

VISUAL ARTS NOVA SCOTIA STRATEGIC PLAN



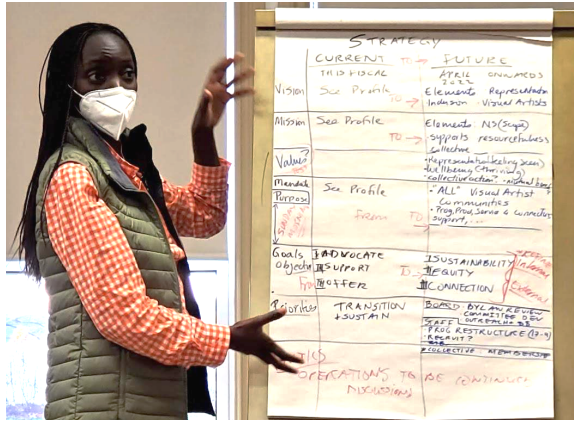
Top left to bottom right: I'thandi Munro, Onya Hogan-Finlay, Carri MacKay, Jocelyn Li, Andrea Ritchie, Bob Williams, Charles Doucette, Annik Gaudet, Jenny Yujia Shi, Michelle Sylliboy, Shannon Webb-Campbell, Josephine Clarke

Introduction:

In November 2021 the Board, Core Staff, and several Contract Employees of Visual Arts Nova Scotia (VANS) began a strategic planning process with the support of facilitator Louise Adongo, Executive Director of Inspiring Communities. The intention set for the weekend was to examine the current context of VANS recovering from the pandemic; what is working well and what needs to shift to accommodate our new realities; and together, consider what a future world for VANS might be. The weekend retreat participants Reimagined, Rebuilt and Revised the work of VANS.

The Executive Director went over context and background to support the discussion. This began with an overview of VANS' 17 programs offered at the time of the retreat. It also included some specific feedback and findings from two members surveys; one that was done shortly before the retreat, but which yielded less (67 respondents), but similar feedback from the previous survey which had over 200 respondents.

We wish to thank all the participants and artists who supported this process without whom we would not have been able envision and outline our new strategic plan.



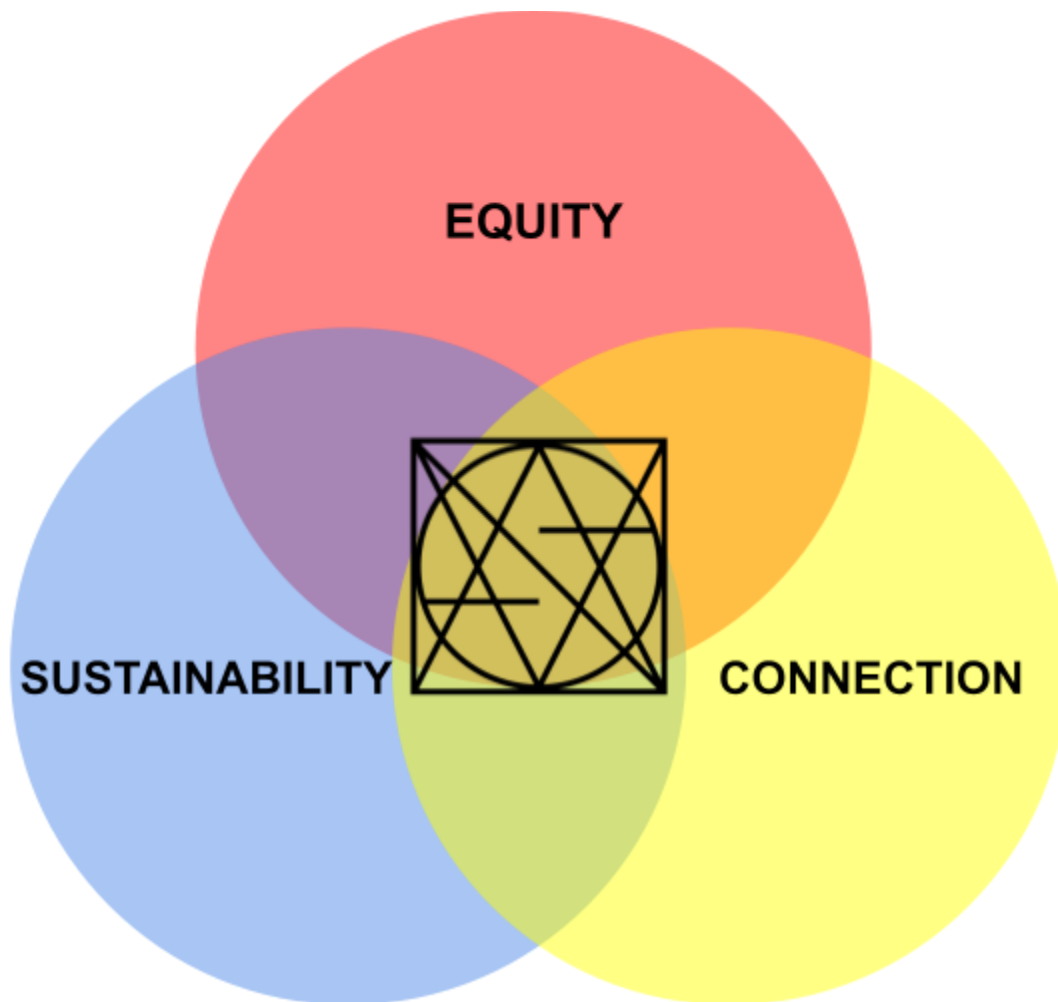
Left: Facilitator, Louise Adongo Right: pom pom bunting made during planning as a visual metaphor for our work

What are our strengths?

- Creating and connecting artists to professional opportunities and providing support
- Providing professional development, training, and career support to artists
- Connecting artists to each other and broader communities
- Advocating on behalf of artists and providing leadership on governance models
- Showcasing East Coast artists online and in nationally distributed print magazine
- Providing avenues for feedback and being responsive to the needs of our members
- Extremely efficient and resourceful with staffing and monetary resources
- Enthusiastic and dedicated staff and volunteers

Where are we struggling?

- Representation and diversity of membership
- Outreach specifically to equity seeking artists
- Burnout and minimal capacity for partnerships, and new initiative development
- Managing expectations with over 400 artists across the province, equivalent of 2 staff
- Qualitative program evaluation and communicating value in a compelling way
- Very limited funding resources - no increase from primary funder in over 20 years
- Projects being driven by special funding availability rather than core values
- Financial barriers to artist participation in membership and some programming



MOVING TOWARDS VALUES BASED PRIORITIES

Understanding that we are operating in a rapidly changing environment and that the needs of artists and stakeholders are shifting at an unprecedented pace, we are shifting towards a values based priorities approach to decision making when considering future challenges and opportunities. Visual Arts Nova Scotia will maintain the type of programming offered, and the spirit of collectivity that VANS has operated with since its inception in 1976. However recognizing that we are inadequately engaging equity seeking artists, our language, methodologies, policies, and outreach need to be more welcoming, equitable and inclusive.

<i>From: Current Goals</i>	<i>To: Values Based Priorities</i>
▪ Offer ...	▪ Equity
▪ Support...	▪ Sustainability
▪ Advocate...	▪ Connection

NEW VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES

VISION:

Visual Arts Nova Scotia believes in a future where a career as an artist is accessible, sustainable, and recognized as an integral part of our communities.

MISSION:

Visual Arts Nova Scotia (VANS) supports artists through education, connection and advocacy. We operate across Mi'kma'ki, the unceded and unsundered territory of the L'nu people, also known as Nova Scotia. We prioritize artist-to-artist learning through workshops, mentorship, and sharing information about meaningful opportunities. Visual Arts Nova Scotia advocates for artists by listening to their concerns, speaking up for their needs, and creating platforms to share their work. Recognizing that equity-seeking artists face additional barriers to a career in the arts, Visual Arts Nova Scotia works to make resources accessible to artists across the province, while prioritizing support for those who are impacted by systemic oppression.

VALUES:

Equity: Prioritize diverse perspectives and work to dismantle oppressive systems and barriers that exclude equity-seeking artists. Use an intersectional approach to prioritize and uplift underrepresented communities in the visual arts.

Sustainability: Work proactively, responsively, and transparently, while respectfully acknowledging the limitations of our resources, to build a sustainable future for artists. Approach challenges with both optimism and pragmatism, prioritizing consistent effort over urgency.

Connection: Create opportunities for artists to connect with and support each other. Lead with generosity while facilitating opportunities for artists to pursue their careers. Champion artists' unique contributions to society, offering perspectives to connect us with each other and the world around us.

VALUES BASED SHORT & LONG TERM GOALS

EQUITY:

Internal – staff composition & governance; External - membership & outreach

Complete:

- Rewrite Vision Mission Values with a focus on broadening our audience and prioritizing equity seeking artists
- Explore honoraria, or gifts where honoraria are not permissible.

In progress:

- Audit the organization from an equity lens, organizational policy and procedure review.
- Review Board and Committee recruitment strategy with an equity lens.
- Explore funding opportunities for leadership transition management, equity focused recruitment, and coaching.
- Build onboarding that is welcoming, responsive and considerate of cultural diversity.

Next steps:

- Apply for funding to hire an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion consultant.
- Engage in community and stakeholder outreach to identify necessary changes for increased participation by diverse stakeholders.
- Diversify outreach strategies beyond surveys and passive avenues for feedback.
- Determine what barriers exist to working at VANS. Develop a succession plan for leadership. Focus on recruiting diverse staff persons.
- Develop a qualitative evaluation of programs with a values based equity lens.
- Work towards serving equity deserving artists as well as equity seeking artists.

SUSTAINABILITY:

Internal - increase funding & decrease burnout; External- supporting artist's career sustainability

Complete:

- Develop and implement an orientation and training strategy for board.
- Revise committee terms of reference and add a Fund Development Committee.
- Reduce programming levels from seventeen to nine core ongoing programs.

In progress:

- Develop a succession plan and mentorship strategy for board leadership and staff.
- Define board roles and responsibilities in fundraising including foundation prospecting and relationship building, sponsorships, grant writing, and crowdfunding.

- Create job descriptions and handbooks for executive positions and committee chairs.

Next steps:

- Develop a robust funding strategy and goals for sustaining remaining programs and increasing staff complement and compensation.
- Revise core programming and operations with a focus on sustainability and increased diversity in participation.
- Prioritize professional development for staff and board.
- Work towards including class concerns and discussion in our future goals and strategies.

CONNECTION:

Internal – across programs, staff and board, other; External – outreach & partnerships.

Complete:

- Activate committees to increase engagement in programming and membership.

In progress:

- Recruit new committee members with a focus on inclusivity for equity seeking artists
- Create opportunities for board and committees to connect with artists across the province and beyond membership
- Create avenues for artists to connect with each other and share resources and stories about VANS impact.
- Develop a partnership rubric and guidebook to ensure values and resource alignment in project development.
- Explore alternative membership models (sliding scale, or service level) with the intention to increase diversity and accessibility while also being sustainable for the organization.

Next steps:

- Revise code of conduct with a focus on outlining process for implementation.
- Increase avenues for participation within the organization in a variety of ways beyond membership or program participation, centering equity seeking artists.
- Develop a conflict resolution strategy to constructively integrate a broader variety of perspectives.
- Regularly reevaluate our goals and language in our strategic priorities, programs, policies, and processes.
- Develop messaging and a training program for board and staff to build storytelling skills among leadership using inclusive language for the board to champion VANS by igniting enthusiasm for organization.