

INTRODUCTION

The Arts Partnership (TAP) engaged me to help turn the organization's *strategic* plans and long-term goals into a *tactical* plan, which would provide the means to those ends. Why a tactical plan rather than a traditional strategic plan? It has been said that strategic planning is a process, not an event. Regular revisiting and updating of an organization's strategic plan keeps the goals relevant and motivates the organization to continue moving forward in its work.

In initial discussions with staff and Board, we determined that TAP's existing strategic plan was still relevant to its overall aims as an organization. However, what was needed was a way for TAP to identify more immediate tactics that would help the organization attain those longer-term goals. TAP wanted something simple and actionable. A tactical planning process would lead to a plan that was more adroit, more flexible in its maneuvering. This kind of adroitness has become a hallmark for TAP. Its ability to move quickly on opportunities that deepen and/or broaden its work has served the community well and established the organization as a forward-thinker.

Too, the tactical plan was a way to investigate further the goals laid out in the strategic plan. Certainly, TAP's board and staff learned new things along the way in this process. But perhaps more importantly, by bringing a range of people to the table, the tactical plan process helped to confirm some of TAP's assumptions about the impact of its work. And that knowledge empowered TAP to take action immediately, rather than waiting for a final report. Such actions include the Board adopting a set of value statements and the revision of the grant application process.

TAP's strategic plan dates from a year-long process undertaken by the staff and Board in 2012 and 2013. The plan is regularly revisited in annual retreats by the full Board, and more informally by the staff throughout the year. In brief, the organization's stated goals are:

- I. Be a strong, collective voice for our Partners.
 - A. Develop a communications model and strategy informed through community engagement.
 - B. Become the central communications hub for amplifying the arts in our community.
 - C. Raise awareness of the value/importance of the arts in our community.

- II. Be a catalyst for collaboration.
 - A. Engage businesses and organizations in the work of improving the livelihood of artists.
 - B. Facilitate events and networking for artists.
 - C. Facilitate community engagement with art.
 - D. Develop a Public Art Committee.

- III. Exemplify best non-profit business practices.
 - A. Demonstrate fiscal responsibility and sustainability.
 - B. Develop clear business strategies that support our strategic initiatives.
 - C. Systematize board and organizational procedures.
 - D. Facilitate an engaged Board of Directors.

- IV. Be transparent and responsible in granting and re-granting activities.
 - A. Review and align tri-city re-granting philosophy and practice with strategic plan.
 - B. Establish a strategy with funding for grant program(s) outside of the tri-city scope.

These goals became the basis of the tactical planning process.

TAP engaged me to make three several-day visits to the Greater Fargo Area in March 2015, October 2016 and January 2017. During those visits I had the opportunity to spend time with the TAP staff, Board members, grant recipients, artists, business and community representatives, local government officials and educators. Appendix A provides a list of those who shared their insights with us.

The focus of these discussions can be broken down into two primary categories. The staff and Board focused on institutional and financial issues. The conversations with others were almost exclusively about TAP's role in the community and its grant-making. It should be noted that TAP's programs (Chalk Fest, CSA and the Artist in Residence) were not focused on by the people I spoke with except as demonstrations of value-added services and as initiatives typical for an arts service agency.

All of the meetings have contributed greatly to creating a picture of a dynamic arts-service organization. One that is well respected and trusted.

THE TACTICAL PLAN

The following plan is offered as a blueprint to guide the organization over the next few years as it, and the community it serves, grows. While a blueprint captures the vision and goals of a client it is not a rigid, prescriptive document that is immutable.

From the beginning of this consultancy, it was understood that TAP's Board and staff would not wait for a formal planning document from me before implementing tactics that were feasible, time-sensitive and fulfilled the objectives of the Board and staff. Therefore, with the adroitness mentioned previously, TAP has implemented many of the

recommendations stated in this plan, such as the articulation of the organization's Core Values, making its grant making process transparent, and offering value-added services in addition to grants. These updates are noted within each recommendation.

Visibility and Communications

There was great consensus with regard to TAP's success in increasing the visibility of the organization and the arts community under Dayna's leadership. Programs such as Chalk Fest, the *Variety* arts coverage and Dayna's column in The Forum, Support Local Art campaign and its Facebook page have all helped to elevate the visibility of the arts community. There was great agreement on this point across all sectors of the community.

While this success was universally applauded, there were a number of arts professionals and board members who were concerned that too much of the communications efforts rest on the shoulders of Dayna.

In my last meeting with the Tactical Plan Committee and the Board there was significant discussion about the communications plan and workload. The Board agreed in principal to hire someone to supplement the marketing and communications effort. There was also considerable discussion about the need to bolster TAP's social media presence.

Recommendations

Diversify the "voice" of the arts by including other arts professionals and business people in Public Service Announcements or through TAP's social media outlets. *Progress Update: TAP has started to use non-TAP bloggers but needs to continue to find opportunities for other voices to be identified with TAP.*

Add a new position to assume day-to-day marketing and communications tasks, as well as potentially taking on some administrative/operations tasks as well. The position would be part-time for the near to intermediate future. *Progress Update: TAP will have two interns during Summer 2017 working on marketing and communications. This will help TAP develop the communications piece of a job description for a part-time staffer, to be posted in Fall 2017.*

Develop a Speakers Bureau for the arts – five to six people (preferably Board Members or donors) who would be prepared to speak publicly on different aspects of the arts.

Explore the use of Info-Graphics to tell the story of TAP – where does the money come from and where does it go and, most importantly, what is the impact? Quite often complex narratives can be better digested if there is a strong visual "map" to illustrate the communities' return on its investment. At the meeting with business leaders, a few attendees offered to assist with communication efforts – TAP needs to take advantage of such offers which, in turn, will generate greater affinity and engagement. *Progress Update: TAP has started to work with a*

graphic designer to develop some info-graphics for its annual report to articulate visually TAP's work. This should set the stage for further creative use of images to help TAP quickly tell its story through numbers.

Relations with the Cities of Fargo, Moorhead and West Fargo

It is clear that the Mayors have respect for Dayna and The Arts Partnership. The establishment of the Arts and Cultural Commissions in both Fargo and Moorhead does not appear to be viewed as a comment on the activities of or the role of TAP. After speaking with city leaders and staff, it became clear that these commissions were set up as a way to provide greater oversight and accountability for public expenditures via grants and public art. Ultimately, this is a good thing because it institutionalizes and internalizes the cities' support for the arts rather than being at the discretion of the Mayor.

The mayors were obviously interested in tangible projects such as public art and performing arts centers. Like most elected officials, and the public, they do not differentiate between public art projects, chalk fest or festivals – they want good things to happen and they don't particularly care who does it.

One official mentioned that TAP needed to create a big vision for the future, much like the plan that was used to support Fargo's public works/water quality project. As noted previously, the creation of arts and cultural commissions in Fargo and Moorhead has the potential to blur responsibilities but could also provide an opportunity for TAP to more fully solidify the value-added it provides.

Recommendations

The Board should develop a set of Value Statements that guide its grant-making process and reflect its community-focused goals. The articulation of such values should prove useful when talking to elected and appointed officials about TAP's role as a re-granting agency and its history of grant making. *Progress Update:*

The Board has articulated the following core values:

- *Support local art and the artists who make it*
- *Advocate the Arts' role in a vibrant economy*
- *Promote a creatively enriched community*

Use this planning process to clarify the role of TAP as a resource development agency, meaning that it fulfills its organizational mission by gathering resources – financial and other – from a variety of sectors such as government, individuals and businesses. Whatever terminology is used (*resource development agency* was not universally liked), the objective is to find a way to quickly communicate that TAP is there to not only raise awareness but to generate resources (more than just money) to support artists and arts organizations.

With regard to creating a Big Vision for the arts community, TAP might consider working with its stakeholders to convene a "visioning" session where the groups

are invited to share their big ideas for the future. While participants should be encouraged to be audacious and bold in their thinking, they should also be prepared to discuss how this would tangibly benefit the tri-cities.

I recommend that Dayna resign from Fargo's commission which would enable TAP to advocate more effectively on behalf of the arts and for its annual funding. In order to avoid any appearance of conflict or tension between TAP and the Commission, there was some discussion about Dayna stepping down once her term ended. Given that TAP seems to enjoy a strong relationship with each City's mayor and staff, TAP's time and efforts could be better spent on building relations with the business community.

Grantees and the Primary Arts Partners

Meetings with grantees and primary arts partners revealed support for recent changes in the grant-making process – greater transparency and public review were all seen as positive developments. There was general consensus that TAP's advocacy efforts are especially critical during political campaigns. I did get the sense that many of the groups would welcome opportunities to be more of a partner with the organization.

My meetings in 2015 had included discussion of grant-making and resulted in the grant review undertaken by Tania (then a consultant to TAP) during Summer 2015. During this tactical planning process, I have made further recommendations about the grant-making process, and have worked with staff to make additional refinements to the program, as noted below.

Recommendations

Develop a grant-making policy to outline and articulate the principles of grant making adhered to by TAP and provide a standard of grant making practice for TAP. *Progress Update: The Board approved a grant-making policy on January 22, 2017.*

Revise the guidelines to reflect the organization's grant-making policies. *Progress Update: The guidelines for the 2017 City Arts Partnership Grants have been revised.*

Revise the guidelines and processes to raise the bar for grant applicants. A more transparent and rigorous process will increase confidence in the process overall, and should be a good learning process for those writing the grants. Given that the City Arts Partnership Grants are tax-payer dollars, the grant review panel should ideally be held in public. *Progress Update: The May 2017 CAP grant review panel was indeed opened to the public. Virtually all 34 applicants were represented at the meeting. An on-line survey conducted post-meeting indicates strong satisfaction with the process overall.*

Engage the arts groups in revisions to the grant-making process. It is important for TAP to embrace an attitude of “we are all in this together” – the more the groups are involved in the formulation of the review and assessment criteria, the more they will respect and trust the process which in turn creates a sense of fairness and transparency. *Progress Update: The January 2017 tactical plan meeting with those grantees receiving General Operating Support included discussion and review of the revised guidelines and assessment criteria. Those conversations led to subsequent revisions for the 2017 City Arts Partnership Grants cycle.*

Develop concrete, deadline-driven plans to utilize arts groups in advocacy campaigns and throughout the year, such as sending thank you letters to elected and appointed officials for public funding. Note: although TAP already requests such letters to be sent, it should *require* them going forward. *Progress Update: TAP will incorporate this requirement into its grant award contracts, beginning with the 2017 City Arts Partnership Grants cycle.*

TAP should continue to engage with grantees and Primary Arts Partners on a regular basis to discuss changes to the grant-making process or matters that are of universal concern, i.e. major cuts to the National Endowment for the Arts. *Progress Update: In April, TAP called together the leaders of the larger arts organizations for such a discussion. It was agreed that this group would meet monthly going forward, addressing different topics as they arise.*

The Business Sector

It was evident that those business leaders with whom we met hold TAP, its Board and Dayna in high regard and that TAP is a trusted and well-respected organization. The key issues that surfaced during the meeting were measurement of success and brand awareness. On more than one occasion, it was stated that better measurement was tied to greater funding. During the course of the meeting, it was noted that the “arts” were not included in community/civic initiatives such as Minnesota Compass. In addition, the GO2030 plan (a study by the City of Fargo) was mentioned and that the Arts & Culture chapter needed to be reviewed and integrated into TAP’s planning process.

There was also some discussion about TAP’s capacity to provide sufficient visibility – the “plaque on the wall” recognition – that many larger donors may seek.

Recommendations

Call upon business contacts to assist with a communications plan and strategies to provide sufficient recognition to corporate benefactors. *Progress Update: TAP has expanded its Marketing Committee beyond Board members to include three members from the corporate world. The Committee meets monthly.*

Seek help from corporate donors to get TAP included in civic initiatives that deal with planning, economic development and growth. Dayna, or another TAP

representative, needs to be a part of Chamber of Commerce meetings when issues related to community development, quality of life, and education are being discussed. TAP should have a seat at the proverbial table on an on-going basis.

Because of its good relations with local government and its growing success with the business community, TAP should consider what it will do with increased revenue. Options include increasing grant awards, developing a discretionary fund to respond to opportunities outside the regular grant cycle, award grants to individual artists and/or hire full-time staff to administer and assess value-added programs.

The Education Sector

On this last visit, I met with representatives of the school districts and higher education. It was evident that the school districts and universities face many of the same challenges as the nonprofit arts community -- financial constraints, personnel wearing many "hats" and full calendars conspire against developing long-term partnerships with TAP. Ideas such as an arts internship/residency program that TAP could coordinate as a service to its constituents would be mutually beneficial, but it would require time and a strong commitment on both sides. At this time, I recommend that TAP remain open to shorter-term opportunities as they arise because such engagements may lead to developing something more substantive.

APT = Arts Incubator

APT is the only TAP program that generated a significant amount of discussion. Since my October 2016 visit, the arts incubator space has become a reality for TAP. It was a prime topic of conversation during my January visit, particularly with the Tactical Plan Committee and the Board. Dayna and Tania have kept me in the loop as things have developed at APT since that time.

From the initial discussion, I easily understood Dayna's vision for what was possible and, likewise, the enormous work involved with the care and feeding of real property and tenant management. This project has great potential to be a tangible value added proposition for TAP, another way in which it is generating resources to support, nurture and strengthen the arts in the community.

The Kilbourne Group has seen an opportunity to activate an otherwise vacant building in the downtown area while benefiting artists and arts groups in need of space. This kind of corporate engagement is to be applauded as long as the carrying costs of the project can be covered by subsidies, philanthropic contributions and/or rental income. APT already shows great potential as a proof of concept.

Recommendations

Hire someone to manage the facility. The demands of this space far exceed the capacity of the existing staff. *Progress Update: TAP has contracted with a freelance employee to handle programming and on-site facilities management.*

Determine the carrying costs of the facility and TAP's "break-even" point. Ideally TAP can increase revenue and keep costs in check to make it a break-even proposition. Even if it does run at a deficit, this project should do more good than harm in terms of public relations, corporation relations and creating new opportunities for the arts community. *Progress Update: TAP is projecting that hard costs should reach a break-even level before the end of Summer 2017.*

It appears that through the arts incubator, TAP may be able to provide services to artists and or arts groups that it has not reached before. This in turn could lead to new Primary Arts Partners and, perhaps more importantly, to new donors. After a period of time, TAP may wish to develop a special fundraising appeal to support this project – the appeal should target the mailing lists of the artists and groups benefitting from the space. *Progress Update: Several of the APT tenants who were not previously Primary Arts Partners have become Partners. Additionally, TAP has recently received a couple of donations (from individuals and businesses) specifically geared to support TAP's work at APT.*

If this space is used regularly for performances and other paid events, TAP may want to create an Apt Card that would entitle donors to a XX% discount on ticket prices.

Explore the feasibility of creating a tax-free zone. Downtown Providence, Rhode Island, with State approval, suspended sales tax on work purchased from artists who lived and worked in a specific zone. The arts, as is the case in many urban areas, led the redevelopment of downtown Providence.

TAP Programs

TAP manages three on-going programs that would not easily fit under another organization's mission. As I mentioned previously, while review of these programs was not explicitly part of the tactical planning process, there were informal discussions with staff and board members that touched on the programs.

- ChalkFest is a free, hands-on art-making event. Held at the Red River Zoo, the event attracts a particularly diverse crowd, including all generations, New Americans and those with disabilities. TAP estimates that one-quarter of the 5,500 attendees last year were from underserved audiences.
- Community Supported Art (CSA) introduces arts supporters to local artists and builds audiences (and consumers) for their work. The program is modeled after

Community Supported Agriculture, with art “shareholders” receiving original art or artisan articles, performances and culinary art shares.

- The Artist-in-Residence Programs cultivates creativity in corporate environments. Each program features an art exhibit plus an artist engagement with staff members.

Each of the programs provides added value to the work TAP is doing in the community, helping to build audiences/support for the arts. That said, such value-added programs are not integral to accomplishment of TAP’s mission. It is not unusual that programs such as this may go on hiatus or be discontinued permanently should the organization find there is no longer a need for or interest in the programs. In the long-run, TAP will be assessed on its grant-making processes and its ability to generate resources for the arts in the tri-city area.

However, one significant benefit of these programs is that they provide TAP with opportunities to reach beyond nonprofit arts organizations to individual artists thereby broadening its constituent base.

Recommendations

TAP should regularly assess these programs to ensure that they continue to meet both program and organizational goals.

Organizational Infrastructure

It would be impossible to undergo a tactical planning process without giving due consideration to organizational/institutional structure and infrastructure. The board and staff have been self-reflective throughout this process.

On the structural side, they have asked themselves the right questions: Do we have the right number of board members? What should the board structure *be*? What experience and talents do we need on the board? Can we continue to grow the operation with only three full-time staff members? Do they have the skills and experience necessary to ensure mission-accomplishment for the organization?

Following a national trend, TAP has kept its board smaller as board members have rotated off the board. (The current by-laws note that the board shall consist of “no less than 9 and no more than 15 individuals.”) TAP has also expanded its notion of “board committee structure” to include non-board members who bring the specific skills, experience and interest in the committee on which they serve. This type of committee structure brings new talents to the organization and *can* serve as a way to identify individuals with the interests and experiences needed on the board prior to inviting them to serve.

Organizational infrastructure includes best practices that increase good governance, accountability and transparency. Having a strong organizational foundation will allow

TAP to move to the next level. That means ensuring that the organization has procedures and systems that support goals, activities and staff/organizational performance. In the past three years, TAP has been assessing what policies and practices it needs to have in place to ensure that it is modeling best practices – and being as effective and efficient with its resources as possible.

Recommendations

Determine whether the staff structure is appropriate for where the organization currently finds itself versus where the organization wants to go. *Progress Update: The board has recently approved a title change from Executive Director to that of President & CEO. The change reflects the more complex operational duties held by TAP's senior manager, presenting a better public posture for the manager and a better strategic posture for an organization. In conjunction with this change, the position of Grants & Programs Coordinator has been changed to Director of Operations.*

As with many non-profits, TAP has a small staff of three, each of whom wears many hats. Elsewhere in this report, there were recommendations to hire part-time or hourly staff to help extend the communications reach and also to manage the day-to-day of APT. In January, the Board challenged the staff to think about a potential position or positions that could best support the existing staff. *Progress Update: With the title changes and thus changes to the job descriptions of existing staff, staff are in the process of creating a job description for a part-time position and/or freelance or project-based hires. As noted elsewhere, TAP hopes to post for a position in Fall 2017.*

TAP should self-assess what *additional* formal policies and procedures need to be in place to ensure the effective functioning and growth of the organization. *Progress Update: TAP is using the Principles & Practices for Nonprofit Excellence in North Dakota as a guide to evaluate operations and become more efficient and effective. To that end, since January, TAP's board approved two key policies – for grant-making Policies and gift acceptance – and will be approving updated Personnel policies before the end of Fiscal 2017.*

Continue to bolster TAP's committee structure with individuals from outside the board who can bring new energies and talents to those committees.

Appendix A Tactical Plan Participants

The following lists the individuals who participated in meetings as part of the Tactical Plan process. The participants included TAP's Primary Arts Partners and Grantees and representatives from the business community, the Metro's public school systems and higher education. Thank you for your participation.

The Arts Partnership Board

Karin Rudd, Chair
Gate City Bank

Alyson Bjornstad, Treasurer
Bell State Banks

Melissa Tomlinson, Secretary
Humach

Mara Brust
Conmy Feste, Ltd

Crystal Gilson
FBS Data System

Jeff Knight
Cereal

Ann Arbor Miller
Arbor Photography

Ellen Shafer
Leeco Steel

Tactical Plan Advisory Committee

Scott Beaulier
College of Business, NDSU

Michael J. Burns
Michael J. Burns Architects

Maureen Kelly Jonason
Historical & Cultural Society of Clay County

Tracey Moorhead
Concordia College

Shyla Thompson
Microsoft

Melissa Tomlinson
TAP Board and Humach

Wayne Zimmerman
Arts Advocate

Karin Rudd
TAP Board Chair

Other Participants

Myla Alsaker
FM Golden Notes

Betsy Alberty
Gate City Bank

Mike Allmendinger
Kilbourne Group

Bob Ames
Foss Architecture & Interiors

Dave Anderson
Sanford Health

Kathy Anderson
Trollwood

Tim Beaton
FM Area Foundation; Moorhead
Arts & Culture Commission

Emily Beck
Fargo Theatre

Mary Bjerke
Dawson Insurance

Linda Boyd
FM Symphony

Eloise Breikjern
FM Community Theatre

Kim Citrowske
City of Moorhead

Tom Dawson
Dawson Insurance

Ken Demmons
HDR Engineering, Inc.

Sarah Dotzenrod
Artist

Nicole Ellis
TMI Hospitality

Char-Marie Flood
Artist

Jim Gartin
Greater FM Economic
Development Corp

Tiana Gris e
FM Area Youth Symphonies

Bruce Grubb
City of Fargo

David Hamilton
FM Opera

Marty Hoffmann
The Barry Foundation

Kristi Huber
United Way

Christy Jacobson
Allerus

Chad Johnson
Rourke Art Museum

Charley Johnson
FM Convention & Visitors Bureau

Maureen Kelly Jonason
Historical & Cultural Society

Jeff Knight
Artist

Dr. Lynn Kovash
Moorhead Public Schools

Jay Krabbenhoff
Gate City Bank

Bill Law
Performing Arts, NDSU

Anna Lee
Artist

Mark Lundberg
YHR Partners, Ltd.

John Mahocheck
Greater FM Economic
Development Corp

Mayor Tim Mahoney
City of Fargo

Matt Marshall
City of West Fargo

Andy Maus
Plains Art Museum

Todd Medd
JLG Architects

John Miller
Performing Arts, NDSU

Cady Mittlestadt
Rourke Art Museum

Lauris Molbert
TMI Hospitality

Richard Moorhead
Image Group

Dawn Morgan
The Spirit Room

Adrienne Olson
Kilbourne Group

Cris Oehler
Ottetail Corporation

Arlette Preston
Fargo Arts & Culture Commission

Michael Redlinger
City of Fargo

Dr. Jeff Schatz
Fargo Public Schools

Brad Schlossman
West Acres Development

Scott Seiler
Artist

John Strand
Commissioner, City of Fargo

Rooth Varland
Theatre Arts, NDSU

Matt Von Pinnon
The Forum

Sara Watson Curry
Great Rides

Deb Williams
Fargo Arts & Culture Commission

Mayor Del Rae Williams
City of Moorhead

Emily Williams-Wheeler
Artist

Carrie Wintersteen
Theatre B; Moorhead Arts &
Culture Commission