

# The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington

**Strategic Plan 2015–2018**



Encouraging the Creative Impulse  
in Our Community

# The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington

Strategic Plan 2015–2018

*Encouraging the Creative Impulse in Our Community*

The Strategic Plan - 2015 – 2018 was approved by the Board of Directors  
on October 8, 2014

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*Rowena Dykins*

# Contents

- 2 Introduction
- 3 Our Current State
- 11 The Strategic Environment
- 15 Strategic Themes, Goals and Initiatives
- 20 Implementation Framework



# Introduction

This document captures the most recent considerations of our current state of affairs, our desired future state and our plans for making that journey. Our commitment to our mission and vision remains strong, and our strategies and plans have evolved to reflect the progress we have made and the anticipated changes in the world around us.

This updated plan was developed by the board and staff of the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, through consultation with artists, community organizations, instructors, members, other galleries, students, teachers, the Municipality of Clarington and volunteers from across the community.

The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington acknowledges and appreciates the work done by the Strategic Plan Update committee—James Campbell, Jeremy Desjardine, Fred Mandryk and Craig Ryan—to lead and facilitate the updating process.



John Climenhage

# Our Current State

## Who we are

The Visual Arts Centre (VAC) of Clarington is a charitable not-for-profit organization. We are recognized as a professional gallery of contemporary art by the Ontario Arts Council, the Ontario Association of Art Galleries, artists and arts organizations in Ontario and beyond.

As we prepare to celebrate our 40th anniversary in 2015 and consider what lies ahead, our vision, mission and guiding principles continue to guide our journey.

### Our Vision

Providing arts education and appreciation that fosters the development of creative thinkers, problem solvers, and visionaries, strengthening society's ability to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

### Our Mission

The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington nurtures the cultural development of our community by encouraging the creative impulse through arts education, exhibition and promotion.

## Our Guiding Principles

### **INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE**

We will work to build community and be part of the community. Our programs, exhibitions and facilities will reflect a diversity of ideas, engage the broader community, support established and emerging artists and be accessible to all.

### **OUTSTANDING QUALITY**

We will offer high-quality programming that challenges, enriches and educates, while retaining a character and environment that is welcoming, friendly and reflective of the community.

### **VISIONARY AND PROFOUND**

We will be forward thinking and innovative as an organization, demonstrating knowledge and insight that trigger reflection and thought.

### **AESTHETIC SENSITIVITY**

Our work will model a deep-rooted belief in the importance of aesthetics and ideas.

### **STEWARDSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

We will be good stewards of the funds, facilities and other resources entrusted to us. We will earn public trust and community support through ethical and socially responsible actions



*Gordon Smith*

# Services

We are an active and productive organization that makes good use of limited resources to generate a significant, varied and ever-expanding volume of activity within each of our five service areas: exhibitions; educational programs; publications and information; community outreach and special events; and recognition programs. While the majority of artists, participants and visitors are from Clarington, we also draw a considerable number of people from across the GTA and beyond.

## Exhibitions

We provide professionally curated exhibitions with accompanying catalogues at the Visual Arts Centre, exhibitions in the Clarington Municipal Building and the Clarington Library, as well as Art on Public Lands outdoor sculpture installations on our grounds. We present an annual exhibition of art from Clarington secondary schools, an annual juried show open to all artists, and an annual “100 Small Paintings” show and sale of art for our members at the Visual Arts Centre.

In 2013 we presented five curated exhibitions, our annual juried show, an exhibition of works by VAC instructors and students, our annual Christmas show and sale for members, 15 exhibitions at the Clarington Municipal Centre and 6 exhibitions at the Clarington Library. Our Art on Public Lands outdoor sculpture project resumes in 2014.



*Ed Falkenberg*

## Educational Programs

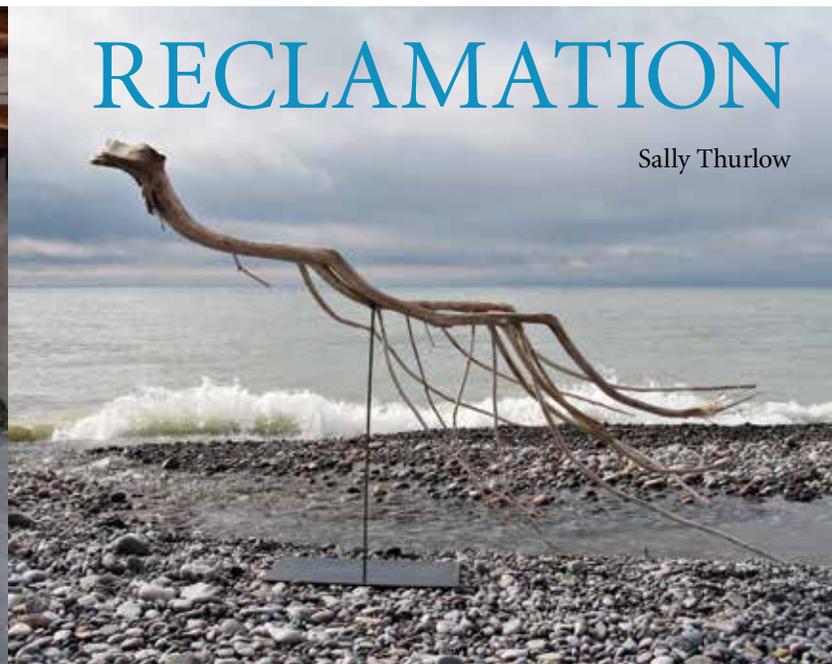
Our education programs include:

- Art classes and workshops for adults, youth and children
- March break and summer camp programs
- Workshops and instruction to support local school curriculums
- Customized workshops for community groups and private parties
- Professional development workshops for artists and teachers
- Artist talks and art history lectures

Over the course of 2013, we offered 24 weeks of sessional classes for adults, youth and children, 9 full weeks of summer art camps, 12 community workshops, 8 school workshops, 4 weekend workshops, weekly pottery open studio sessions, and weekly uninstructed life drawing sessions. We hosted 6 talks for our ongoing series of art history lectures, presented 4 artist talks in connection with curated exhibits, and responded to dozens of requests to speak to community groups and jury exhibitions at other galleries.

## Publications and Information

We contribute to the documentation of professional artistic practice through the production and distribution of exhibition catalogues and brochures. We also develop and disseminate web-based information and varied publicity materials to our membership and the general public. In 2014 we produced five exhibition catalogues and an exhibition brochure, and we disseminated four electronic newsletters and numerous e-blasts to promote VAC programming and a host of publicity and general information materials.



## Community Outreach and Special Events

We also serve the community by providing an art history reference library; providing space for regional arts and culture organizations and community groups; and supporting local arts festivals and community events. In 2013, for example, we spearheaded or participated in 12 community events. Many of these events were collaborative efforts with other Clarington organizations, such as the Clarington Library, the Clarington Museums and Archives, the Heritage Working Group, the Municipality of Clarington Community Services, the Clarington Older Adults Association, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, the Firehouse Youth Centre, the Rotary Club of Bowmanville, and the Orono Fair committee. In 2014 the VAC organized and hosted its third annual Picasso's Picnic, which featured young artists and performers, provided activities for families and brought together many youth-focused community organizations.

### Recognition programs

We recognize and support local artists through yearly high school bursaries, high school commencement awards for students pursuing post-secondary studies in the visual arts, and a yearly professional artists' bursary selected by the executive director.



# Our Organization

The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington is governed by a volunteer board of directors and operates with a small staff, contracted services and volunteers.

- Full-time staff includes an executive director/curator, a programming and operations associate and an office coordinator.
- Part-time staff provides reception and administration on evenings and weekends, and students are hired for summer camp positions.
- Contracted services are provided by an art installer, a faculty of approximately ten professional artist/instructors, a bookkeeper and a cleaner.
- We recruit youth and adult volunteers and are fortunate to have individuals who devote a great deal of time and take on significant levels of responsibility within our volunteer group.

We have taken some steps over the last few years to address workload and compensation issues. People remain dedicated and hardworking in the face of increasing demands and expectations, but we have reached limitations of current organizational structures, systems and processes, and we have recognized the need for change. In addition to bolstering capacity and capability in some key functions, we also need to significantly enhance our organization's ability to lead, plan and manage the ongoing improvements necessary for continued success and growth in a dynamic environment.

## Partners

Collaborative relationships with key partners in our community are essential to the Visual Arts Centre and provide mutual benefits for all concerned.

We engage in joint initiatives and continue to build and maintain positive relationships with the Municipality of Clarington, provincial and federal agencies, public art galleries and cultural institutions in our region, schools, community groups, service organizations and the local business community.



# Finances and Funding

The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington is financially supported by operating grants from the Municipality of Clarington and the Ontario Arts Council, as well as from federal grants, programming revenue, sponsorships, donations, fundraising and memberships.

<b>SOURCES AND USES OF FUNDS—FIVE-YEAR AVERAGE FOR 2009–2013</b>			
<b>INCOME</b>		<b>EXPENSES</b>	
Grants—Clarington	59.6%	Wages and Salaries	50.3%
Educational Programming	16.3%	Building, Grounds and Utilities	13.4%
Grants—Provincial	9.3%	Educational Programming	11.6%
Donations	5.8%	Exhibitions	11.3%
Grants—Federal	2.8%	Office, Sundry	5.3%
Special Events	2.0%	Fees, Insurance	3.7%
Membership Fees	1.9%	Advertising	1.8%
Exhibitions	1.6%	Special Events	1.7%
Other	0.7%	Awards, Bursaries	0.9%

We have successfully operated with positive net income over the last five years and increased our reserves/contingency funds to recommended levels. This was achieved through a strong focus on financial management; concerted efforts to reduce operating costs and increase earned revenues; annual increases in municipal grants; Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) project grants; and setting aside a portion of some large donations.

The VAC receives funding support through the following government agencies: the Ontario Arts Council, the OTF, the Canadian Museums Association (Young Canada Works student summer employment program), and Service Canada (Canada Summer Jobs student summer employment program). The VAC enjoys a long and very positive relationship with these agencies. We have received annual programming funds from the Ontario Arts Council to assist with payment of artist fees and catalogue production costs for more than twenty years. In 2010, we applied for and were approved for multi-year funding status, ensuring OAC support for a three-year period. This status was once again successfully achieved in 2013, confirming our status as a public gallery with a substantial history of achieving and maintaining professional standards.

The VAC has also benefitted from OTF support for three substantial building improvement projects over the past several years, most recently with the main floor/washroom accessibility project of 2011. Support from the Canadian Museums Association and Service Canada has enabled us to hire two Clarington post-secondary students each summer to assist in teaching our summer art camps, providing these students with invaluable hands-on experience.

Ensuring our financial sustainability remains an ongoing challenge. The extent to which we can maintain, improve and expand our capacity and our capability to fulfill our mission is constrained by our ability to acquire additional financial support for those initiatives. There are untapped potential sources of governmental and non-governmental funding available.

# Our Facilities

The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington operates out of the historically designated Cream of Barley Mill in Soper Creek Park. Built in 1905, the facility is owned by the Municipality of Clarington and includes two gallery spaces on our main floor, a multimedia studio space and reference library on the second floor, and the loft gallery space on our third level. The basement houses a pottery studio, meeting room and storage and preparatory room for our installer. The grounds include the Rotary Centennial Gardens, walkways, parking areas, an outdoor sculpture site, and an amphitheatre.



In 2011, our entire main floor was made fully accessible thanks to the collaborative efforts and contributions of the VAC, the Municipality of Clarington, the OTF, and the Rotary Club of Bowmanville. This substantial project resulted in three new washrooms—one fully accessible—a meeting room and the aforementioned installers workspace.

The existing facility, while a strategic asset to the organization due to its historic quality, setting, and atmosphere, also presents significant constraints:

- The building and grounds need an increase in ongoing maintenance and repair.
- The basement and second and third floors are not wheelchair accessible and limit access to educational and exhibition programming.
- The lack of appropriate climate control limits exhibition and programming possibilities and capacity.
- The electrical supply requires an upgrade to ensure capacity and reliability.



David Gillespie

# The Strategic Environment

*Our strategic plan recognizes and responds to the changing environment. The most significant realities and trends that have shaped our planning are listed below.*

## The Arts Sector in Ontario

In 2013 the Ontario Arts Council completed an environmental scan of the issues and trends affecting the Ontario arts sector today and in the future. It identified three major drivers affecting the arts in Ontario—demographic change, economic uncertainty and technology. These issues are impacting how the arts are created, produced, disseminated and promoted, as well as how people participate in and engage with the arts.

### Demographic trends:

- Ontario is likely to see an overall increase in seniors and an increasingly diverse younger generation.
- Despite achieving high levels of education, the younger generation is struggling financially due to a retraction of the job market and high levels of student debt.
- Ontario’s population continues to be predominantly urban, but the “creative economy” is becoming part of the discussion in rural communities, where arts and culture are seen as a potential response to youth out-migration and the downturn of traditional employment sectors.

## The economic environment:

- The economy remains fragile, and forecasts indicate that economic growth will be restricted for the next few years.
- Some arts organizations are having difficulty keeping pace with operating costs, and this is having a negative effect on programming resources.
- Artists' earnings continue to be well below the overall labour force average.
- Public arts funding overall has remained relatively stable in recent years, but a lack of confidence in the reliability of public funding has the arts sector continuing to explore alternate revenue sources.
- Arts sector organizations are leaner than ever and operating without much of a cushion.
- Alternatives to the current not-for-profit organization model required to receive government funding are being considered by new generation arts groups and those pursuing social innovation.
- New artists and arts organizations, as well as equity-seeking groups (in particular Aboriginal artists and artists with disabilities) continue to lack an appropriate infrastructure to support their practice and are unable to access the same levels of stable funding as their predecessors.
- Funder priorities are shifting to include more community-based, participative, socially conscious arts activities.

## Technology:

- The transition to a digital society has had a significant impact on the arts sector, shifting and even transforming how the arts are created, produced, disseminated and promoted.
- There is a widespread sense that digital technologies are critical to the spread of the arts, helping to make art a more participatory experience and audiences more diverse.
- The capacity for interactivity associated with digital technologies is also altering the artist–audience relationship.



# Arts and Culture in Our Community

The population of Clarington is projected to grow at a rate of 2.35% and reach 97,000 by 2016. As Clarington continues to grow, the demand for cultural services is anticipated to grow as well.

The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, the Clarington Museum and Archives and the Clarington Public Library are the three main publicly funded cultural institutions in Clarington. These three institutions have increased the level of networking, collaboration and coordination of activities in recent years. The Visual Arts Centre also maintains mutually supportive relationships with public galleries in the neighbouring communities of Oshawa, Whitby, Cobourg and Peterborough.

The visual arts community continues to include artist-run galleries, commercial galleries and independent artists who earn their living through the creation and direct sale of art, teaching, etc. Art and craft classes are offered by a few small businesses and some not-for-profit institutions in the community (i.e., Gift of Art, Clarington Older Adults Association, and the Firehouse Youth Centre).

The contribution that the arts and culture make to the vitality and economic growth of any community is being increasingly recognized by our community leaders. This is reflected in the Municipality of Clarington's latest statement of its vision: "Building a sustainable, creative, caring community" and in recent initiatives aimed at understanding the needs of the arts and cultural communities in Clarington. The municipality also celebrated and raised funds for the arts by organizing The Mayor's Gala—For the Love of Art in 2013 and 2014.

The Municipality of Clarington regards the VAC as an important, effective, efficient and valued resource in the community. The municipality continues to provide funding and support as well as seeking advice and involving the VAC in a variety of joint initiatives related to the arts, culture and community development. We expect that the Municipality of Clarington will continue to look to and support arms-length community organizations such as the VAC to provide cultural services to the community.

The VAC actively promotes and supports the broader arts community in Clarington and offers its facilities as a venue for performing, literary and dramatic arts groups. In 2014 the VAC successfully partnered with the municipality, the Rotary Club of Bowmanville and the Orono Fair to get OTF funding for a mobile stage for the community.

# Education Sector

Educational institutions in the Clarington area include the following:

**Public Board**     Elementary: 19     Secondary: 3

**Separate Board**     Elementary: 5     Secondary: 1

**Private**     Elementary: 1     Secondary: 1

**College**     Durham College—Oshawa

**University**     University of Ontario Institute of Technology—Oshawa

School enrolment in Clarington is forecasted to continue to grow over the next few years. Durham College has a School of Fine Arts and a School of Design and Communication Arts. Programming is expanding at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT).

Funding for arts programming in schools has been dramatically cut over the past decade, and the VAC has reached out, especially in the elementary panel, to fill the void. We are pursuing opportunities to expand the VAC's partnerships with the education sector and connect programming with curriculum requirements.



*Art from the High Schools, 2012*



# Strategic Themes, Goals and Initiatives

*Our overall aim is to make the necessary changes to ensure that the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington is positioned for continued success into the future. The following strategic themes, goals and initiatives will provide focus and establish priorities for the next three years.*

## Themes:

Strengthen and adapt our organization

Secure additional sources of funding and support

Upgrade our facilities, infrastructure, systems and processes

Continue to improve our programs and services

# Strengthen and adapt our organization

*We will strengthen and adapt our organization to ensure we have the capacity and capability to continue to successfully fulfill our mission.*

Goals	Specific Initiatives
<p>1. Increase the capacity and capability of our organization to operate <i>and continuously improve</i> in key areas, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR and volunteer management</li> <li>• Fundraising, membership</li> <li>• Facilities and project management</li> <li>• Administration/IT</li> </ul>	<p>1.1. Analyze and resolve workload issues with respect to the ED/curator position</p> <p>1.2. Identify gaps and limitations in the capacity and capability of the current organization</p> <p>1.3. Redesign organizational roles, responsibilities and relationships to fill gaps identified in 1.2 above (full- and part-time staff, board, volunteers, contracted services, committees)</p> <p>1.4. Develop and implement a transition plan for the organization.</p>

# Secure additional sources of funding and support

*We will secure additional funding and build the support required for sustainable growth.*

Goals	Specific Initiatives
<p>2. Tap into new sources of funding from private, public and corporate sources to achieve the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support sustainable increases in our annual operating budget (10% per year)</li><li>• Finance improvements and capital projects</li></ul>	<p>2.1 Develop a fundraising strategy (feasibility, case for support, fundraising goals, plans and priorities)</p> <p>2.2. Successfully implement our fundraising strategy and plans</p>
<p>3. Take advantage of the growth in support that will come from significantly increasing the size and level of engagement of our membership.</p>	<p>3.1. Redefine the nature of VAC membership by doing the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enhance value and benefits provided</li><li>• Develop new membership categories that will attract a broader audience (corporate, lifetime)</li><li>• Adapt to pending legislation re not-for-profit corporations</li></ul> <p>3.2. Establish specific goals, plans, responsibilities and a performance-tracking routine for expanding our membership</p>
<p>4. Maintain the strong, healthy relationships we have built with our stakeholders and community partners.</p>	<p>4.1. Maintain frequent, open communications with MOC, OAC, OTF, Service Canada, Rotary, OPG and other supporters</p> <p>4.2. Prioritize the community outreach activities and special events that we organize, host and attend; concentrate on those that provide best value for the resources we invest</p> <p>4.3. Expand the audiences we reach with our marketing and communication efforts</p>

# Upgrade our facilities, infrastructure, systems and processes

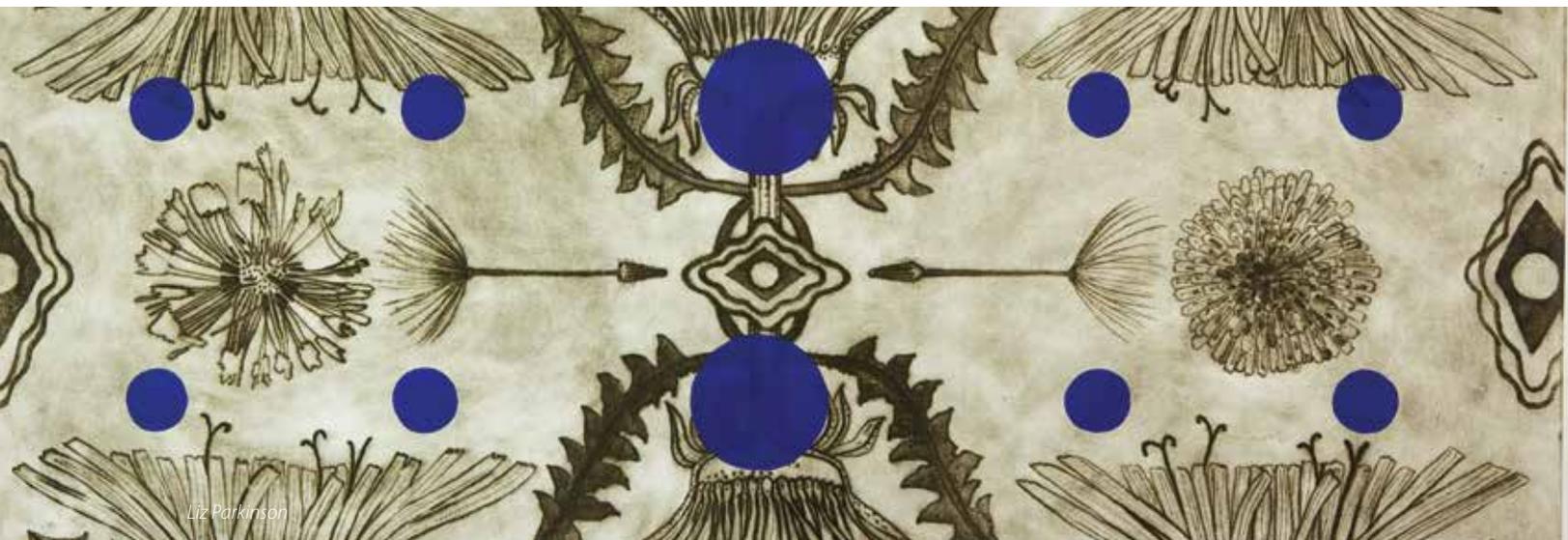
*We will invest in changes that enable us to be more proactive and to work together to deliver programs and services more effectively and efficiently.*

Goals	Specific Initiative
<p>5. Improve the systems and routines we use to lead, plan and manage individual and collective efforts.</p>	<p>5.1. Review and upgrade our corporate policies and procedures</p> <p>5.2. Update our office/administrative systems and practices</p> <p>5.3. Establish better routines for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligning goals, priorities and action plans</li> <li>• Monitoring, evaluating and managing performance</li> </ul>
<p>6. Take full advantage of information technology to enhance our ability to access and share information internally and externally.</p>	<p>6.1. Identify and resolve the issues and limitations of our IT infrastructure (hardware, software, utilization)</p> <p>6.2. Upgrade computer skills of staff and others</p>
<p>7. Fix the chronic problems in our current facilities and elevate the standards to which they are maintained.</p>	<p>7.1. Collaborate with the MOC in addressing the issues and improvements we identified in our 5-year facilities plan</p> <p>7.1. (Re)design our methods of planning and managing the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routine maintenance and repairs</li> <li>• Improvements and capital projects</li> </ul>

# Continue to improve our programs and services

*We will continue to respond to the needs and expectations of the people for whom we provide programs and services.*

Goals	Specific Initiatives
8. Sustain the high quality of our exhibition programming and continue to expand the depth and breadth of its impact.	8.1. Provide more opportunities for emerging artists and post-secondary art students to exhibit  8.2. Increase the number of art talks
9. Utilize our full capacity to deliver high-quality educational programming to the community.	9.1. Target programming for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Youth, seniors</li><li>• Schools, teachers</li><li>• Community groups</li></ul> 9.2. Increase the number of one-day seminars and workshops by visiting/exhibiting professional artists
10. Identify a feasible strategy for establishing and managing a permanent collection.	10.1. Research approaches used by other not-for-profit galleries to establish and manage permanent collections  10.2. Identify, specify and evaluate permanent collection options—what would be collected and why; how it would be collected, stored and shared; what resources would be required, etc.



# Implementation Framework

*This strategic plan maps out our aspirations and intentions and will provide direction and focus as we move forward together. Further work is required to bring it to life.*

The board will oversee the implementation of the plan and work with staff and others to do the following:

- Share the plan with our stakeholders and community partners
- Plan and manage the sequence and priority of the strategic initiatives
- Develop specific mandates, assign responsibility and provide necessary resources for each initiative
- Monitor, evaluate and recognize progress and adjust the plan as necessary

# Strategic Goal Summary

1. Increase the capacity and capability of our organization to operate and continuously improve in key areas.
2. Tap into new sources of funding from private, public and corporate sources.
3. Take advantage of the growth in support that will come from significantly increasing the size and level of engagement of our membership.
4. Maintain the good relationships we have built with our stakeholders and community partners.
5. Improve the systems and routines we use to lead, plan and manage our individual and collective efforts.
6. Take full advantage of information technology to enhance our ability to access and share information internally and externally.
7. Fix the chronic problems in our current facilities and elevate the standards to which they are maintained.
8. Sustain the high quality of our exhibition programming and continue to expand the depth and breadth of its impact.
9. Utilize our full capacity to deliver high-quality educational programming to the community.
10. Identify a feasible strategy for establishing and managing a permanent collection.

***Please contact us if you would like to know more about our plans, programs and services or if you are interested in joining us on our journey as a member or volunteer!***



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The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington is supported by its Membership and Donors, the Municipality of Clarington, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Ontario Arts Council, Canadian Heritage (Young Canada Works) through the Canadian Museums Association and Service Canada (Canada Summer Jobs).





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