

Strategic Plan Overview
2026 - 2030

DESIGN NITSNVA

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The Opportunity

04 **Overview**

05 **Mission & Vision**

The Opportunity

Design Austin is an independent 501c3 organization that celebrates and supports a diverse community of designers and creatives as a unifying platform to fill a long-standing gap in our community. While Austin has an abundance of creativity, it lacks an entity that connects disciplines and the public for multi-dimensional innovation.

Design is more than aesthetic—it is essential to livability and resilience. Design Austin brings design thinking into everyday life through story-telling, connection, and champions.

We are committed to building a multi-disciplinary, inclusive, and supportive organization, community, and city. Design Austin began as the 501c3 arm of AIA Austin and focused on architects; we are continually cultivating that relationship while growing our reach and intentions as engaged members of the larger design community. We have developed city-wide activations, public-private partnerships, and signature events. We know that meeting our community's need will take sustained focus, investment, and goodwill, and we are prepared and excited.

This plan details the first major phase of our growth as a year-round catalyst of creativity, inspiration, and problem-solving. Through signature events and multi-disciplinary partnerships, Design Austin will engage local professionals, community members, and visitors in high quality experiences that enrich, educate, and delight. Eventually, we plan to open an Austin Center for Design as a community gathering place, showcase, and third place, and our work now is foundational for that as well. The activities envisioned in this plan will strategically build relationships, reputation, and trust to support the Center.

At Design Austin, we believe that design is innovative and useful. It is approachable and profound. We know that problems of all kinds are solved by people from all fields, so we are inclusive and idea-driven. We are charting a course that prioritizes design as visible, public, and human. We believe that design adds value, and this plan is designed for us to add value. We are excited for the opportunity ahead and look forward to designing Austin with you.

Our Motivation

During the planning process, we crafted vision and mission statements to describe our intentions and provide a foundation for this plan and the work it lays out. Design Austin is committed to enriching lives and elevating creativity locally and globally, and we believe that design is the key component of

innovation and integration that changes experiences, lives, and communities. Accordingly, Design Austin has adopted these vision and mission statements to describe our hope for the future and how we are working to achieve it.

Vision Statement

We envision a world made better by design.

Mission Statement

Design Austin advances the role of multidisciplinary design in shaping culture and community locally and globally.

Commitments

Design Austin is uniquely prepared and committed to do this work. Since its founding, it has been consistently modeling these commitments.

These fundamental premises describe our intentions, are the premise for the goals laid out in this strategic plan, and rally Design Austin to serve.

We are a multidisciplinary forum.

- We convene larger conversations.
- We are pluralistic.
- We amplify creativity in the public realm.
- We invite different perspectives.
- We elevate civic conversations through creativity.
- We have a platform for storytelling.
- We have an inclusive, joyful approach.
- We are a laboratory and a stage.
- We curate great experiences and content.
- We are idea-driven.
- We are a gateway to a large, engaged audience.
- We have credibility.
- We want to shake it up.

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We support others.

- We elevate our partners.
- We thrive on collaboration.
- We share and explore content.
- We add value to conversations.
- We celebrate creativity.
- We are a group hug.
- We help people see themselves in creativity.

We are Austin.

- We understand the nuance of city issues.
- We champion a shared vision for a better-designed Austin.
- We are proud of our city.
- We reveal creativity throughout the city.
- We are committed to Austin's success.

Our Plan

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Our Plan

Design Austin young and ambitious with a well-informed vision of growing into the civic and culture design hub that Austin truly deserves.

This is a long-term plan, with well-measured steps for the next five years to guide our work.

Overview

The plan also incorporates strategic activities not just for sustaining operations today but to grow in capacity to be able to open an Austin Center for Design in the future.

As we developed this plan, we identified a set of criteria to use as in our decision-making. These represent operational priorities and will remain important through the course of the plan, as additional opportunities to make decisions arise.

Routes of Engagement

Routes of Engagement: Routes of Engagement

Signature event

World-class showcase of Austin as a design and cultural center and opportunity to grow by attracting national and international luminaries

City-wide activation

Public-private partnerships, geographic distribution, and engagement across disciplines and demographics to connect Austin through our mission

Strategic Criteria

Alignment: Mission and strategic alignment

Viability: Financial viability and organizational capacity (staff, governance, etc)

Impact: In multiple disciplines and directions (civic, educational, reach, reputation)

Excellence: Commitment to excellence (creativity, quality)

Delight: Make content accessible through quirkiness and joy in unexpected ways that make people smile

Our Plan

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As part of this planning effort, Design Austin spoke with leaders of different organizations and stakeholder groups to find out what types of problems they want help with, what worries them about their work or the city, and where the gaps are in getting things done. We reviewed those responses with the criteria we developed and our mission in building this plan. Design Austin is ready to solve problems, and we have a plan to do it.

These goals will define our work. Each goal has a detailed set of strategies, tactics, milestones, and metrics to guide our work.

Goals

1. Educate and convene across disciplines, sectors, and institutions to cultivate a connected community with local and global impact
2. Engage diverse perspectives and expertise as a networked community with local and global impact
3. Host a multi-disciplinary signature event that builds identity, relationships, and resonance
4. Design a homebase that showcases and welcomes thinkers, problem-solvers, and the curious to engage
5. Model design-thinking and delightful decision-making operationally

Goals

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Goal 1: Engaging year-round programming

Educate and convene across disciplines, sectors, and institutions to cultivate a connected community with local and global impact

Overview

Design Austin is an every day for everybody organization. This goal focuses on its year-round, inclusive efforts to provide programming and activities for the community. Through forums, hands-on activities, scholarships, speaker series, and other welcoming events, Design Austin is committed to raising the level of engagement and discussion in our community. To ensure that we do it thoughtfully, we will develop a companion marketing and editorial strategy to clarify our message and build a wide audience. We anticipate doing much of this work in partnership with other organizations to build community, learn from each others' strengths, and best reach multiple disciplines and new audiences.

Strategies

Year-round programming that builds a forum, connecting, inspiring, and exciting the design community

Create inclusive, welcoming, and fun educational activities for the community to raise the level of discussion

Expand scholarship and awards program to reflect breadth of DA community and impact

Marketing and editorial strategy with distinct DA tone, voice and goals to build a broader, more inclusive audience

Goal 2: Connected community with local and global impact

Engage diverse perspectives and expertise as a networked community with local and global impact

Overview

We believe in the power of design and the power of Austin. We are committed to growing the power of both simultaneously. We will build community among organizations and link individuals through value-added, values-driven outreach programming. We will also develop a compelling membership program with benefits that delight by design.

Strategies

Reach and grow community through relationships with nonprofits, professional groups, and universities

Customize membership programs for key audiences, leveraging Design Austin's unique value proposition for each groups' priorities.

Cultivate our brand, identity, and visibility as leader

Audience

Design professionals: Curated cross-sector events and content, Build bridges between creative and civic partners, High quality networking and convening, Platform to showcase and engage as thought leaders

Entities (non-profits, universities, city): Gateway to efficiently connect with design professionals across disciplines, Trusted partner to enhance content and audience

Design enthusiasts and a curious public: Trustworthy, high-quality content, Sense of exclusive opportunities and access to unique experiences, Feeling of satisfaction from participation

Goal 3: Spectacular signature event

Host a multi-disciplinary signature event that builds identity, relationships, and resonance

Overview

Design Austin will expand the early success of WaterWork to an even more spectacular and impactful event. In addition to a larger scope for WaterWork itself, with more artists, more showings, and more opportunities to engage along Lady Bird Lake, we will incorporate more activities in the week around WaterWork to engage design-thinkers in a new signature event. With an ability to showcase the leading edge of design and Austin, this event represents a significant new revenue opportunity to support Design Austin's work as well as to further build Austin tourism.

Strategies

Showcase the leading edge of design, design-thinking, and Austin in a week-long, multi-disciplinary, city-wide event

Anchor annual event with WaterWork, an accessible and dynamic experience in the heart of Austin

Marketing and outreach strategy to attract local, national, and international participants and thought leaders

Secure sponsorship, stewardship, and VIP opportunities to attract excitement and engagement

Goal 4: A center for design

Design a homebase that showcases and welcomes thinkers, problem-solvers, and the curious to engage

Overview

Design Austin dreams of opening the Austin Center for Design. Not only will that serve as a homebase for programming, but as a showcase for the talent of our community. We want to build a home for thinkers and tinkerers to come together. We envision a third space coffee shop, exhibits, and dynamic meeting spaces. We aren't ready for that today, but with this plan we set the wheels in motion. First, we need the community to know and support us, so we will be actively hosting events throughout the city. This aligns with our values and the strategies of goal 1 to be inclusive and welcoming for everyone, and we intend that our eventual Center will be those things, too. We will also launch programs that build awareness and excitement for the idea of the Center, and eventually, we look forward to modeling the design-thinking process and including the community in the process together as we build the Austin Center for Design.

Strategies

Host signature annual event focused on home-building to generate enthusiasm for designing an eventual home for Austin's Center for Design

Leverage well-placed partners for pop-ups and activities to bring design to people throughout the city and continue introducing everyone to DA and our mission

Partner with AIA Austin in a capital campaign for a home that engages and showcases our community upon reaching internal readiness benchmarks

Incorporate viable earned revenue strategies in new facility to support ongoing operational expenses

Goal 5: Sustainable operations

Model design-thinking and delightful decision-making operationally

Overview

We are committed to good design and good decisions at every aspect of our work—external and internal. Thanks to our original partnership with AIA Austin, we are grateful to have a shared Executive Director and staff that enables us to fill key functions like communications and technology while we grow. As we continue to steward those roles, we also are preparing to expand with program and development specialists to focus on Design Austin’s unique growth opportunities. To support this expansion and the overall growth of our work, we will also expand our board and build an active network of committees to steward this new era of growth. We have ambitious goals as an organization to serve and build our community, and we are committed to growing our organization responsibly in order to meet the call to service that we feel.

Strategies

Partner with AIA Austin to achieve efficiencies of operations with mutual accountability and leadership

Right-size Design Austin staff to support planned growth

Expand board to represent multi-sector vision and mobilize Design Austin as it moves into this new era of growth

Significantly grow fundraising to fuel start-up and growth phase of Design Austin’s work

Engage professionals as leaders with an active committee structure to inform and support Design Austin

Ensure organizational efficiency, transparency, and accountability through thoughtful systems and processes.

Overview

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Strategic Plan Summary

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Engage diverse perspectives and expertise as a networked community with local and global impact

Host a multi-disciplinary signature event that builds identity, relationships, and resonance

Design a homebase that showcases and welcomes thinkers, problem-solvers, and the curious to engage

Model design-thinking and delightful decision-making operationally

Together we will make our world better by design.

Our work is rooted in and rooting for the community. We developed this plan with community input, and we plan to deliver it with community participation.

Design Austin Board

Interim Chair - Daniel Woodroffe
Treasurer - Justin Rankin
Secretary - Veronica Castro de Barrera
Emily Eisenhart
Libby Gillen
Larry Speck
DJ Stout
Michael Hsu

Design Austin Staff (in partnership with AIA Austin)

Executive Director - Ingrid Spencer
Rob Hoffman
Julia Brown
Courtney Mallen
Tanya Zal
Erika Wendel

Our Collaborators

AIA Austin
American Institute of Graphic Arts
Austin Parks Foundation
Big Medium
Blanton Museum of Art
Central Texas American Society of Landscape Architects
Downtown Austin Alliance
FuseBox
Society of Environmental Graphic Designers
The Contemporary
The Trail Conservancy
University of Texas School of Architecture
University of Texas School of Design and Creative Technologies
Visit Austin/Opportunity Austin
Waterloo Greenway Conservancy
Tara Levy Nonprofit Consulting