

fire

Fire

Historical and Cultural Arts Collaborative

Five Year Strategic Plan

2016-2022

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OUR STORY

For over ten years, Fire has grown as a unique organization for cutting edge artistic expression and individual leadership development, especially for people most marginalized in Kalamazoo. From housing music production with a recording studio and community radio station, a rehearsal and performance arts space to youth arts education - Fire has provided a creative space. Often, people name Fire as their “safe space,” amidst a world that oppresses people based on marginalized identities of race, gender and sexuality. Fire was cofounded in 2005 by Dr. Michelle Johnson and Denise Miller. Michelle Johnson describes her time at Fire, “...as an extension of my 25-year insistence on space for marginalized people to express their autonomous and authentic selves. This work has solidified my commitment to the liberatory, self-defined space for people of color, women, youth, economically challenged people and members of LGBT communities. During my time at Fire I have become convinced not just of the imperative of linking social justice to creativity but also of the integral link between play in creative expression and group development.” Denise Miller is a published poet and has lead public art, poetry and culinary arts programming at Fire.

Eight years ago, Fire developed the Creative Justice Model to develop authentic self expression through artistic methods based in communication and geared towards sustainability. Staff, volunteers, artists and community members transformed lives by sustaining space for artists and producing long-standing programs including poetry, theater and youth development, particularly as they connect with the liberatory effects of access to cultural production. Fire understands that education and participation in cultural production contributes to the healthy development of young people, their families and communities. As a leader in youth development for the past ten years, Fire has responded to young people in our community through programming that helps youth develop the leadership, self-confidence and self-esteem necessary to lead positive and productive lives.

During 2016, Fire transitioned leadership, narrowed our focus, and emphasized growing our internal organizational structure. We have developed youth-driven out-of-school time programming and clarified our mission to bridge art and justice. After evaluation, and narrowing programs to serve young people ages 14-21, Fire also decreased expenses by 54% by discontinuing renting the loft and managing our resources more efficiently. In addition, Fire negotiated our relationships with partners and renters to better concentrate on Fire’s own programming and ensure more opportunity for youth to shape Fire’s space. Fire has also decreased and rebuilt our staff and Board of Directors. These changes are key steps to refocus and clarify our work to have the greatest impact, using our organizational strengths to focus on our organization’s heart and essence.

Strategic Planning Process

Fire Historical and Cultural Arts Collaborative (Fire) initiated a strategic planning process in April 2016. The Board created a Strategic Planning Committee after hiring a new Executive Director. A review of the results of Fire’s prior strategic plan and an analysis of the primary elements of Fire’s current situation helped frame an intensive brainstorming workshop with members of Fire’s Board of Directors in early June. Allison Kennedy, the new Executive Director collected input through creative processes from current staff, youth participants and the WE LIT: Fire Teen Advisory Council. After the planning session, the Strategic Planning committee came together with collected information to find themes that highlight what Fire is now and where Fire would like be in five years, and what capacity and role Fire will have in making its visions a reality in Kalamazoo.

Over the past year, Fire has been in a state of rebirth. In April 2016, Fire hired a new Executive Director, built a larger Board and Board Committees to move Fire forward, as well as created WE LIT: Fire Teen Advisory Council with the support of United Way’s Kalamazoo Youth Development Network in order to recenter and remind the organization of its priorities and purpose. The conversations and ideas generated by all participants is condensed here into a basic strategic roadmap; intended to help organize Fire’s five year goals with the clearest pathways forward.

MISSION and VISION

VISION

- Fire envisions a world where young people can express their authentic selves without the fear of judgement or oppression and have the courage to imagine and the freedom to create a more just and vibrant future.

MISSION

- *Current:* Fire encourages and responds to people's desire to express themselves authentically. Fire believes that social and cultural awareness generates and sustains social justice.
- *Our Mission Looks Like:*
Fire is a youth-driven space for art and justice in the Edison Neighborhood, emphasizing individual leadership development for young people ages 14-21 through arts-integrated social and emotional learning.

OUR SHARED DEFINITIONS

WHAT and HOW

Expressive Arts are artistic practices that value personal and public risks, engagement and vulnerability.

Justice recognizes the inherent value and dignity of all people. Justice calls for both *personal reflection* and *social change* to ensure that each of us has the right and the opportunity to thrive in our communities, regardless of our identities.¹

Authenticity has been and continues to be the heart of Fire. It means “keeping it real,” and genuine.

Shameless Space is a physical space that encourages everyone to embrace, accept and challenge each other.

Vulnerability means *hurt* or *wound*, and Fire believe these wounds can be claimed and used a source of strength for people through expressive arts encouraged in shameless space.

Youth: Our greatest resources between the ages of 14-21.

Marginalized People/People from the Margins: We believe it is important for us to recognize and name who Fire invests in. People who have been excluded, oppressed, disenfranchised from opportunity, art and equity. Including: people of color, people surviving poverty, working class people, queer people, trans folx, and gender non-conforming people.

¹ Inspiration borrowed from the Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership.

OUR VALUES

- **YOUTH VOICE:** We believe that young people can create and lead the way to a more free world through art and justice. We value young people as competent leaders and part of the decision making body at Fire. We believe that it is important for youth to see themselves as part of a larger world within and beyond Kalamazoo. We believe in youth and adult partnerships at all levels; We value intergenerational and intersectional creative spaces to grow empathy and emotional capacity.
- **AUTHENTICITY:** We value radical authenticity and modeling a space where people can be themselves without judgement or shame. We believe art and justice movements are essential to each other's vision of a more free world. We value artists and justice workers, through compensation, trust, exposure, space, empowerment and community. We believe creating art can be a personal act of liberation, and when done collectively can transform communities.
- **LIBERATION:** We believe in liberation from all forms of oppression. People from marginalized identities belong at Fire because their creativity and skills are seen, amplified and encouraged to grow through risk-taking. We are committed to centering youth who are queer, trans*, people of color, survivors of criminalization, racially profiled and marginalized by discriminatory public policies.

BEING A FIRE YOUTH MEANS...

These are values written by and for our youth from the Summer of Healing program in 2017.

1. Being a catalyst and SPARK for SOCIAL CHANGE through art!
2. Radically accepting and caring for yourself and others!
3. Finding your authentic voice!
4. We HEAL, GROW, SOW!

SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE, ACTIONABLE, REALISTIC, TIME-BOUND

SMART FIVE YEAR GOALS

INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL and FINANCIAL STABILITY

By 2022, Fire operates at an \$200,000 annual budget with a full-time Executive Director, additional leadership positions for adult allies and youth organizers, youth staff, volunteers, Board of Directors, and a Teen Advisory Council with clear day-to-day procedures to execute multi-year visions.

BUILD YOUTH-DRIVEN SPACE FOR ART and JUSTICE IN EDISON NEIGHBORHOOD

By 2022, Fire will partner with 75 Kalamazoo youth ages 14-21 to understand their own identities and the world around them through arts and social justice programming that prepares them to own their voices to impact the communities around them to be a more just place. Fire youth and staff connect with over 2000 youth a year via workshops, performances, and the Kzoo Youth Poetry Slam.

BRIDGE ART and JUSTICE IN KALAMAZOO COMMUNITIES

By 2022, Fire will be a convener and collaborator for liberatory public programming with other youth-driven non-profit organizations, schools and grassroots groups who share our vision and values.

The next section of the strategic plan presents the goals that will guide Fire over the next five years. The goal statements relate to 202twoand the measures of success relate to the 2017-18 program year. The status of 2016-2017 goals are listed in the following section for accountability. The measures of success are adjusted annually by Fire's Board of Directors at the annual retreat.

Goal: INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL and FINANCIAL STABILITY

By 2022, Fire operates at an \$200,000 annual budget with a full-time Executive Director, additional leadership positions for adult allies and youth organizers, youth staff, volunteers, Board of Directors, and a Teen Advisory Council with clear day-to-day procedures to execute multi-year visions.

2017-18 Objective:

By Summer 2018, Fire increases financial stability through following our fundraising, creating board structure and accountability, and builds staff capacity with a consistent structure of daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual plans.

	Indicators of Success: 2017-18	Strategies	Resources	Responsible Parties
\$	Create fundraising calendar with goals and accountability Create a plan for financial stability including a fundraising calendar of grant-writing, events, individual donor relationships and a contract model	Identify grants to apply for, sources for partnerships, and fundraisers Create calendar Apply for 5 new grants to foundations		EA Committee ED
	Increase donor base to 150 individual donors.	Annual fund with mailings to current donor base, “sharing our story” with potential donors	Board	External Affairs Internal Affairs Board
	Acquire funding to increase ED’s position to 30 hours a week	Apply for capacity building grant from KCF and other funders		Internal Affairs ED
	Create a plan for bookkeeper transition	Add line item to the 2017-18 budget Expand financial policy		Internal Affairs ED
B O A R D	Increase Board membership, focusing on people with financial literacy and those with fundraising experience	Reach out to the community and find local resources	ONEplace Board President	Board Dev. Committee
	Board members attend/participate in two Fire events annually	ED sends invitations		ED + BOD
	Fundraise to provide professional development for the Board	Annual retreat Cultural Competency and Board Education		
	Board commit to contribute 10% of the annual budget through direct support and fundraising efforts	Board training		BOD
	Get legal review of By-Laws and Articles of Incorporation	MCR Legal Clinic	MCR Miller Canfield	
S T A F F	Maintain current staff levels Executive director continues to train and scaffold staff. Get legal review of Employee Handbook	Ongoing training, creating systems and evaluation methods and tools	ONEplace	ED
	Build consistent youth staff with Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU).	Develop two new youth staff at Fire for 17-18 school year Develop 5 new youth staff at Fire for 2018 summer	YOU	ED

Goal: BUILD YOUTH-DRIVEN SPACE FOR ART and JUSTICE IN EDISON NEIGHBORHOOD

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2017-18: Strengthen WE LIT: Fire Teen Advisory Council (TAC) to 10 members + Support 75 youth in art OST programming. Support youth in responding to an injustice through the Teen Advisory Council (TAC).

Indicators of Success: 2017-18	Strategies	Resources	Responsible Parties
25 Teens regularly producing and performing creative work at Open Mics	Creative Workshops School Outreach Youth Hosts, Features and DJs as paid opportunities	KPS Teachers KYD Network (Kalamazoo Youth Development Network)	ED AA Staff TAC
Quarterly Evening Programming engaging 20 youth	Queer-Friendly Lock-Ins Open Mics/Dances/Proms		ED
WE LIT: Fire TAC Completes two Quick Wins ²	WE LIT: Fire TAC meets <i>weekly</i> TAC gains structure with Adult Allies for school year Collaborates with other YAC/TAC TAC builds off of KYD Network summer-identified issues	KYD Network	ED AA Staff
Teen involvement in programs increases to 50 teens in Out-of-School Time Workshops	Drop-in Once Weekly Try 4-Week Focus Workshops K College CES Program running 1 Weekly Program Train 5 New Youth in KYD Network Skills Saturday Attend all Skills Saturdays	KPS Public Libraries	ED AA Staff
WE LIT propose and approve Fire programs and interview all new hires	Utilize hiring process from Spring 2016 Create program-creation process	KYD Network	ED, YA + TAC
HOST CITYWIDE KZOO YOUTH POETRY SLAM! Take 15 youth to Michigan Louder than a Bomb!	Apply to MHC (Michigan Humanities Council) Apply to Arts Council Build relationship with Grand Rapids Build relationship with InsideOut Literary Arts	High School Teachers EFA	ED

² A “quick win” is a 4-8 week long project led by youth, usually part of capacity building. We understand and want youth to be part of long-term gains, *and* “quick wins” are essential to keeping motivation, deadlines and building skillsets.

Goal: BRIDGE ART and JUSTICE IN KALAMAZOO COMMUNITIES

By 2022, Fire will be a convener and collaborator for liberatory public programming with other youth-driven non-profit organizations, schools and grassroots groups who share our vision and values.

2017-18: Fire will continue to be a safe space for self expression. We will continue to offer and expand our First Friday Open Mics.

Indicators of Success: 2017-18	Strategies	Resources	Responsible Parties
First Friday Open Mics continue to feature and center people most impacted by injustices and resensitize people to current issues through healthy expression	Explicitly name connection between people sharing their stories with people changing a public narrative through community organizing. Introduce calls to action at Open Mics Partner with 3 organizations to share space, resources and stories. Create formal avenue for Open Mic Feedback First Friday Open Mic brings in money to build youth voice	KYD Network	ED
Fire joins efforts with OST youth organizations to advocate for youth liberation	Fire partners with Youth Advisory Council cohorts to build youth-led efforts for change across organizations	KYD Network	AA TAC
Fire partners deeply with three organizations around our shared values	Does 1:1s with leaders in organizations that may share our values: Kalamazoo Poetry Festival, SHARE/Youth Summit on Racism, Michigan United to determine if we can be healthy partners		ED
Fire executes public programming with schools' support and in partnership with teachers for Kzoo Youth Poetry Slam	Fire receives funding for teaching-artists and Fire adult ally staff		ED

ACCOUNTABILITY 2016-2017 OBJECTIVES

INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL and FINANCIAL STABILITY

2016-2017 Objective:

By Summer 2017, Fire increases financial stability through fundraising, creating board structure and accountability and builds staff competency with a consistent structure of daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual plans.

	Indicators of Success: 2016-17	Strategies	STATUS	Responsible Parties
\$	Meet and follow our proposed 6-month budget for the end of 2016, and propose and approve a 70,000 budget for 2017.	Convene an EOY evaluation of 6-month budget and December adjustments to October-approved 2017 Budget.	Completed	Finance Team ED
	Internal Affairs Committee, Volunteer Bookkeeper and Board Treasurer all clearly aware of Fire's financial status, and meeting outside of Board meetings to ensure sustainability of Fire.	Create Finance Checks and Balances Procedures Maintain relationship with accountant Recruit accountant to be on BOD	Completed/ In Progress	Finance Team Chair
	Launch annual End of Year Event raises \$1000 and begin 40 New Donor Relationships	Target ONE community to attract investment in Fire Create EOY Committee	Completed	EOY Committee ED
	Create a plan for financial stability including a fundraising calendar of grant-writing, events, individual donor relationships.	Create calendar Apply for 5-10 new grants to foundations Raise \$1500 by EOY	In progress	Finance Team ED
B O A R D	Strong Board Transition through December 2016 to January 2017	Recruit 3 new Board members by January 2017 for 1, 2, 3 year terms. Create specific roles and committee <i>missions</i>	Completed	ED +BP Board Dev. Committee
	Board members attend/participate in 1 event quarterly.	ED sends invitations	In progress	ED + BOD
	Board Maintains Active Committees	Infuse Board committees each with a volunteer Maintain Relationships with Board Chairs Board Committee Chairs report out at Board Meetings	In progress	ED + BP BC Chairs
S T A F F	Executive Director sets tone of creativity and professionalism for the organization internally and externally	Finds a longterm mentor by December 2017! Keeps deadlines and communicates openly with the Board, volunteers, Communities partners and funders through Board reports, committee attendance, twice-monthly staff check-ins, monthly e-newsletters, annual mailed letter and accessible annual report.	Completed	ED
	Support and develop two committed staff members in youth development.	ED creates twice-monthly check-ins and monthly DARS evaluations to gain feedback from Fire employees. ED applies for capacity building funding! Connect with Y.O.U.	Completed	ED

ACCOUNTABILITY 2016-2017 OBJECTIVES

BUILD YOUTH-DRIVEN SPACE FOR ART and JUSTICE IN EDISON NEIGHBORHOOD

Objectives by year:

- 2016-17: Strengthen WE LIT: Fire Teen Advisory Council TAC to 6 members
 Support 15 Youth in art OST programming and 50 Youth participate in Kalamazoo Youth Slam (Michigan Louder than a Bomb)
 BEGIN SATURDAY NIGHT PROGRAMMING IN EDISON NEIGHBORHOOD SPRING 2017 w/ Kzoo Youth Poetry Slam
 One Youth Join Fire's Board of Directors

Indicators of Success: 2016-17	Strategies	Status	Responsible Parties
5-10 Teens producing and performing creative work at Open Mics	Creative Workshops	Completed	ED AA Staff TAC
Quarterly Queer-Friendly Lock-Ins	Jan-Mar Lock In, Mar-June Lock In	Completed	ED
WE LIT: Fire TAC Completes two Quick Wins or 1 Larger Project	WE LIT: Fire TAC meets twice monthly ED applies for funding to pay teens w/ TAC Cultivate a relationship with local high schools	Completed	ED AA Staff
Physical Space at Fire is inviting and clear in its purpose.	Plan with WE LIT on how physical space can reflect and operate with a youth aesthetic.	Completed	ED AA Staff TAC
Teen involvement in programs serves 20 teens	Keep consistent framework Utilize youth to spread the word Visit KPS and PPS	Completed	ED AA Staff
WE LIT Propose and Approve Programs of Fire and interview all new hires starting 2017.		Completed	ED, YA + TAC
Spring 2016 Saturday Evening Programming for Youth	Filling a gap in Edison Neighborhood.	Completed	ED
CITYWIDE KZOO YOUTH POETRY SLAM! Take 10 youth to Michigan Louder than a Bomb!	Class Visits to K Central + Norrix Visiting Writing Workshops	Completed	ED

ACCOUNTABILITY 2016-2017 OBJECTIVES

BRIDGE ART and JUSTICE IN KALAMAZOO COMMUNITIES

Objectives by year:

2016-17: Double “bridge” base by increasing to twice-monthly Open Mics to capacity to and prepare and launch Bridging Artist pilot with one partnership and 3 outreach models.

2017-18: Execute and evaluate Bridging Artist pilot, and adjust to make most effective.

	Indicators of Success: 2016-17	Strategies	Status	Responsible Parties
A R T I S T S 4 A C T I O N	Strong and meaningful relationships with art and justice organizations in Kalamazoo.	One-on-one relationship building Partnership Open Mic for Third Fridays <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan United + ISAAC Freedom in Schools? Open Roads? Kzoo County Youth Cabinet? 	Uncompleted	ED Board TAC
	Co-apply and receive a meaningful grant with Michigan United to support work of two Bridging Action Artists	By 12/17, meet and brainstorm with MU for grant. Apply to the Criminal Justice Initiative	Uncompleted and Altered	ED AA Staff
	Experiment, practice, research and design Bridging Action Artist model	Outreach efforts to KPS twice in 2016-17 school year, and outreach to 3 community organizations working with marginalized communities. Research through site visits to Prison Neighborhood Arts Project in Chicago, Young Chicago Authors, We Charge Genocide.	Uncompleted	AA Staff ED
O P E N M I C S	Poetic Justice Open Mic	Explicitly name connection between people sharing their stories with people changing a public narrative through community organizing. Introduce calls to action at Open Mics. Partner with 3 organizations to share space, resources and stories. Create formal avenue for Open Mic Feedback	Uncompleted and Altered	ED
	First Friday Open Mic and Feature continues to feature and center people most impacted by injustices.	Continue rotating hosts and features for new voices. Create formal avenue for Open Mic Feedback	Completed	ED

CURRENT PROGRAMMING

PROGRAM	WHO	HOW	GOALS
WE LIT: Fire Teen Advisory Council	Youth ages 14-21	Meets Weekly with youth one-on-ones, trainings and more. 10-15 Youth	The Teen Advisory Council is aligned with the Kalamazoo Youth Development Network (KYD Network) and engages a team of youth for 8 months to gain 21st century skills such as strategic planning and facilitation. WE LIT builds youth confidence, voice, and influence in Edison neighborhood and drives focuses of youth programming at Fire.
After-School Workshops	Youth ages 14-21	Meets Twice-Weekly during School Year (Tuesdays & Thursdays) 30 Youth	“Drop-in” after school workshops available Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4-6 & 6-8pm builds social and emotional learning for teens through artistic exercises. Youth leave every workshop with a social emotional learning tool and something they’ve created.
School Workshops	High School Aged Youth	Workshops for each trimester 500 Youth	Facilitated by 2-3 Fire staff, these 45-70 minute creative writing workshops in classrooms enrich high schoolers understanding of race, gender and sexuality through literary analysis of spoken word poetry, prompts and circles of trust in sharing. These are co-planned with teachers.
Retreats & Lock-ins	Youth ages 14-21	Quarterly <i>On-site & Offsite</i> 15 Youth	Retreats and lock-ins are hosted quarterly to allow for more time for youth to more deeply plan and reflect on current programming and build relationships, a key part of social and emotional learning.
First Friday Open Mics and Feature	Youth ages 14-21 Families Intergenerational Communities	Meets Monthly 48 People	Fire’s First Friday Open Mic & Feature is the longest running poetry Open Mic in the state and continually centers and celebrates emerging artists and builds youth leadership skills through hosting and DJ’ing roles. At Open Mics, Fire connects and inspires intergenerational audiences, and cultivates empathy and listening. It also provides an open-to-the-public non-judgemental space for people to respond to personal and justice issues.
Kzoo Youth Poetry Slam & participant in Michigan Louder than a Bomb Youth Poetry Festival	Youth ages 14-21	Annual Event 50 Youth	The Kzoo Youth Poetry Slam is an annual culminating event that centers youth voice through the culturally relevant method of “slam,” performance poetry. The Kzoo Youth Poetry Festival also connects 15 Fire youth to Michigan Louder than a Bomb, a statewide youth poetry festival.
Parent & Guardian Angel Nights	Parents and guardians of Fire youth	Quarterly 10 Parents	Connects Fire parents to each other, Fire staff, and focuses on connecting them to another relevant service/community resource or referral.

NEXT STEPS and ACCOUNTABILITY

STRATEGIC PLAN ACCOUNTABILITY

- All Executive Director Reports and Board Agenda meetings will follow the format of these objectives
- The One-Year Objectives will be evaluated quarterly by the Board of Directors to better hone our purpose

BIG QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Do we change or expand the mission?
- What does “cultural and historical” mean at Fire? Can we do that? Is that in our capacity of our current staff?
- How do we maintain a focus on youth, and simultaneously connect buy-in for Fire’s existing intergenerational communities?
- Are we working to connect artists to justice or justice workers to art? Or both? How do we actually do that in Kalamazoo?

WHO?

- Centering Q/P/TOC in youth development, Who Don’t Often Feel Like They Belong, Marginalized, Emerging
- Emerging artists catalyze youth connection to their own voices
- Adult programming serves as a way to support Fire, but is not the center of Fire