



**Freethought Association**  
OF WEST MICHIGAN

STRATEGIC PLAN

2005 – 2008

[www.freethoughtassociation.org](http://www.freethoughtassociation.org)

P.O. Box 101  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(Jeff Seaver)

# BOARD AUTHORIZATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN

On this the 22<sup>nd</sup> Day of November 2004 we authorize the implementation of this Strategic Plan for the Freethought Association of West Michigan

Jeff Seaver – Chairman \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Robert Collins – Vice Chairman \_\_\_\_\_

Jan Van Oosterhout – Treasurer \_\_\_\_\_

Charles Larue – Secretary \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Gregory Forbes – Member \_\_\_\_\_

David Cleveland – Member \_\_\_\_\_

Strategic plan compiled and prepared by Jennifer Beahan – Assistant to the board

## ORGANIZATIONAL DESCRIPTION

The Freethought Association of West Michigan was founded in 1997 by Jeff Seaver, Don Hansen and Charles Leedy. Originally an informal group of fewer than a dozen members, the Freethought Association's membership has since grown to over two hundred freethinkers with attendance at meetings ranging from forty-five to ninety people. During its history the Freethought Association has met at various locations including Schuler Books, the Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts, the Wyoming Public Library, and the Grand Rapids Community College. The Freethought Association currently holds its bi-monthly meetings at the Yankee Clipper Branch of the Grand Rapids Public Library.

The Freethought Association was incorporated as a Michigan non-profit educational corporation in 2001 and the Freethought Association is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501c3 tax-exempt organization and is lead by an appointed board of Directors. Board meetings are open to the public and members are encouraged to attend. The Freethought Association's funding comes from voluntary tax-deductible donations and the Freethought Association is an entirely volunteer organization.

In the seven years since its formation the Freethought Association has seen considerable membership growth and is currently experiencing a 20% growth in membership annually. Many well-known guests have spoken at the Freethought Association's meetings, including Michael Shermer – Skeptics Society, Rob Boston – Americans United for Separation of Church & State, Ellen Johnson – American Atheists, Dan Barker – Freedom From Religion Foundation, Paul Kurtz – Council for Secular Humanism, Dr. David Myer & Dr. Ruth Tucker. Topics of the Freethought Association's meetings have included science, religion, social and environmental issues, history, philosophy, politics, civil rights, non-theism, skepticism, deism, evolution, morality and ethics, secularism, rationalism psychology, and the arts.

# MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of the Freethought Association is to provide a community for Freethinkers to explore ideas from a rational, critical and non-theistic perspective.

# VISION STATEMENT

The Freethought Association's vision is to foster a society that tolerates, advocates, and solicits alternate viewpoints on societal issues and subsequently considers these alternative viewpoints in educating the community on social policy, societal norms and legislative action.

# VALUES STATEMENT

The Freethought Association is committed to:

- *A Community of Freethought.* A Freethinker is one who has rejected religious authority and dogma in favor of rational inquiry and speculation.
- An environment in which *All Viewpoints can be Expressed* within civil discourse, without fear of recourse and to provide a philosophical approach to alternative views in which these views are provided serious analysis and consideration.
- The *Application of Reason and Science* to the understanding of the universe and to the solution of human problems without reference to supernatural explanations.
- The principle of the *Separation of Church and State.* It is our goal to ensure that a plurality of world views has a voice in the public arena.
- *Free Inquiry* and oppose any oppression of the human mind and any efforts by ecclesiastical, political, ideological, or any other social institutions to shackle free thought.
- *Universal Moral and Ethical Principles* that are founded on enlightened self-interest and reason. All human values should be grounded in a profound respect for life, personal freedom and the universe in which we live.

# GOALS & STRATEGIES

## Goal 1: Membership Development

1. Plan, Implement and evaluate outreach programs to spread knowledge and awareness of the Freethought Association in order to promote Membership growth.
  - 1.1. Appoint Director of Membership Development to head up outreach programs
  - 1.2. Increased Public Relations – see Goal 4 for Details of Media Outreach
  - 1.3. College / High School Awareness and Advertising –
    - 1.3.1. Increase presence in school programs/presentations through the establishment of a speaker's bureau to expand awareness of the Freethought Association and the acceptability of differing points of view.
    - 1.3.2. Explore the establishment of scholarship for freethought activities to foster free thought among youth – essays, speeches at state/national meetings
    - 1.3.3. Explore possible partnership with “CFI on Campus” and “Secular Student Alliance”
    - 1.3.4. Advocate and support the development of campus freethought groups
2. Membership Retention
  - 2.1. Increased sense of membership
    - 2.1.1. Membership packet & name tag
    - 2.1.2. Creation of a positive environment free of misperceptions/ labeling  
Continued explanation of non-partisanship and non-religious standing
    - 2.1.3. Increase responsibility – Volunteerism  
Help members to become an active part of the Freethought community – thus contributing to its growth and prosperity.
    - 2.1.4. Continue to provide additional Freethought networking opportunities
    - 2.1.5. Continue to expand educational and activism opportunities
    - 2.1.6. Establishment of Freethought Networks
3. Membership Diversity – continue to expand and encourage diversity (gender, age, ethnic and religious/political) among members.
  - 3.1. Develop Plan for expanding diversity
  - 3.2. Invite speaker(s) to talk on Diversity at meetings

## Goal 2: Program Development.

1. Continue to establish an educational exploratory forum through the use of:
  - 1.1. Continued dissemination of Educational materials
  - 1.2. Formation of topic classes to encourage discussion and education of membership.
  - 1.3. Continued expansion of small groups.
2. Expanded use of the Freethought discussion board on website
3. Celebrants training and availability for members
4. Development of senior programs and outreach
5. Development of children's programs
  - 5.1. Meeting childcare
  - 5.2. Summer programs

## Goal 3: Community Outreach

1. Increase public awareness and acceptance of the Freethought Association as a well known community group.
2. Increase networking and coalition building among other groups that share Freethought's mission and vision
  - 2.1. Create database of groups that would be compatible with the Freethought Association's mission and vision and begin to contact groups with invitations to attend Freethought Association meetings and inter-group functions.
  - 2.2. Continue to provide ritual alternatives for freethinkers and to increase the number of social events based on significant cultural customs (Solstice, Harvest) and open the celebrations of these events to other community groups.
  - 2.3. Create Outreach opportunities by offering discussion groups at libraries, breakfast meetings, etc.
  - 2.4. Expand outreach to area schools for guest speakers/discussants
3. Establishment of a speakers bureau in order to continue sharing the mission and vision of the Freethought association group with other community groups to avoid misperceptions of the group's purpose and to encourage inclusion in various community events.
4. Explore the possibility of establishing a yearly – state wide – Freethought annual meeting that is open to the public with major speakers.

## Goal 4: Public Relations

1. Begin drive to establish the Freethought Association as a recognizable name and image
2. Establish a public relations committee.
3. Communication and Image
  - 3.1. Complete logo revision
  - 3.2. Stationary and brochure design and printing
  - 3.3. Create and distribute Annual reports and donation request to membership
  - 3.4. Consider the possibility of expanding to monthly publications/updates
4. Continue to establish and strengthen relationship with the media by maintaining current connections and expanding in to additional markets
  - 4.1. Newspaper/ Print
    - 4.1.1. Continue to maintain partnership with local newspapers
    - 4.1.2. Expand Freethought's name and image through the use of advertisements and sponsorships
  - 4.2. Television
    - 4.2.1. Continue to partnership with G.R.T.V. and create a plan to expand programming
  - 4.3. Radio
    - 4.3.1. Create and script Radio programming and ads
  - 4.4. Internet
    - 4.4.1. Continue to Update Website and provide additional resources
    - 4.4.2. Continue to build E-News content and membership.
5. Establishment of a speaker's bureau

## Goal 5: Board & Volunteer Development

1. Establish a committee for board and volunteer development
2. Fulfilling needed volunteer positions
  - 2.1. Mailings
  - 2.2. Web updates
  - 2.3. Small group sponsors
  - 2.4. Identify future board members

## Goal 6: Meeting Facilities & Building Planning

1. Research long term building and leasing possibilities & create budget for long term building prospects.
2. Explore the establishment of a building fund.
3. Establish a committee for meeting facility availability and building planning

## Goal 7: Funding

1. Create long term budget and financial plan for continued stability for the Freethought Association
2. Appoint a director of development.
3. Implement programs to increase individual membership donations
  - 3.1. Yearly membership pledges
  - 3.2. Increased education for members regarding the need for donations and the use of donations.
  - 3.3. Create possibilities for direct giving donations including speaker and meeting sponsorships
4. Grants – continue to research and apply for grants that are aligned with the Freethought Association’s mission and values.
5. Develop fundraising plan for soliciting donations from local and national businesses.
6. Fundraisers
  - 6.1. Create fundraising committee to oversee organization and expansion of efforts
  - 6.2. Continue evaluation of book sale and garage sale.
  - 6.3. Organization of a Freethought “Book Store”
7. Long term fund planning
  - 7.1. Build program for pursuit of larger “angel” donors
  - 7.2. Spread awareness of planned giving possibilities for estate and will donations
  - 7.3. Establishment of an endowment or similar continuing funding sources
8. Explore funding alliances with the Council for Secular Humanism