



FINDING TRUTH

2023-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN



the
Valentine

PURPOSE & DIRECTION

VISION

The vision of the Valentine is to be recognized as the premier source for experiencing Richmond's history – using its past to inform the present and to shape the future.

MISSION

The mission of the Valentine is to engage, educate, and challenge a diverse audience by collecting, preserving, and interpreting Richmond's history.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Being inclusive
- Meeting or exceeding accreditation standards
- Being proactive, outreaching, and customer-focused
- Acting as a good community partner
- Being creative and embracing an entrepreneurial spirit
- Being ethical
- Being accountable – measuring outcomes and impacts
- Being good stewards of entrusted resources including the organization, funds, and collections
- Acting in a fiscally responsible manner

INTRODUCTION

Dear Valentine Community,

Over the past 125 years, the Valentine has served as stewards of our city's stories while keeping an eye on the future. Strategic planning is an important process that allows us to move forward as an institution. Our new 2023-2028 strategic plan **Finding Truth** is our most comprehensive plan to date. Thanks to all of the stakeholders who participated in interviews, surveys and conversations. The research shows that in the next five years we will be able to broaden our stories, connect with more people and strengthen conversations.

A special thank you to the Valentine board, staff and volunteers for making our plan possible.



Neelan A. Markel
Chair, Strategic Planning
2022-2023



Tee Valentine
Chair, Board of Trustees



William J. Martin
Director

OUR PROCESS

Reflecting on our focus around active engagement of the community, the Valentine engaged many different voices in the development of our plan. Our consultants The Spark Mill guided more than 250 people in various modalities including informal surveys, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and retreat sessions. The culminating data brought forward six key questions for staff and board to explore:

- Is the Valentine's asset its spirit or the museum itself?
- How do we increase entry-points to our "stuff"?
- How does the museum organization need to evolve to remain relevant?
- How do we maximize our spaces?
- "They're not just a history museum, they're a looking forward museum"

The result of this work is **Finding Truth.**

STAKEHOLDER OVERVIEW

Data was gathered from approximately 250 people to inform the strategic planning process. This included 21 one-on-one interviews with members of the community and other industry leaders from around the country; engagement with the Board of Trustees, Board Immersion Trustees, and Valentine staff; as well as 178 responses to an informal survey of community members to learn more about barriers to access and reasons for visiting or not visiting the Valentine. The Spark Mill also reviewed internal documents, including previous strategic and financial documents, annual reports, and other important organizational data.

WHAT IS RICHMOND'S FUTURE?

The world is changing – so is the Richmond region. A lack of civil discourse, ongoing challenges to education, and the elevation of identity over building community have contributed to increased division in our community. And yet, an increasing willingness to explore and discuss challenging subjects that span our history is beginning to bring our community back together. The Valentine must be welcoming to all – where every Richmonder can see themselves reflected in the stories we share. Since its inception 125 years ago, the Valentine has focused on building a better future for our region through the history we preserve and active engagement in the community. We do this work while acknowledging that building trust is critical.

The Valentine is that place for us to gather in our common pursuit for understanding and truth. This truth is found in our research and collections, our exhibitions and programs, and in our commitment to honest dialogue and discovery.

Finding Truth amplifies the Valentine's role as a participant, interpreter and steward of the past and future of our community over five themes:

The Valentine will be truth-seekers.

The Valentine will be Richmond's heartbeat.

The Valentine will welcome all.

The Valentine will amplify our presence.

The Valentine will strengthen within.

The plan recognizes that while in-person museum experiences are deeply important, new opportunities for connection are found in the digital world and the whole city. It affirms the museum's commitment to downtown and the importance of place. It acknowledges that the Valentine must improve its public awareness and strengthen its internal culture and assets. Most significantly, it asserts that truthful storytelling is at the very core of what we do.



THE VALENTINE WILL BE TRUTH-SEEKERS.

The Valentine will be a source for truthful insight that guides challenging conversations.

Impact:

The community will experience the diverse stories of the region's past, leading to more tolerance and empathy, deeper dialogue and increased connection.

We will:

- Be trusted storytellers of the region's history.
- Tell new and untold stories that fully recognize the diverse history of the region.
- Develop transformative learning experiences that connect the past to the events of today and that invite challenging civic conversations.
- Be transparent about the museum's institutional history, practices and interpretative intentions.
- Recognize and memorialize the stories of enslaved people's contributions on our campus.



THE VALENTINE WILL BE RICHMOND'S HEARTBEAT.

The Valentine will be a compelling and welcoming anchor within downtown Richmond, attracting residents and tourists to explore the city's core.

Impact:

The community will see, hear and feel history everywhere in the city and will be inspired to partake in intentional exploration.

We will:

- Create a unified, welcoming visitor experience on our physical campuses.
- Promote visitation to the Court End neighborhood and surrounding areas.
- Expand beyond our walls to emphasize the power of historical places through programming that invites exploration of the city.
- Transform the Valentine First Freedom Center into the region's starting point to explore the values and impact of freedom of religion and conscience.



THE VALENTINE WILL WELCOME ALL.

The Valentine isn't just a place – it's an experience. We will connect diverse audiences to Richmond's past in ways that make everyone feel they belong.

Impact:

Community members will see themselves reflected in museum content in authentic, meaningful and relevant ways – sparking joy and wonder while discovering new concepts and stories.

We will:

- Foster opportunities to engage that lead to honest dialogue and consensus building.
- Leverage innovations in technology to reimagine how we share the region's history and expand our reach.
- Build accessibility into exhibitions and programming to acknowledge varied abilities and learning styles.
- Do community-centered collecting that represents the deeply diverse history of our region.



THE VALENTINE WILL AMPLIFY OUR PRESENCE.

The Valentine will invest in reimagining its communications to become widely recognized throughout the Richmond region in order to increase community access to our shared history.

Impact:

The community will experience increased outreach that raises awareness of how the region's history connects to and impacts Richmond today.

We will:

- Ensure more residents and visitors recognize the Valentine as the premier source for experiencing Richmond's history.
- Commit to long-term, substantial investment in general public awareness strategies.
- Understand our audiences more by undergoing comprehensive audience evaluation and prioritization.
- Ensure a consistent voice that reflects our spirit and supports our brand identity.
- Develop and implement a data collection system to more effectively understand the museum's impact on our community.
- Better leverage existing community and media partnerships and build new ones to allow for more co-branded experiences that expand our reach.



THE VALENTINE WILL STRENGTHEN WITHIN.

The Valentine will commit to building internal resources and being a welcoming place for all to work and grow professionally.

Impact:

The community will view the Valentine as an example of what is possible through a commitment to excellence and a dedication to learning.

We will:

- Create a culture of leadership through a robust succession plan.
- Provide ongoing opportunities to learn at every organizational level.
- Initiate a practice of self and organizational reflection through board and staff development.
- Strengthen alignment with philanthropic priorities to broaden community support.
- Embed diversity, opportunity and inclusiveness throughout the museum's internal culture.
- Invest in the preservation of our collection assets.

