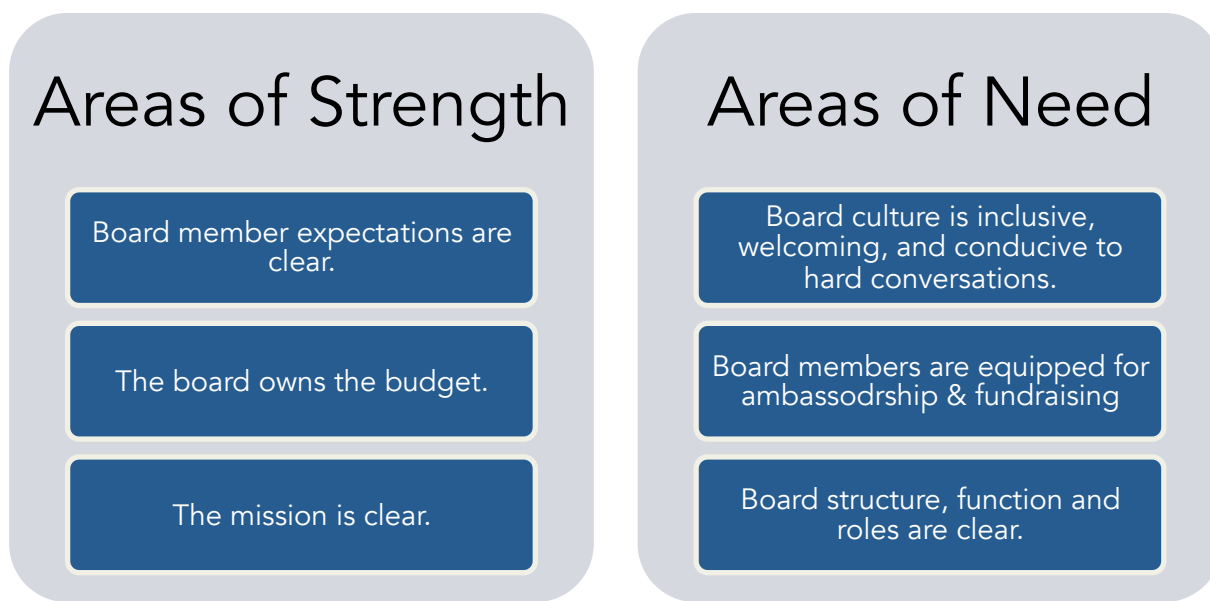


Pratt Fine Arts Center

Board Assessment Report

prepared by Fife Consulting
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OVERVIEW

This report is the result of an assessment of the Board of Directors for Pratt Fine Arts Center. Of the 25 board members, almost all participated on some level. Interviews were conducted with eight board members and one staff member. And 19 board members completed the digital survey.

Overall, Pratt has a large and committed board of directors who are an effective and organized body, though there is some confusion and conflict about the role of the board and where the focus and priority should lie. It is a board that has endured past challenges during times of scarcity and change, transitioning leadership and establishing structures and practices that have improved accountability, sustainability and management.

Now having moved past those challenges, it is a board that hasn't left behind its more operational identity and therefore has yet to adopt a more strategic identity. It is a board with a lot of opportunity to transform.

Similarly, the neighborhood, community and region have entered a time of rapid growth and change. While much of the opportunity for change and evolution lies outside the organization, board members don't feel they have the proper capacity for ambassadorship and community relations required for the coming challenges. But they do have the passion and interest.

In all, the challenges and opportunities for Pratt's board of directors are not insignificant, but they are also not unique. It is time for existential consideration, to either confirm or revise the fundamental definition and focus of the board. But not of the organization overall, and that is an important distinction. Pratt is in excellent shape as an organization, much to the credit of the efforts of the board of directors, as well as staff leadership.

This report goes into further details about each of the areas explored in the survey and interviews. In reading it, it is important to keep in mind that the critical analysis here is not a reflection on any particular staff or board member past or current.

Board culture and practice are changed slowly and usually just repeated and self-perpetuated over the years. Pratt is ready for a more radical shift, but it should be noted that any evolution takes time. Hopefully, this report and the subsequent board development plans will provide clear areas of focus and some direct interventions for immediate advancement.

Highest Scores	Lowest Scores
1. I understand my own personal goals as a board member. (Expectations)	1. Board membership adequately represents and reflects the community served. (Culture & Inclusion)
2. I can state the mission of the organization without referring to the website, brochure or other document. (Mission)	2. Board meetings offer a compelling social environment where I get to build community with others. (Meetings)
3. I find that the mission statement as written fits with my own understanding of the unique purpose and activities of the organization. (Mission)	3. The board has regular and adequate opportunity to reflect on board structure, performance and leadership, both together and individually. (Structure)
4. I can roughly estimate with confidence the size of the annual budget for the organization without referring to other documents or people. (Budget)	4. For each community or population type served by our programs and services, I can describe the specific direct outcomes and/or impacts of our work. (Outcomes)
5. I know the general percentage of our annual income that is earned vs contributed. (Budget)	5. The distribution of roles and responsibilities between staff and board is appropriate and is clear to all involved. (Structure)
6. I understand the roles and responsibilities of board membership with this organization. (Expectations)	6. I am building and deepening relationships with multiple potential donors on behalf of the organization regardless of their status as a donor. (Fundraising Strategy)
7. I have been thanked well and acknowledged properly for my gifts and contributions in the past. (Good Models)	7. I have personally thanked or otherwise spoken with a former or current donor who has given a significant gift to the organization. (Fundraising Strategy)
8. I can state five (or more) things that I am asked to do as a board member each year. (Optimization)	8. Relationships that I bring to the organization become institutionalized and would continue even if I were absent. (Optimization)
9. The things that I am asked to do as a board member are the best use of my position on the board. (Optimization)	9. I have had conversations with board and/or staff members about increasing the depth and sophistication of my contributions to the organization over time. (Good Models)
10. I have been asked gracefully, personally and directly to support the organization financially by a staff and/or another board member. (Good Models)	10. The current goals and strategies of the organization inspire and catalyze action. (Goals)

BOARD MAKEUP, RECRUITMENT & EXPECTATION-SETTING

At the risk of stating the obvious, there is a culture-wide generational shift underway that is affecting every level of system, institution and community in the world. On top of that, the city of Seattle and surrounding region are in the midst of an unprecedented period of growth. For Pratt, the board of directors is likely just one of many elements of the organization encountering a sudden cultural shift and dealing with the related whiplash.

In particular, the makeup of the board is undergoing a change in demographics. And while that is upsetting status quo expectations of culture and identity within the board, it is a needed shift and ultimately presents a healthy set of challenges. As with many other institutions and systems in this time, the danger is in thinking that these conflicts and tensions are temporary and that the status quo should return soon and permanently. Pratt's board should instead turn into those challenges as the beginning of a much larger transformation and create space for healthy cultural friction and conflict as a natural part of the foreseeable future.

There is a really strong mix of time and experience on the board, with members that are very new serving alongside members who have been there for more than 5 years. Many boards are weighted in one direction or the other, leading to either paralyzing inertia or an unfortunate lack of institutional knowledge and history.

Balancing recruitment sourcing is important for power sharing and Pratt's board is very balanced between staff and board, with approximately 50% coming from each.

While the board ought to be balanced in other factors, it is best if most of the board has some history with the organization, which is the case with Pratt. Over 60% of the board has been involved with the organization for more than 5 years. While this is generally a good thing, it also means that it is vitally important to engage newer stakeholders in strategic planning to avoid settling into a status quo understanding of identity, community, impact and opportunity.

Pratt has only a few members without any experience serving on other boards. Since board governance is not taught nor acculturated broadly, it can be a challenge to include both experienced and inexperienced board members. Many boards are either a place for either first-timers or long-term board veterans but not both. However, it is much healthier for the org and for the community at large for organizations to work through those struggles and include both perspectives. For those members who do not have outside board experience (and even for those who do) it can be beneficial to audit other board meetings and/or talk with members of other boards to compare notes and cross-pollinate tactics for board participation.

For Pratt, the newest board members are also the least experienced ones and the ones who felt that expectations were not set clearly for board members. So even though this wasn't a majority concern among the board at large, the minority here is important when thinking about future recruitment, onboarding and expectation-setting.

"We need to start with some basic understandings about what a board should be doing. The responsibilities are not widely understood, especially for newer members."

Newer board members need more orientation, not just to this board in particular, but into the experience of serving on a board generally. And because POC, LGBTQIA, young folk and other marginalized peoples have less experience with boards, it is vital that we build onramps for them if we are to continue to create an inclusive and equitable board environment within Pratt and across other organizations.

CONTEXT

Pratt is doing okay in contextual awareness among the board. The majority feels they understand the core problem or opportunity in the community and can name other peer organizations and the relationship to Pratt. The rationale for the approach and the various systemic pressures that surround the organization are moderately understood. And most board members can speak to when and how Pratt has made a difference in the past.

That said, most answers in this area were mixed and there is room to improve knowledge of the context of Pratt's work. As with any org, it would be ideal if board members were fluent in the number of artists in the community, neighborhood and community demographics, access to facilities and programs like Pratt, ties to health and economic metrics, and the overall landscape of policy, funding, facilities and cultural program access for the region.

While compiling some resources and focusing on some learning opportunities might be advantageous, it may be even more effective to improve board member confidence in context through focus on a more critical area below—ambassadorship and community engagement. Books, articles and data are great, but people and stories are even better.

BUDGET & FINANCE

Pratt's finances are in good shape and while they should never be neglected or de-prioritized, there doesn't seem to be a lot of need for change in this area at the moment.

There is a fair amount of confidence in the finances and for the most part board members can speak to the size and basic shape of the annual budget.

There is opportunity to compare income percentages with other organizations and talk about how it has changed over time and set objectives for the future. But this is more of a specific opportunity to expand board understanding of the budget and financial life of the organization than it is a problem with overall board capacity or knowledge.

"Fiscal discipline is important and has gotten much better over the years. Many nonprofits have a weakness there. Pratt has had challenges in the past, but is really strong in this area right now. It will be critical as we begin our building campaign."

"Current board meetings are more of a report-out, operationally and financially. We have not had enough opportunity for team building. We should implement breakout sessions for small group discussion. We get this at the annual retreat, but that is only for 6 hours one day per year."

MEETINGS

Responses around Pratt's board meetings were mixed. The second half of 2018 into the start of 2019 appears to have been a very difficult time for the board, and specifically at board meetings. And most of the negative responses in this area seem to stem from particular challenges during this time.

For the most part otherwise, board members find the meetings enjoyable, worthwhile and connected to the work of Pratt. However, there are clearly some opportunities to move past reporting towards more generative strategic conversations, learning and growth opportunities and community-building social activities.

With some more variance in the type of activities and format for conversation, it may also create a stronger venue to receive and process the challenges that appeared in the last year and any that are still to come.

There was a lot of interest in different board meeting formats, exploring different lengths and frequency to increase the time available for generative discussion and community-building. This also dovetails with conversations about balance of roles between board and committees.

MISSION

The board generally feels confident with the mission of the organization and their ability to express it. They use the mission statement as it is written to express the purpose and activities and in the long-run feel it has been used to help guide decisions.

Naturally, newer board members don't have as much experience with it, so perhaps it hasn't been part of many more recent decisions, but it clearly has been involved in the past.

There may be more opportunities to use the mission statement more prominently and to point it out and mention it when it is featured on materials. It is always good to tie successes directly to the language of the mission to bring it to life for board members and others.

"Board service is a good complement to my other work. It is personally fulfilling to be part of a community of other professionals who are thinking at a strategic level about business practices. It's nice to take a step back and look at the big picture together. It is a good community."

GOALS

Overall, Pratt is clearly working strategically. Annual and mid-length strategic goals exist and are familiar to most board members, and most feel they had input into crafting them.

However, it appears to be a good time to reconnect with the existing goals and re-confirm or redevelop them with the board. In particular, some mobilization around the goals is important, connecting them to specific activities, as the board does not feel that they adequately inspire and catalyze action.

Like with the mission, it may be advantageous to look for opportunities to tie more reporting and conversation to the language of the goals and objectives regularly. Regularly tying shorter-term activities to the long-term directions not only serves to better reinforce those strategic directions but helps to motivate the team and increase their fluency in speaking to the strategic plan.

OUTCOMES

While the board feels comfortable with the stories and basic logic of how Pratt produces outcomes, there is room to hone and advance this understanding.

This is especially true around the identification of specific communities or population types. Pratt has an opportunity to better drill down to explore a number of personas, including the specifics of their condition and experience, how they engage with the organization and how specifically it changes their life and community.

This may involve stronger or different program evaluation methods and/or the sharing of results with the board. But it also could result from direct outreach and engagement efforts, as mentioned again in ambassadorship below.

FUNDRAISING STRATEGY

Board members are mixed in their confidence levels with individual donor fundraising. There is opportunity to better activate board members through connection to current donors. It is clear that the fundraising and event committee members feel effective in this area, but less so for those who are not serving on those committees.

Most board members perceive the balance of fundraising efforts to be weighted towards grants and contracts instead of individual donors. They recognize that there is a strong base of donors supporting the organization, but many of them don't feel well connected to them.

A notable strength is in providing good models. Board members have seen good models for donor relations by being asked and thanked well and regularly as donors. Perhaps inviting board members to start by asking and thanking

"I agree we have a strong donor base, but they're really not all that familiar to me."

each other (or at least joining the ED and DD in those activities) can serve as a warm-up.

Also, within the board asks, there is some opportunity for those conversations to look across the years to explore growth and deepening of their individual gifts, but the base conversations are clearly happening and can be drawn upon as models for their own outreach.

The opportunity to activate the board around donor relations is timely. While it is always a good idea to invite more direct connection between each board member and multiple current and potential donors, the upcoming capital campaign will require it. As of right now, most are not currently building relationships with potential donors on behalf of the organization and there is opportunity to start with connections direct to the existing donor base.

AMBASSADORSHIP

This is the area of biggest potential for future advancement. Generally, board members do not feel fully actualized as ambassadors for Pratt. They feel they know what information to share and collect from individuals and groups, but do not feel that they know exactly who to prioritize with outreach.

Many board members feel they are underutilized in reaching out and including their own networks and communities and where they do, they do not feel confident that those relationships are established in a way that will survive their departure from the board.

By inverting the focus and energy of the board away from internal work and policy and instead prioritize learning from, engaging with and representing the broader base of external stakeholders, the board can better embody their role as strategic advisors, collect the contextual knowledge to succeed and cultivate the relationships and engagement resources necessary to better fundraise and advocate for the organization broadly.

If those external relationships are authentic, inclusive and dynamic, it becomes very difficult to identify the line between internal and external. The question of inclusion and representation disappears, and the struggles with equity and diversity with it. Board recruitment is no problem, and any lack of knowledge, skill or resource is solved with some simple outreach. Almost nothing compares to a well-connected and networked board of directors.

With the forthcoming facility project and related campaign, Pratt's board has the opportunity and need to now invest in ambassadorship as the driver of the next stage of board evolution.

"Being a good representative of the community takes time and energy, and folks run out of both. But it is a good idea for us to put in the work, attend classes and community meetings, and connect with other organizations. It requires continual work and maybe we can split up those duties [among the board]."

STRUCTURE

Board structure is definitely seen as an area of need, though it may be more an issue of clarification and communication than it is in a lack or problem with the underlying formal definitions and policy. In particular, there is confusion about the distribution of roles and responsibilities between staff and board at Pratt. This may stem from the continuing shift away from a working board, as discussed more in “Priorities” below.

Board members also generally feel that there isn’t enough opportunity to reflect on the board structure, performance and leadership throughout the year, either together or in a group. Some sort of annual process of review and reflection may be an important practice to adopt.

Otherwise, there is confidence in the structure and leadership of the board. The committee structure is strong and well defined. Board subcommittees are used appropriately and efficiently. And for the most part, officer positions are clearly defined though there may be some room to better orient newer board members on the positions and election process.

It is often the case that organizations tend to pull back during times of challenge to prioritize a review and revision to the structure of their group, while it may actually be other areas, such as meeting design, strategic planning or external relations that are actually where the opportunities lie. That said, it is always a good idea to match any strategic or tactical shifts with the appropriate shift in structure.

CULTURE & INCLUSION

In the long run, the board has maintained an environment of mutual respect and compassion, but the last year has been a challenge in this area, with some loss in trust and safety internally and externally.

Overall, it is a comfortable place to ask hard questions and constructively challenge assumptions about business values, strategies and systems. But in the last year this dynamic changed, and some cultivation will be required to restore trust and ensure that a culture of rigorous critical reflection.

Though the responses were mixed, the majority of board members don’t feel that the board adequately represents the community served, especially in representation of the people of the surrounding historically Black and Asian neighborhoods.

In addition, about half of the board feels that there isn’t a shared framework of definitions and priorities for diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice among the board. And while the other half agreed moderately that there was a shared framework, interviews indicated that these replies were more likely indicating that respondents felt that the board had

“We are not always using the same baseline level of knowledge about race and equity. I hear some terminology that just isn’t used anymore in 2019. We need a collective understanding of vision and values that are a living part of the conversation in an ongoing sense.”

shared values around social justice and equity, but not that there had been enough facilitated process to create an active and collective framework for conversation, definitions, decision-making and action.

Overall, the board feels confident that it has the collective courage and focus to do the right things for the right reasons. So the culture of the organization is set up for success but would benefit from a stronger ongoing commitment to courageous conversations around race, equity and social justice.

"[With another organization], facilitators came in to work with board and staff. They built equity into the strategic plan in a deep and meaningful way. They created a framework around it. The board and staff were all able to buy in. It was specific but not complicated. It outlined how to meet objectives, and how to know how they'd met them. Pratt needs the same scaffolding."

PRIORITIES

The remaining question is how now to use this information to establish a plan to change and develop the board and its work in the future.

When asked what area they wanted to work on the most, board members fell into some predictable patterns, which are not a perfect match to the needs of the board as identified otherwise in this assessment.

The highest two categories in the survey were regarding the structure and function of the board and the setting of expectations for board members. Other areas of higher interest were in culture/inclusion and examining strategy and outcomes. Unsurprisingly, individual board members had the least interest in fundraising, ambassadorship and budgeting.

This is a standard challenge with boards, and really with any teams or work environments. Often when facing a challenge, the instinct is to step back and focus on re-structuring and strategy. And while that would certainly be beneficial in Pratt's case, even more important is to focus energy outward, to connect more fully with the community, establish confidence and practice in ambassadorship and community stewardship.

There is a chance now for Pratt to move away from its history as a working board and move more fully into a role of strategy and ambassadorship. It ought retain the necessary elements of policy work to feel comfortable with the operations while working to make many of the board functions more oriented towards relationship, long-term planning, and stewardship of values and vision.

Pratt should continue board recruitment to maintain an organic turnover, but can balance that with continued cultivation of existing board members. There is an opportunity now to ask

about adjusting the size of the board overall, but any shifts there (like shrinking the size of the board or changing meeting structure) should be done so while maintaining or even increasing the base of core stakeholders engaged in fundraising, ambassadorship and strategic advising.

"I served on another board that works at a very high level, not a working board at all. They focus on strategic vision and development, opportunities for growth and change. Pratt really has a history as a working board. And that's kind of been the lasting tone even as the board membership has changed over the years. We haven't really been able to get to that higher level. But the organization is at that point. And it is time for our board to step up as well."



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