

This document summarizes the key elements of New Urban Arts 2019-24 Strategic Plan.

Mission

Our mission is to build a vital community that empowers young people as artists and leaders to develop a creative practice they can sustain throughout their lives.

Our free, year-round out-of-school programs promote sustained mentoring relationships between urban high school students and trained artist mentors—who, together, engage in youth leadership, risk taking, collaboration, and self-directed learning. We are grounded in the belief that in order to fulfill the promise of our democracy, all young people, no matter their place in society, should have the opportunity to become more creative and independent thinkers.

Critical Issues

- Young people need access to creative spaces and resources.
- Young people need learning environments that are free, responsive to their interests, and not overly prescriptive.
- Young people need culturally responsive learning environments and educators from their backgrounds.
- Young people need additional access to postsecondary planning.

Core Practices

The following is a list of practices that guide staff and volunteers in interactions with young people at New Urban Arts:

- Relationship Building and Maintaining Community
- Youth Agency and Freedom of Expression
- Inquiry and I-Statements
- Safe Space
- Flexibility and Fidelity

Over the next five years:

In accordance with our strategic priorities, we will **sustain program quality** by addressing concerns around increasing needs for program and office space; by better serving our students through programs that are responsive to their needs; and by managing the relationship between core programs, new programs, potential programs, and key partnerships.

We will **invest in and diversify our staff, while continuing to value longevity and consistency in staffing** by building a workforce and board that increasingly reflects the population that we serve; and by empowering our community to serve as ambassadors for our approach to arts education and youth development.

We will **continue to mature our operational practices** by ensuring that our operational, management and financial practices are appropriate to New Urban Arts' size, structure, and complexity; and by ensuring that staff and board are fluent in these practices.

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MISSION

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PLAN OVERVIEW

New Urban Arts has identified three priorities areas in our 2019-24 Strategic Plan:

1. Sustain program quality.
2. Invest in and diversify our staff, while continuing to value longevity and consistency in staffing.
3. Continue to mature our operational practices.

This introduction provides background on the strategies proposed within these priority areas.

1. Sustain program quality. (three strategies):

A. Address concerns around increasing needs for program and office space.

Student attendance in New Urban Arts' programs—particularly screenprinting—continues to grow steadily, as have our program and administrative staff. Screenprinting currently occupies an area that staff and students must traverse to get to the bathrooms, the photography darkroom, rear storage, the kitchen, and the rear exit. This increasingly presents concerns around safety and congestion, particularly because the screenprinting area is full of trip hazards. At the same time, while office space has always been tight, many of our office workers are now working in less than half of what is considered a minimum-size office.

B. Better serve our students by ensuring that our programs are responsive to their needs.

New Urban Arts' programs have historically been very responsive to the young people's needs, as articulated by both young people themselves and youth development experts. However, some of our mechanisms for assessing and addressing those needs have been ad hoc. This plan seeks to formalize those mechanisms. Also, we have recently experienced external pressure to

formally incorporate more political content into our programs. We solicited extensive feedback from students on this issue; there was wide consensus among students that New Urban Arts is a safe space, and that this means different things to different students. For some, safe space means a place to discuss identity, politics, and experiences of oppression, and, for others, safe space means a break from thinking about those subjects. Thus, while staff and mentors should be prepared to facilitate such discussions, we will not require them to.

C. Manage the relationship between core programs, new programs, potential programs, and key partnerships.

In 2017, New Urban Arts launched NUA Knights, a new comprehensive afterschool program at Central High School in partnership with Central's administration. While the program is meeting the expectations of funders and school administration, we are eager to bring more of New Urban Arts' historical knowledge of best practices in youth development to NUA Knights. New Urban Arts has long struggled with questions of whether and how to serve alumni. This plan affirms that we will not be introducing new programs for alumni. Rather, it articulates strategies to manage expectations of graduating students for their future relationship to the organization. It also lends New Urban Arts' support to the efforts of partner organizations seeking to develop programs that would serve our recent alumni, and it continues our efforts to reengage alumni as volunteers, staff members, and donors.

2. Invest in and diversify our staff, while continuing to value longevity and consistency in staffing. (two strategies):

A. Build a workforce and board that increasingly reflect the population that we serve, while maximizing staff longevity and consistency.

A large and growing body of evidence indicates that young people, particularly those from historically marginalized groups, need educators—as well as administrators—in their lives that reflect their identities in order to see the full range of possibilities for their futures. Furthermore, educators with similar identities and experiences to their students are often better equipped to facilitate difficult conversations about identity, power, privilege, and politics that our students increasingly want to have.

At the same time, a significant factor in New Urban Arts' success has been our consistent investment in retaining staff. Staff retention promotes systemic stability, long organizational memory, smoother transitions, and—coupled with effective professional development—continuous improvement. These have all been vital to the development of the programs and administrative practices that have distinguished New Urban Arts. Therefore, staff retention remains a priority.

Thus, we must acknowledge that, given limited resources, there is a tension between retaining a staff that, currently, is predominantly white and increasing the proportion of staff members of color. We acknowledge this tension because, in our experience, processes that aren't honest about such tensions fail to generate truly actionable strategies. For example, many oft-cited best practices around diversity have been developed in institutions with multiple levels of management, fully realized HR departments, and a large enough workforce to determine stable annual metrics around retention, resignation, and promotion. However, New Urban

Arts is a relatively small institution, and predictions based purely on mathematics are unrealistic.

What this means then, is that we must find ways to formalize another strategy that has distinguished New Urban Arts: developing leadership from within—from staff, former mentors, and alumni—through professional development, paid apprenticeships and internships, and similar opportunities. In order to accomplish this without the scale that larger institutions enjoy, this plan calls for high levels of intentionality, transparency, and planning around the goals and ambitions of current staff, so that we can be aware of potential openings long in advance and make the most of them in order to maximize equity in hiring.

For instance, as of this writing, we know that, within the year, our two full-time operations staff will be leaving; with this much notice, we are able to budget for an apprentice who can overlap with the departing staff members for up to eight months in order provide on-the-job training to a candidate interested in replacing one of these staff members.

At the same time, at the board level, turnover is predictable and more frequent than for staff. In recent years, we have worked hard to engage and bring on more board members whose identity and experience reflect those we serve, and we will continue do so under this plan.

B. Empower our community to serve as ambassadors for our approach to arts education and youth development.

Funding for youth arts programs has become more limited in the past few years. Surprisingly, only four of our 20-25 current institutional funders are supporting New Urban Arts through funds earmarked specifically for the arts. The rest fund us through youth development, general afterschool, or career pathway programs. At the same time, we affirm that youth arts education is more important than ever, and we want to continue adding resident artist mentors to our staff (RAMs). Therefore, we must, more than ever, become emissaries for New Urban Arts' core concepts. Thus, this plan calls for New Urban Arts to develop its competencies around communications and empower more alumni to become spokespeople for our work.

3. Continue to mature our operational practices. (one strategy):

A. Ensure that our operational, management and financial practices are appropriate to New Urban Arts' size, structure, and complexity, and ensure that staff and board are fluent in these practices.

New Urban Arts' budget and staff have grown and become more complex in the past two years. This plan seeks to ensure that our finance, reporting, and HR practices keep pace with our growth. Over the course of the planning process, we had the opportunity to work with Financial Management Associates, an engagement that is ongoing. We have presented the results of this work so far as Appendix B.

One more thought on equity, diversity, volunteer artist mentors, and RAMs

We are currently thinking about two goals around equity: 1) equitable access to creative practice and arts education for Providence's public high school students and 2) equitable distribution of the labor associated with our work (as mentioned above).

Again, it is vital to acknowledge tensions in order to develop effective strategies for progress. In that spirit, we note that the volunteer artist mentor program is in concert with the first goal and at odds with the second.

Given current funding, we need volunteers in order to work, at a meaningful scale, toward that first goal. Regarding the second goal, as mentioned, there is clearly a tension between our reliance on volunteers and our goal to distribute labor more equitably. We know that institutionalized volunteer service programs favor the participation of the privileged and affluent, who are disproportionately white. For this and other reasons, over the past few years, one of our key goals has been to seek funding to increase the number of paid teaching artist positions in the organization. Essentially, we want to lessen our reliance on volunteers without interrupting our current level of service to young people.

Therefore this plan reaffirms our commitment to developing more RAM positions, and equity is just one of the reasons. RAMs offer more consistency and accountability than volunteers; they make it possible to build more and stronger relationships between young people and adults, and they have been vital to our success in scaling up the Youth Mentorship in the Arts program.

Our investment in RAMs also represents an organizational commitment to the notion that arts mentorship and teaching artistry should be sustainable forms of employment for socially-engaged artists. The “mercenary” model—in which artists must constantly hustle for the next two-month teaching engagement, while simultaneously hustling to create and sell their own artwork—turns teaching artistry into a chore rather than a joy, creating a dynamic where successful artists are all-too-eager to abandon this work. New Urban Arts seeks to resist that dynamic. For that reason, this plan also calls for efforts to make healthcare accessible to seasonal, part-time staff, such as RAMs.

CORE PRACTICES

As part of this planning process, we reconsidered our core values with the intention of ensuring that they reflect our organization as its current staff, board, and volunteers conceptualize it. Through that conversation, we built the following list of practices that should guide staff and volunteers in interactions with young people at New Urban Arts. We do our best to gracefully navigate moments when two or more practices are in tension with each other, and we can always ask each other for support.

Relationship Building and Maintaining Community

Be proactive about connecting with as many young people as possible. Learn names and pronouns, and use them. Say hello and goodbye. Students should feel seen, heard, and known here. Find ways to welcome new youth into your circle. Challenge yourself to push through awkwardness and implicit bias, and talk to young people with whom you don’t have an instant rapport. Be trustworthy and respect students’ confidentiality. At the same time, cultivate and maintain healthy boundaries; own your adulthood, and don’t rely on students to process your emotions.

Youth Agency and Freedom of Expression

Respect that young people have agency and that they are here voluntarily. Artistic and educational experiences should originate from their creative impulses and interests. Support

students' interest in leading their own projects. When youth want to learn a skill that's unfamiliar to you, learn together with them. If they don't know where to start, and you have an idea for an activity, propose it; don't impose it. Let young people take risks and try things their own way, even when your experience or expertise tells you it's the "wrong" way.

Think of instructional moments in terms of consent; ask students if you can show them something that you've learned, or ask them to teach you something. When working with youth on projects that are deadline-driven or require particularly high levels of rigor, your job is to hold them accountable to goals they have set for themselves. At the level of organizational strategy, staffing, and programming, the staff and board should collaborate with youth, as much as possible, in decision-making.

Inquiry and I-Statements

Use rhetorical approaches that invite young people to share and that indicate your perspective isn't the final word on any matter. Model curiosity, and acknowledge your own ignorance. Ask yourself, "How can I ask a question instead of making a statement?" This does not mean "playing devil's advocate" or using questions to put students on the defensive. Foster growth by inviting, rather than pushing, youth to take risks and go beyond their comfort zone, and affirm their feelings of comfort and discomfort. Ask questions to encourage young people to think for themselves and articulate their values and decision making processes. Be aware of your own influence, power, and privilege. Use I-statements to locate your perspective in your own experience, and convey that it's okay for students to disagree with you.

Safe Space

Protect young people's physical safety. Cultivate emotional safety for students, with particular respect to the diverse identities and experiences of our core constituency: youth of color from low-income families, many of whom are first generation Americans, and many of whom are LGBTQ+. Be aware that for some young people, safe space means a place to discuss their identity, politics, and experiences of oppression, and that, for others, safe space means a break from thinking about those subjects.

When a student takes a risk and fails, be there to help them learn from the experience. Intervene in instances when a young person's physical or emotional safety is under threat, either from another student or an adult. At the level of organizational strategy, the staff and board should be prepared to speak out and take appropriate action regarding policies that impact the safety of young people.

Flexibility and Fidelity

Respect that Youth Mentorship in the Arts is a drop-in program, where young people can choose when and how they participate. Our students are often faced with burdensome responsibilities, demands, and pressures at school, home, and in other afterschool settings. Differentiate this space through flexibility around their varied and shifting attendance levels, interest in socializing, attitudes toward artistic rigor, and commitment to a single medium.

Flexibility is not indifference; to convey to youth that there is a broad spectrum of ways to engage with our studio, we must consistently be present to provide learning experiences. Exercise fidelity. Be on time; follow through on your commitments, and communicate to staff

and students when you cannot. Be present and available, and engage each young person equally and without favoritism.

Future Practices

New Urban Arts is currently seeking to develop trainings and conventions around:

Restorative Justice

When one member of our community harms another, use a restorative—rather than punitive—approach to repairing harm. Understand that restorative justice consists of an ongoing set of concepts, practices, and tools, many of which seek to minimize the chance of harm being done in the first place. These “preventative” elements are present in our other practices, most notably:

- Relationship building
- Maintaining community
- Inquiry
- I-Statements
- Being trauma-informed

STRATEGY SCREEN

This screen is meant to guide board and staff in evaluating new opportunities that aren’t predicted in our plan.

1. Is the opportunity in line with our mission? Does it advance our mission?
2. Do we have the organizational capacity (e.g., staff, volunteers, funds) to implement it?
3. Is it consistent with our core practices and values?
4. Does it contribute to the organization’s capacity for operational stability?
5. If we don’t act now, will we lose this opportunity?
6. How does it impact our reputation?
7. Does it leverage and/or enhance our competitive advantage?

CRITICAL ISSUES

- Young people need access to creative spaces and resources.
- Young people need learning environments that are free, responsive to their interests, and not overly prescriptive.
- Young people need culturally responsive learning environments and educators from their backgrounds.
- Young people need additional access to postsecondary planning.

PLAN ELEMENTS THAT DRIVE NEW EXPENDITURES

Space

Staff Retention (Compensation and Benefits)

Continued growth of RAM positions

“Pie in the sky” dreams for new and expanded positions

PLAN DETAILS

Priority Area 1 - Sustain program quality.

Strategy A

Address concerns around increasing needs for program and office space.

Goal: Explore acquisition of additional space.

Owners: Board of Directors, Executive Director and Finance and Operation Manager.

Action Steps

- Assess costs of various office space solutions, including the abutting property at 58 Lyman Street.

Goal: Fully implement attached fund development plan (Appendix C).

Owners: Development Committee, Board of Directors, Development Director

Action Steps

- Maximize efficiency of development staff by creating dedicated office space.
- Begin to lay groundwork for an endowment campaign with current major donors, with the intent to launch in the next Strategic Plan.
- Assess whether a Board of Trustees would be appropriate for New Urban Arts.

Strategy B

Better serve our students by ensuring that our programs are responsive to their needs.

Goal: Form a standing Program Committee consisting of staff, board members, volunteers, or reorganize existing committee structure to enable appropriate board attention to programs.

Owners: Board of Directors, Governance Committee, Program Staff, non-board member volunteers involved in nearby schools

Action Steps

- Report regularly to the full board of directors on the state of programs.
- Address various aspects of student safety (lockdown/emergency procedures, mental health, first aid, crisis prevention intervention, de-escalation, nonviolence, and restorative justice).
- Formalize channels for students to provide regular feedback on programs.
- Formalize connection between youth leadership group, Studio Team Advisory Board (STAB) and the Board of Directors and function as official channel between the two bodies.
- Provide occasional reports on peer organizations, locally and nationally, to the board.

Goal: Ensure continued commitment to primacy of student interests and creative impulses in the Youth Mentorship in the Arts program, while also cultivating relevance of programs to contemporary social issues.

Owners: Program Committee, Program Staff

Action Steps

- Continue to develop resident artist mentor (RAM) positions
- Address diversity, equity, and inclusion in volunteer mentor selection
- Redesign mentor trainings as necessary to reflect the following statement: "The Youth Mentorship in the Arts program does not require youth to make

art about—or talk about—power, oppression, or identity. However, if young people want to talk about or make art about these subjects, the staff and volunteers should be able to facilitate those conversations.”

Goal: Build capacity around program data and evaluation.

Owners: Program Committee, Program Staff

Action Steps

- Build upon the NYU partnership, the NIOST fellowship (currently held by Director of Programs, Emily Ustach), and other opportunities to establish New Urban Arts as a “preferred research partner” in order to seek other new opportunities around data and evaluation—particularly funding opportunities.

Goal: Figure out NUA’s role in publicly taking positions on political issues.

Owners: Board, STAB, Staff

Action Steps

- Work with constituent groups to assess concerns they may have relevant to New Urban Arts taking policy positions.
- Establish a screen to establish what kind of political requests we will consider and decide upon action steps to utilize the screen.

Goal: Continue to invest in professional development of our program staff and volunteers so that they are prepared to meet the social and emotional needs of all students.

Owners: Program Staff, STAB?

Action Steps:

- Provide trainings to key staff, particularly in mental health first aid and restorative justice.
- Update volunteer training accordingly.
- Potentially train some students in restorative justice as well.

Strategy C

Manage the relationship between core programs, new programs, potential programs, and key partnerships.

Goal: Solidify connections between programs at our two sites, 705 Westminster and Central High School, to better bring our expertise and best practices in youth development to the Central NUA Knights program.

Owners: Program Committee, Program Staff

Action Steps

- Reassess staffing pattern and supervision structures, being attentive to the Director of Program’s supervision burden and ability to divide attention appropriately between two program sites.
- Explore ways to share New Urban Arts’ training practices with program providers at Central.

Goal: Better manage New Urban Arts’ relationships to 18-24 year old alumni who might still seek services from the organization.

Owners: Program Committee, Program Staff, External partners

Action Steps:

- Formalize new strategies, piloted in 2018, for preparing seniors to become alumni including:
 - A private senior sendoff.
 - Using the STAB retreat to talk about students' future relationships with NUA
- Create a firm policy around alumni participation and ensure mentors know the policy and are equipped to recognize alumni.
- Work with RISCA, AS220 Youth, The Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism and other youth organizations to build a support network for young artists who are recent alumni of Providence's youth programs
- Expand ALAS staff so that support is stronger and more consistent for alumni who came through the ALAS program.

Priority Area 2 - Invest in and diversify our staff, while continuing to value longevity and consistency in staffing.

Strategy A

Build a workforce and board that increasingly reflect the population that we serve, while maximizing staff longevity and consistency.

Goal: Build a thoughtful and responsive long-range succession plan at the Board and Staff levels that is attentive to diversity and equity.

Owners: Governance Committee, Administrative Staff

Action Steps

- Explore new staffing structures that could better facilitate the growth of leadership and better distribution of supervisory burdens (See Appendix D)
- Explore the interests of all staff—particularly program staff—in supplementing their work with opportunities to learn administrative and other professional skills for further advancement.
- Find opportunities for organizational apprenticeships and mentoring relationships
- Create a more direct connection between student and board leadership.
- Continue to formalize practice of creating individualized professional development plans.
- Develop a staff leadership pipeline that includes, in addition to staff themselves, students, alumni, volunteers, and former volunteers.
- Develop internal mentoring practices.
- Amend hiring policy to include formal language around diversity and equity, along with considerations of life experience as an employment qualification.
- Reexamine the role of VISTA at New Urban Arts, with attention to the following questions: How do we ensure that the VISTA placement is rewarding to both parties and not a drain on staff? How are we attentive to the tension between adding more capacity through VISTAs while offering unsustainably low wages? VISTA funding is federal; it is unguaranteed and is not represented in our budget as it is an 'in-kind' contribution.

Goal: Distinguish New Urban Arts in the sector by developing staff—including our teaching artist staff—characterized by continuity, stability, and continuous improvement.

Owners: Executive Director, Finance Committee, Program Director

Action Steps

- Continue to develop resident artist mentor (RAM) positions.
- Offer healthcare for part-time staff.
- Create a bonus policy and/or staff morale fund.
- Review and revise the Operations Manual and Human Resources Policies.
- Provide higher quality workspace for administrative staff to increase productivity and minimize "compromised time."
- Explore the possibility of forming a Professional Development/Human Resources cooperative with the Providence Youth Arts Collaborative (PYAC) to enable us to invest in our staff while taking advantage of scale.

Goal: Create and execute regular assessments of the long term plans and goals of individual staff in order to anticipate openings and facilitate transitions.

Owners: Executive Director, Program Director

Action Steps

- Continue effective hiring and management processes.
- Institute regular discussions of employees plans, goals, and ambitions as part of the review process.
- Convey that we want as much advance notice as possible of resignations and other professional transitions, in order to maximize every opportunity to promote equity in hiring through the above-mentioned techniques (internal apprenticeships, etc.)

Strategy B

Empower our community to serve as ambassadors for our approach to arts education and youth development.

Goal: Build our communications staffing and infrastructure in order to secure more funding and establish New Urban Arts as an important voice in public conversations on youth and creativity.

Owners: Administrative Staff

Action Steps:

- Secure funds to create a communications position.
- Identify our various audiences and create a communications plan that is responsive to all of their needs.
- Remain mindful of the fact that enrollment is at capacity.
- Develop infographics that communicate New Urban Arts' contributions and achievements.
- Communicating accessible, quantifiable accomplishments and data points
- Develop NUA Merchandise that makes clear what happens here
- (Clarification; we're still NOT planning to sell students' artwork)
- Mentor brochure for recruitment

Goal: More formally involve Alumni in organizational governance and engagement.

Owners: Program, Governance, and Development Committees of the Board

Action Steps

- Revive alumni committee.
- Continue to expand alumni involvement on the board level.

Priority Area 3 – Continue to mature our operational practices.

Strategy A

Ensure that our operational, management and financial practices are appropriate to New Urban Arts' size, structure, and complexity, and ensure that staff and board are fluent in these practices. As mentioned, over the course of the planning process, we had the opportunity to work with Financial Management Associates, and we have presented the results of this work so far as Appendix B. Their final report, which will include an action plan, will serve as our guiding document for this Priority Area.

Goal: Develop a deeper understanding, for staff and board, of New Urban Arts' expense/cost base.

Owners: Administrative Staff, Finance Committee

Action Steps:

- Develop and maintain a list of long term financial risks and opportunities
- Get input from Development to ensure this can be communicated to funders in a consistent format.
- Funding commitments based on R&O (report and overhaul AKA maintenance) should expect to see demonstrable risk mitigation; in other words, consider the long term costs of maintenance and depreciation before we commit to stuff.
- Establish a cost model per student to allow stakeholders to understand the cost of funding and create an accurate baseline expense expectation.
- Establish a process to use the cost model for new program and expansion evaluation.
- The cost model should answer the fundamental question around expense management in the face of growth and expansion and should be simple to communicate to stakeholders.
- Better train staff to read financial documents.

Goal: Refine existing finance policies at New Urban Arts.

Owners: Executive Director, Finance and Operations Manager, Finance Committee

Action steps:

- Participate in the Rhode Island Foundation financial resiliency program.
- Review depreciation procedure and investment policy.
- Get input from Development Staff and the Development Committee to ensure that finance policies support fundraising practices well.
- Identify and pursue Finance Committee/Board awards for financial practices at non-profits.

Goal: Fully implement attached recommendations from Financial Management Associates.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Plan Dashboard

APPENDIX B – Financial Resiliency Program Assessment Report (DRAFT March 2019)

APPENDIX C – Five-year Fund Development Plan as of March 2019

APPENDIX D – Current and Future Proposed Org Charts

APPENDIX E – Three-year Budget Projections as of March 2019