



THE VERA
PROJECT

BUSINESS
PLAN

2009

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION/MISSION VISION VALUES..... 2

THE VERA PROJECT MARKET ANALYSIS..... 4

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN 10

FUNDRAISING..... 12

OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT..... 15

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) 19

PLANNING AND EVALUATION..... 20

BUDGET 21

SPECIAL THANKS..... 22

INTRODUCTION/MISSION VISION VALUES

As the Vera Project approaches its 10th anniversary, it seems prudent to create a new Business Plan to help guide the organization through the coming years. After having four homes in seven years, Vera has finally built and settled into its permanent home and participation is increasing rapidly. This Business Plan will contribute to Vera's robust future.

This Business Plan provides a framework for the implementation of the goals identified in our strategic plan. It is our hope that this plan will permit us to efficiently and effectively utilize our resources, especially in these tough economic times, and will be a tool that will help us stay on mission as we pursue our goals. That said, this plan is not designed to be the final word, but instead to be a jumping off point to help guide decisions as particular issues and opportunities arise.

This plan reiterates our mission, vision and values, analyzes the current all-ages "market" then attempts to identify Vera's unique position and advantages in that market. That analysis then informs our (1) communications plans, (2) fundraising focus, (3) governance structure and (4) IT infrastructure plans. Some of the highlights of these plans include communicating Vera's unique power-sharing structure to the world, focusing on individual giving, expanding the interactions between the board and members, and developing IT infrastructure to support all of these plans.

One of the central themes of the strategic plan is that Vera is moving beyond its inward focus (designed to find it an ongoing home and a performance space) to an outward focus (engagement, outreach, activism). This business plan provides guideposts to allow us to attain that shift in focus while staying true to our mission, vision, and values. This is not a static document and can be modified to adapt to the needs of the organization over time.

MISSION

The Vera Project fosters a participatory creative culture through popular music concerts, arts programs, experiential learning and volunteer opportunities for all ages, especially young people.

VISION

The Vera Project envisions a truly participatory all-ages music and arts community. Vera fundamentally believes that popular music is a vital force, and that young people and adults have the ability and right to shape their culture. Vera produces the consistent all-ages concerts necessary for a healthy arts community. Vera uses the concept of all-ages to create paths towards learning and power-sharing between youth and adults, towards a positive attitude to youth culture, and towards a vibrant and progressive community.

This vision translates to music and arts presentation, education and engagement programming driven collaboratively by Vera's youth-led Membership, volunteers, staff and Board of Directors. Programming blends the energy, talent and resourcefulness of Vera's participants with the expertise of some of Seattle's most experienced community leaders. Vera promotes artistic experimentation and excellence in a professional setting, leveraging industry-standard technology to showcase music and arts. Vera's innovative participatory structure gives constituents – particularly youth – the means to not only enjoy music and art, but also to participate in arts production, administration and non-profit governance. The creative and professional skills participants gain at Vera activate future creativity, careers and leadership within Vera and in the greater community.

Vera is at the forefront of trends in popular music, arts and youth culture, encouraging civic participation to protect the interests of those cultures. Vera learns from and shares experience with similar local, national and international programs; seeks to make its model open, accessible and understandable; and is a friend and collaborator to like-minded artists, individuals and organizations.

Vera is an acronym for the Latin "Veri et Recti Amici", meaning true and sincere friends. Vera is intentional about creating a safe, alcohol and smoke-free space where people of different ages, ethnicities, cultures, ideologies, sexual identities, musical tastes, and economic backgrounds come together and experience music

and art in a way that transcends commercial entertainment and builds community. Vera participants become true and sincere friends.

VALUES

- We value participation in music and art to bring people together and to encourage creative and personal expression and development.
- We value the contribution that young people make to popular music and art.
- We value all-ages, cross-generational skill sharing and power sharing.
- We value volunteerism as a powerful aspect of community building.
- We value the power of learning new skills to enhance personal growth, civic engagement, and political activism.
- We value collaboration with individuals and organizations that share our goals.
- We value cultural independence and artistic experimentation.
- We value responsiveness to current arts trends, youth culture, and community input.
- We value being open and inviting to all those who wish to attend and participate in a safe, drug and alcohol-free environment.
- We value organizational transparency.

THE VERA PROJECT MARKET ANALYSIS

This marketing analysis looks at who Vera's audience is and where Vera fits in the current arts, music and youth engagement scene. As such, this analysis reports youth demographics in the Seattle region and at Vera, regional economy and its impact on the arts, trends and issues around all-ages music, art and activism, and highlights some youth and arts programs in the region.

Youth in Seattle and at the Vera Project

The Vera Project aims to serve all music and arts enthusiasts, with the focused intention to actively engage Seattle's youth ages 14 to 24 in participating and producing music and arts. Vera offers specific programs, workshops, and governance opportunities designed for these audiences.

Vera's audiences have been increasing since it opened the Seattle Center venue with increased participation in all sectors: audience size, number of musicians and artists showing, volunteers, Members, participants in music festivals and participants in workshops and conferences. In 2009 to date, over 50,000 people have been served by Vera's programs, including 220 volunteers, and 67 youth members who help guide the organization.

Based on observation at the venue, demographics vary depending on the music or program presented. The following statistics are based on Vera's 2008 email survey of member, supporters, and community members:

More than 59% of Vera's audiences and volunteers are between the ages of 14 and 24. Racial and ethnic background is roughly reflective of the population of King County with people of color counting for 30.2% of the audience (King County demographics report 73.1% white, Vera survey reports 69.8% white).

59.6% of survey respondents were from Seattle proper, 18.8% from surrounding cities in King County, and 21.5% from outside King County. Of the respondents, the majority attend 5-10 concerts a month, 3-5 of which are Vera Project events. 66% of respondents identify themselves as musicians. Over 50% of the respondents drove to Vera events, 25% took the bus and 15% came by bike.

Between 2000 and 2009 the population of the City of Seattle grew by 6.9% to 602,000, and the greater Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area represents more than 3.5 million residents. 23.3 % of Seattle's population is between 0 and 19 years, a 2% drop from 2000, and another 13.3% are between the ages of 15 and 24. While the state's general population growth rate overall has slowed, Seattle's 2009 growth rate is the highest this decade.

Enrollment in Seattle Public High Schools (grades 9 through 12) remains fairly steady since 2000, with public high school enrollment at 13,489 in 2009. This figure does not include private school enrollment or community colleges, or those not enrolled in school.

(2009 population estimates from the Office of Financial Management. Public school enrollments from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.)

Seattle's Economy and the Arts

Seattle, like other US cities, is in the midst of an ongoing economic downturn. The City of Seattle projects a \$72 million revenue shortfall in its 2009-2010 biennial budget, and King County projects a \$56.4 million shortfall. Economic forecasts predict that it could take three years for jobs, budgets, and economic growth to recover to previous levels.

Arts organizations are being impacted by the economy both in terms of funding and in terms of audience attendance. The economy has also had an impact on national touring, music industry businesses, and corporate

and private support of the arts.

Seattle and All-ages Music

Since The Vera Project's founders' initial work with the City of Seattle and the passage of the All-ages Dance Ordinance (AADO) in 2002, Seattle has seen a marked increase in support of and access to all-ages music, although the all-ages scene remains in a tenuous position.

There is increased governmental support for all-ages music and arts through funding, partnerships, and policy. Opportunities for community partnerships and cross over programming have arisen as the number and types of youth music and arts organizations increased, creating a stronger youth arts culture in Seattle. There is also strong interest from private funders and corporate sponsors in the all-ages music scene in Seattle.

The Vera Project has a permanent home. Seattle's live music venues and individual promoters also put on a limited number of all-ages music shows in all genres, representing two to four all-ages shows per week. Local media has a more sophisticated understanding of the issues around all-ages music, and awareness of the importance of all-ages music scene. This has resulted in both broad articles on all-ages culture, and tools like the all-ages event calendar in *The Stranger*.

Yet governmental, institutional, and private funding, and arts revenues, are all threatened by the current economic situation. The non-profit organizations supporting the all-ages music scene are dependent on unreliable funding sources and audience revenues. For-profit venues struggle with the decreased revenues all-ages shows present due to additional costs and lack of bar sales, and show a preference for booking 21+ shows in hard economic times.

After a period of positive momentum, tensions between city administration and the music and nightlife scene have increased, straining Seattle's music scene. The 2009 election may affect this situation, but as of the creation of this plan, it is too early to see the impact.

Seattle Area Venues for All-Ages Music

Within Seattle, there are now several all-ages venues with permanent, established homes: The Vera Project has shows 3 to 5 days a week; Studio Seven presents all-ages metal and rock shows 5 to 7 days a week; and other venues, including the Fusion Café and various informal spaces, have shows 2 to 8 times a month.

Local live music venues present an increased number of all-ages shows since the passage of the AADO, resulting in 10-12 all-ages shows a month at venues ranging in capacity from 2,200 to 200. Ticket prices vary widely at privately owned all-ages venues.

Seattle also has a thriving informal-venue scene, with anywhere from 4 to 15 all-ages shows a month at venues such as the Georgetown LAB, Healthy Times Fun Club, and Gallery 1412. There is an increased do-it-yourself movement, with all-ages shows produced at homes and businesses such as GreenHouse and Full Tilt Ice Cream.

Near Seattle, the most established venues are the Old Fire House in Redmond, Ground Zero in Bellevue, and the Kirkland Teen Union Building, in Kirkland. All three are substantially supported by their respective city governments. These venues provide all-ages music approximately two to six times per month. The Den and the Viaduct, both in Tacoma, and the Department of Safety in Anacortes are all also all-ages. For Seattle youth, access to any of these is extremely limited without a car.

The Seattle-based All Ages Movement Project, while not a concert-producer, provides a center and support for all-ages organizations nationally by pooling resources and sharing best practices. AMP shares offices with the Vera Project.

The creation of the Seattle Mayor's Office of Music and Film gave the all-ages music scene a liaison to the city administration and provides information and support to those interested in putting on all-ages music shows.

Seattle Area Venues for Youth Arts and Activism

Seattle has a number of cultural centers offering arts and music access and education. The largest nonprofit arts educator in the Seattle area is ArtsCorp, offering classes in arts including dance, digital media, visual arts, and music, in partnership programs with Seattle Parks and Recreation, school facilities, and YMCAs.

In August 2009, as part of the Music National Service, ArtsCorp launched MusicianCorps, a program in which professional musicians commit to a year of service in music education, the.

The Youngstown Cultural Arts Center is a dedicated space offering significant arts programming including music classes, workshops, a media lab, a movement studio, galleries, and a 150 seat performance venue. Youngstown frequently collaborates or partners with The Vera Project.

Youth activism is supported through Seattle Young People's Project (SYPP) and Seattle Youth Involvement Network. Both are youth-directed in terms of empowering youth to define issues of concern and create modes of action that build leadership, civic involvement and decision-making.

Seattle Parks and Recreation offers a range of youth activities focused on athletics and physical recreation, and a Late Night Recreation Program for high-risk Seattle youth with limited events in high schools. The Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA (multiple facilities) provide a variety of recreational and educational programs for youth and teens. Boys and Girls Clubs in Seattle focus on programs to support life skills, education, health, and fitness for ages 6 to 18. Arts programming is limited, but includes all-ages music a few nights a month and a youth art gallery.

Local Initiatives and Relevant Issues

Seattle's City of Music Initiative

In 2008, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels launched the Seattle City of Music initiative, honoring Seattle's rich music history and celebrating its ongoing importance to the city's economy and culture. The initiative recognized the significant, culture, financial, and educational impact of the music community and industry on Seattle.

A group of music advisors to the City of Seattle created a 12 year plan to create action to enhance the climate for our music industry, and to propel Seattle's leadership role in music throughout the nation and the world. The plan aims to cement Seattle's future as:

- 1) A city of musicians, with enhanced music learning opportunities for children, professional development opportunities for musicians, and access to programs to support making a living as a musician; Components include:
 - K-12 Education and After School Programs: Music education programs will be provided by all public schools, as well as through neighborhood community centers and independent organizations.
 - Higher Education: Local colleges will lead the nation in music education and performance.
 - Professional Opportunities for Musicians: A professional development structure will be established to support musicians who want to make a living-wage career playing music in Seattle, including teaching and mentorship.

- Livability for Musicians: Musicians will have access to health care and will be able to afford to buy a home and raise a family in the city through a career in music.
 - Creating Community Among Musicians: Fellow musicians of all genres will support one another and work together to advance their craft, their professional community and their role in the city.
 - The Musician in All of Us: The people of Seattle will value music in everyday life and enjoy chances to expand personal involvement with music.
- 2) A city of live music; with more opportunities to experience live music performance; Components include:
- Music Festivals for All: Seattle will encourage public celebration through a wide range of musical events throughout the City's parks and neighborhoods.
 - Audience Engagement and Support: Residents of all ages will have a range of opportunities to learn about, connect with, advocate for and support live music in Seattle.
 - Facilities for Music: Seattle will be rich with well-managed concert venues of various sizes, supporting a wide variety of musical performances.
 - Connecting our Communities with Live Music: Unconventional and publicly owned spaces will be utilized for live music performances and will encourage music as a means for community building.
 - Connecting Tourists with Live Music: Seattle will be regarded worldwide as a destination for exceptional and diverse live music performances, which will be promoted via visitor centers and tourism communication.
- 3) A city of music business, with increased support for innovative and independent music businesses. Components include:
- Enhancing Business Development and Retention: The growth of Seattle's music business sector is made a priority among city leaders and developers, and will be continually measured and enhanced through government incentives and support.
 - Creating Job Opportunities: Initiatives will be developed across the public/private sector that create and retain music industry-related jobs and aggressively pursue new opportunities to promote business growth.
 - Our Technology Sector Assets: Professional networks will exist among Seattle's information and communication technology sector to ensure music businesses are at the forefront of new technology economies.
 - Business Investment and Mentoring: Successful business leaders will recognize and support the contribution of the music sector through investments in new entrepreneurial opportunities and music-related not-for-profit programs.
 - Supporting the Sector: Seattle's music industry will be valued and supported for its enhancement to the city's tax base and for fostering economic diversity. Educational and not-for-profit music will be valued for its important contribution to the continuity of this industry and for enhancing the quality of life in the community. Such endeavors will receive sustainable financial support from individuals, foundations, government and business.

Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative

In 2009, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels introduced a new initiative to dramatically change how the city deals with youth violence. The initiative will focus on about 800 children a year who are at highest risk of perpetuating violence or becoming victims. The City's 2009-2010 budget included \$8 million for the Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative for the next two years.

Young people will be referred to a wide range of services through juvenile court, police, community outreach workers, schools, Seattle Parks and Recreation Youth Centers, and the neighborhood network agencies. This includes working with repeat offenders and truants. The program offers several solutions relevant to Vera:

- Extended hours at some youth centers.
- City support of more community-based projects that engage and mentor young people.
- Funding for summer youth employment, giving young people an opportunity to learn important job skills and putting them on a path for a better future.

This program is primarily aimed at three Seattle neighborhoods (southeast, southwest and central Seattle). Local youth organizations will be leading the program targeted to 800 youth at high risk of violence: the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle; Southwest Youth and Family Services; and a consortium of agencies led by Rainier Vista Boys & Girls Club.

All-Ages Movement Nationwide

There has been enormous growth in organizations being set up to engage young people through music across the country, both in the form of smaller, DIY collaborative projects, and on the part of larger institutions using resources to create more formal youth music programs. In 2006, the All-ages Movement Project (AMP) conducted a study of youth-run cultural organizations focused on music in the United States. Here are some of the key findings:

- There are now literally hundreds of programs and spaces existing in the youth, music, and civic engagement realm in the US.
- Regionally, these programs are located in and around the country's urban and cultural centers; in particular coastal California and the Great Lakes region.
- Almost 75% of these programs have and rely on having a facility to do their work, while only 25% of these organizations own their facility.
- About a third of organizations who responded to questions about financial status are either fiscally sponsored, part of a larger organization, or a government entity (e.g. a city teen center). The other two-thirds are independent, the majority of which are 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations.
- The most consistent guideline cited among organizations for selecting artists was having zero tolerance of anything racist, sexist, or homophobic in nature.
- The organizations demonstrated an intentional move towards using public platforms to model socially positive and progressive values. 87% of the organizations said they promote civic engagement philosophically and consider peer to peer networking to be an integral part of their programs.
- Within these programs, organizations are producing anywhere from one concert a month to five a week. Many are also producing records and release anywhere from 1 to 5 a year.
- More than half of the organizations surveyed said youth participants are responsible for planning and implementing programs and offer formal leadership training. Close to half are staffed and led by people under 25.

AMP has designed a database that now houses the names of over 300 organizations that embody a combination of youth empowerment, popular music focus, participatory structure, and producing music related cultural products. For full report findings, see:

<http://www.tastemakersllc.com/amp/docs/AMP%20Findings%20for%20publication-1.pdf>

Comparative Analysis of Youth Arts Organizations

Ground Zero Teen Center

Ground Zero is part of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Bellevue, which currently has 800 members. The Ground Zero Teen Center offers all ages concerts every Friday and Saturday night, and also offers a drop in center, band practice space, and a Teen Feed. They operate a Music Advisory Meeting for interested teens to share new music, new show ideas and learn about their local music scene; and a Keystone Advisory committee is available for teens who want to get involved in leadership. Ground Zero Teen Center is open to youth ages 13-19, with a special program aimed at middle school age youth 13-16. As part of the Boys & Girls Club, it is funded through governmental and private funders, corporations, and individual donors.

Old Fire House

Started in 1992 in the City of Redmond, the Old Fire House serves Redmond's youth ages 13 to 19 with progressive and innovative recreation, arts, music, education, and personal support services. It offers weekly music, field trips and classes such as videography, studio recording, skateboarding, art, photography, and dance. In an average week, the Old Fire House has 300 teen visits. The Old Fire House is supported by the City of Redmond and depends on contributions through volunteering, partnerships, and donations.

Youngstown Cultural Arts Center

Youngstown Cultural Arts Center is a multi-purpose facility dedicated to arts, education, and to the provision of space for members of the community to create, converse, and perform. Located in West Seattle, Youngstown is a program of The Delridge Neighborhoods Development Association (DNDA) and provides 36 affordable live/work studios for rent to artists of all disciplines and public rental spaces for a variety of uses from live performances, classes and workshops to business, civic and social occasions.

It includes 25,000 square feet of public space including a recording studio, media lab, 150 seat performance venue, movement studio, workshop, and a gallery. Youngstown is funded through DNDA, and includes corporate and private foundations, federal and local government, and individual donors, as well as earning income from rentals. Tenant partners include ArtsCorps and other youth arts, leadership and service organizations.

ABC No Rio

Founded in 1980 by artists committed to political and social engagement, ABC No Rio is a collectively-run center for art and activism in New York. Its mission is to facilitate cross-pollination between artists and activists, and inculcate to believe that art and activism should be for everyone. It provides 1 to 3 music shows a week including a Sunday HardCore/Punk matinee and COMA, a weekly series of experimental and improvisational music. It also offers arts classes to New York City Jr. High and High School students; media training to adults; exhibitions of visual art; weekly open poetry readings and other literary events. In 2009, ABC No Rio was granted \$1,650,000 in City funding for a new building on their current site. Other funding comes from individual and foundation donors.

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Vera's got an amazing story to tell and a way of looking at the world that others want to hear about. It's got really, really good shows, art, classes, and other programs. And the Vera Project's communications have been effective in driving engaged participants to programs and building the case for support.

The role of a communications plan is to help determine what to do with all that good fodder. There is potential for more efficient communication that builds larger, diverse audiences and broadcasts Vera's ideology of fostering a participatory culture and experiential learning out to world.

Audiences

The Vera Project's communications and marketing is currently primarily aimed at 14 to 24 year-olds and to institutional funders such as government and foundations. Vera needs to deliver a consistent message across all audiences, even if they seem to be on different planets. One way to hone the message is to prioritize audiences. You can't please everyone all of the time. Please the people that really count.

Audiences include (in general order of priority for communications):

- Program participants and future members—both youth and adults participating in the arts, including those who attend shows, classes, and other programs because they are Vera regulars and those attracted to a single program or show
- Youth volunteers & members—present, and past volunteers, interns, members
- Government officials and institutional funders
- Parents—parents of youth participating at Vera, specifically
- Individual donors with diverse giving motivations including supporting the arts, services for youth, parents, music industry
- General public who care about youth and arts in their city
- Artists and musicians
- Board, Seattle Center, partner orgs, etc that aren't major sectors but should be considered

Goals/Objectives:

Vera's top-level of communications should be relating the mission and purpose, and delivering information on actual activities, events, and programs to bring people in to participate. If you know why you are doing something, it's often easier to do it right. Communications goals map easily to strategic plan goals:

- Attract participants and artists to Vera, creating a nexus of independent arts and music
- Communicate Vera's mission of participatory culture and power sharing to the outside world and clarify it to insiders
- Attract youth members and volunteers to participate and understand Vera's culture
- Move members and volunteers into greater roles of responsibility and commitment
- Move donors into greater levels of commitment and funding
- Achieve local, national, and international recognition

Recommendations:

Define internal and external messages about power-sharing. With the all-ages music scene in Seattle now alive and kicking, Vera should take communications to the next step in talking about Vera's unique impact on Seattle and the world. Vera's power-sharing structure is what sets Vera apart and it's what often brings

people in from youth to funders. Vera should develop and clarify how we talk about it internally, recognizing that power-sharing is a constantly evolving process. Then build some consensus and get that messaging out.

Define a message platform. Vera has a clear mission and strategic plan—how is that communicated? Does Vera talk about power-sharing at every chance? Should it? How does Vera talk about measurable outcomes for participants? How do you sound like a hip, independent arts venue when talking about measurable outcomes? An “elevator message” and a few clearly identified key messages go a long way.

Build capacity for consistent, simple outreach. Define who is responsible for media, promotions, community outreach, merchandise, etc. Have that person set annual goals and measurements, concentrating on high-impact, targeted activities, and building on that base of success. Streamline and cut the fat.

Plan for technological leaps. The tech landscape changes monthly, and the best tool now may be obsolete in two years. Be willing to change tactics as technology changes and don’t over commit to one technology or media trend.

Talk about the people. Vera needs to sing its own praises and sing them loud. Tell someone’s story. Put faces in front of media and funders, use them to bring in new participants and volunteers, and win the support of the city. Find someone who was lost without Vera and ask her to share the details publicly. Ask former Vera members in the industry to speak on panels. Have a new volunteer blog about the experience. Post DIY directions for music projects. Show how Vera is impacting these people.

Create individual outreach and marketing plans for shows, gallery, workshops, and services (rentals, recording, etc). A show plan, for example would include marketing steps taken for all shows, additional activities for larger shows, and tactics for reaching new audiences. Consider a communications & marketing internship to execute plans.

Word of mouth and social media. You’ve already got teen advocates and digital natives that thrive on the internet and social media. Use ‘em to help with this. Vera needs look at how Vera is promoted through word of mouth and have a plan to mobilize Vera’s masses to keep getting the word out.

Create a media plan. What are Vera’s goals for media coverage? Sending a note to 500 media outlets (spray n’ pray) is often less effective than reaching out to a specific person on a single issue. Consider alternate media tactics like op-eds, letter campaigns, and youth-authored articles to bolster support for Vera and share its model. This plan should include a crisis communications plan, you know, just in case.

Reaching outside Vera’s walls. Facilitate participation with groups that don’t currently use Vera. Conduct research on the best tactics to reach diverse communities, new audiences, and donors outside of Vera’s traditional profile. Select and prioritize the activities and then go out and pique their interest.

FUNDRAISING

INTRODUCTION

A solid fundraising plan is crucial to Vera's future. While Vera has been successful cultivating a diverse funding base, organizational evaluation and strategic planning have identified areas of needed improvement. Vera assembled a team of business and development professionals to assess future opportunities for growth and advise this fundraising plan. These experts drew on Vera's evaluations and strategic goals, a comprehensive report from Leadership Tomorrow workgroup, and their own knowledge and expertise to inform Vera's fundraising strategies.

FUNDRAISING RECOMMENDATIONS

EXPAND INDIVIDUAL GIVING Based on comparisons to peer organizations, and on the riskiness of other funding sources (foundation/corporate/public), Vera's individual donor pool should represent 20-30% of total donations. Possible strategies include:

- Leverage Vera's online presence: for example, create 30 second videos online of Members, volunteers and shows as a fundraising tool.
- Target request for specific projects/needs to prospective donors who have a connection to the project/need: e.g. ask IT professionals to support a new website, business owners to support revenue development, visual artists for silkscreen funding
- Leverage donors' networks: e.g. ask major individual donors for 1-5 friends they can introduce to Vera
- Leverage media and music industry connections to increase awareness of Vera in the media and at concerts, festivals and events
- Focus on Vera's alumni. Messaging for alumni should include:
 - Youth involvement: Youth participants are still involved in the organization and management of Vera, and Vera remains a direct voice for youth in the Seattle community.
 - Renown: Vera is recognized by the media and others as a successful organization and a valuable addition to the Seattle community. Notable artists perform at Vera.
 - Strong growth: Vera has grown robustly and remains stable. Vera has a bright future and continues to fill a need in the community.
 - Successful alumni: Feature stories of awesome things Vera alums have accomplished within Vera and in the larger community
- Focus on parents. Messaging for parents should be mindful not to alienate participants, and should include:
 - Safety: Vera is a safe place for people of all ages
 - Skills: Vera teaches participants valuable concert/arts production and technical skills
 - Personal growth: Vera participants learn valuable personal skills such as teamwork, and leadership and project management
 - Non-commercial: Vera is a non-profit entity that encourages independent expression and does not push commercial goods/services
 - Diverse: Vera is a diverse community and gives participants new ways to connect to people from different backgrounds

EVENTS Events have proven to be a successful way to increase public awareness and raise funds. Vera should continue to refine the following fundraising events:

- Viva Vera Gala: late Jan. 2011, 2013 with net income goals of at least \$100k

- Spring Fund Drive: March/April annually with income goal of at least \$20k. Vera will work to engage in more advance/strategic planning of Spring Fund Drive, including tiered matching donors secured in advance.
- A Drink for the Kids: June annually with income goal of at least \$20k
- Run Vera Run: October annually with income goal of at least \$50k
- Bring it screen it: November annually with an income goal of at least \$1k

EXPAND CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS Vera evaluations and strategic planning identify corporate partnerships as an area with significant potential for growth:

- Continue to develop relationships with current corporate sponsors; ensure a significant connection with Vera’s mission and programming
- Develop strategy/campaign for insider and employee outreach that gives employees at major companies opportunities to interact with Vera (e.g. as volunteers)
- Develop relationships with promoters to incorporate general and fundraising outreach into these concerts
- Research new corporate partner prospects (in local business journals and newsletters)
- Focus on sponsorship efforts
 - Create sponsorship strategy and collateral
 - Explore in-kind sponsorships to reduce cash expenses
 - Involve Membership in sponsorship pre-approval process, including brainstorming prospect ideas, working to define what sponsorship entails, and approaching sponsors when appropriate.

EXPAND EARNED INCOME Vera’s earned income contributes to roughly 20-30% of the overall budget. Vera will explore ways to expand earned income:

- Continue success in live music show revenue
- Increase education revenue
- Develop pilot projects of new models for earned income 2010-2013; create business plan for each model, submit them to friendly business owners for review
- Cultivate brand identity – online/concessions sales of prints, shirts, etc featuring Vera-related art
- Explore capital investment grants to develop earned income streams – e.g. work with local business owners who support Vera to reach investors for projects like developing Vera’s merchandising capacity
- Expand Vera’s capacity to contract merchandise production for other events and organizations
- Invest in member-driven earned income initiatives as capacity allows

MAINTAIN AND STRENGTHEN PUBLIC SUPPORT Vera founders initially envisioned The Vera Project as a partially government-funded program (like [Vera Groningen](#) or [Redmond’s Old Fire House](#)). While City funding is a cornerstone of Vera support, it has steadily declined relative to Vera’s operating budget over the course of Vera’s history. In the original business plan Vera projected twice the funding that was been allotted in 2009. Vera has since expanded its public support to include City, County and State funding. Public support is financially and philosophically vital to Vera’s existence. It is important for Vera to continue to work with public officials and staff to ensure a strong public funding partnership. Possible strategies for strengthening public funding relationships include:

- Map public funding cultivation strategy on long-term calendars – meet with representatives and start cultivating local, state and federal level relationships well before budget cycle
- Survey state, city, county departments and their directors for funds that relate to Vera’s mission and programming – eg. Workforce development, youth safety
- Work to increase Vera’s budget allocation from the City of Seattle

- Secure a dedicated public funding source that is less politically vulnerable –e.g. attach Vera funding to an arts or property tax levy

MAINTAIN AND STRENGTHEN FOUNDATION SUPPORT Foundation support has been historically strong for the Vera Project. Recommendations for maintaining support include:

- Continue to seek multi-year funding
- Reach out to national foundations, and emphasize the replicable nature of Vera’s model
- Ask current foundation funders to introduce us to at least one other foundation that is not on our list of donors
- Make specific campaign that targets small family foundations (including prospect research)

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS WILL ALSO HELP VERA RAISE MORE MONEY TO SUPPORT AWESOME SHOWS RUN BY AND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE:

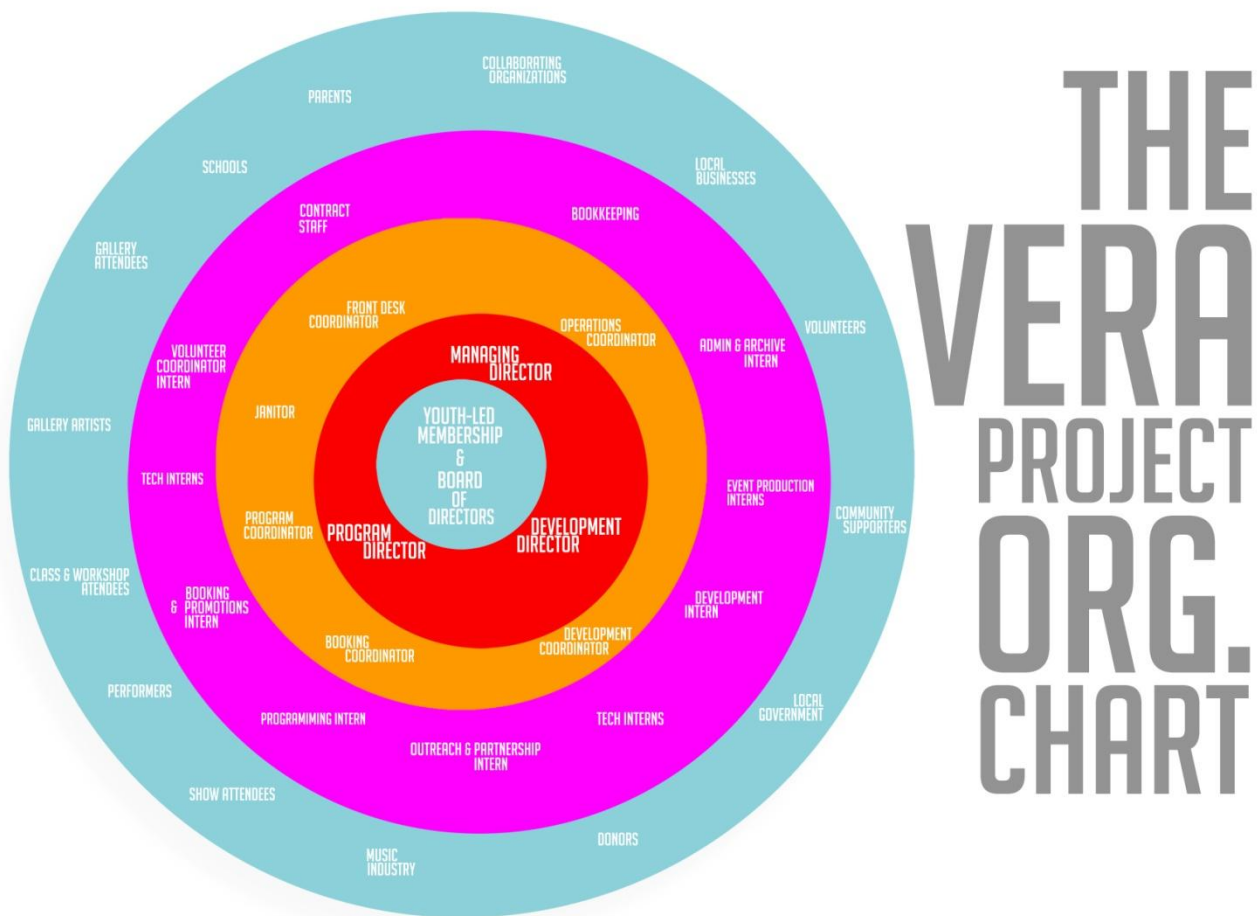
- Streamline tools for fundraising, including database and communications tools
- Create a comprehensive communication plan for type and timing of fundraising/donor communication, ensuring communication is appropriate for different donor groups
- Ensure organizational alignment with fundraising goals, including Board and Member support, sufficient Development staffing, and clear communication of Development needs to Programming and Managing staff.
- Form advisory groups for each fundraising category – use as resources for connections, ideas, evaluation and more

OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Overview

Vera functions through a participatory structure that fosters collaboration between the youth-led Membership, volunteers, staff and the Board of Directors. Young people participate throughout the organization, from running concerts to directing programming to serving on the Board. By integrating young people throughout its operations Vera stays accountable and relevant to constituents, fosters youth engagement and leadership, and makes the organization a true partnership between youth and adults.

In the recent process of organizational evaluation and strategic planning, the Vera community tried to fit its organizational structure traditional hierarchical chart, and we found this doesn't quite work for Vera. We took a step back and sought a new model to illustrate organizational values of participatory governance, skill sharing, and power sharing, and this is what we came up with:



THE VERA PROJECT ORG. CHART

The concentric circles of Vera's organizational chart depict a fluid, non-hierarchical vision of the multiple participants who make Vera happen. At the core of Vera are the two bodies who share power to co-govern the organization: youth-led Membership and the Board of Directors. Following this chart outward, the Vera staff team supports these governing bodies. Next you see the numerous players who facilitate mission-focused program delivery.

The Operations and Management section of this business plan describes current practices and recommends future improvements in the governance, staffing and volunteerism illustrated in this organizational chart.

GOVERNANCE

The current co-governance between Vera's Board of Directors and Youth-led Membership is strong and effective, keeping Vera mission-focused, legal and solvent. The strategic plan outlines recommendations to continue strengthening and building this co-governance. The business plan recommendations *in italics below* identify specific measures to achieve strategic plan goals:

- a. Develop, use and refine clear mechanisms for increased power-sharing between Board, Members, volunteers and staff within Vera's governance:
 - *With Board and Membership, document current skill sharing and power sharing opportunities at Vera.*
 - *Using documented examples, define Vera's skill sharing and power sharing concepts.*
 - *Continue to implement, refine and document these concepts in governance and programming.*
 - *Communicate skill sharing and power sharing concepts in all Vera marketing and communications.*
- b. Strengthen Board and Member collaborative governance:
 - *Hold at least one combined Board and Member meeting annually, and invite representatives from Board and Membership to regular Board and Member meetings.*
 - *Cross-pollinate Vera Member and Board Committees.*
 - *Communicate goals and celebrate achievements from each of the governing bodies.*
- c. Strengthen opportunities for staff, Member and Board skills development and learning
 - *Create professional development goals for governing bodies, and where possible, use the expertise in each governing body to cross-train and address professional development needs.*

This plan also recommends that Vera consider Advisory Boards or committees to support the Board of Directors and Youth-led Membership. These bodies may bring needed voices into the organization and involve individuals who may not have the time or inclination to join the Board or Membership. Vera values of all-ages skill sharing and power sharing must be reflected in these bodies. These advisory groups may be ongoing or ad hoc, depending on the purpose.

STAFFING

In 2005 Vera served just over 17,000 people; in 2008, over 37,000. In 2009 to date over 50,000 have participated in Vera programming. Program growth has been exponential. The cost per client ratio has decreased, but not without the sacrifice of numerous hours of uncompensated overtime for Vera staff. The Vera Project staff team has grown since 2005 from 3 FTE and four positions to 5.8 FTE and nine positions. It is essential that the staff team expand to continue quality program delivery, raise funds, and build infrastructure to support organizational growth. Staff team increases will occur incrementally, based on budget capacity and organizational goals.

While Vera's staff works collaboratively as a team to support Board and Member initiatives, the staffing structure can be divided into three functions: development, management, and programming.

Development (1.5 FTE in 2009; recommended growth to 3FTE by 2012) oversees fundraising planning and implementation, including individual donor cultivation and relationship management; government relations;

foundation relations; corporate giving; sponsorships; special events; grant administration; community relations.

Current positions include Development Director (1 FTE) and Grants Coordinator (.5 FTE).

Recommended growth includes Development Events Coordinator (.5 FTE), Sponsorship Coordinator (.5FTE) and Individual Donor Coordinator (.5FTE)

Management (2.3 FTE in 2009; recommended growth to 3FTE by 2012) oversees Board relations and business functions, including organizational and strategic planning and evaluation; financial management; budget creation and oversight; board development/relations; evaluation; human resources; communications; records management; IT planning and implementation; risk management; facilities management; master scheduling; community relations.

Current Positions include Managing Director (1FTE), Operations Coordinator (.75 FTE), Front Desk Coordinator (.4 FTE) and Janitorial (.15 FTE).

Recommended growth includes adding a Communications Coordinator position (.25 FTE) increasing Front Desk Coordinator hours to accommodate increased programming hours (additional .35 FTE to .75FTE), adding facilities repair to the Janitorial position (additional .1 FTE for a total .25 FTE).

Programming (2 FTE in 2009; recommended growth to 3FTE by 2012) oversees Member relations and program management, including music booking and promotions; show production oversight; educational curriculum development and delivery; volunteer management; collaborative and partnership programs; resource and space rental; internship management; art gallery management; programming equipment upkeep; programming budget creation and oversight; Membership development/relations; community relations.

Current Positions include Programming Director (1FTE), Booking Coordinator (.5FTE) and Programming Coordinator (.5FTE).

Recommended growth of 1FTE will be responsive to programming needs; suggested growth of the Programming Coordinator position to 1FTE and adding a Volunteer Coordinator position at .5FTE.

This plan recommends that Vera continues a vibrant ongoing internship program to complement Vera's permanent staff team. Internships provide invaluable staff support and create entry level opportunities to gain in-depth experience in Vera's development, management and programming functions. The internship program should continue to grow in response to Vera's overall program growth and needs.

Contracted positions will be used for specific professional expertise and for short-term initiatives. Contractors identified to date include:

- Bookkeeping: 10 hours/week.
- Sound engineers: On a per-show basis.
- Show managers: On a per-show basis.
- Workshop and class instructors: As needed.
- Facilities IT and equipment upkeep and repair: As needed.
- Organizational facilitation, planning and evaluation: As needed.

The following infrastructure improvements are recommended to support staff needs:

- Develop human resource systems including hiring and termination procedure, and improvement of staff evaluation methods.

- Provide the best benefits the budget can afford (health, paid time off, retirement).
- Provide professional development opportunities, including an annual staff retreat and individual education opportunities.
- Provide an annual Executive Committee and Steering Committee review of personnel policies and procedures.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteerism is central to Vera's identity, providing support to the organization's programming and operations, as well as providing meaningful opportunities for experiential learning, community engagement and leadership development. Youth and adult volunteers are essential to the structure and success of the Vera Project. Currently hundreds of volunteers participate at Vera annually, and it is expected that this number must continue to grow as programs expand. The following recommendations will help bolster Vera's volunteer programs:

- Define and clearly communicate engagement paths for volunteers; document volunteer entry points, positions and responsibilities.
- Continue to develop support for volunteers including volunteer orientations, committee orientations, and personal/professional development opportunities.
- Develop simple but meaningful methods and delivery of acknowledgment and recognition for volunteers at all levels of involvement.
- Use technology to ease volunteer engagement, communication and record-keeping (ie: online sign-ups for positions, wikis, message boards).

Vera owes its success to collaboration between Youth-led Membership, the Board of Directors, Vera staff, and hundreds of Vera volunteers. These business plan recommendations will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this collaboration, ensuring continued mission-focused, quality program delivery.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

A strong IT infrastructure is essential to program delivery, marketing and communications, audience access to Vera information and programming, staff efficiency, and sound data management. Vera's IT systems have not grown with the organization, and are in dire need of improvement. This IT plan will provide:

- A long-term strategic vision to support a participatory creative culture at Vera
- Stable and scalable IT systems to support organizational evolution
- Collaborative, prioritized, phased IT implementation
- Ongoing support for Vera IT operations

IT Plan recommendations are organized into two phases:

Phase 1: Stabilize/Refresh:

- Website redesign
- Database redesign
- Infrastructure vision
- Workstation stabilization/refresh
- Server update
- Integration

Phase 2: Optimize/Sustain

- End to end security review
- Design backup and recovery strategies
- Serve OS and patch process design
- Integration
- Documentation
- Technology sustainment

These IT improvements result in an awesome future vision for Vera. This IT future promises high reliability: IT systems function when we need them. There is scalability: the infrastructure is easily expanded for program growth. Usability is efficient: there is ease of use for staff and stakeholders, and lower cost end to end. Systems are integrated: all technology process flow end to end and communication is streamlined.

(A detailed IT plan is available in an attached Power Point report)

PLANNING AND EVALUATION

The Vera Project has a five year strategic plan that clearly outlines Vera’s mission, values and vision, providing specific direction for Vera’s future with seven organizational goals. In cooperation with Board and Membership, Vera staff create annual work plans to achieve the strategic plan goals. Staff present quarterly reports to Board and Membership tracking progress toward these annual goals, and present a detailed annual evaluation describing progress toward the five year strategic goals. This detailed evaluation is distilled to a 2-sheet document which we share with funders and stakeholders. Current tracking is extensive, and includes:

Number of live music shows/non show events	Class participation/cost Studio participation	Quarterly finance reports to Board Archiving of media coverage
Number of bands/performers	Number of internships	Archiving of show posters/promotional collateral
Musical genres	Number of Members	Archiving of photos/video/
Number of show volunteers	Total number of volunteers	Questionnaires about quality of classes
Ticket price	Number of volunteer orientations	Quotes from members/participants
Number of festivals/off-site events	Meeting participation	
Number art shows	Monthly fund raising reports to Fundraising Committee	
Number of gallery participants at openings	Monthly finance reports to finance committee	
Number of classes		

RECOMMENDATIONS: While Vera planning and assessment methods are comprehensive, viewers can sometimes get lost in the volumes of information contained in reports. The following recommendations will help the Vera project to present assessments in a more simple, direct, impactful way.

PLANNING:

Vera will continue to use the five year strategic goals and objectives as a compass for organizational direction. The Business plan will also help to guide business management and program delivery. On an annual basis staff will evaluate which goals should be addressed by Membership, Board, and staff. The governing bodies and the staff team will then create annual goals and work plans based on the strategic plan goals and business plan initiatives.

EVALUATION:

Detailed tracking: Vera staff will continue to gather detailed information and present reports to the experts who populate pertinent committees (ie: programming, steering, finance, fundraising, executive) to ensure the organization is mission-focused, solvent, legal and successful. In addition to numbers tracking, Vera will collect qualitative data including quotes and photographs from Members, artists, partners, donors, media and program participants.

Dashboard Reporting: In an effort to step away from the details and explore overarching trends and organizational health, Vera staff will work with Membership and the Board to create a dashboard report to present quarterly to the governing bodies. Using the strategic plan as a compass, Vera Board and Steering committees will work to determine dashboard content, including areas to be measured, and indicators of success, and methods of evaluation.

Annual Report: The Vera project will present an annual report to funders and stakeholders. This report will describe what Vera does, how well we do it, and the impact of our work, triangulating qualitative data (photos and quotes, a personal letter from staff, Board and/or Membership) with quantitative data (financial reports, donor list, and some of the metrics determined in dashboard reporting). The same template will be used until the organization creates a new strategic plan in 2013.

BUDGET

While the recommendations in this business plan will improve management practices, development capacity and program delivery, there are certainly budget implications to implementation of these recommendations. The next step in this businesses planning process is to meet with governing committees to determine project costs. Once these costs are determined, they will be incorporated into proforma budget through 2013.

There are several factors to consider in long-term budget development and subsequent oversight:

- Vera must maintain strong financial policies controls in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Procedures
- Vera needs to develop a healthy financial reserve
- Fundraising capacity needs to increase to meet programming and staffing expansion

Cost analysis and proforma budget development will be addressed in 2010.

SPECIAL THANKS

to the advisors who helped shape this business plan:

Chris Price- Vera Board Member, Assistant Director of Infrastructure and Platforms at Regence Group-Blue Cross/Blue Shield

Dan Johnson-Development Director, Farestart

Danielle Henderson-Program Associate, AIA Seattle

James Kebblas-Director, Seattle Mayor's Office of Film and Music

Jerry Everard-Council, Groff Murphy Trachtenberg /Nightclub and restaurant owner

John Halberstadt- Director of Product Management and Development, NextIT

Josh Powell-Program Director, The Vera Project

Kate Becker-Development Director, Seattle Theatre Group

Kate Jackson-Publicity Director, Sub Pop Records

Leigh Sims- Story Wrangler, Team Soap

Molly Moon Neitzel- Owner, Molly Moon's Icecream

Nick Turner- Development Director, The Vera Project

Noah Gotz- Data Network Consultant, NPower

Shannon Roach- Managing Director, The Vera Project

Steven Franz- Director at Royal Celebrity Tours

The Vera Project Board of Directors and Youth-led Membership