



JVA CONSULTING, LLC
linking experience and vision

Rocky Mountain Arts Association Strategic Plan 2006-2008 Process Report

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“With the tools to climb, you have the power to ascend.”

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Rocky Mountain Arts Association

Strategic Plan Process Report

August 1, 2006

Introduction

The following report captures the process through which the Rocky Mountain Arts Association (RMAA) board of directors and staff progressed during their strategic planning retreat on August 1, 2006. While not all dialogue is recorded here, JVA has included comments and discussions that led to different decisions. The final product of this process was a three-year strategic plan with a corresponding one-year action plan. That plan is included at the end of this document as Appendix A.

Welcome and Introductions

Will welcomed the group to the strategic planning session and introduced Margaret Roberts from JVA Consulting.

Attendance

The following board members attended the strategic planning retreat: Will Adams (Board President), Jay Kline, Tim Starchman, Kevin Whatley (Treasurer), Dave Kincade, Peter DiLeo, Don McMaster, Guy McPherson.

Staff members who attended the retreat included Deb Pollock, Business Manager and David Dunbar, Artistic Director.

Margaret Roberts of JVA Consulting, LLC facilitated the planning process. Makenna Berry of JVA recorded notes.

Focused Conversation

To initiate group communication in preparation for the day's work, Margaret led the group through a "focused conversation." Questions asked of the group and responses follow:

When you think of Rocky Mountain Arts Association work, what images come to mind?

- Umbrella shape that infiltrates the upper level of the GLBTQ community, people inspire to, a way of being "out," personal as well as being community, a web
- A group of folks standing underneath the umbrella. The umbrella has been closed, but now it's open, and now it needs to be cleaned and refurbished
- A bunch of different people standing on stage together and having a good time, bringing people in from the community
- I see RMAA as a work in progress with the capacity to grow through music to communicate its mission
- I think of (Will) saying that we want to be the premier arts organization; it's an umbrella organization that will help other organizations who do not have the capacity

- It is moving forward enough to absorb that growth; other organizations grow within it
- I see the RMAA at the moment as the DGMC. I see where it's going, and it's positive
- I see RMAA as a parent figure that guides, heard but not so much seen, a quiet director of what will become future choruses
- I see the RMAA as Will has discussed; premier GLBT organization focused on the arts
- I see us having an arts organization for the GLBT community that could rival the world
- The image that came to me was a mountain; RMAA is an entity without a brand. Nobody knows what it is and what it stands for. The mountains stand for me the different parts of RMAA and the choruses
- An image of stability fulfilling a mission of building community through music, an entity that the community can look to as a positive representation, as a positive voice

What excites you about the organization?

- It's the excitement of taking us back to the original vision of what the organization was intended to be; a second chance
- It's the work that we do. There is so much of every person that is shared through this. This is every person's personal journey
- Being cultural warriors; no matter what we do, we reach out and break that gap
- It's a lot of work, especially in time commitment; after concerts everyone is happy and crying in a good way; we are accomplishing our mission
- Validation as who we are as people
- Having a voice. We sang at PrideFest. We wondered if we would have an audience—we packed the "house;" not only that, but the chorus could be heard across the park
- The potential of what this organization can be, knowing that this organization has really good talent, knowing that potential can make everything possible

What concerns you as the organization moves into the future?

- I have concerns that the board is too insular, almost everyone on the board is on the chorus or involved with the chorus. It's difficult at fundraising events to reach out; we need to be less insular
- Staff. We have only one part-time staff member. The board is a working board; we need funding to hire more staff
- The vision of DGMC and RMAA are like Siamese twins, and we need to separate them, making sure that somehow the DGMC twin is taken care of as we focus on the RMAA twin
- The DGMC members struggle that they didn't know there was another "twin" RMAA

What are your hopes for your work today?

- That we apply controlled growth, that we have a set plan, that we are growing consistently at the right pace, but quickly as well. This is such a large undertaking (that) we don't want to lose things along the way
- Knowing which steps to take in this growth—hire staff?

- Communication is going to be important, reviewing the plan every quarter, make the time, commit to make the time, and meeting with each other
- That would be great to have quarterly review
- We all need to share with the synergy and share in the vision, and share in the same energy and commitment levels
- I have seen in the last 11 months the passion in this group. There were a few people that were not with the plan and they left; that is the evolution. Through momentum and the community need, things are happening, people are saying we need this.

Mission

Margaret then reviewed the mission of RMAA.

Rocky Mountain Arts Association exists to build community through music

The group confirmed that this is still the mission of RMAA.

Vision

Margaret explained that the visioning process is about creating a vision picture for RMAA. In other words, what does success look like three years from now? What is happening in the programs, financially, with staff, with the board, with community awareness, and with collaborations? After the group brainstormed ideas, Margaret asked, "Does this vision support your mission statement?" The group confirmed that it did. She then asked, "Is there anything on this list that anyone disagrees with or believes cannot be achieved in three years?" The group said that it may not achieve the entire vision in three years but it was worth striving for.

A **summary of the three-year vision** is described in the following sentences:

- RMAA is recognized as ***one of the premier arts organizations*** in the country, with three well-respected programs and serves as an artistic incubator, which has the capacity for growth.
- RMAA has ***long-term sustainable funding***, with major corporate sponsors, major individual donors, and a planned giving program and financial reserve.
- RMAA has ***an organizational structure with a governing board of directors*** and staff.
- RMAA can look back at what we had done and ***we can say that we have done well.***
- RMAA has ***artists who want to perform as guest performers with the choruses.***
- Each program (chorus) will be ***responsible for the programs' nuts and bolts.***
- RMAA is ***conducting outreach with community liaisons, TV performances, and relationships with churches and schools.***

The group suggested many ideas for the three-year vision. JVA has organized the vision picture into different categories for better understanding.

Create business plan

- Communicate plans (writing your business plan)
- Have deadlines (check progress)

- Business plan & staff
- Organizational plan (strategic plan)
- Learn to allow each organization's autonomy
- Develop youth chorus

Board

- Create board development plan
- Capitalize on board member strengths
- Invite new diverse board members
- Assign responsibilities
- Create flow chart (organizational)
- Is board's vision the same as the programs?

Create Governance Structure

- Designate authority
- More involvement by chorus members

Marketing/Public Awareness

- Create RMAA website
- Create marketing plan

Funding

- Submit grants
- Set up for automatic withdrawals for donations
- Create financial plan

Staffing

- Hire more staff to run programs
- Hire Executive Director

Outreach

- Share mailing list for funding
- Community development plan

Collaborations

- Has connections with other choruses', organizations around the state
- Relationships with open and affirming churches, schools' GSA, children's choruses
- Combined chorus outreach, performances

Discussion on organizational structure and roles of board members. The group discussed the need to transition the current board from a nuts and bolts board to a governance board. There was also a long discussion about the organizational structure, given that RMAA now has three choruses. In the past, there has been the perception that the RMAA board was skewed toward the DGMC. Individuals suggested the need to expand the board to include a broader representation to include community members. The group also discussed who from the choruses should be on the board and what their role should be on the board. Currently, the Denver Gay Men's Chorus has a plan to have two representatives from the DGMC chorus council to serve on the RMAA board. Discussion included:

- Should RMAA hire an Executive Director, responsible for the overall work of the RMAA?
- Should each chorus have a chorus council with two representatives serving on the RMAA board?
- Would the choral representatives be voting members?

- If chorus representatives serve as RMAA board members, this would mean six members of a 14-member board that will be directly related to the individual programs. Would the remainder be the current board and community members?
- The people who are on the RMAA board are RMAA board members; there has to be equal representation. The chorus representatives would need to also serve as RMAA board members, but not just advocate for their specific programs.
- RMAA should have a board job description.

Current Reality

Next, the group analyzed the current reality in which the Rocky Mountain Arts Association is operating, including the organization’s internal strengths and weaknesses, and outside opportunities and threats. **Strengths** are the internal assets the Rocky Mountain Arts Association can build upon to achieve its vision. **Weaknesses** are those things that will need to be addressed or compensated for in the plan. **Opportunities** are outside opportunities that the organization could take advantage of in its plan. **Threats** are external conditions that must be taken into account since they could become barriers or derail the organization’s efforts.

The following table illustrates the group’s analysis of the Rocky Mountain Arts Association’s current reality:

Strengths	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24-year history, strong, respectable • Large pool of dedicated choral members • We have this dedicated board and the leadership of it, and fearless leaders • We have sustained growing pains • We are in the “black” • Chorus large pool to draw from • Diverse audiences • Excellent artistic direction • Passion of the board and the members • The art form itself is a way to address controversy • Has a good reputation with our current funders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential board members in community, straight allies • New funders: foundation and individual • Incorporating new organizations, other choruses • Developing new audiences for all of our programs • New venues • Larger budget • New programs

Weaknesses	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time commitment; we have full-time jobs, board members and staff, lack of time • “Inbreedness” • Board works on nuts & bolts and not as a governing board • We don’t network with other arts organizations • We don’t have a development plan • Communication between board meetings not consistent with meeting and schedules • RMAA is not a brand; confusion • Lack of knowledge of how the board should work, roles, and responsibilities • Lack of organizational structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much too soon (internal) • Time • Heterosexism, religious right • Potential community rejection • Political climate, backlash • Natural/national disasters

Strategic Planning Brainstorming

After the group thought through the Rocky Mountain Arts Association mission, vision, and current reality, Margaret asked the group the following question: “What key action steps will Rocky Mountain Arts Association need to take in the next three years to accomplish its vision? Make sure you take into consideration the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats discussed earlier.” Group members first engaged in independent thinking around needed action steps, then shared their ideas with a partner. Each team sent ideas forward that were placed on a large wall. The group organized the ideas into related clusters, named each cluster, and then articulated three-year goals. After the brainstorming session, the group divided into several teams to develop a Strategic Action Plan, with timelines and persons responsible. Teams organized action steps into Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3. Finally, each team reported to the rest of the group for comments and feedback.

Appendix A contains the final strategic plan with goals, action steps, timelines, and persons responsible. A complete list of brainstormed action steps is found in Appendix B. A summary of **three-year organizational goals** follows:

Rocky Mountain Arts Association goals

Organizational Goal

- Create governance organization structure
- Create business plan

Board Goal

- Expand and diversify board

Fundraising Goal

- Increase and diversify funding
- Develop fund development plan

Staffing Goal

- Increase staff

Marketing Goal

- Develop marketing plan

Discussion on organizational structure. Before dividing into small work groups to think through each goal, the larger group decided it needed to address the larger question of organizational structure for RMAA. Margaret explained that there were many ways RMAA could create an organizational structure with the three choruses remaining largely autonomous with their own responsibilities for fundraising, and programming. The group seemed to prefer having an Executive Director who would oversee all three choruses, but with chorus councils, elected by each chorus. Each chorus council would be responsible for the day-to-day management of the chorus. One participant suggested that each chorus have a program coordinator, who would then report to the ED. However, the group seemed to prefer the chorus council idea. The DGMC has drafted operating principles, based on the RMAA bylaws, which outline the roles and responsibilities of the DGMC and chorus council. Margaret asked the group to define what would be the responsibilities of the ED, Artistic Director and chorus councils. The group brainstormed the following:

RMAA Board responsibilities:

- Oversight/vision
- Fiduciary
- Fundraising for RMAA
- Budget
- Hire/ED

RMAA Executive Director responsibilities:

- Oversees the programs, not artistically
- Publishes RMAA agenda
- Attends all concerts for all groups
- Participates in fundraising for all groups
- Attends minimum of one rehearsal per group/season
- Coordinate w/ all artistic directors in regards to venues and retreats
- Manages RMAA.org website to include calendars for all programs, marketing, and donating
- Publishes programs for concerts

Each Choral Council responsibilities:

- Develops and manages choral membership
- Administrative duties, attends rehearsals, concerts
- Interacts with Artistic Director; representative to Artistic Director
- Provides representatives on RMAA board
- Serves as channel of communication between board/chorus/Artistic Director
- Must be active members; singer or supporters
- Council members are voted for. Councils could have five to seven members, with three officers. The President and Vice President of each Council could serve on the RMAA board.
- Creates individual operating procedures tailored to their own needs
- Creates membership handbook for each group (i.e. dress code, requirements for membership)
- Artistic director is part of the program council

- Scholarships
- Set up retreat

Artistic Director responsibilities:

- Direction of all artistic management of the chorus
- Selection of members
- Responsible for auditions, running rehearsals, setting concerts dates, and artistic programs for each concert
- Work with Executive Director to locate and negotiate venue

Organizational structure discussion. Participants discussed at length options for an organizational structure. The discussion focused on whether RMAA needs an Executive Director to help manage the day-to-day operations, or should each chorus have a position similar to a program manager. Attached is an outline of the proposed structure of the organization, which the group discussed. ***JVA recommends that the board members approve the proposed structure at the next meeting.***

Board expansion discussion. While the group discussed a desire to diversify the board of directors, it did not create a specific goal for that area, nor did the planning team develop action steps to achieve this outcome. If this is something the board desires, it should consider creating a board-related goal and corresponding action steps for board development. JVA has worked with the ED to create a goal and action steps in order to diversify and expand the board of the directors, given the need to prioritize this goal for funders.

Next Steps:

At the end of the day, the group identified the immediate next steps needed to move the plan forward and begin implementation.

1. JVA will write up the draft plan by August 10 (submit to Will) and will include resource materials in the final plan.
2. Set date to review and finalize operating procedures of the DGMC (Will/Don/David/Tim).
3. RMAA board will make a decision by August 22 if it will meet more often and/or create more committees.
4. RMAA board will need to approve organizational structure.

The RMAA board agreed that the Secretary should review the timeline calendar during each board meeting.

Additional Recommendations

Review the plan and clarify or add detail. Due to time constraints and lack of access to information, some teams were not able to refine their action steps as desired. The following steps should be taken to complete the plan:

1. Committees and/or staff should revisit action plan areas that pertain to their responsibilities and refine steps and timelines as needed.
2. These revised mini action plans should then be shared with the board and incorporated into the master strategic plan.

3. *The board should also review the plan for clarity, consistency, and feasibility.* For example, several action steps may require associated costs (i.e., staff additions, consulting, marketing materials, etc.). Given these costs, are the timelines appropriate?
4. Think through how champions can be involved in strategic plan.

Monitor the strategic plan regularly. In order to ensure that this plan becomes the guide for the organization's work over the next three years, it is imperative that it be revisited regularly. Ideally, the board would check progress at each monthly board meeting. This way, board and staff are held more accountable for achieving benchmarks. Changed deadlines and circumstances can also be factored into the plan, if necessary. If the board and staff commit to monitoring the plan regularly, they will have a much greater chance of actually achieving their desired goals at the end of the three-year period.

Calendar the plan. There are several ways to monitor the plan, in addition to revisiting it at each board meeting. Committees and staff could create a yearlong calendar that details action step deadlines for each area and benchmarks to achieve annual goals. This could be done by goal or for the entire strategic plan, depending on what would be most useful to the organization. Some managers like to use a yearlong Vis-à-vis calendar with wipe-off markers that are color-coded. There is also project management software available to monitor strategic plans and progress. Check with JVA if interested.

Update the plan annually. The board can still engage in a strategic planning retreat each year, but with a focus on reviewing achievements, reassessing goals, and refining strategies for the upcoming year. In other words, annually, the board and staff will work on the current year's *operating plan* for the organization and revise any long-term goals if circumstances have changed or if goals have been achieved.