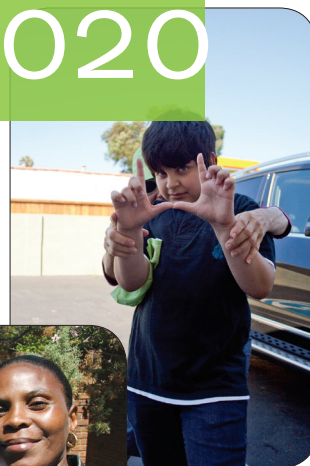


# Strategic Plan 2016–2020



# Mission Statement

## “Venice Arts

**ignites, expands, and  
transforms** the lives of  
Los Angeles’ low-income  
youth through photography  
and film education,  
and uses its participatory  
storytelling practices to  
amplify the voices of  
underrepresented  
communities around  
the world.”



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# Executive Summary

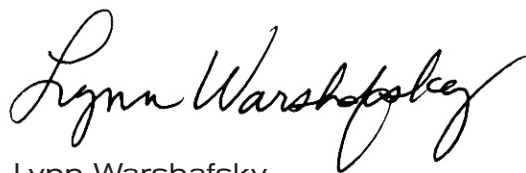
For over 23 years, Venice Arts has grown in both scope and impact, while sustaining our principal commitment to access and equity through the arts, mentoring, and education for Los Angeles' low-income youth. We are proud for having been recognized, nationally and locally, for our innovative, high-impact programs; our business model and long history of financial stability; our solid infrastructure and creative, dedicated staff; and our active and committed Board of Directors. Our future focus? To build on these strengths so that we may sustain, deepen, and expand our impacts well into the next decade and beyond.

To this end, in late 2014 we embarked on an update to our 2012–2015 Strategic Plan, giving ourselves a full year to complete research into each of our core areas of work. We listened to our community—kids, parents, artists, mentors—to understand their needs, desires, and best hopes, and talked with leaders in the arts, civic, and funding sectors about the social, economic, and demographic trends that might shape our future. We also completed an internal assessment, including an analysis of who we serve—95% low-income kids, more than 50% of whom live in poverty—and who we are reluctantly forced to turn away: over 150 low-income youth each year.

Our staff and Board put significant effort into distilling and discussing all input and data, resulting in this five-year plan. It focuses on three, interrelated imperatives—**facility, leadership, and organization development**—that will result in expanding our reach to impoverished children and teens, while sustaining the quality of our programs and impact. Although we anticipate future adjustments, we believe that a five-year timeframe most ably communicates the importance of what we are undertaking to continue to realize our mission to ignite, expand, and transform the lives of Los Angeles' low-income youth through photography and film education, and use our participatory storytelling practices to amplify the voices of underrepresented communities around the world.



Ruth Seroussi  
Board President



Lynn Warshafsky  
Founder/Executive Director

# Strategic Plan Overview of Planning Process Details

Our planning process was highly interactive by design, engaging as broad a number of stakeholders as possible. Planning activities kicked off with a review of our mission, an assessment of the achievements and challenges in realizing our 2012–2015 plan, and an evaluation of our internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis).

We conducted Key Informant interviews with community, civic, and funding leaders, and Focus Groups with parents (in Spanish and English), children, artists, and mentors (see Appendix B). We analyzed program evaluations and process data (participation, retention, impacts, youth achievement awards) from the last 3 to 5 years, and reviewed an extensive list of research and reports (see Appendix D) in the arts, nonprofit, technology, and related sectors. They address everything from the role of the arts in the Common Core curriculum, to the growing

national interest in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) and its relationship to our own programs, which naturally intersect art and technology.

We discussed the alignment of our curriculum with the commitment of education leaders to integrate media and technology into the K–12 curriculum, and considered how we might contribute to the national dialogue on “creative youth

development.” We also explored our role in

responding to the entrenched problem of low-income youths being left behind because they do not have equal access to a quality education, nor to the many support resources required for college or career success so often provided to their more affluent peers.

We culminated the process with a full-day retreat, where we confirmed the three directions that we believe are most strategic, and affirmed the spirit of our mission, while simplifying its language.

## CORE PROGRAMS

### Art Mentoring & Education

### Gallery & Public Programs

### Participatory Documentary Programs



# Strategic Plan Details

## Strategic Directions

As an outcome of our process, we developed the following, three strategies to guide us over the next five years:

- 1. Secure New Facility.** Our central imperative is to implement an aspirational plan for a long-term facility—whether through purchase or lease—that will provide stability and support our growth objectives. Given our deep roots in Venice, and our success staying missional despite local economic changes, our goal is to continue to maintain our primary center in Venice.
- 2. Leadership.** Even with the best of Boards, leadership development and engagement is a standing goal. At this juncture in our development, making significant strides is critical, as we work on our facility initiative, as well as on more ambitious fundraising goals, particularly in raising increased major donor and corporate dollars. Our organization's long-term health is also dependent on each of our Board members more fully growing into their leadership and stewardship roles.
- 3. Organization Development.** We are committed to continuing the practice of regularly assessing and building upon our organization's strengths, mitigating our weaknesses, and including in our development and financial planning goals that will help protect the organization, whether from economic downturns or the loss of key leadership. As a 23-year old organization, with an Executive Director who is also a Founder, we are committed to codifying, and periodically reviewing, our succession plan, as well as our structure, staffing, and leadership cultivation efforts. Our goal is to assure that Venice Arts remains strong beyond the involvement of our Executive Director or any other key leader.

Our principal commitment is to access and equity through the arts, mentoring, and education for Los Angeles' low-income youth

# Strategic Plan Details

## Key Findings

These Key Findings from our data informed the development of our Strategic Directions.

### **FINDING 1: A holistic approach to arts education and youth development has the deepest impact.**

A review of field research, as well as an analysis of our own evaluation data, clearly supports this finding. Parent respondents were very vocal about their positive perception of Venice Arts' role in their child's overall development. They reported that our programs build their child's confidence, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships, as well as their creative and technical skills and knowledge. Youth respondents echoed their parents, viewing Venice Arts not simply as a place to take a photo or film class but, rather, as a place where they become creative individuals, access opportunities that they wouldn't otherwise have, and build self-efficacy because they are "listened to and supported." Both youth and parents said that they wanted more: more opportunities for scholarships, more internships, and more support for college and career. When asked why they thought Venice Arts existed, one young person said, "This place is to make your dreams come true, to allow you to open up and become who you want to be in the future."

### **FINDING 2: Community need and service demand far exceed our facility capacities.**

The growing visibility of Venice Arts has significantly increased the demand for our services. In fact, in 2015, alone, we turned 150 low-income children away simply because we do not have sufficient space, despite having implemented a number of creative strategies for expanding our classrooms: from borrowing our next door neighbor's parking pad, to holding classes in our garden. During each of our three workshop cycles, we enroll nearly 200 youth, with 460 new and continuing youth per annum. With young people "hanging off the rafters," the regular displacement of staff through regular conversion of workspace to classroom, and the competition for exhibition and screening space, solving our facility limitations has become our number one priority.



Select Youth Awards:  
U.S. Presidential  
Scholar in the Arts,  
National YoungArts  
Awards, Scholastic Art  
& Writing, Warner Bros.  
Reach Honorship,  
Nikon College & High  
School Awards.

# Strategic Plan Details

## Key Findings

### **FINDING 3: Gentrification in Venice poses significant challenges, while also offering a number of unique opportunities.**

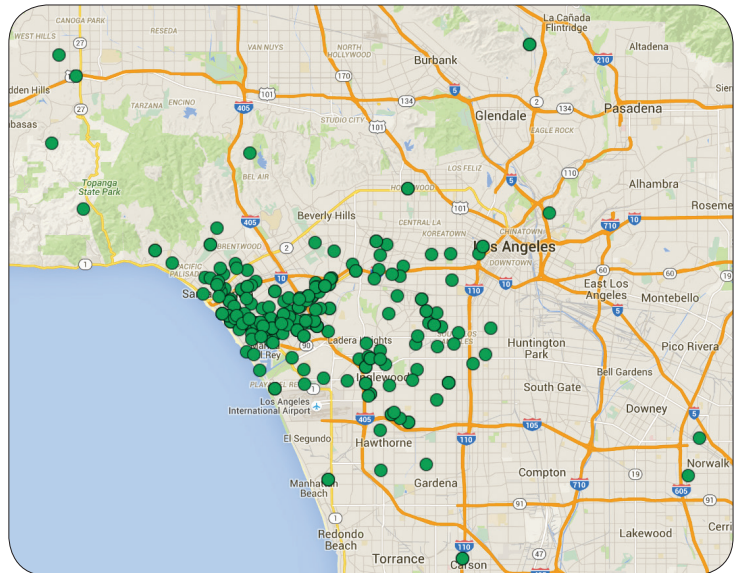
To a person, adult respondents discussed the gentrification of Venice and its implications for Venice Arts. An analysis of data on economic change in Venice during the past decade underscores the community's growing wealth, while showing that 10-15% of residents remain low-income. Data on the economic class of our participants show that we have successfully maintained our commitment to low-income youths: 95% are low-income, with more than 50% living in poverty.

On the positive side of community change, the many creative companies that have moved into Venice—technology, digital content development, and others—have a natural affiliation with our programs. Early outreach indicates that many are interested in contributing dollars and time, with some working actively to develop a corporate culture of “giving back.”

### **FINDING 4: There are multiple advantages to continuing to house our primary facility in Venice, despite the area's growth in affluence.**

Adult respondents talked about small businesses and low-income families being displaced from Venice, and expressed concern that Venice Arts would face a similar situation in the near future. As one respondent said, “You are serving a vanishing Venice.” An analysis of internal data tracking where our families live supports this contention: 60% now live in the Venice area and 40% throughout Los Angeles. This not only illustrates the demographic change in our community but, also, tells us that our program model is sufficiently unique and high impact to draw low-income young people from across the region.

After many discussions, we have determined that we—and our community—are best served by staying in Venice: Leaving would destabilize services to hundreds of low-income young people, it would



Low-income families travel from throughout the Los Angeles region to participate in our Art Mentoring & Education Program, with the highest concentration of students residing on the West Side.



# Strategic Plan Details

## Key Findings

not allow us to respond to the additional demand for programs, and it would require us to do significant rebuilding elsewhere. Staying in Venice offers us the opportunity to build our Board and our relationships with the local tech and creative communities. Additionally, if we are able to establish an affordable, larger, long-term facility in the Venice area, we will have the stability necessary to expand our ArtPartners programs in impoverished communities across Los Angeles.

### **FINDING 5: We need to breach our “glass ceiling” in major donor and corporate support if we are to be successful.**

A review of data from the past five years of fund development efforts shows that our strong card is grant-based fundraising, primarily from Foundations, our largest source of support. Data also underscore the importance of growing our individual, major donor, and corporate donor base. While this is a recurrent theme for most similarly sized nonprofits, we know that without greater capitalization, we will not be able to maintain and grow our programs.

Data from conversations with institutional funders indicate that we are supported by a large percentage of local Foundations, and that to grow such giving we will need to increase our budget by successfully securing grants from larger, national Foundations, as well as through increased individual and corporate giving.

### **FINDING 6: Focused organizational capacity building will help assure our longevity and continued success.**

Data from an internal assessment of strengths and weaknesses, as well as from an external assessment of our financial health completed by the Nonprofit Finance Fund, show that we are a healthy, well-managed organization. We have a strong infrastructure, an effective business model, and high performing staff with opportunities for growth. Data also indicate that our primary vulnerabilities lie in a small staff managing a large program scope, and underscore the importance of codifying a succession plan, given that the Executive Director is also a Founder, and using this process to further engage the Board's leadership.

95% of our participants  
are low-income,  
with more than  
50% living in poverty.

# Strategic Plan Details

## Key Findings

### **FINDING 7: Venice Arts would benefit from simplifying our communications strategies and key messages.**

An analysis of multi-year communication strategies and their outcomes tells a story of a sound approach to communications, with sophisticated use of multiple platforms (social media, email, print) despite an under-resourced communications staff. Our website received mixed reviews—with some finding it dynamic and informative, and others too complex, with too many creative assets that muddle our message.

There was a good deal of discussion about the virtue of changing Venice Arts' name. It was decided that this decision would be revisited once there was a clear action plan for facility. Questions considered included: (1) Is the name too rooted in a specific community, and does the association with "Venice" support or distract from our fundraising efforts? (2) If the name serves the organization, from a local perspective, how do we more effectively communicate our broader reach (e.g., throughout Los Angeles, statewide, and internationally)? (3) Is the name sufficiently aspirational? Does it speak not only to who we are, but to who we want to become?

### **FINDING 8: The boundaries between Documentary Programs and Consulting & Training Programs have increasingly blurred over the past five years.**

While we maintain a strong documentary track within our Art Mentoring & Education Program serving Los Angeles youth, the boundaries between our Documentary and Consulting & Training Programs, which largely serve communities and organizations regionally, nationally, and internationally, have increasingly blurred over the past five years. Out-of-area projects have grown more "client" driven over time and, consequently, the distinction between the two programs has not only lost relevance, it is confusing to others.

Thus, we decided to merge these programs, which are now called Participatory Documentary Programs. We believe that this more clearly articulates the essence of what we are trying to achieve through both: develop the capacities of participant-producers—whether community members or NGO staff—to create high-impact and high-caliber stories through photography, film, and multimedia.

# Strategic Plan Details

## Program Goals

Venice Arts identifies Program Goals that reflect our strategies and serve as a planning umbrella for staff, who create more detailed operating plans. Given our strategic focus on organization development, for the plan's first several years we expect to sustain participation levels, quality, and impact of our programs. Our key goals are:

### Art Mentoring & Education

- 1. Sustain programs for 460 new and continuing** low-income youth annually, including 70 teens in Advanced Studies. Once we secure a larger facility and build our fundraising capacities, we plan a two-to-three-year program expansion to: (a) reach at least 50% of the 150 youth currently turned away; and, (b) grow our high-impact Advanced Studies program, including internships and training for work in creative industries.
- 2. Fully integrate College Track activities** into our ongoing operations, which include portfolio development, support for awards and scholarships, and college counseling. As an outcome of capacity development, we expect to expand this program in years 3–5.
- 3. Develop and implement a creative vision for our 25th Anniversary (2018)** that, in this program area, will be reflected in the creative projects of our youth participants.



Angela editing her portfolio, which earned her numerous awards, including a full scholarship to Boston University and the Presidential Scholar in the Arts.



Venice Arts' Gallery & Public Programs foster community and conversation around documentary photography and film. Above: Installation view of "One Person Crying: Women and War," a 30-year, global documentary project by photographer Marissa Roth.

### Gallery & Public Programs

- 1. Sustain our schedule of 4 exhibitions annually**, including one juried exhibition and our Gala exhibition, as well as our documentary film screening series tied to major exhibitions in partnership with film-focused organizations.

# Strategic Plan Details

## Program Goals

### 2. Develop a creative vision for our 25th

**anniversary (2018)** that, in this program area, will engage a broad and diverse community in exhibitions, film screenings, and other activities that highlight work by professional artists; artists with long affiliations with Venice Arts; and our youth participants.

### 3. Increase cross-pollination

between this Program and the Art Mentoring & Education Program through such activities as expanding opportunities for youth to learn from artists exhibiting or screening work; sharing participant-produced works at relevant exhibitions or film screenings; and engaging advanced teen artists as presenters alongside adult artists on panels or other public programs.

## Participatory Documentary Programs

### 1. Implement at least one, participant-produced documentary project every two years,

in collaboration with a nonprofit trainee, university, or other partner.



Past partners include non-profit organizations and community groups in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and California's Central Valley; Detroit, MI, Maysville, KY, and Leachville, AK; Mozambique, Senegal, and South Africa; and Hong Kong, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand.





# Appendices

## Appendix A:

### Board And Staff List [As of 01/01/2016]

#### Staff | @venicearts.org

Lynn Warshafsky *Founder/Executive Director*

Elysa Voshell *Associate Director*

Karen Kiss *Director of Grants & Administration*

Issa Sharp *Director of Education*

Christian Rozier *Lead Filmmaker*

Scott Oshima *Program & Media Coordinator*

Chelsea Chenelle *Development & Communications Associate*

Erica Rodriguez *Administrative Assistant*

#### Finance and Development Support

Judith Stephan *Accountant*

Christina Blair *Bookkeeper*

Kelly Layne *Events*

#### Artists

10 consulting artists/educators

#### Interns

6 high school and college interns

#### Board of Directors

##### OFFICERS

Ruth Seroussi *Attorney-at-Law, Buchalter Nemer, President*

Steven Oritt *Independent Filmmaker, Vice President*

Greg Haddad *Sr. VP, 1st Century Bank, Secretary-Treasurer*

##### DIRECTORS

Neal Baer, M.D. *Showrunner, CBS Television*

Michael Cannone *Sr. Portfolio Manager, Westmount Asset Management*

Caroline Converse *Marketing Consultant*

Brandell Davis *Coaching General Manager, Regus Group*

Jodi Gusek *Associate Director, Insights, Siegel + Gale*

J-T Ladit *Head of Development, Red Bull TV*

Mike Newhouse *Attorney-at-Law, Newhouse Law Group*

Matt Ogens *Independent Filmmaker*

Josh Rose *Chief Creative Officer, Weber Shandwick*

Wendy Slusser, M.D. *Associate Vice Provost, UCLA*

*Healthy Campus Initiative; Professor, UCLA School of Medicine*

Lynn Warshafsky *Executive Director, Co-founder, Venice Arts*

Katie Welle *VP of Creative, Sony Music*

# Appendices

## Appendix B: Key Informants and Focus Groups

### Key Informant Interviewees

Mike Bonin Councilman

Angel Roberson Daniels Angell Foundation

Michael Dolotta Dolotta Family Charitable Foundation

Dorothy Fleisher Keck Foundation

Mary Lou Fulton The California Endowment

Jim Herr California Community Foundation

Mary James Donor

Cat Jimenez The Lucie Foundation/Month of Photography L.A.

Sarah Montrose Weingart Foundation

Rick Noguchi The James Irvine Foundation

Jennifer Price-Letscher The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation

Benson Riseman Riseman Foundation

Leslie Thomas City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs

Matty Wilder Herb Alpert Foundation

### Focus Group Participants

Approximately 50 people participated through four Focus Groups held with artistic faculty and mentors, parents (in English and Spanish), and youth (one middle school, one high school).

“This place is to make  
your dreams come true,  
to allow you to open up  
and become who you want  
to be in the future.”



# Appendices

## Appendix C: Questions

To develop consistent data, we asked the same, core questions, modifying the language to make it appropriate to the participant group.

### **Perceptions/Understanding of Venice Arts' Mission/Core Programs**

1. What is your understanding of Venice Arts' mission and core programs?
2. What part(s) of our mission and programs are most compelling to you? Why?

### **Community Needs**

1. What do you think are the most critical, unmet needs of low-income communities?
2. What do you think Venice Arts' role should be in meeting or supporting those needs?

### **Environmental Scan**

1. What do you think are the key social, economic, and demographic trends that will be relevant to Venice Arts over the next 3–5 years? What do you think are the key challenges and opportunities?
2. During planning, we analyze a range of relevant research and reports (give examples). Are there any reports or data sets that you think we should review/that might be of interest to us as we plan?

#### **Funder questions, only:**

3. Are there funding or other trends in your sector that might inform our strategies and plans?
4. What would need to change at Venice Arts for us to secure higher level grants/multi-year funding? Are there other funders that you might recommend we research?

### **Future Vision**

Outline emerging directions that we are seeing at this point in time and ask:

1. If we could pursue only one of these, and **you** were shaping our vision based on your understanding of our programs, community need, strengths, and challenges, what would you recommend we pursue?

# Appendices

## Appendix D: Data Sources

### Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT)

Board and staff, informed by research data, assessed internal strengths and weaknesses, and evaluated external opportunities and threats.

### Evaluation Data

Aggregate data from the prior year's student, artist, and parent evaluations

Summary of anecdotal data from staff, faculty, and mentors

### Process Data

Changes in student enrollment over the past five years

Student retention over the past five years

Increase/decrease in workshops and projects over the past three years

Comparison of dollars raised, sources, number of donors over five years

2012–15 Strategic Plan achievements and challenges

### Research Reports, Online Sources, Articles and Publications

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**venicearts**

A Center for **Media** and the **Imagination**

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