Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................. 3
Background and History ..................................................... 3
Strategic Planning .......................................................... 4
Mission, Vision, and Values ................................................. 5
Current State ................................................................. 6
Goals, Objectives, and Key Performance Indicators
    Student Composition and Demographics ......................... 7
    Program Quality and Staffing ......................................... 8
    Sustaining the Academy ................................................. 9
    Communications, Outreach, and Engagement ................. 10
    Infrastructure ............................................................ 10
Implementation of the Strategic Plan ................................. 11
Acknowledgments .......................................................... 11
Introduction

Walker|West Music Academy’s Strategic Planning Committee developed this strategic plan with assistance from staff and GrayHall consulting firm. The committee included two board members, one of Walker|West’s founders, and four members of the Walker|West faculty and management team.

The committee met six times over nine months to reflect on Walker|West’s mission, vision, core operating values, and assumptions underlying the organization’s approach to its work. The committee developed a comprehensive list of Walker|West internal and external stakeholders (funders, parents, grandparents, community partners, founders, faculty, community leaders, and others) from which to choose participants for the environmental scan interviews. Walker|West staff helped coordinate the planning process and provided important support and analysis, and GrayHall facilitated the planning meetings and conducted the environmental scan.

Scan data were collected through telephone interviews with twenty of the identified stakeholders. The results shaped discussions at strategic planning meetings, helped Walker|West assess both the challenges and opportunities it is likely to face over the next three years, and set the context for the goals and objectives noted in the plan. Committee meetings also set the stage for a work session with the full board in March 2020, during which the draft of the strategic plan was reviewed and revisions considered.

This plan provides Walker|West with a three-year blueprint for addressing programming, ways of working, student enrollment, communications, community outreach/engagement, and infrastructure. The board and staff will review progress quarterly and update the plan annually as needed.

Background and History

Walker|West Music Academy, founded in 1988, is one of the oldest community music schools established by African American musicians in the nation. The Academy provides intergenerational, affordable, and high-quality music instruction inspired by the African American cultural experience. All faculty members are working professional musicians. Walker|West is located in the Summit University neighborhood of Saint Paul, Minnesota, and is a nonprofit community-based organization that teaches instrumental and vocal music to students from infants to seniors. One of its founding principles is “everybody in,” which ensures that children and adults of all ages are involved in the Walker|West community. During its thirty-two years, the Academy has been known for offering lifelong learning and developing a caring community of music students and educators.

Walker|West’s founders, the musicians and teachers Rev. Carl Walker and Grant West, teach all styles of music, including classical, but are especially well-known for instruction in jazz, gospel, blues, and other improvisational styles of music.

A generous scholarship fund and public and private funding partnerships help keep Walker|West’s music education affordable and accessible. The founders’ vision has always been to make music education available to any student who wishes to learn, and their work has touched the lives of thousands of students, many of whom have gone on to study at top music conservatories and perform professionally.

Walker|West alumni have performed on The Tonight Show and The Late Show. Its youth jazz ensembles are the only youth groups to annually perform alongside international headliners on the main stage at the Twin Cities Jazz Festival and for thousands more at public and private events throughout the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area. Walker|West string students regularly perform at the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts and participate in the nationally renowned Sphinx String Performance Academy for African American and Latinx students. Our string students are consistently admitted to competitive regional youth symphony organizations.
Walker|West Music Academy began a strategic planning process in June 2019 with the intention of engaging the organization’s broad array of stakeholders in a thoughtful discussion of the organization’s strengths, challenges, and future opportunities. As the world began to undergo dramatic changes related to COVID-19 in 2020, Walker|West’s Strategic Planning Committee refocused its planning discussions to take full advantage of the creative opportunities offered by remote learning, including the full implementation of the signature program called Walker|West Without Walls.

By moving remote teaching to the forefront of its plan and taking advantage of the creative digital economy, Walker|West’s new format recognizes the importance of creativity and innovation in students’ lives and acknowledges dominant trends in the work environment related to student safety. Walker|West Without Walls has also allowed the organization to expand its educational opportunities to new geographies, such as to a former student living in Oregon who is now taking lessons again.

Walker|West’s core operating principles, rooted in African American culture, enable it to fully engage with exciting opportunities for exploration, innovation, and enterprise. With this new focus, Walker|West is positioned to serve as a prominent destination for students of all ages who are increasingly flexible in the face of complexity and highly comfortable with technology. Walker|West’s educational perspective and strengths are strongly aligned with this newly engaged way of working.

The Strategic Plan will guide the allocation of Walker|West’s resources and ensure its operational and financial health during a precarious time, when the income from online learning is substantially less than in-person class time. Walker|West intends to do all it can to contain costs, develop financial resources, and build long-term reserves.

The plan commits Walker|West to devoting its efforts and resources to offering the best music education for students of all ages. It expects that enrollment growth in the coming years based on the digital economy, new partnerships, and increased outreach will enable it to make increased investments in digital technology, facilities, expanded faculty, and new initiatives. In particular, the organization is committed to increasing the enrollment and engagement of African American students from low-income backgrounds and students living in its surrounding neighborhoods using its signature music programs, digital technology, and partnerships and collaborations.

With this strategic plan, Walker|West is also concentrating on building and sustaining permanent intergenerational programming that reaches students of all ages, including infants, children, young adults, adults, and seniors. Strategic planning discussions identified ways to design and sustain programs for all age groups to amplify and promote lifelong learning. To provide consistent programming, Walker|West will need to increase its financial stability through strategies for increasing both program income and individual and foundation donations.

The strategic planning process identified one of Walker|West’s greatest challenges: to use data-driven efforts and metrics to systemically demonstrate and better share the value of Walker|West’s intergenerational experience. The plan’s goals and objectives are intended to help link the organization to a broader array of community support and add a variety of new funding sources. Its focus on including community and parents in data gathering and other evaluation processes and activities supports Walker|West’s principle of “everybody in” and participatory engagement.

Among the assumptions of the plan is that Walker|West will grow strategically in areas where there is strength, capacity, and demand. Its focus on balancing enrollment to optimize the number of African American students while diversifying the revenue base through remote lessons, individual donors, and new funder relationships will help make Walker|West less vulnerable to annual fluctuations in enrollment. Leading with a strong vision offers Walker|West a tremendous opportunity to build on its strengths, become more visible, and remain relevant and strong.
**MISSION**

Walker/West Music Academy is a music learning community rooted in the African American cultural experience where people of all ages and backgrounds gather, explore, and grow through music.

**VISION**

Walker/West’s mission will drive music teaching that addresses African American academic success; position the Academy to meet a larger variety of individual student needs through course selection, collaborative efforts, and leadership opportunities; increase the number of African American participants; and usher in a new era of growth and productivity that will build Walker/West Without Walls to scale.

**VALUES**

Walker/West’s offerings are rooted in providing applied music learning opportunities as part of the performing arts; culturally relevant music education rooted in the African American experience; music education as an essential part of brain development and academic success; music education accessible to interested students of all ages and backgrounds; partnerships and collaborations that expand organizational capacity; space and opportunity to build community through music; and faculty diversity, professionalism, expertise, competence, and quality.
Current State

A SWOT analysis of the data collected by the environmental scan, presented below, identified the organization’s main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The goals, strategies, and performance indicators provided in the following section build on those positives to address the current challenges facing the organization.

### INTERNAL FACTORS
(internal organization)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Mission</td>
<td>• Finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Location</td>
<td>• Limited visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Leadership</td>
<td>• Instrument upgrades and additional technology resources required for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reputation</td>
<td>remote lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community history</td>
<td>• Limited professional development opportunities for faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Faculty</td>
<td>• New partnerships and collaborations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Group experiences</td>
<td>• Decline in number of African American students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Instruction (e.g., the WW</td>
<td>• Decisions not driven by data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>way)</td>
<td>• Faculty’s need for technology training and development</td>
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### EXTERNAL FACTORS
(external organization)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• City’s interest in developing Selby Avenue (jazz destination location)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Early childhood education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Senior education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Technology/online instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stronger Instruction, music theory delivery</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Jazz and world drumming</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ensembles</td>
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<tr>
<td>• WW + HSRA + Penumbra 3-way partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Festivals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Church music ministry</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Community convenings using WW facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stronger partnerships with African American social groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Video/showcase founders and African American music history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased Interest in WW student participation in public arts spaces</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THREATS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Destination location (Selby Avenue changing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uncertainty about future arts funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Seniors (silver tsunami—changing community)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of visibility within broader Twin Cities community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of school partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Measurement of impact and outcomes—not art for art sake, impact and outcomes are necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Currently leasing space in building that may be redeveloped</td>
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<td>• COVID-19</td>
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## Goals, Strategies, and Key Performance Indicators

### Student Composition and Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOAL</th>
<th>OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Further develop, plan, and implement Walker</td>
<td>West Without Walls as a signature program.</td>
<td>1.1: Establish a leadership team to fully develop the program structure and curriculum plan for Walker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.2: Implement the structure and curriculum plan developed by the leadership team in a pilot program.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3: Evaluate pilot program execution and outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Expand enrollment and engagement of students and families who are most in need of music education.</td>
<td>2.1: Increase enrollment and engagement of African American students, lower-income students, and students/families in WWMA’s immediate neighborhood by 25% each.</td>
<td>• Enrollment of African American students, lower-income students, and student/families in the immediate neighborhood increases by 25% each.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Continue to build partnerships and collaborations to expand program enrollment and engagement.</td>
<td>3.1: Focus on overall growth by building specific collaborations and partnerships that introduce African American students, lower-income students, and students/families in the immediate neighborhood to WWMA.</td>
<td>• Partnerships are established with local businesses and organizations to boost student enrollment and engagement and designated populations are active participants. • Enrollment distribution is rebalanced to optimize the representation of targeted populations. • Seminars, festivals, and other events (e.g., Selby Jazz) are fruitful student recruitment locations.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.2: Develop a signature music program to help drive African American student academic success and engage students to use their innate gifts and propensity for success.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Program Quality and Staffing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Key Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1: Continue to improve systematic efforts to gather data and widely share results related to student outcomes; educational, job, and internship placement; and professional achievement.</td>
<td>• Measurement of organizational impact and outcomes is increased. • Organizational value and accountability is more clearly demonstrated to community and funders. • Parents, teachers, and community members are better integrated into evaluation processes. • Better structure and documentation of student achievement/recognition from one level to the next that shows student progress over time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2: Track and publish specific metrics for improvement of Walker</td>
<td>West operations and services, including data gathered regularly through surveys of students, faculty, and staff.</td>
<td>• Student satisfaction is measured through reflective surveys. • Assessment of customer service is conducted at key points of contact. • Data that can be used to enhance operations and services is available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3: Continue to systematically implement metrics that measure Academy-wide and program-specific learning outcomes and competencies.</td>
<td>• Direct links between music education, brain development, and academic success (e.g., in Obama Elementary Music Program) are visible. • Data are collected to determine whether program activities are producing the desired result and results are adequate in proportion to their cost. • Numbers of students taking lessons and participating in ensembles and group instruction are tracked annually. • Data that can be used to enhance programming are collected.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.4: Quantify improvements in Walker</td>
<td>West’s financial base, including increases in sources and amount of revenue.</td>
<td>• Measurement of organizational impact and outcomes has increased and is ongoing. • Walker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5: Explore and implement the most effective economic opportunities to upgrade instruments (e.g., partnerships, rental/leasing agreements, direct purchases).</td>
<td>• A plan for all required instrument upgrades is completed and a timeline for plan implementation is in place.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6: Equip employees with the resources to drive innovation and increase their effectiveness in teaching and their personal and artistic growth.</td>
<td>• Walker</td>
<td>West employees’ experience is further enhanced. • Appropriate professional development opportunities are available. • Employee wellness in terms of market rate wages and salaries is regularly evaluated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7: Expect and foster exemplary teaching.</td>
<td>• Student satisfaction reports and student placement report findings inform operations and programs.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Sustaining the Academy | 5. Build permanent programs that transform Walker|West offerings beyond after-school music programming and provide music education across all generations. | 5.1: Identify and sustain anchor programs by age groups (Early Childhood Music Program, Public School Residency Music Program, Digital Music Production, Elders Group Music Program) and integrate inter-generational components across programs. | Early Childhood Music Program  
- Continue expansion of the early childhood music program drawing on music to enhance brain development.  
Public School Residency Music Program  
- Continue current Obama Elementary residency music program to provide music instruction to students who do not have access to music in their school and expand into additional public schools.  
Digital Music Production  
- Continue current collaboration with the High School of Recording Arts to engage urban teenagers and enhance their skills in digital music production.  
Elders Group Music Program  
- Continue the Amazing Grace Chorus to allow elder singers to give voice to their creative potential and combat the isolation many elders experience.  
- Leverage senior housing in the community to build an instrumental ensemble. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 5.2: Develop growth plan for anchor programs. | A growth plan for anchor programs has been developed.  
A series of initiatives to extend the Walker|West brand has been created and launched. | 6. Improve long-term financial stability, including retiring debt and increasing both program income and individual and foundation donations. | 6.1: Create a funding and financial plan to bolster the Academy’s strategic initiatives and establish a longer-term financial reserves plan and governance structure.  
- Funding, financial, and reserves plans are developed and implemented.  
- Double Walker|West’s fundraising income:  
  - Individual donors increase annual gifts.  
  - Number of corporate donors and corporate giving levels have increased.  
  - New grants fund new programs/services, including administration, outreach, and marketing.  
  - Strategic partnerships and collaborations generate additional program revenue.  
  - The Academy relies most on individual donations and program income. |
| 6.2: Explore and implement opportunities associated with increasing funding streams. | A more accurate overall budget identifies revenue and expenses of all projects and programs, including necessary overhead such as time devoted to communications, outreach, and fundraising. | 6.3: Identify opportunities to manage short-term financial fluctuations. | The Academy’s financial base is strengthened and diversified through improved efficiency, increased fundraising, and development of new revenue sources. |
### Communications, Outreach, and Engagement

**7. Increase Walker|West's visibility via community outreach and engagement.**

- **7.1: Continue to communicate programming and community engagement activities to the community and potential donors.**
  - A communications plan, including target audience and modes of communications (e.g., open house, webinar, website), is developed and implemented.
  - The organization’s internal identity and external image are aligned with Walker|West’s mission.
  - A focus on African American churches and public schools is maintained.
  - Walker|West's communication approaches are refined to highlight its strengths and most prominent commitments and characteristics.

- **7.2: Promote the contribution of music education to early childhood brain development and maximizing academic success.**
  - The value of the Walker|West Music Academy experience is demonstrated to families and educators across the socio-economic spectrum.
  - Emotionally moving and compelling stories (narratives) that connect deeply with current and prospective Walker|West students are created and shared.
  - Communications strategies emphasize distinctive learning opportunities.
  - New opportunities for learning centers are identified and pursued (e.g., senior housing, community centers, etc.).

### Infrastructure

**8. Explore feasible options for expanding and acquiring space to support formal and informal interactions among Walker|West musicians, community members, and visitors and help Walker|West fully realize its long-term sustainability, viability, and efficiency.**

- **8.1: Develop a facility plan that includes a larger community gathering space.**
  - A thorough review of Walker|West’s space usage is completed.
  - Space needs are determined and a plan is created and executed.

- **8.2: Based on the facility plan, identify and explore cost-effective space opportunities, including building ownership, leasing, space sharing with partner organizations, and available City of Saint Paul resources.**
  - A study timeline is established.
  - Facility options are studied.
  - A physical environment or scenarios is recommended to Board of Directors that will support greater community engagement and open new opportunities for inspiring programming.

- **8.3: By the end of 2023, acquire space that accommodates Walker|West’s facility needs.**
  - Necessary teaching, rehearsal, practice, performance, community, and storage space is acquired.

- **8.4: Become a community destination that includes appropriate sound treatment, performance halls, rehearsal spaces, and attractive waiting areas for families, community members, and other guests.**
  - An enduring destination is established.
  - Walker|West has strengthened its sustainability.

- **8.5: Create specific space for cyber learning and performance.**
  - Technologically integrated space for advanced learning and performance is created.
Implementation of the Strategic Plan

The Board of Directors will oversee the accomplishment of the Strategic Goals as outlined in this plan. The Board may assign committees and staff liaisons to track individual goals and/or objectives as necessary and appropriate. The Executive Director will provide the Board of Directors with an operational workplan and periodic reports on the overall progress toward each goal and discussion of what is working and recommended changes or additions to the plan. The Board of Directors reserves the right to amend this plan as needed throughout the three-year implementation timeframe.

Acknowledgments

Walker|West’s Board of Directors thanks everyone involved in the development of this Strategic Plan. The board is especially grateful to the twenty stakeholders who provided information through individual interviews.

WALKER|WEST STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
Walker|West Board Members, Administrative Team, and Selected Faculty
Maya Beecham, Vice Chair, Board of Directors
Braxton Haulcy, Executive Director
Tonya Gregory, Program Director
Earl Ross, String Department
Grant West, Co-Founder and Piano Department Head

WALKER|WEST BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Barbara Doyle, Chair, Minneapolis Urban League
Maya Beecham, Vice Chairman, Minnesota Office of Higher Education
Tim Nelson, Secretary, Minnesota Public Radio
Eric Clark, Treasurer, Habitat for Humanity
Mary Balcom, Honson Balkcom Law Group, Ltd.
Maya Buckner, The Maya Marchelle Company
Anthony Cox, Musician and Educator
Sharon Garth, Dove Ministries
Dr. Valerie Littles-Butler, Saint Paul Public Schools
Margaret Marrinan, Minnesota District Court Judge, Retired
David Mohr, Morgan Stanley Wealth Management
David Pegg, State of Minnesota
Lawrence Waddell, Musician
Karen Welle, Division of Health Policy, MN Dept of Health

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Reverend Carl Walker, Co-Founder
Grant West, Co-Founder

WALKER|WEST ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM
Braxton Haulcy, Executive Director
Tonya Gregory, Program Director
Lisa D. Moy, Student Services Manager
Ronisha Davis, Office Manager and Student Services Coordinator

STRATEGIC PLANNING INTERVIEWS
Diana Babcock, MacPhail Center for Music, Community Partner
Paul Babcock, MacPhail Center for Music, Community Partner
Mary K. Boyd, MKB Associates, Advisory Committee, Community Partner, Donor
Melvin Carter, Mayor of City of Saint Paul, Parent, Government Community Partner
Toni Carter, Ramsey County Commissioner, Grandparent, Government Community Partner
Sharon Demark, Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundation, Funder
Morgan Fierst, Parent
Greg Finzell, Rondo Community Land Trust, Former Board Member, Community Partner
Beverly Hawkins, Former CEO of Model Cities, Community Leader
Felix James, Walker|West Faculty
Vanne Owens-Hayes, Cultural Consultant and Health Educator, Advisory Committee Member, Community Partner, Donor
Arletta Little, McKnight Foundation, Funder
Matt Owen, Central High School, School Community Partner
JoAnne Peters, Butler Family Foundation, Funder, Parent
Toni Carter, Ramsey County Commissioner, Grandparent, Government Community Partner
Diane Snodgrass, Obama Elementary School, School Community Partner
Rev. James Thomas, Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, Parent, Community Partner
Carl Walker, Walker|West, Co-Founder
Thomas Wells, Walker|West Faculty
Grant West, Walker|West, Co-Founder, Faculty

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Contact Walker|West Music Academy to learn more about how to participate in programs as a student or partner.
Follow us on Facebook at @WalkerWest Music