundraising program.



The Robert McLaughlin Gallery

72 Queen St., Civic Centre
Oshawa, ON L1H 3Z3

info@rmg.on.ca
905-576-3000



The
Robert
McLaughlin
Gallery

rmg.on.ca