

Mentoring Artists for Women's Art (MAWA)

Strategic Plan 2018-2021

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Report by Bev Pike with input from Gwen Armstrong, based on a Strategic Planning workshop conducted by Sheila Spence, Dec. 16, 2017.

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In December 2017, the staff and board of MAWA gathered to develop the 2018-2021 Strategic Priorities. The group reviewed MAWA's Vision, Mission and Mandate to ensure they were current and being followed in all MAWA's programs and activities. They discussed Strategic Actions, as well as the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats being faced by MAWA. A set of non-negotiable items was identified as key to MAWA as it heads into the future. Senior established artist and arts administrator Sheila Spence led the session.

LOCATION

MAWA is located on original lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation.

MAWA respects the Treaties that were made on these territories, MAWA acknowledges the harms and mistakes of the past and present, and MAWA is dedicated to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

VISION*

All people in the visual arts have full access to opportunities and achieve equal representation.

MISSION*

MAWA empowers women, non-binary, trans and 2-Spirit woman-identifying people in the visual arts, and fosters their practices and professional development by providing diverse programming within a supportive community.

MANDATE

Mentoring Artists for Women's Art encourages and supports the intellectual and creative development of women in the visual arts by providing an on-going forum for education and critical dialogue.

LANGUAGE

In this Strategic Plan, the word "women" is used repeatedly. At MAWA, "women" means women-identified: cis-gendered, trans-gendered and any non-binary folks who feel comfortable being included under this umbrella term. MAWA never polices gender—each individual self-identifies. MAWA's mandate and focus reflects the historic and present-day gender biases in the visual arts.

* revised and approved by the Board, July 14, 2021

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STRENGTHS

1. Uniqueness
2. Responsiveness, respectfulness:
 - a. between MAWA members
 - b. between MAWA and the arts community
3. Analytical processes in place to:
 - a. evaluate existing programming
 - b. create new programs to fill in gaps
 - c. provide services to women unsuccessful in their applications to existing programs
4. Adaptability
 - a. MAWA exists to serve the needs of its members
5. Strong governing ideas that foster:
 - a. continuing growth with appropriate use of staff and board expertise and energy
 - b. consensus-based, non-competitive decision-making
6. Courage:
 - a. to interrogate every action
 - b. to ensure all women receive respect
 - c. to create ambitious new projects that fill cultural gaps
 - d. to provide international and interprovincial service
 - e. to value humour as part of decision-making processes
7. Leadership
 - a. to continue to provide internal mentorship at every level within MAWA
 - b. to provide organizational assistance, when requested, to other arts organizations
8. Consistency in:
 - a. membership engagement and services
 - b. support of a safe space for women to grow in their artistic practices
9. Use of collective energy to help women artists who seek professional development
10. Strong work ethic
11. Physical accessibility (a space that enables access to people living with disabilities)
12. Modelling of professional standards for artist-run centres

WEAKNESSES

1. Space needs:
 - a. Larger footprint (MAWA has outgrown its space)
 - b. Quiet space for focussed study, research, mentoring
2. Financial needs:
 - a. Would ideally become self-supporting, reducing staff and board time spent on fund-raising/grant-writing appeals
 - b. Better employee benefits and pensions, enhancing staff financial security
 - c. Creation of a contingency fund to:
 - i. take advantage of opportunities as they arise
 - ii. allow hiring of additional staff on an ad hoc basis
 - iii. enhance projects
3. Promotional needs:
 - a. Increase national visibility beyond Manitoba
 - b. Employ staff dedicated to public relations
4. Staff needs:
 - a. More staff to enable:
 - i. facing unforeseen heavier workloads
 - ii. reduced reliance on board and volunteers as unpaid labour
 - iii. viable workloads for staff
 - iv. longer tenure in all positions
5. Board needs:
 - a. Continuity of board knowledge
 - b. Succession planning
 - c. Mentoring of incoming board members by outgoing board (especially in key roles)
 - d. Retaining volunteers once they are trained
6. Programming needs:
 - a. Paying volunteers who run programs (to encourage and enable involvement of those on limited incomes)
 - b. Paying the artists for the art they currently donate at fund-raisers
 - c. Expanding:
 - i. community responsiveness
 - ii. ability to meet the needs of increased membership

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Re-thinking space, both physical and virtual
2. Increasing Canada Council funding
3. Collaborating/co-programming with other arts organizations
4. Mentoring of other groups in policy and procedures and in gender equity
5. Franchising (national, international)
6. Setting a high standard for staff and valuing the Co-Directorship model that has been so successful at MAWA
7. Consolidating existing programming at a high level of excellence
8. Tapping other revenue streams
9. Continuing to employ a multitude of diverse, talented women at MAWA
10. Paying consideration to the well-being and work balance of senior staff who, in addition to their regular duties:
 - i. orient new volunteers/Board members
 - ii. train new mentors
 - iii. evaluate other staff
 - iv. manage other staff
11. Hiring additional staff on an ad hoc basis for large projects to ensure that existing staff workloads are manageable (while increasing employment opportunities for women in the arts)
12. Maintain and nurture staff members by:
 - a. encouraging self-care
 - b. encouraging balance with family and community

THREATS

1. Because MAWA depends on government grants, potential funding cuts remain a perpetual threat.
2. Member frustration from space being over-subscribed (approximately ten times a year, programming must be cancelled or rescheduled due to space already being booked).
3. Dark days for women internationally. Violence against women persists. Hard-won gains are eroded.
4. Staff loss: though women employed at MAWA tend to leave for greater personal opportunities, and applications for MAWA positions allow the choice of excellent applicants, MAWA's small number of staff means that staff turnover remains a threat.

NON-NEGOTIABLES

1. Vision of equality for women artists
2. Using feminism to address every woman artist's professional needs
3. Elevating women artist's careers and encouraging youth to become professional artists
4. Mentorship
 - a. Concretizing criteria to ensure maturity and diversity in mentors and mentees
5. Paying women visual artists for their work
6. Support for staff by acknowledging and rewarding strong leadership with job security and appropriate pay schedules
7. Focussing on women by:
 - a. Providing a safe environment, especially in group settings
 - b. Providing compassion, but not counselling
 - c. Discouraging autocratic event attendees through:
 - i. providing on-going training in conflict resolution
 - ii. listening to, then applying appropriate action/direction/redirection to any disgruntled attendee
 - iii. providing back-up for employees hosting events
 - iv. acknowledging mistakes to improve responses
8. Financial stability in the context of risk-taking (i.e. balancing the need for financial viability with potential failure)
9. Encouraging respect, kindness and consideration for others
10. Providing affordable, comfortable and welcoming space in a setting that is safe and accessible
11. Remaining connected to the community by striving always to be focussed on member needs
12. Continuing advocacy through:
 - a. award nominations
 - b. lobbying funders to support more women
 - c. lobbying the School of Art to hire more women in all positions
 - d. lobbying arts organisations to show and recompense more women's work
 - e. liaising with other feminist groups

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2018-2021

1. A larger, more functional space suited to simultaneous use for multiple art-related purposes is located and financed.
2. More women artists are paid more.
3. Strong national and international connections are fostered and strengthened.
4. Programming is accessible to, and meets the professional needs of, diverse groups of women artists (including youth and Indigenous women).

STRATEGIC GOALS AND ACTIONS

1. Research will be conducted, evaluating MAWA's physical space needs and options for growth (fall/winter 2018/19). Funds will be raised towards expanded or new physical space to accommodate existing and future programming (2019/20). MAWA will move into its larger or new space (2021).
2. More women artists, particularly group leaders, will be paid professional fees for work currently being done on a volunteer basis. Staff wages will increase (2018).
3. Programming will continue to increase and diversify, based upon the needs of MAWA members (2018-2021).
 - a. MAWA received a coveted Canada 150 New Chapter grant to exhibit 50 contemporary Canadian Indigenous female artists on billboards across Canada. This endeavour will increase visibility of female artists and MAWA, while seeking to redress unacceptable practices inflicted on Indigenous women and girls (June-August 2018).
 - b. MAWA-sponsored international and national artist residencies will expand from 4 to 6 per year to help address demand (in 2017, there were 47 applicants from 17 countries) and increase contact between local, national and international artists (spring/summer 2019).
 - c. MAWA will develop 1-2 additional international residency exchanges, such as the currently operating artist exchange with ArtCenter/South Florida in Miami, to provide international opportunities to local artists (2020).
 - d. Research the feasibility of building a network of MAWA prototypes and satellites (2021).
4. Continue to forge partnerships within and outside of the arts community (2018-2021). Youth (teen) programming will be developed in the form of an annual feminist art symposium (2019).

EVALUATION

The MAWA Board will review the Goals and Actions annually.

CONCLUSION

MAWA is at a significant juncture in its history. It has recently completed publication of a book of national significance (*Desire Change: Contemporary Feminist Art In Canada*, 2017) and is embarking upon a cross-country exhibition on billboards (*Resilience*, 2018). These large-budget projects reflect ambition and organizational capacity.

MAWA has recently received a significant increase from the Canada Council for the Arts (a 100% increase in operating funds) and an increase from the Winnipeg Arts Council. This reflects confidence in the quality of MAWA's programs and its organizational strengths.

MAWA has the resources and will to grow. It is incumbent on us to do so mindfully and exuberantly, guided by the priorities outlined herein.