



## Background

The Arts Council of Princeton (ACP) embarked upon a strategic planning process in 2014 to provide the organization with a four-year roadmap to guide our work as we head toward our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017.

As part of this FY 2015-FY 2019 strategic planning process, the board strategic planning committee reviewed the ACP's current operations and assessed the ongoing needs in our community through a series of focus groups and one-on-one interviews with various ACP constituencies.

The process confirmed that the ACP continues to be true to its mission of building community through the arts, and our mission continues to respond to the needs of the community. Key conclusions included:

- The community the ACP currently serves encompasses the geographic areas of Princeton, Mercer County and the localities contiguous to Princeton. The ACP will continue to have this “greater Princeton” reach, while retaining a special focus on the local Princeton community immediately surrounding the Paul Robeson Center.
- ACP programming engages people of all backgrounds regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, abilities, or social- economic background – and it must continue to evolve with these diverse constituencies firmly in mind.
- Our community values that the ACP uses a combination of visual, performing and literary arts to forward its mission through a wide range of arts and arts education programs including studio-based classes and workshops, exhibitions, performances and community cultural events.

## Mission Statement

The mission of the ACP is to “build community through the arts.” The strategic planning process reconfirmed the validity and value of this mission.

### Guiding Principles for the ACP's Mission and Strategic Plan

*The ACP continues to be guided in its mission and strategic planning by the following core values:*

- The arts and arts education are fundamental to a healthy society.
- The arts and arts education directly impact academic achievement and improve literacy for school children.
- The arts and arts education contribute significantly to economic development.
- The arts and arts education promote cross cultural understanding and appreciation.
- The arts and arts education positively contribute to the quality of life for everyone in the community.

## Vision for this Strategic Plan

Over the four-year period covered by this strategic plan, 2015-2019, the ACP will strive to:

- Expand the number of people within its community with which it has direct contact by strengthening programming for youth, families and the community;
- Improve its messaging so that the members of the community have a clearer understanding of what the ACP does;
- Assess its staffing and space needs and constraints to determine a plan for future, long term growth;
- Expand its funding base and achieve greater financial security;
- Increase its board diversity and deepen board member participation in ACP activities.

In addition to pursuing the strategic initiatives listed above, the ACP will maintain the excellence of ongoing programs including: exhibitions and performing arts, with a focus on local and regional artists; community arts outreach programs, with a focus on the local at-risk youth and seniors; education programs for children, teens and adults; and community cultural events including: Communiversality, and other multi-cultural events serving the local community.

## Summary of Current Position

### Strengths

- The ACP is recognized as a leader in arts education, presentation and advocacy. Our programs and organizational excellence have been repeatedly recognized with awards and honors.
- Our highly respected education and outreach programs are, in general, operating at capacity.
- Our community events are well attended, growing and highly valued by attendees.
- Our recent emphasis on work with the elderly has been recognized and applauded.
- Our revenue has grown significantly since the opening of the Robeson Center in 2008, we have made progress in paying down the debt tied to our new building and we are on a solid financial footing.
- There are other “arts councils” and arts organizations operating in our community such as West Windsor Arts Council, Hopewell Valley Arts Council, ArtWorks Trenton. We do not view these organizations as competitors but rather collaborators with whom we can potentially partner on certain initiatives and with whom we can share best practices.

### Challenges

- We operate at or near capacity in our current facility.
- We have a talented and committed staff that is stretched very thin, making it critical that we develop ways of increasing capacity while we identify areas for growth and improvement carefully to avoid over-burdening them.
- Despite all of our success, ACP has a branding/marketing issue in that the people in our community do not consistently have a clear idea of what the ACP is and the breadth of the organization’s activities.

## Strategic Priorities and Strategies for Achievement

Following an internal assessment of our programming and resources, including human, financial and facilities, as well as an assessment of community needs accomplished through a series of focus group discussions with a variety of stakeholders in our community, we determined the following strategic priorities and strategies. Implementation of each of these initiatives will require a more detailed budget and human resource analysis. New programming referenced in this plan will only be initiated once we are secure in our ability to fund and administer the program.

### **PRIORITY 1: Strengthen Our Programs for Youth, Families and the Community**

- Expand programming for public and private school students through partnerships with schools that include payment for ACP programs. This is a model we have successfully used in the past that we believe we can use to grow our programs, given our resource constraints. This programming will happen outside of the ACP building and so will enable us to grow despite our space constraints. It also recognizes funding constraints by requiring co-payment. True to the value we place on inclusiveness, the co-payment will not preclude any student from participating as we will make funds available through scholarships for those who cannot afford the co-payment.

**Goal:** Initiate expanded programming by December 2016.

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- Enhance and expand engagement with the Witherspoon-Jackson neighborhood, most notably using the W-J Stories Project as a vehicle to work more closely with the W-J neighborhood to determine how we can more effectively engage with and serve the neighborhood.

**Goal:** Design and schedule new programs relevant to the W-J neighborhood; improve marketing of existing programs and new programs, including availability of scholarships, and improve Spanish language marketing; Planning and implementation of improvements to commence by the beginning of FY 2015/16.

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- Expand after-school classes using the “art club” model for middle and elementary school children. Like the public school partnership program, this program will enable us to reach more children at their schools rather than in our building and so enables us to grow despite our space constraints.

**Goal:** Increase the number of children served each academic year through FY 2016/17.

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- Develop programs to further engage middle and high school students using the CAPS afterschool model, volunteer opportunities, and other program models. Develop programs that serve students both in the ACP facility and through partnerships that provide opportunities for increased engagement in school or community locations in a range of media: visual, performing and media arts.

**Goal:** Develop and implement programs by April 2016.

- Working in partnership with the municipality and owners of sites throughout Princeton (such as AvalonBay), build upon early successes to develop an ongoing public art program that engages artists and the public in projects that bring art into the community and provide greater visibility for the Arts Council. Effectively utilize programs that currently exist (such as the Artists in Residence program) and projects in development (such as the Parklet program) as a basis for both temporary and permanent projects over the next three years.

**Goal:** Produce one public art project per year beginning in FY 2015/16.

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- Explore creating an ACP “art bus” that would enable the ACP to create mobile programs to reach more people in the community.

**Goal:** Recommendation to the board due by Fall 2015. If the decision is made to move forward on the “art bus” concept, the board and development staff will target raising funds for the mobile unit during calendar 2016 with the goal of having a functioning mobile unit by the spring of 2017.

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- Continue existing programs that serve seniors while concurrently evaluating such programs to assess impact and funding.

**Goal:** If such programs are determined to be well-funded and programmatically effective then explore expanding them during 2016-17.

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- Create a task force with board member participation to explore potential new programming and funding for the special needs populations (i.e. autistic, developmentally or physically disabled).

**Goal:** Task force to complete its study by end of 2015 so that any new programming can be explored in early 2016 and budgeted for 2016-17.

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- Assess ACP’s Performing Arts offerings to determine their place in ACP’s programming.

**Goal:** Conduct a more detailed cost/benefit analysis of ACP performances using historical attendance data and cost information and explore the value of partnering with organizations such as McCarter Theatre and Princeton University to improve the cost/benefit ratio. Study to be completed by end of 2015.

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- Create system for ACP staff to use to assess new and existing programming on an ongoing basis to ensure that it is consistent with the ACP mission and economically viable.

**Goal:** Create system by July 2015 with immediate implementation.

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## **PRIORITY 2: Improve our Messaging**

- The Marketing Committee will work with a volunteer consultant and other resources to review our current marketing/branding and create a new and improved marketing/branding strategy that will more clearly articulate what the ACP does and the service it provides to the community.

**Goal:** New comprehensive marketing plan, based on this strategic plan and our consultant’s initial work, due to the board by October 2015

- As part of the marketing/branding review, the committee will formally assess the effectiveness of the name “Arts Council of Princeton” and determine whether we modify the name as part of our re-branding. The board agrees to dedicate limited dollars to ensure this assessment is well informed and definitive.

**Goal:** Recommendation must be part of October 2015 marketing plan. If we proceed with name change, it must be implemented in time for promotion of Communiversy 2016.

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- Review the Robeson Center “image” and determine how we might make the facility a more inviting venue for the community.

**Goal:** Recommendation to the board due by Fall 2015, with majority of any resulting changes to be completed by the middle of 2016.

### **PRIORITY 3: Assess Space and Staffing Needs/Constraints to Create a Plan for Long Term Growth**

- Professionally assess the current use of space at the Robeson Center. It is clear that the ACP will require additional staff to continue to grow and the ACP offices are currently unable to accommodate additional staff. It is also clear that the ACP will require additional space for programming if it is to continue to grow. This task force will both determine whether there is a more efficient way to use the Robeson Center and also determine whether we should consider adding space to the ACP either adjacent to the Robeson Center or elsewhere in the community. The strategic plan projects a two-three year period in which to assess and implement expansion changes for space and programming.

**Goal:** Recommendations due to board by Fall 2015, with changes in place by Spring 2016.

### **PRIORITY 4: Expand our Funding Base and Achieve Greater Financial Security**

Work with staff and the Development Committee to create a development plan to cover the period of this strategic plan, to include:

- Complete pay down of mortgage by end of 2016.
- Goals and development plan for Endowment Campaign for 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a focus on building the endowment and increasing the working capital fund for facilities and emergencies.
- Launch of the Endowment Campaign for 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

*Phase 1:* Assess development staffing needs to determine whether additional staffing is required to achieve the goals stated above.

**Goal:** Recommendation due to board by June 2015

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*Phase 2:* Put in place development staffing structure with clearly delineated areas of responsibility to achieve the goals stated above.

**Goal:** Changes in place by fall 2015

*Phase 3:* Begin raising, through a combination of increased grant proposals, corporate funding and individual donor requests, and fundraising events, the funds needed to meet the goals stated above.

**Goal:** Pay down mortgage by end of 2016 in anticipation of launching the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary campaign in fall 2017.

**PRIORITY 5: Increase Board Diversity and Broaden Board Member Participation in ACP Activities**

- Ensure Nominating Committee seeks out and proposes board members who add diversity to the Board and help the ACP remain representative of the community we serve.

**Goal:** Ensure continued focus on increasing diversity with 2015 nominations and continue annually to make the full board more fully reflective of the communities the ACP serves.

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- Structure better system for engaging board members in ACP activities including maximizing how we use committees and special task forces.

**Goal:** Create system by June 2015 including updated committee and task force structure. Survey Board each year to ensure continuous improvement.

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The Board and staff of the Arts Council of Princeton endorse this plan and its five key priorities. Together we are committed to following through on the direction laid out in this document and measuring our success against the goals enumerated within the plan.

We are confident that the ACP will enter its “second half century” better positioned than ever to build community through the arts in Princeton and the surrounding region.