

STRATEGIC PLAN 2025 – 2030

SAVE ELLIS ISLAND

REIMAGINING THE SOUTH SIDE



COVER IMAGE

A black and white photograph of a dilapidated interior hallway. The walls are heavily peeling, revealing a rough, textured surface underneath. Large, multi-paned windows line the right side of the hallway, letting in bright light that creates strong shadows on the floor. The floor appears to be made of concrete or stone, with some debris scattered on it. The overall atmosphere is one of neglect and decay.

MARGARET MCLEOD SELLERS
(SEPTEMBER 26, 1928 - JULY 8, 2021)

FEBRUARY 26, 1930 MY MOTHER MARGARET MCLEOD SELLERS, AT 17 MONTHS OLD, ARRIVED AT ELLIS ISLAND. MY MOTHER, KNOWN TO MY SISTER AND ME AS "MUZ MUZ", SELDOM SHARED MUCH ABOUT OUR FAMILY'S IMMIGRATION STORY. HOWEVER, I CAN STILL HEAR HER SINGING SCOTTISH LULLABIES TO ME.

I WAS SO PROUD TO TAKE HER TO ELLIS ISLAND TO HAVE HER PICTURE TAKEN IN 2018 BY INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED PHOTOGRAPHER JOE MCNALLY. IT MEANT SO MUCH TO HER. THE IMMIGRATION IDENTIFICATION CARD THAT SHE IS HOLDING IN THE PHOTOS IS STILL PRISTINE. THAT DOCUMENT WAS SO MUCH A PART OF HER FAMILY'S STORY SHE KEPT IT IN A SPECIAL FOLDER WITH ALL HER IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS.

MARGARET (MAGGI) SELLERS

SAVE ELLIS ISLAND

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INTRODUCTION

REIMAGINING THE SOUTH SIDE

The background image shows the interior of a historic building, likely on Ellis Island. The walls are made of light-colored, peeling plaster or concrete. There are three large, arched windows. The window on the right is the largest and shows a clear view of the Statue of Liberty and the water. The window on the left is smaller and also shows the water. The floor is made of dark, weathered wooden planks. A white text box is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

The South Side of Ellis Island provides unique opportunities to raise awareness and inspire action for generations of Americans on key issues including immigration, public health, and climate change. In partnership with the National Park Service, Save Ellis Island can enhance the enjoyment, inspiration, education, and preservation value of the South Side by unleashing its potential.

A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

We believe partnerships that increase public access are the best path forward to ensure Ellis Island’s South Side grounds are preserved and enjoyed for generations to come.

Ellis Island occupies a physical and emotional location no other place can match. It is the center of past global immigration in the harbor of one of the world’s most iconic and visited metropolitan areas.

Together with our partners at the National Park Service, Save Ellis Island helps protect the historic structures on the South Side of the island. It’s home to an ahead-of-its-time hospital complex where America’s modern-day public health system began. While the Statue of Liberty and the Immigration Museum welcome 3.8 million visitors every year, the South Side of Ellis Island remains largely unknown to the public—and so does its story.

Without significant investment in this historic site, a critical piece of U.S. history may be lost forever. We strongly believe that a reinvigorated South Side campus, one that is both well used and beloved by surrounding communities, will be key to preserving America’s story as a leader at the center of global migration and public health.

Save Ellis Island sees an incredible opportunity to invest in the South Side’s grounds and infrastructure to create programmable

spaces—artist studios, conference and meeting rooms, outdoor recreation, festivals, and dining. These bring life to this side of the island. Investments from new partners, leases, and small businesses on the site can bring both renewed interest and long-term financial sustainability to a portion of the island that has fallen into disrepair. We envision a reinvigorated South Side that is both welcoming and informative, a hub for learning, reflection, and intellectual exchange.

We must act at once in collaboration with partners to tell the broader story of our island while also joining a national narrative around healthcare that leverages the South Side’s power and impact.

Investing in the South Side hospital complex will keep the shared history of immigration and public health alive, bolster a sense of global citizenship, and inspire compassionate care for one another. We invite you to join us in preserving our history in service of a better future.

Janis De Luce Calella
President and CEO

THE SOUTH SIDE

ELLIS ISLAND'S OPPORTUNITY

Audience

The South Side captures only a fraction of the audience—around 30,000 annual visitors—of the 3.8 million who passed by the island in 2023. By developing and promoting this area, there is a tremendous opportunity to engage those visitors and millions more.

Green Space

The South Side features an expansive quad with stunning views of the Manhattan skyline and the Statue of Liberty. This 14-acre green space is underutilized and could become an inspiring area for reflection, respite, education, and community gatherings.





Storytelling

Ellis Island is the most renowned and recognizable location in the United States and has a public health story to tell. The South Side, which includes the hospital complex where countless immigrants were treated, is a compelling site to explore the history of public health in America and its evolution over time.



Experiences

The state of decay on the South Side of Ellis Island provides a powerful, visceral experience offering a haunting yet enlightening glimpse into the past. Additionally, these structures stand as a stark reminder of the impact of climate change, especially considering the island's vulnerability to rising sea levels.

OUR NEW MISSION AND VISION

Save Ellis Island (SEI) champions Ellis Island's South Side, a thought-provoking environment that celebrates American innovation and fosters appreciation for the intertwined history of immigration and medical care.

In service of our renewed vision for the South Side, SEI has authored new mission and vision statements that link two vital stories—immigration and healthcare—as the connective tissue for everything we do.

MISSION

Save Ellis Island works to preserve and restore the historic hospital complex on Ellis Island's South Side. We educate the public, celebrate the immigrant journey, and safeguard this national treasure for future generations.

A revitalized South Side will catalyze reflection on immigration, personal identity, and health, encouraging a deep connection to the stories, people, and places that define our shared history. Through dynamic dialogue and exchange of ideas, Save Ellis Island will foster a greater understanding of what it means to be a responsible and compassionate member of the global community.



VISION

Our Ellis Island stories inspire future humanitarians who forge innovative paths for the future of immigration and human health.

We envision a transformative journey that inspires visitors to become better local and global citizens. As we pave the way for a more compassionate and interconnected future, we inspire empathy that extends beyond each visit, sparking thoughtfulness and a commitment to better citizenship long after leaving Ellis Island.



OUR STRATEGY

The Next Five Years and Beyond

To meet our new mission and vision, we are taking action to evolve our value proposition in the coming years, increasing our educational, recreational, inspirational, and preservation impacts on the island and nationwide.



Short Term (1-3 years)

EXPAND ACCESS

Strategy: Expand access to the South Side's grounds with compelling programming that engages the large audience that already ventures to Ellis Island each day.

Outcomes: Grow the visibility of our work and better engage a broad audience in our current programming and available open space to grow a strong base of support.

Medium Term (1-5 years)

AMPLIFY THE STORY

Strategy: Complete Ellis Island's story and add to its national and global significance by elevating the site's key themes: public health, healthcare, and innovation.

Outcomes: Differentiate our work and better engage a targeted audience in current and future programming and available space, deepening support.

Long Term (5 years and beyond)

RESTORE AND REPURPOSE

Strategy: Leverage new and creative partnerships to selectively restore and repurpose buildings, allowing for multi-use, contemporary, entertaining, and artistic experiences that further Ellis Island's enduring message of the importance of immigrants in America.

Outcomes: Increase long-term preservation and financial sustainability of the site, laying the groundwork to engage a broader future audience in not-yet-feasible programming and outdoor space.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These approaches will guide us to address immediate and long-term needs on the South Side, to ensure that SEI, in partnership with NPS, can educate and engage the public on key contemporary topics, maintain important historical assets, and grow its visibility to build support.

Strategic Partnership. Open, creative collaboration and partnership among diverse constituents and local, state, and national decision makers.

Community Voices. Engagement with key constituencies who can tell today's immigrant and public health stories and invest in tangible outcomes and impact.

Financial Sustainability. Organizational growth supported by deep, long-term investment from those inspired by our mission to develop our capacity and activate our space.

FOCUS AREAS

OUR PLAN IN ACTION

While we endeavor to accomplish much over the next five years, our activities will focus on three primary domains



Activate the South Side

Harness the imaginative power of South Side spaces and strengthen ties with the community to create and deliver innovative, inclusive, and engaging visitor experiences.

Improve Accessibility

Expand visitor access with sustained stabilization and improvement of South Side spaces, buildings, and facilities.

Grow Operational Capacity

Invest in organizational growth and development to meet new operational demands.

FOCUS AREA

ACTIVATE THE SOUTH SIDE

Goal 1:

Deepen and expand programs with significant educational and experiential value and leverage spaces for immersive and engaging experiences.

Objectives:

Develop programs and exhibits that continue the immigration and medical narrative, focusing on personal stories and addressing the intersection of immigration and public health.

Implement adaptive reuse strategies for underutilized spaces, transforming them into functional areas.

Activities:

Update the historic quad area to provide a welcoming recreational space that allows visitors to explore and understand the significance of the entire campus.

Rehabilitate specific buildings to serve as studios for artists and workshop spaces for preservation and trade school programs.

Goal 2:

Strengthen ties with the community and enhance outreach efforts to increase engagement and visitation.

Objectives:

Attract and involve diverse community groups through targeted programs and events that celebrate the rich diversity of the tri-state area to integrate current issues and diverse narratives into the Ellis Island experience.

Enhance the reach of programs and experiences by utilizing technology.

Activities:

Expand school group programming on and off the island, including increasing accessibility and partnership with New Jersey institutions.

Add visual and audio components across tours, programs, and spaces on the South Side.

Goal 3:

Grow partnerships that support programs and enrich visitor experiences.

Objectives:

Develop and implement collaborative interpretive projects that highlight the historical and cultural significance of Ellis Island and the Hospital Complex.

Expand and cultivate strategic partnerships to operate additional activities on the South Side.

Activities:

Work with public health departments, medical institutions, organizations, and companies on joint initiatives to provide public health education such as medical lecture series and health and wellness workshops.



FOCUS AREA

IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY



Goal 1:

Prioritize and implement capital improvement and maintenance projects that enhance the visitor experience.

Objectives:

Implement high-visibility projects to demonstrate success and build a model for long-term funding of the South Side.

Develop and implement a comprehensive facilities management plan to improve accessibility to the South Side.

Activities:

Upgrade essential services, build accommodations for people with disabilities, and partner with food and beverage concessionaires to provide a comfortable experience.





Goal 2:

Expand visitor access in a phased approach.

Objectives:

Design and implement a plan to provide self-guided options to interpret elements of the South Side.

Collaborate with other NPS partners to enhance the value of the South Side.

Activities:

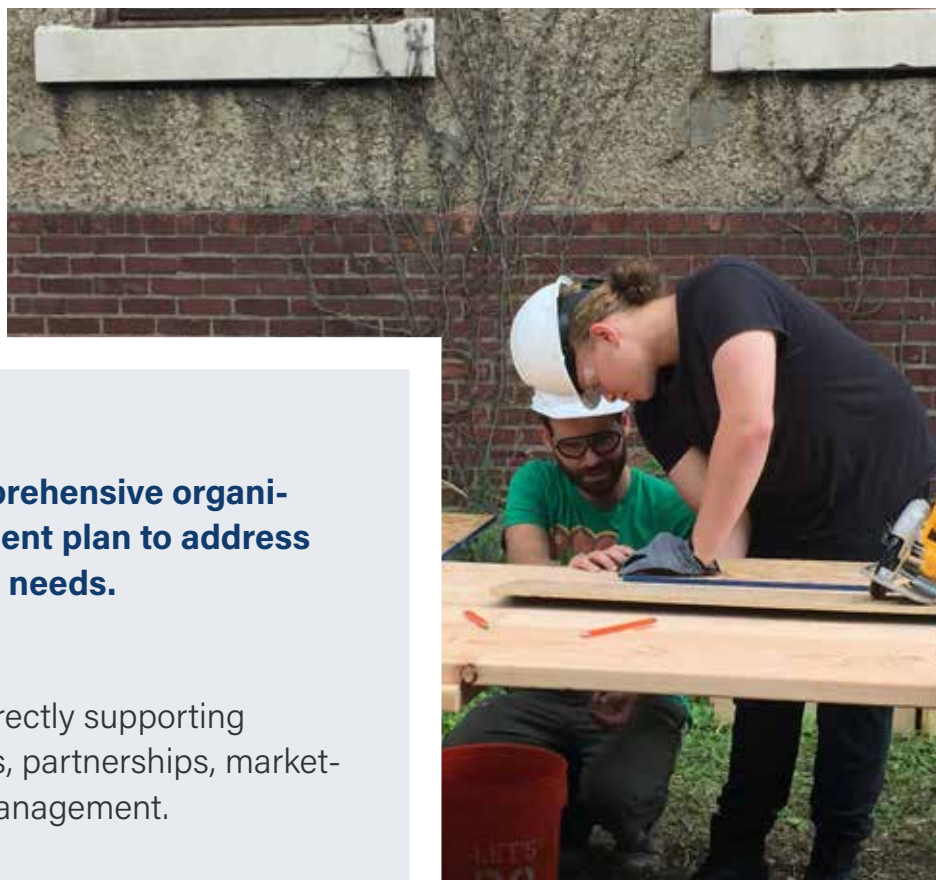
Build and implement a volunteer program to provide daytime interpretive support to the South Side.

Build a collaborative sales and marketing partnership with the Ellis Island ferry vendor.



FOCUS AREA

INCREASE OPERATIONAL CAPACITY



Goal 1:

Implement a comprehensive organizational development plan to address current and future needs.

Objectives:

Hire critical roles directly supporting expanded programs, partnerships, marketing, and facilities management.

Provide ongoing professional development opportunities to ensure staff are equipped to meet evolving operational demands.

Upgrade current IT infrastructure and administrative operations.

Activities:

Partner with educational institutions to provide professional development in gap areas.

Goal 2:

Develop a sustainable funding model to support the organization through earned and contributed income.

Objectives:

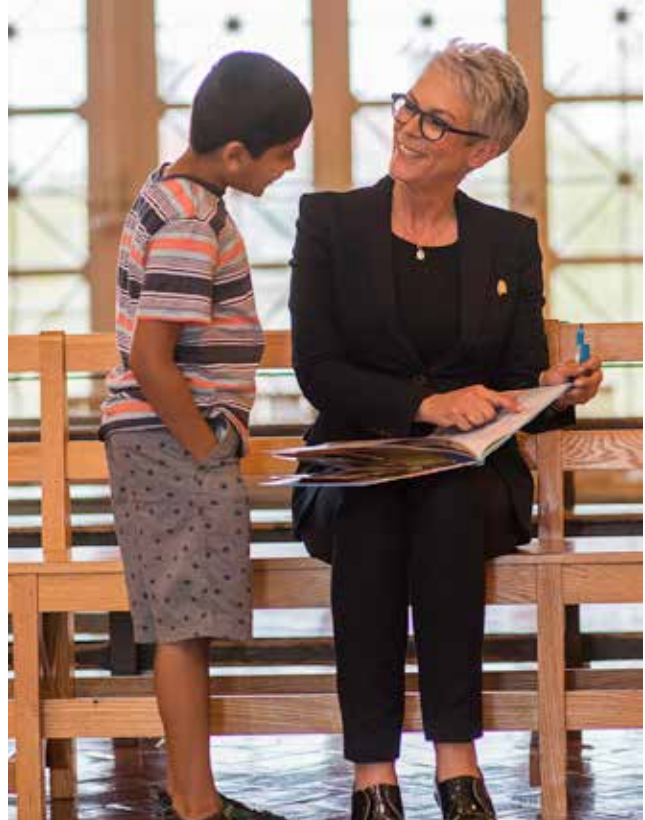
Diversify revenue between earned income from programs, institutional giving, and individual giving.

Grow governance systems and structures and recruit experienced board and advisory council members to enhance financial planning and its connection to high-level strategy and oversight.

Activities:

Recruit strong, connected, and engaged board members who can build connections to community, civic and corporate leaders, the healthcare industry, and historic preservation.

Identify and build relationships with key partners to advance SEI's mission and provide education on the value and needs of Ellis Island.



OUR REALIZED VISION

Examples of an Activated South Side

We are excited to introduce innovative programs over the next five years and beyond designed to deepen public engagement, enhance educational opportunities, and expand the cultural offerings available on the island.

The activities below illustrate the long-term programmatic vision emerging from our new strategic direction:

Laundry and Hospital Outbuilding Exhibit

This new exhibit would complete the narrative of Ellis Island's hospitals by showcasing the laundry and hospital outbuildings, emphasizing the critical role of the U.S. Public Health Service in the care of immigrants. The exhibit would provide visitors with a more comprehensive understanding of the hospital's operations, highlighting the challenges and triumphs faced by doctors, nurses, and staff. Through this exhibit, visitors will gain insight into the scale and impact of the hospital's operations on the lives of immigrant patients, enriching their overall experience on Ellis Island.



Interpretation and Restoration of Significant Interior Spaces

We would like to interpret and restore key interior spaces within the hospital buildings, including the morgue, linen rooms, powerhouse, operating theater, and contagious disease ward. These spaces will be carefully restored to reflect their historical significance, offering visitors a unique glimpse into past medical practices and public health challenges. By restoring these spaces, we aim to create immersive environments that honor the legacy of the island's medical facilities and the countless lives they touched.



Expanded Arts and Preservation Programming

We hope to expand our arts programming to include film and theater productions, an Artist in Residence Program and Preservation workshop, enriching the cultural experiences available to Ellis Island visitors. These programs will offer new ways to engage with the island's history through creative expression, providing visitors with special presentations, guided tours, and first-person interpretations. By integrating the arts into our programming, we aim to create a vibrant cultural landscape that draws diverse audiences and fosters a deeper connection to Ellis Island.



OUR RESULTS

SEI AIMS TO ACHIEVE THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.



ACTIVATE THE SOUTH SIDE

Engage new visitors by activating South Side spaces with innovative and inclusive programming.

Support local community groups and schools on and off the island to learn about our shared immigrant and public health history, including growing art and preservation programs.

Create and implement major exhibits or programs that utilize the South Side's unique history and spaces, emphasizing public health and immigration narratives.

Expand our partnership network by establishing collaborations with new regional, national, and international organizations focused on public health, immigration, and cultural heritage.



IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY

Complete stabilization and accessibility improvements that support the South Side buildings and quad area, expanding visitor access and ensuring long-term safety.

Launch accessible programs in multiple languages and formats, including content for people with specific visual and auditory needs.

Create new public access routes and amenities to facilitate seamless visitor experiences across the South Side, improving overall visitor satisfaction.

Create self-guided tours that ease financial costs and operational complexity to ensure increased opportunities for visitors to explore the South Side.



GROW OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

Increase staffing of key operational and programmatic roles to meet the demands of expanded visitor services and programming.

Achieve growth in earned income and annual fundraising through new revenue streams and donor engagement, directly supporting South Side projects and organizational sustainability.

Establish advisory council and board governance structures that support overall organizational strategy.





WHAT WE NEED

REALIZING OUR PLAN

Save Ellis Island must increase its resources to support the goals of the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan.

By increasing our resources and strategically investing in key areas, SEI will be better positioned to preserve the legacy of Ellis Island, engage visitors and the community, and advance our mission to tell the powerful stories of immigration and public health in America.

- Strengthen our operations to cover increased visitation, investing in IT and media production equipment.
- Invest in senior-level programs, development, and partnership staff to allow SEI to grow its capacity and offerings, benefiting the community and the historic sites of Ellis Island.
- Strengthen our current operating staff with key additional positions, particularly in facilities, media, and education, and invest in increased onboarding and training.
- Raise the resources needed for these investments through a targeted fundraising plan that will engage individuals, foundations, corporations, government, and earned revenue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our Supporters and Donors

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SAVE ELLIS ISLAND

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