

Norman Studios Silent Film Museum, Inc. Strategic Plan
Adopted by the Board of Directors, June 12, 2017;
Revised June 17, 2024

I. Introduction and History

The Norman Studios in Jacksonville, Florida, represents two significant, and largely forgotten, aspects of American history:

- The Norman Studios complex is the only surviving studio complex in Jacksonville, Florida, from the era when Jacksonville was “The Winter Film Capital of the World.” During that era, 1908-1918, 30 studios operated in Jacksonville, making over 300 motion pictures. In addition, Norman Studios did not transition to sound production so it represents a very rare example of a complete silent film complex.
- Norman Studios is the only surviving “race films” studio. “Race films” were motion pictures made for African American audiences that played in African American theaters and featured African American actors. Norman Studios produced motion pictures in the 1920’s that presented African Americans in positive ways that challenged then-current stereotypes. This is all the more remarkable since Richard Norman, a white man from Florida, produced these films during a period that arguably represented the height of “Jim Crow” in the South.

In 1923-4 Richard E. Norman, Jr. brought the former Eagle Film Studios complex in the Arlington area of Jacksonville to continue his production of “race films.” Following the end of the silent film era Norman ceased production of feature films although continuing in the film business in other ways. The property also became the site for the Gloria Norman Dance Studio operated by Norman’s wife.

By the mid-1990’s, however, the buildings of the former studio complex were in extreme disrepair. Arlington residents discovered the hidden past of the buildings and founded Old Arlington, Inc., to save and restore the property. In 2002 the City of Jacksonville purchased four of the five Norman Studios buildings. (Circle of Faith Ministries had previously purchased the other building.) In 2007 the city finished structural repairs and exterior renovations of the four city-owned buildings.

In 2006 Norman Studios Silent Film Museum, Inc. (NSSFM) was founded to focus solely on the Norman property and story. In 2013 it entered into a contract with the

city to manage the property. In 2016 Norman Studios was made a National Historic Landmark.

In 2019 the City of Jacksonville appropriated \$1 million to renovate the first floor of the production building into museum space. The work was completed in 2022; the grand opening of this first phase of the museum (the second phase to be the renovation of the second floor and the addition of an elevator) was held in August of 2023. Later that year NSSFM began holding regular open hours for the museum. Also, in 2023 the City of Jacksonville purchased the other building and property (belonging to the Circle of Faith Ministries) that made up the original Norman Studios, and NSSFM was given possession of the property.

The entire historic Norman Studios campus is now managed by the NSSFM under its contract with the City of Jacksonville.

II. Process

The process of developing NSSFM's original strategic plan began with a Board of Directors retreat in May of 2016. The original plan was the result of board and volunteer collaborative efforts, including review of past plans and programs developed by and for NSSFM as well as input from stakeholders and members of the general public. In 2024 the Board of Directors began the process of updating the strategic plan, beginning with a board retreat in January. Further discussion of the changes to the plan were held, and members were given the opportunity to suggest changes at the membership meeting in May of 2024.

III. Goals

Aspiration: Norman Studios will be a premier research and educational institution on race films and the early Florida film industry. The museum and related programs will reflect the history of the Norman Studios, Jacksonville as the "Winter Film Capital," the importance and history of "race films," and the history of early filmmaking, particularly of silent films. Norman Studios will be a center for not only those interested in this (and related) history, but also for the community and for continuing the legacy of filmmaking in Jacksonville.

Preface: All goals are important, but priority will be placed on the accomplishment of the first three goals.

Goal 1: Strengthen the governance structure of Norman Studios.

Objective 1: Annually review and update bylaws and other policies.

Objective 2: Annually review and update financial accounting systems and processes.

- Continue the implementation of an annual budget process.

- Create a budget for all fundraising activities.
- Continue to use standard accounting processes for expenditures and gift receipts.
- Develop an audit plan as needed.

Objective 3: Recruit appropriate volunteers for the board of directors, for standing and other committees, and for other board-related tasks.

- Work with the City of Jacksonville on risk management and legal issues that impact the properties and volunteer activities.
- Develop an appropriate application process, orientation, and training for board members and other board-related volunteers.
- Develop a board development plan.

Objective 4: Review and work cooperatively with the City of Jacksonville concerning contractual obligations for the site.

- Hold regular meetings with appropriate City officials.
- Establish procedures in conjunction with the City for events at the City's Norman Studios property.

Objective 5: Create and maintain a strong communications and public relations program, including a social media program with an up-to-date website, Facebook page, Twitter, etc.

Objective 6: Maintain and improve the NSSFM membership program.

- Ensure that the membership portal on the website and membership brochure is current.
- Ensure that the membership program is appropriately carried out (acknowledgement letters, renewals, membership benefits, etc.) and monitored.

Objective 7: Create and maintain a formal volunteer program, including screening and training

- Create and utilize a volunteer application form, waiver form, screening procedures, and background check procedures.

- Create and publish a volunteer handbook/brochure.
- Create and institute a training program for volunteers.
- Enter into intern agreements with local colleges/universities.
- Work with interns on specific projects.

Objective 8: Identify and work with potential collaborating institutions and organizations and their representatives.

Goal 2: Create self-sustaining operations.

Objective 1: Identify the priorities for administrative support, in terms of type, amount, and timing.

Objective 2: Create a multi-year budget for operations.

Objective 3: Raise funds for operations.

- Fundraising may be solicited from private, corporate, or foundation sources.
- Identify potential donors.
- Develop fundraising materials, both printed and online.
- Develop a budget for fundraising drive.
- Hold pre-fundraising events targeting those able to provide significant donations.
- Solicit donations through volunteers.
- Identify and apply for appropriate grant funding.
- Hold at least one major fundraising event each year.

Objective 4: Implement the administrative plan, including the hiring of appropriate persons.

Goal 3: Renovate the interiors of all the Norman Studios buildings, giving priority to the Production Building and the Set Building (the Rita Reagan Building).

Objective 1: Implement the planned renovations of the second floor of the Production Building.

- Work to advance the funding on the CIP list.
- Plan exhibits for the second floor and the entire museum.
- Create a plan for the funding of exhibit expenses.

Objective 2: Create a plan for renovating the Set Building (the Rita Reagan Building).

- Include goals and historic preservation principles to be applied.
- Plan appropriate administrative space, archival and research space, event space, and ADA compliance.
- Prioritize expenditures necessary for the renovation, including an acoustical evaluation, architectural plans with consideration to bringing the building back to its 1920s configuration, flooring as needed, audio-visual equipment, chairs, piano, office furniture and other equipment.
- Create a budget for renovating the Set Building.

Objective 3: Create a plan for renovating the generator building, wardrobe cottage, and properties garage.

- Include goals, historic preservation principles to be applied, and descriptions of potential exhibits.
- Plan appropriate administrative space, public space, filmmaking and educational space, ADA compliance, and integration of collaborators such as Old Arlington, Inc.
- Plan for visitor amenities.
- Create a budget for renovating the generator building, wardrobe cottage, and properties garage.

Objective 4: Raise funds for renovating the interiors of Norman Studios buildings.

- Fundraising may be solicited from private, corporate or foundation sources.
- Identify potential donors.

- Develop fundraising materials, both printed and online.
- Develop budgets for fundraising drives.
- Hold pre-fundraising events targeting those able to provide significant donations.
- Solicit donations through volunteers.
- Identify and apply for appropriate grant funding.
- Hold at least one major fundraising event each year.

Objective 5: Renovate the interiors of the Norman Studios properties.

Goal 4: Create a vibrant, world-class museum with an emphasis on race films and the early North Florida film industry.

Objective 1: The museum will illustrate the importance of North Florida to the early film industry.

Objective 2: The museum will illustrate Richard E. Norman's importance as a pioneer in the Florida and United States film industry, especially as a producer-director-writer-cinematographer of early films with all African American casts.

Objective 3: The museum will recognize the contributions of African Americans to the Florida and American film history.

Objective 4: Budget and raise funds for museum exhibits in conjunction with the objectives set forth in Goal 3.

Goal 5: Create a physical and online archive of materials relevant to Norman Studios and to the early Florida film industry.

Objective 1: Create policies for the collection, preservation, and utilization of Florida and Norman Studios film-related materials.

Objective 2: Actively pursue collections that are available from the Norman family and elsewhere.

Objective 3: Formulate policies on oral history and take relevant oral histories through trained volunteers.

Objective 4: Create an online research center for race films.

Objective 5: Create an online research center for early filmmaking in Florida.

Goal 6: Create and sustain educational programs for all levels that explore the history of filmmaking, race relations, innovations, and other topics related to the history of the Norman Studios.

Objective 1: Create internship programs in collaboration with appropriate colleges and universities in accordance with the objectives set forth in Goal 2.

Objective 2: Create programs that engage elementary and secondary students, particularly those from the neighboring community.

Goal 7: Educate the public through the museum resources, both physical, online and other media, concerning race films, the history of early filmmaking, and related topics.

Objective 1: Continue the Silent Sunday program.

- Provide entertaining programs that illustrate the history of silent films and race films.
- Provide a venue (the set building) in which silent films are accompanied by live music.
- Continue to raise money through these programs.

Objective 2: Provide programs to local and national groups on the Norman Studios, Jacksonville as the Winter Film Capital of the World, the history of film (particularly silent film), discrimination, and other topics related to the history of Norman Studios.

Objective 3: Begin a lecture series on topics related to the history of Norman Studios.

Goal 8: Become a community center as well as a major tourist destination in the Jacksonville area, collaborating with related local, national, and international organizations.

Objective 1: Make the Norman Studios an attractive meeting place and resource for the community.

Objective 2: Plan and execute a campaign for promoting Norman Studios as a tourist destination.

Goal 9: Become a site for continuing the legacy of filmmaking in North Florida.

Objective 1: Provide education and training programs for filmmakers and potential filmmakers and related professionals.

Objective 2: Provide a venue for filmmaking.

Objective 3: Promote filmmaking in Jacksonville and Northeast Florida.