

Strategic Plan 2012-2015



comox valley
ART GALLERY

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Comox Valley Art Gallery

Strategic Plan, 2012-2015

Fresh, surprising, evocative.

1.0 Mandate/Mission

Mission/Mandate: The Comox Valley Art Gallery (CVAG) is a regional public art gallery dedicated to exhibiting, interpreting and celebrating emergent contemporary art practice. This includes facilitating art education and critical conversation and presenting programming that encourages an ongoing exploration of the arts and their role in shaping and clarifying our culture. We do this in a welcoming and engaging environment where all visitors and participants are invited to examine, challenge, and transform their understanding of the world around them.

Vision:

The Comox Valley Art Gallery is a vibrant cultural centre in our community with a dynamic membership and engaged volunteer base.

The Comox Valley Art Gallery actively reaches out into the community, cultivating diverse relationships, initiating unique partnerships and modeling inclusion and openness.

The Comox Valley Art Gallery values education and the ongoing pursuit of knowledge, understanding and excellence.

The Comox Valley Art Gallery operates with clarity of purpose, high integrity and a strong commitment to effective management and good governance.

The Comox Valley Art Gallery is a courageous organization that embraces challenging material and encourages rich discourse.

The Comox Valley Art Gallery is a champion of creative industry and is recognized as a significant contributor to the cultural economy and destination tourism of the region.

2.0 Core Activities

Visual Arts: The Gallery places emphasis on *contemporary* visual art by professional West Coast, Canadian and international artists – both established and emerging. Work selected for exhibition resonates, in some way, with issues and debates that have regional relevance. We program three Gallery spaces. The Contemporary Gallery exhibits the work of professional artists; and the Community and George Sawchuck Galleries the work of local artists.

Media Arts: In partnership with the Film Circuit of the Toronto International Film Festival and the Rialto Theatre, CVAG presents an international film series with at least ten films screened from September through April. There are no other venues in the region showing art films, animations or shorts on a regular basis, yet the success of and feedback from our International Film Series demonstrates there is a keen and demanding audience.

The Gallery has recently entered into the production of media art through the instigation of its Media Lab. This lab, currently in development, is designed as a platform through which community outreach initiatives will be created, and through which members will be provided access to new media technologies.

Education: Art Education is an emerging program for Comox Valley Art Gallery with development opportunities. Each exhibition presents opportunities for education – through measures such as group tours, artist talks, didactic materials, demonstrations, workshops and discussion groups. Art Education includes engaging with local schools, colleges and community groups enabling connections with new audiences unfamiliar with the Gallery.

The Gallery Gift Shop: The Gallery Shop offers one of the best selections of high quality handmade artwork on Vancouver Island. It is well known as *the* destination for locally made personal and significant occasion gifts. The Shop features work from more than one hundred different artists, some of whom have been selling work in the shop for a number of years, and new artists are added regularly. Excellent relationships with participating artisans contribute to the success of this largely consignment retail venue.

Socioeconomic Health: We work hard to leverage the arts as a catalyst for community revitalization: the creation of new markets, good jobs and the long-term enrichment of the region are all part of our driving purpose. We at CVAG are convinced that advancement of the arts, increased tourism, deeper community participation, and regional economic redevelopment are all mutually reinforcing and inextricably linked. We collaborate with many partners to strengthen regional tourism, and attract and retain residents.

3.0 Background

The Comox Valley Art Gallery (CVAG) is a non-profit, 37-year-old regional public art gallery – one of four such galleries on Vancouver Island. The Gallery hosts 22,000 visitations annually, drawing visitors from Courtenay (35%), Comox (21%), Cumberland (7%), Royston/Union Bay (10%), Black Creek/Merville (4%), Denman and Hornby Islands (1%), other areas of Vancouver Island (11%), other areas within Canada (9%) and internationally (2%). The Gallery has 400 members, 355 fans on Facebook and we directly engage around 400 individuals a year in art education activities.

In 2005, the Gallery realized a decade-old dream to move into a new, award-winning arts centre built in Courtenay's old Firehall. With this move came opportunities to significantly increase the Gallery's regional base, and to cultivate a symbolic presence, attracting new interest from visitors locally and beyond.

The potential for growth offered through the relocation initiative has yet, however, to be fully realized. Though the Gallery continues to offer a wide range programs and services to individuals throughout the region, the scope and sophistication of its activities has not significantly changed since the move. The lack of growth can be attributed to a range of factors, notably, the economic downturn of 2008 and the resulting cutbacks in arts funding. Of further impact is the organization's reliance on earned revenue through its Gift Shop; the profit margin of which has declined since the onslaught of the recession. In the face of declining revenues, the organization has struggled to retain staff, and to put forward a strong growth-plan for the coming years.

4.0 Approach

This document maps out such a plan. Premised upon the philosophy 'think globally, act locally', it offers an approach to organizational development that begins with the cultivation of a strong community network – one rooted in principles of equality, participation and access. Once our community roots have been strengthened and expanded, the task at hand (outlined in Phase 2 of the plan), is to evolve artistic programming, mobilizing the power of bold and fantastic art to cultivate experiences that are 'fresh, surprising and evocative' to community members and visitors alike. Through this two-phase approach, we intend to respond effectively to the cultural needs and opportunities evident within the region (see Appendix A for an outline of these needs/opportunities) and to mobilize our community to support of bold art that engenders pride-of-place. Through this plan, the Board and Staff intend to instigate a paradigm shift in which the Gallery is re-positioned as a ***vital tourism destination, driver of community-based innovation and expression of regional pride.***

5.0

PHASE 1: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

2012-2013

Growing our regional relevance and connectedness

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - OUTREACH – EDUCATION

5.1 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Re-framing the Gallery as a *vital tourism destination, a driver of community-based innovation and an instigator of regional pride* begins, we believe, with the growth of a strong and active community base – developed through engagement, outreach and education initiatives. This base is comprised of local advocates for the Gallery – individuals and organizations whose values are aligned with ours, and who actively work to improve the Gallery’s position and contribution within the community. These members sit on our Board of Directors, participate in artist-talks and exhibitions, volunteer in various capacities, visit the Gallery, offer and receive connections and inspiration, enhance our community’s well-being and connectedness, etc.

Growth, in our minds, refers not only to the quantity of members, but to the quality of member engagement, and to the diversity in the membership’s composition. We envision a membership that is: passionately involved in the work of the gallery, and in the community espoused therein; active in supporting the gallery – both financially and through donations of time and resources and intellectually engaged in the direction of the Gallery.

Key Performance Indicators (by December, 2013):

- **Membership numbers increase: from 400 to 600**
- **Visitation numbers increase: from 22,000 to 25,000**
- **Member-based (ie: free community) events increase: from 5 to 25**
- **Volunteer numbers increase: from 50 to 75**
- **A comprehensive Donor/Sponsorship program is implemented**
- **A Community Engagement staff position is created**
- **A Visitor Lounge is created**
- **A Member-driven Community Newsletter/Zine (printed & electronic) is developed.**
- **Average attendance at Member Meetings increases (from 10 to 30).**
- **The gift shop’s net revenue increases by \$10,000 – reflecting growing community participation**

Goals:

The process of developing a strong and active membership base involves several goals, including: 1) the **development of an engaging social environment** in which visitors feel welcomed, 2) **enhancement of accessibility and awareness** of the Gallery's activities within the local community, and 3) the **development of member-based fundraising programs**.

1. **Develop an engaging social environment in which visitors feel welcomed, and challenged to think and create.**

Enhance the 'Visitor Experience': Work is needed to improve the overall visitor experience, which begins with visitors' interactions with the Gallery through print and electronic media, and continues on to the visitors' human interactions with staff, their interactions with the space itself, with the art displayed, and with the Gallery's programming, education and community outreach initiatives. Providing a friendly, interactive, welcoming and 'fun' visitor experience on all levels of contact, and thereby ensuring a high level of client satisfaction, will result in an increase in overall interest and engagement in the Gallery, and a growth in membership numbers.

In 2012, we plan to bring in outside expertise (ie: a consultant) to engage staff in **professional development workshops designed to improve customer service** protocol. An **increase in human resources** capacity is needed to enhance the quality of engagement with our visitors, and to this end, we intend to **hire a Community Engagement Coordinator** in 2013 to (among other tasks) manage and improve the visitor experience, and to support the growth of the membership. In addition, the following membership development initiatives are planned:

Increased number of Events: Beginning in 2012 (and continuing on into 2013 and beyond), we plan to increase the number of free community and member-based events, so as to bring individuals into the gallery who have not yet been, and to increase opportunities for visitors to activate a deeper level of involvement (creatively, intellectually, socially, etc.). These include:

- **Member Meetings:** These newly-initiated meetings serve to inform members of major events and/or opportunities with the Gallery, allow members to network and share ideas, and encourage member participation via the Gallery's committee structure. While this initiative is currently in its infancy, it is intended that it grow in such a way that members become involved as 'movers and shakers' in the Gallery's core initiatives.
- **Education Events: See 5.3 (page 12) of the Strategic Plan (Education: New Programs)**

2. Cultivate a strong visual presence and destination appeal

Invest in Signage: By increasing signage, the Gallery increases its profile within the local region and community, and sends a welcoming message to passers-by. Many visitors have expressed frustration in trying to locate the Gallery due to its lack of signage. By more clearly marking the building, we increase local awareness of our existence and activities, and thereby cultivate an increase in both visitation and membership numbers.

Develop Visitor Lounge: Currently there exists no space within the Gallery for members and visitors to sit and socially interact. To construct the Gallery as a social destination, and to provide enhanced value to the visitor experience, we intend to develop a visitor 'lounge' that involves seating and refreshment options (the viability of refreshment provisions to be researched). Currently, this lounge is projected to be placed within the Community Gallery so as to surround those engaged in 'social' activity with dynamic community art. Planning for this initiative will occur throughout 2012 (the Gallery will apply for a planning grant through Enterprising Non-Profits), for installation in 2013.

In addition to the 'lounge', the newly-developed Media Lab will serve as a social environment for members. In this space, members will have the opportunity to interact with art-producers, and to collaborate on projects as desired. The Lab is projected to be operational by June of 2012.

Engage in Community Re-Branding Partnership: Effort is needed to develop a strong and consistent brand for the Gallery that speaks to our core values, and that sends a welcoming message to the community. In 2012, we intend to partner with the Fine Arts Diploma program at North Island College to undertake a brand-development initiative – drawing upon the expertise of students and faculty to engage Gallery staff in a process of creative development, and to thereafter construct a variety of brand options for consideration. Implementation of the new brand will occur in 2013¹.

3. Develop fundraising programs/events

Beginning in 2012, and continuing into 2013 and beyond, we plan to implement a series of fundraising (and fun-raising) programs/events that encourage a greater level of participation and financial commitment/support amongst members and the general public at large. These initiatives include both the expansion/development of existing initiatives, and the instigation of new ones:

¹ Note: this partnership serves a dual purpose – to develop a new brand for the Gallery, and to strengthen the Gallery's relationship with NIC/EC students, faculty and staff.

Existing Initiatives:

- Development of the **Wearable Art Show** (annual event scheduled for July, 2012). Through this show, we plan to attract increased interest/investment in the Gallery by including one additional 'matinee' performance.
- The **2012 Christmas Craft Fair** is planned to occupy full gallery in 2012 and 2013 (as opposed to half of the Gallery, as is customary). This move is projected to both increase revenue through sales, and to extend the gallery's network of connections with local artists.
- Masquerade: On October 20th, 2012, we're planning a large-scale **masquerade party/fundraiser and silent auction**. This event is designed to **replace the bi-annual auction**, and may be replicated and developed as an annual event.
- **The Film Series:** Efforts will be made to increase viewership so as to sell-out our existing Toronto International Film Series screenings. These efforts may include: purchasing (or pursuing sponsorship for a video ad to be played prior to Rialto films, developing relationships with local businesses, promoting the festival in advance through on-site events, etc. Additionally, we are expanding the Film Series to include three additional screenings (a Spring series) in 2012.
- This year, we plan to hold the Wearable Art Show alongside a **Lost Treasures fundraiser** (July, 2012). This fundraiser may be developed into an annual event in 2013 and beyond.

New Initiatives:

- Development of an **Annual Campaign Letter (and associated Donor Program)** to be sent to members in May of 2012, and annually thereafter. This campaign informs members of some of the opportunities/challenges facing the Gallery, and requests support. This program will be developed in concert with a **Sponsorship Program** (see below).
- Development of a **Sponsorship Program** geared towards businesses. This program will invite businesses to support key initiatives of the Gallery in exchange for advertising in our Sponsorship pamphlet, and name-recognition at events. The Donor and Sponsorship programs include the development of recognition activities for Donors/Sponsors (ie: a 'Donor's wall, benefits for tiered giving, etc.).
- Development of a **Print Run** through a local screen printer that involves the replication of a print series (ie: 3 print runs of 100 each) which sells through both the Gallery and Shop.

Through the above-mentioned programs and events, we intend to develop a fun and participatory culture that provides members the opportunity to interact with and support the Gallery in new ways.

5.2 OUTREACH

Re-framing the Gallery as a *vital tourism destination, a driver of community-based innovation and an instigator of regional pride* involves, in our view, the cultivation of an atmosphere of inclusiveness at all levels of the organization. It involves inviting people from a diverse range of backgrounds (including ethnicity, income, sexual preference, special needs, etc.) to participate in Gallery activities, and creating a welcoming democratic sphere in which a wide range of voices can be heard.

Efforts will be made in 2012/13 to invite participation in the Gallery and its activities from particular demographics and subcultures for whom there is an identified 'gap' in participation, and for whom relationship-cultivation is considered a strategic priority: seniors, youth and individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. To this end, we plan to undertake a series of development projects in collaboration with key community partners that are structured in such a way as to invite diversity, break down barriers to participation and serve as models for community innovation and engagement.

Key Performance Indicators (by December, 2013):

- **In 2012 and 2013, the Gallery is host to (or partner to) two 'pilot' projects that engage with communities identified as under-served.**
- **The media lab is utilized as a classroom/production space for at least one of these projects.**
- **15 works are created through the Media Lab in 2012 and 30 in 2013.**
- **Diversity (of race, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, etc.) is evident within the organization's governance structures (ie: on its Board of Directors, etc.)**

Goals:

1. Develop the Media Lab:

The Media Lab, currently in development, will be completed by June, 2012. This lab will serve as a hub for member media-based production, and as a platform for production rooted in strategic community outreach.

2. Initiate Community Development Projects involving Art Production:

A series of projects will be initiated that engage marginalized demographics and sub-cultures in art- production initiatives. These initiatives will occur in partnership with key community-based organizations. Two such projects will be accomplished in 2012, however, additional projects will also undergo research and development during this time, with the intent of launching them in the future. The following projects are currently being developed:

Youth Media Project: Designed to activate the voices of local youth surrounding key issues that are of interest to them through the language of Visual and Media arts. Currently, we are working with the Wachiay Friendship Centre to develop this project, and are pursuing funding

from multiple sources (ie: Vancouver Foundation, Service Canada, Canada Council for the Arts, etc.)

Graffiti Project: Designed to engage local youth street artists and street art appreciators in an exploration of legal graffiti and public art-making practices. The project involves a partnership with local 'underground' arts advocate, Wallfarmers.ca, as well as exhibition, production and education components. Funding applications are to be made to the Canada Council for the Arts and other granting agencies as appropriate.

Digital Storytelling for Seniors: Designed to engage Seniors in a process of public storytelling, using digital technologies (ie: video, animation). Currently involves a partnership with North Island College's ElderCollege, with grant application to Service Canada's New Horizon Program outstanding.

5.3 EDUCATION

While education has always been a central component of the CVAG's activities, work is needed in the coming years to expand education initiatives so as to cultivate a dynamic presence within, and contribution to, the local community. Currently, our education initiatives consist of: school visitations, artist talks and a workshop series for adults, youth and children. While we intend to maintain our artist talks and workshop series as they exist, we envision growth in our school visitations. We also envision the development of a number of new education programs, including: a Docent program, a Gallery in the Schools program, an Artist in the Schools program, an Art Expeditions program and ART21 (a dialogue program).

Within these initiatives, efforts will be made, where logical, to link our education initiatives to our exhibition series. In making this linkage, there exists the potential to cultivate a two-way line of communication, in which exhibitions are used as a starting point for dialogue and exchange. By engineering these conversations, we hope to create a sense of community and intrigue around these exhibitions, and to promote community-based innovation.

Key Performance Indicators (by December, 2013):

- **School Visitations increase: from 6 (current) to 15 per year**
- **A 'Docent' program is developed**
- **A 'Gallery in the Schools' program is developed**
- **An 'Artist in the Schools' program is developed**
- **An 'Art Expeditions' program is developed**
- **A Dialogue Series is developed (ie: Art 21)**
- **Our existing partnership with North Island College's Fine Art Department is developed and strengthened.**

Goals:

1. School Visitations

Over the next two years, we plan to increase the Gallery's school visitations from 6 to 15 per year. Currently we are in the process of developing a template that outlines various options available to school groups (ie: tour, talk & workshop), and that provides pricing for each. We are also in the process of developing a 'school visit kit' that outlines a format and protocol for visits, and that allows some of the work involved with visits to be accomplished by volunteers.

2. New Programs

Docent Program/ Discover Art Saturdays: Designed to engage visitors of all ages in conversations about the works exhibited in the Gallery, and to provide opportunities for visitors to 'get their hands dirty' by creating unique visual arts projects. Currently this program occurs on selected Saturdays, and involves a three-hour 'discovery' session – the first hour is a facilitated art discussion, and the remaining hours a 'creation blitz'.

Dialogue Series (Art 21): Using the PBS ART21 series as a platform for dialogue and discussion, the CVAG Curator guides visitors through an exploration of the various themes, ideas and reactions that manifest when viewing this 'contemporary art' documentary series. This initiative takes place on selected Wednesdays throughout the year.

Gallery in the Schools: Designed to bring critical art discussions off-site into schools and classrooms. This program is not yet operational, but is planned to be so by December, 2013.

Art Expeditions: This program is a newly-conceived initiative that involves off-site Member-based tours of Galleries throughout the Island and into the lower mainland. The tours will be followed by public presentations that speak to the art experienced, and to the themes and ideas expressed therein. This project may be developed by the CVAG Members Group.

3. Partnership with Academic Art Institutions

The Gallery Board and Staff will pursue partnerships with academic art institutions. The idea of a jointly-produced *Contemporary Arts Conference* may be proposed to such institutions for consideration. Additionally, there exists a role for students to play as democratic participants of the Gallery's life and culture – for instance, in contributing to the development of its Media Lab and Docent programs, volunteering, sitting on the Board, etc.

5.4 ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

To accomplish the plan outlined above, investments are needed in the organization's capacity. These investments can be categorised as: governance, human resources and communications / information. Some of the required investments involve re-allocation of staff time and strategic usage of volunteer time (including mobilization of the membership); others require financial resources.

Key Performance Indicators (by December, 2013):

- **Existence of Board Policy Manual**
- **Existence of Organizational Policy & Procedure Manual**
- **Existence of Community Engagement Coordinator position**
- **Existence of comprehensive database**
- **Existence of funding to support growth-initiatives**

1. Organizational Investments

GOVERNANCE

Board Development

Work is needed to strengthen the Board's role, growing it into a model for non-profit governance. A major recruitment initiative will occur with respect to the 2012 Annual General Meeting, and recruitment included as a key Board activity thereafter.

Policy Development

Effort will be made to strengthen and clarify the organization's operations through the development of a policy and procedures manual. This manual will include policies related to human resources, creative submissions, media lab usage, the permanent collection, membership, volunteerism, safety/emergency, etc.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Member Services Coordinator

Additional human resources are needed to spearhead the growth of the CVAG membership – including its Sponsorship and Donor programs. In 2012, we intend to pursue resources that will allow us to add one additional part-time (25 hrs/wk) staff member to our team. This position will oversee a wide array of member services, cultivate new revenue for the organization and work to develop a long-term community-engagement and development plan.

Closing the Wage Gap

Investment in ongoing staff salaries is needed to bring wages up to par with industry standards. Currently, staff are paid, on average, 25% below that which is standard in BC public art Galleries (based on wage study accomplished by Campbell River Art Gallery). Work is needed to close the

gap so as to retain a strong staff team that will move the organization forward. We will pursue funding throughout the next four years that will allow us to 'close the wage gap', and to thereby build sustainability and long-term excellence into our human resources practices.

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT

Effort is needed to develop a comprehensive system for the tracking and management of information as related to gallery contacts - our current systems are inadequate to accomplish the scope of communications necessary to achieve the growth outlined in Phase 1. A database is needed, and upon its completion, work is needed to strategically deploy the data collected so as to achieve maximum communications benefit for the Gallery and its initiatives.

Database Development: The timeline for database development is as follows:

- May-Aug, 2012: Set up a database for the tracking of customer/member/donor information (summer student project, with assistance from database developer). The database should be of sufficient complexity to allow us to target particular demographics/interests within our membership with suitable pieces of information, and to view the history of individual member transactions.
- Sept, 2012: Set up protocols for collecting this information, as well as incentives for the collection of this information.

Strategic use of Data: Upon gaining access to an expanded bank of data, we intend to build our membership by offering information to, and inviting participation from, individuals currently on the periphery of the Gallery and its activities. The Database will also serve as a key piece of infrastructure that will allow us to coordinate our fundraising initiatives.

2. Increasing Revenue

It is estimated that \$50,000 is needed (in addition to ongoing operating capital) to accomplish the growth initiatives identified in Phase 1. Efforts are currently being made to research and pursue funding sources to this end. We are considering applying for a wage-subsidy program in 2013 through Young Canada Works that would partially support the Community Engagement Coordinator position. It is hoped that some of the new fundraising initiatives we have planned for 2012 (ie: the initiation of Donor and Sponsorship programs as well as an Annual Campaign) will produce new revenue that would then be allocated to various aspects of this initiative. Additionally, revenue will be sought through project grants through various municipal, provincial and national funding sources.

5.5 SUMMARY:

By following this strategy, we intend to enact a series of changes within the Gallery that significantly increase its presence within, impact upon and service to the local (ie: regional) community. We envision a community whose pride in the Art Gallery is demonstrated through hands-on involvement and democratic participation. Through this Phase 1 strategy, we plan to enhance the Gallery's symbolic position within the local community, and to re-frame it as a *vital tourism destination, a driver of community-based innovation and an instigator of regional pride.*

6.0

PHASE 2: BUILDING EXCELLENCE

Give them something to talk about

BOLD ART – TOURISM

2014-2015

Following on the heels of an initiative to dramatically increase the Gallery's presence within the local community is one in which the Gallery becomes recognized, both within and outside of the Comox Valley, for its spirit of innovation and its commitment to artistic excellence. In this phase, we leverage new-found community investment cultivated in Phase 1 to exhibit bold art that is 'fresh, surprising and evocative'. This art will target four key demographics: **1. School Aged Children (Grades K-12), 2. Non-artist and/or persons with low-medium familiarity/knowledge of contemporary art, 3. Artists and/or persons with a high level of familiarity/knowledge of contemporary art, and 4. Retired and non-working persons.** These demographics will serve as the basis for a dynamic and wide-ranging marketing campaign. Additionally, the community-building work outlined in Phase 1 will continue, adding fuel to our efforts to significantly re-frame the Gallery's identity and symbolic presence. Throughout this phase, we plan to construct the Gallery (and the Region) as a destination cultural hot-spot, and to work alongside other cultural entities to bolster the region's cultural tourism market.

6.1 BOLD ART THAT DRAWS A CROWD

Efforts will be made to program exhibitions that are 'fresh, surprising and evocative', and that reflect the Gallery's vision and its commitment to the key above-mentioned audiences (at least one exhibition per year will target each of these audiences). A 'blockbuster' exhibition will be programmed every two years through partnership with other BC Galleries and investment in grant applications (ie: Canadian Heritage: Museums Assistance Program). This exhibition will serve as a significant tourism draw – not only to the Comox Valley Art Gallery, but to the region at large.

Efforts will be made to supplement our exhibition program with a diversity of artistic experiences (ranging from music to dance and performance art) – programmed through partnerships with other cultural organizations. Through these experiences, we create intersections between the work that we do and cultural/creative processes occurring within the community at large.

Finally, this stage involves activation of the plaza, and the Region's 'public' space at large – in consultation with a range of stakeholders (ie: the City of Courtenay and other municipal governance entities, other tenant organizations of the Comox Valley Centre for the Arts, etc.). While the details of this activation are still to be determined, we see in this initiative the potential to significantly increase

the visual and symbolic profile of the Gallery, to mobilize the possibilities inherent within public art to achieve 'destination' status, and to thereby attract visitors to the Region.

Key Performance Indicators:

- **The existence of funding for blockbuster exhibitions**
- **CVAG exhibitions are widely celebrated in local and provincial news media, as well as in national and international arts publications.**
- **The existence of at least one 'public art' project**

6.2 TOURISM & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Alongside our efforts to program bold art exhibitions (both inside and outside the CVAG Gallery spaces) lies an initiative to connect these exhibitions with as broad an audience as possible – with emphasis on the destination tourism market.

This initiative involves, first, **tapping into the existing cultural tourism market** in the region by collaborating with other tourism-focused businesses (including restaurants, accommodations venues, local retailers, etc.), government agencies and cultural entities with an aim to share knowledge and resources, develop mutually-beneficial partnerships, and present coordinated and comprehensive 'tourism enhancement' strategies within the Region. Such partnerships may result in:

- The development of a comprehensive 'cultural walking tour' that provides a diverse and engaging cultural experience to visitors wishing to partake in the region's cultural life.
- The development of jointly-produced events during peak tourism season that serve as 'tourism magnets' and that celebrate the life and vitality of the Region.
- Initiatives to raise awareness of the region's cultural tourism opportunities as a complement to the other forms of tourism presently popular within the valley. (ie: eco-tourism, sports tourism, etc.).

Additionally, CVAG plans to take an active role in **developing an on-site tourism info-centre** that provides additional motivation for tourists to visit the Gallery, and that draws attention to the broad array of tourism possibilities available within the Region.

Through these initiatives, the Gallery aims to significantly increase its tourism traffic – drawing new interest and financial investment into the region.

Key Performance Indicators:

- **Visitation numbers increase from 25,000 (2013) to 50,000 (2015)**
- **The existence of tourism-based partnerships with local businesses and development orgs.**
- **The existence of an on-site tourism info centre**

6.3 ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

The key organizational investment required to bring the Gallery to a new level in terms of its bold art/tourism agenda is that of 'Marketing'. Building on the power of our newly-developed brand (developed in Phase 1 in partnership with North Island College), the Gallery will launch a comprehensive marketing strategy that leverages the power of all communications mediums at its disposal (ie: print media, TV & radio, social media, YouTube, relationship marketing, etc.) to cultivate awareness of its activities on multiple levels, and with multiple demographics (both within the 'domestic visitor' market and a broader 'cultural tourism' market). Funding for this marketing initiative will be sought through grant revenue, donations, sponsorship, etc. Additionally, it is projected that the Gallery will match marketing funds with artistic program funds – procured through exhibition-based grant applications.

Key Performance Indicators:

- **The existence of a Marketing Coordinator position & increased marketing budget**
- **Evidence of creative deployment of all communications platforms available**
- **Evidence of a broad range of marketing partnerships**

7.0 CONCLUSION

Through the efforts outlined in this Strategic Plan, we intend to play a leadership role in diversifying the local economy through the bolstering of the cultural tourism market within the Valley. We believe that these efforts will contribute to the development of the Valley as a thriving visual arts hub, and cultivate within the local community a range of unique creative opportunities that stimulate, provoke and educate.

It should be acknowledged that there exist a range of growth-opportunities that the Gallery does not plan to pursue in the near future, but will pursue in the long-term. Development of our permanent collection, initiation of an artist in residence program and cultivation of an arts festival are just a few of the initiatives we would like to pursue following the actualization of this plan.

In the short-term, however, (ie: the four years described by this document), we look forward to 'laying a foundation for growth', and to 'building excellence' through the initiatives outlined – thereby re-framing the Gallery as a *vital tourism destination, a driver of community-based innovation and an instigator of regional pride*.

Appendix A:

Context - Needs & Opportunities Analysis

The Comox Valley Art Gallery interacts on a regular basis with a complex and evolving set of interests within the Comox Valley region and beyond. By identifying a number of these interests, we intend to situate the Gallery's activities within a wider frame of reference, and draw attention to its potential role as an agent of regional development.

Regional Trends

The Comox Valley is a Growing Region: The Comox Valley Regional District's 2010 *Regional Growth Strategy* outlines a trend in the valley towards A) increased population numbers (the population is expected to increase by 50% over the next 20 years), and B) the propagation of 'urban-sprawl' (as 10,000 more housing units are added to the valley). The strategy advocates for development initiatives to be conducted in a manner "that creates a sustainable long-term development pattern". (CVRD: 2010 *Regional Growth Strategy*)

The Population is Rapidly Ageing: The Comox Valley's climate, natural areas and opportunities for recreation have made it an attractive place for retirees. By 2031, the seniors population is expected to increase from 18% of the population to 26%, while the number of people aged 80 and older will almost double to over 5,000 people. The CVRD report advocates for initiatives to be taken that "allow [seniors] to maintain a high quality of life as they age." (CVRD: 2010 *Regional Growth Strategy*)

Affordability is a growing issue: The cost of home ownership has dramatically increased since 2001, while the average family income has been stagnant. The report advocates the development of targets that "ensure a diversity of housing type, form, tenure and price". (CVRD: 2010 *Regional Growth Strategy*)

Job creation is a challenge: The ratio of jobs to population is relatively low at .45 jobs per person... This trend is expected to continue as there will be more people in the Comox Valley living off the wealth they have accumulated in the past than current paid employment." The report recommends the facilitation of local economic development through a framework of regulation that "encourage[s] entrepreneurship, increase[s] value-added production, and support[s] local businesses". (CVRD: 2010 *Regional Growth Strategy*)

Growth in knowledge-based industries: Additionally, the Valley economy is gaining a reputation for growth in knowledge-based industries - including areas of new media and internet technology, engineering technology, software development, etc. (Invest Comox Valley – *Key Sectors Analysis*).

Sectoral Trends

Provincial arts funding is low, and is under threat: While the national average for provincial arts funding is \$26 per capita, in BC it is \$6.60 per capita.² Beginning in 2008, BC public arts funding came under attack with both BC's Gaming Commission and the BC Arts Council enacting sector-wide cuts. Many organizations throughout the province have since been forced to downsize, and some have had to close their doors. While BC Arts Council's Funding was restored by \$7 million in 2011, this initiative only allowed the Council to reclaim a portion of the moneys cut. BC Gaming funding was also significantly cut in 2010, and the remaining funds designated towards youth and children's programming – a move that has made many organizations previously receiving money from Gaming ineligible (CVAG's Gaming contribution decreased substantially between 2008 and 2011). In 2011, the Province conducted a review of these cutbacks, and has since restored a portion of these funds – recognizing their importance to community and economic development³.

Arts valued for development potential: Along with a national and global progression towards a globalized market ecology, arts organizations have increasingly faced pressure to articulate the rationale underlying their existence in terms of economic development. The 'Creative Cities' movement, made popular in the 90's by such theorists as Richard Florida, has brought to bear a particular role for the arts in enhancing the 'desireability' and competitiveness of urban centres. Arts organizations have grown to assume new roles in tackling socio-economic challenges such as poverty, crime and mental illness, and have been sought out as instigators of urban and economic reform.

Technology is key: The current landscape of national public arts funding demonstrates an emphasis on technology as a vehicle for innovation. Such programs as Canadian Heritage's 'Interactive Fund' have challenged Art organizations to embrace technological innovation as a key growth-tool.

Diversity is important: Likewise, the inclusion of diversity (gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.) within an organization's composition and activities is considered important by such public arts funders as Canadian Heritage and Canada Council for the Arts.

² <http://stopbcartscuts.wordpress.com/>

³ <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2011/03/24/bc-15-million-arts-gaming-grants.html>

Organizational Trends (SWOT Analysis)

STRENGTHS

CVAG is the **only public gallery and the only gallery in the region that brings in exhibitions and artists from outside the Comox Valley region**. The three exhibition galleries provide an opportunity for a wide variety of artistic programming.

Since the arrival of the **Emily Carr University of Art and Design** Bachelor of Fine Arts degree program at North Island College in 2005, CVAG has worked closely with the ECU administration and faculty to host the ECU BFA Graduation exhibition, one of the most anticipated and well attended exhibitions of the year. The inaugural graduating classes exhibit took place in spring of 2007 and CVAG will continue to host this exhibition.

CVAG is unique as the only organization in the Comox Valley presenting **Toronto International Film Festival** movies to the community. Working with the TIFF Festival Circuit, we screen at least ten contemporary international films annually at the Rialto Theatre in south Courtenay. The CVAG Film Selection Committee chooses films from a variety of countries of origin and covering a range of subjects. These are films that would not come to the commercial theatres in this community and have significant artistic and cultural merit.

Another highly anticipated event unique to the Comox Valley is the **CVAG Wearable Art Show and Competition**, a theatrical fashion show that showcases one-of-a-kind wearable artworks in live performances set to music. This event is building a reputation as a “hot ticket sell out” in the valley and has doubled in size in two years. It is significant for engaging CVAG with our theatre, music, design and youth communities.

The Gallery Shop is unique in the quality, variety and moderate price of handmade crafts and artwork. The main feature of the items for sale is that the majority of them are produced within a 100km radius of the Comox Valley, including from surrounding Gulf islands and the Vancouver Island area. Gallery Shop staff are well informed about the artisans represented and are open to taking special orders for customers. Visitors from all over Vancouver Island are drawn to the store, recommend to friends, and often return.

The Current Staff team is strong, and is dedicated to the advancement of the Gallery. There exists a positive and forward-thinking momentum within this team that is resulting in the emergence of new partnerships and opportunities. **The Board Team**, although it faces recruitment challenges, is comprised of individuals who have gone above-and-beyond the call of duty in attempt to maintain the Gallery and its activities amidst a volatile funding climate. The Board-Staff relationship is healthy.

WEAKNESSES

Financial Uncertainty: Since the economic downturn of 2008, CVAG has witnessed a decline in revenue (including both provincial grants and earned revenue) of about 18%. The City of Courtenay came to the Gallery's aid in 2011 with \$50,000 in operating revenue. This revenue, presented as 'stop-gap' or 'emergency' funding, was intended to sustain the Gallery in the short term. Though the City is projected to again provide operational funds to the Gallery in 2012, the longevity of this funding is uncertain.

Work is needed to obtain stable long-term funding, and to diversify our revenue streams. The Gallery has not historically boasted strong donor and/or sponsorship programs. Work is needed to cultivate these programs, which not only serve to stabilize the Gallery's financial status, but also to generate community awareness and participation.

Programming in need of investment: While the staff of the Gallery works to stretch its existing exhibitions/events budget, this budget is relatively low in comparison to other similarly-sized art galleries throughout the province. Additional investment is needed to allow the Gallery to exhibit bold and dynamic work that draws tourism interest to the region, and to cultivate learning and community engagement opportunities alongside this work.

Human Resources is in need of investment: As the organization has struggled to reduce expenditures, it has been unable to compensate its staff in accordance with industry standards. Currently, staff are paid, on average, 25% below that which is standard in BC Galleries (based on wage study accomplished by Campbell River Art Gallery). Work is needed to close the gap so as to retain a strong staff team that will move the organization forward.

Organizational Policies need development: In an effort to 'keep the place afloat', the essential work of constructing policies for such important organizational facets as Human Resources, Exhibition Protocol and the Permanent Collection have been put to the side. Work is needed to construct these policies so as to clarify, and give structure to, the organization's core activities.

Inaccessibility: The Gallery must work hard to convey the message that its services and activities are open to the community at large, and to build community buy-in on all levels. Perceptions of inaccessibility exist, in which the Gallery is perceived to function apart from, rather than as intrinsic to, the local community.

OPPORTUNITIES

Build the Gallery's community of members and supporters: There exist a significant number of individuals who have a peripheral interest, at least, in the gallery and its activities. In 2011, membership numbers increased by 30% over 2010 levels (from 250 to about 325). Exhibitions are often well-attended, film screenings and fundraising events (such as the Wearable Art Show) often sold-out. Work is needed to invite these 'interested' parties into a closer relationship with the Gallery (ie: through membership, volunteerism, donor/sponsorship, etc.).

Increase earned revenue: In conjunction with the move to cultivate members and supporters lies the opportunity to increase earned revenue. The development of Sponsor and Donor programs, as well as of an Annual Campaign, could significantly increase earned revenue. Additional efforts to increase the profit margin in the gift shop (ie: by increasing sales and/or decreasing expenses) would further contribute to this agenda.

Enhance the Gallery's presence (visually, symbolically, etc.): The opportunity exists for the Gallery to significantly enhance its visual and symbolic presence (ie: its 'street-appeal') within the City and Region. This 'enhancement' could include a number of factors, such as public-art sculpture, landscape design, signage, water features, performance and festival activity, an outdoor 'amphitheatre' or stage, green spaces and gardens, a food or coffee vending area with tables, etc. Enhancements to the exterior façade/courtyard have the ability to significantly improve the Gallery's appeal to tourists and locals alike, and to send a 'welcoming' message to those passing by.

Technologize: The opportunity to use technology both as a creative platform (ie: providing access to new media technologies to our members and to targeted community groups), and as an enhancer of administrative processes (ie: increasing organizational efficiency and connectedness) is ever-present. While the institution of new technology-based solutions is often resource-consuming, the end-results often justify the means.

Demonstrate a model of non-profit governance: Currently there exists a desire and plan to affect change on the Board level so as to usher the organization into a new era of leadership. Once this plan has been actualized, the opportunity exists for CVAG to serve as a model to other organizations intending to affect positive change on a governance level.

Become a major player in the region's cultural tourism market: The Comox Valley Regional District's 2010 *Regional Growth Strategy* identifies the emergence within the Valley of a cultural tourism market, and recommends the implementation of initiatives that cater to this market. As an entity strategically positioned at the heart of the Comox Valley's cultural district (ie: between the Library, Sid Williams Theatre and Courtenay & District Museum), and within walking distance to the 5th street shopping district, there exists a potential leadership role for us to play in catalyzing and 'boosting' this market – collaborating with other key cultural entities and businesses, as well as with strategic development entities such as the Downtown Business Association and Comox Valley Economic Development, to bring new tourism revenue into the region.

Diversify and extend our community partnerships and projects: Over the past six months, CVAG has engaged key community leaders in a visioning process, through which we've invited feedback and discussion surrounding potential directions and partnership-based initiatives. From these meetings was built a web of relationships and of innovative ideas. The potential now exists for CVAG to partner on a variety of exciting projects with North Island College (NIC) and the NIC Emily Carr program, ElderCollege, the Wachiay Friendship Centre, the Library, the Linc

Youth Centre, Courtenay and District Museum, Sid Williams Theatre, Simon Fraser University and others.

Increase Education: Significant growth-potential exists in the education domain. The Gallery faces an opportunity to ‘boost’ activity by hosting a range of educational initiatives for adults and Kids on-site at the Gallery, and by bringing art education into the classroom. Various initiatives have been created in 2012 in this domain, such as the Art21 talks, Community Art Days (free art-making workshops and discussions for families), panel discussions associated with exhibitions and a docent program (idea still in formation).

Increase Production: Dovetailing with an increase in education activity is an increase in production. There exists the opportunity for CVAG to provide comprehensive platforms by which to encourage production within its membership and within the community at large. The Media Lab is an initiative designed to provide such a platform; additional effort to provide opportunities in visual art-production could be of value (ie: artist in residence program, member-based ‘art-creation’ events, etc.). CVAG’s existing production studio is currently under-utilized and provides a valuable resource for this type of initiative.

Enhance discourse: CVAG faces an opportunity to position itself as a leader in facilitating discourse surrounding contemporary art practices as they intersect with community interests. Projects accomplished in this vein might involve the hosting of conferences, coordination of public ‘idea-jamming’ sessions surrounding the role of culture in our community, participation in cultural research projects that bring together diverse sets of interests towards the accomplishment of common goals, etc.

THREATS

Volatile funding scenario: The Gallery’s reliance on temporary funding for a large portion of its annual budget presents an uncomfortable risk that would be mitigated through: a) the diversification of funding sources, and/or b) the development of a long-term funding plan with the City of Courtenay and/or other funding agents (ie: the CVRD).

Staff retention and burn-out: Losing our existing team members (and their respective knowledge-banks) to higher paying jobs is a constant threat. This threat would be mitigated with an adjustment to staff compensation (placing wages at industry levels).

Resources dedicated to subsistence rather than to growth: The threat exists that the organization will not develop its capacity to change and grow. In recent years, a large portion of the organization’s human resources has been invested in ‘subsistence-level’ maintenance of existing programs and infrastructure (ie: staying afloat). The ideas and partnerships arising from the recently-instigated visioning session demand investment.