



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 Artist-in-Residence Johnny Coleman (Oberlin, OH) filmed by Black Valve Media to document his exhibition, *Crossing the Water: Requiem for Lee Howard Dobbins*, 2019

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



The People's Museum of Revisionist Natural History group exhibition, 2015

PROGRAMMING

PROGRAMMING VISION:

Promote dialogue and challenge perceptions of the world by commissioning artists who address complex issues and disrupt the status quo.

PROGRAMMING GOAL:

Enhance community engagement initiatives and redesign the exhibition model to consist of residencies as a key component of our work, allowing for the flexibility required to meet the needs of artists and staff.

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.



Risa Puno (New York, NY), *Exhaust*, 2015

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.



Bellefaire JCB's Social Advocates for Youth participating in the SPACES Creative Engagement Campaign initiative, *Write, Rinse, Repeat*, 2018



Anne Howard (Cleveland, OH), *Interplay*, performed in response to Sarah Kabot's *Forgetting Lessons*, 2019, photograph by Marissa Glorioso

STRUCTURE

STRUCTURE VISION:

Evolve from a grassroots initiative to a fully sustainable organization, and become a model for nonprofit best practices.

STRUCTURE GOAL:

Reorganize the existing governance and staffing models to enhance programming, sustain the financial viability of the organization, and position SPACES as a champion of contemporary art—both regionally and internationally.

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.



SPACES Artist-in-Residence Anna Viola Hallberg (Stockholm, Sweden) during the opening of *Imperial Differences*, 2015

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.



Ward Shelley (Easton, CT), *Back Office, in the Flats, Cleveland, OH, 2018*



COMMUNICATION

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.

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.



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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