



## Strategic Plan Report: 2012-2015

Ratified December 3, 2011

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1702 Lincoln Boulevard, Venice, CA 90291

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The last three years have been an interesting, exciting, and demanding time at Venice Arts. Our country's significant economic turmoil resulted in both a more challenging fundraising environment and, for many of us, a concurrent increase in requests for services, including from families who had never before sought support from community-based programs. We are proud that we have not only been able to stay the course during this difficult period but, also, to grow our programs and our budget by more than 25%. We attribute this success, at least in part, to remaining forward thinking, albeit cautious; to the extraordinary commitment of our staff, board, faculty, and volunteer artist-mentors; and to having had the opportunity to partner with extraordinary nonprofits, foundations, and community groups—each equally committed to bettering individual lives and communities.

We are so satisfied with the outcomes of our work—especially the young people whose lives have been changed through their participation in our programs. We are delighted to have contributed to the capacities of other organizations and groups regionally, statewide and internationally through consultation, curriculum development, and providing an online library of curricular resources. And we are pleased that we have been able to sustain our schedule of exhibitions, while launching a nascent screening and public program series that we expect to find full bloom over the next few years;

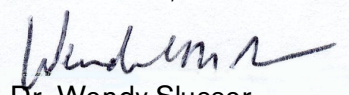
To set the stage for our future, we engaged in an intensive planning process, during which we reflected deeply on how the recession has affected the poor and low-income families that we serve, as well as middle-income families who have faced new and unexpected challenges. We listened closely to parents and children participating in our programs and to our artist-mentors and educators. We assessed our strengths and weaknesses and spoke to leaders in the arts, media, funding, human services, and social justice. We reviewed multiple reports that reaffirmed what we know about the significance of the arts and creativity in young people's education and development, and read new research that underscored the importance of the middle school years in shaping future success.

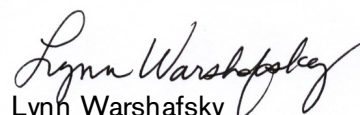
We think of a Strategic Plan as a puzzle that can be put together in many different ways to achieve the whole. To find the right fit for each piece, we asked ourselves what would best fulfill our mission. What would we pursue and what let go? Would we go wider, deeper, or both? What could we reasonably expect to fund? How could we assure that we were also seeding some unknown future, leaving room for the unexpected, while working with intention on specific goals?

In answer to these questions, we identified three strategic directions and a set of program refinement goals. Two of our strategic directions represent plans for growth in existing areas of work: *expanding the ways in which we step up to leadership within our field*, and *extending the significant impacts of our Art Mentoring model to a greater number of youth*. The third, *developing our model Artist Training Program*, challenges us to take the work that we have been doing over the last few years to a whole new level, including increasing our ability to share our successful methodologies with other organizations.

Venice Arts' mission is to bring professional artists together with low-income youth to ignite their imagination, mentor their creativity, and expand their sense of possibility through high quality, accessible media-based arts education programs. We also seek to serve as a catalyst for people of all ages, living in low-income or underrepresented communities, to create and share personal and community stories through photography, film, and multi-media. We hope that this summary report, and related online materials, underscores our commitment to our mission, demonstrates our understanding of the needs of the families that we serve, and reflects our strengths as individuals and as an organization.

December 3, 2011

  
Dr. Wendy Slusser  
Board President

  
Lynn Warshafsky  
Founder/Executive Director

## **ORGANIZATION AND PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

Venice Arts was founded in 1993 with the launch of a documentary photography project involving ten low-income children. Nineteen years later we have evolved into an award-winning, media-based arts organization that has sustained a focus on youth arts education, while also offering programs of interest to adults. While most of our work is done out of our Center in Venice, we have ongoing programs throughout Los Angeles and in the Central Valley of California. We also run documentary photography and film projects, as well as provide consultation and training, locally and internationally. Among other honors, in 2011 we were named one of 50 top youth arts organizations nationwide by the President's Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

### **Core Programs**

**Mentoring and Education:** Standards-based, sequential arts education with a minimum ratio of 1 artist to every 3 students is offered after-school and on weekends during the academic year, and through a daily Summer Media Arts Camp. Includes Art Discovery for children ages 6-9; Media programs—film and digital photography, filmmaking, animation, and multi-media—for youths ages 10-18; and an Advanced Studies Track that offers a structured pathway to college and work through advanced workshops, 1:1 mentoring, internship placements, and assistance with portfolios, scholarships, and college applications.

**Documentary Projects:** Local, national, and international participant-produced photography and film projects that engage community members in personal and community storytelling, which is shared through exhibitions, screenings, festivals, media, and more. Examples: *Picturing Health* (low-income teens in Southern and Central California, 2009-11); *Got Caught Up Out There* (homeless, mentally ill women in Los Angeles, 2008); *The House Is Small But The Welcome Is Big* (HIV/AIDS affected women, children in South Africa, Mozambique, 2006-2009).

**Gallery and Public Programs:** Exhibits featuring high-caliber work by young artists, as well as work by adult photographers, filmmakers and multimedia artists; free public programs include artists' talks, panels, film screenings, and other activities intended to engage community members with artists and creativity.

**Institute for Photographic Empowerment:** A collaboration between Venice Arts and the University of Southern California's Annenberg School supports the study and practice of participant-produced projects and the first-ever Minor the field of participant-photography.

**Consultation and Training:** Support to other organizations and groups, locally, regionally, and internationally, interested in participant photography and film, arts education and related activities. Includes curriculum development, consultation, artist training, and an online library of educational resources for individuals and organizations working with youth.

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTION DETAIL**

### **1. Expand Our Leadership in The Field**

Venice Arts first identified Leadership as a Strategic Goal in our 2008-11 Strategic Plan (see [www.venicearts.org](http://www.venicearts.org)). This emerged from our positive experience partnering with Dean Geoffrey Cowan, of the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, to start the Institute for Photographic Empowerment (2007). Subsequent to that, we advised USC on the launch of the first-ever Minor in the field of participant photography (2010). We increased our involvement in local, regional, and statewide networks, including initiating a monthly professional development meeting with participants from area mid-size and large arts organizations. We collaborated with a funder to initiate Youth Art and Media, YAM-LA, which now sponsors an annual youth media festival that, in 2012, will be hosted by the Museum of Contemporary Art. Asked by the same funder to share our curricular resources, we established the Venice Arts Online Library. Finally, we were asked by The California Endowment to pilot a two-year program with youth in the Southern Merced area of California's Central Valley (2012). Each of these activities set the stage for 2012-15.

#### **Goals:**

- a. **Expand University partnerships:** Develop a collaborative program of student training, research, and/or field projects, with the emphasis to be determined following research in Year One. Our strong preferences for collaboration are: 1) developing training for a new generation of artist-educators, which also provides a steady pool of qualified interns to Venice Arts; and 2) collaborative field research projects that might ask “big questions” regarding visual media advocacy and media-based arts engagement.
- b. **Online Library:** Maintain and build the content of the newly launched (December 2011) Venice Arts Online Library with a goal to sustain a rich, unique resource—curricula, lesson plans, activities—for artists and educators working with youth within and outside of our organization.



- c. **Visibility and participation:** Increase participation of key staff in local, statewide, and national networks, convenings, and leadership groups in each of our intersecting fields of work in order to share perspective gained through nearly 20 years in the field, and to foster new opportunities for cross-fertilization and collaboration.

## **2. Extend the Impacts of Our Art Mentoring Model by Instituting a “Bridge” Program.**

We have elected to focus on a reconfiguration of our Art Mentoring program that, over the course of three years, will result in providing a bridge to success for students at each end of our population: Middle school students requiring a “bridge” into our Advanced Studies Track, and recent high school graduates who would benefit from continued involvement in our programs.

In planning for this strategic expansion, we analyzed both internal and external sources of data, including student and artist evaluations, enrollment and retention data, economic and educational demographics in our target areas, as well as studies on the trending needs of low-income children, teenagers, and their families. We also discussed the impact of arts engagement on learning, behavior, creativity and critical thinking; the growing role of digital media and technology in education; and barriers to education and aspiration—that is, to knowledge and skill, as well as a child’s belief in her or his own future possibilities.

We found research that addressed the importance of intervening in the middle school years to be particularly relevant, as it indicated that successful engagement of both youth and families improves the middle-school experience and prepares young people for the challenges of high school, thereby maximizing high school success and college readiness.<sup>1</sup> This coincided with our interest in building out our programs for middle school youth.

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<sup>1</sup> Partnership for 21st Century Skills, “Framework for 21st Century Learning,” 2009, accessed online March 14, 2010, [www.p21.org/documents/P21\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.p21.org/documents/P21_Framework.pdf)

We were also interested in new research on “disconnected youth,”<sup>2</sup> the more than 17% of the nation’s 38.9 million youth and young adults, ages 16-24, who are neither in school nor employed. This research affirmed the value of our Advanced Studies Track, which currently targets high school age teenagers, and echoed internal, anecdotal data that indicating that a small subset of our graduates would benefit from continued participation at Venice Arts as they transitioned into adulthood.

**Goals:**

**a. Implement a Middle School Bridge that will:**

- Increase access to Venice Arts as an after-school destination
- Expand the number of middle school youth served to build a larger base of participants
- Deepen learning opportunities for retained middle school youth
- Provide a clear, sequenced pathway into Advanced Studies Track and its many benefits
- Provide annual college-path information and support to middle school youth and their parents

**b. Implement a Teen or Advanced Bridge that will:**

- Provide advanced workshops targeting the educational needs of older teens
- Offer continued support for college and/or career, such as assistance with scholarships, applications, résumés, and portfolios
- Offer continued Internship and Externship opportunities that build job skills
- Provide hands-on experience and community engagement through a “give back” component, with older teens mentoring younger participants

**3. Develop Our Model Artist Training Program**

Over the years, Venice Arts has received countless requests for materials, consultation, and support as individual artists, organizations, and community groups have looked to develop similar programs in their communities. We have responded to this interest in a number of key ways: launching the aforementioned Institute at USC; writing a comprehensive curricular guide

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<sup>2</sup> Bridgeland, John & Milano, Jessica A., "Opportunity Youth: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth" January 2012

that offers syllabi, lesson plans, and more; creating an Online Library of educational resources; and exporting our Artist Training model and curriculum both domestically (southern and central California) and internationally (Hong Kong). With an easily adaptable model that is rooted in constructivist and child-centered pedagogy, we are poised to strategically expand our work in this area even further.

**Goals:**

**a. Expand the internal training program for Venice Arts' teaching artists and volunteer artist-mentors**

- Complete the build-out of a comprehensive, annual artist training program
- Test ongoing professional development seminars and special workshops
- Institutionalize volunteer information and orientation cycles

**b. Research the viability of training to educators/artists for-fee and launch pilot**

- Explore the viability of delivering professional development to K-12 educators and artists not affiliated with Venice Arts, either through specially created training programs and/or by opening professional development seminars to others for a fee or through grant funds

**PROGRAM REFINEMENT GOALS**

During each planning cycle, in addition to defining our strategic directions, we also set three-year program development and refinement goals. Generally, these tend to reflect staff priorities that do not require significant changes, new resources, or substantive new activities. These are included by area, below.

## **Art Mentoring**

Goals 1, 2, and 3 relate to existing programs, but their implementation will also directly support Strategic Direction #2.

### **Goals:**

- a. **Advanced Studies Track:** Create consistency in the benefits of participation in the Advanced Studies program, regardless of discipline, including institutionalizing a program of support for competitions, scholarships, and college applications.
- b. **Educational Innovation:** Roll out at least one interdisciplinary workshop at the beginning through the Advanced Studies level each year.
- c. **Externships:** Improve the consistency and number of annual externships, maintaining at least 4 placements per year. Note that this may represent more than 4 youth placed as some placement take several youth over the course of 12 months.

## **Gallery and Public Programs**

With our Gallery and Public Programs Manager going full-time in July 2011, we are now able to build off of the foundation that we laid over the last two years. Our overarching intention in this area is build audience and create new opportunities for community members to engage in creative ways with artists and art works.

### **Goals:**

- a. **Exhibition & Audience Development:** Sustain our current schedule of 5 exhibitions, while building our audience by 10% per year from a baseline of 380.
- b. **Public Programs:** Maintain a consistent schedule of at least 5 public programs each year, while building audience by 10% per year, with a baseline of 142, through a more diverse palette of programs that might engage a broader or new audience.
- c. **Innovation:** Experiment with new, out-of-the-box ideas for public programs, including participatory workshops that may engage a broader constituency with artists and art.
- d. **Screenings:** Partner with like-minded organizations to create a documentary film screening series and opportunities to interact with filmmakers.

- e. **Marketing and Communications:** Maintain and implement an effective, annual marketing and communications plan, including social, online, and traditional print media outreach.

## **Documentary Programs**

### **Goal:**

- a. **Project of Significance:** Implement at least one documentary project of significance every other year (local, national, and/or international).

## **Development**

### **Goals:**

- a. **Contributed Income:** Continue to build Venice Arts' capacity to raise contributed income at all levels of giving, including: (a) targeting lower-level donors (\$25-\$499) in multiple ways, with the goal of increasing the number of total gift dollars at this level by 5-10%; (b) increasing outreach to mid-level (\$500-\$4,999) donors, through personal meetings and other means, with a goal of increasing donors at this level by 10% and dollars at this level by 5%; (c) increasing outreach to major donors (\$5k-\$25k +) through personal meetings and active cultivation, with a goal of increasing donors at this level by 50% and gifts at this level by 25%.
- b. **Earned Revenues:** Continue to build earned revenue strategies, with an emphasis on facility rental and service fees, with a goal to triple this revenue stream, as compared to the 2011 baseline, at the end of three years.
- c. **Innovation:** (a) Implement new ways for artists, parents, volunteers, and other community members to get involved in small donor outreach including through individual social media fundraising campaigns, personal events and solicitations, and related strategies. (b) Explore the creation of a membership campaign, in concert with the Gallery & Public Programs Manager, to provide membership benefits (special events, exhibits, classes, etc.) to donors.

## **APPENDIX A: ABBREVIATED LIST OF DATA SOURCES**

### **Environmental Scan**

- American Community Survey, U.S. Census
- Anderson, Susan, Walch, Nancy, and Becker, Kate, "The Power of Art: The Arts as an Effective Intervention Strategy for At-Risk Youth," 2003, for The California Endowment
- Bridgeland, John & Milano, Jessica A., "Opportunity Youth: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth" January 2012
- Los Angeles County Income Data Prepared by The United Way
- Mapping data on income and education in Los Angeles County, prepared by Wolf-Brown
- Mapping data on Venice Arts service population centers, prepared by Wolf-Brown
- The National Endowment for the Arts, "Arts Education in America: What the decline means for arts participation?" 2011
- Partnership for 21st Century Skills, "Framework for 21st Century Learning," 2009, accessed online March 14, 2010, [www.p21.org/documents/P21\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.p21.org/documents/P21_Framework.pdf)

### **Abbreviated List of Key Informant Interviews**

- Individual/major donors (anonymous)
- Mary Lou Fulton, The California Endowment
- Janie Gates, Principal, Olympic Continuation High School
- Ruth Green, Venice High School
- Leslie Ito, The California Community Foundation
- Cassandra Malry, The California Consumer Protection Foundation
- Steven Oritt, The Selma Oritt Family Foundation

### **Focus Groups**

Five groups were held with Venice Arts' stakeholders including artistic faculty and mentors; parents (one in English, one in Spanish); and youth (one middle school, one high school)

### **Evaluation Data**

- Aggregate data from the prior year's student, artist, and parent evaluations
- Anecdotal data from staff, faculty, and mentors was summarized

### **Organizational Challenges and Opportunities**

- Past program, administrative, and development strengths and weaknesses were analyzed
- Internal and environmental opportunities were identified

### **Process Data**

- Changes in student enrollment over the past 3-5 years
- Changes in student retention over the past 3-5 years
- Increase/decrease in workshops and projects over the past 3 years
- Comparison of dollars raised, sources, and the number of donors over 3-5 years
- Analysis of 2008-11 achievements and challenges in programs and development

## **APPENDIX B: ABBREVIATED LIST OF ONLINE MATERIALS, ART, AND BLOGS**

### **PLANS, RESEARCH, AND BACKGROUND ON VENICE ARTS**

2008-11 Strategic Plan <http://www.venicearts.org/assets/media/24087.PDF>

2004-07 Strategic Plan <http://www.venicearts.org/assets/media/24088.PDF>

Art Mentoring Research Study <http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=section&id=7866>

Venice Arts' Awards <http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=section&id=7386>

Venice Arts Press Attention

### **Teaching Resources**

Venice Arts Online Library <http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=section&id=7369>

### **Sample Teaching Artist & Mentor Portraits Created by Venice Arts' Youth:**

- Comics Artist Mike Jasorka <http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=sets&id=23636>
- Filmmaker Steven Oritt <http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=media&id=27344>
- Photographer Russell Baer <http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=media&id=25465>
- Photographer Wynn Miller <http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=media&id=27346>
- Internship Video: An Interview with Law & Order: SVU's Editor, Nancy Forer, and Venice Arts' student, Jocelyn Ramirez <http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=media&id=27190>

### **Sample Student Personal Stories and Blogs**

- Youth Art Intern Blog  
<http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=projects&id=1592&action=%3E>
- Photographer Alex Thomas <http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=media&id=20317>
- Photographer Evelyn Alvarez <http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=sets&id=20695>
- Genevieve Ward <http://www.venicearts.org/index.php?view=media&id=27047>

## APPENDIX C: BOARD AND STAFF LIST [As of 01/01/2012]

### Staff

#### Executive and Development

- Lynn Warshafsky, Founder/Executive Director: [lynn@venicearts.org](mailto:lynn@venicearts.org)
- Jerry Allyn, Director of Programs: [jerri@venicearts.org](mailto:jerri@venicearts.org)
- Liz Leshin, Development Director: [liz@venicearts.org](mailto:liz@venicearts.org)
- Erica Lindsten, Grants Manager: [erica@venicearts.org](mailto:erica@venicearts.org)

#### Art Mentoring and Education

- Cathy de la Cruz, Art Mentoring Program Manager: [cathy@venicearts.org](mailto:cathy@venicearts.org)
- Deanna Erdmann, Lead Photographer: [deanna@venicearts.org](mailto:deanna@venicearts.org)
- Rosalyn Escobar, Program and Administrative Coordinator: [rosalyn@venicea-arts.org](mailto:rosalyn@venicea-arts.org)
- Evan Whale, Media Arts Assistant: [evan@venicearts.org](mailto:evan@venicearts.org)

#### Gallery and Public Programs

- Elysa Voshell, Gallery and Public Programs Manager: [elysa@venicearts.org](mailto:elysa@venicearts.org)

#### Southern Merced Program

- Roger Wyan, Merced Program Manager: [roger@venicearts.org](mailto:roger@venicearts.org)

### Board

#### Officers

- Wendy Slusser, M.D., Pediatrician, Professor of Medicine, *President*
- Ruth Seroussi, Principal, Newhouse Seroussi Attorneys, *Vice-President*
- Colette Bailey, Lucky Brand Jeans, *Secretary Treasurer*

#### Directors

- Neal Baer, M.D., Showrunner, Executive Producer, CBS Television
- Jodi Gusek, Partner, Hall & Partners
- Bob Hayward, Former Principal/COO Summit Entertainment
- Mike Newhouse, Principal, Newhouse Seroussi Attorneys
- Ian Toynton, Executive Producer, ABC's Bones
- Lynn Warshafsky, Executive Director

### Contact

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