

FRANCONIA

sculpture park

Strategic Plan 2014–2018



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INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, Franconia Sculpture Park (Franconia), north of the Twin Cities, has blossomed as a widely known and welcoming regional destination for lovers of art and the outdoors, and as an international destination for sculptors. Staff and artists generate unique high-quality art and there are activities and experiences for artists and visitors of all ages. Franconia provides working spaces that create a sense of community among artists and visitors, advancing the art form and artists at all levels of achievement. It promotes creative excellence and artistic risk-taking. As it approaches its 20th Anniversary in 2016, Franconia continues to be a place of contagious energy and enjoyment. Its hallmarks: highly supportive artist residencies, an expansive exhibition of new three-dimensional artwork, rich arts learning experiences, and diverse cultural programming for all ages, all set in a rural outdoor landscape.

Franconia is unique among sculpture parks nationally with its combination of artist residencies, changing exhibitions, eclectic activities, and rural environs. Artists at all stages of their careers are breaking new ground, taking risks, and creating with others around them.

Franconia is a highly regarded organization and destination, one that contributes to the social, educational, cultural, and economic life in the region. Artists, neighbors, visitors, partners, supporters, and participants enthusiastically affirm the value of Franconia's mission, programs, and direction. Steadfast vision, hard-working staff, and collaborative spirit have brought Franconia to a new level of maturity.

Steady programmatic, budgetary, and audience growth now require new investments in facilities, capacities, and management infrastructure. Staff and facilities are stretched, producing high output with thin resources. New strategies and resources are needed to position staff, board, and artists for growth and to expand Franconia's base of donors and program revenue.

Building on organizational strengths and addressing challenges, this plan calls for strategic and operational focus in five areas:

- I. Deepen current programs.
- II. Build relationships.
- III. Broaden leadership and board capacities.
- IV. Strengthen financial sustainability, organizational management, and administrative capacity.
- V. Launch capital expansion project.

This plan includes a revised statement of mission, vision, values, and over-arching strategies with a set of activities relative for each of the five focus areas. Interwoven is an emphasis on sustaining the balance between supporting working artists and engaging visitors, to maintain the shared creative experience that defines Franconia's valued character.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

History

Franconia Sculpture Park was founded in 1996 by a small group of visionary artists who established a community where artists provided the space, assistance, and resources to create and exhibit large-scale sculpture. Franconia has grown into a vibrant artist residency and professional arts organization that has supported 735 national and international artists, and now attracts tens of thousands of visitors annually.

Core Programs

Franconia has programmatic focus in three areas: **Artist Development, Arts Learning, and Arts Access**. The artist residency offers emerging and mid-career artists the opportunity to create large-scale sculpture, develop their artistic practice, and connect to an international network of artists. Franconia provides a free and accessible, continually changing, exhibition of more than 105 contemporary sculptures experienced by 60,000 visitors each year. Thousands of community members of all ages participate in Franconia's arts learning programs annually.

Artist Development

With an “open-air sculpture laboratory” in a rural environment, free from the constraints of traditional venues, the residency program supports artistic experimentation through projects that are adventurous in the use of materials or structure, make innovative use of technology, and/or offer fresh perspectives. Artists engage with the public as they create new work and present their work in public symposia. The community-building aspect of the residency program provides artists with a professional network that sparks future projects and collaborations, propels academic opportunities, and provides meaningful peer feedback.

Arts Learning

Through public programming, Franconia creates the rare opportunity for visitors to engage with and learn directly from professional artists-in-residence. This dynamic exchange between artists and the public fosters deep experiential learning in the arts. Franconia offers a robust suite of arts learning activities and cultural programming that serve all ages including: guided tours of the 30-acre sculpture exhibition, artist symposia, art-making workshops, metal pour demonstrations, customized learning programs for at-risk youth and underserved rural youth, and an annual music and performing arts series.

Arts Access

More than 100 sculptures are on exhibition, every day of the year, for free. The Park serves 60,000-plus visitors annually with accessible art in an inspiring, unintimidating environment, conveniently located in a high-visibility, heavily trafficked area of rural Minnesota. By fostering the creation of new artwork, infusing art into the landscape, supporting 40 artists each year, and providing extensive arts and cultural programming to the public, Franconia ensures that people of all ages, ethnicities, and abilities have opportunities to participate in the arts.

MISSION, VISION, VALUES

Mission

To provide physically and intellectually wide-open spaces where all are inspired to participate in the creative process.

Vision

Franconia Sculpture Park was founded to provide artists a supportive community, unfettered and expansive space, and the assistance and funding necessary to create and exhibit three-dimensional artwork. Today, this vision includes supporting a community of both artists and visitors, where outdoor sculpture doubles as backdrop for a variety of artistic and community activities. We envision a place unlike any other: where artists may get fresh perspectives on their work during informal conversation; where a visitor may learn the context for an artwork directly from its creator; and where there are numerous opportunities for these kinds of spontaneous connections to happen in a welcoming and wide-open environment. The spark of these connections fosters deep engagement in our programs by artists and audiences alike – and adds to the vibrancy and quality of life of surrounding communities. Interactions among artist, artwork, and audience transform into a greater awareness of the world we live in, build understanding for diverse perspectives, and inspire creativity.

Values

- Access for All
Participation in arts, culture, and the creative process are essential aspects of community life and human development, and should be available to all.
- Creative Ambition and Risk-taking
Healthy individuals and communities endeavor to create, invent, and support each other in exercising imagination.
- Integrity and Excellence
Striving to achieve quality and sincerity in all actions, interactions, and transactions promotes sustainable, respectful communities.
- Collaboration
Collective effort rooted in mutual respect brings about greater achievement and produces joy in the process.
- Infectious Energy
Appreciation and celebration of creative expression attracts and amplifies aspirations.
- Balance
Perspective that considers and includes the contributions and interests of all maintains healthy and successful communities.

SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

I. Deepen Current Programs

Articulate and assess core programs to more fully achieve the mission. Strengthen and enhance the effectiveness and value of what is offered to better serve artists and audiences. Expanding programs in the short term is not a priority—nor is there physical or staff capacity to do so. Quality, sustainable programs already are in need of new space and management resources. If programs are meeting needs and well-managed, they will grow further as capacity permits.

II. Build Relationships

Develop and foster relationships and networks within the public and private sectors. These include networks among artists, funders, educators, etc.; in the arts, education, cultural, community, and economic sectors; at local, regional, national, and international levels. Such relationships built around the joy and positive energy of Franconia will sustain and propel the organization's work.

III. Broaden Leadership and Board Capacities

Expand the breadth and depth of leadership in both board and staff capacities to support sustainable growth. This includes board members stepping into stronger leadership, governance, and fundraising roles; executive leadership focusing on field leadership, fundraising, and long-term park and program development; and staff sharing greater responsibilities and taking initiative. A focus on individuals' strengths and skills will create a progressive and enjoyable work environment to generate the strongest results.

IV. Strengthen Financial Stability, Organizational Management, and Administrative Capacity

Improve Franconia's balance sheet through continued disciplined management, retirement of debt, and diversification of the funding base. Careful annual planning, assessment, evaluation, and budgeting can bring greater operational stability. Investments in technology and equipment along with the time to formalize policies and procedures will build administrative capacity and strengthen organizational management.

V. Launch Capital Expansion Project

Plan, prepare, and launch a multi-year campaign to develop the recent property acquisition. This adds year-round facilities for visitors, artists-in-residence, community programs, and administrative space. Doubling the size of the park's land presents a remarkable opportunity—and a challenge that must be carefully addressed through thoughtful planning, appropriate capitalization, and responsible use of the land.

FOCUS AREA I: Deepen Current Programs

Strengthen and enhance the effectiveness and value of programs offered to better serve artists and audiences. Build on the commitment to excellence, creative risk-taking, and ambitious collaboration in all programs and opportunities for visitors and artists. This includes activities such as artist dialogues, hands-on workshops, special events, and daily interactions. Recognize demographic variations and the different needs for Franconia’s constituencies. For example, a core program such as Kids Make Sculpture, while successfully attracting participation, will be assessed and adjusted as needed to best serve its constituency. As a result, these relationships with schools and families will be deepened and curriculum fine-tuned to create more meaningful and lasting impacts.

Operating Strategy/Underlying Assumption

Recognize and maintain the critical balance between activities and resources that support working artists and those that accommodate and engage visitors. An almost magical balance exists that remains a source of strength and energy. Expanding programs is not presently a priority – until there is physical and staff capacity to do so. Quality, sustainable programs are already in need of new space and management resources. A focus on program quality and impact will bring about long-term, sustainable.

GOAL: Enhance effectiveness and value of core programs for constituents through assessment, articulation, and strengthening programs.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Improve arts learning programming through well-defined and enhanced curricula; assess and evaluate the impact of programs.
- Elevate live and virtual visitor experiences through improved communication and interaction, whether visitors are attending a concert or symposium, participating in a workshop or artist lecture, or simply touring the exhibition.
- Professionalize the artist residency and exhibition programs at both the Park and the Northeast Minneapolis facility, beginning with participation in curatorial practices to select artists and determine artistic content for fellowships, residencies and commissions.
- Evolve programming parameters (artist and public) to be inclusive of surrounding communities when appropriate.

Vision of Success

Each core program: • Makes a defined contribution to the mission. • Has a clearly articulated set of outcomes and evaluation method. • Attracts and generates dedicated sources of revenue. • Serves a clearly defined community need. • Generates a “return” to Franconia.

FOCUS AREA II: Build Relationships

Develop and foster relationships and networks within the public and private sectors. These include networks among artists, funders, and educators; in the arts, educational, cultural, community and economic sectors; at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Franconia has earned an outstanding reputation locally, regionally, and nationally as an artist-centered organization that fills a unique and critical role. Franconia has gained considerable affection among local, regional, and national constituents for its ability to educate, illuminate, and amuse. Franconia is the most valuable resource for sculptors in the Upper Midwest, and it has many relationships on which to build.

Operational Strategy/Underlying Assumption

The most sustainable and supportive organizational relationships are not binary but webbed. For Franconia, that means a web or network of relationships among those Franconia brings together. These relationships are essential to sustain and grow the organization. Ongoing efforts to reach, serve, engage, and maintain relationships with diverse communities are central to Franconia's success.

GOAL: Leverage resources that strengthen programs, presence, and capacities by building strategic relationships with key partners, networks, organizations, and individuals.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Engage Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers in focused and ongoing efforts to build new and maintain existing relationships with partners and donors.
- Build a stronger presence among peers within the arts sector in the Upper Midwest and nationally.
- Establish more active and deeper partnerships with individuals, communities, and organizations within Twin Cities, St. Croix Valley, and East Central Minnesota communities.
- Build and formalize a year-round volunteer program.
- Invest in administrative and technological systems, along with personnel and communications strategies to capture and nurture lasting relationships with constituents, including visitors, volunteers, donors, artists, partners, and others.

Vision of Success

• Franconia is host to a wider audience year-round. • Constituency and base of supporters keeps increasing. • Recognized as a vital resource for artists, a leading artist residency, and innovative three-dimensional exhibition venue nationally and internationally. • Valued as an active contributor to community development, economic activity, and cultural vibrancy of the region. • All internal stakeholders are actively engaged in building relationships with partners, visitors, and donors.

FOCUS AREA III: Broaden Leadership and Board Capacities

Expand breadth and depth of leadership in both board and staff capacities to support sustainable growth. This includes board members stepping into stronger leadership, governance, and fundraising roles; executive leadership focusing on field leadership, fundraising, and long-term program development; and staff sharing greater responsibilities and taking initiative. Franconia has made considerable progress in building a capable and dedicated staff. Greater shared responsibility and knowledge among staff will build a leadership team able to engage in thoughtful planning and strong daily management.

Operational Strategy/Underlying Assumption

Enabling all staff to grow and thrive – and to build on their strengths – will produce greater energy and fulfillment. The organization’s founder, well known nationally and key to its success, needs the opportunity now to divest more of his day-to-day responsibilities to focus on broad strategies for artistic development, fundraising, and resource development. The board must be a full partner and expand its membership to steward the organization for the long-term.

GOAL: Support sustainable growth by expanding the breadth and depth of leadership in both board and staff capacities.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Further develop members of the Board of Directors as active generators of support in the form of financial resources, advocacy, networking, and professional expertise.
- Develop an annual planning, assessment, and evaluation process for programs, resource allocation, and communications, using a shared direction-setting and decision-making model integrated with the annual budgeting process.
- Expand staff leadership capacity and increase employee retention by investing in professional development, field training, and networking opportunities.
- Have Artistic Director increase focus on field leadership, fundraising, and long-term programmatic development.

Vision of Success

• Members of the Board of Directors are full partners in generating support in the form of financial resources, advocacy, networking, and professional expertise. • Shared decision-making process, annual planning, and assessment sync up with the annual budgeting process. • Leadership staff attend regional/national conferences, participate in field training, engage in professional networking, and implement best practices. • Artistic Director cultivates and stewards major donors and funders and is deeply involved in field leadership at a national level.

FOCUS AREA IV: Strengthen Financial Stability, Organizational Management, and Administrative Capacity

Improving Franconia’s balance sheet through continued disciplined financial management, retirement of debt, and diversification of the funding base is an ongoing priority. Careful annual planning and new programmatic partners can bring greater operational stability. Building the staff through strategic hiring and training will strengthen and improve program quality and delivery.

Organizational Strategy/Underlying Assumption

Taking care of business is the bottom line for any successful organization striving to serve its community over the long term. The positive momentum already achieved must be maintained. A growing organization recognizes the need for ever-maturing management practices and systems.

GOAL: Increase operational effectiveness and sustainability through strong financial and organizational management and administrative capacity.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Develop a program-based annual budgeting process with staff participation and board oversight, informed by the leadership team’s annual planning/assessment/evaluation process.
- Strengthen financial stability by continuing to operate in the black, build cash reserves, retire debt, and plan for long-term depreciation in annual budgeting.
- Attract and retain professional staff through fulfilling work, improved compensation and benefits, and formal human resource policies and procedures.
- Broaden and diversify revenue through public and private support for mission-driven activities, programming, and general operations including mission-related earned income opportunities.
- Build administrative capacity through investments in technology, equipment, and training.

Vision of Success

• Annual operating surpluses are directed to reserves and to strategic opportunities to ensure long-term stability. • Professional staff members are retained through fulfilling work and a competitive compensation and benefits package. • Policies and procedures are current and easily accessible. • Investments in technological infrastructure continually adapt to support operations and programming. • Programming and general operations are funded through a diverse revenue portfolio. • Franconia operates on program-based budgets.

FOCUS AREA V: Launch Capital Expansion Project

In 2012, Franconia acquired 23 acres of land adjacent to its current 20-acre home. The total site now encompasses a contiguous 43-acre parcel. Doubling the site size of the Park presents a remarkable opportunity—and a challenge. Building on artistic, visitor, and financial successes, while also leveraging the upcoming 20th Anniversary, Franconia is ready to assemble the capital to better serve its current programs and grow thoughtfully into its newly expanded property.

The capital project will improve and expand Franconia's site, providing facilities and infrastructure required to enhance capacity to strengthen programming. The multi-year project includes construction of new facilities, including a multi-use community learning center, indoor artist workshop and studio space, and information center and administrative offices. In keeping with the nature of the artist-driven and rural nature of the Park, expansion plans will be simple, functional, appropriately scaled, and modestly built, using skilled planning and design assistance.

Operating Strategy/Underlying Assumption

Continuing development of institutional capacities, as described elsewhere in this plan, *before and during* the capital project. These include:

- Building board and staff leadership to allow time for a capital initiative without debilitating current programming.
- Expanding internal fundraising capacities, systems, and technology.
- Developing detailed financial projections to maintain operational sustainability.

GOAL: To assure long-term stability, quality programs and continued visitor growth through the planning, preparation, and launch of a site expansion and multi-year capital fundraising campaign.

KEY STRATEGIES:

- Plan, prepare, and launch a multi-year capital fundraising campaign.
- Commission a comprehensive site plan for the park's entire 43 acres that integrates new and existing facilities, taking into account the natural terrain, visitor experience, and best presentation of artwork.
- Use sustainable design to develop the expanded site and construct three indoor facilities.
- Prioritize debt retirement to achieve a stronger long-term position and relieve the operating budget of interest expense.

Vision of Success • A well-formed site plan with appropriate facilities serves the needs of current programming with space to accommodate growth. • Campaign attracts sufficient capital to meet established goals, expands donor base, and increases contributions to annual fundraising. • Thoughtful development of land acquisition and construction of facilities complements existing structures and program needs.

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSETS

The organization has substantial assets to build upon, not the least of which are its visionary and hard-working staff and board. Most notable is its positive reputation among artists, interns, art students, and others who have created work and been in residence at the park. These passionately loyal “alumni” have founded other sculpture parks, moved into academic positions, and achieved significant status as artists. Visitors, too, represent a growing group of supporters. An almost universal attraction to the quirky environment and eclectic nature of the art work in this rural setting has captured the imagination and curiosity of people of all ages and walks of life. The park is particularly attractive to young people because of this quirky nature, its interactivity, and the visible and palpable sense of expressive freedom.

Initially an “outpost” for Twin Cities artists and art lovers, Franconia has sparked increased interest among, and gained increasing support from, its Central Minnesota and St. Croix Valley neighbors. This includes schools, recreational businesses, civic leaders, artists, outdoor enthusiasts, and others. Institutional as well as individual donors have invested significantly in the park, and educational institutions with interest in sculpture find it a substantive resource for practical and theoretical learning opportunities. The park’s location is also a major asset. It sits at the intersection of two important state highways, near and en-route to a variety of rural recreational attractions an hour or less from the heart of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

The park’s reputation is built on a foundation of multiple core competencies. These include nurturing artists working in a wide variety of three-dimensional forms, fabricating and siting large-scale sculpture, maintaining a welcoming outdoor environment enjoyed by both artists and visitors, and producing events ranging from participatory iron pouring to music, biking, and recreational cross-over events. Leadership works hard and intuitively to build positive relationships on many levels with neighboring communities, arts organizations, and similar sculpture parks nationally. Through interviews, focus groups and meetings for this planning process, the following positive characteristics of the park were expressed and reinforced.

- Contagious energy—everyone enjoying themselves.
- Organized chaos—delicate balance, feels organic, light on rules, unbridled.
- Unique place and unique work—not precious or pretentious.
- Engages mind and body—work is intellectual and muscular, ambitious.
- Working artists on site—evolving and changing work.
- Art in the outdoors/art and the outdoors—connecting art and nature.
- Big gestures—enabling bold new thinking.
- Both a place and a space—a destination and an open opportunity.
- Interactivity—with visitors, with the work, with artists, with each other.
- Welcoming—no pressure, open and free, not just for artists.
- Nurturing for artists—about art, life, community, and sharing.
- Career and project support—recognition and networking for artists.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES

Franconia's challenges are not unusual in the evolution of a nonprofit, mission-driven enterprise. The relationships among a maturing Board of Directors, a hard-driving founder/director, and talented, dedicated staff require clarity, mutual trust, and institutional balance. While a collective vision was not difficult to achieve, moving operational responsibilities and authority to another level of a growing organization requires focused and sustained effort.

There are few models for outdoor sculpture parks that have achieved a broad base of community and philanthropic support. Franconia is, in many ways, further advanced in this regard than its peers. In the most common model, a major benefactor bequeathed significant financial, land, and art—and frequently retains control of the operating budget and/or real estate.

Franconia is unique in the region and nation, and appears as a highly unusual entity to people who live nearby as well as those who pass through. Potential allies and funding sources in land conservation and environmental stewardship are also strangers to the park, with nominal or non-existent bridges between those worlds. Under-capitalization, a dearth of operating support, and elusive earned income opportunities (very typical in the visual arts) make adequate management staffing hard to sustain. In turn, this makes much-needed relationship-building and resource development labor-intensive and slow.

CONCLUSION

Franconia Sculpture Park is poised to enter a new phase of its existence. Well loved and increasingly well known, Franconia stands out as somewhat of an anomaly among the array of arts organizations in the Greater Twin Cities Metro Area. Rural-based yet internationally connected, Franconia has developed relationships that could serve it well in the future. Undercapitalized, yet highly productive, the park is positioned to achieve substantive benefit to its overall physical functionality with a relatively modest capital investment. Highly spirited yet determined to evolve organizationally, Franconia leadership has recognized, acknowledged, and embraced the challenges it faces.

Remarkably consistent organizational consensus is shared among Franconia's constituent groups, as evidenced through this strategic planning process. Board, staff, artists and a strong circle of supporters, along with the consultants who have assisted with the creation of this plan, hold high hopes for the future of the park and are optimistic for its prospects in achieving the goals we've identified.

PLANNING METHODOLOGY

The Board of Directors of Franconia identified the need and committed funding to develop a strategic plan during the second half of 2013. They engaged Tom Borrup of Creative Community Builders who, in 2007 with George Sutton of Sutton + Associates, developed a 2008-2012 strategic plan for Franconia.

The consultant approached planning by first assessing existing assets of the organization and ascertaining its corporate values and unique character. An in-depth survey of six other sculpture parks in the United States was presented to the Board of Directors and staff to expand understanding of the enterprise and its context. Extensive interviews and focus groups engaged key constituent groups. Together with ongoing consultation of staff and board members, the vision and mission for the park's future and for its organizational infrastructure were established. Assets, values, and aspirations were examined in relation to challenges identified throughout the process. Strategies were formed to build on strengths that can be leveraged to move the organization towards its vision and to overcome its challenges.

Meeting with the Board of Directors on five occasions, staff and consultants provided updates and sought formal approval of the plan's building blocks. With extensive input of staff, step-by-step work plans for each of the strategies were constructed.

Consultants found considerable enthusiasm from all stakeholder groups for the work and for possible futures for the park. It can fairly be said that the founders' vision, hard work, and multiple program activities—although many are underdeveloped or under-resourced—have set the stage for growing the park well into the future. While there was some push and pull between Twin Cities artists, art aficionados, and the park's neighboring communities, the tension is a healthy one. All see the park as "theirs." Multiple stakeholders feel it serves their interests—and want it to do more. These challenges were synthesized into a plan that prioritizes building outward from core strengths while calling on resources from a growing range of programmatic and geographic sources.



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