Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation
Strategic Plan
2017-2019
A Strategic Plan ‘Refresh’

AMS Planning & Research was engaged in 2015 by Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation (MAAF) to refresh its current strategic plan and chart a course for the next three years.

In 2011 Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation engaged in a year-long intensive discussion of its strategic direction. A robust review of internal documents and operations was complemented by research into industry conditions, arts funding, and other regional arts organizations. Input was gathered from board members, staff, key funders, state arts agency leaders, industry experts, grantees, artists and thought leaders. In all, more than 100 participants (in addition to 1,700 survey respondents) worked to consider a robust future for Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.

The resulting plan has served the organization well. The work took place during a time of significant economic volatility, robust discussion of the future of the arts and culture sector, and shifting patterns of participation and consumption of the arts. Following the recession of 2008/09, the U.S. economy was fragile, and, while the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act was a mechanism to foster public support for the sector, state appropriations to the arts and, in fact, entire state arts agencies were in jeopardy. Further, Congress was intent on significant reduction of the federal budget, and eager to eliminate bureaucratic excess and reduce the role of government. Many believed future NEA appropriations would shrink.

In that context, Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation adopted a plan that embraced a strategic direction but recognized the difficulties that the field was facing. Planning for multiple possible scenarios was a key element of the strategic planning initiative.

As it looked to the future, MAAF understood that change was afoot – this time internally as well as driven by external forces. The most important strategic initiative facing MAAF for the next three to five years was leadership succession planning -- both at the volunteer and executive leadership level. While affirming the current plan’s direction as well as its usefulness in considering multiple future scenarios, MAAF desired to incorporate known past and future developments. The goals for the planning work were twofold: to agree upon priorities in an ever-changing funding landscape; and to determine clarity for defining MAAF’s impact as it considers how to lead in the future.

A Vision for the Future

Vision
Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation envisions a vital arts and cultural sector enriched by the movement of a vibrant and diverse environment of artists and arts organizations engaging audiences across geographic, artistic and institutional boundaries regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Mission
Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation develops partnerships and programs that reinforce artists’ capacity to create and present work, and advance access to and participation in the arts.

Values
Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation believes that art is essential, that it has the power to transform individuals and communities, and in so doing helps define our society. Excellence, integrity, service, inclusion, and engagement are fundamental tenets of its commitment to the arts.
Strategic Plan Goals

Goal I: Foster expanded access to the arts by connecting artists, communities and resources, and by exploring new forms of creative expression and methods of presentation.

In order to remain relevant in a rapidly changing environment, MAAF must continually strive to reach new artists, presenters, communities and art forms.

Objectives:
• Work to expand reach of existing programs within mid-Atlantic states as well as nationally and internationally.
• Reinforce points of entry for new artists.
• Align legacy programs with impact outcomes.
• Enhance reach of existing programs with outreach support and partnerships.

Strategies:
1. Expand service to mid-Atlantic states by adding special presenter networks or other mechanisms as available.
2. Strengthen international portfolio by implementing recommendations in Southern Exposure and French-American Jazz Exchange evaluation reports.
3. Strategically enhance certain programs to include support for audience and community engagement.
   a. Develop contextual materials for FAJE Tours.
   b. Enhance residency opportunities for touring artists (FAJE, On Screen/In Person).
   c. Partner with festivals and conferences to showcase international touring programs (SEPALA, USAI, FAJE).
4. Engage in formal program evaluations to include established metrics of success with a focus on Outcomes as well as grant-mandated Outputs.
5. Re-evaluate program guidelines and applications ensuring language and delivery foster inclusivity for all potential end-users.

Evaluation Measures:
• Number, geographic reach, and diversity of new or expanded networks.
• Increased program activity and grant dollars awarded.
• Periodic evaluations of all MAAF programs.
• Responses from targeted artist surveys.
• Increased participation with North American festivals across targeted programs.
• Number of non-performance activities supported and audiences engaged.
Goal 2: Provide leadership in the development and delivery of model programs to address access, creation, presentation, and the expansion of markets for artists and their work.

MAAF has the leverage and expertise to identify critical areas with inadequate or no existing programs to address them, and create flagship initiatives supported by national resource partners to invest in solutions. Programmatic investments can support specific disciplines, geographies or artistic practice.

Objectives:

• Maintain distinguishing focus in jazz and international work.
• Expose and address emerging issues through program development, or strategic partnerships.
• Pro-actively respond to funding partnership opportunities to address emerging priorities in the sector.

Strategies:

1. Capitalize on depth of knowledge and trust in the sector to create networks of presenters focused on specific genres (i.e. folk and traditional arts, contemporary dance).
2. Consider cultural exchange models for emerging foreign markets (Cuba, China).
3. Consider a new “Arts AND” program based on the former Artists & Communities model to allow for responsiveness to national priorities (focus on aging, military, social equity, place making, etc.).
4. Increase opportunities to connect artists with communities through On Screen/In Person.
5. Explore new models for touring the visual arts within the mid-Atlantic region.
6. Expand opportunities for artistic creation and innovation through existing and new programs.

Evaluation Measures:

• Evidenced support and growth in priority program areas (jazz and international).
• Growth in host and filmmaker participation in OSIP.
• New models/new partnerships for presenter networks.
• Incorporation of artistic creative opportunities in programs.
• Number of presenters and artists engaged in programs.
• Growth in funding partners.
Goal 3: Effectively share resources, knowledge, and connections to enable artists and organizations to build audiences and relationships, and to explore new approaches that enhance their operational and creative practice.

In addition to its work to fill programmatic gaps identified in Goal 2, MAAF is uniquely positioned to create and support broader and more efficient systems of knowledge sharing among artists, organizations and the field. MAAF’s relationships at the national and regional level foster an appreciation of issues that hold the sector back. MAAF is at the forefront of aggregating information, providing leadership, and proposing solutions.

Objectives:
• Communicate MAAF’s value as a trusted partner.
• Emphasize MAAF leadership role in the region, among RAO’s, and in the sector.
• Provide services and resources to artists and organizations to build capacity and knowledge.

Strategies:
1. Focus on the value of aggregating – resources, knowledge, and information.
   a. Shift from creating networking opportunities to enabling participation and attendance at existing retreats and conferences (folklorist retreats; support presenter travel to explore new art forms).
2. Collaborate with the RAOs as a cohort to address sector challenges in leadership development, with emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
3. Provide regional leadership to arts advocacy and accessibility initiatives.
4. Explore new technologies for skills-based learning.
5. Provide opportunities for presenters to share knowledge and best practices.

Evaluation Measures:
• Staff participation in relevant retreats and conferences.
• Participation in RAO developed initiatives.
• Level of engagement with existing advocacy and accessibility initiatives.
• Constituent participation in learning opportunities.
• Growth of web or technology-based services.
Goal 4: Represent excellence and best practices in management and governance.

A noted earlier, the single most pressing issue facing Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation is leadership transition. There is significant focus on strengthening institutional culture at the board level, and preserving historical knowledge within staff. MAAF’s current financial position provides the strong financial underpinning to provide ‘breathing room’ to seek private sector support and re-balance the sources of support for flagship initiatives.

Objectives:

• Strengthen institutional engagement by existing and new board leadership.
• Cultivate new relationships with major national foundations.
• Engage key program staff in codifying legacy.
• Aggressively position MAAF nationally as an important leader for the sector.
• Prepare MAAF for leadership change.
• Use the Strategic Plan to develop annual board engagement targets and benchmark success.

Strategies:

1. Develop an intentional diversity plan to encompass every aspect of the institution, including programs, board, staff, funders and grantees.
2. Solicit multi-year funding from national foundations for MAAF flagship programs (USAI, FAJE, SEPALA).
3. Maintain an ongoing board prospect pipeline and cultivation plan. Establish a board leadership succession plan.
4. Consider board role and expectations in financial resource development. Explore governance best practices of other national arts service organizations.
5. Develop a strategy and expectations for immersive engagement by new board members (year 1).
6. Develop and execute a strategy for executive leadership succession.
7. Involve Program Staff more deeply in program design, implementation and evaluation.
8. Invest resources in expanded presence at key national conferences.
   a. Increase attendance and visibility at conferences; work to reinforce MAAF brand and showcase program opportunities to artists, presenters, and arts leaders.
   b. Solicit speaking roles and other opportunities to showcase artists and programs (i.e., Arts Presenters).
9. Use succession planning opportunity to overtly discuss board and institutional culture, future priorities, and desired attributes.
Evaluation Measures:
• Expanded funder base for flagship initiatives
• Ongoing board cultivation and development program
• Definition of intended organizational culture
• Success in meeting goals of an intentional diversity plan.
• Growth in staff training and engagement
• Increased presence at appropriate national convenings