

BUNKER **p r o j e c t s**

2022-2027 Strategic Plan

Presented by Procopia Consulting, LLC

Background

Bunker Projects is an experimental gallery in Pittsburgh, PA, specializing in contemporary and multidisciplinary art-making and exhibition. The organization's mission is to provide the resources and supportive environment emerging artists need to self-direct their creative growth. Since its founding in 2012, Bunker Projects has hosted 51 residents and produced 84 exhibitions with an all-volunteer staff.

The organization embarked on a development and planning process to steward the organization into the future. Enriching the mission, embodying equitable practices, and building organizational sustainability are at the heart of this effort. With financial support from Arts Equity Reimagined and Bridgeway Capital, the Board of Directors retained the services of Procopia, LLC. Procopia's charge was to build a five-year strategic plan and support Bunker Projects with capacity building initiatives specific to grant writing, fundraising, and board development.

Several key factors motivated the Board of Directors to develop the organization's first strategic plan.

- Bunker Projects will celebrate its 10th year of operation in 2022. The board is looking with an eye to the future to secure another decade of artist support and experimentation.
- Decreased capacity due to leadership changes as founding members and longtime board members moved away from the organization to pursue new opportunities.
- The impact of Covid-19 exacerbated an already strained financial position.

The enclosed strategic plan provides a path forward for Bunker Projects to navigate these factors while continuing to champion artists with an appetite for the experimental.

Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Champion equity in programs, online content, and through our day to day operations.

- 1) Artist Strategy: Lift artists by defining Bunker's stake in equity work and securing financial resources to support artists and eliminate residency fees.**

Benchmarks:

- Increase support to artists with financial need through fundraising by launching an innovation fund and need-based scholarships. Ask board members to champion this effort through fundraising, as well as creating the process to define scholarship criteria and the mechanism for dispersing project funding for innovation.
- Assist artists with art sales.
- Through dialogue with BIPOC artists, develop policy and adopt practices that define Bunker's role as a white-led organization striving for allyship.

- 2) Ensure that Bunker's leaders promote a shared vision for equity by defining the organization's role as a catalyst for change.**

Benchmarks:

- Invest in board training specific to equity.
- Conduct an audit to assess how the organization's internal operations support, advance, and/or hinder inclusion and equity in the arts.
- Provide leadership opportunities to underrepresented artists.

- 3) Physical Space Strategy: Make Bunker Projects ADA accessible.**

Benchmarks

- Conduct an assessment to consider options to address Bunker's space needs (i.e. purchase, upgrade, and modify the current building, finding a new independent space, or exploring a shared-space venture with other organizations).

Goal 2: Double down on what we do best by shoring up our operations and focusing on sustainability.

- 1. Artist Strategy Recommendations: Artist support is central to achieving Bunker's mission. Artists will benefit from increased structure including formal procedures, timelines, and an orientation for resident artists**

Benchmarks:

- a. Develop an annual operating calendar that includes deadlines to post the call for applicants, application submission, notification date, and residency start dates. State clearly in the call for applicants the benefits of the residency and the challenges—i.e. Individualized support, networking opportunity, and affordable rates vs. challenges of the space. Furthermore, include in the application process a questionnaire to learn more about artists' living needs to take into consideration for co-residencies.
- b. Create artist-in-residency orientation materials that detail Bunker Project's expectations for artists living and working in the space. Provide clear communication about Bunker's expectations for artists living and working in the space and to set expectations for artists about programmatic offerings to ensure they utilize their artist-in-residence to its fullest.

2. Operational Capacity Strategy: Develop the board through training and recruitment; obtain the funds to hire staff members to fulfill key roles.

Benchmarks:

- a. Prioritize funding for a Creative Director through a multi-year fundraising commitment that demonstrates to funders the long-term benefit of investing in this position at present. The Creative Director position will focus on providing programmatic support to resident artists, which is separate from living needs.
- b. Hire an Operations Coordinator or partner with another arts nonprofit to secure a shared administrator. This person will be responsible for overseeing the residential living needs of artists, handling finances, and coordinating the needs of the board.
- c. Strengthen the board through a combination of training to grow the skillsets of current board members as they relate to nonprofit management, governance and fundraising.
- d. Recruit board members who satisfy the unmet skills including: board development, marketing & PR, media, multimedia technology, fund development, finance/accounting, legal, HR/personnel, nonprofit management.

3. Physical Space: Develop a healthy fiscal plan to balance capital and program expenses

Benchmarks:

- a. Increase operational support through fundraising and art sales to support capital.
- b. Identify potential space sharing options to decrease overhead expenses.

Strategies

I. Artist Support: Artist support is central to achieving Bunker’s mission. Artists will benefit from increased structure including formal procedures, timelines, and an orientation for resident artists. Lift artists by defining Bunker’s stake in equity work and securing financial resources to support artists and eliminate residency fees.

Over more than 15 hours of interviews, board conversations, and weekly meetings with key volunteers, Procopia learned that Bunker Projects is, above all else, filling a unique and important role for the arts. The gallery provides a liminal space for local and transient artists to meet and create. Respondents spoke about a “special vibe” or “welcoming feel.” Time and again, those interviewed couldn’t quite put into words the energy harnessed in the space.

“I’ve been at pretty big artist residencies with more planned activities and structures. You may be in a dorm room situation with 10 other artists. This is unique.”

“I think the space is so unique. I still remember when I was 20 and toured it for the first time. It’s a special place to have a show and it’s a good memory for me.”

“Bunker is something I feel very strongly about. I think it’s the most important resource for early career artists in Pittsburgh.”

Through artist-in-residences, Bunker Projects developed a program that captures the attention of international and national artists. Our study conducted several interviews with former residents drawn to Bunker Projects by reputation. During their residency, those artists created connections strong enough to launch their career.

“I was looking at a number of arts organizations in the city and Bunker stood out because of the quality of work, and how it was experimental.”

“You often see these artists’ names elsewhere, in larger venues after their residency. You see Bunker artists go onto hold shows in major cities. They take chances on experimentation and creativity.”

“There is a vacuum for exciting new, young and contemporary art in Pittsburgh.”

“Bunker was a great way to introduce me and my work to Pittsburgh.”

Interviewees shared that bringing outside perspectives to Pittsburgh arts from experimental artists enhanced the community by opening new forms of dialogue and introducing fresh voices. For the city, Bunker artists find inspiration in their adoptive home, albeit temporary for some. Often, these national and international artists create works that reflect Pittsburgh and their experience as a resident there. Bunker Projects is giving Pittsburgh a voice in the contemporary art world that stretches far beyond the city limits.

Another area of common ground for each artist was the tug and pull between wanting to advise Bunker Projects to develop more structure and communication around the program, while cautioning leadership to steer clear of becoming too polished or professional. One artist shared, “I’ve done a lot of artist residencies and what I think is special about Bunker is how DIY they are,” before going on to say that more structure is needed. At times, former artists were almost apologetic about providing feedback to urge structure. For instance, one artist reflected on the short notice between being accepted as a resident and the start time: “The residency approval came on short notice. They were kind and flexible, but planning is really difficult in these roles. People are in different places in their life with help needed to pick up and go.” Artists appreciate that every aspect of Bunker Projects is approachable—the space, the board members, and the patrons. The intent of their feedback is to encourage the organization to provide clarity, shape expectations, and meet them where they are at without sacrificing Bunker’s informal and unpretentious, almost folksy, culture.

“They are easy to be in touch with, they are approachable, and they are willing to help you.”

“A program description up front should mitigate past residents’ concerns. That and paid staff who can really provide those services and when they will be rendered.”

“I wished there was more structure and guidelines”

“To put too much structure I think is to take away from the energy that has made us successful.”

To that last point, Bunker’s secret ingredient comes from its team of servant leaders. As the next section will detail, those driving the organization forward champion the artists with whom they work. Conversations with board members focus on finding ways to increase artist support, dismantle barriers that stand between experimental artists and a residency at Bunker, and amplify the voices of contemporary artists in Pittsburgh, regionally and nationally.

“They clearly think about ways to support artists. I love the way that they are dedicated to trying to figure it out.”

“[Former residents] are in the community and talking about how they’ve been helped by Bunker.”

The organization finds itself torn between delicately balancing its own uncertain financial position with that of artists, most of whom rely on service-industry jobs to support their art. Maintaining a rented space for artist housing is Bunker’s largest expense, and that is covered through residency fees. The residency fees are prohibitive to low-income artists. Moreover, those who cannot support themselves through art practice alone cannot fully

participate in the residency because of the demands of their jobs. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of artists cannot support themselves through their art practice alone.

“We should transition as quickly as we can from paid into funded residencies.”

“As the cost increases the program should be in alignment with the cost.”

“I do think that what would have been nice was help with selling my work. More support with sales and marketing or at least giving me a list of things to do.”

“The residency is critical to bunker. I think it’s important to the organization because it’s foundationally what the organization is and I think I’ll leave it at that.”

The conundrum outlined to this point can be simplified by saying that to achieve its greatest impact, Bunker sees value in reducing or eliminating the residency fee. Moreover, artists seek increased output from leadership to create structure. The board continues to find demand for more and more revenue without seeing an opportunity to decrease expenses.

Through its partnership in the VACE coalition, Bunker aligned itself with a movement focused on equity in the arts. To date, Bunker’s efforts to engage in the work broadly referred to as DEI has focused on providing BIPOC and queer artists opportunities through the residency program and by launching the Hand-Off series, an initiative led by board member Harrison Smith. This process discovered that some stakeholders were enthusiastic about Bunker’s achievements in this work while others more hesitantly reflected on the work as “a good start.”

“Initiatives I proposed in the past on how to address black and brown artists weren’t supported. I think Bunker might be ready now.”

“Bringing in national artists who demonstrated artistic excellence coming from the ivy and being a queer artist of color demonstrates their willingness to do a lot of what many organizations say they want to do. I want to see. more of that.”

“I got here and couldn’t find all of the black people. It would behoove their team to have more cultural sensitivity. I arrived here alone. I had no connections to Pittsburgh. Just coming in with a layer of isolation already built into the program and then having no resources available.”

Artists seek clarity around Bunker’s role. Furthermore, they caution Bunker to recognize the difference between being a white-led organization helping BIPOC artists and being a black-led organization doing the same work. One said, “It’s OK to do what you do. It only becomes a problem when you say you want to help black artists but you aren’t doing the work.”

II. Operational Capacity: Bunker Projects can improve its operational capacity by developing its board members’ skillset and by obtaining the funds to hire staff members to fulfill key roles; Ensure that Bunker’s leaders promote a shared vision for equity by defining the organization’s role as a catalyst for change.

The driving force behind Bunker Projects has been and continues to be the Board of Directors. The organization cultivated a group of talented, energetic artists with a passion for the mission. These characteristics, coupled with each member’s individual willingness to contribute a multitude of volunteer hours, has sustained the organization for the last decade. External perceptions of the board of directors indicate that the board’s reputation as a small, youthful, and ambitious group reflects its reality.

An important point to note, however, is the lack of knowledge about the efforts of the individual board members or their identity. In fact, through interviews the same point cropped up repeatedly, stating that Bunker Projects lacked diversity on its board.

“It strikes me as a pretty white organization in terms of leadership. I think they need to think about diversity.”

“Well I think the one gap is on the DEI front with their leadership being white. That’s an issue.”

Since 2019, Bunker Projects made a concerted effort to address diversity on its board through recruitment. For the purpose of assessing the strengths of the Board of Directors, the point to be highlighted is the lack of visibility of individual members as leaders in the organization.

Because of its status as a working board, Bunker Projects board members satisfy a specialized set of skills. For example, one board member manages the individual needs of the residency program while another assumes editorial responsibilities for the Bunker Review. As the following chart demonstrates, a significant skill gap exists in terms of building a leadership team with experience in nonprofit management and/or a team with the combined legal, financial, and operational experience to serve collectively as advisors.

Expertise	Skill Met
Board Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Philanthropic Foundation Work	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Marketing & PR	<input type="checkbox"/>
Events Planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Media	<input type="checkbox"/>
Multimedia Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fund Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finance/Accounting	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Organizing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Legal	<input type="checkbox"/>
HR/Personnel	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nonprofit Management	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mission knowledge/background	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

A key theme that emerged through conversation with the board members themselves was a need for structure and communication. This group of go-getters is ready to dive into the work, although the entry point can be difficult to find and miscommunication sometimes complicates the process. One board member described it by saying, “In terms of the board, what I like the most etches into what is sometimes the most confusing. It’s the flexibility that we all have to do the work we do. Where does flexibility become disorganization?” Another board member simply stated that there was a lack of communication with the board as a whole.

A greater challenge is board retention. By relying on a volunteer board to carry out the day-to-day work of the organization, Bunker Projects has struggled to retain board members. A volunteer commitment of this scope leaves little time for much else. To that point, it also limits the organization’s pool of potential board members because few individuals have the ability to meet the time requirements as they currently stand. This alone decreases Bunker Projects’ capacity significantly.

“Board members can get burnt out. Others are having to prioritize other parts of their life as they grow in their careers.”

“Bunker’s administrative bandwidth is low because they are working with a tight group of people.”

As a whole, the board shared that the most pressing matter at hand was to grow resources to make it possible to fund a staff member. Moreover, each individual indicated that role should be filled by founding-member, Jessica Rommelt. Jessica has invested significant

time and effort into the organization. Her role in the organization is central to Bunker Projects. With help, she maintains the residency program, gallery, and external relations, as well as board recruitment. Undoubtedly, Ms. Rommelt's energy and passion for the work has sparked the same in her fellow board members. Like the rest of the board, Ms. Rommelt seeks a plan to build financial resources to fund her work for Bunker Projects.

The general consensus from each conversation about the financial resources of Bunker Projects can be summarized with this one simple quote, "They need more funding." Bunker's revenue streams consist of the residency fees, grants, special events, and small donations—the most stable source being residency fees. The message from the board is clear that the fees for artists cannot increase and, in fact, the goal is to lessen the financial expectations for artists.

Bunker Projects does benefit from a handful of individuals with knowledge of the Pittsburgh philanthropy sector. Because of this, the organization did successfully secure a number of grants. Furthermore, one board member in particular has hosted small fundraising events for the organization in the past and is willing to revive those efforts. The organization also has a number of small, loyal donors who make annual contributions. In conversations with the board members, particularly those responsible for Bunker Review, it was clear the organization is open to partnerships through advertisement and sponsorships. An assessment of their fundraising efforts leads Procopia to the conclusion that Bunker has done a commendable job as a lean, volunteer nonprofit to create a starting point for more robust fundraising efforts.

Beyond fundraising, Bunker Projects has the ability to increase its support to artists while simultaneously creating a strong revenue stream through art sales. Not all of the artists involved with Bunker desire to sell their art. Those who do, however, remarked that it would be beneficial to them if the organization amplified their focus on sales. Ms. Rommelt and other board members do intend to increase not only gallery sales, but also sales online and by exploring the possibility of attending fairs. Bunker has had success with selling art in the past, with pieces selling in excess of \$5,000. As their online presence continues to grow through social platforms and the Bunker Review, so will their marketability for web-based art sales.

III. Physical Space: Bunker Projects has an asset in that it has access to physical space that can be made available to artists. However, key to sustainability, it's important for Bunker to find a way to make its organization ADA accessible and develop a healthy fiscal plan to balance capital and program expenses.

Bunker's founding members achieved success as young women fresh out of college with little to no experience. They developed a multi-faceted, experimental space that has

garnered international recognition among contemporary artists. One of the secrets to their success was an ambitious plan to establish their residency program in the 2nd and 3rd floors of a space previously used as a residence. Bunker's founders proposed they handle the renovation of the facility and that their investment in the building factored into expenses relating to the lease. This creative approach made Bunker a reality. Although, the organization's home now poses the following challenges.

- The space is not accessible for people with disabilities. Bunker Projects is located on the second floor of a walkup facility with no ADA accommodations.
- The rental agreement outlines an understanding that the organization receives reduced monthly rent in exchange for maintenance of the building. This has been manageable because of Ms. Rommelt's experience in home renovations. There is serious concern for Bunker's long-term ability to maintain the cost of rent and maintenance.
- The layout of the space is not conducive for the cohabitation of resident artists, nonprofit operations, and an exhibiting gallery all in one. Artists shared they had little to no privacy.

As the artist support recommendations clarify, residents have expectations about a program in which they are investing their financial resources. Basic expectations are that their art will be protected from the elements. That has not always been the case, although it should be noted that Bunker has a strong relationship with the building's owner, and the organization and owner work tirelessly to fix problems as they arise.

Simultaneously, some interviewees were not equally moved by Bunker's appeal for help with the space.

"A lot of artists would kill for that space even with the things wrong with it."

"We don't acknowledge the privilege of having space. The space is an asset that a lot of artists don't have. It might be leaky pipes or whatever but acknowledge that privilege."

What the space does offer is an anchor for the organization on Penn Avenue, surrounded by their partner art organizations like Silver Eye, Assemble, and Boom Concepts. It provides Bunker a presence in a vibrant arts community and opens up their resident artists to a community of creators and art-appreciators alike. Moreover, by comparison to other residencies, Bunker Projects is the most affordable of its kind at its current rate because of the affordable rent.

Appendix A: Strategic Plan Chart

	Artist Strategy	Operational Capacity Strategy	Physical Space Strategy
<p>Goal 1: Champion equity in programs, online content, and through our day to day operations.</p>	<p>1. Lift artists by defining Bunker’s stake in equity work and securing financial resources to support artists and eliminate residency fees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Increase support to artists with financial need through fundraising by launching an innovation fund and need-based scholarships. Ask board members to champion this effort through fundraising, as well as creating the process to define scholarship criteria and the mechanism for dispersing project funding for innovation. B. Assist artists with art sales. C. Through dialogue with BIPOC artists, develop policy and adopt practices that define Bunker’s role as a white-led organization striving for allyship. 	<p>2. Ensure that Bunker’s leaders promote a shared vision for equity by defining the organization’s role as a catalyst for change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Invest in board training specific to equity. B. Conduct an audit to assess how the organization’s internal operations support, advance, and/or hinder inclusion and equity in the arts. C. Provide leadership opportunities to underrepresented artists. 	<p>3. Make Bunker Projects ADA accessible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Conduct an assessment to consider options to address Bunker’s space needs (i.e. purchase, upgrade, and modify the current building, finding a new independent space, or exploring a shared-space venture with other organizations).

Appendix A: Strategic Plan Chart

<p>Goal 2: Double down on what we do best by shoring up our operations and focusing on sustainability.</p>	<p>1. Artist support is central to achieving Bunker’s mission. Artists will benefit from increased structure including formal procedures, timelines, and an orientation for resident artist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Develop an annual operating calendar that includes deadlines to post the call for applicants, application submission, notification date, and residency start dates. State clearly in the call for applicants the benefits of the residency and the challenges—i.e. Individualized support, networking opportunity, and affordable rates vs. challenges of the space. Furthermore, include in the application process a questionnaire to learn more about artists’ living needs to take into consideration for co-residencies. B. Create artist-in-residency orientation materials that detail Bunker’s expectations for artists living & working in the space. Provide clear communication about Bunker’s expectations for artists living and working in the space and to set expectations for artists about programmatic offerings to ensure they utilize their artist-in-residence to its fullest. 	<p>2. Develop the board through training and recruitment; obtain the funds to hire staff members to fulfill key roles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Prioritize funding for a Creative Director through a multi-year fundraising commitment that demonstrates to funders the long-term benefit of investing in this position at present. The Creative Director position will focus on providing programmatic support to resident artists, which is separate from living needs. B. Hire an Operations Coordinator or partner with another arts nonprofit to secure a shared administrator. This person will be responsible for overseeing the residential living needs of artists, handling finances, and coordinating the needs of the board. C. Strengthen the board through a combination of training to grow the skillsets of current board members as they relate to nonprofit management, governance and fundraising. 	<p>3. Develop a healthy fiscal plan to balance capital and program expenses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Increase operational support through fundraising and art sales to support capital. B. Identify potential space sharing options to decrease overhead expenses.
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Appendix A: Strategic Plan Chart

		<p>D. Recruit board members who satisfy the unmet skills including: board development, marketing & PR, media, multimedia technology, fund development, finance/accounting, legal, and nonprofit management.</p> <p>E. Highlight the talented individuals at Bunker's helm to ensure that Bunker's board members receive recognition for their work as it's most dedicated volunteers.</p>	
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Appendix B: Methods

Procopia undertook an information gathering process that engaged board members—both past and present, resident artists, funders, partner organizations, and national artist in residence programs. Procopia conducted 21 interviews with former resident artists, funders, board members, and other resident programs across the country. A full list of interviewees is available in Appendix C.

Interviews were facilitated by one individual with a consistent set of questions. Interviews ranged in length from 30-60 minutes. They began in July and ended in September. Board members were surveyed, participated in a group discussion, and participated in individual interviews. All attendees received a project summary in advance of the interview to provide a framework for the conversation. That summary outlined the following areas of concern: artist support, operational capacity, and physical space. The enclosed recommendations share the overarching themes of these interviews and insights from those conversations, which informed the strategy herein.

In addition to interviews, Procopia met with board members Jessica Rommelt and Nina Friedman weekly to discuss the evolving plan and request access to key organization documents. Procopia had access to the current and recent budgets of the organization, historical documents, grant applications, and board information.

Appendix C: Interview Participants

Nina Barbuto

Assemble
Executive Director

Benjy Blanco

Achieva
Creative Arts Manager

Kate Bowen

ACRE
Executive Director

***Tara Fay**

Independent Curator & Artist

***Nina Friedman**

Arts Management Professional

Madeline Gent

Associated Artists of Pittsburgh
Executive Director

Jake Goodman

The Opportunity Fund
Executive Director

Kathy Lachenauer

Executive Director
The Fine Foundation

Atiya Jones

TWELVE\TWENTY STUDIO
Artist & CEO

****Reese McArdle**

Reflexions
Business Development Coordinator

***Anna Mirzayan**

Art Writer

Jessica Moss

The Roll Up CLT Artist Residency
Founding Director

Sidney Mullis

Artist

***Anna Nelson**

Poet

David Oresick

Silver Eye
Executive Director

***Jessica Rommelt**

Artist

***Harrison Smith**

Artist

Veda Sun

Artist & Production Designer

Rick Swartz

Bloomfield-Garfield
Community Development Officer

Barbara Weissberger

Artist

* Board Member

** Former Board Member