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The Design Program of the National Endowment for the Arts

A Strategy for Growth (Internal version)
The second planning phase of A Strategy for Change

Executive summary
A Strategy for Growth is the Design Program's vision of the future and plan for action. It strategically organizes the Program's resources to achieve a core of integrated objectives. The Program defined these objectives during a six month period by extensive consultations with the design community, panel policy discussions, the National Forum Planning Meeting, and a series of staff retreats. A Strategy for Growth is organized into four sections: environmental overview, strategic areas of engagement, thematic focus, method, and office structure.

The NEA planning framework
A Strategy for Growth is part of the NEA Planning Framework. The Strategy responds to the NEA goals in specific ways:

- **NEA goal one**: to foster "excellence, vitality, diversity, and access" in art and design across the nation.
- **Design Program response**: to meaningfully integrate these standards into the core of its new thematic focus, with emphasis on underserved communities

- **NEA goal two**: to invest resources effectively
- **Design Program response**: build strategies for partnerships and leveraging into its **tactical project development criteria** for evaluating potential projects

- **NEA goal three**: to identify and take leadership opportunities.
- **The Design Program response**: to increase the relative portion of its budget on initiative partnerships for developing critical new design technologies and building essential institutions in the design community.

Overview of the four sections in this document

**Environmental overview** broadly maps the Program's vision of the designed environment it wishes to affect, adding coherence to planning discussions. The Environmental Overview helps to cohere the staff's understanding of how the designed environment is structured and the context for its work.

**Strategic areas of engagement** define where the Design Program can effectively apply its resources within the designed environment.

**Thematic focus** is the priority we identify for focusing budget and staff resources on an important region of our vision map. The thematic focus also helps us to clearly communicate our goals and priorities to our constituents, political leaders, the design community, and potential project partners.

**Method** is how we strategically organize and deploy our resources to have maximum impact. The method requires planning approaches, strategies, and careful management and conservation of Program resources.
Office structure is how we functionally reorganize the Design Program around the strategic areas of engagement and our thematic focus.

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Overview of designed environment (Internal version—not for the public.)

Individuals design their world and are, in turn, conditioned by what they have made. The designed environment, understood as a complex mosaic, helps to organize relationships between individuals; in doing so it creates the potential for community.

Designed places help to mediate the individual's relationship with their community. Each place might contain different manifestations of design, including: consumer products, buildings, landscapes, systems of transportation, and areas of infrastructure. Although these places functionally overlap in the real world, for our planning purposes they are:

- **Civil places**
  - Forums for culture, parks, universities, plazas, schools, certain buildings and spaces defined by government, electronic forums, etc.

- **Domestic places**
  - Houses, apartments, etc.

- **Places of commerce**
  - Stores, malls, main streets, electronic environments

- **Places of public movement**
  - Circulation places with opportunities for public appearance and interaction; for example, city squares, plazas, roads, bike paths, sidewalks, etc.

- **Places of infrastructure**
  - Power plants, rail lines, highways, airports, communications systems, etc.

- **Places of production**
  - Factories, farms, service sites, etc.

- **Places of support**
  - Designed places and products for under served groups that are marginalized or without a place in the community proper; for example, universal designs for the disabled, homeless shelters, etc.

- **Natural places**
  - These areas exist in contrast to the designed environment, but are still defined by it.

Places

The places described here are only planning aids. They provide a shared vocabulary and a common understanding of the designed environment. They are not grant or initiatives areas and they do not exist in the real world as separate spaces.

The designed environment: notes

Our designed environment is a complex mosaic of objects, among which there are products, buildings, spaces for movement, infrastructure, landscapes, clothing, communication media, and other components. We design this mosaic to suit our needs and reinforce our identities. In turn it conditions us by influencing our sense of how we fit in to the community, its history, and culture. Most often we confront the complexity of this mosaic by focusing our attention on a small part of it. But over time it influences us as a whole.

The importance of a shared conception of the designed environment. It is important that, within the diversity of viewpoints in the Design Program, we have a coherent and shared understanding of this complexity. While any conceptual "map" of the designed environment diminishes its rich reality,
without a “map” the program is unable to strategically deploy its resources. It becomes reactive. If we allow complexity to overwhelm the Program, proactive initiatives can become increasingly isolated from one another and take on the character of arbitrary interventions.

Places and planning

Various forms of planning consider the syntax of these places, their proximity, development, and interrelationships, adding coherence to the community.

The mosaic of designed artifacts that embodies these places, and the complex connections between them, mediates a relationship between the citizen and community.

2 Strategic areas of engagement

Strategic areas of engagement define where the Design Program can effectively apply its resources. The strategic areas of engagement relate to many places defined by the Design Program’s planning overview of the designed environment outlined above. They represent areas of activity that maximize the Design Program’s position within the government and the design community:

- Design to improve innovation in industry
- Design to advance research and technology
- Design to reinvent government
- Design to address social and cultural issues

3 Thematic focus

Our thematic focus is: Design excellence as a means of fostering vital, accessible, and diverse on-line communities. The purpose of the thematic focus is to isolate a particular area of content that is vital to the design community and the nation, and as means of engaging with the strategic areas. It maximizes the impact of increasingly limited resources. The Program has one thematic focus for a three year cycle.

4 Method

The method defines how we strategically deploy our resources to have maximum impact in the thematic areas in the designed environment. Our method is to foster the civic potential of digital technology by using effective planning approaches, strategies, and careful management of the Program’s resources. The success of our method depends on its key internal components: the thematic project planning criteria (TPPC), project management, and office structure.

Tactical project planning criteria

Every project we initiate should be based on the TPPC. Each of the following steps should be thoroughly considered, outlined in written form, and tentatively scheduled, at the beginning of each project:

- Identify the goal
- Conduct research to understand the issues, formulate responses, and locate potential partners
- Select a point of intervention
- Carry out the activity (implementation)
- Rigorously assess the effectiveness of the activity and follow-up

Thematic statements: additional notes

Digital technology, particularly in the form of on-line communications, has created the potential for a new kind of civic place. The commercial on-line services, and now the Internet, provide access to information and forums for interaction that have never existed before. Although current first generation Internet communication is often problematic for various reasons, already the next generation of technology promises the potential for a much richer and more accessible world of civic interaction and involvement. The Design Program has a unique opportunity to foster design excellence in technology that could significantly reshape the way Americans communities interact and define themselves.
Specific strategies
Within the framework of the tactical project development criteria, we have decided that we that our work should emphasize these specific strategies:

Leveraging additional resources from foundations, partners, and other sources, as a means of increasing the value of our investment in a project.

Communication of the Program's work to appropriate audiences through effective methods of dissemination.

Pivotal positioning of our activities between the design community and the public. In other words, we are interested in funding design in the context of its users—not as an isolated process.

Project managing with the Design Program's new computerized project management system. The very nature of this system encourages coordinated planning, strategic thinking, and effectively allocating time and resources. The tactical project planning criteria are "built-in" to our customized version.

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Outline of Program and office structure
The Design Program is entirely restructured to be proactive and driven by content. The new Program organization is built around strategic areas of engagement and a thematic focus (see page 2), which have been chosen in close consultation with the national design community. The resulting structure eliminates traditional grant programs in favor of strategically allocating increasingly limited resources to developing critical design technologies, building essential institutions in the design fields, actively creating fellowships and grants that are integrated with our initiatives, and supporting other selected programs of national importance.

Each thematic focus would have dedicated funds for 3 successive one year phases. During the research stage before the first year, the Program clearly communicates its extended 3 year commitment to the thematic focus, in order to attract further funding from foundations, corporations, and other sources.

Year 1 funding: Announce thematic focus and begin project development
During the first year, the Program broadly announces the thematic focus, objectives, and related funding components. The partners are announced. If grant partnerships are an important part of achieving the objectives, the area of content is announced, procedures are disseminated, and the staff works with applicants. The grant partnerships are related to, often directly dovetailing with, Design Program initiatives and other programming.

Year 2 funding: Solidifying and broadening institutional support
During the second year institutions and organizations are located to continue working on essential areas of the thematic focus after the third year. The most creative and viable work emerging from the thematic focus is further supported by funding and expertise from grant partners and others. This work becomes the basis for continuation of the thematic focus after the third year.
Year 3 funding: Completion, dissemination, hand-off, and new project research
During the third year tangible advancements fostered by funded projects are coherently assembled, curated, and/or edited, critically evaluated and aggressively disseminated. The Program officially hands-off the programming to a partner to continue work. During this phase the Design Program is conducting research and locating potential partners for the next thematic focus.

Impact on staffing and funding
This scenario allows the program staff to be reduced by one position below grade 12. The reduction is made possible by eliminating traditional grant programs. The budget is structured into one primary funding category related to the thematic focus. This approach to the budget allows the Program to develop programming in a way that is flexible, responsive, and entrepreneurial, thus improving its impact and minimizing the impact of pending budget reductions.

Note: the proposed staff reduction is only possible if this plan is fully implemented with broad support from NEA management. The Design Program in its current form is under staffed.