

Action Plan for Vibrancy & Sustainability at Torpedo Factory Art Center

January 2020*

*Due to the impacts of COVID-19, the release of the draft report was delayed until October 2020. As a result, the plan has minor updates, but the overall approach of the plan remains the same and will be implemented within City COVID-19 guidelines.

C H O R A



SMITHGROUP

Overview: For over a decade, various stakeholders of Torpedo Factory Art Center have commissioned studies, reports and plans to review and comment on, issues at the Art Center. The issues ranged from governance, management, and financial issues, to articulating a shared mission, purpose, and vision for the enterprise. Several of the stakeholders pointed out the TFAC has evolved into a more inward-looking organization without clear programming for the community, and that it needs to evolve outward looking. Further, the main takeaway goal from 2017 Community Engagement Report was stated as a need to “broaden and deepen the Art Center’s community connectivity.” All stakeholders agreed that change is necessary for the good of the community and to reestablish the Art Center as a leader in the art world.

Torpedo Factory Art Center has had a long and distinguished history culminating in the 70s and 80s as a model for placemaking and unique way for the public to see artists at work. Today, the public has multiple ways to consume art and the novelty of seeing art being made is varied across the country. To avoid being left behind; the Art Center must adapt to an ever-changing landscape of 21st century art institutions to regain its place as an arts leader.

Some of the elements such this 21st century Art Center should embody include:

- A new look at the state and content of the 21st Century arts with special attention to the intersection of art and technology through newsworthy programing;
- Identifying the viewer or visitor as equally important in the art process as the artist;
- Promoting the core role of the arts in human-wellness, creative expression, and empathy.
- A successful response to the changing expectations of contemporary audiences for interactive, immersive experiences, special events, temporary exhibitions, and contemporary art;
- An updated strategy for assessing and meeting the contemporary needs of artists and the arts community;
- Non-traditional life-long learning opportunities, especially for older adults;
- Inclusion and diversity in audiences, artists, and art
- Expanded definition of “art” to include culinary arts, music, and performances;
- Art and arts education as economic drivers;
- Effective collaborations with community and arts organizations, both for profit and not-for-profit sectors;

Culminating the stakeholder studies, reports, and plans, the City of Alexandria commissioned a “Study of Studies” to cull the best recommendations and directions from all 15 of those previous efforts (appendix reference), as well as, provide fresh insights to create the 21st Century Torpedo Factory Art Center.

To that end, this Action Plan represents an immediate response to the challenge of creating a 21st Century Art Center to effectively move the Art Center in a positive direction and address some immediate, short-term improvements to intentionally grow the Art Center into the future.

Through the City’s sound management of Torpedo Factory Art Center over the past several years, a solid set of management procedures and practices have been established, providing a sound foundation for next steps including: space leasing and studio-management policy and practices, first floor upgrades, sustainable fiscal policy and practices, and experimental events to test and evaluate a more public-facing Art Center. Events such as the Late Shift art parties and weekend long Torpedo Beer and Wine Garden have showed audiences are hungry for new expenses.

Additionally, the City has proved Old Town is ready to enjoy, consume, and experience a 21st century art experience thanks to the results of the temporary public-art installation at Waterfront Park, *Mirror Mirror* by New York based SOFTlab and *Wrought, Knit, Labors, Legacies* by Olalekan Jeyifous and the new Art Center events increased visitation and the media profile of Old Town through contemporary, publicly accessible art.

While the outcomes and results of this Action Plan are being executed, the City will undertake the development of an architectural plan for the renovation and repurposing of the entire building while also creating a detailed business plan to ensure a sustainable financial future for Torpedo Factory Art Center in alignment with the City of Alexandria strategic plan as well as the City's arts, waterfront, and economic development plans, and other relevant City plans.

Together, these plans will combine to shape a 21st Century Art Center ready to successfully and sustainably serve the City of Alexandria and the greater community for the next decade.

Executive Summary: Torpedo Factory Art Center Action Plan

The City's management of the Art Center has stabilized the organization and created a sound foundation upon which to plan and move forward and shown the hunger for a 21st century art experience at the Waterfront. Based on the recommendations of prior studies and the current Art Center management, this Action Plan is designed to achieve priority results and outcomes to establish a foundation for a renewed Torpedo Factory Art Center. The goal is to improve the efficiency of operations and sustainability of Art Center while also broadening and deepening its connections to the community and re-configuring the first-floor spaces to create a more dynamic public experience of the Art Center.

Three interconnected Core Strategic Directions (CSDs) are included to guide the Art Center's action steps. The CSDs and the actions and outcomes are derived from the *Study of Studies* and the related recommendations as well as with conversations with community organizations including, but not limited to, Visit Alexandria and Alexandria Economic Development Partnership.

The Core Strategic Directions are:

CSD #1: Re-establish the Art Center's Identity for a 21st Century Audience

CSD #2: Curate the Building, with a Focus on the First Floor, for Improved Visitor Experience and Artist/Studio Program

CSD #3: Establish Policies and Procedures that Identify the Art center as a High Performing Organization and Rebuild the Art Center's Role as a Leader in the Country

Each of these CSDs have a series of related actions and outcomes outlined in the following pages to ensure that the Art Center proceeds steadfastly in these strategic directions.

Core Strategic Direction #1: Re-establish the Art Center Identity for a 21st Century Audience

Increasing the number of guests and increasing the intensity of their learning and artistic experience will make the Art Center a premier art destination for the region. Interactive, immersive experiences, family fun, festivals, and art fairs are all ways to increase the public engagement and enjoyment of the Art Center.

The re-imagined Art Center, with its emphasis on public engagement and alignment with the City's art and waterfront development plans, will create a new personality, and identity, for the Art Center. This new identity will need to be marketed to a wider audience. This CSD will also support the increasing and diversifying of audiences through improved marketing and public relations efforts.

- 1. Action:** Curate a roster of public events/programs to evaluate initiatives of varied offerings to include community favorites, family friendly, media worthy, and new artistic media that promote the core role of the arts in human-wellness and creative expression, as well as championing life-long learning.

Outcome:

- a. Develop systematic process for selecting partners and events/programs that include artistic, professional, and ethical standards as well as matching the goals of the Art Center.
 - b. Art and Food/Drink: Celebrate food as art in a food/drink centered event/festival, utilizing regional restaurants and or breweries.
 - c. Art and Technology: Implement a “when art meets technology” event that explore the contemporary intersection of art and technology, utilizing regional partners such as colleges.
 - d. Art and Family: Plan and schedule an additional family “Make-it” event(s) or programs (in addition to Art Safari in October) featuring family-friendly and educational experiences.
 - e. Experiment with “on the road” pop-up offerings to be located throughout the Waterfront and City.
- 2. Action:** Expand the artist studio program to better reflect contemporary best practices, diversity, and public interaction.

Outcome:

- a. Design and implement an impeccable, credible, artist selection process to determine studio leases. Grounded in best practices, selection is based on art quality, ability to work and interact with the public, working for greater good of Art Center/community, and diversity including media, place in career, and personal background.
 - b. Similar to current “Post Grad Residency” at the Art Center, establish specific short-term studio residences for specific demographics such as career level or new media.
 - c. Offer artist professional and business development seminar(s) (open to all).
- 3. Action:** Expand role and impact of Target Gallery, the Art Center’s critically acclaimed contemporary art gallery the promote the core role of art in human wellness as expressed in Action 1 above.

Outcome:

- a. Establish Target Gallery a focal point within the Art Center by merging marketing efforts and public facing interaction when in the building.
- b. Develop new, newsworthy elements to the Target Gallery roster of exhibits.

4. Action: Establish new Art Center attributes towards a refined identity, maintaining an independent and unique marketing strategy and tools within the larger City framework.

Outcome:

- a. Attributes should include:
 - i. Unique
 - ii. Dynamic
 - iii. Vibrant
 - iv. Family-friendly
 - v. Welcoming
 - vi. Memorable
 - vii. Diverse
 - viii. Creative

Core Strategic Direction #2: Curate the Building, with a focus on the First Floor, for Improved Visitor Experience and Artist/Studio Program

To meet the needs and audience expectations of a 21st Century Art Center, the Art Center will have to be re-conceived. Public spaces and amenities, artist studios and galleries, and the relationship to the waterfront will be reshaped to serve the new purpose of the Art Center.

Evaluate and develop initiatives that better curate the visitors experience. Focusing on the first floor, create art experiences that engage the visitors in art making and experiencing professionally curated, newsworthy exhibits.

- 1. Action:** Re-design and evaluate first floor as a space to be a more exciting, interactive, hands on, accessible, and ever-changing experience for visitors.

Outcome:

- Identify, utilize, and upgrade space on first floor for studios/workshops with hands-on opportunities, specialized technology, and an ability to be viewed as spectacle, such as printmaking and glass making.
 - Relocate and upgrade existing studio space to accommodate new “public-facing” first floor features (see 1.a above).
 - Develop a family-friendly, hand on “Make-It” space on first floor.
 - Expand the Target Gallery into upgraded space to provide additional exhibition space and increase its visibility in a more central location).
 - Investigate moving The Art League Store to first floor.
- 2. Action:** Re-design and evaluate third floor to afford better use of space for a greater audience, more programs, and income potential.

Outcome:

- Identify and repurpose space to institute a large inviting flexible, technologically updated, publicly accessible/rentable lecture and event space capable of accommodating more than 100 people and hosting events during open hours that minimally disturb working artists
- 3. Action:** Re-design and evaluate building to create opportunities for diversity and increasing the Art Centers role in Waterfront Small Area Plan.

Outcome:

- Establish Waterfront as primary entrance
- Plan, design and implement an experimental café space within the building
- Prioritize use of space/space allocation throughout the building with a focus on the first floor to determine highest and best use
- Develop intentional plan and use for common areas to include expanded exhibit opportunities and how rentals use building
- Identify, utilize, and upgrade studios for specific short-term studio residences for specific demographics such as career level or new media
- Explore the accessibility and use of the rooftop as a restaurant or other kind of community of gathering space.

Core Strategic Direction #3: Establish Policies and Procedures that Identify the Art Center as a High Performing Organization and Rebuild the Art Center's Role as a Leader in the Country

As the Art Center re-imagines itself for the 21st century, it will need to challenge its internal policies, practices, and business model in accordance with best practices and industry standards to become a sustainable organization. Its resources will have to be optimally deployed to maximize the impact of every dollar.

Operations should be refined to ensure a fiscally sustainable Art Center that is entrepreneurial in its policies and practices, diversifies revenue opportunities and attracts artists.

- 1. Action:** Develop a clear and compelling Mission and Vision for the future of the Art Center.

Outcome:

- a. Build new Mission and Vision affirming purpose of Art Center, broader City goals and objectives, and a unique identity that resonates with the community and artists.

- 2. Action:** Update the Art Center's policies, procedures, and standards, to fit external facing direction and be in line with a 21st century Art Center and allow for Art Center to operate as an entrepreneurial and fundraising organization to ensure vibrancy and sustainability within the larger City framework.

Outcome:

- a. Update the Operating Rules and Procedures tied to the leases to align with the CSDs.
- b. Phase in a lease holder re-jurying process to ensure vibrancy and vitality based on new artist selection process addressed in CSD #1.
- c. Research best practices and methods for effective internal and external communications and engagement.
- d. Modify open days and hours to meet needs of visitors and lesson artists fatigue/ provide more private studio time.
- e. Test dynamic pricing for services offered, including private event rentals, premium programs/events, and studio leases, using a model similar to the City Council approved RPCA Resource Allocation and Cost Recovery Policy.
- f. Align staff to priorities and duties determining optimal deployment of resources.
- g. Explore and test alternative marketing and business tools to allow for greater entrepreneurial and fundraising flexibility.

- 3. Action:** Plan for the next five - ten years.

Outcome:

- a. Develop a comprehensive business plan / financial model to support strategic / fiscal decision including a fiscal analysis, analysis of fundraising or private support, analysis of food services in the Art Center, and revenue plan.
- b. Plan and implement a marketing and branding effort, to include future new logo, signage, website, and other marketing tools, and design a marketing campaign.
- c. Identify a consultant to conduct a holistic facility assessment following the ASTM E2018-15 standard. Identify building maintenance issues and plan for implementation of updates.
- d. Identify firm to commission architectural plan for space reallocation to be developed in concert with programing and identity outlined in CSD #1 and #2.

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