

2026 Board Retreat Minutes

Due to an ice storm, the board decided to prioritize everyone's safety and stay in CFalls for the weekend. We met at Montana Harvest Moon over two days

Monday January 19th

3:00 Team Building Exercise

This exercise was really helpful to see how people value things different, communicate differently, and operate differently. Some people value organization and checklists while others value open conversation and flexibility. There is value in communicating and continuing to connect, even with different communication styles.

3:30PM: Brainstorm : Setting Intentions for the Retreat

- WORDS SUGGESTED: STABILITY, MAINTAIN, SLOW DOWN, CONNECT, SOLIDIFY, FOUNDATION, LEGITIMIZE, MAINTAIN, SUSTAIN, DEFINE, STRUCTURE, SIMPLIFY.

Sentence (internal): We want to simplify our organization to solidify our foundation so we can sustain our operations and legitimize our working systems.

Refined (external): We are working on our foundations by clarifying our working systems so we can continue to maintain high quality programming for the community.

Celebrating our Accomplishments

- Storycore recorded in the space!
- Uptown Hearth made its first donation, and now is our first location! :)
- So many applications for MOTM open call!
- Last 3 classes sold out fast!
- Successfully ran craft nights each month
- Learning which workshops work and what time of year is best
- First social event: Art Cafe!
- Got our first grant!
- Showed up to the 2026 Parkside presentation with \$50,000 more dollars than the year before. Great feedback on the Parkside presentation which Amy and Tricia gave. There was a lot of engagement from people who attended events or are interested in events :)
- Harvest Moon Fest brought joy and wonder to people from all over the valley who were blown away and so impressed with the atmosphere and community created
- Members and guests using the space every day
- Big congrats because we have completed and are on track to accomplish so much from the initial strategic plan
- Other nonprofits have been inspired by our progress
- Congrats to the board for being dedicated to learning and improving. The community is seeing and feeling that dedication, trusts us, and is ready to give us more than we are even ready for!

MORE INTENTIONS FOR 2026:

- Create space to meet in person to talk about important things, to have more productive and clear meetings so we can have less meetings and reduce miscommunication in written memos.
- Create a safe space for open communication and sharing of ideas.
- Give ourselves and each other grace for the amount of workload we are taking on as a fully volunteer organization that is doing so much.
- Embrace friction as an opportunity to learn and grow.
- Let the community know that we need help- Be transparent about the process.
- Trust the broader community (as well as personal networks) and know our community cares and can give us grace
- Structure more committees with committee heads so the board can meet less and more volunteers and members can engage at the monthly committee meetings as we move toward a worker-led nonprofit model.

Hours and energy we are giving personally & as a group

- How do we collectively talk about how much time is reasonable to spend on The Making Place and how do we enforce and manage that consistently?

Respecting each other's time, energy, ideas, communication styles

- o Time and energy is a gift not an expectation
- o Mistakes will be made! Offer gratitude even in hard situations

Time we can give and how we prioritize

Sienna: One day per week on Making Place stuff. Sienna will check email two days a week. Working on upgrading software to manage volunteers and a CRM for members. Implementing quick start guides for new structures.

Kay: One day per week, in the space most Fridays. Work on policies and procedures, developing personnel and job descriptions, and how do we maintain these systems in order to keep doing it well.

Justin: To be a volunteer, not a worker. To ask for help instead of pushing boundaries. To focus more on being an artist. To eventually look for another board chair to take over and to help fill out a strong advisory board. Flexible time during the week, but trying to limit the amount of time spent on TMP stuff.

Tricia: Giving more time in the winter since summers are full with other things. Trying to give one day per week. Okay with checking emails every day but heavy duty time is better November–April. Working on personnel stuff and a lot of donor/sponsor relationships and ways to keep them sustainable. Exploring potential for donor money to be delegated differently from operations income, potentially investing so we can grow funds to invest in future programming. Would like to spend more time on community events and classes, and potentially getting sponsors to partner with workshops and each MOTM.

Sky: Goal for one day per week with a flexible schedule. The biggest goals are to hire a bookkeeper to take care of entries and categorization. Currently checking mail and making deposits to the bank, usually on Fridays. Interested in potentially taking on the role as liaison of the facility, between the board, tenants, and Uptown Hearth, as well as volunteer coordinator. Amy and Justin will work to add sky to the bank account.

Emma: Goal is to provide 10 hours per month of marketing planning to help assign roles to volunteers to take over the bulk of marketing, potentially implementing a 3rd party scheduling software to manage content. Would also like to do community networking events. Emma will reach out to potential volunteers and include Sienna and Amy in those decisions.

Amy: Sets and schedules event calendar, sends out call for artists twice a year, and works with artists to get contracts, checks, other logistics, etc. Will be

helping lead and launch the Events Committee which would have a few other people in it helping support her work. Board members would be welcome to attend Event Committee meetings but not necessary. Wants to commit 10-12 hours/month on average and more during Harvest Moon Fest probably. Amy would also work closely with marketing volunteers and would like to be a part of choosing the volunteers.

5:00PM: 2025 Review

What worked well vs. what didn't work well – Sienna

1. Email

- Suggestion to use email for longer emails or more serious discussions. Send meeting notes and docs. Email can be saved.
- Designate committee leads to send notes and updates on committee topics.
- Be sure to reply all to inform the board of who is taking on an action item or answering a question. Reply all but always keep it relevant and on topic.
- Make sure to start a new email thread if there is a new topic.
- All board emails should be sent from the head of a committee or to call a meeting. Don't send to "all board" if you're not a committee lead, but send your note to the committee lead directly.
- Check email once a week at least

2. Slack

- Slack not as great for long form communication. Better to use as a quick chatting app, short reminders, social invites, quips.
- Suggestion to add a thread for a social tab channel for fun events and networking opportunities.
- Reorganize slack channels to only include the people from each committee in each channel.
- Headline message with urgent if timesensitive
- Check email once a week at least

3. Google Drive

- Suggestion to reorganize Google Drive.

- Make Meeting Notes more easily accessible.
- Make meeting invitation in Google Calendar with linked Docs
- Duplicated documents get confusing
- Add the end of the year, put all 2025 stuff to a new folder
- Organization of drive could be a secretary or committee job

4. All-board Meetings

- Make same day every month
- Be more efficient with time so we don't rush important topics at the end
- Move "New Ideas" to committee meetings
- Inconsistent attendance of board meetings was hard. Advisory board is meant to advise all together, so someone who can't attend board meetings can consider being a volunteer on a committee instead.
- If you miss a meeting, you need to go through and read the notes.
- Every board member should look at agendas and review them before hand.
- Have system for who fills in agenda and by which day.
- Copy agenda and add notes in a different color, organize in a folder, send out notes after every meeting in email

5. Committee Meetings

- Establish board member committee lead for each committee and charters (charters are required by bylaws)
- Committees would be filled primarily with volunteers (as opposed to other board members)
- Board members can serve on no more than 2 committees (if enough board members are available)
- You could "guest star" on a committee
- All board and committee meetings have to be available to the public and anyone can request notes for any of our meetings (Sunshine Law)
- Goal to work on solidifying committee procedures

6. Fist-to-Five voting

- Love as a temperature taking tool but not as a final vote tool
- Good for gauging interest in new ideas or beginning stages of something
- Have up-down final vote (required to record for finance, hiring, board positions, personnel policies, any business decision really)

- The fist-to-five is useful for seeing if something is ready for up-down final vote
- Voting to proceed with fist-to-five for an idea would have to be different from a final vote on all the nitty gritty details of a project
- 7. Group Agreements
 - This could be a smaller part of a more detailed board expectations contract
 - Add minimum time and communication expectations to board contract
- 8. Roles/ Division of Labor (discuss tomorrow)
- 9. Volunteer Program
 - Sienna is working on implementing Volgistics so we can have a database and a software that helps people create applications for opportunities, have volunteers apply and sign waivers, and more. Committee leads can make their own waivers as well, but every volunteer should start with a basic volunteer waiver at least.
 - Onboarding packets and quick start guides/tutorials for volunteers will be developed
 - We need a role on this board to be a Volunteer Coordinator
 - Suggestion to give Volunteer Members a free key holder membership which gives them more sense of ownership, encourages more help, and strengthens relationships with us. They could have a probationary (introductory) period with a 3-month review.
 - Committee leads will know if the volunteer member is not doing the work. Software can also show if they've entered the building or not.
 - Member volunteers will be managed by their committee lead.
 - The Volunteer Coordinator would be more in charge of managing one-off volunteers or large event volunteers.
 - Host volunteer appreciation events
 - We will create a Volunteer Committee and have a large meeting

1. Programming/ Services

a) Events, workshops & classes

- Seek sponsorships for workshops and events, sponsor would get

recognition at the event (maybe a social shoutout before)

- Less pop-up outreach events (farmers market, heritage days took more time and didn't yield much results)

- Expand offerings of workshops, different types of classes and levels of classes

- EX: Business Development with Parkside partnership aimed toward entrepreneurs specifically

- We can measure the categories of all of our classes so we can look back and see the diversity of classes offered

- Vision into multi-week, longer class structures

(1) Changing the AWS to structure to adding a materials fee to make 50/50 split more true

- Goal to pay teaching artists more

- If an artist wants to donate their time, make sure we pay artists no matter what and tell to them donate it back to make sure everything is recorded

- We need to make language on contract more clear, like now we are including material fees in the contract ahead of time

- Partner with Artisan Workshops that are outside of our space (Plein air, beekeeping, trade stuff, studio open houses)

b) Shared workspace

- Build up member-led events

- Our current software/form is not great for usability but we're looking to improve that.

- If we do more longer term workshops we would need a larger space

- Get a larger space that can accommodate larger trade type work as well

- Ceramics studio would require safety measures like ventilation and proper electricity hookups, etc

- Would it be more strategic to have one large location or multiple satellite locations? Maybe one large building could be built in 5-10 years.

- Maybe a 3-5 year goal would be to offer larger classes at other workshops that we rent out to host the class (like a community collab series). Is providing offsite memberships part of our end goal?

- Long-term vision could be to move more into a business model.

- We could change our finance model to separate donations from program income to keep workspace income separate from donations
- Our space is small for classes but isn't too small for our membership. Can we look for a bigger space on the edge of Columbia Falls?
- What is our cap of how many members can use the space and supplies we have? We should try to get more members and reach our cap so we can make a great plan when we are ready to move into a larger space.
- Another idea is to have an upscale artist studio space and sponsor/meeting space/gallery/store as a separate building from a larger workshop space
- No stairs!!

c) Tool Library

- Feature tool library more with events
- Which tools do we want to collect and how much is too much?
- In a bigger workspace, the library tools could be included in the space and not separate from it.
- Publicize the tool library more. Contact Daily Interlake and Flathead Beacon. Show how it works. Make reels.
- 3-5 year vision is a super easily automated filled with cool tools that are harder for individuals to have. Right now it is the most time intensive but least profit.
- Ideally we could employ people to manage the tool library (Tool Librarian!)
- We could have a day where people pick up and a day they drop it off (Sundays?) to streamline management of tools.
- In the future it can be staffed every day
- Non-member check out on individual tools could increase profit
- Midway doesn't have a lot of tools to rent and have high prices
- No stairs!!

d) Private studio rentals

- more artist studios
- Artist residency model (teach classes and make work for a period of time)
- Multiple workshop model with hired person/expert artist

- Tenants could be offered a January review to address their lease since we are doing the same thing with Uptown
- e) Online resources (public events calendar was used a lot!)
 - Let's maintain it
 - Encourage people to submit to artist registry

2. Marketing & Outreach

- Target each target audience group with at least one event in 2026

BREAK

7:00PM: Goal Setting

Suggestions for additions/ edits for Strategic Plan

o SWOT

WEAKNESSES

- Unify wording on Vision in Canva doc
- Change the wording of our location to not include "Flathead"
- Change values to "we put the interests of our creative community first"
- We need to fill accessibility gaps and also define what that means moving forward as well as define diversity
- ACCESSIBILITY: Financial and affordable, age range for younger and older, vision ability, hours, access limited to smart phone, elevator problems. We can't offer kids programming directly but can partner. We could also partner with senior centers as well to visit them or offer field trips. We could also connect with CRYJ and SKOLA to provide programming materials and guides and the parents can work with us. Change accessible to "take accessibility into decision making."
- INCLUSIVITY: Age range, financial means, racial, LGBTQIA+, artistic ability. We can be more inclusive of financial groups with our scholarship program and using sponsors to cover workshops. People may be intimidated by "artists" and also may not use email or technology. We can reach out to working with the Veteran Home. We should reach out to local Indigenous communities to provide programs and scholarships.

- We need to define “diverse” leadership and work harder to fulfill that by bringing in more older folks, business professions, and provide more opportunity for Indigenous members to join the board
- We need a centralized and well managed place for organizing and implementing feedback
- How would we handle inclusivity toward negative politics? “We will not support or allow any means of communication that demeans, dehumanizing, or objectifies another person.”
- On “welcoming”- How do we handle if someone walks in wearing clothing with hate speech while de-escalating the situation? We should change this language to “inclusive space for all who have mutual respect for each other and are not dehumanizing anyone” or “a safe place for

THREATS-

- Duplication of services, keeping an affordable space, overextending our offerings in terms of liability
- Keeping our space and growing to a larger space that fits our needs
- Volunteer Burnout, Board Member Decay, Limited Time and Capacity
- Growing too much, too fast
- Overusing people and undervaluing them, which could lose talent
- Not being able to pay a contractor/employee enough
- Geographic distribution. A lot of people live far away and don’t want to drive
- Underdeveloped Operating Procedures

OPPORTUNITIES

- People are still interested in learning new skills and DIY crafting
- Maybe tourism is not a big part of our organization anymore?
- Maybe tourist events would be a future goal for small things, shows, shops
- Seasonal (summer vs. winter) could be an opportunity to use day passes. Advertise with AirBnb experiences, community boards, chamber of commerce, explore whitefish, Whitefish Mountain Resort.

- Programs and Services
 - 1. We are still working on generating sustainable revenue
 - 2. Change to “continue developing systems to scale tool library”
 - 4. Not hosting youth programs. Maybe change to “underserved groups and work with them to develop programming”
 - 5. What would a better system be for receiving and implementing feedback and what committee would feedback fall under? Maybe this could be a secretary job or location staffer could digitize it and categorize it. Action item: System to record, store, and categorize feedback.
- Financial Sustainability and Fundraising
 - Separate revenue from development money, and place the development money somewhere where it can grow. Work with local financial institution to increase financial literacy and optimize investment opportunities?
 - We will know we’re more sustainable when our program revenue is paying for TMP operating expenses so donor money is more toward long-term and strategic planning, scholarships, and community development
- Organizational Structure and Governance
 - add “developing into a well rounded and an active advisory board” and a plan toward becoming a self-directed worker nonprofit
 - LEGAL COMPLIANCE: Model releases for all waivers, taxes, insurance, contracts, accessibility, upholding our bylaws
 - Adjust governance structure to reflect co-leadership model
- Facilities and Equipment
 - Should we put a section here to say we want to hire staff?
 - Assign maintenance, cleaning, and orientation to a facilities committee which has a handy man volunteer, a cleaning volunteer, tool library maintenance, and a facilities person who is on the board
 - We should consider recruiting for the facilities manager board

member position so we will develop and define this role who would be paid in 3-5 years

- Volunteer and Staff Development
 - Sienna is excited to build out the volunteer software and system.
 - 4. FVCC has a ton of nonprofit board and leadership courses. Something we could do is to sponsor someone from the board to go take those classes.
 - Staff and board members should be involved and present in the space so we can be good representatives of the space and speak knowledgeably about it
- Marketing and Outreach
 - Need to make accessibility changes to website and implement SM alt text
 - 5. Expand on marketing by leveraging partnerships in general, like leading tours, engaging more with Whitefish Pilot, DIL, Hungry Horse News, and the Beacon. Maybe Hello Whitefish? In person networking like chamber events, etc. Maybe use volunteers for farmers market?
 - 6. Develop marketing team and volunteer system

Community Collaboration and Partnerships

- mentorship will be more 3-5 years than 1 year plan. We can connect mentors but we will not actively create the mentorship.
- 4. A collab with C-Falls to do mural projects would be amazing, maybe the electrical boxes, Dumpsters???
- We could recruit someone to come to the board to do more community collab and partnerships position

Tuesday, January 20th

8:00AM: Breakfast and open forum (anything that came up after yesterday).

- We had a quorum on this day necessary for board voting, with only one member absent, having given feedback the previous day.

8:45AM: Revisit goals for the year

- Reviewed Intention Setting exercise from previous day to guide our discussion
- Board meeting structure: reduce information firehose by summarizing and leaving detailed discussions to committees
- Enforce BOD attendance for the year - setting # of allowable absences and reinforcing that notes/minutes MUST be kept up on.
- Let's dial in a consistent process for developing attendance and taking notes: templates, post-meeting action items, organized archive, etc.
- Fist to 5 is a good communication tool, but we need to be more intentional about taking and recording up/down board votes.
- Board goal for the year will be refining BOD agreements, Code of Conduct, Expectations, etc, and unifying into an onboarding document/packet for new board members as we begin to seek specific positions and skillsets for the BOD and committees.
- Also focus on formalizing the process for annual BOD elections, as well as rolling onto or off of the board (eg. exit interviews, getting people onto or off of the technologies like Gmail and Slack).

How can staffing help meet our organizational goals?

- [Phase 1 Hiring Proposal](#)
- Focus on improving internal operating systems in order to maintain and improve products and services that TMP offers.
- Priority: hiring a bookkeeper to get our finances in ideal shape and help maintain while taking the burden off of volunteer board members.
- Next step: hiring a software consultant to upgrade our internal software systems: eg. volunteer and membership databases, tool library

management, etc. – Sienna has offered a bid to implement these softwares, along with recommendations for software purchase.

- Increased structure for volunteer engagement will allow us to bring high-commitment volunteers onto committees to help support working board members.
- Prepare for Phase II: Hiring Contract or Part-Time Staff.
 - Goal of starting hiring process in March, dependant on software systems integration and prospective funding.
 - Discussion of contract vs. employee hire – pros and cons
 - All contractors will need to have MT ICEC certification.
- VOTE: The board voted unanimously to hire Nicola _ _ _
- VOTE: The board voted unanimously to approve free memberships for high-commitment volunteers that serve on committees
- VOTE: The board voted unanimously to approve an insurance cost increase that would provide more coverage for TMP in some key areas related to our services
- VOTE: The board voted unanimously to approve a one-time rebate to studio tenants in the space due to building maintenance issues.

9:30AM: Board Logistics

- Proposed bylaws changes:
 - Verbiage, logistics and cleanup (section numbering, simple proof-reading corrections etc.)
 - Striking a few passages addressing landmarks which have now been achieved in order to establish the organization.
 - Re-naming BOD Governance positions:
 - Suggestion of 2 co-chairs rather than a President and VP. This moves us closer to the worker-led NP model, and provides redundancy, support, and checks in Board Governance.
 - Replace bullet point “job descriptions” for BOD Governance positions with position summaries, for ease and clarity.

- Striking requirements for Committee Charters, and suggesting committee outline/descriptions be kept by committee chairs.
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- Growing the board -
 - We spent time outlining positions and skillsets that we're searching for to fill out our board this year
 - Created a draft Org Chart which outlines agreed upon BOD and Committee structure, responsibilities and areas where we want to plug in new Board members and/or volunteers
- VOTE: The board voted unanimously to elect Sky Burley as Treasurer Pro-Tempore (will be seeking a more long-term person for this role/committee in the coming year as well).

10:15AM: Upcoming events and fundraisers for 2026

- MOTM, AWS, Storytelling Event, HMF, Working with Parkside
- Craft Night February: Valentines
- MOTM February: Fly Tying February
- Programming break in March? Pending software setup.
- Revisit 2026 Intention
- Revisit Updated Operating System

11:00AM: Meeting Adjourned!