

Romona Riscoe Benson

African American Museum in Philadelphia

Since 2005, Romona Riscoe Benson has been the President and CEO of the African American Museum in Philadelphia. Romona initially started as interim president and faced the challenges of transitioning during a major leadership void and massive debt. Among her many accomplishments during that time, Romona worked with the board to develop and implement the six-month recovery plan that moved the Museum into a direction of strategic stabilization. She inherited an institution with a deficit of over \$600,000 and was able to work with stakeholders to reduce and eliminate this deficit over three fiscal years. She moved from the Recovery Plan to engaging the museum in an Institutional Assessment conducted by the Philadelphia Cultural Management Initiative. Her business model involved strong fiscal management, increased museum visibility, introduction of strong highly acclaimed exhibitions, increased quality of programming in education and public events, building strategic relationships with elected officials and corporate leaders, and collaborative partnerships with leaders of arts and culture organizations. In 2008, she spearheaded an effort to develop and adopt a 3-year Strategic Plan, which was approved by the Board of Directors.

Romona has undertaken and completed a \$4.5 million renovation project that included installation of the highly acclaimed core exhibition: *Audacious Freedom*, which tells the story of African Americans living in Philadelphia from 1776-1876. Construction of a new front façade gave the museum a much needed facelift and new orientation for visitors entering the building. Her fundraising leadership allowed the museum to see a \$500,000 surplus in support for the Standing on the Shoulders Campaign.

Romona has over 25 years experience in non-profit, arts management and public sector work. She serves as president of her own consulting firm, Riscoe and Associates, Inc., started in 1997. For five years she served as Executive Director of the Multicultural Affairs Congress, a division of the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau. She produced the city-wide PECO Energy Jazz Festival and the first city career-fair focused on careers in hospitality for urban school students in the area. For three years, Romona was the senior director for Visitor Services at the New Jersey State Aquarium (now the Adventure Aquarium). For nine years she held various management positions in social services, including Vice President of Eastern Pennsylvania with the Abraxas Foundation.

Romona is a civic-minded professional, serving on a number of boards – The Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, the Arts & Business Council, the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau, the National Park Service – President’s House Oversight Committee, The Mayor’s Commission on Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy, the Philadelphia International Airport Advisory Commission, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society – Greater Philadelphia, the Mayor’s Commission on African and Caribbean Immigrant Affairs and, most recently, the Center City District.

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Romona has received numerous awards of recognition from the Philadelphia Tribune, The Philadelphia Business Journal, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, the Minority Business Enterprise Council, State Representative Cherelle Parker, Women Making a Difference, WDAS-FM Radio, and – along with the Museum and in partnership with PECO – a 2010 Arts & Business Council award for Business and Arts Partnership, to name a few. Nationally, she has been recognized by the National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners, and the Meeting Professionals International. She majored in Communications and Music at the University of Pittsburgh and in Human Service Administration from Antioch University, earning a Bachelors degree. Romona has completed certificates in Museum Management from the University of Colorado, Quality Service Management from Disney University, Social Enterprise Marketing from Harvard Business School Club of Philadelphia, and in History Administration from the American Association of State and Local History. She has a passion for history, music and family. Romona and her husband, Herbert, share a love of jazz, coffee and biking.