

# FY 2017 Strategic Plan



“The collapse of social compacts and values has produced an equally radical awareness of mutual interconnectedness with environments, nature, and people. Care is the name for this exposure.”

- Michael Stone-Richards in *Care of the City*, a conversation from 2016 about the routines of habit which establish spaces as livable

# Executive Summary

**Building upon over a decade of history, we are revolutionizing the way we work with artists, communities, and institutions worldwide to develop projects that further promote public culture, civic imagination, and a more equitable society for all.**

This strategic plan was developed through a collaborative process during the 2016–2017 academic year. It has culminated in five key priorities for Slought Foundation over the next five years, as well as critical targets to measure our progress:

1. Growing Solidarity Networks
2. Welcoming Community
3. Building Capacity
4. Extending Education
5. Incubating Ideas

Slought's commitment to enhancing socio-cultural well-being will require sharp focus on outcomes but also its signature adaptability for future strategies. We have identified examples of work to advance strategies for reaching each priority.



In 2016, Slought collaborated with Fazel Sheikh, its first artist-in-residence, to develop a multi-venue exhibition. *Erasures* explored the legacies of the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and the politics of dispossession and displacement.

# Background

Founded in 2002 as an inter-generational collaboration between a curator, a philosopher, and an artist, Slought Foundation begins with a commitment to bridging social and cultural histories. The name of the organization derives from the word ‘slough,’ to suggest ecological metaphors of rejuvenation, reinvention, and openness.

## Mission, Vision, and Values

Slought’s mission is to engage publics in dialogue about cultural and socio-political change in Philadelphia, the world, and the cloud.

Our vision is to create a new form of institution that builds relationships and social trust through collaboration and the exchange of ideas to encourage inclusiveness, advocacy, and the sharing of knowledge.

Nine values have emerged in response to our founding principles and projects. These values hold our organization accountable to our history and publics and guide our continued formation.



Urgency



Resistance



Partnerships



Process



Geographies



Publics



Dialogue



Display



Exception

# External Challenges

**Building upon over a decade of history, we are revolutionizing the way we work with artists, communities, and institutions worldwide to develop projects that further promote public culture, civic imagination, and a more equitable society for all.**

The urgency to do so comes from the recognition that we are in a moment of tremendous uncertainty and instability, one that is marked by the return of virulent forms of racism, misogyny, xenophobia, and fundamentalism that undoubtedly foreshadows profound cultural and economic changes to come.

Current events compel us to reconsider assumptions about national and cultural identity, social equality, and group cohesion. The increasing polarization of society and politics has left more communities vulnerable and unequal. Now, more than ever, there is an urgent need for public conversation about what these changes might mean. Our efforts at Slought to foster dialogue remain vital and important in this time of sundering. Therefore, we are renewing our commitment to rethinking social structures, reflecting on our institutional relationships, and mitigating distrust through dialogue and openness.

Slought has a unique opportunity and responsibility to move between disciplines and use its curatorial ability to foster dialogue. We strive to address the degradation of public life and well-being with urgency. We remain committed to contesting policies that strip individuals of their freedoms and humanity, and to upholding the spirit of aesthetic and socio-political resistance we have always supported.



In 2012, Ko Siu Lan performed *Love Me If You Can* as part of her exhibition *Chai-na/China Signs* with Huang Rui. Her action questioned the dichotomies and boundaries between public/private and collective/individual.



# A Call to Action

**We will work to bring about a community with:**

- **Institutions of power that rethink themselves and their resources together with communities**
- **Accountability from municipalities and investment in marginalized and underserved neighborhoods**
- **The political and economic tools to incubate new social organizations**
- **The power to develop neighborhoods incrementally and deny developments that do not benefit the community**
- **The reinvention of lending and housing in the service of sanctuary and resilience**
- **Intelligent public spending on the arts, education, and ecology, in order to build a more holistic culture of health**
- **A new political language that values public culture, memory, and social relationships, not as expendable commodities but as human rights**

To support this effort, we will identify partners at both local and global levels that share Slought's vision of promoting social and cultural well-being, including universities, cultural institutions, and local groups. We will uphold our shared values and urge our partners to resist self-censorship out of fear for the socio-political or financial consequences they may face. We will engage these partners in programming related to our renewed focus on social justice, political freedom, and community health.

We will commit to constructing a safe space where people can come together to care for and reflect with one another, privately and publicly. As needed, our space may serve as a sanctuary for those seeking it. We will open our space to community activities and groups who share our desire to help form a bulwark against racism, misogyny, and xenophobia and stand in solidarity with those who have been affected. We will help communities access resources and tools needed to achieve their outcomes.

Through fundraising and attention to the organization's financial security, we will strive to keep programming free and open to all and to reinvest in community activities.

Slought's commitment to enhancing socio-cultural well-being will require sharp focus on outcomes but also its signature adaptability for future strategies. We have identified examples of work to advance strategies for reaching each outcome. While not comprehensive, these examples illustrate our current thinking. We may not invest equally in all of the outcomes. Rather, work and investment will emerge according to Slought's organic process, in conversation with partners and community to meet changing needs.

# Priorities

The collaborative strategic planning process has culminated in five key priorities for Slough Foundation over the next five years, as well as critical targets to measure our progress.

1. Growing Solidarity Networks
2. Welcoming Community
3. Building Capacity
4. Extending Education
5. Incubating Ideas

# 1. Growing Solidarity Networks

Partnership is at the core of Slought's organizational ethos and programming. Sustaining supportive partners and growing their diversity and reach is critical to the organization's future. Our network of partners must expand as Slought's projects grow in ambition and foray into new and unique areas.

Many other institutions and cultural organizations are already engaged in activities which support public culture and well-being. Identifying potential partners who align with our values and mission will help us address where change can be enacted and amplify efforts for greater impact. New partners will also help Slought diversify its offerings and expand participation. In the coming years, Slought will look internationally as well as locally in Philadelphia to replicate its previous successes (e.g. *Slought in Transit*) and begin to engage new communities.

# Action

- Expand public awareness and support of Slought's renewed focus on public life and well-being as well as our mission, values, and practices
- Generate list of potential partners, prioritizing their diversity and ability to bring new expertise and representation of communities
- Encourage viability and growth of Slought affinity partners and the projects they sustain through funding and visibility
- Consider creation of global "chapters" to grow solidarity networks, offering support and funding as able
- Engage community members in local outreach efforts
- Assign a fellow to oversee partner outreach efforts
- Target local colleges and universities in the greater Philadelphia region and other US metropolitan areas
- Build relations with new and existing partners in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East



In 2017, *We are powerful* provided a forum for conversation with Philadelphia's top reentry experts, a group of formerly incarcerated individuals who power the Reentry Think Tank.

## 2. Welcoming Community

If Slought's renewed focus is to serve communities, it must double down in its efforts to build relationships and foster open dialogue with these publics. Slought's current programming stems from the interests, culture, and expertise of its curators and collaborators. As we move to address complex topics affecting society, we find we must cast a wider net to build relationships and a presence with the communities we hope to serve.

One way Slought will achieve this is by inviting greater participation in opening its 4017 Walnut Street space to increased community programming. Specifically, Slought seeks to transform the 4017 Walnut space into a literal window of its activities, embodying the dynamism of its origins, underscoring the diversity of its programming and publics as well as the organization's commitment to remain an accessible, active cultural resource for all. Community partners will bring in new publics through film screenings, readings, and group activities, perhaps visiting the space and encountering Slought for the first time. Meanwhile, Slought will also take its programming out of the space and into the neighborhoods and institutions to launch deeper relationships between community and the organization, inviting feedback and new insights.

Slought's storefront and programming calendar will reflect a constant flow of activity, interspersing more curated programming with activities brought in by outside communities. In addition, its digital presence will be simplified and expanded to reflect a more open and inclusive approach.

# Action

- Engage partners, volunteers, and community members in better understanding our work and motivating them to support our efforts
- Simplify web language and expand digital and social presence
- Increase total number of community-driven events and their diversity, with the aim of hosting 30% more programs not initiated by Slought
- Reduce barriers to participation
- Provide funding and support to connect Slought to community projects
- Extend open hours and increase hospitality (fellow ownership and recruitment, hospitality manager, etc.)
- Utilize new technologies (e.g. livestream, library partnerships)
- Offer off-site programming to engage new publics where they are
- Develop invitational storefront signage that includes listings of community resources





Devin Allen's exhibition *A Beautiful Ghetto* responded to the Baltimore uprising of April 2015 and the death of Freddie Gray. The exhibition created a space for conversation, and highlighted the power of photography and protest to change the cities we live in.

### 3. Building Capacity

Fifteen years after its humble beginnings as an experimental arts collaboration, Slought has built a remarkable reputation backed by an impressive archive of projects, world-renown collaborators, respected funders, and deep roots in the community. A hallmark of the organization is leveraging small budgets and a committed network of volunteers to launch large-scale projects. However, Slought still does not have the technical, operational, and financial infrastructure to match its ambitions.

Slought's small size and agility has enabled it to succeed in a tight philanthropic environment that traditionally privileges direct project costs. However, its basic infrastructure could use attention: administration, facility upgrades, IT, equipment, training, outreach, and—most importantly—fundraising, are all bound up in cultural production. Moving ahead, Slought must make greater investments in its organizational structure and sustainable revenue streams.

Slought will need to reconsider its internal processes and capacity as it takes on more collaborative programming in new areas.

Recently, Slought solicited an unrestricted gift, investing the funds to generate interest to offset organizational overhead and help mitigate uncertainty in the years ahead. Slought will explore how to grow this idea of reinvestment to expand its revenue streams and thus its global cultural and community activities.

# Actions

- Build Slought's internal capacity to achieve its strategic goals, including board development and fellow support and acculturation
- Grow our funders in numbers, diversity, and sustainability for more steady and robust support
- Increase capacity by empowering fellow ownership of projects and community initiatives
- Improve security by upgrading technology to reduce potential for outages and ensure continued operations onsite and online
- Update disaster recover plan
- Consider investments needed to reach new publics in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East
- Collect input from project partners, community members, and attendees through survey to assess future directions
- Grow and support volunteer community



John Cage's *How to Get Started* is a permanent installation at Slought that features a rarely heard performance by John Cage and evolves over time through participation from the public.

## 4. Extending Education

From the outset, Slought established itself as a group open to ideas, thinking and rethinking together. High quality cultural production remains at the forefront of Slought’s core activities. Rather than focus on fewer time-and space-consuming projects such as exhibitions, Slought seeks to constantly activate the organization through more regular—and responsive—programming reflecting its community and educational interests.

Building out a new combined media and educational space at 4017 Walnut will allow Slought to promote opportunities for more activity of this kind, encourage outreach to forge new partnerships, and explore new options to enhance revenue. Slought will pilot more formal educational programs with partners to test a variety of needs and uses for the space. Slought will also expand its reading group activities focused on health and wellness under the newly launched Health Ecologies Lab. Complementing its onsite activities, Slought will explore offsite programming to engage new partners and new publics where they are. Above all, Slought must cultivate a like-minded educational partner who can bring greater visibility and resources to realize the organization’s renewed educational agenda.

# Actions

- Forge new partnerships with respected educational institutions for greater visibility, reach, and expertise in education and social justice
- Make facility and technology investments to support growth of educational initiatives
- Research and develop architectural plans for flexible space usage
- Develop programming and invite film curators and other educational partners
- Pilot offsite activities (e.g. reading groups)
- Explore possibilities for formal educational programs and shared revenue
- Project attendance and research need for possible ticketing system



*Fairytale Project* is a research initiative and online archive about the experiences of 1001 Chinese participants who traveled to Germany with Ai Weiwei.

## 5. Incubating Ideas

**As a relatively mature organization, Slought sees a role in mentoring young artists and activists as well as providing space for their activities and growth.**

We wish to encourage community building, education, and dialogue through new programming specifically focusing on young adults between the ages of 14 and 25. As such, Slought will expand its invitation for others to become cultural producers by offering support, access to resources, and coaching as needed.

We will concentrate on areas where Slought is best positioned to make a difference. These include support for local grassroots and student organizations focused on societal impact that share our values.



# Actions

- Explore possible artist- and scholar-in-residence programs
- Support recruitment of new contributors by fostering greater hospitality and improving tools for future collaborations, including an open project call and community calendar for website
- Identify fellows and community leaders to serve as recruiters and mentors to new contributors
- Expand process, tools, and policies that manage and organize projects
- Document best practices
- Implement standards to ensure quality projects



Youth researchers from Mixplace organize a walking tour to build relationships with neighborhood residents and institutions. The studio began in 2012 as an urban education model that addresses the crisis in community participation and political representation.



## Acknowledgements

This strategic plan was internally developed at Slought during the 2016-2017 academic year. It emerged from a collaborative effort involving inputs from the Board of Directors, various committees, and key individuals.

The process was facilitated by Megan Schmidgal and Aaron Levy. Contributing fellows and interns included Anastasia Colzie, Iz Korostoff, Gwynne Fulton, Alan Smith, Tung Chau, Akili Davis, and Ami Yares.

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