

# COUNCIL OF AMERICAN JEWISH MUSEUMS

## STRATEGIC PLAN

(Adopted by the Membership / January, 2004)

### CAJM Background and History

The Council of American Jewish Museums (CAJM) was initiated in 1976 at an informal gathering of seven Jewish-museum directors attending the annual meeting of the American Association of Museums (AAM), the professional association serving the spectrum of museum professionals throughout the United States. The seven directors, who represented The Jewish Museum and Yeshiva University Museum in New York, the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, the B'nai Brith Klutznick Museum in Washington, DC, the Spertus Museum in Chicago, the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles, and the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley, CA, recognized that their shared missions, curatorial concerns, and educational perspectives differed significantly from those of other AAM members and that their institutions could benefit from closer networking and resource-sharing.

Under the auspices of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture (NFJC), which provided administrative and fiscal support, the Council of American Jewish Museums was organized formally the following year, with a mission to “encourage, support and further the development of North American Jewish museums in collecting, preserving, studying and interpreting Jewish art and artifacts.” CAJM established standards of operation, began to convene annual conferences addressing field-wide issues, and commenced cooperative projects, such as a network of traveling exhibitions (JETS).

In subsequent years, the Jewish-museum field in America has grown and changed dramatically, both through the leadership of CAJM and as a result of changes within the greater museum world and within America’s Jewish community.

Within the *museum world*, new concepts of exhibition and cultural engagement have transformed these institutions into multi-faceted cultural centers that may feature interactive exhibitions and multi-media presentations, as well as lectures and performances that interpret collections or extend public outreach.

Within the *American Jewish community*, increased concern about Jewish identity-formation and Jewish education have focused attention on the Jewish museum as a central institution for promoting and sustaining Jewish culture. Museums appeal to all age groups. Jewish museums provide opportunities for direct encounters with Jewish art and artifacts; and they expose visitors and other museum participants (i.e., audiences at off-site programs and internet users) to countless aspects of Jewish culture and history.

The growth and expansion of the Council of American Jewish Museums parallels and reflects these changes. In keeping with trends, CAJM’s member museums now do much more than collect, preserve and exhibit art and artifacts. They are important cultural resources, centers of Jewish education and culture that serve both Jews and the broader population.

Through their exhibitions, publications, classes and public programs, the Jewish museums of North America reach more than one million individuals each year. They engage and enrich the work of Jewish scholars, curators, educators and communal workers. They also contribute significant cultural and financial resources to their surrounding communities.

### **CAJM Mission**

The Council of American Jewish Museum is committed to strengthening the Jewish museum field in North America. Through training of museum staff and volunteers, information exchange, and advocacy on behalf of Jewish museums, CAJM assists its institutional and individual members as they educate and inspire diverse audiences on all aspects of Jewish culture and history.

### **CAJM Goals**

1. To support its member institutions in their missions to collect, research, preserve, present and interpret Jewish art, history and culture.
2. To facilitate cooperative efforts and resource sharing among member museums.
3. To foster the professional growth of Jewish-museum workers, volunteers and lay leaders through conferences, workshops and publications.
4. To raise professional standards in the field by providing information and access to resources, and by encouraging Jewish museums to seek accreditation and comply with best practices.
5. To advocate for the interests of Jewish museums in North America through participation in the AAM Council of Affiliates, association with the National Foundation for Jewish Culture and other cultural agencies, and representation at international museum forums.
6. To expand the impact of Jewish museums through partnerships with other North American and international museums and museum alliances that engage in the study and presentation of the Jewish experience or whose missions are in other ways complementary to that of CAJM.

### **CAJM Membership**

Currently CAJM's membership is comprised of 80 museums (Institutional Members) in the United States and Canada, as well as dozens of Individual Members who are interested in supporting the work of these Jewish cultural centers.

*Institutional Members* include art and history museums, Jewish historic sites, historic and archival societies, Holocaust centers, synagogue museums, and galleries connected with Jewish community centers and universities. Eligible institutions are those with:

- A primary focus on Jewish art, history or culture;
- A governing Board of Directors;
- Paid or volunteer staff;

- A minimum of ten public (open) hours per week or regular public programming;
- Permanent and/or changing exhibitions open to the public.

*Individual Members* include Jewish museum staff members; docents; volunteers; Board members; collectors; professionals from non-CAJM museums; and independent curators, educators and scholars in North America.

An *Affiliate Membership* program is available to professional staff members and volunteers at Jewish museums and counterpart institutions in other regions of the world.

### **CAJM Governance**

CAJM is governed by a Steering Committee comprised of eight representatives from CAJM Institutional Members and one representative from its Individual membership. The Committee includes four officers (Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer) and five members-at-large, including the Immediate Past Chair. There are in addition three *ex officio* (non-voting) members: a newsletter editor designated by the Chair; a staff member of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture (NFJC), and an NFJC Board member.

Since its founding, CAJM has been administered by the NFJC, as part of its National Cultural Services agenda and under its 501(c) (3) status as a public foundation. The NFJC provides professional, lay and financial oversight, as well as part-time program staff to facilitate annual conference and newsletter production, administer Steering Committee meetings and communications, maintain membership information, prepare grant proposals, and coordinate joint projects with Jewish museums abroad.

### **CAJM Programs and Services**

As its membership has grown, CAJM has developed a range of programs and services with value for member institutions, other museums and the interested public:

1. **Annual Conference.** From the first meeting of the seven founding Jewish museum directors in 1976, the CAJM's Annual Conference has grown into a major three-day event, attended by more than 200 museum professionals and interested lay leaders. The conferences feature keynote addresses by major figures in the Jewish, museum or cultural world, panels and workshops on issues of professional concern, tracks for specialized interests, and networking opportunities.
2. **Newsletter.** CAJM's Newsletter is currently distributed to over 1,200 individuals and institutions around the world. It has become a significant forum for the exchange of information and ideas relating to Jewish museums and their collections.
3. **Database.** CAJM's comprehensive database provides up-to-date information on the collections, exhibition schedules, public programs, staffs, Boards and budgets of member museums and other Jewish cultural institutions in North America.
4. **Professional networks.** Responding to demand from the field, CAJM has organized specialized networks for professionals within the Jewish museum community. The Educators Forum has held a number of mini-conferences and developed mechanisms for

sharing curricular materials. An incipient Curators Circle has dealt with issues of accessioning and deaccessioning, as well as the provenance of art and artifacts recovered after the Holocaust.

5. **Representation at AAM.** CAJM is a member in good standing of the Council of Affiliates of the AAM and an active member of AAM's Council of Affiliates. CAJM representatives have frequently chaired the Council and have also served on the AAM Board of Trustees. Over the past two years, CAJM has organized prominent panels at AAM conferences, attended by over 1,000 people, on such topics as Jewish historic sites, the repatriation of Jewish cultural property, and museums that are also sacred spaces.
6. **Representation in European and Israeli Jewish museum networks.** In recent years, parallel Jewish-museum organizations have begun to develop in Europe and Israel. CAJM provides both a key link to and a resource for the community of Jewish museums abroad.
7. **Coordination of special projects.** CAJM has undertaken a number of special projects on behalf of the entire Jewish-museum field. A model program for circulating traveling exhibitions, the Jewish Exhibition Traveling Service (JETS), proved highly successful, although it was undercapitalized. A comprehensive Jewish Museum Docent Training Manual, and a 2004-05 Jewish Museum Calendar featuring art and artifacts from member institutions (in conjunction with *Celebrate 350: Jewish Life in America 1654-2004*), are currently under development.
8. **Web page.** As part of the NFJC site, the web page provides an online CAJM directory with highlights of upcoming programs, links to member museums' individual web sites, and the ability to register online for the annual conference and other CAJM special events.

### **CAJM's Agenda for the Future**

The Council of American Jewish Museums is now at a critical juncture. The importance of cultural institutions as sites for engagement with and formation of Jewish identity has become increasingly apparent; and there is an ever-greater need and demand for the services and resources that CAJM can provide. CAJM is now called upon to provide critical services in three areas:

- A. Services to CAJM's member institutions to help them do their work more effectively, more professionally, and with greater impact on their members and visitors.
- B. Services to the broader Jewish and general North American communities through the direct provision of resources, information services and educational experiences.
- C. Services on behalf of the organization's membership, with CAJM representing and advocating for Jewish museums – within the organized Jewish community, within the national arenas of the arts and humanities, and within the growing international community of Jewish museums, particularly in Israel and Europe.

#### A. Future Services to Members

- **Expanded Annual Conference.** As CAJM grows, the Annual Conference assumes even greater significance and value. CAJM's increasingly diverse institutional and professional membership demands special programming before, during and after the conference. With increasing numbers of participants from Israel and Europe, the conference has the potential to become the *international* forum for Jewish museums.
- **Pacesetter Newsletter.** As the major forum for the Jewish museum community, the newsletter should develop into a quarterly magazine with feature articles on issues affecting the field, reviews of exhibitions around the world, and analyses of demographic research and Judaica scholarship relevant to Jewish museums.
- **Formalized Professional Networks.** The Educators Forum and Curators Circle already have a large agenda of field-wide projects ready to be analyzed and implemented. Exhibition Designers, Shop Managers, Programmers, Marketing Directors and Development Officers have a similar need for professional networks. The work of all these member subsets can be facilitated through electronic listservs for ongoing connections and dialogue.
- **Peer-to-Peer Mentoring and Consultation.** To keep the Jewish museums healthy, it is essential to mentor younger (i.e., newer to the field) members and to provide consultation services to individual museums on various aspects of management, exhibition and resource acquisition. At the same time, the expanded membership base represents a highly experienced pool of mentors and consultants. Facilitating this interaction could have major impact on the field.
- **Job Bank for Jewish-Museum Professionals.** As a critical mass of institutions and professional opportunities has been reached within the Jewish-museum field, there is increasing need for recruitment, training and placement of specialized personnel.
- **Reciprocal Membership.** In an effort to promote a greater sense of our national – and, increasingly, international – Jewish-museum community, CAJM member institutions have begun exploring the logistical and financial feasibility of offering reciprocal privileges to members of their respective museums.
- **Joint Projects on National and Field-Wide Issues.** Short-term collaborative projects among member museums have benefited from CAJM coordination (e.g., the American Jewish Museum Calendar compiled as part of *Celebrate 350*). Other short- and long-term collaborations can be initiated, further reinforcing the idea of Jewish museums as vital keepers of community memory, assuming adequate central staff and funding
- **Jewish Museum Website** (see B. below)

#### B. Future Direct Services to the Community

- **Reinstituted JETS.** Although in part a service to CAJM's membership, JETS is even more a service to the greater Jewish and non-Jewish communities. By packaging, promoting, distributing and managing touring exhibitions on Jewish cultural and historical subjects, CAJM can make significant educational and cultural resources

available to thousands who would not otherwise encounter them. Smaller and lower-security exhibitions can be disseminated to schools, campuses, community centers and synagogues unable to mount large, museum-scale exhibitions.

- **Jewish Museum Website.** At present CAJM is part of the NFJC's multi-tiered website. The CAJM page provides information on upcoming exhibitions and programs at member museums, as well as web links to their sites. A fully functioning website should function as an information resource for the broad community, as well as a "community-of-practice," providing access to resources, on-line exhibitions, and discussion forums for professionals and interested publics.
- **Public Visibility.** By raising the profile of Jewish museums, CAJM can increase attendance and impact. It can encourage the reappraisal and collection of Jewish material culture, as well as disseminate the highly engaging, participatory educational techniques employed by museum educators, and can provide the social and historical context for understanding the larger Jewish community.

### C. Future Services on Behalf of Members

- **Expanded Advocacy Efforts.** As the field of Jewish museums expands and matures, there is a growing need for CAJM to articulate public positions on a variety of issues. Within the Jewish community, CAJM should advocate on behalf of Jewish museums, emphasizing their impact on Jewish identity, education and community relations. Within the larger community, CAJM should continue to adopt positions on such issues as Holocaust-era art restitution, the tax-deductibility of donated art works, and federal support of the arts and humanities.
- **New Research.** Given that the Jewish-museum arena encompasses so many institutions across such a broad geographical range, it is surprising that remarkably little self-study research has been conducted to date. A centralized, comparative research agenda should assess data of mutual interest (e.g., visitorship patterns), as well as evaluate, or develop techniques for evaluating, the effectiveness of Jewish-museum programs and the institutions' cultural and societal impact (e.g., the role museums play in Jewish-identity building, in expanding public knowledge about Jewish history and culture, and in stimulating local economic activity).
- **Promotion.** As the importance and impact of the Jewish-museum world is better understood, the more effective will be the work of individual museums, and the more extended will be their reach. Promotion in the form of coordinated publicity and educational-outreach campaigns, employing both print and electronic media, will help raise awareness of Jewish museums in general and will foster appreciation of local museums in particular.
- **International Initiatives and Links to Jewish Museums Abroad.** In recent years, the Jewish-museum field has witnessed a remarkable expansion throughout the world. In Europe, many Jewish museums and historic sites are being established or refurbished. In Israel, Jewish museums are actively exploring their relationship to Diaspora culture. CAJM has been a model and catalyst for these movements, and has served as official American connection to these institutions and alliances. As world Jewish culture

continues to evolve, CAJM can play an important role by nurturing these creative links among museum professionals, boards, artists and scholars worldwide.

## **NEXT STEPS FOR CAJM**

At this time there is both significant need and significant opportunity to expand CAJM services in all of these dimensions. To do so successfully, four steps are essential and should be undertaken expeditiously:

1. Restructure governance.
2. Hire staff.
3. Launch a marketing campaign.
4. Raise additional funds.

**Governance.** Given their common values, goals and constituencies, both CAJM and NFJC recognize the value and benefits of a continued connection. At the same time, both recognize the need for CAJM to develop more full-time and independent leadership and to move toward autonomy. Accordingly, the CAJM Steering Committee and NFJC Board of Directors jointly recommend that CAJM become an “affiliated organization” under the aegis of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture (NFJC). As such, CAJM would be separately incorporated, with its own Board of Directors, staff and budget; but, as specified in a written affiliation agreement between the two organizations, the NFJC would continue to provide umbrella not-for-profit status under its “group exemption,” as well as financial and legal accountability, and assistance with fund-raising and development.

**Staffing.** It has been recognized by both the NFJC and CAJM that full-time professional staff is needed to achieve the ambitious agenda projected for CAJM in the years ahead. The part-time administrative support that the NFJC can provide is insufficient for the expanded program services; and the CAJM Steering Committee – professional representatives from member museums – cannot devote the time needed to manage the growing organization on a volunteer basis. For an initial phase, minimal staff would consist of an Executive Director (full- or part-time, as resources permit) and part-time administrative assistant. Specific staff duties and responsibilities would include: budget preparation and oversight, fundraising, office management, membership services and recruitment, event coordination, program development, newsletter editing and production, and coordination of long-range strategic planning efforts.

**Marketing campaign.** Recognizing the many and varied institutions functioning as Jewish museums, CAJM should embark on an outreach campaign to engage, involve and secure membership affiliation from these potential constituents: allied institutions such as Jewish libraries, archives and galleries, secular museums with Judaica collections, Jewish Studies programs on universities campuses, Jewish communal professionals, and secular-museum professionals with interests in the role and work of Jewish museums.

**Raise additional funds.** In order to achieve these objectives, an additional \$100,000 to \$120,000 must be raised beyond what CAJM currently derives from membership dues, conference registrations and NFJC operating support. For the initial three-year phase, the members of CAJM will seek to raise at least \$50,000 from their respective communities (e.g., Board members and supporters). The remaining \$50,000-\$70,000 will be solicited from foundations and/or corporations through the NFJC’s Development Office. Going forward, it is expected that operating expenses will be covered by increased membership dues (institutional and individual)

and expanded conference registration and vendor revenues. CAJM will continue to solicit foundations and corporations to support specific programs and special initiatives.

**VOTE TO ADOPT:** A vote to adopt the Strategic Plan by CAJM's Membership at the 2004 Annual Conference in New York City will indicate the membership's endorsement of the goals and purposes outlined in the document and will authorize the Steering Committee to proceed with the four steps outlined above.

*The Strategic Plan for CAJM was drafted by Amy E. Waterman and Judith C. Siegel, with assistance from Richard Siegel, in consultation with the CAJM-NFJC Strategic Planning Task Force, chaired by NFJC Board member Diane Frankel, and the CAJM Steering Committee between September 2002 and December 2003.*