



CounterPulse Strategic Plan 2021-2025

A Dynamic Movement of Risk-Taking
Art that Builds Community



Clarissa Dyas in "Meet Us Quickly With Your Mercy" by Flyaway Productions. Photo by Austin Forbord.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A person in a blue tank top, loose grey cotton pants, and flat black shoes sits on a metal box suspended from the roof of a red building. A blue neon sign reads "San Francisco CounterPulse"

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Helen Wicks in Meet Us Quickly With Your Mercy by Flyaway Productions. Photo by Austin Forbord

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A person with fair skin and dark pinned-up hair dressed in all white holding a small metal cage hangs suspended from the wall of a brick and cinder block building.

Part 01: Welcome

Hello!

Welcome to our new strategic plan—the outline of our vision and framework for the work of CounterPulse.

During the last several years, we took a deep dive in examining the value and impact of CounterPulse’s work, and looked to our myriad community members for input. Our work has been rooted in our tenacious support of artists and expansive commitment to building enduring communities. In this strategic plan, we look to the future and harken in our 30-year legacy to guide the next chapter of our strategic impact. In this document, we dream of a CounterPulse with impact across sectors of civic engagement and cross-sector partnership, and envision a world that centers the arts as essential within broader social, political, and cultural movements. We aspire to prove the impact of the arts on dynamic communities as a way to spark radical, human-focused collaborations that bring people together in transformational ways.

We have made this plan during sociocultural upheavals and economic uncertainty—in our neighborhood, the Bay Area, and in the world. We stripped away our institutional frameworks and listened deeply to the communities who depend on us to thrive as artists, audiences, and humans. So it is appropriate that our **Theory of Change** responds to the ever-changing realities of the arts ecology of intersecting communities. We look inward and articulate a vision for a world we dream of—for the artist we springboard, for ourselves as cultural workers, for the communities we touch, and the partners we depend on and lift up. We commit to proving the impact the arts have in inspiring positive social change through transformational experiences. What begins with a ticket purchase can result in the seeding of brilliant, unexpected connections. We know this because of studying the ongoing impact of 30+ years of CounterPulse producing radical, risk-taking arts in San Francisco. We have committed with unwavering enthusiasm to our core values, evaluating and responding to community needs, and adapting our work. It is by this process of deep community rootedness that we direct our work, change our worlds, and build our communities.

We could not have achieved the depth and range of this Strategic Plan without the dedication and investment of our incredible board of directors, the visionary leadership of our talented staff (who are also artists in the field), the thoughtful contributions of the many colleagues who informed this process, and the skilled facilitation and freedom work from our internal equity consultant, ChE, among many other practitioners, consultants, and artists who gave feedback, support and insight.

Each word in our Theory of Change is the result of hours of impassioned dialogue, and the sum total is a testament to the power unleashed when a group of bright and dedicated people share a common purpose.

This Strategic Plan is CounterPulse's next official investment in the world we're wielding, a guide to our next five years of art & action. We know this plan is only as strong as the community that rallies behind it, and we would not affirm our aspirational and bold vision if we did not believe in our community and trust that they believe in us. Whether you are an audience member, artist, employee, funder, community partner – or any combination – we hope that this plan inspires you to be part of our movement. Together, we can build a dynamic movement of experimental art that sparks personal transformation and builds enduring community.

“What begins with a ticket purchase can result in the seeding of brilliant, unexpected connections”

Mica Sigourney in 1000 Confetti Cannons from CounterPulse's 30th Birthday Celebration at SF Center for the Book. Photo by Robbie Sweeny



IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A person with light skin and a shaved head wearing white overalls and purple headphones holds a cardboard tube exploding with confetti which sticks to the inside of a transparent plastic bubble..

Our Mission

CounterPulse is a dynamic movement of experimental art that sparks personal transformation and builds enduring community. We provide space and resources for emerging artists and cultural innovators, serving as an incubator for the creation of socially relevant, community-based art and culture. CounterPulse acts as a catalyst for art and action; creating a forum for the open exchange of art and ideas, sparking transformation in our communities and our society. We work towards a world that celebrates diversity of race, class, cultural heritage, artistic expression, ability, gender identity, and sexual orientation. We strive to create an environment that is physically and economically accessible to everyone.

Uzo Nwankpa in Performing Diaspora 2021. Photo by Robbie Sweeny.



IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A person with dark skin and a black afro wearing a large beaded necklace, a sparkling green face mask, and a colorfully patterned skirt stands holding a bowl over their head. In the foreground, there is a pile of sunflowers, and in the background there is a projection of a person with dark skin, a dark hair bun, and a red shirt walking through a forest of bare trees.

Our Process

Our process began by critically analyzing the current work of CounterPulse and the organization that we aspire to be. With the support of Jeanne Belle, CEO of CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, we've convened Board and Staff for an initial strategic planning retreat in 2018. This intake session was built on multiple staff only half-day retreats to feed an informed consensus on who CounterPulse is and who CounterPulse strives to be.

Out of that retreat, we convened a Strategic Plan Committee of our Board of Directors, with participating members Kush Amerasinghe, Victor Cordon, Joel Goldsmith, and Peter McCormack. The committee collaborated on articulating shared Values that informed and streamlined our Strategies and clarified our Intended Impacts.

“ This plan is only as strong as the community that rallies behind it ”

Throughout the entire process we interviewed CounterPulse stakeholders (i.e. audience, artists, Tenderloin residents, partners) to glean community needs, concerns, and impact opportunities for CounterPulse. Then, with the support of the Hewlett Foundation Organizational Effectiveness award, we conducted an internal audit examining how diversity, equity, accessibility, and liberation are positioned not just in our programs but in the very fabric of CounterPulse's organizational design, from operational systems to office culture and HR protocols. This continuous work preceded and grew throughout widespread social uprisings in 2020 as national/community awareness and action grew in response to ongoing, systemic violence against Black, Indigenous, & People of Color (BIPOC). CounterPulse has never had a sharper focus on contributing our efforts to overturning white supremacy, racism and subjugation of all kinds within and beyond our artistic communities.

It is with this spirit of radical community action that our Theory of Change emerges renewed and fortified, and becomes the backbone of our Strategic Plan.

In one, unfolding document, our Theory of Change captures our intended impacts, the communities with whom we focus our strategies, and the organizational and curatorial values that underpin all of our work. This Strategic Plan document provides a comprehensive narrative around the components and how we see them working in concert.



Gerald Casel and Clarissa Dyas in Radius at McEvoy Foundation for the Arts. Photo by Robbie Sweeny.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A person with dark skin, short black hair, a red t-shirt, and yellow shorts and person with dark skin, short bleach blond hair, an orange tank top and blue jeans face each other in a lunge position with their arms outstretched, mirroring each other while others wearing neon clothes dance behind them in an empty parking lot.

Part 02: Our New Theory of Change

A theory of change ties together an identified issue, desired change, potential strategies – and the foundational values that propel the work. The process of developing and continuously testing a theory of change requires staff and board – and our community who holds us accountable – to question and refine how our chosen programming achieves our desired impact. It becomes a central vehicle for learning and evaluating our practices—broadening leadership’s focus from tabulating quantitative inputs and outputs to measuring the organization’s contribution to deeper, more compelling social change. Since CounterPulse’s previous theory of change in 2015, we’ve updated our vision, clarified our foci of change, and refined and added several strategies and values to reflect the organization we’ve become and who we aspire to be.

Vision

CounterPulse is a dynamic movement of experimental art that sparks personal transformation and builds enduring community.

All of CounterPulse’s work will drive to this ultimate, intended vision. This statement speaks to our influential, continuous role of deepening and broadening a movement that inspires, elevates, and adequately resources experimental art that truly engages and transforms individuals and subsequently, communities and the world at large. Our vision reflects a humble shift away from cause:effect and impact-laden language to recognize that there is no beginning and end point to this work. CounterPulse’s vision necessarily avoids an ultimate “impact” or “goal” to break away from scarcity nonprofit models that imply labor is the key driver to achieve change. Rather, CounterPulse’s vision is the essence behind all our values, strategies, and intended impacts. Our vision notably brings the humanity of the arts into all our work. By focusing on personal transformation, we believe that the art’s audacity to create transformative individual experiences will in turn build a more collaborative and resilient world.

Breaking Down Our Vision

We begin our vision by celebrating CounterPulse as a dynamic movement. By this we recognize the myriad artists, communities, and supporters that rally behind our work to truly make it a movement. By experimental art, we mean engaging our audience in ways that are unexpected and innovative, inviting artists to work in new ways and address contemporary issues and break down the boundaries of artistic disciplines. By sparks personal transformation, we mean to inspire the development of new ideas, new connections, and new ways to participate in community that fuel positive change on the personal level, positing that the individual is the base unit of social change. By enduring communities, we mean preserving and developing existing cultures that withstand divestment, inequities, and displacement.

“ Experimental art that truly engages and transforms individuals and subsequently, communities and the world at large. ”

Foci of Change

To continually become a dynamic movement, our strategies are directed to three Foci of Change. In concert with our three foci of change, CounterPulse will pursue three near-term impacts and three and mid-term impacts per foci.

- **Diverse, Emerging and Mid-career Artists and Cultural Workers**
- **Established and Emergent Arts Audiences**
- **Partners with a Vision for Social Change**

Intended Impacts

➤ **Diverse, Emerging and Mid-career Artists and Cultural Workers**

Near-term: A diversity of artists and cultural workers are in leadership roles, carving new pathways for artistic and cultural production

CounterPulse’s unique incubation and ongoing support of artists will ensure their development in all of these essential aspects. Through community partnerships and robust marketing and professional support, artists advance their careers by participating in CounterPulse programming. Artists will develop additional skills and networking opportunities in established and emergent communities resultant of their work with CounterPulse.

Mid-Term: There are well-resourced, influential field models designed and led by diverse artists and cultural workers

CounterPulse’s curatorial approach and specialized support to artists will ensure there is a large and growing body of risk-taking work that’s increasingly recognized by audiences and the field internationally as important and influential.

➤ **Established and Emergent Arts Audiences**

Near-term: Audiences from a growing range of backgrounds consistently engage in arts and culture programming

CounterPulse audiences are diverse across socioeconomic, gender, and political spectrums, and consistently participate in CounterPulse shows, events, and arts activities. CounterPulse maintains practices in physically & economically accessible arts programming as a field leader to ensure everyone can access the arts.

Mid-term: Engaged audiences develop into stakeholders in the local and global arts ecosystems

CounterPulse’s audiences will grow and diversify while becoming more actively engaged in the broader cultural dialogue concerned with innovative art and progressive community building.

➤ Partners with a Vision for Social Change

Near-term: A growing network of partners collaborate in novel formations to support the arts ecosystem

CounterPulse's dynamic programming garners attention from new donors and civic partners who experience a growing appreciation of the arts compelled by CounterPulse's rigorous proof of concept and growing documentation of the impact of our work.

Mid-term: Partnership, collaboration, and resource sharing are heralded as an axis of sustainable, positive social impact

CounterPulse's leadership by example will inspire a growing number of investors, philanthropists, and civic leaders and to seek out and fund opportunities to include arts as a critical part of their social change efforts.

Strategies

We outline 11 core organizational strategies that CounterPulse employs to achieve our intended impacts. Together they are CounterPulse's unique way of working, our secret sauce. With this set of strategies, we are committing to do what we've always done well—incubating risk-taking artists and building enduring communities—even better and more consistently. Furthermore, these strategies outline how we will significantly expand our work through extensive partnerships to better resource the arts ecosystem and deepen our impact.

“ With this set of strategies, we are committing to do what we've always done well—incubating risk-taking artists and building enduring communities ”

Organizational Strategies

- 1. Springboard artists and cultural workers to greater visibility and leadership**
- 2. Increase the profile of Bay Area artists and position San Francisco as a cultural hub globally**
- 3. Provide consistent paid opportunities for artists and cultural workers from historically subjugated communities**
- 4. Forge networks that enable transdisciplinary, intercultural and intergenerational connections**
- 5. Provide accessible, catalytic support to generate transformational community-based art and culture**
- 6. Steward a facility and create space that is a physically, economically, and culturally accessible home for the arts and community in and beyond the San Francisco Bay Area**
- 7. Present artistic work and cultural events that cultivate engagement across diverse audiences**
- 8. Offer place-based, creative, accessible, and information-rich arts activities of, by and for residents of our local community**
- 9. Cultivate ongoing partnerships that share resources to broaden and deepen support for the arts**
- 10. Advocate for the inclusion of the arts within social, political, and cultural movement**
- 11. Serve as a translator between grassroots community models and institutional frameworks to forge new collaborations for mutual benefit**

Organizational And Curatorial Values

Through the formation of our Theory of Change we brought together the notions of organizational values and curatorial values. How we hold ourselves and how we hold the artists, audiences, and community partnerships we nurture are very much the same. These six values are not close to encapsulating all of the dynamic principles that drive our work, but they form the backbone of our work as community members working toward our Vision.

➤ Personal Transformation

We will challenge norms, shatter assumptions and foster imagination so that new ideas emerge

➤ Acting with Purpose

We will promote more egalitarian futures by centering and resourcing BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and disabled communities

➤ Responsivity

We will continually adapt in response to changing artistic and community needs

➤ Mutuality

We will prioritize mutual accountability and benefit in our collaborations

➤ Freedom

We will celebrate and encourage every person's right to be in their bodies with agency and have access to artistic expression and experience

➤ Radical Spirit

We will center the development of imaginative alternative social systems and world-building

Rick Darnell and Hannah Meleokaiao Ayasse explore Pseuda's are:era installation at CounterPulse. Photo by Robbie Sweeny.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: An older person with light skin wearing a blue surgical mask and walking with a cane and a younger person with light skin and dark brown curly hair in a bun and wearing a long orange coat wander around a dark theater, illuminated by horizontal screens which display their own image back at them.



Samuel Melecio-Zambrano in Split by FACT/SF. Photo by Robbie Sweeny.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A person with long tight curls, dressed in a white tank top and dark pants, shrouded in neon pink light outspreads their arms while jumping through a colorfully lit room.

Part 03: Our Listening

The development of our Strategic Plan and Theory of Change was predicated on careful listening to stakeholders and program evaluation throughout 2017-2021. We surveyed ourselves, CounterPulse staff and board, to develop consensus around what is important to us as an organization, as arts professionals, and as individuals - and continued to test our assumptions. In addition to informal testing of ideas in peer conversations throughout the process, we undertook six formal listening efforts:

We met first with our core community to test our assumptions about what people value in CounterPulse, as well as what they hope to see evolve. We surveyed 2017 Artists-in-Residence alumni to examine a three-year impact following their residencies. We conducted annual audience surveying to measure engagement and the power of the arts to inspire social action. We surveyed residents, workers, and visitors in the Tenderloin neighborhood to understand their outlook on how the arts could be part of positive neighborhood changes. Along the way, we listened to cultural workers more generally, the backbone of our cultural productions, to learn about our impact in their financial and career trajectories through staff performance reviews, goal setting, exit interview, artist debriefs, and event personnel roundtables.

“ We surveyed residents, workers, and visitors in the Tenderloin neighborhood to understand their outlook on how the arts could be part of positive neighborhood changes. ”

Our Dual Bottom Line

As part of phase one of our project— Who Are We Now?—we used CompassPoint’s Matrix Map tool to assess our current program business model. The key concept here is ‘dual bottom line,’ which means considering both the impact and the financial result of each of our core program and fundraising lines at the same time.

The Strategic Planning Committee developed four impact criteria by which to assess our current programs and fundraising lines. These impact criteria lived on as central to our theory of change development process in later phases of this project.

Fills an Important Gap: unique in the community in encouraging artistic risk-taking, fostering diversity, supporting activism, or promoting physical, financial, and social accessibility.

Artistic Impact: represents innovation, advancement of an artistic discipline, and/or supports the career trajectory of artists.

Public Impact: changes the audience and/or community by educating and informing, inspiring deeper commitment, or fostering a new understanding or perspective.

Excellence in Execution: CounterPulse is effective and efficient in how it manages the work.

With respect to the financial bottom line, the Matrix Map process underscored for us the extent to which we have been a break-even enterprise—disciplined financially, but as yet unable to build up adequate working capital to invest substantially in our capacity to grow and innovate.

We recognize that for an organization of our size, we have been very successful in partnering with foundations, and that they will be central to our business model going forward. But, we also know that we will have to continue to increase our capacity to raise money from individuals to create more robust unrestricted working capital. We have already begun the work of engaging our board differently in this effort, and the past five years since we have opened our doors in the Tenderloin have brought huge strides in individual fundraising.

It was at this point in the process that we began to make the distinction between our historical ‘project-based’ business model—and its requisite set of financial assumptions and demands on staff time and demanding foundation or government contracts—and what is emerging as a more holistic set of integrated program strategies all working together to support artists, engage audiences, and build community whilst designing a more sustainable and human-centered organizational design.

Artists & Cultural Workers

CounterPulse’s flagship ARC (Artist Resident and Commissioning) program provides six artists annually with residencies to create and show new live art works while receiving professional mentorship and exhibition production support.

Our ARC Artists-in-Residence represent some of the most experimental performing art forms the San Francisco Bay Area has to offer from demographically diverse artists that reflect the cultural vibrancy of the region. The vast majority of CounterPulse resident artists reside in the Bay Area; 44% artists identify as BIPOC; over half identify as LGBTQIA+, and over half report making under \$30k/yr.

Artist Alumni

CounterPulse conducts post-residency interviews with our Artists-in-Residence to evaluate the efficacy of our ARC program in springboarding artistic careers; and we additionally survey resident artist alumni three years following their participation in the program. Throughout 2017–2021 we evaluated our artist impact against criteria devised in our previous Strategic Plan. Specifically, we measured 1) Percentage of artists who report specific changes to artistic and/or business processes because of CounterPulse program structure; 2) Percentage of Artists report specific changes to community engagement activities because of CounterPulse program structure; and 3) artists have increased recognition through awards, articles, residencies and presentation opportunities.

We found that CounterPulse resident artists report significant advancements to their artistic & professional careers. Since moving to our new Tenderloin building, we’ve supported over 180 Artists-in-Residence and collaborators – the majority of whom reside in the San Francisco Bay Area – springboarding their careers to new heights like global tours.

Ronja Ver in Matchbox Lab #4: Hybrid Tenders. Photo by Robbie Sweeny.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A person in a cheetah-print catsuit speaks into a microphone, looking over a pile of dirt with various technological equipment scattered around. In the background there is more assorted technological equipment and a projection of leaves in cyanotype.



Space Impact Survey

In the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, we conducted a Space Impact survey to understand how we can better resource artists with our facility moving out of the pandemic. A major learning from this survey is that many artists expressed desire for a gathering space inside of CounterPulse to co-work and gather when not actively rehearsing or performing, imaging CounterPulse as truly a home and cultural hub for the arts. Stewarding a facility and creating accessible and welcoming space in the Bay Area is key to this five-year Strategic Plan.

“CounterPulse resident artists report significant advancements to their artistic & professional careers.”

Cultural Workers

In addition to artist alumni, we have expanded our impact areas to cultural workers more broadly to capture the creatives and event staff behind the scenes of everything we do. These community members comprise house managers, graphic designers, videographers, technicians, and the CounterPulse admin staff. A significant change in this Strategic Plan is the integration of these critical community members in the fabric of our vision and strategies, with subsequent benchmarks and metrics for evaluating our progress.

Moving into the future, we will continue to glean insight from artists and cultural workers alike whom we aim to support through new networking and income stream opportunities. As outlined in our Dashboard of Indicators, we particularly strive to support individuals from BIPOC/LGBTQIA+/Disabled communities, by providing an artistic home that is true to their practice, vision, and cultural/ community affiliations.

TenderArts Participants

From 2017-2019 we held a series of focus groups and individual interviews for TenderArts participants and artists. We call this project the Tenderloin Art Exchange. CounterPulse framed our research around two major areas: daily life in the Tenderloin and art experiences. We surveyed participants at live Block Fest activations, residents at SROs, and other neighbors, workers, and visitors of the Tenderloin to identify neighborhood challenges and key opportunities for positive arts activities. We traveled around the neighborhood, visiting community meetings to begin our information collection. We hosted focus groups and interviewed 60 Tenderloin residents, service providers, frequent visitors, and workers. We continue to survey community partners, artists, and participants throughout and following their engagement with our TenderArts program to adapt our programming to better serve the neighborhood in which we are situated.



Sylvester Guard Jr. leads the Tenderloin Murals Walking Tour. Photo by Robbie Sweeny.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A person with dark skin, pink hair, and a puffy pink coat leads a large tour group outside of CounterPulse's building in the Tenderloin.

Core Insights of the Tenderloin Art Exchange:

- Relationships of proximity—particularly neighbors—but also friends, family, co-workers, and social service workers are core to thriving in the Tenderloin.
- There are a lot of services in the neighborhood, but access and consistency are problematic.
- There is a perceived “freedom to be” that is uniquely valued in Tenderloin.
- There is a preference for art that is celebratory of the diversity of the Tenderloin, and is beautiful and uplifting.
- Lack of environmental consistency encourages distrust and persistent vigilance.
- There is a dire lack of public space in the Tenderloin. There are few benches, street trees, or parks.

These core insights led us to identify gaps and opportunity areas for our TenderArts programming in offering arts activities of/by/for our local community as germane to our Strategic Plan.

Audience

CounterPulse’s community is a microcosm of the Bay Area’s dynamic culture of arts and action. Since 2012, 77% of our audiences have reported having a new or deepened connection to a social issue after engaging with CounterPulse. Every year roughly 15,000 people engage with CounterPulse as audiences, artists, and supporters.

On average 52% of our audience are LGBTQ+, 42% are BIPOC, 60% are women, 13% are disabled, and 46% of our audience report an income of less than \$30K, and many report little prior involvement with the arts.



Attendees at Upon a Phrase at SF Center for the Book. Photo by Robbie Sweeny.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: Two older people with fair skin, white buzzed hair, and elaborately patterned clothes attend a gallery event. One wears red glasses, the other wears a pink scarf. On the walls of the gallery are shelves with books encased in glass.

But numbers alone don’t reflect who comes to CounterPulse. Many CounterPulse audience members are any configuration of working artists, funders, community partners, and other stakeholders. This is both a strength of the CounterPulse community and empowers us to boldly work to expand our reach to a broader, cross-sector audience and community base.

CounterPulse deploys an annual audience survey to understand what is valuable to our audience community, what their interests are and how CounterPulse impacts them. One fundamental ongoing take-away from our listening efforts is how deeply CounterPulse’s core communities overlap. Many CounterPulse audience members are any configuration of working artists, funders, community partners, and other stakeholders.

Throughout 2017-2021 we evaluated our artist impact against criteria devised in our previous Strategic Plan. Specifically, we measured 1) Percentage of audiences who respond affirmatively and with detail about new or deepened connection to a social issue.; 2) Percentage of audiences respond affirmatively to the opportunity to connect with a community partner and take action; and 3) Percentage of audiences who report an increased level of engagement with the creative process and/or artistic community.

To provide some data, in 2019, 85% of audiences “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” that they find the creative process of artists interesting or they follow the developmental process. 52% of audiences report deepened connection following their experience at CounterPulse, and 28% were inspired to take social action. This data was key in informing our baseline data for evaluating the next five years of CounterPulse’s work. However, audience priorities have shifted in response to our changing community and developing field trends.

In 2020 we retested our refined strategies with our audience members, asking specific and open-ended questions to understand what our audience values, and looking for potential alignment with our new strategies and focus. We conducted an online survey with 69 participants, many of whom are frequent CounterPulse audience members and artists. We found that our regular audiences believe art has the potential to inspire social change, and that our audiences believe art should address social issues. Further, our audiences believe CounterPulse demonstrates leadership in eliminating boundaries, and connecting artists, art and audiences.

Next, we followed up via an in person focus group with consistent audience members to assess CounterPulse values and within our larger community, which in part informed this Strategic Plan.

Partners

A key transformation in this updated Theory of Change is recognizing our work is part and parcel to – and largely dependent upon – community and funder partnerships. In our new Theory of Change we set specific targets and indicators for partners and funders with a vision for social change. These listening efforts track and evaluate how our work ripples throughout cross-sector ecologies of impact in various Bay Area (and larger) communities. At the moment of publication, we have begun to analyze our history and future in shared programming, partnerships with social service/justice organizations, and the impact of these partnerships in continuing to support the arts and cross pollinate distinct communities. We will continue to deploy a series of surveys, interviews, and focus groups including individual and foundation funders and community partners in order to understand how partnership as a foci and a strategy drives our work and build enduring community.

Julie Phelps in Radius at McEvoy Foundation for the Arts. Photo by Robbie Sweeny.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A person with a bowl cut in a blue collared shirt and matching pink skirt and mask leads a line of dancers through a crowded parking lot.



Alexander Paris in un-rest by curbAlert. Photo by Robbie Sweeny.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A person with tan skin in an oversized hot pink blouse and silver pants and high heels walks around the edge of a circular garden at Oakland's Estuary Park

Part 04: Our Accountability

Guiding Principles

D.E.A.L.

As part of our Diversity, Equity, Access and Liberation process, we worked with an external liberation coach, ChE, to audit CounterPulse's internal equity and deliver coaching sessions to staff on how to become a truly equitable organization from the inside out. In 2019, ChE's consultation engagement involved two full-day liberation workshops couched in Afro-Indigenous Liberation Praxis frameworks and contemporary anti-racism literature. ChE provided intuitive, spiritual, and practical guidance for liberating one's body and mind in the workplace as a paradigm for collaborative working for CounterPulse's staff, who trust one another to show up for CounterPulse in the spirit of collective and personal care.

“We will pursue these strategies with cultural awareness and responsivity to our changing arts and social landscape”

Accessibility

Throughout the past several years we have worked closely with Gravity Access Services to audit and improve accessibility across our programming to enhance access to everything CounterPulse does. A key dimension to this work involved a deep revamp of CounterPulse's accessibility protocols to welcome all our community members across a range of access points. In 2021 we hired Judith Smith and Bonnie Lewkowicz to conduct a full-facility accessibility audit with specific recommendations for augmentations and improvements for augmenting accessibility programmatically and operationally.

Thanks to the dedicated team behind Gravity Access Services we have made programmatic, operational, and marketing changes with

the aim to recognize CounterPulse as a field leader in accessible arts programming. Thank you to Jess Curtis, Tiffany Taylor, Judith Smith, Bonnie Lewkowicz, and Jeshua Aveno for their contributions.

Dramaturgical Council

In 2019 we convened a Dramaturgical Council of diverse voices to evaluate and assist in programmatic and curatorial functions of the organization. CounterPulse believes it is vital to incorporate the perspective of externally situated community members in key internal processes in order to resist insularity and achieve our values in DEAL. Dramaturgical Council Members engage with CounterPulse through artist mentorship & dramaturgs, community listening and stakeholder input, thought leadership, artist-expert engagement for commissioned projects, or participating as a curatorial panelist. We have selected these individuals to leverage their art practice and/or curatorial frameworks to elevate the voices of marginalized communities and challenge institutional power dynamics.

By centering the perspectives of subjugated communities, Council Members advance CounterPulse's work as a socially-rooted performing arts institution, and we look forward to continuing the Dramaturgical Council at the core of CounterPulse's work in the future.

Thank you to our first cohort of Dramaturgical Council members, Anne Bluethenthal, Joanna Haigood, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Dazié Grego, Weidong Yang & Daiane Lopes Da Silva, and Gerald Casel.

A Collective Effort

These listening efforts directly influenced the finalization of our core strategies. In the end, we are committing to a very different way of arranging and deploying CounterPulse's essential means of supporting artists and cultural workers while strengthening communities **without** proposing radical changes to the business model that fundamentally works for both CounterPulse and our constituents. We thank all who contributed to make this at once a bold and feasible Strategic Plan for CounterPulse.

Dashboard Of Indicators

We anchor our Theory of Change with an associated dashboard of activities and indicators for tracking the impact of our strategies. This dashboard - also known as our Strategic Plan Baselines & Measurements - is a robust evaluation plan that has been collectively devised with staff and our equity consultants throughout the formation of our Strategic Plan. We will continue to measure our intended impacts against several indicators of success. Our dashboard tracks a hybrid of qualitative & quantitative inputs to uplift alternative methodologies of evaluation gleaned from the various ways that humans measure "success." By doing so, CounterPulse troubles positivist notions of tracking and evaluating our impacts in recognition of the humanity behind data points. We've thereby developed novel ways of capturing anecdotal evidence that center our communities' voices' in reflecting their own impacts - rather than a top-down extraction of data. Through long-form interviews and storytelling - coupled with rigorous social science analysis - our entire community is the driving force behind our metrics.

We plan to mobilize this dashboard as the mechanism by which the next five years of CounterPulse will be executed. CounterPulse will use these indicators, strategies, and outcomes as a roadmap in tandem with our updated Theory of Change to evaluate our ongoing work.

We will assemble and monitor together as a staff and board evidence of our progress in three areas: impact, strategy execution, and capacity to achieve strategies. Over the course of this 5-year strategic plan we will: establish baseline data in our newly selected metrics, collect additional trend data based upon the baseline data, and explore refining, adding, or deleting metrics to align to emerging priorities. Our emphasis is on metrics that will directly inform and motivate our work together and ensure progress towards our theory of change. Although a published document, our Strategic Plan is indeed a living document that will continue to respond, adapt and grow, continually re-aligning with our mission and vision. See our dashboard in Appendix A.

Our Commitment

We, the staff and board of CounterPulse, embrace this strategic plan as a powerful framework to guide our shared endeavor. We commit our passion, intelligence, energy, and resources to achieving our intended impact. We will pursue these strategies with cultural awareness and responsivity to our changing arts and social landscape. We will adhere to these core values and ensure that they inform every element of our work. We invite you to join us in building a dynamic movement of experimental art that sparks personal transformation and builds enduring community.

Staff



Julie Phelps



Hannah Ayasse



Rick Darnell



Zerena Diaz



Justin Ebrahemi



Kimi Harvey-Scott



Ach Kabal



Zoe Leonard



Kevin Lo



Grey Tartaglione



Kat Trataris

Board



Kush Amerasinghe



Lisa Beyer



Victor Cordon



Laura Elaine Ellis



Joel Goldsmith



Peter McCormack



Lindsey McClenahan



Toni Petkova



Lucy Milligan Wahl

Hannah Meleokaio Ayasse in Upon a Phrase at SF Center for the Book. Photo by Robbie Sweeny.

IMAGE DESCRIPTION: A person with light skin and dark brown curls in all white stands mouth agape, arms contorted in front of an off-white wall covered by her own shadow.

Appendix: CounterPulse Annual Evaluation Metrics Dashboard

VISION: CounterPulse is a dynamic movement of experimental art that sparks personal transformation and builds enduring community.

FOCI OF CHANGE:
Diverse, Emerging, And Mid-Career Artists And Cultural Workers

Near-Term Impact

A diversity of artists and cultural workers are in leadership roles, carving new pathways for artistic and cultural production

Strategies

Springboard artists and cultural workers to greater visibility and leadership

Increase the profile of Bay Area artists and position San Francisco as a cultural hub globally

Provide consistent paid opportunities for artists and cultural workers from historically subjugated communities

Forge networks that enable transdisciplinary, intercultural and intergenerational connections

Provide accessible, catalytic support to generate transformational community-based art and culture

Indicators

Artists/cultural workers report specific advances in artistic and/or business trajectories as a result of CounterPulse support

Artists/cultural workers report have increased recognition through awards, articles, residencies and presentation opportunities.

Total days of performance and public engagement by national and international artists/cultural workers at CounterPulse.

Percent of artists/cultural workers who report an increased network due to their work with CounterPulse

Percent of artists/cultural workers who report new streams of income as a result of their work with CounterPulse

Total pay to artists/cultural workers

Percentage of artists/cultural workers who do not identify as White / Caucasian

Percentage of total staff salaries paid to to BIPOC/LGBTQIA+/Disabled persons

Percentage of BIPOC/LGBTQIA+/Disabled artists/cultural workers who report CP feeling like an supportive artistic home in producing work true to their practice, vision, and cultural/community affiliations

Percentage of cultural workers who report CounterPulse’s professional dev was aligned with personal goals

% of SF AMI for lowest paid staff person

Average staff retention rate (in years)

Percent of ongoing programs (classes: 20–28 + 30, 35) costs covered by unrestricted funds/multi-year grants (excluding space/staff/indirect)

Appendix

CounterPulse Annual
Evaluation Metrics Dashboard

FOCI OF CHANGE:
Established And Emergent Arts Audiences

Near-Term Impact

Audiences from a growing range of backgrounds consistently engage in arts and culture programming

Strategies

Steward a facility and create space that is a physically, economically, and culturally accessible home for the arts and community in and beyond the San Francisco Bay Area

Present artistic work and cultural events that cultivate engagement across diverse audiences

Offer place-based, creative, accessible, and information-rich arts activities of, by and for residents of our local community

FOCI OF CHANGE:
Partners With A Vision Of Social Change

Near-Term Impact

A growing network of partners collaborate in novel formations to support the arts ecosystem

Strategies

Cultivate ongoing partnerships that share resources to broaden and deepen support for the arts

Advocate for the inclusion of the arts within social, political, and cultural movement

Serve as a translator between grassroots community models and institutional frameworks to forge new collaborations for mutual benefit

Indicators

Audiences report an increased interest in the creative process and/or artistic community.

Audiences report personal transformation directly after an event at CounterPulse.

Percentage of BIPOC/LGBTQIA+/Disabled audiences who report CounterPulse being an accessible and welcoming experience/environment

Audience report a new or deepened connection to social activist causes or broader social movements related to their experiences with CounterPulse

Percentage of audiences from non-arts related field increase

Percentage of NOTAFLOF tickets and Patron of the Arts tickets increase

Percentage of our audiences do not identify as White / Caucasian

Percent of our audiences identify as BIPOC/LGBTQIA+/Disabled

Total # virtual event attendees

Total # of audiences who report living in the Tenderloin

Total # of audiences who attend 5+ CounterPulse events annually

Indicators

% of partners who report subsequent collaborations with other arts organizations or the incorporation of artistic activities into their programming as a result of their partnership with CounterPulse

Total # of times CounterPulse (outside of production specific coverage) is mentioned in the press or academic publications

Total # of instances of CounterPulse partnering/speaking/organizing external conferences, panels, or programs related to community-building artistic work

Total # of shared activities with social justice/service organizations

Total # of partners w/o traditional history of arts funding/programming

Total # of events produced in partnership with other organizations or businesses (excluding individual artists)

Total number of renewed/repeat partnerships

Total # partnerships with non-local partners

% partners reporting that their impacts were deepened as a result of their partnership with CounterPulse

% of who report having a positive and generative collaborative experience partnering with CounterPulse

Total number of active foundation and government funders

Total number of active individual donors

Percent of annual budget from individual donors

COVER IMAGE DESCRIPTION:

FRONT: An illustrated version of the CounterPulse building’s magenta façade under a starry dark sky. A neon sign which reads “San Francisco CounterPulse” hangs over Turk Street, where a diverse range of stick figures explore the neighborhood.

BACK: Grey buildings under a starry dark night sky. Blue, purple, and orange stick figures of all body types are seen walking, riding bikes, rolling in wheelchairs, and dancing.

COUNTERPULSE GENERAL OPERATING AND PROGRAMS SUPPORTED GENEROUSLY BY

Alliance for California Traditional Arts, The Adobe Foundation, California Arts Council, California Office of the Small Business Advocate, Emmet R. Quady Foundation, Epispase Foundation, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Facebook, Fleishhacker Foundation, Ken Hempel Fund for the Arts, The Kenneth Rainin Foundation, The Koret Foundation, MAP Fund, the Miner Anderson Family Foundation, Mendenhall-Horan Fund of the Philadelphia Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation, Princess Grace Foundation-USA, San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco Grants for the Arts/Hotel Tax Fund, San Francisco Mayor’s Office of Economic & Workforce Development, U.S. Small Business Administration, Violet World Foundation, Minnesota Street Project Foundation, Walter & Elise Haas Fund, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Zellerbach Family Foundation, CSAA Insurance Group, a AAA Insurer, CounterPulse members and generous individual supporters.

THANK YOU TO THE 80 TURK PROJECT SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS Chase Bank, Community Arts Stabilization Trust, Epispase Foundation, Jensen Architects, Community Vision, Sakana Foundation, San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco Grants for the Arts/Voluntary Arts Contribution Fund, San Francisco Mayor’s Office of Economic & Workforce Development, The Kenneth Rainin Foundation, Violet World Foundation, Walter & Elise Haas Fund, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Ventura Partners, and ZenDesk. Special thanks to the CounterPulse Board of Directors and all our generous individual 80 Turk Project supporters.

