



THE AUTRY 40 STRATEGIC PLAN:
**MAKING THE AUTRY MATTER
MORE TO MORE PEOPLE**



The Autry Museum brings together the stories of all peoples of the American West, connecting the past with the present to inspire our shared future.

Covering the period from 2025-2028, this strategic plan leads the Autry Museum of the American West to its 40th birthday. Its focus is on the renovation and revitalization of the Autry’s Griffith Park campus. Through the reimagining of the lower-level history galleries and the spaces outside the museum that introduce visitors to the Autry, we will make the museum a more inviting and meaningful place, especially to people living in the greater Los Angeles area, rotate more of the Autry’s renowned collections onto public view, and better fulfill the museum’s uniquely broad and inclusive mission. In bringing collections, stories, and people together, the museum will help us see and see beyond our historical and current divisions. That pursuit of conciliation and mutual understanding inspires the work ahead, for nothing matters more to making a better shared future.



A LETTER FROM THE AUTRY’S BOARD CHAIR JODIE REA AND PRESIDENT AND CEO STEPHEN ARON:

From its establishment to the present, the Autry has remained, as its founders Jackie and Gene Autry intended, a museum devoted to the history and mythology of the American West. They understood, as we do, the enormous impact that the American West has had on American society and on cultures around the globe. With our mission statement as a guide, the Autry at 40 will encourage greater recognition of our entangled histories and deeper appreciation for southern California and the West as they were, as they are, and, most important, as they might be.

A lot has changed about the Autry and the American West since the museum first welcomed the public in 1988. Shifting interpretations of western history resulted in significant revisions to exhibitions and programs that brought forward the Autry’s emphasis first on the multicultural and then on the intercultural dimensions of the West’s past and present. The merger with the Southwest Museum and the efforts to safeguard its collections led the Autry to build a 100,000 square foot Resources Center (RC) in Burbank. Its opening in 2022 stands as the milestone achievement of the current strategic plan and the foundation for the next evolution of the Autry Museum; the operations at the RC and the implementation of a new Native Collections policy make possible much of what “The Autry 40” plan envisions happening at the Griffith Park campus in the next few years.

Still, the devotion of financial and human resources to the construction of the Burbank facility and the move of collections to that site meant the Autry’s Griffith Park campus changed less than it should have. The museum’s infrastructure and several of its interpretive spaces have grown more outdated. Aging and failing lighting and climate control systems demand replacement; they jeopardize the safety of collections on display and (literally) dim the experience of visitors. So, too, many of the core history galleries on the lower level of the Autry have not been reimagined since their original staging by Disney’s Imagineers.

Between 2025 and 2028, “The Autry 40” plan shifts the focus back to the museum in Griffith Park and to the visitors there. We will embrace the challenge of long overdue repairs to update the areas that introduce the public to the Autry and the history galleries on the lower level. Heeding the Autry’s mission statement, we will attend to what it means to bring together the stories of all people, to connect the past with the present, and, above all, to inspire our shared future as we carry out these projects.

We will, as well, aspire to better connect the Autry to today’s audiences and to southern Californians, who make up most of our visitors and members (and potential visitors and members). To enhance the experiences of all visitors, we will invest in amenities and employ appropriate technologies as we redesign introductory spaces and history galleries. Contrary to the understandings of most Los Angelenos, who now see the American West as something apart from southern California, as being “out there and back then,” we view the West from Los Angeles as being both here and now. In reframing our approach to the American West to give primacy to “the views from here,” we will illuminate the ties that bind local and regional histories and uncover stories from greater Los Angeles that exemplify, exaggerate, and anticipate developments across the American West.

The ambitions set forth in “The Autry 40” plan are considerable, as are the costs to realize them. Fortunately, the funding for the infrastructure repairs has been committed. Still needed is to raise the money to implement the renewal of introductory spaces and lower-level galleries and then to sustain a higher level of rotation and operations. For this, increasing the Autry’s annual budget accounts for the lion’s share of costs. That will augment the capacity of the Autry staff, whose charge will be to incorporate these goals into an accompanying workplan that they will shape and that will in turn shape their decisions and schedules in the years covered by “The Autry 40” plan.

As we look ahead to the Autry’s 40th birthday, we draw proudly on the work and wisdom that has shaped this museum from its founding. At the same time, as a museum that explores and learns from the history of the American West, we worry about a future in which our differences overwhelm us. That makes it more imperative for the Autry to bring collections, stories, and people together to inspire us to come together.

Jodie Rea

Jodie Rea
Chair, Board of Trustees

Stephen Aron

Stephen Aron
*Calvin and Marilyn Gross
Director and President and CEO*

Goal 1: Make a Better First Impression



Use exterior and arrival spaces to pique visitors' curiosity and provide a better orientation to the power of our collections and the mandates of our mission.

Objectives:

1. Complete infrastructure repairs to the roof, plaza, and lobby.
2. Change the interpretive face the Autry presents in the areas the public initially encounters the museum (the area around the south and west exterior, the tunnel, the plaza, the tower) through outdoor sculpture, artistic installations, enticing graphics, and digital messaging.
3. Redesign the museum plaza and lobby with updated furnishings, lighting, graphics, and wayfinding aids to create a more welcoming experience for visitors while maintaining the plaza's function as an adaptable, multi-purpose space.

Goal 2: Make the Autry a Place to Be and Stay



Ensure that the quality of visitors' experiences is on par with the quality of our collections by investing in physical spaces that facilitate people coming more often and that encourage their lingering and learning from one another.

Objectives:

1. Complete infrastructure repairs to the theater.
2. Complete lighting upgrades to Heritage Court.
3. Build operational capacity to ensure the regular rotation of multiple showcase spaces and recurring programs.
4. Improve experiences across the whole of a visit through investments in amenities, dining, and design that encourages people to congregate and converse.
5. Further enhance the appeal of the Autry to families and children through the development of additional family-friendly areas and recurring activities.
6. Make the Autry accessible and welcoming to all visitors, employing physical aids that reduce barriers to participation and programs that support meaningful engagement.



Goal 3: Reframe the Autry's Approach to the American West



Direct programming and rotating exhibitions to reveal the links between Los Angeles and the wider West, opening our collections to conversations about the opportunities and obstacles that have shaped diverse histories and that can inform the possibility of a better shared future.

Objectives:

1. Open the following exhibitions: "Black Cowboys" in 2025; "Life, Liberty, and Los Angeles" in 2026 to coincide with the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence; "California Treaties" in 2027; "Native Skate" in 2027-2028 to coincide with the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles; "Native Californians" in 2029.
2. Expand upon practices developed with Native communities to consult and collaborate with other communities in southern California in the development of public programs and rotating exhibits that reveal the multifaceted views and voices from here.
3. Incorporate into exhibition and program review a process that attends to the three elements of the mission statement: to bring together the stories of the peoples of the American West in intercultural presentations; make explicit connections between the past and the present; and tackle the challenge of what it means to inspire our shared future.



IMAGES THIS PAGE (TOP TO BOTTOM): "HECTOR BAZY" IS: COURTESY ANACOSTIA COMMUNITY MUSEUM, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION; SEE LEE, HONG STORY QUILT DOCUMENTING HER FLIGHT FROM LAOS TO REFUGEE CAMPS IN THAILAND AND ARRIVAL IN LONG BEACH IN 1979; 91.42.1; NATIVE YOUTH SKATEBOARDING PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOE D. HORSE CAPTURE; BASKET, LINDA AGUILAR (CHUMASH), 2013.2013.271; OUT OF SITE OPENING RECEPTION PHOTOGRAPHED BY GRANT TERZAKIS

IMAGES OPPOSITE PAGE (TOP TO BOTTOM): OUT OF SITE OPENING RECEPTION PHOTOGRAPHED BY GRANT TERZAKIS; IMAGINED WESTS OPENING RECEPTION PHOTOGRAPHED BY GRANT TERZAKIS; SADDLE STORAGE ROOM AT THE AUTRY RESOURCES CENTER; CURATORIAL ADVISORS FOR CREATIVE CONTINUITIES: FAMILY, PRIDE, AND COMMUNITY IN NATIVE ART; LEFT TO RIGHT: BROCADE STOPS BLACK EAGLE (CROW), JOHN PEPION (BLACKFEET) JESSA RAE GROWING THUNDER (NAKODA)

Goal 4: Goal 4: Reimagine the Lower-Level History Galleries



Better align the lower-level history galleries with the Autry's mission statement, creating nimble spaces within them for rotating shows and in-gallery programs that spotlight collections and address timely issues.

Objectives:

1. Complete infrastructure repairs to the lower-level history galleries.
2. Reinterpret lower-level history galleries, adhering to the mission statement, attending to "the Views from Here" bringing the Autry's historic collections into dialog with contemporary pieces and issues, and prioritizing the display of Autry collections.
3. Design these reimagined galleries with 500 to 1,000 square foot small changing showcase spaces within them while also allocating space for in-gallery programs and incorporating interactive technologies to enhance interpretation.
4. Begin to reinstall the reimagined galleries.



Acknowledgments: “The Autry 40” plan emerged from discussions with the Autry’s senior staff, members of its board of trustees, and leaders of museums and foundations. The deliberations of the Strategic Planning Taskforce, which consisted of Stephen Aron, Dean Beresford, David Cartwright, Carole Goldberg, Robyn Hetrick, LaLena Lewark, and Jodie Rea, refined and confined the objectives that define this plan. There are many things not delineated here that have been and will continue to be essential to the work of the Autry. In addition, our new to-do list for 2025-2028 could easily have been much longer. But recognizing that good plans demand strategic choices, we have crafted this one to emphasize what can be achieved to make the Autry matter more to more people in the next few years.

**AUTRY
MUSEUM
OF THE AMERICAN WEST**