

STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

Report on year one implementation
of the 2022-2025 strategic plan

INTRODUCTION

In January of 2022, NJCH's Board of Directors passed a new, three-year strategic plan. That plan was created on the basis of written and oral feedback from constituents and stakeholders around the state, meetings between our strategic planning consultants SKA + Associates and members of the Board of Directors, as well as many discussions among the staff. We think of it as the work of the New Jersey public humanities community and are grateful to have received so many helpful ideas. One year later, we are taking the opportunity here to reflect on the ways that the strategic plan guided our work in 2022 and to consider our successes and challenges thus far in meeting the Strategic Goals laid out within that document; we have focused on providing general summary and some highlights here, rather than a comprehensive inventory of our work, but we welcome questions from anyone who would like additional details.

We have structured our assessments of our work using the Implementation Steps laid out in the original Strategic Plan, signaling the ways in which those steps actually contributed to our three broad goals: to strengthen NJCH's role as a convener; to expand and diversify the humanities; and to advocate for the advancement of the humanities. We have tried to be clear, honest, and transparent about our work, and feel that we've made significant progress on achieving our strategic goals. For that we extend our gratitude to our program partners, our Board, our stakeholders, and our donors, all of whom make our work possible. We look forward to realizing some of these Implementation Steps more fully in 2023 and are eager to pursue the steps laid out in the Strategic Plan for Year Two.

If you have additional thoughts or suggestions about our strategic plan or our work more generally, please don't hesitate to let us know.

Sincerely,

Carin Berkowitz, Ph.D.
Executive Director



GOAL 1: STRENGTHEN NJCH'S ROLE AS A CONVENER.

Foster collaboration and resource sharing among humanities organizations to strengthen and advance common goals.

GOAL 2: EXPAND AND DIVERSIFY THE HUMANITIES.

Expand access and participation in humanities organizations and create more diverse organizations and leadership.

GOAL 3: ADVOCATE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE HUMANITIES.

Be the state's leading voice for raising public awareness and understanding of the humanities and build capacity for humanities organizations across the state.

YEAR 1 IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

PILOT EXPANDED PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY COLLEGES THROUGH MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET

We have successfully worked with community college faculty at RCBC, ACCC, Mercer, Brookdale, Union, Middlesex to ensure that they were supported in building and promoting programs associated with the MoMS Voices and Votes exhibit. In doing so, we learned a great deal about faculty needs, institutional culture at community colleges, and capacity building and coordination both within and among individual colleges across New Jersey. Project directors especially singled out for praise the exhibit's value in helping their institutions recognize "how resources and people could collaborate to make wonderful events on-campus possible," as well as the exhibit's role in generating new and creative opportunities for community engagement and sustainable partnerships between colleges and their communities. This landscape knowledge was integral in helping NJCH plan a community college convening, which is tentatively scheduled for Feb 2023 and is one of our Year 2 strategic plan goals, and in incorporating community college partners into our NJCIC grant and program plans for Informed NJ. It has been gratifying to see how these partnerships can help to expand and diversify humanities program participants across the state.

THIS WORK CONTRIBUTED TO THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIC GOAL(S):

- » GOAL I: STRENGTHEN NJCH'S ROLE AS A CONVENER
- » GOAL II: EXPAND AND DIVERSIFY THE HUMANITIES

IDENTIFY STRATEGIES TO EMPOWER BOARD OF DIRECTORS TO SERVE AS ADVOCATES FOR THE ORGANIZATION

We are beginning to lay groundwork for Board advocacy by creating some of the tools that Board members will need in order to reach out to lawmakers. At the end of 2022 NJCH started using Boardable, a Board management software. We regard Boardable as an ideal space to distribute materials and communicate our advocacy needs with the Board. Many of our new communications pieces and programs will provide the core material, with facts and figures, we want Board members to reference and advocate with. Though these are meaningful steps, the goal is still in its early stages, due in part to a vacancy in the Development role since early spring 2022. Over the next year, we anticipate hiring new staff, identifying key legislators, and engaging Board members who could best approach them, so stay tuned!

THIS WORK CONTRIBUTED TO THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIC GOAL(S):

- » GOAL III: ADVOCATE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE HUMANITIES

DEVELOP DEIA-INFORMED MODELS FOR CONVENING GRANTEE AND PROGRAM PARTNERS

Throughout summer 2022, NJCH conducted a search for an external DEIA consultant, with the aim of identifying someone who would help lead the staff in foundational exercises on internal DEIA culture and begin to evaluate how DEIA currently shapes NJCH's grantmaking and convening practices, and where improvements might be made. We ultimately selected Dr. Simran Jeet Singh, a nationally-known DEIA expert and Executive Director of the Religion & Society Program at the Aspen Institute. Dr. Singh conducted a half-day session with NJCH staff in fall 2022 to build trust, identify unconscious bias, and unpack assumptions and questions about identity among staff members. We expect to continue working with Dr. Singh through 2023 to translate those internal learnings into actionable suggestions for making our convenings more equitable and inclusive. We also plan to solicit counsel from members of NJCH's Board of Trustees who have proven expertise in operationalizing DEIA practices in the cultural sector.

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PILOT PUBLIC SCHOLARS PROJECT ALTERNATIVE FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND SCHOLARS

In 2022, NJCH offered a PSP-like speakers bureau through our Democracy Conversation Project, which offered 10 curated public humanities programs on democracy-related topics and resulted in programming at 16 different cultural organizations across the state—including 14 libraries. We also engaged our friends at libraries around NJ with our Storybox initiative, which to date has collected over 300 personal reflections on citizenship, democracy, and voting via 25 sites around the state and collaged these reflections into a compelling digital repository on NJCH's website. At this time, however, we have not yet identified a longer-term strategy for providing meaningful off-the-shelf humanities opportunities to libraries and scholars. We anticipate continuing to think about this goal in the new year, particularly as we look at thematic opportunities (such as environmental humanities or humanities and health) that might be timely and meaningful for New Jersey's residents.

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- » GOAL I: STRENGTHEN NJCH'S ROLE AS A CONVENER

DEVELOP MARKETING MATERIALS TO CONCISELY COMMUNICATE THE HUMANITIES, THEIR MISSION, DIVERSE HISTORY, & IMPACT

Thanks to the expertise of communications consultants at SKA + Associates, in 2022 the NJCH team made significant progress towards developing concise and compelling marketing materials to tell the story of our mission, programs, and impact. Our new materials include:

- Extensive print and digital communications resources for MoMS partner institutions, including professionally designed flyers, email templates, postcards, signs, and videos featuring local elected officials.
- Digital assets including a redesigned and more dynamic NJCH homepage, revamped program webpages, an events calendar, and interactive grantee maps
- Dedicated 50th anniversary collateral, including 50th anniversary programming flyers, gala print programs, an online gala photo gallery, and NJCH-themed gift bags that helped to celebrate the Katz Prize, the Council, and a beautiful book from RU Press that was created with NJCH support.
- Print collateral including an organizational one-pager and one-pagers for programs including Informed NJ, In the Weeds, and Community History
- Segmented emailings for partner organizations (a monthly Resource Roundup) and for individuals (a quarterly NJCH-focused newsletter).
- Opportunities for individuals to engage with playful and personal content through our Humanities Moment, Summer Playlist, and Grantee Spotlight features on our website.

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IDENTIFY WAYS TO BRING DIFFERENT VOICES INTO 50TH ANNIVERSARY PROGRAMMING

Events on women in politics, the kickoff for MoMS, and the Gala itself were the events that most usefully broadened our reach. In the case of the event on women in politics, we had a panel of impressive women working in the political arena discussing their experiences. The kickoff for MoMS at RCBC really allowed us to get to know the campus's student community, its trustees, and local Burlington County residents and politicians. The Gala itself featured distinguished poet Evie Shockley, whose poetic voice invokes and celebrates the richness of African American literary culture, as well as reflections from the winners of the inaugural Katz Prize for Excellence in Public Humanities, including Chief Vincent Mann, Turtle Clan Chief of the Ramapough Lunaape Nation.

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PURSUE HIGH VISIBILITY ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ORGANIZATION AND STAFF TO BROADEN NJCH'S REACH

- 50th Anniversary gala: NJCH's 50th anniversary gala program at Morven Museum and Gardens was headlined by Pulitzer Prize-nominated poet and critic Evie Shockley, Zora Neale Hurston Distinguished Professor of English at Rutgers University. Shockley's eminence both within the poetry community and beyond heightened the profile of our event, boosted attendance, and led to press coverage including a feature in Princeton's venerable Town Topics newspaper: <https://www.towntopics.com/wordpress/2022/09/07/poet-evie-shockley-will-headline-humanities-council-gala-at-morven/>
- MoMS: the Museum on Main Street tour afforded NJCH staff and partners a number of high-visibility opportunities to engage elected officials and advocate for the role of the humanities in civic life. These included a special exhibit tour with Representative Andy Kim at Rowan College at Burlington County; an audience with Governor Christine Todd Whitman at Mercer County Community College's exhibit launch; and a special event at MCCC honoring former NJ Assemblyman John Watson Coleman and Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman, among others.
- Informed NJ: NJCH continued to expand our reach in South Jersey communities with a fall mixer that brought together NJCH staff, community reporter trainees, and journalists and mediamakers from outlets such as the Bloomfield Info Project, *The Courier Post*, Free Press, *Front Runner NJ*, Newark News & Story Collaborative, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, South Jersey Information Equity Project, *Stories of Atlantic City*, and WHYY. NJCH staff member Valerie Popp also organized and co-presented a panel on NJCH's journalism and democracy work at the 2022 NJ Local News Summit, hosted by the Center for Cooperative Media.
- Community History: NJCH's signature Community History program was included in a recent piece from the State Federation of Humanities Councils that showcased programs around the United States that are helping to expand our society's understanding of history: <https://www.statehumanities.org/expanding-history-and-exploring-collective-identity/>. Gigi Naglak also presented about the program at several conferences, including the National Humanities Conference, and AASLH.
- Grants: NJCH Program Officer James Kirkland assumed a lead role in organizing programming for state humanities council staff at the November 2022 National Humanities Conference in Los Angeles. Among the activities he co-planned were a pre-conference day with cultural excursions around the city and a session for grants and program staff to meet, network, and discuss timely topics in the public humanities world.
- Leadership: Carin Berkowitz co-edited a special issue of *Daedalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, called *The Humanities in American Life: Transforming the Relationship with the Public*. In that issue, she and her coauthor Matthew Gibson described the important work that the state councils are doing in an article titled "Reframing the Public Humanities: The Tensions, Challenges & Potentials of a More Expansive Endeavor." As a result of that work, Carin was asked to moderate a March 2023 event at AAAS in Cambridge on the tenth anniversary of the Academy's *Heart of the Matter* report on the value of the humanities.

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DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A PLAN TO BROADEN REVENUE BASE

- NJCH had the opportunity to approach the question of how to pursue development opportunities anew, both with the 50th anniversary presenting a chance to reach out to different funding sources, and with the departure of its former Development and Communications Director. In doing so, NJCH worked with development consultant Michele Walls to create an initial list of possible sponsors for the gala and institutional funders for our work.
- We particularly focused on efforts to secure philanthropic funding for Informed NJ and CH and succeeded in securing a \$339,000 NJCIC grant. Our experience over the last year has helped us get a sense of the funding landscape in New Jersey, and we will continue to pursue corporate, foundation, and grant-based funding for our work.
- We also mailed our first large, personalized year-end appeal to everyone who had given in the last 10 years, as well as all gala attendees, scholars, and program partners. This sort of outreach will continue to create additional funding sources, and to remind our friends that we are a 501c3 nonprofit.

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DEFINE AND TRACK EVALUATION METRICS FOR BOTH NJCH'S WORK AND NJCH-FUNDED WORK

This is the goal that we found ourselves least able to complete during our last (and very busy year). But it is of critical importance to us and our work, so we will strive to achieve it in the next year. We did lay groundwork for better evaluation and reporting with a long and laborious implementation of Salesforce software, cleanup of old data, and creation of appropriate categories for tracking our work. Our NJCIC-funded community college journalism training program has positioned NJCH within funder and grantee networks that have considerable evaluation expertise; we are currently in conversations with those networks to determine how to track and communicate the impacts of this program, and we hope that these learnings will be applicable to other NJCH evaluation efforts. The Community History was developed with plans for short- and long-term assessment, and we are both following those plans and continuing to improve them. And our Grants program convened conversations with various grantees and evaluators as a precursor to further evaluation and to efforts to operationalize our commitment to DEIA. Finally, in 2023 we intend to dedicate one staff meeting each month to discussing evaluation efforts as an organization.

THIS WORK CONTRIBUTED TO THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIC GOAL(S):

- » GOAL I: STRENGTHEN NJCH'S ROLE AS A CONVENER

YEAR 2 IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Expand partnerships with community colleges and other statewide organizations that share similar missions to NJCH
- Build capacity of Board of Directors to serve as advocates for the organization
- Develop repository tool on website for internship, fellowship, and career opportunities in the humanities
- Expand to full implementation of a program that serves scholars and host sites around the state, including public libraries
- Expand, co-create, and formally curate resources of value to grant-seeking organizations
- Develop a series of NJCH signature events and programs annually and promote those, as well as non-NJCH public humanities events happening around the state
- Implement DEIA-informed models for convening grantee and program partners
- Support and model meaningful DEIA initiatives embedded in the humanities, especially those that engage underrepresented communities and perspectives
- Continue to refine evaluation metrics for both NJCH's work and NJCH-funded work