

EVANSTON ART CENTER

STRATEGIC PLANNING



2024-2029

A CENTURY IN THE MAKING

EVANSTON ART CENTER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evanston is a city with a vibrant cultural scene, and for more than 90 years the Evanston Art Center (EAC) has been a vital hub for its diverse artistic community. It is a place where anyone—regardless of skill level, background, color, identity, or income—can come to experience the joy of art, from taking a class, to visiting an exhibition, or attending a lecture or other event. The relocation to its present home on Central Street in 2015 ushered in an era of rapid growth for the EAC. During the last decade, the EAC has provided additional classes, exhibition space, and onsite programming, while expanding the financial aid it offers and enhancing community outreach programs.

There's a lot to be proud of as the Evanston Art Center approaches its 100th anniversary and continues to carry out its mission of fostering the appreciation and expression of art. In 2024 alone, the EAC served more than 3,000 adult students and welcomed more than 2,000 youth students. More than 30 major exhibitions, representing 450 artists, were offered in 2024, alongside a fifth Curatorial Fellowship, which is underway. The EAC also engaged in a website refresh, making it more user-friendly, accessible, and supportive of long-term goals.

As the Evanston Art Center looks forward to the next five years and the centennial anniversary, this strategic plan builds on the EAC's rich history and recent successes by forging new partnerships and collaborations with local community groups and arts organizations while continuing to expand programming and outreach. The Evanston Art Center will also focus on maintaining and improving the physical space and continuing the professional development of its dedicated staff members. In order to accomplish all of these goals, the Evanston Art Center is launching the Centennial Capital Campaign. In doing so, the EAC hopes to continue to strengthen relationships with donors while cultivating new contributors who recognize the importance of the EAC and the impact it has in local communities and beyond. The Evanston Art Center is truly a place for all people that needs everyone's support to further its work and ensure that the EAC remains at the heart of creative expression and community connection in Evanston and beyond.

Leslie Scattone, President, Board of Trustees

Approved by the Board of Directors, January 9th, 2025

Officers:

- Leslie Scattone, Board Chair (2022-2025)
- Michael Davis, Vice President (2022-2025)
- Dana Lieberman, Vice President (2023-2026)
- Elizabeth Pope, Vice President (2022-2025)
- Art Williams, Vice President (2022-2025)
- Maureen Sullivan, Treasurer (2022-2025)
- Nancy Brooks, Secretary (2024-2027)

Staff:

- Paula Danoff, President & Chief Executive Officer
- Emma Rose Gudewicz, Director of Development and Exhibitions
- Ellie Hazlett, Director of Education and Community Engagement

Trustees:

- Patty Bloomfield (2024-2027)
- Caitlin Caspersen (2023-2026)
- Noel Cunningham (2024-2027)
- Kristen Delphos (2023-2026)
- Amrisha Dubey (2024-2027)
- Cathy Garnett (2023-2026)
- Fran Joy (2022-2025)
- Jen Jessen Lunt (2024- 2027)
- Alana Obaseki (2022-2025)
- Lee Ann Russo (2023-2026)
- Mark Tendam (2024-2027)
- Julie Weber Ugarte (2022-2025)

VISION & MISSION

VISION

To be widely recognized as a dynamic art education and exhibition center that encourages freedom of artistic expression and enriches cultural life. To be the hub of artistic endeavors, a passionate advocate for the arts, and a valuable partner for arts initiatives.

MISSION

The Evanston Art Center is dedicated to fostering the appreciation and expression of the arts among diverse audiences by offering extensive and innovative instruction in broad areas of artistic endeavor through classes, exhibitions, interactive arts activities, and community outreach.



THEN

The EAC's rich history dates back to 1929 when, on October 28, 1929, Alice C. Riley sponsored an afternoon tea at her home on Sheridan Road with the purpose of discussing how to memorialize the contributions of longtime Evanston arts teacher Julia Ferguson. We're not sure what was in the tea that afternoon, but by the end of the meeting, it was decided that the city of Evanston needed a cultural arts center. And that's how the Evanston Art Center was founded. Despite the previous week's stock market decline, the EAC went forward with its Gala Opening Benefit, held at the old Evanston Public Library. The Evanston Art Center's original purpose was as "a civic agency for the enjoyment and study of all of the Arts."

1930:

The Evanston Art Center set up its first home in the lower level of the Evanston Public Library. An impressive collection of fine art books was on hand for library visitors to use.

1941:

A group of Evanston artists formed the "Evanston Art Market" which worked and exhibited from a former barber shop in the 500 block of Dempster Street. Lingering scents of Lilac Vegetal and St. John's Bay Rum blended with those of pigment and turpentine.

1942 - 1944:

The Evanston Art Market and "Art Center" joined forces and the entity was incorporated as a charitable nonprofit organization, the Evanston Art Center (EAC), operating out of the Dempster Street building. By 1944, a formal schedule of classes was established and School of the Art Institute teachers were involved.

APRIL

1946:

The Evanston Art Center members learned that they would be out on the street by June 15, so a home of their own was called for. A full-out fundraising effort commenced to raise the \$25,000 for the cost of the building. In 60 days all but \$9,000 was in hand.

OCTOBER

1946:

A successful, community-wide fundraising effort resulted in the purchase of 800 Greenwood in Evanston. In 1948, celebrated artist and beloved teacher, Paul Wieghardt, joined the Evanston Art Center faculty.

1966:

As class registrations and programming grew, once again the Evanston Art Center needed more space. Katie O'Neil and Dorothy Bohnen, among others, were on the lookout for a new building. The Evanston City Council supported the EAC's move to the former Harley Clarke mansion, a city-owned building, located at 2603 Sheridan Road.

1980s:

The EAC rented additional studio space at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center.

**JUNE
2015:**

The Evanston Art Center moved into a new facility at 1717 Central Street in Evanston and quickly began expanding programming, as the now larger space provided the opportunity to increase the number and variety of the EAC's classes, outreach, and exhibitions. More than 30,000 people from all walks of life, representing more than 100 Illinois zip codes, used the Evanston Art Center, viewing one of the 26 exhibitions in the four galleries or participating in one of the 400 classes with more studios. The EAC expanded programming to include 3D printing and digital fabrication in the Maker Lab for teens and adults and a new woodworking studio for adults and youth.

2020:

Despite the hurdles that came with COVID-19, the Evanston Art Center adapted and found new ways to continue serving communities. The EAC introduced online classes so that people could learn from their own homes, as well as offered a series of online lectures and presentations. Additionally, the Evanston Art Center introduced its Curatorial Fellowship, providing an opportunity for young and emerging BIPOC curators to create an exhibition that will both build new ties to historically underrepresented groups as well as introduce Chicagoland to new curatorial and artistic perspectives.

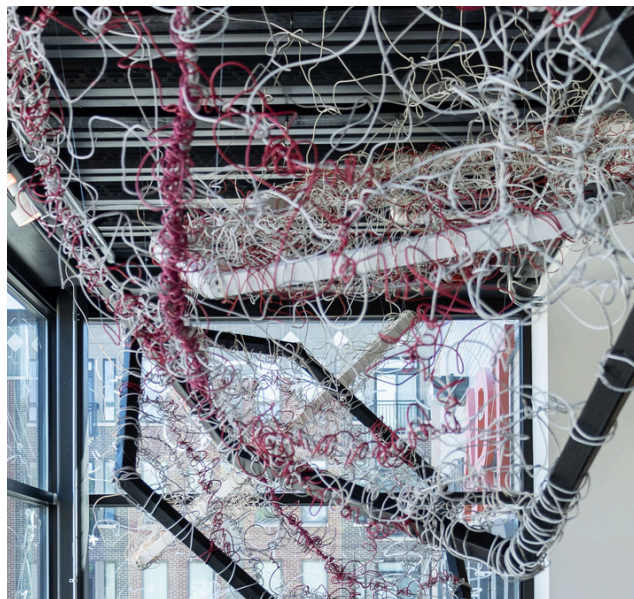
NOW

In 2024, the Evanston Art Center served **3,064** adult students and welcomed **2,145** youth students. More than **30** major exhibitions, representing **450** artists, were offered in 2024, alongside a fifth Curatorial Fellowship, which is underway. The EAC continues to carry out its mission of fostering the appreciation and expression of art.

2025-2029

GOALS & STRATEGIES

The Evanston Art Center prides itself in a history of supporting multiple community partners by providing arts programming that might not otherwise be available to them; need-based scholarships to artists from all backgrounds and skill levels; classes for all ages; and exhibitions that span diverse artistic expression—from artists who bring new cultural perspectives, works of art from a wide spectrum of media, and stories from diverse communities and around the globe. Building new partnerships and collaborations allows the EAC to financially support the continuation of exceptional artistic exhibitions, multi-community outreach, and unparalleled arts education for individuals of all ages and skill levels.



OVERARCHING GOAL: CATALYZE THE CONTINUED GROWTH OF THE RICH HISTORY OF ARTISTIC EXHIBITIONS & ART EXPRESSION, INTEGRATED WITH EDUCATION FOR ALL AGES & SKILL LEVELS, AND THE MULTI-COMMUNITY OUTREACH & SUPPORT THAT COLLECTIVELY MAKE THE EAC SO UNIQUE.

- 01 Collaborations:** Build strategic partnerships to optimize the relationships, reach, skills, and expertise of the community to deliver the highest-quality and most accessible art instruction, programming, and exhibitions. Further integrate internal workflows to elevate impact.
- 02 Capital Campaign:** Activate and accelerate the Centennial Capital Campaign for the growth and maintenance of the Evanston Art Center's diverse exhibitions, community engagement, classes, outreach programs, and more.
- 03 Outreach:** Broaden marketing efforts and optimize omnichannel reach for the EAC across all workflows to engage new and existing audiences with a consistent voice and seamless experience for all those in contact with the nonprofit organization, while deepening the understanding of the EAC's contributions to the arts at large and the resources provided to multiple communities.
- 04 Infrastructure & Staffing:** Create and implement an infrastructure and staffing vision to meet the expanded goals of the EAC as it prepares for the next 100 years.
- 05 Metrics:** Guide staff and committee work with short- and long-term key performance indicators, set to help meet centennial 2029 goals and lead the EAC into its next 100 years.

EXHIBITIONS

COMMITTEE



Photography by Tanea Crawford

The Evanston Art Center's exhibition programming is robust: over the past five years, the EAC has organized nearly **170** exhibitions and presented the work of nearly **2,000** artists. In 2024 alone, the EAC curated more than **30** exhibitions that featured **450** artists and showcased an additional **250** faculty and Winter Expo artists. Upholding the rich tradition of bringing diverse artists into the exhibition space and helping them share their talents with the world continues to be a strategic goal of the Evanston Art Center.

AWARENESS & ATTENDANCE

Continue elevating the EAC's best-in-class contemporary exhibitions, engaged artists, and curatorial community by further expanding awareness and attendance among diverse audiences.

COLLABORATIONS

Nurture partnerships with organizations for the EAC's diverse exhibition programming and build financial support from donor organizations and individuals to fund the exhibitions and expansion of the EAC's signature Curatorial Fellowship.

INTERSECTIONS

Further imagine integrated intersections between the exhibiting artist experience, the educational experience, and the engagement with faculty to nurture a holistic experience for all members of our diverse community, including our artists, students, faculty, supporters, and community partners.



EDUCATION & COMMUNITY OUTREACH COMMITTEE



The Evanston Art Center's legacy of providing arts education continues, serving more than **4,000** youth in the last five years and almost **12,000** adults, from emerging artists to experts sharpening their skills, while offering **475** need-based scholarships and community outreach, including **80** scholarships in 2024 alone. In addition, the EAC's commitment to multiple communities shines through its community partner engagements, hovering near **150** diverse partners since 2019. To reach our 2025-2029 strategic goals, we commit to:

ENGAGEMENT

Grow community engagement beyond the multiple communities already served, and improve awareness of the EAC's need-based scholarship and outreach programs.

AUDIENCE DIVERSITY

Diversify offerings and attract new audiences, as well as the additional faculty needed to remain relevant and engaging in these new areas.

PARTNERSHIPS

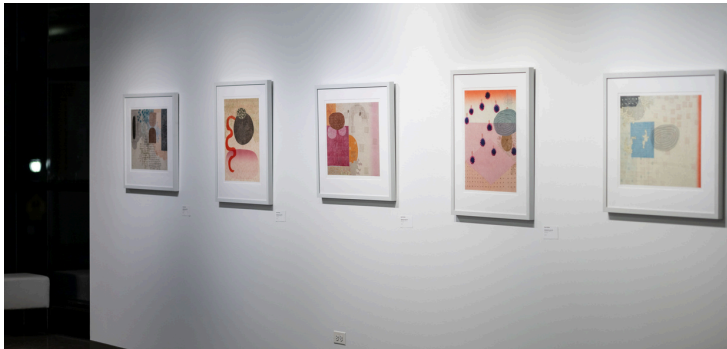
Position the EAC to build upon its long history of funding a vast array of community arts programming by growing strategic partnerships with organizations and institutions that align with the EAC's mission.

INTEGRATION

Further imagine integrated intersections between the educational experience, the exhibiting artist experience, and the engagement with faculty to nurture a holistic experience for all members of the EAC community.



INFRASTRUCTURE & WORKFORCE SUPPORT COMMITTEE



The Evanston Art Center's relocation to Central Street in 2015 positively supported program expansion capabilities, yet the facilities need an ongoing vision for innovation, upgrades, and care; this growth-mindset vision will work to support long-term programming and strategic goals.

PLANNING

Create and implement a best-in-class infrastructure and staffing vision for the future, which takes into account current opportunities and any constraints, as well as an innovative outlook for the EAC's future.

TECHNOLOGIES

Build plans around visionary goals that lead the EAC to the centennial mark and beyond, including expansion/addition of technologies that would enhance the EAC classes, exhibitions, and more.

PEOPLE

Ensure professional development, skills-building, and knowledge-sharing among staff and volunteers, which will be especially important as the EAC scales and encounters new demands; implement strategies to retain key personnel, recruit Board members with diverse expertise, and retain and recruit faculty to support expanding programming.

ENHANCEMENTS

Address visitor improvements for the facility, including operational efficiency improvements and ways to support fundraising activities; pinpoint potential partners with the skillsets needed to meet a future vision that continues to elevate the EAC.



FINANCIAL GROWTH & SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE



Photography by Tanea Crawford

Financial growth and sustainability are critical aspects of 2025-2029 strategic goals; two key areas of focus will include:

FUNDING DIVERSIFICATION

Diversify funding sources and develop comprehensive fundraising strategies with Development Committee member(s) and internal staff to both meet forecasted long-term growth goals and ensure short- and long-term financial health.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Develop a high-level risk management strategy that addresses potential economic downturns, donor fatigue, and operational risks (such as facility emergencies). Outline contingency planning and financial resilience strategies to support stability.



MARKETING COMMITTEE



Both optimized omnichannel marketing and a streamlined development outreach will be key to success for the 2025-2029 strategic plan period leading to the centennial celebration; key elements include:

BRAND

Establish clear brand positioning and messaging for each key audience that are consistent across channels.

AWARENESS & EVENTS

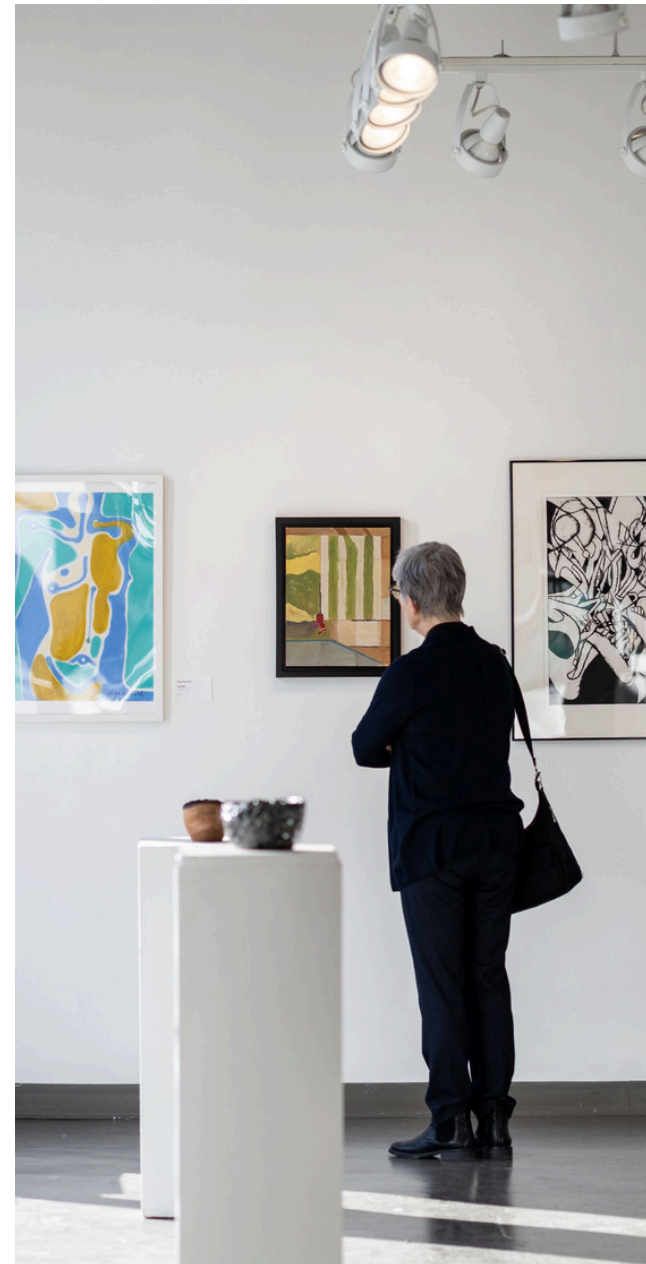
Increase the visibility of the EAC's contributions and all events, exhibitions, and classes—help integrate a marketing plan and development outreach approach into all staff and board Committee workflows.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Establish a structured feedback mechanism with the community and stakeholders to gauge the effectiveness and relevance of all of the EAC programming and communications; ensure an internal process is in place to assess changes needed.

DIGITAL PRESENCE

Ensure marketing digital tools meet the needs of the EAC, including the website, which serves as the 24-hour, seven-days-per-week voice of the EAC and should remain in line with a consistent brand and up-to-date with all activities; also work to lean into automation in distributing marketing communications and development outreach.



DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE



Streamlined development outreach, supported by marketing efforts, will ensure both the continuance of current programming and the growth of the EAC through the 2025-2029 strategic plan period and beyond; key elements include:

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Launch and support realization of the Centennial Capital Campaign to support strategic growth goals.

EVENT FUNDRAISING & ATTENDANCE

Ensure continuation and growth of all current events, especially the Art Party and Winter Expo, as they are critical to the financial support of the EAC. Additionally, explore new possible events to support goals.

DONOR & GRANT SUPPORT

Expand on support from grants and individual donors with a focus on understanding existing and possible donor relationships and donor participation. Additionally, create consistent communications and best coordinate opportunities for both existing and new donors.





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