

INTRODUCTION

The Staff and Board of BlackRock Center for the Arts began work on the Strategic Plan in the winter of 2024. Continued collaborative sessions throughout the year culminated in a 4-5 year Strategic Plan for launch in 2025. Accompanying the Plan will be an Implementation Timeline resource template to (1) ensure accountability of operationalization in alignment with the established goals and (2) center a responsive and flexible document that will guide reflections for the organization every six months.

To begin, a Think Tank working group was established for shared accountability of the process and the inclusion of diverse perspectives at all benchmarks. The Think Tank, comprised of 15 Staff and Board members, agreed upon the Collaborative Process Framework* to guide the work, resulting in a commitment to hearing and valuing community voices and contributions and intentionally moving the process beyond established leadership. To provide a strong foundation and framing for the collaborative sessions, Strategic Community Gatherings** were held in three tiers of equitable engagement from May 2024 through August 2024 across the Germantown region in Montgomery County to center community engagement and ideation in the planning process.

BlackRock collaborated with The Leadership Institute for Compassionate Changemaking to engage partners for feedback and guide the process of formalizing the Strategic Plan. An external facilitator led sessions that fostered the creation and elevation of all aspects of the Plan to highlight (1) the role of public service in the arts and community engagement, (2) equity embedded throughout the process and product, solidifying commitment to anti-racism, and (3) continued and celebrated sustainability. For this work, community was defined as a group of people coming together with a shared purpose or identifier(s). Often, specific groups (i.e. based on geography and/or demographics) were a part of the discussion further defining the specifics of community in order to clarify intention and decision-making in the process.

Within the Plan that follows, BlackRock clarifies:

- Vision and Purpose,
- Organizational Values,
- 3 Overarching Goals,
- Objectives to support the overarching goals, and
- Strategies to achieve the objectives.

The process of formalizing the Plan, in collaboration with The Institute, centered creative and collaborative processes, heart-centered exchange, a commitment to practicing equity, and humanness as a model for being. By creating a space to hear and honor participants, both verbally and electronically, with purposeful processing time, the celebrations of BlackRock were uplifted to serve as the foundation for the ambitious and impactful Plan.

**The Collaborative Process Framework was developed by The Leadership Institute for Compassionate Changemaking.*

***Strategic Community Gatherings Report attached as an addendum.*

PURPOSE

BlackRock envisions an accessible and inclusive community anchor for creative expression, cultural exchange, and belonging, where artistic growth thrives.

BlackRock:

- Celebrates the diversity of Upper Montgomery County, Germantown, and the surrounding areas through arts and culture,
- Nurtures and builds artistic, cultural, and educational experiences,
- Elevates historically excluded people and art, and
- Dismantles systemic barriers.

VALUES

Trust

We are committed to building trust and holding ourselves accountable to the community and to each other.

Equity

BlackRock strives to make art accessible and welcoming to populations systemically oppressed in our community. We believe that the ability to participate in and express oneself through art is a right for everyone.

Curiosity

We are committed to embracing inquiry as we learn and live the creative process.

Community

Elevating the soul through community, intention, and inclusivity can impact each individual, improving our society and our world.

STATEMENT OF EQUITY

We recognize that arts and cultural institutions, [historically and presently](#), exclude people from marginalized racial, religious, and gender backgrounds through various systemic practices and biases such as:

- Centering of white and Eurocentric narratives,
- Inequitable access to resources,
- Rewarding gatekeeping practices,
- Cultural appropriation and harmful stereotypes over appreciation, and
- Policies and barriers that perpetuate exclusion and inequity.

We seek to disrupt these practices at BlackRock through a commitment to:

- Intentionally centering artistic and cultural work of historically marginalized communities through programming and community engagement,
- Assessing inequities within BlackRock Center for the Arts and taking action to address them,
- Shifting power dynamics within BlackRock by recruiting marginalized representation to take leadership roles in curating exhibitions, directing projects, and creating programming that highlights their experiences and perspectives,
- Practicing intersectional approaches in artistic and cultural programming to create a fuller understanding of how identities shape experiences and inform representation in arts and culture,
- Providing platforms for education and discussion surrounding the histories and contributions of historically oppressed groups, and
- Prioritizing the allocation of resources and funding for projects that center marginalized stories and experiences.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We believe that acknowledging Indigenous erasure and working to truthfully acknowledge tribal histories is critical to our Mission as a cultural arts center committed to spotlighting historically excluded people, art, and culture.

We acknowledge that the Piscataway and Susquehannock tribes continue to maintain relationships with the land where BlackRock is today, present-day Germantown, and have stewarded this land for generations. We recognize their kinship to these lands and waters and that we are uninvited visitors to Indigenous lands.

We recognize that European colonialism forcibly removed Indigenous people from the land on which BlackRock sits. European settlers destroyed their lands, narratives, and history in Montgomery County, which was once hunting grounds for the Piscataway and the Susquehannock tribes.

Subsequently, as a start, we commit to:

- Learn about local tribal histories and tribal leaders in the area,
- Intentionally allocate human capital to local tribes based on what we learn from conversations, and
- Prioritize the cultural needs of tribal leaders in Germantown.

GOAL 1

Solidify financial sustainability in alignment with the organization's Purpose.

- Expand funding requests to include culture, community, and creativity in alignment with the organization's purpose.
 - Identify revenue opportunities that fund civic responsibilities in Germantown.
 - Inventory current contributed revenue and intentionally expand the reach beyond arts to include culture, community, and/or creativity.
 - Nurture relationships with new funding partners that align with the organization's purpose.
- Increase earned income opportunities currently at capacity, such as classes, educational engagements, and camps.
 - Intentionally engage with the community to determine programmatic focus areas and needs.
 - Engage with organizations, groups, and artists who are already doing work that is in alignment with the organization's purpose.
 - Research fiscally successful models in this type of work (e.g., free theater, Deb's piano lesson, etc.).
 - Reallocate more instructional space for educational offerings.
 - Explore class and workshop additions that could be one-time, drop-in, or monthly.
- Investigate return on engagement opportunities with folks currently involved.
 - Identify opportunities to enhance connections with attendees before, during, and after events.
 - Include organic connections to other programs once a ticket or class is purchased.
 - Establish intentional communication following engagement.
 - Establish procedures throughout departments to track return on engagement.
- Increase the transparency and availability of financial and in-kind contributions to build community support.
 - Explore possibilities for a collective or cooperative model to contribute shared resources.
 - Demystify the donation process and the myth that only large donations matter.
 - Establish specific donation drives with intentionality (e.g., sound system light board).
 - Provide opportunities for people to offer alternative donations such as time, resources, or a direct ask (such as art supplies).
 - Reduce recurring costs by encouraging partner organizations to donate reusable resources.
 - Publish specific numbers of donations anonymously (e.g., 30 people donated \$10 to \$50).
- Invest in marketing to increase community, corporate, and philanthropic support.
 - Center a marketing framework around community outreach.
 - Increase awareness in areas geographically close to BlackRock.
 - Expand the marketing team to meet identified goals.
 - Investigate word-of-mouth marketing as a means to connect to new audiences.

- Tell the story of the depth and impact of BlackRock’s programming.
- Establish a campaign centering on community collaboration.

GOAL 2

Engage the community to bring their visions into BlackRock.

- Create a cultural exchange series to support community groups in creative endeavors.
 - Prioritize impact and equity as outcomes in implementation.
 - Identify local organizations doing creative work and seek ongoing feedback.
 - Create accessible opportunities for resource sharing, such as a partnership portal.
 - Develop a tiered, cost-accessible pricing structure for venue rentals tailored to for-profit organizations, nonprofits, grassroots groups, and individual artists.
 - Engage with the community to develop and support more community-driven initiatives and events.
 - Provide a cost-accessible venue for organizations without an established permanent space.
- Establish multiple avenues for the community to collaborate with BlackRock.
 - Identify community collectives and organizations to connect with diverse abilities, religions, ethnicities, and class positions.
 - Meet with identified collectives and organizations to listen, learn, and share.
 - Ensure that immuno-compromised individuals are considered in accessibility planning.
 - Think outside of the box to remove cost as a barrier to participation.
- Distinguish how the gallery and performance spaces can be best utilized to uplift the community’s visions.
 - Connect gallery and performance space to programming, such as inviting local featured artists to teach classes and host workshops.
 - Expand the definition of artistic and cultural expression regarding the use of the gallery and theater.
 - Use gallery and theater programming gaps as opportunities to hold free space for creatives.
 - Develop a plan for sharing space and resources that encourage autonomy and responsible use without requiring too much oversight from BlackRock.
- Evaluate which programs the community desires and discontinue efforts that do not show a return on investment, are inequitable, and are duplicative.
 - Discuss the community needs/desires for curated art (for them, rather than by them), including presented works.
 - Analyze patron service hours to maximize investment.
 - Evaluate which programs uphold a frame of Euro-centric “professionalism” and disrupt that work.
 - Increase the number of joy-focused events to attract larger audiences and boost community engagement.
- Prioritize multicultural festivals in programming.

- Conduct research to solidify a 3-year commitment to a lineup of annual festivals and determine the outcomes for each festival that align with the organization's purpose.
- Identify community members to guide festival curation.
- Intentionally include the community in designing an event from beginning to end.
- Build intentionality in planning and debriefing discussions.
- Establish and grow partnerships with organizations that are doing this work well.
- Establish a community board of representatives of critical cultural stakeholders to ensure equitable and community-led decision-making.
- Redefine BlackRock's outside space to offer what the community envisions.
 - Engage in a community-driven public art design and installation process.
 - Redesign entrance spaces to welcome the community.
 - Curate the lawn to attract community members into the space.
 - Intentionally collaborate with the unhoused community.
- Recognize BlackRock's space as its primary asset and share it openly with the community.
 - Explore how staff can take on "teacher" roles, connecting community members with the space.
 - Open the space to non-arts gatherings.
 - Establish targeted open houses for communities and schools.
 - Consider affordable artist housing above the parking lot.

GOAL 3

Broaden community connections to elevate a sense of belonging.

- Establish multiple pathways and entry points for ongoing feedback.
 - Identify events in the community for BlackRock's presence.
 - Organize mutually beneficial town hall gatherings to collect data from the community.
 - Establish compensated focus groups to improve BlackRock's presence and cyclical programming.
 - Create an accessible, consistent feedback loop, such as a suggestion box, and regularly reply to foster trust.
 - Gather and analyze all current data to drive programming.
- Increase BlackRock's representation to better reflect the diversity of the communities it serves.
 - Increase Board representation to include intersectionalities of historically excluded communities and artists.
 - Establish intentional procedures and connections to ensure the participation of diverse community collaborators and audiences.
 - Identify artists of various artistic disciplines to serve on the Board.
- Deepen relationships with identified community groups to foster belonging.
 - Highlight BlackRock as a haven for young people.
 - Promote BlackRock as a go-to spot for the community to congregate.

- Increase transparency around the organization's operations, such as decision-making, with the community.
- Explore opportunities to bring BlackRock or supported community programming out of the space.
- Identify and invite groups with a logical nexus to specific programming curated for and with them.
- Seek creative collaborations with partner organizations.
 - Explore profit sharing with venues without a permanent space.
 - Collaborate with conference planners for multi-day events.
 - Intentionally spend locally to increase mutual benefits and collaboration.
 - Establish formal, mutually beneficial, partnerships with current partner organizations.
 - Seek out unknown partnerships.
- Enhance community trust.
 - Establish avenues for impactful and honest connection with each group in the community.
 - Attend more local and community-based artist exhibitions, performances, and programs and events to build relationships and foster connections.
 - Volunteer at local events to build rapport.
 - Discuss and confirm approaches to communities who have not felt welcomed.