

## **Vox Populi - Values Statement: 1-Page Executive Summary | August 2020**

Over the Summer of 2020, the Collective Membership of Vox Populi came together to discuss the effects and influences on or within our organization of white supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, widespread racist and state violence, economic inequality, and the corporate exploitation of labor, land, and environment, considering how these conditions plague the operations of those within the non-profit arts and culture sector more broadly.

The Vox Populi Values Statement is a public document through which we seek to actively interrogate and transform our organization and its operations. The document serves as a tool for guiding the choices and investments of current and future organizational leadership and membership, details specific commitments to annual trainings and conscientious collective decision-making, and provides a roadmap for how to hold one another accountable to the ongoing work of anti-oppression.

### At-A-Glance

- Vox Populi announces anti-racism as central to its purpose and commits to supporting under-represented artists and communities through its space and resources. Vox Populi defines '*under-represented artists*' as those whose identity corresponds with populations that have historically been and perpetually are marginalized by white, Euro-centric, and commercial institutions of art.
- Vox Populi condemns all forms of state-sanctioned violence against individuals and communities, particularly Black, brown, immigrant, and LGBTQ individuals and communities, and recognizes the pivotal role police forces and prisons have played in perpetuating systemic racism, xenophobia, homo/transphobia, harm, and the intentional deprivation of resources from said communities.
- Vox Populi commits itself to the work of police and prison abolition, reflecting that commitment in its endorsements of and affiliations with likewise groups, its programming, and its messaging. Vox Populi commits to developing protocols for responding to crisis and emergency situations without involving police when possible.
- Vox Populi and its members pledge to make conscientious partnership, purchasing and contracting decisions, buying from or contracting with local QTBIPOC-owned and operated businesses whenever possible and appropriate, and commits to developing a transparent process for determining the appropriateness of corporate sponsorships and/or public-private partnerships.
- Vox Populi seeks to resist the role arts organizations can play in gentrification and, thereby, producing housing instability for local residents by being selective about what neighborhood businesses, developers, or other associations we partner with.
- Vox Populi commits itself to holding two organization-wide trainings annually: a Deescalation and Crisis Intervention Training and an Anti-Oppression Workshop.
- Vox Populi seeks to undo economic barriers to participation within our Collective and Board by revising dues expectations, introducing work opportunities and fundraising expectations to minimize out-of-pocket costs for members, and developing alternative models for measuring member contributions.

## **Vox Populi Values Statement | August 2020**

Founded in 1988, Vox Populi is a 501(c)3 non-profit arts organization, gallery, performance venue, and artist collective in Philadelphia, PA, dedicated to supporting the work of local, national, early-career, and under-represented artists. Vox operates as a cooperative, member-run public art gallery, which functions as a laboratory for artists, offering them the opportunity to exhibit and perform their work in a context that they themselves create. Historically and today, Vox commits to providing space and support for artists who lack professional-representation and whose work is not readily supported by museums and commercial galleries. Exhibiting in a cooperative gallery gives early- and mid-career artists a platform from which to build an audience for their work, develop their professional practice, and invest in a community of artists. Vox also provides administrative support for artists to organize special projects. Through Vox, artists curate exhibitions, organize film screenings and performances, and run educational programs. Vox also provides workshops to promote the professional development and financial education of artists.

**Vox Populi acknowledges that it is part of a complex network of majority-white art institutions in Philadelphia - museums, galleries, schools, non-profit organizations, and DIY spaces - that have benefited from white supremacy, patriarchy, classism, xenophobia, trans/homophobia, and other modes of oppression and exclusion.** As an organization that has carried this legacy and that for too long has remained complacent on issues related to race, identity, and representation,<sup>1</sup> we commit to the following changes in the interest of creating an equitable organization, better representing the demographics of the city in which we exist, and becoming more accessible, safe, and supportive of marginalized artists.

**Vox Populi announces anti-racism as central to its purpose and commits to supporting under-represented artists and communities through its space and resources.** Vox Populi defines '*under-represented artists*' as those whose identity corresponds with populations that have historically been and perpetually are marginalized by white, Euro-centric, and commercial institutions of art.

We believe that all artists deserve space to share their ideas, manifest their projects, and congregate their communities, so long as those ideas and communities do not spread hate. As the keepers of such a space, we seek to make our resources more available and inclusive, in service to communities who have been or actively are denied such resources. **Vox Populi believes that all board and collective members must participate and advocate for progressive structural changes within our organization and within our city in order to bring about meaningful, equitable change citywide.**

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<sup>1</sup> This is despite the nondiscrimination statement contained in Vox' bylaws- *Vox Populi does not discriminate according to race, age, religion, gender-identity, disability, citizenship status, or sexual orientation, and has a zero-tolerance policy for discriminatory behavior and language.*

## **Expectations of Board and Collective Members**

To truly create a space that is safe, supportive, and welcoming to under-represented artists is to work collaboratively throughout the city with like-minded individuals and organizations. Through our Membership and Board of Directors, we hope to provide and receive support, leadership, and collaboration in our intra-organizational goals of dismantling racism, supporting under-represented artists, as well as other goals articulated in Point II under *Cultural Expectations*, below.

In order to provide this support, it is imperative that members of our Collective and Board of Directors are actively engaged in the opposition of institutional oppression tacitly supported by all arts organizations, non-profits, and other connected institutions, schools, and universities whose legacies rest on a white supremacist foundation.

**This is not a punitive expectation**, whereby Collective and Board members' participation in anti-oppression work will be actively policed and monitored. Rather, it is an expectation of interpersonal accountability - that we are all working towards Vox's goals both within and outside of Vox Populi; an understanding that this work can take many different forms; and a commitment to growth, as we all continually develop tactics, strategies and modes of unmaking the oppressive structures that have been foundational to our lives, artistic and otherwise.

**Members of the Vox Populi Collective and Board of Directors are held to the following expectations:**

### **Cultural Expectations**

- I. All members of the Board of Directors and Collective vow to share and defend the vision and values of the Vox Populi Collective, and to serve as an advocate for Vox's values in their respective work-places and communities. We urge Board and Collective members to remember that virtue-signaling and self-centering performative measures<sup>2</sup> do not effectively advance the vision and values laid out in this statement. Rather, we expect Board and Collective members to meaningfully engage within their respective workplaces and communities towards the goals stated in this Values Statement.
  
- II. As leaders within Vox Populi and the broader Philadelphia community, all Board and Collective members are active agents in the effort to end systemic racism, economic inequality, and oppression within the art world and the city at-large by (i) connecting material resources and opportunities to under-represented artists<sup>3</sup> (ii) calling-out and eliminating racist, xenophobic, classicist, misogynistic, and trans/homophobic behaviors and barriers to participation within Vox Populi and the Philadelphia

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<sup>2</sup> See [Wikipedia's article](#) for a helpful definition of virtue signaling

<sup>3</sup> As stated in our Values Statement, we define 'under-represented artists' as those whose identity corresponds with populations that have historically been and perpetually are marginalized by white, Euro-centric, mainstream, and commercial institutions of art.

- artworld at-large, (iii) actively informing Vox Populi of- and connecting Vox Populi with- likewise social-justice oriented arts and education organizations throughout Philadelphia, and (iv) endorsing and supporting systemic change within all of our institutional surroundings (i.e., city government, museums, universities, libraries, etc.).
- III. Vox Populi stands in opposition to overt or covert attempts by corporations and real-estate developers to displace communities, gain municipal power, and instrumentalize arts organizations as part of neighborhood gentrification efforts (i.e., art-washing) that contribute to housing instability for local residents.
    - A. Collective and Board Members must disclose to each other any neighborhood organizational affiliations, real estate properties, and/or other investments that may conflict with *Cultural Expectations* Point III, particularly those assets from which individual Board or Collective members may seek to personally profit.
  - IV. In an effort to support local businesses and to shift capital, Vox Populi and its members pledge to make conscientious purchasing and contracting decisions, buying from or contracting with local QTBIPOC-owned and operated businesses whenever possible and appropriate.
  - V. Vox Populi commits to developing a transparent process for determining the appropriateness of corporate sponsorships and/or public-private partnerships, gaining organizational-wide approval for new relationships entered into for fundraising or other purposes. Rationale for declining a sponsorship or public-private partnership could include, but are not limited to: abstention from affiliation with businesses that rely on exploitative or extractive labor; businesses that actively or knowingly contribute to neighborhood gentrification; etc.
  - VI. Vox Populi condemns all forms of state-sanctioned violence against individuals and communities, particularly Black, brown, immigrant, and LGBTQ individuals and communities, and recognizes the pivotal role police forces and prisons have played in perpetuating systemic racism, xenophobia, homo/transphobia, harm, and the intentional deprivation of resources from said communities. Vox Populi commits itself to the work of police and prison abolition<sup>4</sup>, reflecting that commitment in its endorsements of and affiliations with likewise groups, its programming, and its messaging. Vox Populi recognizes that artists have and will continue to play a crucial

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<sup>4</sup> While many believe that police and prisons offer safety, the police do not exist to make people safer - rather, they were created to protect the interests of capital & private property, and to enforce- and later, reinstitute & preserve-slavery (esp. via the prison-industrial complex). When police commit horrific acts of brutality against poor, Black, undocumented, trans, and otherwise marginalized people, they do not represent a broken system. Rather, they are functioning as intended. For more reading & listening on Abolition, some resources are available at [abolitionistfutures.com](http://abolitionistfutures.com). Even more resources can be found at [AAIHS.org](http://AAIHS.org).

role in the reimagining of public safety and community-led justice initiatives, and commits itself to supporting that work going forward.

- VII. Vox Populi recognizes that racism, particularly as perpetuated by police, represents a threat to public health, particularly for Black, brown, immigrant, and trans people, and that the presence of the police constitutes an imminent and bodily threat to many within our community of artists and audiences. However, we also recognize that Philadelphians are often deprived of emergency-response or first-responder options for mitigating violent situations. Therefore, Vox Populi commits to developing protocols for responding to crisis and emergency situations without involving police whenever reasonable or possible. All members of Vox Populi will be invited to attend an annual Deescalation and Crisis Intervention training session.
  
- VIII. Annually, the Board of Directors will arrange, finance, and attend at least one organization-wide workshop dedicated to such issues as Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, Decolonization, and related subject-matter, arranged in collaboration with members of the artist collective.
  
- IX. Annually, all members of the Vox Populi community (Board and Collective) will participate in a self-assessment process, the content of which will be decided at the relevant time. We may seek to explore questions such as;
  - A. How am I working towards systemic changes in the arts? What actions have I taken? What actions can I take?
  - B. How am I confronting my role in white supremacy? What actions am I taking to address that role?
  - C. How have I failed (understanding failure is not negative and creates growth) these values and how can I grow?

### **Collective Statement on Arts Funding**

Vox Populi recognizes that the foundation of global financial wealth and, by extension, the foundation of many major philanthropic trusts and funds, has historically been, and continues to be, built on the legacies and practices of violent, exploitative, and extractive industry that contribute to the destruction of the environment, of communities, and of individual human rights.

Vox Populi recognizes the compromised position of non-profit and charitable organizations, including ours, that are presently dependent upon public and private contributions in order to remain viable, while also seeking to work towards a future in which we can reject any and all entities with known financial ties to prisons and private correctional facilities, fossil fuels industries, weapons and securities manufacturers, and all exploitative and extractive businesses that profit from and contribute to the destruction of community and environment.

Vox Populi is conscious of what money we accept, what partnerships we will or will not enter

into, and insists that alternative, sustainable economies are possible. Therefore, the Collective members of Vox Populi commit to a consensus model for all future decisions concerning major changes or new sources of funding.

### **Board of Directors: Attendance, Committees + Artist Mentorship**

- I. The Directors shall meet every other month or as often as they see fit. At the end of each meeting of the Board, the Directors present shall schedule the next meeting of the Board. (Amended from Section 7.7.1 of By-Laws)
- II. A Board member that misses three consecutive meetings, barring approved or agreeable reasoning and following appropriate intervention, can be voted off the Board of Directors by a 2/3rds majority of the Artist Membership.
- III. In addition to maintaining active participation in the Committees of the Board as outlined in Article IX of the By-Laws (Executive Committee, Nominating Committee, Finance Committee), members of the Board of Directors are held to the following expectations:
  - Enthusiastic attendance and promotion of Vox Populi fundraising events, opening receptions, artist talks, and special events.
  - Members of the board agree to supply the Membership with a profile listing areas of expertise, skills, or services that they can offer.
  - Making introductions and forming meaningful relationships between the membership and Executive Director with local and national arts funders, likewise arts, community, and educational groups, visiting artists and curators, and other professionals from whom Vox Populi could benefit.
  - Attendance of twice-a-year Membership Socials during which artists and curators with upcoming exhibitions will share project ideas, subsequently connecting artists with funding/grant-opportunities or material resources in support of their projects, as available or appropriate.
  - Ongoing audience-generation for Vox Populi exhibitions, artist talks, and programs through the formation of strategic partnerships or the brokering of other advantageous relationships.

### **Board of Directors: Financial**

- I. The Board of Directors is expected to raise a combined total of \$10,000 per year through a combination of fundraising events, print-sales, raffles, and personal contributions (at a level that is meaningful to that board member), understanding that some members of the board may be less able to make personal contributions but more able to generate interest in and donations to fundraising activities than others.
  - A. In an effort to lower barriers to participation on the Board of Directors, the current board agrees to investigate alternative expectation-models for how new board members can meaningfully contribute financially to the

organization.

- II. Board members are expected to disclose any and all potential financial conflicts of interest to the Executive Director and fellow members of the Board, including the ownership of investment properties in the neighborhood of where our venue is located. **See Section 11.1.2 of the By-Laws for Conflicts of Interest Definitions.**

### **Collective Statement on Accountability of the Board of Directors**

We recognize the need for structures of accountability within the Board of Directors to support the organizational changes described throughout this statement. Therefore, the Board of Directors agrees to create these structures in collaboration with the Member President and Executive Director, and to report on developments to the Collective membership.

### **Next Steps: Action Items**

We are taking action and implementing internal change while also following the lead of progressive advocacy groups in Philadelphia demanding systemic and structural change in how our city and economy operates, including [Black Lives Matter - Philadelphia](#), [The Philly Black Radical Collective](#), [The Alliance for a Just Philadelphia](#), and [Reclaim Philadelphia](#), who are unanimously and simultaneously calling for the defunding and abolition of police and prisons within the city of Philadelphia, for support of organized labor (including at arts and educational organizations), for ending inequitable city tax policies, exemptions, and incentives that favor corporations and mega-nonprofits over people, for the prioritizing of environmental and community health, and for the reinvestment of our city's government and revenue into community funding.

### **Specific actions we have taken to-date, and intend to make moving forward include:**

- The drafting of a **Cultural Values Statement**, revising and clarifying the meaning of key-terms, such as "under-represented," that appear within our [Mission Statement](#).
- Initiating and conducting an **Internal Review of our Membership and Board of Directors**, parting ways with long-standing Board Members in order to make way for new leadership at the board level, the re-drafting of Board expectations and roles.
- **Launching a Recruitment Campaign for New Board Leadership**, soliciting nominations from leading progressive arts advocacy organizations, and expanding the set of skills and experiences we seek in Board Leadership, including those with trauma-informed counseling expertise, knowledge of cooperative organizational structures, and that are involved in advocating for affordable, safe, healthy, and sustainable communities in Philadelphia.
- **Revising and Implementing New Standards and Protocols for the Recruitment and Evaluation of New Collective Members.**

- **Reducing Economic Barriers to Participation** at Vox Populi as a Board or Collective member, shifting away from a monthly/annual dues expectation per-member model and towards a general fundraising expectation per Membership and Board, offering **Earn-or-Work-Your-Dues Opportunities** to Members unable to contribute to fundraising directly.
- **Issuing an Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Objective to All Artist Committees**, infusing the work of dismantling systems of oppression at all levels of the organization, developing new resource-sharing and participation opportunities for the broader creative communities of Philadelphia in the process.
- **Coalition-Building and Arts Advocacy** by having leadership and membership participate in the co-launching and ongoing efforts of **Philadelphia Arts for Black Lives**, **The Artist Coalition for a Just Philadelphia**, and **No To Zero for the Arts**.
- **Scheduling Regular Board and Membership Training** on such topics, frameworks, and skills as Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, Deescalation/Crisis Intervention, Decolonization, and First Aid, with particular emphasis on Naxolone Training.
  - Vox Populi pledges to invest in alternative systems of safety, justice, and care, and to develop a clear **Deescalation and Crisis Intervention Protocol** in collaboration with local community safety experts that keeps all personnel as safe as possible.
- **Become a Better Neighbor** by offering more free or subsidized space-rentals to local QTBIPOC-led community organizations and businesses and maintaining active participation with [The Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities](#), offering our space and resources when appropriate.