STRATEGIC PLAN
2018 - 2022

Home Affairs, Black-Eyed Women, installed at SPACES as part of The First 100+ Days group exhibition, 2017
Julia Oldham (Eugene, OR), still from Fallout Dogs, 2018
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INTRODUCTION

SPACES is the resource and public forum for artists who explore and experiment. We are the only alternative art space in Ohio that solely exhibits newly commissioned work, serving as a national model for how to materialize artists’ ideas and interact with audiences. Our success is rooted in providing artists the kind of support rarely seen outside of major institutions, which has led to ambitious new projects that have reached an international stage and expanded artists’ practices.

SPACES produces 4 quarters of exhibitions and dozens of events each year that invite people to engage with new ideas. Our programming has reached hundreds of thousands of people, including artists and visitors from throughout the state, across the country, and around the world.

As an artist-driven organization we:

Support artists creating new work at all stages of their careers.
Position artists as decision-makers throughout the organization.
Deepen the community’s connection to, and understanding of, contemporary art.

SPACES has placed artists at the forefront of everything we do—from our board and staff, to our programming—throughout our entire 40 year history.
SPACES has been challenging the status quo since its initial gathering of artists on May 25, 1978. The typewritten invitation that brought together 35 artists appealed to those “with an interest in creating and presenting new art” and who needed “outlets for their creative energies.” It laid the groundwork for an organization that would support artists with unwavering dedication for the next 4 decades.

Through 4 relocations, 5 executive directors, and several changes in board leadership, SPACES has remained committed to our original mission of serving artists. While celebrating 40 years of commissioning artwork and leading the community in dialogue around pressing issues, we also look toward the future. SPACES is proud to present this strategic plan that reflects our service to artists and to our city of Cleveland, and prepares us for a truly transformative future.
PROCESS SUMMARY

SPACES engaged Strategy Design Partners (SDP) to guide a strategic planning process that focuses on SPACES’ mission, audiences, goals, strategies, and implementation plan.

The SPACES leadership team, including the board of directors and staff, participated in numerous meetings, interviews, and a retreat to assist SDP in gathering information, discussing realities and perceptions from key stakeholders, and establishing the organization’s top strategic priorities.

While a steering committee was in place and served as the leaders in the process, everyone within the organization’s management played an essential role in developing the plan.

SDP analyzed the following research:
- 27 one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders (donors, partners, artists, elected officials, and audience members);
- 51 individual responses from a stakeholder survey;
- Internal governance documents including the SPACES Code of Regulations, Articles of Incorporation, committee charters, and staff structure; and
- Peer-to-peer budget analysis.

Following the Board retreat, the steering committee developed 3 work teams to take a deeper dive into SPACES’ top 3 strategic goal areas: Programming, Structure, and Communication.

Our Strategic Plan focuses on:
- **Redesigning our programming model** to balance residencies, exhibitions, and community engagement efforts that better position SPACES as a resource for both artists and audience members.
- **Reorganizing our governance and staffing models** to support the growth and long-term sustainability of the organization.
- **Rebuilding our organizational brand** by creating compelling communication channels that activate diverse audiences locally and globally.
From: Earthlings - Who We Are

PROGRAMMING

The People’s Museum of Revisionist Natural History group exhibition, 2015
The Programming work team developed the programmatic vision, direction, and goals, as well as a set of strategies for staff and board to implement over the course of the 5-year strategic plan. Future SPACES programming will help us continue to lead the conversation around how art organizations can develop strong collaborations with artists to produce work that is inclusive and inspired, as well as provide additional opportunities to artists outside of our quarterly exhibitions.
Programming strategies:

- Expand the definition of “cultural producer.”
- Explore the addition of dedicated residences for all kinds of cultural producers.
- Review and clearly define the role of the staff and board in the artist selection process.
- Distribute grants directly to artists, in order to support projects outside of our regular programming.
- Refine and grow creative engagement opportunities for artists and the community to interact within and outside of SPACES.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of all programs and events.
- Clearly communicate expectations to artists that will help them explore, experiment, and produce quality work that meets SPACES’ objectives.
- Dissolve the labels of SWAP, R&D, & Vault to create greater programmatic flexibility and allow the needs of participating artists to determine the ways in which their projects are handled.
STRUCTURE

Anne Howard (Cleveland, OH), Interplay, performed in response to Sarah Kabot’s Forgetting Lessons, 2019, photograph by Marissa Glorioso
The Structure work team began to review and update the organizational structure—from governance to staffing to volunteers—in conjunction with the strategies set forth by the Programming work team. The structure committee reviewed SPACES governance, including its committee structure, composition, and code of regulations, and made several updates to help support the future of SPACES programming, but also to help support its sustainability for another 40 years.
Governance strategies:
• Determine board member skill sets required for sound and sustainable nonprofit governance, and recruit for ideal composition and attributes of the board.
• Populate updated committees and approve new charters.
• Update the SPACES Code of Regulations to align with strategic plan.
• Review and update duties & expectations for board members.
• Conduct annual individual assessments and full board evaluations.
• Establish and enforce board and officer term limits.

Staffing strategies:
• Formulate the ideal staffing model, based on programming goals and financial predictions.
• Update existing job descriptions that align with strategic plan objectives and strategies.
• Determine the resources and timeline required to fill new positions.
• Develop position performance plans with specific progress/success metrics that align with the strategic plan.

Sustainability strategies:
• Create a 3-year business model that is responsive to the strategic plan.
• Determine cost of program shift to more residencies and ways to secure additional resources.
• Evaluate current revenue sources and select opportunities to grow or diversify.
COMMUNICATION
With the programming and structure goals and strategies in place, a Communication work team was formed to evaluate SPACES’ communications. This team analyzed SPACES’ current messaging and vehicles of communication to weigh their impact and begin planning for the future. While SPACES already has a unique, recognizable voice, there is opportunity to increase clarity and further strengthen the brand through targeted communication channels that engage various audiences.

**COMMUNICATION VISION:**
Define the SPACES brand and export Northeast Ohio’s culture through compelling communication channels that engage diverse audiences globally while positioning SPACES as a thought leader among alternative art spaces.

**COMMUNICATION GOAL:**
Align our programming with our communication efforts so that we are drawing in target audiences with outreach initiatives that are relevant to their daily lives.

Michael Rakowitz (Chicago, IL), A Color Removed, 2018
CONCLUSION

Through this strategic planning process, SPACES has created a blueprint for the future of our organization, building on 40 years of proven success. The next phase of this process is developing action steps for each strategy.

Thank you to all of our partners and stakeholders who participated in the completion of this plan. A well-informed and impactful plan is one that is guided by active participation from the people who know us best. This process couldn’t have happened without YOU!

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