

Summary Version of
Strategic Plan for
New Art Center in Newton, Inc.

Adopted: June 8, 2016

A Thriving Community Space for Art

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Executive Summary

This strategic plan grows out of a profound need to ensure the New Art Center's long-term stability and sustainability in the years to come. It addresses the financial and operational challenges and opportunities currently facing this nearly 40-year old institution - stabilizing cash flow, developing operating reserves, addressing significant deferred building maintenance, and articulating the mission and vision for the organization.

Mission

The New Art Center is a community art education space which offers everyone, at all levels of ability, exceptional opportunities to make, exhibit, view, think about and talk about art.

Vision

The New Art Center will become a vibrant model of a community art center, lowering barriers to participation in the arts and integrating the experience of art into the life of the community.

Values

The New Art Center is based on the belief that the practice of looking at, thinking about and making art helps human beings solve problems, learn from their environment, build durable communities and live meaningful lives. We work towards a future in which all people can incorporate the experience of art into their daily lives.

This plan is in two phases: a detailed three-year plan to stabilize and strengthen the Center, and a more visionary ten-year horizon which fulfills the promise of the values, vision and mission statements.

Four goals have been identified for the first phase:

Goal 1: Optimize net revenue from our core educational activities.

Goal 2: Add capacity to increase donor support

Goal 3: Express the mission through exhibitions

Goal 4: Plan for historic rehabilitation of our building

1. Introduction

The New Art Center was founded at 61 Washington Park in Newtonville in 1977 by a group of interested, committed Newton neighbors.

The Center currently offers some 500 art classes and 60 workshops and other programs each year. Classes are offered in ceramics, painting, drawing, mixed media and woodworking (this last only for children), as well as a limited number of cross-disciplinary offerings. In vacation periods we run full-day art experiences for children. New students comprise a variable proportion averaging 20% of each semester's population, and the proportion of returning students is high. We undertake outreach programs and provide scholarships for those who cannot afford or access them otherwise, such as young adults living independently with cognitive disabilities, women sheltering from domestic violence or those with limited financial means.

We hold exhibitions and artist residencies in two galleries. Gallery visitation has been at 4500 - 5000 per year in the last 3 years. Exhibitions include some proposed by independent curators through the Curatorial Opportunity Program, which produces exhibitions for unaffiliated and emerging curators. In addition, we mount exhibitions of art from the community; by our own students and in partnership with Newton Open Studios, Newton Art Association and the Massachusetts Cultural Council and other local, regional and national organizations.

The staff consists at present of an executive director, education director, exhibition manager, marketing manager, registrar, business manager, facilities coordinator and ceramics studio manager, of whom four are full-time.

The building is a church, built in segments between 1873 and 1888, which is well-used and in need of upgrade. Finances have been consistently tight and the operation has been lean.

The Center is, on the one hand, embedded in the community with a loyal following of committed students, faculty, staff and artists. At the same time, it has been perceived as a "hidden gem", suggesting that more can be done to engage the community and enhance the experience of art in the City and the region.

This plan has been crafted to address the structural challenges faced by the Center, build stability, sustainability and access, so that we may develop programming that is ambitious, exciting and challenging.

2. Goals, Objectives & Timelines

This is a plan in two phases. First is a three-year framework (FY 17 - 19) designed to grow student participation and revenue, build our donor base, build operating reserves and plan for the future. We'll do this by "doing what we're good at", i.e. maintaining a tight focus on core activities through improving the customer experience. We will simultaneously enhance our infrastructure, and build our fundraising capacity, working gradually toward long-term growth and renewal.

The second phase, presented here as a vision rather than a detailed plan, covers years FY 20 - 26. It envisions a physical rehabilitation of the space to accommodate a broader suite of programs for a larger audience, including our current audience of artists and curators, and reaching out to engage non-artist adults interested in exploring the role of art in American culture in a community setting.

Both phases include, at their core, a commitment to the experience of art, and to access for all, regardless of ability, age, physical/cognitive/perceptual limitation, cultural background, financial means or educational attainment.

The three-year plan is rooted in our current reality. The New Art Center will add capacity incrementally in both education and fundraising, with a tight focus on efficiency, productivity and financial results to sustain moderate growth during this period. Planning and implementation projects will come thick and fast during the first year, beginning with a professional review of fundraising and a firm commitment to improving customer service in classes, exhibitions and associated events. Board committees and staff will work together to create a set of coordinated plans in support of the strategic plan, in Fundraising, Finance, Building and Program Development.

By the end of phase 1, the elements will be in place to lay the the groundwork for a capital campaign, and for management of the subsequent projects to renew the organization and facility in the second phase. At that point, an update to this strategic plan will be in order, to assess progress, check in with stakeholders, and clarify and plan implementation of phase 2.

Goal 1: Optimize net revenue from our core educational activities.

The overarching goal of the education program is to reach as many people as possible with the hands-on experience of art, recognizing that there is a wide range of experience and ability within the community we serve.

This plan calls for 5.5% growth per year in revenue from classes, over the next three years. In order to achieve these results we must improve the experience for existing students and foster positive word-of-mouth impressions. To do so we need to:

- Strategies
 - Improve management skills and business processes for class registration and education functions
 - Invest in education operations, upgrade studio equipment & better organize classroom spaces to improve customer service, experience, relationships
 - Institute regular faculty evaluation and professional development programs
 - Continue to raise the quality and profile of faculty and programs
 - Refine and extend our range of offerings, audiences, pricing and schedule
 - Upgrade our website
 - Segment marketing
 - Expand access for students with limited mobility and encourage their participation, through creation of accessible studios/classrooms
 - Engage faculty's assistance and support in energizing classes, improving student experience, retaining existing students and recruiting new ones.
 - Pilot open studio offerings in empty times/spaces .

Goal 2: Add capacity to increase donor support

The smaller part of our revenue comes through gifts and contribution, which represent 27% of New Art Center income, or \$300,000. Both the dollar amount and the percentage of the budget have grown over time.

Nonetheless, this is the area with the greatest potential for revenue growth into the future. NAC needs to raise the level of donations in order to underwrite the expansion of programs, improvements in operations, and upgrade to our facility. We have students and other supporters who will give more if asked appropriately. Other organizations invest far more than we do and achieve better results. We need to increase our investment in this area.

- Strategies
 - Develop permanent, in-house fundraising capacity
 - Hire consultant to design development operation, articulate fundraising strategy, and recruit permanent fundraising staff
 - Hire a full-time Development Manager beginning mid FY17;
 - Increase the percent time the Executive Director spends on fundraising to 50%
 - Engage the Board Fundraising Committee, with support of the Executive Director and the new Development Manager, to lead development and

- implementation of a fundraising plan to take us up to the start of a capital campaign
 - Establish Board's leadership role in giving and soliciting gifts
 - Build and prepare donor base for Year 4 quiet launch of capital campaign
-

Goal 3: Express the mission through exhibitions

The overarching goal of the exhibition program is to support the educational mission of the New Art Center by providing a spectrum of exhibitions that range from work of familiar members of the community to challenging work by leading-edge professionals. The three-year goals are to increase the community's excitement about and engagement with art; to present and celebrate the artists of our community, broadly defined; and to maintain a level of investment appropriate to our financial capacity. Over the course of the ten-year plan, we will broaden our audience and develop successful tools with which our audience can engage with unfamiliar and challenging artwork in a personal way.

We will accomplish this by working closely with NAC Education Department; students & faculty; community organizations such as the Massachusetts Cultural Council, Newton Art Association, Newton Open Studios, International Encaustic Artists, and others; independent curators and artists to present exhibitions and artist residencies that compel visitation while also stretching the audience beyond their expectations. We will work to develop simple tools to assess audience engagement and interest, and to communicate the simple pleasure of looking at and thinking about art.

- Strategies to express the mission through exhibitions:
 - Present a spectrum of exhibitions, from familiar through cutting edge, to encourage, delight and stretch community members
 - Increase the community's comfort level with visiting the gallery
 - Provide opportunities for the community to appreciate the art created by their neighbors.
 - Partner with community organizations to grow audience & expand engagement
 - Optimize revenue opportunities through art sales; partner cost-sharing; exhibition event sponsorships
 - Develop, test and implement tools to analyze and segment exhibition audiences (and those of other free programs)

Goal 4: Plan for historic rehabilitation of our building

The overarching goal of the facility plan is to renovate our building to be a welcoming, accessible, comfortable, appealing space for creating, viewing and learning about art.

The three-year goal is to create a thorough, professional plan for rehabilitating our historic and beautiful facility that has served since its earliest days as a space in which the community can meet and thrive. We will assess existing conditions and feasibility; specify the scope of the project ; select and work with an architect to develop plans through the Schematic Design phase; and engage an independent, professional construction estimator to anticipate costs.

The ten-year goal is to rehabilitate the building into an accessible, welcoming home for the arts in Newton, capable of hosting educational events including classes, workshops, lectures, exhibitions, performances and panel discussions for audiences of any age and ability. We will accomplish this by raising funds through public and private sources to rehabilitate the building and create an ongoing funding mechanism to provide for the maintenance and eventual replacement of building systems and elements.

- Strategies
 - Create a schematic plan to:
 - Rehabilitate our beautiful and historic building to appropriately house our programs and make efficient use of our building while preserving those portions and features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values.
 - Make our exhibitions, classes and programs accessible to all
 - Develop independently verified project budget
 - Incorporate facility reserve into capital campaign planning

3. Finances

The financial plan extends through the initial three year phase. The focus is on maintaining a balance between building cash reserves to a minimum level of two month's expenditure and investing in personnel, consulting expertise, software and equipment.

We will add staff carefully over time as funds become available, initially to support Education programs, then to build an institutional fundraising effort, and, last, to manage operational workflow and scheduling for the organization as a whole. While carefully designed, the staffing plan represented here is provisional, depending on the skills of our current team, the available talent pool, the economic environment, our progress toward plan goals and a host of other factors.

FY 17

One-time Investments:

- Fundraising consulting
- website development/upgrade,
- exhibition and accessibility upgrade,
- facility planning studies & design

Net one-time investments **\$46,000.**

Permanent additions/changes to the current staff plan:

- Education Assistant
- Development Manager

Aggregated salary line increases (pro rated) **\$70,000.**

Please note that only half of the Development Manager salary is represented in FY17; the remainder is in FY18, to arrive at the permanent annual salary projected for that and future years.

FY 18

One-time Investments:

- Second phase of Website upgrade/replacement
- Final phase of facility planning (NAC share)
- Marketing consultant

Total one-time investments **\$47,500.**

Permanent additions/changes to the FY 17 staff plan:

- Pro-rated staff additions & professional development

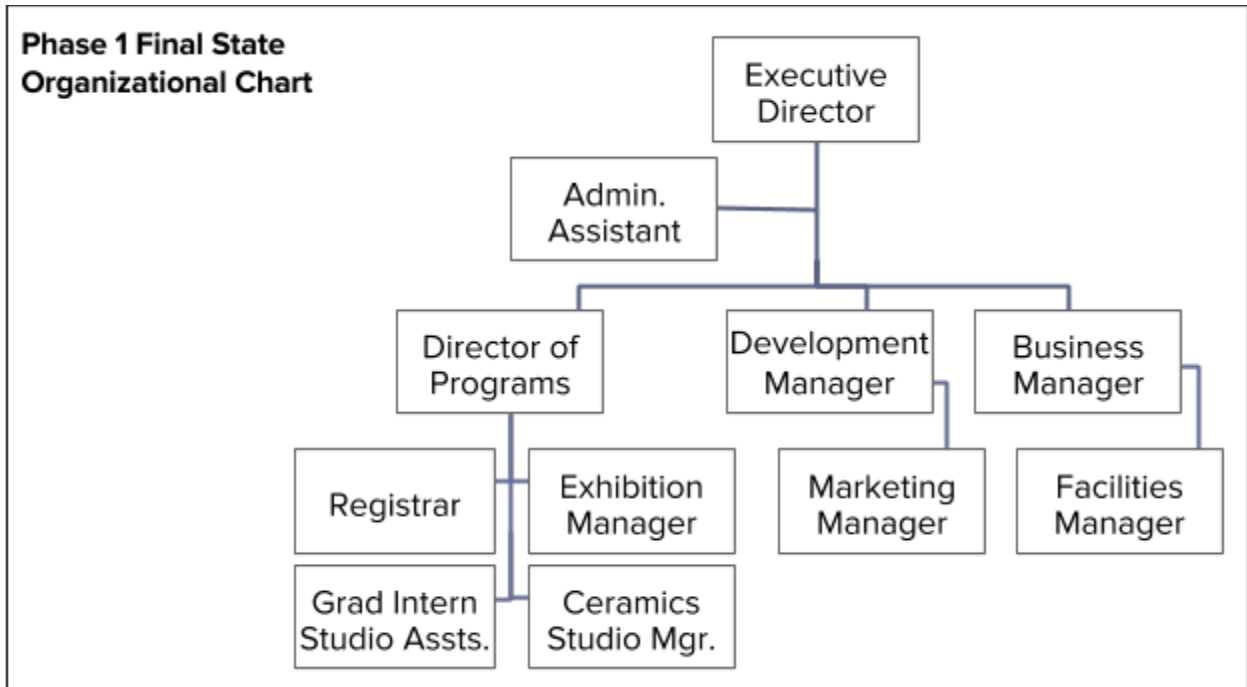
Aggregated salary line increases **\$50,000.**

FY 19

Permanent additions/changes to the FY 18 staff plan:

- Administrative Assistant and pro-rated professional development

Aggregated salary line increases **\$50,000.**



Additions to Base Operating Budget (salaries obscured for discretion)

Additions to Base Operating Budget		FY17	FY18	FY19
Carried from prior year		\$ -	\$ 70,000	\$ 120,000
new this year	2 part-time grad. Interns or Assistant	\$ XX,000	\$ -	\$ -
	Director of Development	\$ XX,000	\$ XX,000	\$ -
	Administrative Assistant	\$ -	\$ -	\$ XX,000
	Raises, professional development for staff	\$ -	\$ XX,000	\$ XX,000
Total Additions to Base Operating Budget		\$ 70,000	\$ 120,000	\$ 170,000
One-time Investments	website & database reconfiguration	\$ 10,000	\$ 20,000	
	gallery reconfiguration	\$ 15,000		
	facility planning (beyond \$72K pledged)		\$ 25,000	
	Marketing software consultant	\$ 1,000	\$ 2,500	
	Fundraising consultant	\$ 20,000		
Total One-time Investments		\$ 46,000	\$ 47,500	
Total Investment by Year		\$ 116,000	\$ 167,500	\$ 170,000

Effect on Base Operating Budget

Effect on Base Operating Budget		Current Year	FY17	FY18	FY19
<u>Operating Revenue</u>					
Earned Income	<i>Annual growth est.: 5.5%</i>	\$ 836,000	\$ 882,500	\$ 930,000	\$ 980,500
Contributed Income	<i>Annual growth est.: 13 - 16%</i>	306,000	339,500	390,500	449,000
Total Operating Revenue		\$1,142,000	\$1,222,000	\$ 1,320,500	\$ 1,429,500
<u>Operating Expenses</u>					
Program Expenses	<i>(incl. new hires & 1 time costs)</i>	402,000	413,000	425,500	438,000
Administrative Expenses	<i>(incl. new hires & 1 time costs)</i>	708,000	798,000	862,500	922,500
Total Operating Expenses		\$ 1,110,000	\$ 1,211,000	\$ 1,288,000	\$ 1,360,500
Net Surplus after one-time investments		\$ 32,000	\$ 11,000	\$ 33,000	\$ 69,000
	Note: One-time Revenue	0	72,652	0	0
	Note: One-time Investments	0	118,652	42,500	0

4. Risk Analysis

The risks inherent in this plan are incremental rather than catastrophic. The Center sells classes; the question is, how many? We can control costs; the question is, when are cuts too deep, reducing capacity? All cost and revenue estimates have both controllable and uncontrollable elements. This plan represents the best estimates and uses of cost and revenue available through the combined wisdom of the board, staff and consultants who have assisted in its creation. It balances those elements, and builds a framework to allow monitoring and mitigation of financial position.

By far the greatest risk we face is that of cash flow, as demonstrated by NAC's periodic financial stresses. The chief priority of the proposed 3-year plan is to improve the NAC's position by creating a modest cash reserve of \$200,000 (2 months of expenses) at the lowest point in the year. This will allow us to manage unexpected swings in enrollment or expenses, or the unpredictable timing of fundraising efforts. The single most important thing we can do to manage risk is to create this operating reserve.

A second major risk is the uncertainty regarding the ability to grow fundraising quickly. By implementing a donor management system and adding staff capacity dedicated to fundraising, we will have greater predictability and efficiency in our funding efforts, thereby growing the proportion of our current supporters who give, and reaching new supporters more consistently and effectively.

There is risk in enrollments, due to variations in human behavior, popularity, weather and all the myriad factors that may have an impact. With clearer goals and measurement tools, we can identify shortfalls much earlier than in the past, and adjust marketing and outreach efforts to bring the numbers back to expected levels.

Risk is also always present in the precarious condition of the physical structure. While the current state is manageable, failure of systems or structures is difficult to predict and mitigate. While this plan calls for ultimate rehabilitation of the building, there are significant risks during the interim. These are managed through budgeting to cover depreciation expense, as well as a capital line item.

The plan assumes we will continue to operate on the efficiency curve, and, in fact, improve on it. There are no frills. Revenues for coming semesters are compared daily with semester-to-date information from prior years, as are fundraising results. Costs and revenues

are budgeted and monitored by department heads, the Business Manager, the Executive Director and the Finance Committee, as well as bimonthly by the Board of Governors. Fundraising will be systematized to improve predictability and reduce surprises and risk. If revenues fall short of expectations, investments can be postponed or expenses cut.

In any plan there is also an “upside risk”, that of earning or raising more money than anticipated, or of spending less. Such unexpected funds need to be managed carefully as well. In an environment of surplus, the temptation to undertake unplanned activities or to front-load planned investments will be balanced with the need to build reserves.

The greatest improvement in risk management is the plan itself. It provides a vision of success against which we can measure ourselves and make corrections as necessary in time to have a significant mitigating impact.

Finally, the risks of this plan must be measured against the risks inherent in turning aside from it or losing the short-term focus on revenue production through education and fundraising. As has often been noted, the building will not fix itself. Teaching children, caring for them and keeping them safe is neither easy or inexpensive, and requires trained professionals and a high level of organization. Students have expectations of their surroundings, equipment and faculty, and competing opportunities are made available to them every day. Faculty members need training, mentoring, evaluation, review and professional development opportunities. Hard work and creative effort are required to fill classes and run programs. Community expectations of New Art Center participation and good-citizenship grow with our stature, and draw away resources that are sorely needed within the building. None of these demands lessen with time, and all of them require creativity, hard work, guidance and financial support. Not to undertake this plan at this time puts all that at risk. We cannot go back, we can only go forward.

5. Conclusion

This plan represents an affirmation of our strengths, but also recognizes our challenges and provides guidance to address them in a disciplined, consistent way, through strengthening financial health, rehabilitating the building, and growing the organization. It is a plan that matures the organization, moving it toward a leading role in the industry and the cultural life of the region. Survey respondents and donors told us to “stick to our knitting”. We were reminded that the community needs us to articulate our value and show them why they need us.

The value in any plan is that it provides a guide by which to steer. A plan shows when we’re making progress towards goals, and when we aren’t. It empowers us to make corrections early, in time to have a substantive impact on the outcome.

This particular plan reminds the New Art Center of its roots, and also its ambitions. At this moment in our history we choose whether to take a lead role in renewing the community’s vision of a life lived with art, or be content with the status quo. This plan shows the way forward to a community where art can be lived and breathed by everyone; where the New Art Center can represent the larger art world, bring it to people in a friendly, un-threatening, accessible way. And we will also represent this community to the art world, with our development of young curators, connections to art schools and museums across the region and engagement of working artists as faculty and artists in residence. We can revive this hard-working building and make it once again a beacon, as it was when the neighborhood was new. And we can reach out to those whose need a helping hand, and give them the tools and the confidence to find their voices through art.

What this plan requires is focused teamwork on the part of every member of the New Art Center community. But it will be work that fulfills and enlarges all of us, and makes life better in Newton and across the region. Let’s get to work!

Appendices

Appendix 1: New Art Center Audience Survey Summary

- Date of survey: 2/19, 2/24, 3/02/16
- Invitations Sent: 10,515
- Responses: 303
- Response rate: 3%
- Questions: 32 total (some patrons saw fewer, depending on their answers)

[NB: Ratios in brackets, such as [296/303], represent total of “Very Interested” and “Somewhat interested” over the total number that answered, unless otherwise noted. If several questions addressed the subject figures are given for each, separated by a comma.]

Intro

The recent Survey of the New Art Center’s audiences was successful and informative. The response rate, at about 3%, was healthy for such a large list, and provided valuable insight into the feelings of our constituents.

The survey began with broad, strategic questions on the current and potential direction of the Center, and progressed to more practical questions of satisfaction with program elements, first the exhibition program, then studio classes. It included some questions on marketing preferences as well.

Fully half of those who responded had not taken a class here [138/272]. This result is significant, showing that we engage a large, active audience willing to answer the survey who are not in the studio program themselves, [although their children might have been].

The Good News

There was consistent, strong endorsement of the Center’s dual role

- Educating artists/art students [292/303, 284/303, 26/113]
 - “How important is each of the following components of NAC’s work?”
 - “NAC provides educational opportunities for art students” 75% (226/303) very important, 22% (66/303) somewhat important
 - “NAC provides educational opportunities for artists” 65% (196/303) very important, 29% (88/303) somewhat important
- Providing a community and set of experiences (including exhibitions) focused on the arts [285/303, 51/113]
 - How important is each of the following components of NAC’s work?
 - “NAC lowers barriers and increases accessibility to participating in and experiencing arts” 69% (210/303) very important, 25% (75/303) somewhat important
 - “NAC builds community through and around art” 64% (195/303) very important, 29% (87/303) somewhat important.

Approx. 75% [213/281] had attended an exhibition.

When asked “How important is each of the following components of NAC’s exhibition program” they responded:

- “Offering high quality/caliber exhibitions” [252/283] 60% (169/283) very important, 29% (83/283) somewhat important
- “Offering access to visual arts exhibitions within my community” [250/283] 55% (156/283) very important, 33% (94/283) somewhat important
- “Providing opportunities to make and see art in the same facility.” [251/283] 50% (141/283) very important, 39% (110/283) somewhat important

Just over half [140/272] had taken classes themselves. 2/3rds had taken drawing & painting, 1/3 had taken mixed media, ¼ had taken ceramics. Education programs were noted for:

- Quality of faculty & instruction [133/140]
 - “For programs you have participated in, how satisfied are you with the experience?”
 - “Teacher”: 70% (98/140) very satisfied, 25% (35/140) somewhat satisfied
 - “Level of instruction”: 51% (71/140) very satisfied, 41% (57/140) somewhat satisfied
- Class size [128/140]
 - “For programs you have participated in, how satisfied are you with the experience?”
 - “Class size”: 44% (61/140) very satisfied, 50% (70/140) somewhat satisfied

The Less Good News:

On the other hand, support was weak for:

- Providing professional development for curators and artists [229/303, 9/153, 3/113]
- Blurring boundaries between artistic disciplines
 - “How important is each of the following components of NAC’s work?”
 - “NAC provides professional development opportunities for artists” 53% (161/303) very important, 36% (109/303) somewhat important
 - “NAC provides professional development opportunities for curators” 37% (113/303) very important, 38% (116/303) somewhat important
 - “NAC blurs boundaries between artistic disciplines” 32% (97/303) very important, 40% (120/303) somewhat important

And in classes, two areas got lower ratings

- Facilities & materials/supplies for adult classes had highest “unsatisfied” ratings.
- “For programs you have participated in, how satisfied are you with the experience?”
 - “Facility”: 33% (46/140) very satisfied, 54% (75/140) somewhat satisfied, 11% unsatisfied or very unsatisfied

- “Materials/supplies”: 44% (41/140) very satisfied, 50% (65/140) somewhat satisfied, 7% unsatisfied

People donate because NAC is an important cultural institution

- “What was your primary motivation to donate to NAC?”
 - “To support an important cultural institution” 45% (51/113)
 - “To support quality education programs” 23% (26/113)

Finally, there were a variety of reasons given why people have NOT donated.

- Need better understanding of mission/activities [45/153]
- Need better understanding of financial need [44/153]
- “Why don’t you donate to NAC?”
 - “Wasn’t asked” 16% (25/153)
 - “Lack of clarity regarding NAC’s mission and activities” 14% (21/153)
 - “Not aware that NAC was a nonprofit organization that needed philanthropy to balance its budget.” 16% (25/153)

New Programs:

New programs for adults that attracted support were

- Art history/appreciation was consistently at top of adult responses. [244/296, 92/138]
 - “NAC is thinking about expanding the programs it offers that are about art and explore the intersections of art, culture, and society. How interested would you be in attending each of the following types of programs at the NAC?”
 - “Art history/appreciation programs” 43% (125/296) very interested, 40% (119/296) somewhat interested
- Dining and travel programs about art, interpretation of exhibitions. [214/296, 211/296]
 - “NAC is thinking about expanding the programs it offers that are about art and explore the intersections of art, culture, and society. How interested would you be in attending each of the following types of programs at the NAC?”
 - “Dining with Art programs: dinner with special guests, including artists, curators, museum professionals, and gallery professionals” 30% (89/296) very interested, 43% (125/296) somewhat interested
 - “Travel programs to visit other exhibitions or studios with a groups” 30% (89/296) very interested, 41% (122/296) somewhat interested
 - “Interpretation programs related to NAC exhibitions” 23% (68/296) very interested, 50% (146/296) somewhat interested
- Open studio time [100/138]
- Printmaking [87/138 adults, 44/69 children]
 - “NAC is considering creating some classes/programs around new art disciplines. How interested are you in signing up for classes/programs in each of the following disciplines?”
 - “Printmaking” 25% (35/138) very interested, 38% (52/138) somewhat interested

- “Open studio time” 44% (61/138) very interested, 28% (39/138) somewhat interested

Responses to new adult programs showed a strong desire for art history/interpretation, and for fun, engaging art experiences involving food and travel.

Other highlights

Artists are most interested in:

- “NAC is considering expanding its programs for artists. What arts and business education topics would most meet your needs as an artist?”
 - “Selling your work” 70% (104/148)
- “Which of the following would you want NAC to provide more of?”
 - “Opportunities to exhibit” 73% high priority (109/149), 17% low priority (26/149)
 - “Opportunities to sell” 60% high priority (89/149), 25% low priority (37/149)
 - “Master classes for artists” 59% high priority (88/149), 30% low priority (44/149)
 - “Affordable workspace” 53% high priority (79/149), 14% low priority (21/149)

Confusing responses

One or two responses were confusing. Exhibition opportunity ranked lowest among components of exhibition program (151/283, or 53% said very or somewhat important on Q4) but highest on artists’ needs. (109/149, or 73% said High Priority on Q9)

Perhaps not surprisingly, new offerings requested for children were quite different than for adults [but note that this was parents indicating what they thought their kids would be interested in which *might* be different than what kids want]. Photography was first for children, fifth for adults. Art History and Art Appreciation were in top four for adults, bottom three for children. Virtual art and gaming were very low for both, Printmaking was 3d for both.

Summary

The overall impression of the survey results is of overwhelming support for the history and character of the institution; of significant interest in adding programs for learning about art (contrasted with learning to make art, which already exist); that studio program faculty are well-regarded, the structure of classes and the character of instruction are well-supported, but facilities and equipment/supplies/materials are below expectations. The comments received at the end of the survey (Q 31) indicate a largely positive experience in both classes and exhibitions, but there were about 30 comments containing critiques about the building, cost, faculty/curriculum, administration, or specific bad experiences. Beyond frustration with facilities/equipment and the cost of classes, there was not an overall pattern to the negative comments.

Dan Elias

Appendix 2: Peer Interviews Summary

Sarah Glatt of TDC conducted benchmarking research on 5 peer institutions, selected in conjunction with NAC staff and board based on size, similarity of mission, exhibition program and (for most of them) a recent, successful renovation or building purchase project:

- Arts Council of Princeton (Princeton NJ)
- Clay Studio (Philadelphia, PA)
- Hyde Park Art Center (Chicago, IL)
- Palos Verdes Art Center (Palos Verdes, CA)
- Umbrella Community Arts Center (Concord MA)

Benchmarking included internet research plus in-depth phone interviews with their EDs which explored the following questions:

- Program model: Different art class models (class topics as well as alternative class structures), exhibition programs, programs for curiously-inclined adult, non-artist audience
- Infrastructure: staffing models, fundraising strategies, marketing strategies

Takeaways for NAC: Programs

- Education & Public-facing Programs
 - Got info about “hot” art education topics and formats
 - Umbrella’s ½ day summer camp (and combo option with ½ day rec camp) might respond to local demand
 - High school parents and teens want classes that prepare them for college and help prepare portfolio
 - Programs in the vein of NAC’s proposed programs for curiously inclined do not seem to be gateways to taking art education classes
 - Regular schedule of programs (whether date nights, samplers, curiously inclined) seems to help with marketing and attendance
- Exhibitions & Artist Support
 - Identifying how to scale and manage exhibitions is challenging
 - Exhibitions are frequently focused on local artists (brings in lots of foot traffic from people who know artist or want to support their local artists) and are used as an opportunity to sell artists’ work (supporting artists directly and raising small earned revenue funds for the organization)
 - Shared studio space (rather than dedicated studio space) might be more achievable for NAC and respond to artist demand
 - Clay Studio’s Work Exchange Program could be a model for
 - artists (shared studio space for labor) or for

- rethinking programs for rising curators (labor for training and curating opportunities)

Takeaways for NAC - Fundraising

- Peers have significant staff time focused on fundraising, including a significant portion of the ED's time along with at least one (usually more) dedicated development staff
- Board leadership in contributing and asking others for money is important
- Tailoring messages to build on donors' connections is critical but time-consuming as is relationship building
- Undertaking a campaign requires having the necessary conditions and components already in place (donor base, staff, board, maybe campaign counsel)
- Skip the membership program for now

Takeaways for NAC - Marketing

- Segment constituents and tailor messages & marketing materials
- Artists, long-time art students, and newbies are interested in different things and need different programs, messages, and marketing materials
- Give newbies lots of opportunities to make art, not just look at it
- Free events and festivals are great for meeting new people but peers don't know whether they actually lead to increased customers or donors. ROI is hard to calculate.

Appendix 3: Donor Interview Summary

Hedda Rublin of TDC conducted interviews with seven donors who have consistently made major gifts to NAC. Their gifts over time amount to more than \$250,000. They make up the majority of the very small group of consistent, high level donors to NAC.

Questions focused on donors' relationships to the Center and their assessment of its strengths and challenges; their motivation for supporting NAC and its standing in their priorities; their support for the exhibition program; and their views of and likelihood of support for the emerging strategic plan. Their responses are summarized here.

View of Mission

- "Providing access to art making for all ages in community setting"
- "Place and space to create and interact with art."
- "Place to learn about, appreciate and do art. Unique blend of art education, and place to see and have your mind expanded."
- "Mission is very broad now, I would like it to be less focused on artists and more on the community...be a community center for art education for children and adults, could still have exhibitions...be a venue for other community entities having exhibitions"
- "2 missions – very good art school, forum for contemporary art in greater Newton/Boston area, I don't know if they fit together."

Strengths

- "Unique and wonderful community center for the arts"
- Excellent faculty and classes – some donors with personal experience with and passion for classes
- Gallery and exhibition programs – "transformative" for one donor
- "Endearing" space
- Marketing was a weakness but is getting better - good job in reaching out
- Small but sizable footprint
- "Live on the efficiency curve" – do a lot with limited resources

Weaknesses

- Try to do too much, this is a big risk and weakness
- "Stick to what you are good at - education"
- "Hardest thing is deciding not to do something."

- “Since I’ve known NAC they are continually facing the same issues...holds me back as a donor... They are always too all over the place, hasn’t changed”
- Building is a strength and a weakness
- Staff turnover – can be confusing
- Students very loyal to teachers and classes, but haven’t been able to convert into broader loyalty to NAC

Motivation to Support

- Most of the donors interviewed support NAC because of the classes more than the exhibitions
- Personal powerful experience with classes, some with exhibitions
- “I would give either way, I like the exhibitions but they are not critical.”
- “Given tight resources, art-making trumps art-viewing.”
- A few donors say that both the classes and the exhibitions are important and value the intersection between the two
- NAC is valued as an important community resource – “they add something to the community.”
- Many donors also value and emphasize the community aspect of exhibitions – local artists supported by their neighbors
- “NAC hasn’t been good at articulating the need.”

Donors’ Views on the Emerging Plan

- NAC has been through this before – what will make it different this time?
- “The hardest thing is deciding, where they should focus so they can breathe? Focus on art making, exhibiting from community.”
- Some elements of the plan feel too big – feels like it needs to be narrowed to be art education
- “Be what you are... the building is so big and gorgeous, focus on fixing that to support your core programming.”
- A few like idea of adding:
 - Art history/art appreciation programs
 - Corporate programs
- Some like idea of insourcing exhibition management to volunteers (rather than staff)
- Focus on community exhibitions

Willingness to Invest in New Plan

- Most donors interviewed project their level of support to remain about the same
- A few indicated a willingness to increase their support given a compelling plan and vision

- “I would consider stepping up, but not when the situation is so financially precarious...I would need to see a plan for how they will be more sustainable.”

Other Feedback regarding Fundraising

- Do more to cultivate support from those who take classes and the parents of child/youth participants
- “There is no reason why NAC can’t spend time, check in and hear about your experience, and say, ‘can I ask for your support?’”
- Can the teachers be more a part of this?
- “There is a lot of donor fatigue in greater Boston – don’t overstretch and fail...it would be better to do the opposite, and you can always go back and look for more.”