

Strategic Plan 2023 - 2027

Executive Summary

OCTOBER 26, 2022

Founded in 1979, Pacific Opera Victoria is one of the most influential opera companies in Canada, applauded for its inspired repertoire and for curating opera in surprising ways, attracting accomplished artists, and engaging the community.

Over four decades, Pacific Opera Victoria has established itself as a vibrant opera company distinguished by strong community support and curatorial vision.

Through dynamic programming, marketing, and donor cultivation efforts, all leveraged by the opera's remarkable productions, this strategic plan aims to strengthen the Opera's donor base and maximize its impact across and beyond the Baumann Centre campus, thereby setting it on course to become a national leader in opera while remaining rooted in its community.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF WORK

This strategic plan was completed by the Pacific Opera Victoria Strategic Planning Committee, which comprised of senior Pacific Opera Victoria staff, board leadership, and pertinent community stakeholders.

This plan was facilitated by Ben Dietschi, Senior Consultant. Research and writing was conducted by the DeVos Institute consulting services team and discussed during nearly two dozen meetings and interviews with the Pacific Opera Victoria Strategic Planning Committee. Detailed research, analysis, and sources supporting these summarized findings can be found in the full-length version of the **Strategic Plan**.

The term of this plan is five years, beginning in January 2023.

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

This planning process followed a six-stage framework:

1. A review of Pacific Opera Victoria's **mission**;
2. A study of the **environment** in which Pacific Opera Victoria operates, resulting in the definition of factors required for Pacific Opera Victoria's success;
3. An **internal analysis** of challenges, strengths, and opportunities at Pacific Opera Victoria, in relation to those "success factors";
4. A set of objectives, achieved by **strategies**, that confront the opportunities and challenges outlined by that internal analysis;
5. An **implementation** plan outlining who will complete each strategy, and when; and
6. A **financial** plan that states the fiscal ramifications of those strategies.

Together, these parts constitute a strategic plan intended to address short-term, mid-term, and long-term opportunities and challenges facing Pacific Opera Victoria.

MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

Our Vision is for a world in which opera enriches the lives of everyone.

Our Mission is to create distinctive and inclusive opera experiences which inspire and engage artists and audiences.

We deliver our mission with integrity and uncompromising adherence to

Our Values: Quality, Leadership, Innovation, Collaboration, Learning, Inclusivity and Stewardship

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In striving to achieve our vision, we...

- Curate inspired repertoire and create high quality new and original productions.
- Create meaningful opportunities for artists, foster their development and careers.
- Engage diverse audiences in the communicative power of opera.
- Encourage the use of opera to enrich the learning of young people.
- Design meaningful experiences and genuine engagement with communities to address cultural, civic and social needs.
- Advance equity, diversity, inclusion and reconciliation and work to dismantle systemic inequities in our communities.

- Cultivate collaboration with cultural organizations regionally, nationally, and internationally.
- Invite investment in our activities, encourage philanthropy and celebrate giving.
- Practice good governance and business practices, and prudently steward our resources.
- Demonstrate leadership in our local communities and the broader arts and opera sectors.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

A comprehensive environmental analysis was conducted to better understand the environment in which Pacific Opera Victoria operates. Four dimensions of the environment were studied:

1. All arts and culture organizations within the North American cultural ecology face several common challenges:
 - An increased awareness in the national conversations around antiracism and social justice have compelled organizations to respond, for example, to become more inclusive.
 - The COVID-19 pandemic forced all organizations to pivot to online programming and caused a loss of earned income.
 - Reductions in arts and humanities education in schools has lowered demand for cultural experiences.
 - The aging of the traditional arts donor base has placed pressure on cultural institutions to develop new sources of revenue.
 - Due to the rapid rate of change, many cultural institutions are having difficulty adapting to this new environment.
 - In Canada, government funding is increasing, but funders must also respond to calls for the more equitable distribution of wealth to a greater number of recipients.
 - Individual giving in Canada is decreasing. Approximately 5% of Canadians are donating to the arts as social causes take precedence in a challenged world.
2. An exploration of North American opera companies uncovers the following notable trends:
 - While overall box office performance for mid-sized organizations has proven relatively stable in the 5 years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, opera companies are facing a decline in subscriptions.
 - Opera companies are investing in learning more about younger audiences in order to create programming and marketing campaigns that speak to, and satisfy, their needs.

- They are responding to the call to address its long-standing reputation as a white-led, elitist art form through the incorporation of DEI principles into the fabric of their organizations.
 - They are blurring boundaries between genres. For example, opera and musical theatre.
 - The integration of technology into the performance and audience experience attracts younger patrons and excites adventuresome operagoers of all ages.
 - These innovative performance formats attract and build new audiences. The growing “indie” opera movement explores new experiments in format, subject matter, and audience experiences.
3. An examination of notable leaders in the field reveals that successful opera companies share several key characteristics:
- Access to world-class talent.
 - The situation of masterworks in the current cultural context, which may include updating the repertoire.
 - Advancing the art form, and equity, with new commissions.
 - Co-productions and collaborations to support cost-sharing, increased visibility, and expanded networks.
 - Innovation in civic-engaged practice.
 - “High-touch” education programs which prioritize the depth of impact over the maximum number of participants.
 - Fostering a sense of belonging to motivate philanthropy.
4. Factors specific to Victoria, British Columbia
- Victoria is well-populated with cultural opportunities for residents and visitors alike. A major tourism destination with over 3.5 million overnight visitors per year, the area boasts a wide variety of cultural offerings. These include The Victoria Symphony, Victoria Philharmonic Choir, Royal Theatre, Belfry Theatre, and Pacific Opera Victoria. However, the tourism sector faces several challenges, identified in its Community Plan, including a strong Canadian dollar, stringent cross-border security, an island location, and high fuel costs. Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has added additional headwinds to efforts to build tourism in Victoria.
 - Its population is expected to grow, as is the proportion of its residence over the age of 65. Notably, there is a high cost of living. In 2019, Victoria was ranked the fifth most expensive

- place to live in Canada by PadMapper. Due to high housing costs, an estimated 1,500 people are homeless in the region.
- There is good overall access to education and work-integrated learning, but declining access to arts education in schools.
 - A growing technology sector continues to generate jobs at levels that match pre-pandemic recruitment. It is also Victoria's largest revenue-producing industry, creating more than \$4 billion of economic impact annually. With three post-secondary institutions, eight federal research labs, and Canada's Pacific Navy Base, Victoria has many of the elements required for a strong technology sector, including Canada's highest household internet usage.

This environmental analysis suggests that institutions like Pacific Opera Victoria must develop a varied slate of distinctive and engaging programming to grow their audience and donor family and must market that programming aggressively to compete with other organizations looking for support.

INTERNAL ANALYSIS

The Internal Analysis is an audit of current strengths and weaknesses that indicates how Pacific Opera Victoria is currently structured to address these environmental opportunities and challenges. The institution has a series of strengths upon which to build. These include:

- A thoughtful balance of new and familiar repertoire.
- An artist-centered ethos that fosters trust and increases access to talent.
- A loyal, adventurous audience and superb patron stewardship.
- Faithful engagement with EDIR and deepening community-engaged practices.
- An energetic, forward-looking brand personality.
- Strong marketing and development ROI.
- An engaged, loyal, capable Board.
- A progressive and motivated staff.
- The Baumann Centre provides a hub for audience engagement.

These strengths are balanced against several challenges, including:

- The need to evolve main stage repertoire to remain culturally relevant; casting could be more inclusive.
- Education offerings have historically been focused on light-touch, short-term offerings.

- Institutional Marketing could place more emphasis on artistic innovation and civic engagement.
- A major effort will be required to welcome back lapsed subscribers, post-pandemic.
- A need to deepen the use of data for audience profiling, segmentation, and tracking.
- A growing dependence on federal funding for innovative projects.
- The organization must navigate the Artistic Director succession, in near-term.
- Its main venue, the Royal Theatre, has limited production capabilities and limits patron data capture.

As a result of these analyses, several changes to the current operating model were proposed:

- Building production capacity towards presenting 1 new work each year.
- Expanding “high-touch” education programs, while de-emphasizing “light-touch” high-volume offerings.
- Introducing long-format artists-in-residence program(s).
- Deepening civic engagement activities.
- Increasing presence in alternative performance venues.
- Emphasizing impact alongside artistry in Institutional Marketing.
- Deepening the use of technology to engage audiences and streamline internal processes.
- Implementing the EDIR Action Plan and Strategic Priorities.
- Implementing a community-centred fundraising model, while de-emphasizing tiered donor benefits.

In summary, all successful cultural organizations, including Pacific Opera Victoria, require:

1. Dominant, unique **Programming** in their mission area. In a media-saturated environment characterized by extreme competition for contributed and earned revenues, there is no room for “second best.” Sustainable non-profit organizations must develop superior human and intellectual capital, and deliver that capital, consistently, through superior services.
2. Aggressive **Marketing**, both programmatic and institutional, to attract buyers to program offerings and engender a sense of loyalty to the institution overall. A strong marketing effort must express, again and again, the institution’s superior service in its mission area.
3. A growing, generous **Family** of board members, advisory committee members, donors, and volunteers. Engaged by dominant program and aggressive marketing, this family

must be carefully cultivated, stewarded, and solicited over time to provide the necessary base for the organization's fundraising efforts.

4. Easy, enjoyable means for that family to contribute **Revenues** and other resources. Sustainable organizations provide a variety of "mechanisms" (or fundraising "products") to engage family members as donors (of time and resource). Likewise, they develop diverse earned revenue streams through both retail (fee-based) services, and other commercial uses of their intellectual and creative capital (e.g. training, licensing, or consulting services).
5. **Re-investment** of funds in more unique, dominant programming the next year.

These essential actions can be defined as a "Cycle" of activities that support the conditions required for sustainability in any cultural organization.

STRATEGIES

A comprehensive series of strategies for each area of the organization was developed to utilize Pacific Opera Victoria's strengths while overcoming its weaknesses. These strategies were guided by an overarching statement of strategic focus:

Pacific Opera Victoria will strengthen its position as one of the most innovative and distinctive opera companies in Canada. It will play a leadership role in the co-commissioning of new works which resonate with a Canadian West Coast cultural perspective. It will celebrate operatic tradition while rewarding its audiences with novel experiences driven by a relentless curiosity to advance the artform.

With the Royal Theatre stage as its heartbeat, alternative performance spaces will become more present in the journey of a season, allowing patrons to choose from a variety of experiences united by a strong curatorial vision. Its longstanding commitment to artist development will underpin the creation of ambitious new artists-in-residence programs, providing a stable vehicle for new works development, innovative public engagement, and enhancement of the local talent pool.

In all that it does, it will be guided by principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, reconciliation, and environmental stewardship. It will be accountable to its community in these areas by setting measurable goals and committing to ongoing dialogue and learning.

New community engagement initiatives will see resident artists and community members collaborating longer-term, to create space for new stories to be uplifted by opera. In partnership with select social change organizations, it will identify and explore specific civic issues over longer periods of time, using its many engagement activities as platforms to foster a rich, interconnected dialogue.

A focus on high-touch, longer-term educational experiences will increase the impact of its rich array of youth programs. The flagship of this effort is provincial tours of newly commissioned operas for young audiences.

A graceful and celebratory transition of artistic leadership will be essential in fulfilling these programmatic ambitions. The incoming artistic leader must be capable of honouring legacy while embracing innovation. Change must not exceed the “speed of trust” for Pacific Opera Victoria’s family of supporters.

This vibrancy and plurality of programming will illuminate an exciting institutional identity in which stories of place, aesthetic beauty, and social inquiry unite. Thought leadership will emerge in focused areas of civic inquiry as Pacific Opera engages with the public and the opera industry.

A magnetic, familial approach to stewardship will permeate an inclusive approach to rewarding patron loyalty. A focus on nurturing a sense of belonging and a strengthened articulation of impact will afford a lessening of transactional benefits. Technology will be unleashed to allow for personalized engagement with patrons, across the entire customer journey.

Strong governance, philanthropic leadership, and passionate volunteerism will continue to support these pursuits. Renewal of board membership will bring the requisite skills and fresh perspectives to support this strategic direction.

In this way, Pacific Opera Victoria can deepen its roots in Victoria while owning a differentiated leadership position in the landscape of North American opera.

STRATEGIC FOCUS

This strategic focus resulted in six primary objectives:

1. **Programming** Pacific Opera Victoria has solidified its position as one of Canada's most innovative and distinctive opera companies through an ambitious suite of original stage productions, co-commissions, and educational programs that celebrate operatic tradition, respect Indigenous reconciliation, and showcase a uniquely Canadian West Coast perspective.
2. **Marketing** Pacific Opera Victoria has achieved and sustained prominence for the quality and impact of its work, artistically and socially.
3. Pacific Opera Victoria has maximized attendance, and fully leveraged its physical and intellectual assets to drive diversified earned revenue streams.
4. **Revenues** Pacific Opera Victoria has diversified and balanced its contributed and earned revenues, and has built a capital base equivalent to 5 months of working capital.
5. **Board and Family** Pacific Opera Victoria has built and sustained a Board and Family of a size, composition, and generosity on par with its artistic and operational ambitions.
6. **Capital and Capacity** Pacific Opera Victoria has developed a human resource and capital infrastructure that supports and sustains its artistic and operational aspirations.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND RECONCILIATION

Four tenets of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Reconciliation will guide all that Pacific Opera does.

1. **Celebrate People, Place and Cultures** of the world and our local nations.
2. **Create Safe Spaces** for Indigenous peoples and equity-seeking groups.
3. **Build Respectful Relationships** with Indigenous peoples and equity-seeking groups.
4. **Share Truths** through art, education, experience, music, and story.

Strategies in support of these pillars are integrated throughout the plan and represented fully in the EDIR Strategic Priorities Action Plan issued by the EDIR committee.

PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES

Over the next five years, Pacific Opera Victoria will focus on refining its programmatic offerings. The programmatic vision is centered around three axes which tie into the marketing strategy.

1. **Place & People** - Explore our relationship to this land and place; its history, its peoples past and present. Express the ways in which we, and our art, are rooted here.
2. **Beauty & Transcendence** - Explore the full range of aesthetic experiences in opera. Embrace timeless distinction. Uncover hidden canonic gems. Develop regional talent towards a global standard.
3. **Inquiry & Action** - Expand the gamut of what opera can be. Advance the art form. Challenge conventions. Uncover the relationship between our work and current civic issues.

Traditional, contemporary, new commissions, and community-engaged artmaking traverse these three dimensions.

The 5-Year Program Plan will:

- Preserve a commitment to balance “Blockbuster” titles with lesser-known canonic gems.
- Modify classic works to reflect modern perspectives and cultural awareness, without compromise.
- Over time, introduce more chamber opera.
- Increase casting of BIPOC performers and creative teams.
- Prioritize Canadian artists, and periodically cast international artists

National leadership in New Works will be deepened, including a work by Indigenous and diverse artists every two years.

A refined set of education programs will focus on high-touch, long-term engagement.

Digital Programming will focus on short releases for film.

MARKETING STRATEGIES

Building visibility is central to the efficacy of this plan. The **institutional marketing** strategy for Pacific Opera Victoria includes:

- A pervasive institutional marketing message that conveys the importance, impact, legacy, and aspirations of Pacific Opera Victoria and its work. This messaging, centered around three anchors, is aligned with each initiative, and applied to all aspects of communication.
- An institutional marketing calendar, with four to six marketable annual and one-time “moments” a year, which may include: season launch, major fundraising event, annual report, new program announcement, civic engagement, major soloist announcement.
- Visibility and excitement are built around the artistic leadership succession. Founding Artistic Director, Timothy Vernon, is honored with a celebratory campaign. This is tied into the annual Institutional Marketing plan and includes a communications campaign, several intimate “Raise a Glass” events, and a special event and fundraiser.
- A celebratory campaign is mounted to welcome the incoming Artistic Director and includes the announcement of major, multi-year programming initiative and fundraising campaign into the annual Institutional Marketing plan.

The **programmatic marketing** strategy for Pacific Opera Victoria includes:

- Increased communication between programming and marketing teams to plan ahead, tell the story of each production, and coordinate across multiple programming streams.
- Deepened understanding of the Pacific Opera audience, with a data-driven effort to profile and respond to patron preferences with segmented communications.
- Increased audiences by focusing on core audiences, lapsed attendees, and inclined non-attenders.
- Engaging the Pacific Opera audience with a vibrant content strategy and exemplary end-to-end user experience.
- Continued monitoring, evaluation, and adjusting of resource allocation and media mix.
- Pursuing a clear set of measurable, multiyear audience development objectives:
 - Increase capacity sold to 80-90% of inventory.
 - Reach 3,000 annual subscribers.
 - Retain existing subscribers at 80%+.
 - Gain a total reachable audience of 40,000 (30K email, 20K social followers).

FUNDRAISING STRATEGIES

Adding a dynamic set of programs and mounting an aggressive and consistent marketing effort will help Pacific Opera Victoria expand its institutional visibility and grow its family of supporters, thereby increasing its fundraising revenue.

The fundraising effort will focus on the following:

- Building and maintaining an institution-wide culture of philanthropy.
- Shifting fundraising emphasis to impact and social benefits.
- Using targeted campaigns and interest-based giving circles to deepen support from annual donors.
- Advancing planned giving and continuing to build the Bravo Society through a strong case for support and targeted, long-term initiatives. This will build in support for Artists-in-Residence, New Works, and Opera for Young People.
- Implementing an institutional fundraising effort centered in social impact.
- Expanding Pacific Opera Victoria's relationships with foundation, corporate, and government sources.

BOARD DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Guided by the "Ideal Board" framework – an outline describing the characteristics, skills, and financial capacity that the Board should possess in service of its strategic direction – Pacific Opera Victoria will maintain its Board of Advisors at 25 members over the next five years while introducing term limits to stimulate renewal. Succession planning will commence to ensure strong leadership into the future. To further professionalize and strengthen the board, transparent and participatory governance practices are introduced to align with the Opera's EDIR principles.

Pacific Opera Victoria will encourage individual board members to "adopt" a project of personal interest and assist in identifying potential resources, partners, and participants. By inviting board members to become personally involved in programs of interest, Pacific Opera Victoria will build a more engaged board and one far more likely to involve their friends and associates in funding the specific program or the institution as a whole.

An honorary Emeritus Board for members with exceptional service records has also been introduced.

STAFFING STRATEGIES

This plan proposes notable changes to the operating model, some of which suggest changes to the staffing structure. The addition of an artist-in-residence program, presenting a new work each year, increasing presence in alternative performance venues, and expanding high-touch education programs will have impact. Proposed changes include:

- Adding a Development Coordinator to free up senior staff to pursue more targeted gifts and sponsorships.
- Adding one Education Coordinator to support “High Touch” program expansion including provincial school tours.
- Once earned revenue growth permits, hiring an internal Digital Marketing Manager.
- Hiring additional contract Production staff as needed to execute projects in alternative venues.
- As commitments for artist-in-residence and new works development are clarified, the organization will remain mindful of potential increases in staff requirements to execute these projects.

To support staff recruitment and retention, Pacific Opera Victoria will prioritize the maintenance of a positive working culture in which opinions are heard and valued from all levels of staff, and decisions are clear and respectful. In order to maintain this positive culture and maximize effectiveness, Pacific Opera Victoria will:

- Increase collaboration between programming and revenue generating staff.
- Prioritize the hiring of BIPOC candidates as new positions or vacancies become available.
- Introduce technology training, in particular Tessitura for Marketing and Development.
- Create opportunities for staff and board members to collaborate on projects. Each board member will have one touch point with staff each month.
- Create learning and mentoring opportunities for board, staff, artists and audiences; including Indigenous cultural safety, safe-space, and antiracism training.
- Add select positions, over time, to enable the objectives identified in the plan.

The organization will also develop a succession plan for the transition to a new Artistic Director. This plan will address the continuity of the artistic programming and vision, stakeholder relations and communications strategies, and pursuing opportunities for special fundraising. Listening sessions with staff will provide input for the incoming candidate profile. The search strategy will market Victoria

as an attractive destination, taking advantage of the wave of urban flight in recent years, to attract strong candidates who are often located in major cities. During this time, the Board will focus on retention of the CEO and the CEO will focus on retention of senior staff.

Finally, Pacific Opera Victoria remains nimble in an uncertain operating environment through maintenance of a “Risk Register” and, when warranted, alternative programming and operating scenarios to anticipate environmental threats.

IMPLEMENTATION AND FINANCIAL PLANS

A five-year implementation and financial plan was developed in concert with the strategies discussed above. The five-year financial forecast indicates that the organization can, after a period of pandemic recovery, pursue bold programmatic expansion in select highly visible and impactful areas which have the potential to drive expanded revenue streams from a growing family of supporters, to support these activities in the long term.

CONCLUSION

As Pacific Opera Victoria looks forward to its future, its board and staff are confident that this strategic plan has contemplated deeply the implications of its complex operating environment, and its unique strengths and challenges to crystalize a roadmap to be the most innovative and distinctive opera company in Canada.

1. Is the most innovative and distinctive opera company in Canada.
2. Is a thought leader in Indigenous reconciliation, in the North American opera industry.
3. Is a national leader in the development of new opera for young audiences.
4. Is broadly recognized throughout Canada for its innovative new works, artist development, and community-engaged practices in opera.
5. Is regularly achieving 80-90% capacity sold in its home season engagements and sustainable touring and co-commissioning fees.
6. Has built a joyful, rewarding, diverse, and equitable board of approximately 25 members whose total contributions offset 3% of operating expenses.
7. Has achieved a 30%/70% Earned to Contributed revenue balance, with a well-diversified base of contributed revenue.
8. Has achieved a human resource and capital base that enables artistic risk-taking and a sustainable, joyous, and productive work environment.