



Development Strategy of the Free Belarus Museum

2026 — 2028

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Introduction

Established in July 2022, the Free Belarus Museum has, during its existence, become a significant and unique phenomenon within the landscape of Belarusian organizations around which the democratically and nationally oriented part of Belarusians abroad is consolidating.

Forced to exist in exile, the Museum seeks to perform several functions simultaneously, engaging in the musealization of the history of the protest, democratic and national liberation movement of Belarusians, organizing numerous exhibitions and cultural events, as well as providing its space for numerous cultural-educational, public and political events.

The changing conditions of the Museum's functioning, its orientation towards dynamic development and sustainability require effective adaptation to the socio-political and cultural situation prevailing in Belarusian society and in the country of residence.

With the aim of searching for sustainable forms of development, this Strategy was developed, designed for the next two years. The implementation of the provisions and recommendations of the Strategy will ensure the further evolution of this representative and exclusive cultural institution.

Activities of the Free Belarus Museum



1.1 History of the Free Belarus Museum: in search of identity

The Free Belarus Museum emerged as a project within the Belarusian émigré community in Warsaw at the turn of 2021–2022. The initiators of its creation were the Head of the People's Anti-Crisis Management, former Minister of Culture of the Republic of Belarus, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Pavel Latushka, and an employee of the PAM, former Head of the Department of Culture and Folk Art of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus, Natalia Zadziarkouskaya. From the very beginning of the Museum's functioning, its goal was declared to be the musealization of the history of Belarusian protests against the dictatorship of Alexander Lukashenko in 2020 and other events of the Belarusian democratic movement connected with them.

In March 2022, the initiative received premises for rent in a historic building at 11 Foksal Street in Warsaw, which it occupies to this day. These premises consist of one office, one Exhibition Hall with an area of 100 m², a museum room, an office for official events and receptions, as well as technical rooms (a basement, two storage rooms, a restroom, balcony-type rooms with complicated access). Additional organizational possibilities for the Museum are provided by the presence of two courtyards in the building at 11 Foksal Street.

In July 2022, the official opening of the Museum took place, the mission of the new cultural initiative was widely announced, and calls were made for the formation of the collection through the efforts of the public. At this time, the Museum's collection began to be filled with the first artifacts, the number of which by the end of 2022 amounted to approximately 10 exhibits, among them Ina Zaitseva's "BChB-bride" dress, campaign materials, documents, personal belongings from the 2020 protests, and works of art.

On 5 May 2023, the Museum became an independent legal entity and now functions as the officially registered non-governmental public organization in Poland, the Association "Free Belarus Museum".

From the beginning of its existence, the Museum has focused on active participation in the cultural and socio-political life of the Belarusian diaspora in Warsaw, organizing several dozen events per year and receiving approximately 9 thousand visitors. Its spaces host both large-scale festival-format projects and intimate artistic initiatives, which has become possible thanks to the highly adaptive nature of the space. During the organization of events, high requirements are placed on the quality of organization, promotion, and support. At the same time, from the beginning of its existence, the Museum has faced clear institutional problems in its development, as the number of permanent employees at this stage is limited to 2–3 staff members. The main communication channel between the Museum and its audience is the Instagram account; the Facebook page is also used, and the website freebelarus.museum is operational.

During 2022–2023, the Free Belarus Museum carried out an inventory of the existing collection, which consisted of 81 exhibits. The concept of collection formation largely remained the same – artifacts of the year 2020, but exhibits reflecting the fate of Belarusian political prisoners and the

participation of Belarusian volunteers in the defense of Ukraine against full-scale Russian aggression also began to be added.

With the aim of developing the institution and searching for the most effective forms of its activity, at the end of 2023, on the initiative of the Free Belarus Museum, a scientific-practical seminar "Museum Reflection on Political Transformations and Contested Memory: Prospects for Representation in the Context of Belarus" was held. Several main conclusions regarding the current state of the Museum and promising directions for its development were formulated during the seminar. Below, these positions are presented, as well as their actualization based on the results as of the end of 2025.

1. The Free Belarus Museum already today presents itself as a multifunctional cultural-educational and scientific-documentary center for Belarusians in Poland, which, in addition to purely museum tasks (collecting, documenting and preserving materials about the Belarusian democratic movement), performs the functions of a cultural-communicative space, a place where Belarusian identity is formed and strengthened, where various meetings and cultural events, socio-political and scientific discussions, presentations, theatrical and artistic performances take place.
2. The Museum, however, emerged and exists within the Polish cultural environment, which in one way or another influences it. In order not to become a center of a "Belarusian ghetto", the Museum must integrate into the surrounding context, creating a product that would be interesting not only for Belarusian but also for Polish audiences. The longer the so-called "emigration period" for Belarusians continues, the greater significance this integration agenda will acquire in the Museum's activities, both at the institutional and conceptual levels.
3. For a part of Belarusians, there will still be a need for a "home of their own" in Warsaw, a so-called "place of strength" and cultural memory, which they will consider important to preserve for themselves and their children. Therefore, the idea of a museum that would exist both as a prototype of a future institution in Belarus and as an independent Belarusian museological project in Warsaw is gaining increasing value.
4. Despite the fact that the Free Belarus Museum emerged and continues to exist as a multifunctional cultural platform, as evidenced by the legal status of the institution, the museum component of its activity (collection and preservation of materials on the history of the Belarusian democratic movement, exhibition activities) is a priority, which has been repeatedly emphasized by its management. However, in order to implement precisely the museological direction of the institution, it is necessary to introduce a number of significant changes in its work schedule, beginning active work on the registration and inventory of museum objects, collection formation, establishment of a storage facility, data archiving, and other activities. It is also necessary to consider institutional sustainability, ensuring consistent financing and a qualified staff of employees. All of this is possible on the condition of its further legalization specifically as a museum institution on the basis of Polish legislation.

Following the work of the scientific-methodological seminar, a Development Concept was prepared at the request of the Museum (end of 2023), which currently serves as the institution's program document.

Let us consider how the situation is developing with regard to the issues identified as key challenges for the Museum at the present moment.

1. The Museum as a multifunctional cultural-educational and scientific-documentary center.

At present, the quantitative and qualitative indicators of the Museum's activities demonstrate that the institution indeed functions as a multifunctional cultural platform important for the life of the diaspora and is a distinctive subject of the cultural process in the life of the Belarusian community in Poland and abroad in general.

Thus, in 2023, approximately 150 cultural and educational events were held at the institution's venues, and around 9,000 people became its visitors. In 2024 and 2025, these indicators remained at the same level. In 2026, the Museum is carrying out visitor registration, and at the time of publication of this Strategy, the quantitative indicators approached 750–850 people per month.

In 2024, the Museum acted as an organizer of such events as Museum Night, the exhibition "Unceasing Voices", "Ales Pushkin. Afterlife", "Dresses for Freedom", the presentation of Uladzimir Nyaklyaeu's book "Without a Motherland", and many others. The Museum also acted as a co-organizer of the following events: the book festival "Pradmova", the video and film festival "Bulbamovie", performances of the Kupala Theatre and the Free Theatre, the celebration of Freedom Day, and others.

During 2025, the Museum maintained and increased the previously achieved pace, organizing and participating in such events as the street cinema festival "Silent Fever", the exhibition dedicated to the memory of Ales Pushkin, "Fragmenty" (selected exhibits from the Museum's collection), "Nothing Particularly New" (belongings, stories, and works of political prisoners), "Five Artifacts and Only One Night" (for Museum Night), Leon Tarasevich's "Identity" within the framework of Warsaw Gallery Weekend, the book festival "Pradmova", and others.

Thus, one of the key roles of the Museum, defined in the institution's program documents – to function as a center for the implementation of initiatives important for the cultural life of the diaspora – is being fulfilled. Large-scale events are held at the Museum, becoming significant events on the cultural landscape of Belarusian Warsaw. The Museum cooperates with key public initiatives of the diaspora, provides premises and organizes its own events and exhibitions that gather broad audiences of visitors. The institution also maintains its position as a venue for high-level meetings and events of the political elites of the Belarusian émigré community.

As a strategic task, it is necessary to preserve and develop the level of preparation and implementation of events that has been achieved during the first years of operation. It is clear that, in addition to maintaining the current state, the institution should strive for new achievements and levels. Further growth may be determined by the development of organizational capacity, which requires an increase in staff numbers, modernization and strengthening of the material and technical base.

It should be noted that this process of developing organizational capacity is taking place here and now, as will be discussed below.

The possibility of expanding and improving the premises allocated to the institution is also of great importance for the further development of the Museum. A large number of public events may sometimes come into conflict with the institution's performance of specific museum functions, which is always observed when different forms of activity are combined within a limited space.

Therefore, for the successful resolution of all current institutional tasks, the strategic goal should be the search for opportunities to increase the number of premises, with one part performing exclusively museum functions, the second part serving representative purposes, and the third part being used for cultural and public events.

2. The Museum in the Polish cultural environment.

The Museum's Development Concept assumes that it will move towards greater visibility not only among the diaspora, but also among representatives of other cultures and, in particular, Polish visitors.

Movement in this direction is taking place, and targeted activities are being carried out, an example of which are initiatives to organize exhibitions of Polish artists in the Museum's premises. This activity, alongside others, may contribute to the process of the Free Belarus Museum appearing and becoming established on the cultural map of Warsaw.

In order to establish better communication with Polish society, in 2025 the Museum conducted an audience research study, including representatives of Polish society among the respondents.

The strategic goal of the Museum in this regard is to function as a space that introduces the Polish (and generally foreign) audience to the current situation in Belarus and to Belarusian culture in general. For this purpose, the Museum created a permanent changing exhibition of new acquisitions, "Entry Point", the task of which is to introduce visitors to the current socio-political and cultural situation in Belarus.

However, in order to achieve such a strategic goal, it is necessary to develop exhibition capacities, as well as forms of interaction with the Polish public that have not yet been implemented. These may include the same forms of work that are currently implemented for the Belarusian audience, but with a focus on the Polish public: guided tours, publications in Polish, development of social media, advertising, collaboration with cultural and museum institutions, cooperation with media resources, etc.

This is an important and large volume of work, which the Museum's current limited resources do not allow it to implement. In order to reach a broad Polish audience, the Museum therefore primarily needs additional specialists who are well acquainted with the audience.

Given the limited available resources, we see the need for the Museum to adopt mandatory practices oriented towards the Polish audience. For example:

- Use of the Polish language in textual materials accompanying events, exhibitions, and museum displays of the institution.

- Formation of a visitor database of the Museum, including Belarusians as well as Poles and representatives of other cultures.
- Informing Polish media and through Polish media about the Museum's events.

Another way of attracting Polish visitors may be the adoption of topics that concern both Belarusian and Polish society – for example, these may include topics of shared Belarusian-Polish history, the life of the Belarusian diaspora in Poland and the Polish diaspora in Belarus, and others.

3. Does the Museum currently function as a “home of its own” for Belarusians abroad, as a “place of strength”?

According to this position, identified during the preparation of the Museum Concept and at the scientific-methodological seminar, the Museum is assigned the role of a close, comfortable, intimate and familiar place where a person feels as if they are in their Homeland. At the same time, it is a place from which a Belarusian can draw inspiration and energy for life.

It appears that the organization of a large number of cultural-educational and public events oriented towards representatives of the Belarusian diaspora contributes to the preservation of these functions by the Museum. Within the walls of the institution, representatives of different generations (and, importantly – children) often spend time participating in recreational activities, experiencing a friendly and welcoming atmosphere here, which allows the Museum to become part of the personal, subjective experiences of visitors.

The perception of the institution within the framework of subjective experience could also be improved by additional family-oriented activities held on a regular basis – interest clubs and initiatives for leisure time (for example, museum classes for children, a Collectors' Club, a library, etc.). However, the implementation of such forms of activity requires additional resources.

4. Implementation of specifically the museological direction of the institution

According to the proposals expressed, there was a desire to carry out a number of significant changes in the working schedule, to begin active work on the registration and inventorying of museum objects, the formation of collections, the establishment of a storage facility, data archiving, and other activities.

It should be noted that the museological component in the institution's work has been present throughout its existence – the collection and acquisition of museum objects has been carried out, registration documentation has been prepared, artefacts have been catalogued, a guided tour of the Museum has been created, and work has been carried out on filling the museum room with acquisitions reflecting the profile of the Free Belarus Museum.

Many of the artefacts have exceptional significance in the process of musealizing the history of Belarusian resistance to the dictatorship of A. Lukashenko and the solidarity of the Belarusian people with Ukraine in the context of Russian aggression.

However, it should be noted that at present the Museum lacks:

1. a properly equipped storage facility;

2. an electronic registration system for cataloguing museum objects that would comply with the standards of state museums.

It appears that this may become an obstacle to the integration of the Free Belarus Museum into the Polish museum system if such a direction is chosen in the future.

The implementation of the museological direction of the institution, however, faces a number of challenges that are objective and difficult to overcome. At present, the Free Belarus Museum is located in premises that are not adapted for storing museum objects, and the organization's balance sheet does not contain the necessary equipment for this purpose. The building at 11 Foksal Street, where the Museum rents its space, is a cultural heritage monument; therefore, redevelopment of the premises is not permitted here. The existing rooms do not allow for the organization of a storage facility with the necessary temperature and humidity conditions. This represents a significant obstacle to the implementation of museum functions by the institution, but it can be overcome through the development of a set of substitute measures. For example, these may include renting other premises, transferring museum objects to the storage facilities of other museums, using climate-controlled cabinets and display cases, and other solutions.

Furthermore, in 2024 the Free Belarus Museum received institutional support, which allowed it to increase its staff and strengthen work on expanding and representing the collection, as well as to have a permanent external communications specialist.

Thanks to this, during 2024–2025 the Museum's collection increased to 400 artefacts. Growth in the audience on social media has been observed. A new fully functional website was developed in the "museum" domain zone – freebelarus.museum. Part of the collection (200 exhibits) was digitized in accordance with the requirements of the Ministry of Culture of Poland, made freely available on the website, and transferred to the electronic database of the National Institute of Museums of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland.

At this stage, the Museum is also beginning to expand the thematic and chronological boundaries of its collection, including exhibits that reflect the history of the Belarusian people's struggle for independence and democracy. Thus, the Free Belarus Museum acquired an artefact from 1773, known as the "Secret Letter of the Brest Voivode", nineteenth-century documents connected with the events of the 1830 uprising, and other exhibits.

At present, the Free Belarus Museum has a collection of artefacts thematically focused on three main and related topics – objects from the protests of 2020 and other years, objects belonging to Belarusian political prisoners, and objects of Belarusians participating in the war in Ukraine.

In accordance with the institutional support programme planned for implementation until mid-2027, the Museum intends to create three thematic collections: the Collection "Artefacts of the Belarusian Protest of 2020"; the Collection "Artefacts Related to Socio-Political Events in Belarus, the Development of the Belarusian Democratic Movement and Civic Activism after 2021"; and the Collection "Artefacts (originals and copies) Related to the History of the Belarusian Democratic Movement since the 1990s".

It should also be noted that the Museum has begun activities aimed at forming a professional community of Belarusian museum workers who are in exile around its institution. This is the initiative Belarusian Museum Laboratory, which began operating in 2025 and brought together around 30 specialists from different countries around the world (Poland, Lithuania, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Germany, Spain). The Museum Laboratory functions in the form of periodic offline and online sessions with expert presentations and educational classes for specialists.

In the future, the development of the Museum Laboratory's activities may make the Free Belarus Museum the main institutional platform representing the interests of this professional community while simultaneously accumulating its resource and intellectual potential. The development of cooperation with Polish museums may create specific opportunities for involving Belarusian museum workers in joint projects – with the possibility of officially formalizing their participation through contracts, internships, or volunteer programmes. Thus, the Museum will function not only as an exhibition space, but also as an institutional hub that brings together dispersed human and intellectual resources of the Belarusian diaspora and incorporates them into sustainable project frameworks.

Regarding the institutional capacities of the organization achieved over the past three years of development.

At present, the Free Belarus Museum has a staff of a total of 4 full-time positions occupied by 5 people. A permanent circle of volunteers and partner organizations has formed around the institution (first and foremost, the Belarusian Association of Political Prisoners "Da Voli"), whose interaction and support make it possible to solve tasks that exceed the organization's independent capacities.

The Museum's financial resources consist of donor support (approximately 40%), grant projects (approximately 50%), and its own income (approximately 10%). Existing agreements and signed contracts make it possible to forecast financial sustainability in the medium term (from several months to a year), and, provided that funding sources are expanded, further institutional development.

Thus, summarizing the current state of the institution, it should be noted that its current operational model includes three main "products" of the Museum, which already exist and will continue to develop:

1. A Museum with its collections and exhibition projects.
2. A cultural, dialogue and representative platform.
3. An institution for educational and research projects and archiving/documentation.

Taking into account the institution's limited resources, the Museum plans internal monitoring in order to determine which current activities should be retained and developed, and which should be limited, because the workload on the team is a critically important sustainability criterion. Ideally, the goal is to find a balance between events that bring people and partnerships, and the museum component, which requires time, quiet, and resources for inventorying and preservation.

1.2 Mission of the Free Belarus Museum

Having emerged – as already noted – under conditions of forced emigration as one of the actors of the protest movement and participants in democratic transformations in the modern history of the Belarusian people, while from the very beginning of its establishment being deeply affiliated with political organizations, the mission of the Museum at the first stage can be characterized as cultural resistance.

Cultural resistance is a form of opposition to power, violence, assimilation, or a dominant ideology through culture: language, art, symbols, education, media, and everyday practices. It is a form of resistance that operates not (or not only) through street politics, but through meanings: who we are, what we call ourselves, what language we speak, what we remember, and what we consider normal.

Such a mission of the Museum fully corresponded to the contemporary Belarusian reality at the time of the institutional establishment of the initiative and the creation of the organization's own identity.

In accordance with this mission, the Museum's focus on organizing events during the first stage of its existence can be interpreted. Their high artistic and organizational level contributed to the formation around the institution of a clearly defined circle of interested audiences, for whom the combination of creativity and political manifesto is acceptable.

It can be seen that at the current stage the mission of cultural resistance remains relevant for understanding the work of the Museum, which is reflected in the thematic content of events, projects, and exhibitions. At the same time, with the process of forming its own audience and partner networks around the institution, new interpretations of the role that the Museum performs in the lives of Belarusians abroad began to emerge.

This change was conceptualized by museum specialists who prepared the "Development Concept" for the Free Belarus Museum in 2023. It reads as follows:

"The Free Belarus Museum in Warsaw is a museum, cultural and educational center that serves as a home for thousands of Belarusians who were forced to leave their homeland due to political repression. It is a place where the memory of the Belarusian democratic movement is preserved, as well as the civic courage of our compatriots who sacrificed their freedom and lives for liberty, human dignity, and the European choice. Our doors are open to everyone and anyone who shares our values. We strive to deepen the understanding of the democratic choice, current circumstances, and future opportunities, to strengthen what distinguishes us as Belarusians and Europeans, and to contribute to further integration into the European cultural space."

Thus, the mission of the Free Belarus Museum is interpreted through the idea of a "home" for Belarusians in exile, which simultaneously preserves the memory of their struggle for democratic and European values and contributes to European integration.

While fully supporting the above-mentioned definition of the Museum's mission, we would like to focus on several circumstances of the "Free Belarus Museum" project which, in our opinion, should also be taken into account when considering the uniqueness and intrinsic value of the mission of this institution.

Firstly, attention is drawn to the fact that the Free Belarus Museum is a cultural institution conceptually connected with the phenomenon of the Belarusian protests of 2020, through the very history of the institution, through its collection content and the themes of its events. Taking into account that, despite the existence of other initiatives thematically dedicated to the events of 2020, the Museum is currently the only organization of this kind with officially registered status, which emphasizes its uniqueness within the constellation of Belarusian cultural initiatives.

The events of 2020, in turn, represent a unique phenomenon in the history of the Belarusian people, which can be interpreted as a reflection of its historical path, existential and ontological choice at an important stage of state and national formation. It is a phenomenon significant also due to the scale of the civilizational shifts it provoked in the Eastern European region, while at the same time becoming the result exclusively of Belarusian internal factors.

The focus on the topic of the 2020 protests and related events allows, in our opinion, through the means of museum interpretation, to reach a broader thematic perspective, demonstrating through the existing collections and exhibition projects of the Free Belarus Museum the socio-political, historical, and cultural picture of the life of the Belarusian people both in the present and from a historical perspective.

Secondly, it should be noted that in its current form the Museum's mission lacks one of the most important objectives, namely – orientation towards the Belarusian audience not only in exile, but also in Belarus itself. Despite the existence of contemporary communication barriers and restrictions, in the long term it can be seen that the Museum's mission should include presenting the collection to Belarusians in Belarus, as well as the musealization of objects and phenomena emerging in contemporary Belarus, for the future of the entire nation, regardless of the place of residence of its individual representatives. It is precisely this that constitutes the main strategic significance that the Museum plays now and should play in the future.

Thirdly, it should be kept in mind that the mission of the Free Belarus Museum, as a platform outside the homeland, should also include visibility for the society in the country of residence, and should be oriented towards a representational function for people unfamiliar with Belarusian culture. It should be noted that achieving these and other similar objectives will be facilitated by a transition (or approximation) towards a more classical museum format, with a significant expansion of collections through objects of high collecting and cultural value.

Existing as a platform with broad functionality, the Museum naturally combines various forms of interaction with audiences, functioning as a museum, exhibition hall, rehearsal space, presentation and negotiation venue, a place for festivals, performances, screenings, press conferences, forums, as well as for organizing creative and educational activities and meetings. Such multifunctionality is a characteristic feature of many émigré cultural organizations, including those with a museum profile.

Such multidirectionality has both positive and negative consequences. Positive aspects may include, for example, the following: it provides the Museum with a broad and diverse audience; it contributes to attracting resources through demand and enables diversification of project initiatives. Negative aspects include: increased pressure on the resource base; dispersion of attention and working time, which prevents concentration on the Museum's own museum-related activities. However, despite all such inconveniences, it appears that this part of the Museum's mission simply needs to be accepted as an inevitability.

Thus, summarizing the previous interpretations of the Museum's mission, based on its current state and role, the final formulation is as follows:

The mission of the Free Belarus Museum is – to preserve in the current memory of the Belarusian people the history of the large-scale Belarusian protests of 2020 and related events; to preserve the memory of the centuries-long history of the Belarusian struggle for freedom, democracy, and against totalitarianism; to function as a multifaceted museum, cultural, social, and educational center for Belarusians in exile and as their symbolic home; to strive to remain close and open to Belarusians living in Belarus who do not have the opportunity to freely familiarize themselves with the current state of the independent Belarusian cultural and historical narratives; to represent Belarusian history and culture for its own audiences and other audiences abroad, for the purpose of integration into the European and global cultural process.

The implementation of the museum mission should lead to the realization of a certain vision of the Museum – what it will be in 2–3 and 5–7 years. It can be seen that this vision is intuitively reflected in the organization's activities – the Museum strives for sustainability and balance between available opportunities and desired outcomes. We believe that, taking into account the current pace of the institution's development, it is possible to aim for an increase in the Museum's core collection to 1,500–2,000 exhibits within 2–3 years, and to approximately 4,000–5,000 exhibits within 5–7 years. The Museum's goal is the effective adaptation of the existing premises, ensuring the functioning of a properly prepared storage facility, as well as permanent exhibitions, including those featuring historical artifacts. Also, in the long term, it is possible to forecast obtaining official museum status in accordance with the legislation of the country of residence, expanding exhibition spaces and storage capacities, and establishing permanent partnership relations with museum institutions in the country of residence.

Museum Collections and Scientific Activity

2.1 Main principles of forming museum collections. Acquisition policy, documentation and provision of access to museum objects

The main principle behind the formation of the Free Belarus Museum's collections at the moment of its establishment was the concern for the need to musealize artifacts of the Belarusian protest movement. The spontaneous creative force of the Belarusian protests of 2020 left behind a multitude of works of art (both street and professional), material evidence of civic resistance, which are threatened by deliberate destruction in Belarus itself, as well as by gradual deterioration due to the lack of proper preservation conditions.

The collection of artifacts from the 2020 protest movement remains the Museum's priority objective. In order to develop this collection, at the end of 2025 the Free Belarus Museum launched a project aimed at evacuating museum-value objects connected with Belarusian resistance to the dictatorial regime that remain in Belarus. The exhibits obtained as a result of this work should become the foundation of the "Artifacts of the Belarusian Protest of 2020" collection.

The Museum's collection interests also include objects thematically connected with the history of the democratic movement and various forms of the Belarusian struggle for freedom and democracy, both in the recent past and in the present. These are objects connected with the activities of Belarusians within Belarus itself (archives of parties, organizations, initiatives, and public figures; materials from electoral campaigns; materials aimed at informing the population; material evidence of political, civic, social, and cultural life, etc.) as well as outside the country.

This applies particularly to objects connected with the struggle of representatives of the Belarusian people at a strategic level — against the regional threat arising from the revanchist and aggressive policies of the leadership of the Russian Federation. These include personal belongings of Belarusian volunteers and aid workers, participants in the defence of Ukraine against Russian aggression, as well as material testimonies of war.

The interests of the Free Belarus Museum also include objects that vividly testify to the traumatic experiences of representatives of Belarusian society in the process of confronting totalitarianism in Eastern Europe. These include personal belongings of Belarusian and other political prisoners, documents, and works of art.

Thus, the first principle of forming the Museum's collections can be identified as the desire to find and preserve objects of museum significance that are threatened with destruction because of their political meaning and the threat they pose to totalitarian regimes, as well as objects that have the potential to tell the story of Belarusians' path towards freedom and democracy. Priority is given to artefacts originating from Belarusian reality.

Taking into account that contemporary events are determined by the course of the civilizational processes of the entire Eastern European region and by the specific features of the historical development of the Belarusian people within this context, the second principle of forming the collections of the Museum of Free Belarus can be described as the intention to represent, through museum interpretation, the main stages of the historical process that have led contemporary Belarusians to their present situation.

The acute political confrontation currently observed in society, primarily along the axis of a vertical conflict with elements of value-based rejection, has historical parallels that can be identified and reflected in the collections. These may include objects connected with the dissident movement during the Soviet period, the declaration of independence of the Belarusian Democratic Republic (BPR) and the struggle for its preservation, items and monuments from uprisings against Russian domination in the lands of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, as well as objects capable of conveying the European choice and values of the Belarusian people and telling the story of their resistance to despotism — a phenomenon that, throughout centuries, was often associated with the influence of centralized neighbouring states.

The European civilizational experience of the Belarusian people, which for centuries has remained a powerful source of attraction for contemporary Belarusian society, can also be represented in museum collections through objects not directly related to political struggle and confrontation. These may include cultural and artistic artefacts, monuments of literature and legal thought. They may also include material and spiritual testimonies of antiquity created on Belarusian lands during the process of national formation and development, as well as those that inspired and contributed to the civilizational growth of previous generations.

The acquisition policy for objects of museum significance at the Free Belarus Museum should be based on the fundamental principles of collection development and should aim to enrich the collections with materials of various types, conditions, values, levels of uniqueness and rarity. It should be taken into consideration that there are objects which may remain outside the interest of other museums and collectors, but whose preservation is essential for documenting the current state of Belarusian society, even if such objects may appear ordinary, insignificant or repetitive. Examples include personal belongings of Belarusian political prisoners or soldiers of the Kastus Kalinowski Regiment, street leaflets and posters.

In addition to collecting artefacts from contemporary everyday life and freely available sources, the acquisition policy should also include the identification and potential acquisition of objects of Belarusian origin available on the antique market. Those items that can highlight the specific features of the historical path of the Belarusian nation and its culture should be considered worthy of acquisition efforts. The final decision on the importance of such efforts should be based on the object's compliance with the fundamental principles of collection development, as well as its artistic value and uniqueness for Belarusian culture.

The process of acquiring objects for the museum collection requires appropriate documentation. Since the Free Belarus Museum is currently located in Poland, it is advisable that, when developing the accompanying documentation, the Museum should follow the recommendations of the National Institute of Museums of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland, which are themselves based on the European Spectrum 5.0 standard.

The high social significance of the Free Belarus Museum's collection means that, in addition to the actual development of the holdings, the institution's policy should also provide for ensuring access to the artefacts for broad sections of the public. Since providing direct access may involve risks to

the preservation of the objects, it is proposed that attention and efforts should also focus on creating digital copies and ensuring access to them.

At present, with the support of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland, the Free Belarus Museum has implemented the project "Digitisation and Provision of Access to the Collection of the Museum of Free Belarus", as a result of which 200 selected artefacts were digitised. There is a need to continue the digitisation process, as well as to support open access to the digitised collection and to ensure the publication of these digital representations on stable international museum and archival platforms.

The following principles of collection development should also be noted, the application of which is considered essential:

- ensuring security and protection of personal data;
- evidence-based verification and documentation of provenance;
- respect for authorship;
- non-partisanship in museum processes (regardless of the existence of political partners).

2.2 Scientific processing of collections

At present, the staff structure of the Free Belarus Museum does not include research employees whose professional responsibilities would involve the scholarly processing of objects and collections.

Documentation management, information gathering, registration, and recording of the narrative component are carried out within the framework of standard procedures for preparing artefact acquisition records.

Opportunities for intensifying work in this area can be seen in the continued search for institutional support, project-based programmes, and forms of cooperation with interested institutions, initiatives, and researchers.

The absence of a dedicated research specialist hinders the implementation of such an important aspect of the scholarly processing of collections as the collection of testimonies (oral history). Although some work in this area has already been carried out, there is also a need to develop a methodology for collecting testimonies and to ensure proper archiving of the materials.

In the long term, with the development of this area of activity, the following vision can be pursued:

- the Museum implements a partnership model of scholarly cooperation by establishing a network of collaboration with universities and researchers;
- the Museum develops its own research outputs: academic articles, catalogues, public lectures, oral history projects, and thematic publications.

2.3 Preservation of museum collections – current problems and ways of solving them

At present, the Free Belarus Museum does not have a properly equipped storage facility that would allow for maintaining the required temperature and humidity conditions and ensuring an appropriate security system.

Adapting to the available premises, the Museum's team has implemented compensatory measures by converting one of the rooms into a storage area. This room has restricted access, which helps ensure the protection of the artefacts, but only partially. It is also impossible to carry out the necessary range of measures in this space to control temperature and humidity levels, as well as to protect the artefacts from exposure to light.

At present, resolving the issue of proper storage facilities is a key challenge in ensuring the preservation of the collections. Possible solutions include: renting additional premises; concluding agreements on the temporary transfer of collections to properly equipped storage facilities of other institutions.

The Museum is also insufficiently equipped with the necessary conservation materials and storage equipment, such as specialised cabinets, shelving systems, and acid-free paper. To improve this situation, it is advisable to plan dedicated institutional expenses, as well as participate in competitive funding programmes of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland and European funds aimed at supporting museum initiatives.

It is also recommended to develop a risk map for the main categories of objects (textiles, paper, paints, digital media, metal objects, etc.) and to identify the most significant preservation risks for each category (humidity, light exposure, temperature fluctuations, pests). Based on this assessment, a compensatory preservation programme should be developed to ensure the safety of the artefacts, including:

- specialised display cases;
- minimum packaging standards;
- acid-free conservation materials;
- basic humidity and temperature monitoring;
- inventory control;
- ensuring access management and security procedures.

Exhibition and Display Activities

3.1 Organization of museum space. Temporary and permanent museum exhibitions

The Free Belarus Museum occupies premises with a total area of approximately 343 m². The Museum's central hall has an area of around 100 m² and is prepared for organising and hosting temporary exhibitions and cultural events. At present, while maintaining the established programme of activities, there are no apparent possibilities for creating a permanent museum exhibition in this space.

A partial solution for developing a more sustainable museum-type exhibition could involve adapting the room adjacent to the main exhibition hall, which is separated from it by a wall without its own ceiling. It would be advisable to equip this space with a universal system of display cases and exhibition panels, allowing it to host temporary museum exhibitions or, alternatively, to create a permanent exhibition there.

The Museum also has a room that is usually used for official meetings, press conferences, and negotiations. If it is not possible to adapt this space for a full museum exhibition, it would be advisable to consider placing temporary or permanent exhibition elements there, such as maps, paintings, and vertical display cases with artefacts.

One of the Museum's rooms has a hybrid form — it is an extension built above a technical space, without a permanent entrance area, although such an entrance could be created additionally. With the implementation of additional works (for example, the construction of a staircase with a gallery), this space could potentially be used either for a permanent exhibition or as a storage facility where the required temperature and humidity conditions could be maintained.

3.2 Exhibition activities

The exhibition activities of the Free Belarus Museum represent one of the most successful areas of its work at the present stage. The unique and attractive exhibition space — even by Warsaw standards — located in an architectural monument that miraculously survived the Second World War, generates interest and enthusiasm among both project authors and visitors. It should be emphasised that the latter often become guests of the Museum solely because they wish to discover the architecture of the building and its interior design, which in turn encourages people unfamiliar with Belarusian issues to become acquainted with the Museum's projects.

The exhibition space is well adapted for large-scale projects due to its high ceilings, with the only significant limitation being the availability of only one exhibition hall. The exhibition equipment allows artistic works and other museum objects to be displayed both on the walls and within the interior space. The Museum's technical facilities make it possible to arrange specialised lighting as well as audio and video accompaniment; however, the improvement of this area is, naturally, an ongoing and potentially unlimited process.

At the current stage, the Museum's exhibition activities have a clear thematic division. They include exhibition projects with a socio-political focus (covering topics such as human rights, political prisoners, the war in Ukraine, repression, and persecution in Belarus) and curatorial projects in the field of contemporary art.

This division complicates the process of building a stable audience due to the thematic gap between different types of projects. This challenge may be addressed through additional promotional efforts, as well as by developing permanent, branded exhibition projects. It should be noted that nearly three years of institutional experience have already resulted in the creation of several recurring events that could develop into distinctive traditions. One example is an annual exhibition or symposium dedicated to the work of Ales Pushkin.

The Museum's participation in Warsaw Gallery Weekend is of great importance for increasing the recognition of the Museum of Free Belarus among Warsaw's exhibition venues. The positive experience of 2025, when works by the widely recognised and highly regarded Belarusian minority artist in Poland, Leon Tarasevich, were exhibited, demonstrates a direction worth pursuing further. This exhibition made it possible to combine Belarusian and Polish elements in one space, which undoubtedly expanded opportunities for representatives of Polish society to become acquainted with Belarusian culture and the situation in Belarus.

It is advisable to continue focusing on themes and authors capable of attracting both Belarusian and Polish audiences to the Museum. The centuries-long shared history of the two nations should provide sufficient material for identifying and developing such themes.

Virtual Space and Interactive Solutions in Museum Activities

One of the components of the mission of the Free Belarus Museum is maintaining a connection with people in Belarus. At the current stage, this connection is ensured primarily through the Museum's presence in the virtual, digital space.

In 2025, the Free Belarus Museum implemented the project "Digitization and Providing Access to Artifacts", which aimed specifically to transfer the most important objects from the collection into the digital sphere. Naturally, as the museum collections grow, this process should be continued, while also seeking other new forms of presenting the collection in the virtual environment.

However, an artifact simply displayed for public viewing may attract little attention if it is not accompanied by an understandable, engaging, and impactful narrative. The trends observed in European digital repositories (for example, Europeana, where work with digital collections is increasingly taking on characteristics of a social network) suggest that further work with already digitized collections will also be of great importance in the future. New narratives and new forms of interaction with audiences can be built around them. It can be assumed that this field offers significant opportunities for the continuous reinterpretation and reactivation of presented objects, although this requires substantial work by professionals with creative approaches.

The limited exhibition possibilities of the Free Belarus Museum require it to actively adopt multimedia forms of representation in accordance with contemporary trends and solutions in museum practice.

Thus, the main objectives for the development of the Museum's virtual space are:

- ensuring a safe presence for people in Belarus;
- increasing international visibility;
- archival preservation.

In addition to the digitization of artifacts themselves, the Museum's virtual space may also include:

- online exhibitions;
- virtual presentations of the "history of objects";
- educational modules/lessons.

Museum Audience



At present, the core audience of the Free Belarus Museum consists of a broad group of Belarusians living abroad who demonstrate a high level of civic responsibility and social engagement. Every year, the Museum hosts several dozen events, attended by several thousand visitors.

According to observations, the vast majority of the offline audience consists of Belarusians in exile who follow the Museum's activities and attend events in response to announcements and news published in independent Belarusian media. A part of the offline audience is made up of Belarusians from Belarus who are aware of the Museum's existence and are interested in its activities, or who visit the venue accompanied by relatives and friends. Another part of the audience consists of representatives of Polish society and visitors to Warsaw from other countries who express interest in Belarusian culture, which is unfamiliar to them.

The audience that physically visits the Museum can therefore be divided into several groups. Since different groups have different personal interests and motivations, work with each audience segment should also take different forms.

Belarusians in exile

Work with this audience should correspond to the Museum's mission and main areas of activity: to serve as a second home and a center of strength for them, to meet their current cultural needs, so that they do not lose connection with their culture and have the opportunity to pass it on to their children.

To meet the needs of this category of visitors, it would be worth considering the development of a separate "Educational and Youth Programme" aimed at audiences of different ages and with different needs.

Beyond meeting the immediate cultural needs of Belarusians in exile, the Museum can also become a place where young people of Belarusian origin seek and discover their cultural and historical identity. This may be one of the most long-term missions that the institution can undertake.

Belarusians in Belarus

Work with this audience requires, first and foremost, compliance with mandatory safety standards, including:

- preventing unauthorized collection of visitor information by third parties;
- informing visitors about risks and recommended security measures (for example, not sharing information on social media, using "No photo" signs, and similar precautions).

The specific interests of this part of the audience must also be taken into account. The Museum of Free Belarus can serve for them as an island of cultural freedom, where they can encounter topics that are prohibited in today's Belarus.

It will be important for them to understand and feel that a vulnerable and disappearing category of national historical and cultural heritage is being preserved here and is under reliable protection.

Work in this direction may include clear, visible, and easily understandable messages explaining the Museum's mission and the importance of its work, for example: "We preserve what must not disappear."

Representatives of Polish society

For this category of visitors, it is important to clearly demonstrate that the Free Belarus Museum is not associated with the Belarusian political regime and represents an alternative Belarus.

The Museum can serve these visitors as a place of encounter with the historically close culture of a nation that has always existed alongside Polish society as a neighbour.

It is desirable to demonstrate shared themes and destinies, as well as common points of historical experience resulting from interconnected historical processes. Such positioning can be achieved through:

- organizing joint events;
- creating permanent and temporary exhibitions;
- providing informational materials at the venue;
- other forms of cultural interaction.

The presence of an exhibition presenting the history and culture of Belarus could significantly improve the Museum's work with this audience.

Representatives of other countries and cultures

For this category of visitors, the Free Belarus Museum can serve as a place to learn about the specifics of the current Belarusian situation and, if the Museum has appropriate resources, as a place to discover Belarusian history and culture.

The second function is especially important because many of these visitors are not organized groups but spontaneous visitors who become interested in the Belarusian museum as an unusual and distinctive element of Warsaw's cultural landscape.

To work effectively with this audience, the Museum should ensure improved visibility by:

- maintaining an up-to-date presence on services such as Google Maps;
- providing English-language exhibition labels;
- maintaining an English-language website section and social media presence;
- preparing materials introducing Belarus to foreign visitors.

Online Audience

The Museum's own communication channels and tools for expanding its audience include the Museum website freebelarus.museum and social media accounts on Instagram (2,731 followers) and Facebook (769 users).

Statistical data shows that the majority of the Museum's social media audience is located in Poland and Belarus. The figures may fluctuate; at the time of preparation of this material, they indicated the following proportions:

- Instagram: 37.9% Poland and 38.6% Belarus;
- Facebook: 73.6% Poland and 4.2% Belarus.

The largest cities where content consumers are located are Warsaw and Minsk (24.3% and 22% respectively on Instagram).

In addition to Belarus and Poland, the audience also includes users from Ukraine, Lithuania, the United States, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic, Russia, Belgium, and France (in descending order, from 4.1% to 0.9%).

Work with the online audience should follow the standards of contemporary internet journalism and blogging. It should include appropriate measures to increase visibility and audience reach, including:

- promotion of publications to target audiences;
- cooperation with designers;
- involvement of SMM specialists;
- involvement of SEO specialists.

Partnership and Cooperation. Board of Trustees



The Free Belarus Museum maintains partnership relations with numerous Belarusian initiatives abroad that are active in the social, political, and cultural spheres.

Long-term partnerships connect the Museum both with its founders and with other political institutions of the Belarusian diaspora, including the United Transitional Cabinet, the Coordination Council, and others. Cooperation with these institutions has primarily taken the form of providing the Museum's infrastructure and facilities for organizing events.

Among civil society organizations, the closest cooperation has developed with the Belarusian Association of Political Prisoners "Da Voli" ("To Freedom"). This cooperation is based on a bilateral relationship: the Museum provides its facilities for events and meetings, while the "Da Voli" Association helps the Museum address current needs by providing volunteer support and other resources.

Other initiatives with which the Museum has established sustainable partnerships represent various cultural projects and social initiatives. Cooperation with them has both permanent and periodic forms. These include the Belarusian Council for Culture, the Forum of Belarusian Cultural Organizations, PEN, "Kupalaŭcy" Theatre, "Viasna," the Belarusian Institute of Public History, "MALDZIS," the bagpipe school, and theatre groups.

Some initiatives have agreements with the Museum for cooperation on a commercial basis. It appears that, in order to ensure the organization's financial sustainability, the Museum should seek to expand the range of services it can provide to other organizations. These may include event organization and equipment rental, as well as specialized museum services such as guided tours, exhibitions, curatorial projects, preparation of museum references, and provision of expert consultations.

Relations with most of the listed organizations are informal in nature, and the number of official agreements concluded between the parties remains limited. Formalizing these relationships, especially in the case of a young cultural organization operating in a vulnerable environment, could become one of the ways to strengthen institutional sustainability.

It is recommended to consider establishing long-term partnership agreements with organizations with which the Museum has maintained many years of cooperation.

A separate and valuable step for the Museum could be the creation of a Board of Trustees. Inviting permanent Museum partners to participate in such a body — including patrons, scholars, respected figures in museum and cultural fields, as well as representatives of influential civil society organizations — would help create a reliable circle of support around the Museum and expand its opportunities for achieving institutional sustainability.

For the successful implementation of a partnership programme, it is recommended to develop a cooperation matrix that would include:

- Strategic partners (those providing resources, legitimacy, or collection development opportunities);
- Programme partners (for the creation of joint content);

- Operational partners (volunteers; organizations providing resources and technical support);
- Communication partners (media organizations).

Separately, it is important to emphasize the need to develop a communication and cooperation strategy between the Museum and Polish and international partner organizations.

Such a strategy could include:

- creating a partnership list of organizations (for example, Museum of Warsaw, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, National Museum in Warsaw, European Solidarity Centre, the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising, as well as museums in the Podlaskie region);
- developing a programme of joint activities (joint exhibitions, exchange of experience, internship programmes for Belarusian museum professionals, joint publishing projects);
- creating a plan for establishing contacts with Polish academic and research institutions specializing in Belarusian studies.

Among foreign organizations whose cooperation has strategic importance for the Free Belarus Museum, particular attention should be given to the Francis Skaryna Belarusian Library and Museum and the Ivan Luckievič Belarusian Museum.

Economic Model of Museum Functioning

At present, as already mentioned, The Free Belarus Museum has three main sources of funding. These include:

- sponsorship support, which covers approximately 40% of the Museum's needs;
- funding obtained through grant programmes, which accounts for around 50%;
- the Museum's own income, which represents approximately 10%.

At the same time, sponsorship support and the Museum's own income primarily cover the costs of renting premises and paying utility bills, as well as everyday operational expenses and, partially, the organization of events. Grant funding enables the Museum to maintain its staff and provides financial support for its own museum activities, including exhibitions, presentations, concerts, round tables, and other events.

The Free Belarus Museum also uses additional forms of fundraising, including:

- collecting donations (through the Stripe system);
- receiving 1.5% of income tax contributions from tax residents of the Republic of Poland.

Income Diversification Plan

To strengthen the Museum's financial sustainability, the following income diversification measures are proposed:

- expand the range of platforms used for collecting donations (one-time and recurring);
- introduce a membership programme "Friends of the Museum";
- introduce ticket sales for selected events;
- expand commercial services (venue rental, guided tours, advertising opportunities);
- develop sales of merchandise and Museum-related products;
- increase the provision of paid services.

Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of this Strategy are understood as an ongoing management practice that enables The Free Belarus Museum to maintain its strategic direction in the context of a changing migration environment, limited resources, and the simultaneous fulfilment of museum and social-cultural functions.

For this purpose, a system of regular monitoring of the implementation of strategic objectives will be introduced, based on an annual operational plan developed in accordance with the goals of the Strategy. The plan will include specific expected outcomes, deadlines, responsible persons, and key performance indicators.

The monitoring system will be based on both quantitative and qualitative data reflecting the Museum's main areas of activity, including: development and documentation of collections; the pace and quality of digitization; the condition and security of storage facilities; implementation of exhibition and educational projects; audience reach and audience structure; communication visibility in the Polish and international contexts; financial sustainability and the development of the partnership network.

Information for monitoring will be collected through internal documentation and record-keeping systems (inventory records, acquisition registers, expenditure and income records, project reports), basic counting of visitors and event participants, website and social media analytics, as well as feedback from visitors, partners, and the professional community. At the same time, compliance with security and privacy standards will be ensured by minimizing the collection of personal data and maintaining the possibility of anonymous feedback, especially for vulnerable audience groups.

Evaluation of results will take place in two modes: internal evaluation, when the Museum team regularly analyses progress, identifies deviations, examines their causes, and adjusts the action plan; and external evaluation, when, after the end of each year (or completion of key stages), achievements and challenges are reviewed with the participation of the Board of Trustees, partners, and, where possible, independent experts. Such an approach will strengthen transparency, trust, and the professional quality of decision-making.

The results of monitoring and evaluation will be documented in short internal reports used for management, planning, and fundraising purposes, as well as in an annual public review of the Museum's activities presenting key indicators, achievements, conclusions, and priorities for the next period. This practice will contribute to continuity, sustainability, and the gradual transition of The Free Belarus Museum towards more systematic museum standards of operation.

Conclusion

The presented Development Strategy of the Free Belarus Museum has been formulated as a response to the unique conditions of the institution's existence in exile and to the combination of several roles it performs simultaneously: as a museum, a cultural and educational centre, a communication platform, as well as a space of solidarity and civic presence for Belarusians abroad.

The foundation of the proposed vision is the preservation and musealisation of material evidence of the Belarusian struggle for freedom and democracy, the formation and development of collections, their documentation, scholarly processing, proper preservation, and expanding access to them both through exhibition activities and digital presence. At the same time, the Strategy emphasises the need for a gradual transition from a predominantly event-based and multi-directional model of activity towards a more systematic museum format, which will allow the institution to strengthen professional standards, reduce risks for collections and the team, and increase institutional sustainability in the medium and long term.

Achieving these goals requires strengthening the material infrastructure, developing professional competencies and human resources, diversifying sources of funding, and further institutional legitimisation within the Polish cultural environment through partnerships, visibility, and joint projects. These efforts will make the Museum understandable and valuable both for the Belarusian diaspora and for Polish and international audiences.

The implementation of the Strategy's provisions should be accompanied by regular monitoring and evaluation in order to maintain alignment with the mission, adapt to a changing context, and transform everyday work into a consistent movement towards a common goal: preserving memory and building a strong cultural institution capable of serving Belarusians today and becoming an important resource for the future Free Belarus.



Warsaw, 2026