



STRATEGY | RISK | FUNDRAISING

NEILSON PARK CREATIVE CENTRE

2025-27 STRATEGIC PLAN

November 30, 2024

Prepared by Scott Russell, Volunteer Consultant
scott@russell.to, 416-655-3692

Management Advisory Service,
www.masinfo.org

CONTENTS

1. **PLANNING APPROACH [3]**

How the plan was developed.

2. **EXPLORING THE SPACE [6]**

Understanding the environmental context that Neilson Park Creative Centre operates in.

3. **THE STRATEGY [11]**

Responding to the challenges ahead.

4. **THE ROADMAP [18]**

A framework to guide implementation and operational planning.

5. **ASSESSING THE STRATEGY [24]**

Considerations for implementation.

1.

PLANNING APPROACH

How the plan was developed.

Overview of the Process

This plan builds on the work carried out by the Board of Directors and published as the 2024 Interim Strategic Plan.

Scott Russell, a volunteer consultant with Management Advisory Service carried out key insight interviews with 10 key stakeholders and reviewed documents relevant to organizational performance and governance.

Scott facilitated a participatory planning process that engaged the Neilson Park Creative Centre Board, staff, resident groups, and wider community. Key elements of the planning process included:

Stakeholder Interviews were conducted from March 19 to May 7, 2024. The consolidated SWOT analysis (Appendix 1) includes the relevant key issues identified by Board, staff, and stakeholder interviews. Unattributed quotes are drawn from the confidential interviews.

A community town hall was held on April 9, 2024. Nineteen (19) people with a connection to NPCC with as little as a few weeks to decades of involvement participated in discussion about the organization's values and aspirations. There were representatives from resident groups, board, staff and the community.

A Board visioning retreat was held on May 11, 2024. The Board reviewed the 2024 Interim Strategic plan, identified relevant trends and forces shaping the organization, and developed a consensus around the core elements of a vision to guide the strategic plan.

Finally, **the staff team were guided in a facilitated planning process** to develop an implementation roadmap that defined three (3) core directions, with five (5) related strategies. Each strategy includes key performance indicators and considerations for operational planning and resources planning over the strategic plan's 3 year horizon.

Contributors

We gratefully acknowledge the participation of everyone who took part in the planning process, whether specifically named or wishing to remain unnamed.

While this is not an exhaustive list, notable contributions were made by the following individuals:

Board:

Natalia Austin

Jenneen Marie Beattie

Fulya Bulur

Kia Fatemi

Wendy McCallum

Aleksandra Piascik

Jerry Smith

Past President: Brenda Shewchuk

Staff:

Julia Farrant

Cory Therrien

Petra Nyendick

Alexander Robinson

Amadeus Wheesk

Resident Groups:

Carole Adams

Jennifer Curran

Elizabeth Evans

Kathleen Haushalter

Kathy Ann Kidman

Rose Robertson

Other contributors:

Antonio Afable

Mark Broadus

Menon Dwarka

Jack Fleming

Councillor Stephen Holyday

Mohammed Kenari

Ed Lettner

Liza Mattimore

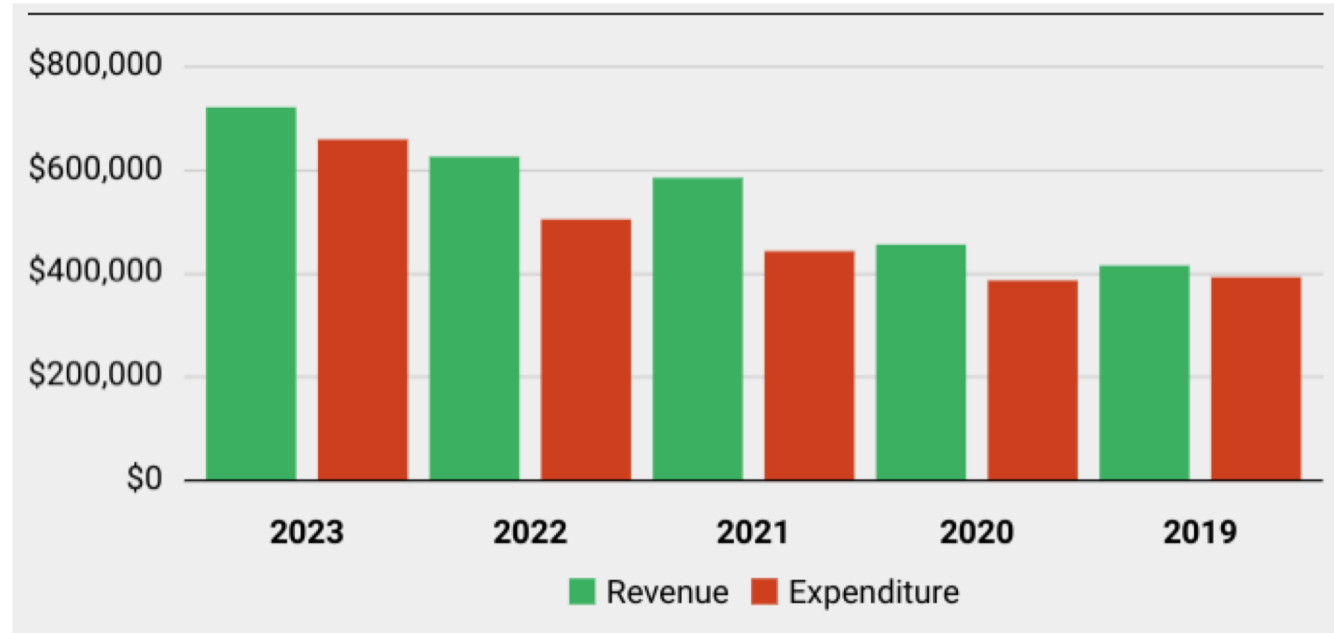
Hamed Tabein

2.

EXPLORING THE SPACE

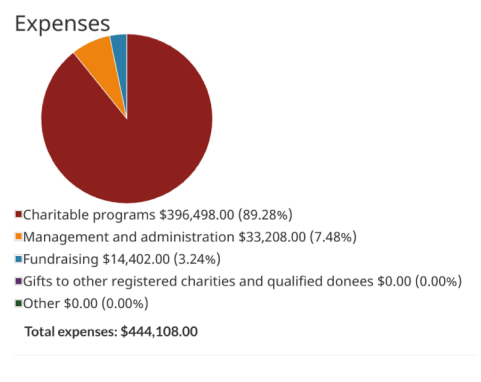
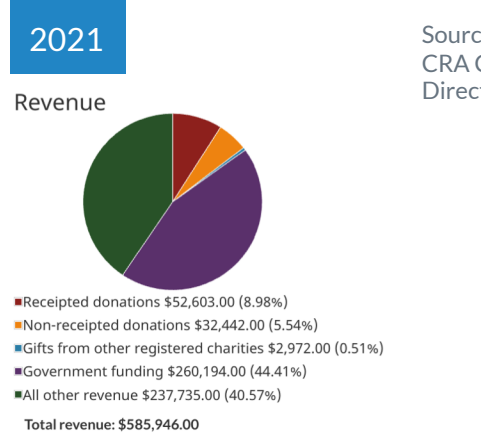
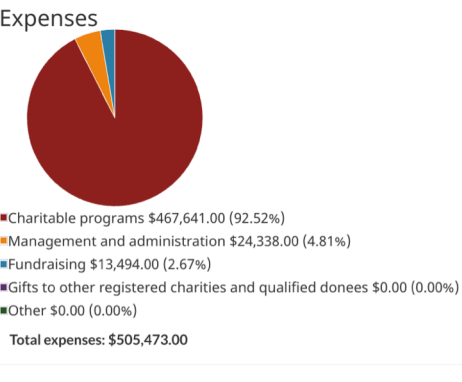
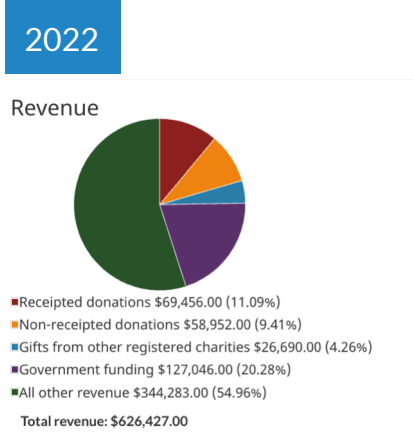
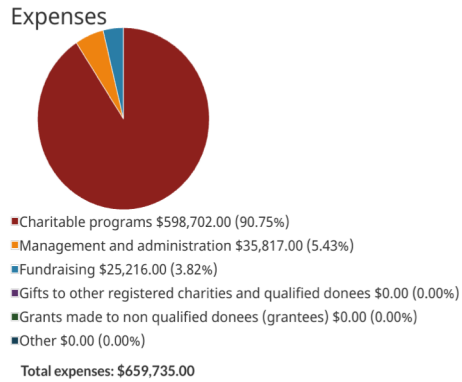
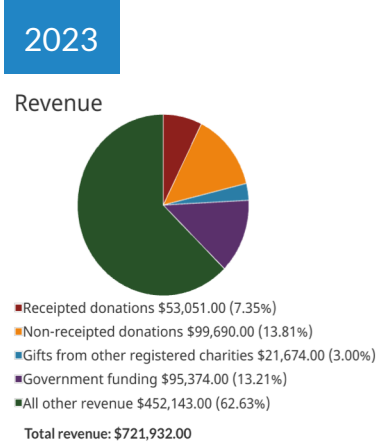
Understanding the environmental context that Neilson Park Creative Centre operates in.

Financial Performance



Source: CharityData.ca

Mix of Revenue and Expenses



Source:
CRA Charities
Directorate

Environmental Trends and Dynamics

Neilson Park Creative Centre (NPCC) is facing several key strategic trends and environmental dynamics:

Financial and Operational dynamics: NPCC has faced financial constraints and membership decline over time. However, the success of the last strategic plan has resulted in revenue growth and an increase in the staff complement.

Community Perception: The local community does not entirely view NPCC as a resource.

Regulatory Concerns and Liability: Operation of day camps creates some concerns about liability for NPCC. Shifting government regulations related to charities and NFPs also creates new issues to track and respond to.

Uncertainty over the Lease: While there remains uncertainty over the lease, NPCC benefits greatly from the space, location, and low expenses involved.

Social Media and online service: Balancing the need for security with effective engagement, virtual presence, and innovation on social media remains an expectation of program participants post-pandemic.

Sustainability: Like most charitable and arts organizations, addressing sustainability concerns is top-of-mind for most stakeholders.

Political Climate: With economic pressures dominating the public agenda, the outlook for the arts and cultural funding is generally pessimistic.

The Community's Values in Action

Community members shared their reflections on participating in various programs, workshops, and community engagement initiatives. NPCC's efforts to build a strong and inclusive community are evident in its diverse offerings. The following themes emerged:

Community: NPCC fosters a sense of community among people with similar interests, validating their art forms and passions. It provides a space for connection and collaboration, differing from corporate life. However, there is a lack of social activities between groups, indicating a need for increased integration.

Skill Building and Knowledge Transfer: NPCC values the passing of skills and knowledge through generations. It offers opportunities for members to contribute their artistic knowledge. However, there is a systematic undervaluing of the arts, making it difficult to make a living in the field.

Accessibility and Inclusion: NPCC strives to be accessible and inclusive, offering outreach programs, evening classes, and welcoming drop-in entry points. Barriers to belonging include financial constraints, transportation issues, lack of knowledge about NPCC and its resident groups, work conflicts, geographic restrictions, busy schedules, and the need for better knowledge transfer.

Artistic Expression and Growth: NPCC encourages artistic pathways, helps people see themselves as artists, and supports professional artists. It provides opportunities for creative thought, making new friends, and nurturing talent among members.

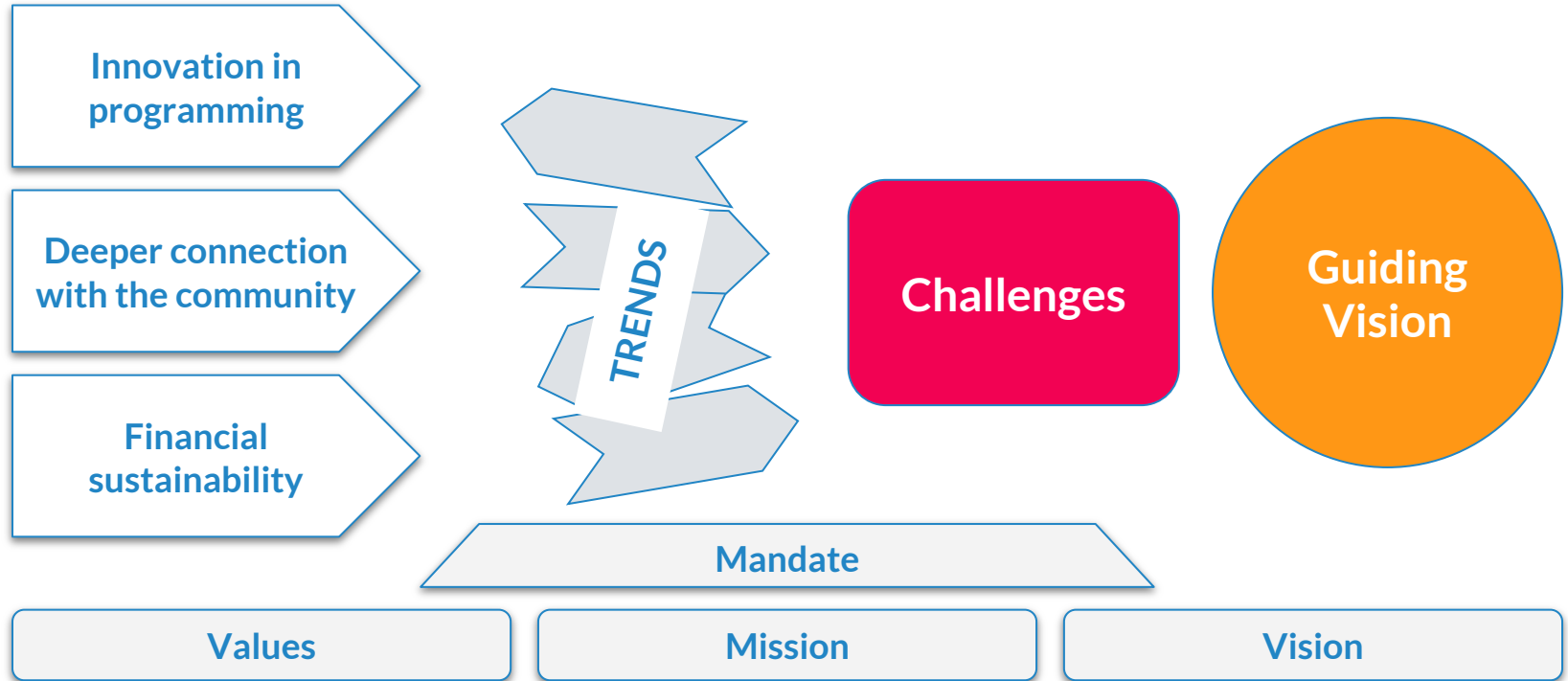
Across the board, the centre also faces challenges in fully realizing these values, including financial constraints, transportation issues, and the need for increased integration and knowledge transfer between groups.

3.

THE STRATEGY

Responding to the challenges ahead.

NPCC is moving toward:



The Foundation (Long term, indefinite)

Mission Statement

To serve as an inclusive arts hub that meets the creative needs of the community by facilitating artistic expression through education, exhibitions, and events.

Vision Statement

Connecting to and celebrating a richer life through the arts.

Statement of Values

There are certain core values that NPCC holds to be true; like prisms, they refract and illuminate the broader spectrum of options that inform NPCC's decision making, including (alphabetically):

- ▷ Accessibility
- ▷ Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- ▷ Engagement
- ▷ Mutual Respect
- ▷ Quality
- ▷ Transparency

The Mandate of Neilson Park Creative

NPCC exists to foster and facilitate connections among our membership and stakeholder communities on their creative journey through our arts-focused programming and facilities.

For our Resident Groups, Neilson Park Creative Centre is a permanent home for current and potential members for their creative, organizational, and social needs.

For emerging groups of practitioners, NPCC delivers a supportive studio setting to encourage the creative, social, and personal growth of artists, creators, and crafters across disciplines.

For our artists - creators and makers alike - NPCC serves as an alternative to the home studio existence of solo artists by offering a creative community of like-minded individuals to share that journey.

For the public, NPCC is a gateway to discovering and exploring how the arts define and enrich their lives.

Guiding Vision (5 years)

Neilson Park Creative Centre strives to be a vibrant and inclusive community hub where our resident groups and artists with diverse voices converge and creativity flourishes.

Within three years, we will be a thriving center for multidisciplinary arts programming, offering accessible resources and opportunities for all, with emerging programming that serves diverse, at-risk, and underrepresented communities.

We will achieve financial sustainability through diverse revenue streams, innovative partnerships, and robust community engagement.

Our reimagined space will be a welcoming and inspiring environment, fostering artistic exploration, collaboration, and social connection.

Critical Challenges

Internal Challenges

Risk Aversion: A culture of risk aversion and fear of failure hinders innovation and the development of new programs and revenue streams. This limits the organization's ability to adapt to a changing environment and attract new audiences.

Lack of Capacity and Specific Skills: The organization lacks critical skills in areas such as fundraising, data analysis, and sponsorship development. This limits its ability to secure funding, manage resources effectively, and develop sustainable programs.

Need for deeper understanding of community: The current approach to programming and outreach lacks a full understanding of the community's needs and interests, particularly those of underrepresented groups such as Asian, African, Indigenous, and LGBTQ2+ communities.

External Challenges

Competition for Funding: The organization faces significant competition for funding, particularly in a challenging economic climate where arts are often seen as discretionary.

Lack of Public Awareness: Many potential sponsors and partners are unaware of the organization's existence or its value to the community.

Accessibility Barriers: Location and cost may be barriers for certain demographics, particularly young adults.

City Restrictions: As the facility is owned by the City of Toronto, there are restrictions and bureaucratic processes that can limit agility and responsiveness.

Strategic Directions (3-5 years)

Innovation in programming

- ▷ Collecting data to inform future planning
- ▷ Building a plan for innovation

Deeper connection with the community

- ▷ Increasing visibility in the community
- ▷ Attracting new audiences

Financial sustainability

- ▷ Finding alternative sources of funding

4.

THE ROADMAP

A framework to guide implementation and operational planning.

Collecting data to inform future planning

| | YR1 | YR2 | YR3 |
|--|--|---|--|
| Objectives and key results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys prepared • NPCC self evaluation through test surveys • Finalize survey creation and distribute process and schedule • Identify new survey opportunities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect survey results • Analyze survey results for usable information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply data to inform programming and develop course catalogue • Comparative analysis to previous years |
| New capabilities needed (people, skills, talents) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue recruiting board members with data analysis skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign staff member to collect and analyse data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign staff member to analyse current registration compared to previous years • Continue data informed programming |
| New resources needed (budget, systems, assets) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore new software applications for more efficient data collection and analysis • Professional development for staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development for staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development for staff • Consider contracting data analyst |

Building a plan for innovation

| | YR1 | YR2 | YR3 |
|--|--|--|--|
| Objectives and key results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore Office 365 Capabilities • Identify vulnerable and at-risk populations • Investigate how AI can be used at NPCC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize Office 365 to its fullest potential • Plan and experiment how AI can be used at NPCC • Investigate how to reach vulnerable and at-risk populations • Explore new ways to use gallery • Utilize building façade sign for digital art and promotions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build tailored programs from survey results • Build programming for vulnerable and at-risk populations • Implement AI at NPCC • Create a plan to renovate the gallery |
| New capabilities needed (people, skills, talents) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contractor quotes |
| New resources needed (budget, systems, assets) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development for staff in Office 365 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create plan and budget for gallery modification • Professional development for staff in Office 365 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development for staff |

Attracting new audiences

| | YR1 | YR2 | YR3 |
|--|--|---|---|
| Objectives and key results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand customer base and sponsorship packages Identify vulnerable and at-risk populations Identify new marketing strategies Attend community events with an information booth Identify other artforms for events and programming | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create outreach plan for vulnerable and at-risk populations Create budget for marketing opportunities Continue to attend events Strengthen community relationships to continue to offer programming Develop plan to offer programming in different artforms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement marketing plan Continue to attend events Assess and continue innovative programming |
| New capabilities needed (people, skills, talents) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing support |
| New resources needed (budget, systems, assets) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget for attending community events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget for attending community events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget for increased marketing efforts and attending community events Hire marketing support |

Finding alternative sources of funding

| | YR1 | YR2 | YR3 |
|--|---|---|--|
| Objectives and key results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue sponsorship opportunities Investigate paid staff cross-training positions Investigate previously unexplored grant opportunities Develop adult and corporate party packages Explore feasibility of opening gallery for performances | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess, review, refine and continue to pursue sponsorship opportunities Hire paid staff training position Apply for previously unexplored grants Implement adult and corporate party packages Hire grant writer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess, review, refine and continue to pursue sponsorship opportunities Evaluate paid staff training position Continue to apply for previously unexplored grants Continue to implement adult and corporate party packages Assess effectiveness of grant writer |
| New capabilities needed (people, skills, talents) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development Committee Sponsorship Committee Grants Committee Consider hiring grant writer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> None |
| New resources needed (budget, systems, assets) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget for grant writer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget for attending community events Budget for training staff position Budget for grant writer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget for grant writer |

Increasing visibility in the community

| | YR1 | YR2 | YR3 |
|--|--|---|---|
| Objectives and key results | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maximize existing relationships ● Compile potential list of partnership organizations ● Explore different marketing opportunities ● Plan new programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement new marketing opportunities ● Reach out to potential organizations for partnerships and compile contacts ● Implement new programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess effectiveness of new marketing programs ● Continue new programs ● Assess effectiveness of new programs |
| New capabilities needed (people, skills, talents) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Development Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● None ● Development Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● None ● Development Committee |
| New resources needed (budget, systems, assets) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Money for marketing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● None |

5.

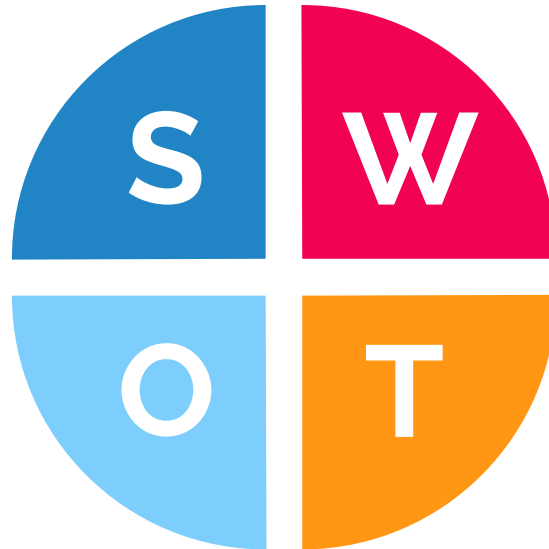
ASSESSING THE STRATEGY

Considerations for implementation

Consolidated SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS

Current organizational capabilities, assets, and resources.



WEAKNESSES

Current gaps or shortcomings in operational capabilities.

OPPORTUNITIES

Changes or emergent events that hold the promise of future benefit.

THREATS

Risks or uncertainties about the future with the potential for adverse impacts on the organization.

Strengths

1. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere

"They're very friendly. I would say everything goes very, very smooth and nice without any stress."

2. Spacious facilities and exhibition areas

"It has a very huge and vast area for exhibitions which is very good. That's one of the things I really liked - that is one of the strengths of the building."

3. Beautiful natural surroundings

"The woods and nature around the buildings are very good too. So that makes me plan for not only being at the class but also to go out."

4. Strong community connections

"There is a good bond between people in the community and NPCC."

5. Diverse programming and workshops

"Neilson Park received a grant in 2023 for a newcomer engagement project, consisting of workshops, exhibit, and artist talk."



S

Opportunities

1. Expand programming of innovative new ways to reach audiences:

"We can start to just jump into some kind of a new movement, new media that is out there, for example, digital art, making video art or something like that."

2. Collaborate with local organizations to extend reach into other spaces:

"...[a partner might think] you can run your class here at our building and you can have access to people in seven high rise buildings that may or may not be able to get down to Neilson Park."

3. Leverage technology to address community needs:

"[I hope] Neilson Park can address loneliness and mental health concerns in Toronto through their virtual activities."

4. Continue to pursue programming, recruitment, and outreach that attracts diverse audiences:

"I think it's great to see younger faces and I think it's great to see diverse faces. What I want to know is how strategic these appointments are, and what current relationships outside of Neilson Park these folks have?"

5. Utilize the space for more community events and exhibitions:

"[I hope] ...Neilson Park will become a hub for art events and exhibitions, collaborating with other art centres in Etobicoke"

Leveraging Strengths

- 1. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere
- 2. Spacious facilities and exhibition areas
- 3. Beautiful natural surroundings
- 4. Strong community connections
- 5. Diverse programming and workshops

| | | | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strategies | Collecting data to inform future planning | | | | | ✱ |
| | Building a plan for innovation | | | | | ✱ |
| | Increasing visibility in the community | | ✱ | ✱ | ✱ | |
| | Attracting new audiences | ✱ | ✱ | ✱ | ✱ | |
| | Finding alternative sources of funding | | | | ✱ | ✱ |

Pursuing Opportunity

1. Expand programming innovative new ways to reach audiences
2. Collaborate with local organizations to extend reach into other spaces
3. Leverage technology to address community needs
4. Continue to pursue programming, recruitment, and outreach that attracts diverse audiences
5. Utilize the space for more community events and exhibitions

| | | | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strategies | Collecting data to inform future planning | ✱ | | | | |
| | Building a plan for innovation | | ✱ | ✱ | | |
| | Increasing visibility in the community | | ✱ | | ✱ | ✱ |
| | Attracting new audiences | ✱ | ✱ | ✱ | ✱ | ✱ |
| | Finding alternative sources of funding | | | | | ✱ |

Weaknesses

1. Accessibility and location issues:

"It's hard to get to and that very much, I think, limits participation by certain audiences."

2. Work to do around diversity and inclusion:

"I'm the only person of colour in that group."

3. Financial constraints and funding challenges:

"Operating funding is a major constraint holding Neilson Park back...[it] needs investment to grow."

4. Limited outreach and community engagement:

"[NPCC] needs to find its way further into the community, through outreach activity through connections, through different programs that they can introduce to attract a broader contingent of people that come from the more diversified community that now exists in Toronto, as compared to 30 or 40 years ago."

5. Aging demographic and need for modernization:

"..some of the audiences are like old fashioned, they are tied with some of the old stuff or old style art pieces or art creation."



T

Threats

1. Changing demographics and potential loss of relevance:

"Neighborhood demographics changing rapidly, requiring intentional marketing and outreach to reach new residents."

2. Funding constraints and financial sustainability lead to program interruption:

"I have concerns about financial sustainability and exploring new funding sources beyond grants."

3. Competition from other community spaces and programs limits audience development:

"[top of mind community arts and culture orgs looking for funding]... include Artscape in Weston, Pride Toronto, and Neilson Park focusing on physical arts."

4. Technological changes affecting traditional art forms limits program reach:

"[I'm concerned about]...how technology will shape artistic expression, and other trends within the art space and community that are relevant for the Board to consider."

5. A competitive job market creates the potential for the loss of key staff:

"[I'd stress the]... importance of retaining key staff, particularly the teachers, and proactively addressing concerns about job security."

Implementation considerations

Insights discussed:

- ▷ Agreement that taking measured risk is necessary.
- ▷ Sustaining growth will eventually reach limits.
- ▷ Change and evolution will require thoughtful tradeoffs (real and opportunity costs).
- ▷ The evolution of programming entails uncertainty and risk.

Food for thought:

- ▷ Is there funding potentially available under the City's new arts and culture plan?
- ▷ How will inflation impact NPCC expenditures?
- ▷ How do we minimize risk as we pursue growth? (Use reserve?)
- ▷ What tolerances should risk/return be tracked against?

Possible activities to consider in planning:

- ▷ Open House
- ▷ Social and/or partnerships (Indigenous)
- ▷ Low cost workshops

Implementation considerations

Resourcing the strategy:

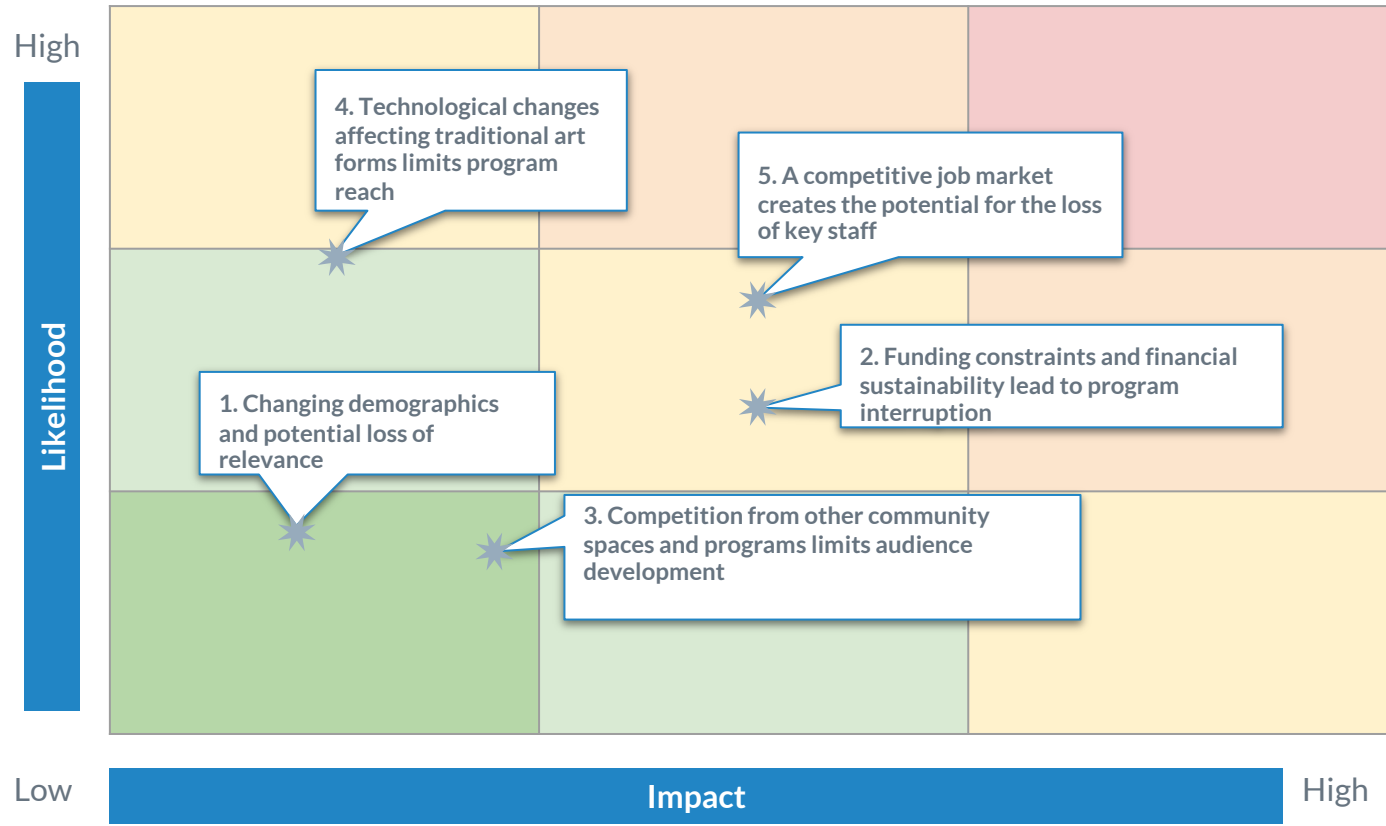
- ▷ To what degree can we make some initial investments in Year 1 (September 1 fiscal year)?
- ▷ Investments from reserve? (assets vs making room in the operating budget)

Making fundraising happen at NPCC

- ▷ How can we use the data we have to demonstrate / support investment in a Fundraising role?
- ▷ Fractional Fundraising: could we get a running start?
- ▷ What is the state of current data? (SUMAC)
- ▷ Current base of support (receipted donations) could justify a modest investment. Opens up staff to pursue other work.

Example of how a multi-year look at fundraising expense and revenue expectations might be presented:

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Exp | 80 | 80 | 100 | 110 | 110 |
| Rev | 40 | 60 | 110 | 160 | 200 |
| Net | -60 | -20 | +10 | +50 | +90 |



Risk Assessment Heat Map

Other risk management considerations

- ▷ As kids' programming grows → continue to remain mindful of safety
- ▷ Ensuring appropriate succession plans are in place for Board and leadership
- ▷ Retaining organization knowledge at all levels
- ▷ Issues connected to the lease:
 - City process is underway to put a lease in place
 - What happens when? → Contingency ?
 - How to address member morale/worry about space?
- ▷ Status quo / complacency poses risk. How do we sustain growth?
- ▷ Large percentage of population may age out (or opt out as lifestyle changes)