



**Kalamazoo Book Arts Center  
Strategic Plan  
2022-2027**

**Mission Statement**

The Kalamazoo Book Arts Center (KBAC) facilitates, teaches, and promotes the practices of hand papermaking, printmaking, letterpress, bookbinding, and creative writing, through preserving and employing traditional technologies and combining them with contemporary ideas and techniques to reinvigorate the collaborative arts of the book.

**Vision Statement**

The KBAC seeks to become one of the leading centers for the study and practice of the book arts, with national and international connections, and the participation and support of the community of Kalamazoo, residents of Southwest Michigan, and beyond. We are dedicated to developing new partnerships with other organizations, offering ongoing educational opportunities for people of all ages, and working with local and visiting artists and writers to create and present new visual and literary works of art.

**Core Values and Guiding Principles**

**Leadership:** We exercise leadership on the local, national, and international levels in pursuing excellence in our field.

**Collaboration:** We partner with other organizations and develop interdisciplinary collaborations between artists and writers, to bring the book arts to a larger audience.

**Integrity:** We confirm our commitment to working together with our partners to achieve valuable educational and creative goals.

**Accountability:** We acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses and take responsibility for the success of the organization.

**Passion:** We support our artists, writers, and staff, who are dedicated to the organization out of a passionate commitment to our discipline.

**Diversity:** We acknowledge that the book arts have a long tradition with contributions from people of all cultures and background, and strive to serve a diverse and inclusive audience.

**Quality:** We develop our expertise in all fields related to traditional and contemporary book arts, to offer valuable educational experiences and produce work of the highest quality.

## **Programs**

The KBAC was incorporated in September 2005 to provide a resource for artists and writers, to serve as a learning center for the public, to offer educational programming for the local schools, and to teach the creative disciplines of book arts, fine art and letterpress printing, handmade paper, and creative writing to a wider audience. Our 3,500 sq. ft. facility includes a papermaking studio, seven letterpresses with movable type, three intaglio, relief, and lithography presses, a bookbindery, a resource library, a retail store, gallery, classroom, and presentation space. The facilities and traditional equipment we have acquired and built in Kalamazoo are used to promote and teach the creative and collaborative arts of the book.

The KBAC's mission includes education, public engagement, and artistic production. The staff and board work together to plan each year's activities, exhibitions, and events. Our goal is to serve people from a wide range of backgrounds and age groups, from the youngest pre-school children, elementary through high school students, college students and young adults, professional artists, and the general public. We believe handmade books, art, and literature are creative disciplines that inspire and engage everyone. We serve up to 1,500 youth per year in our youth education programs with workshops that range from one session to several weeks. Between 500-1,000 people attend our monthly events and exhibitions. Evaluation forms are distributed during KBAC workshops, to review effectiveness and improve programming. The KBAC also solicits evaluations from local public-school teachers during our grant funded programming, to develop workshops that complement their curriculum. In addition, the KBAC interns complete evaluations at the end of their semester in the program. These evaluations are reviewed by the staff and improvements are made based on this constructive criticism.

We strive to present programming of the highest quality in the field of book arts, featuring both local Michigan artists and educators while also attracting visiting artists who have achieved national and international recognition. A summary of our education, exhibition, publishing, and Poets in Print programs follows.

**Classes and Workshops:** Classes are designed for teens and adults of varying experience levels and are offered in papermaking, printmaking, letterpress printing, bookbinding, surface design, calligraphy and creative writing. Instructors for our workshops include highly qualified local and visiting artists and educators.

**Youth Group Educational Programs:** KBAC offers programming to community youth groups, schools, and libraries. Organizations we have worked with include area public libraries, the Kalamazoo Parks and Recreation Department, KRESA Education for the Arts, Read and Write Kalamazoo, the Kalamazoo Public Schools, the Kalamazoo Nature Center, the Air Zoo, and more. Collaborating with this variety of local organizations increases our reach and allows the KBAC to have an impact on a wide and diverse population. Our grant-funded educational programs are primarily offered to underserved African-American and Hispanic children in Kalamazoo urban schools. We estimate up to 70% of our youth educational programming serves this population.

**Internship Program:** The KBAC established an internship program in 2008 and has worked with over 200 students and young adults from Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College, and the community. Students earn academic credit and participate in book arts production, educational programs, exhibitions, and hosting events. Their experience at KBAC helps them obtain employment skills and network within the arts community. Former interns have been successful in finding employment in the fields of education, graphic design, and arts administration using skills and experiences acquired at the KBAC.

**Exhibitions:** KBAC sponsors exhibitions in our gallery, including local and nationally recognized artists who also offer workshops and give presentations. We schedule a variety of exhibitions including one-person shows, group surveys, theme shows, and exhibitions for youth who work in our studio and KBAC interns. Each year we collaborate with WMU Waldo Library Special Collections and the Visiting Scholars and Artists Program to co-host artists who have been recognized on the national level. We have ten exhibitions annually which are each attended by hundreds of visitors as well as seen by youth during on-site school workshops.

**Poets in Print:** Each year the KBAC invites poets from around the US to come to Kalamazoo or participate online to read their work. For each poet, the KBAC produces a letterpress broadside poster that includes poetry and an original printed image. We invite ten different visual artists, using traditional printmaking techniques like relief and intaglio, to participate. During the event the poets read their original work and sign the edition of prints which are offered for sale. Inaugurated in 2008, we have produced over 125 broadside publications for this project.

**Publishing Program:** In addition to the Poets in Print broadsides the KBAC publishes fine press limited-edition books using letterpress on handmade paper, illustrated with hand-carved engravings, and bound by hand. These publications are sold in the KBAC Store and on our website, and are marketed to Special Collections libraries and private collectors.

**Financial Support:** The KBAC is supported by grants from local and national charitable foundations, and state and federal arts agencies. In addition, we receive donations from the community during fundraising events and through our annual appeal. Many community volunteers and college/high school interns contribute labor to help build and maintain the KBAC studio, gallery, and retail store, to organize exhibitions and poetry events, produce and distribute publicity, maintain our website, and many other tasks necessary to run a successful nonprofit arts organization.

**Community Engagement:** The KBAC is fortunate to be located at the front entrance of the Park Trades Center (PTC) in downtown Kalamazoo just one block from the Amtrak train station. The PTC is one of the centers of arts activity in Kalamazoo housing many other organizations including Glass Arts Kalamazoo, artist's studios, and galleries. As a result, we draw a large audience of sometimes up to 1,000 people to our gallery openings. The KBAC audience is from throughout Kalamazoo County and nearby cities including Grand Rapids, Detroit, and Chicago. A wide variety of people of different age, gender, race, and ethnicity attend our events and participate in our workshops. We believe the KBAC can promote economic vitality through cultural activities that increase community participation and tourism. Visitors to the KBAC stimulate the economy by traveling to the downtown area, eating in the restaurants, staying in the hotels, and shopping in the local stores.

Each year the KBAC develops programs to serve new audiences. We often offer free events or partner with organizations such as the Kalamazoo Poetry Festival, to introduce local disadvantaged children and their families to the studio and explore new experiential learning activities. Every summer we offer a variety of classes to youth including our *Make-a-Book-from-Scratch* program. Students work in the studio to collaborate on book arts projects, create relief prints, make handmade paper, learn about traditional letterpress printing, and bind books by hand. For several years we have partnered with Read and Write Kalamazoo, a local nonprofit organization that focuses on developing youth writing skills.

Also, during the summer our director Jeff Abshear accompanies a group of WMU students, many of whom become interns at the KBAC, on a study abroad program, Book Arts in Europe, to work in historic printing, papermaking, and letterpress studios in Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. In September, the KBAC hosts an exhibition of the work produced by the students on this trip, to share these experiences with the Kalamazoo community. In June 2022 we offered our first KBAC organized Book Arts in Venice tour, which went forward with great success. The participants worked in the studios of the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica in Venice and Tipoteca Italiana Fondazione in Cornuda to produce an edition with drypoint etchings and text they wrote, hand-set, and printed with movable type. This program will be offered again in the future.

We are in the community sharing our passion at different events as well, including the Medieval Faires at Parchment and Portage Libraries, the Medieval Congress at WMU, several public school open houses, Kalamadoodle, the Codex Book Fair, and the Power of the Press Festival in Detroit.

We regularly participate during the monthly Art Hop on the first Friday of every month that is organized by the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo. Many people of every age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and economic background attend, including families with children, college students, professional young and mid-career adults, and retired older people.

As the KBAC becomes more known regionally, nationally, and internationally in the world of book arts we are drawing our audience from a wider area. We have had many people travel to our workshops, exhibitions, and poetry readings from Grand Rapids, Chicago, Detroit, South Bend, Indianapolis, and even further away. Recently we've had visitors to the KBAC from Georgia, Ohio, Washington, New York, Germany, Japan, and England.

In our educational programs the KBAC does a great deal of work in the Kalamazoo Public Schools and with youth organizations including Kalamazoo Parks & Recreation, the Boys and Girls Club, and Read and Write Kalamazoo (RAWK). This results in most our grant funded education programs being offered to African American and Latino youth who often come from economically disadvantaged families. In 2018, according to the website GreatSchools.org, 75% of the population in the Kalamazoo Public Elementary Schools we served were considered low-income with 68% of the students eligible for free/reduced lunches. In several of the schools, including Woodward School for Technology and Research, Washington Writers' Academy, and Lincoln International Studies School, these numbers raise to 97% of the populations, and in addition are considered to have "very concerning" academic scores and ratings of student progress and equity. We feel this diverse population can most benefit from the grant funded education programs we offer.

The KBAC also works with a diverse group of teachers, writers, and artists who exhibit in our gallery and teach our workshops. We have had African American, Asian American, and Latino poets and artists featured in our Poets in Print Reading Series and in our Gallery. The KBAC makes great effort to be inclusive of all people in our programs and activities.

All activities at the KBAC are on the ground floor of the Park Trades Center and are accessible to all visitors. The KBAC Board and staff are committed to creating an inclusive, community oriented, successful arts organization that celebrates and preserves the arts of the book.

## **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis**

### **Strengths**

- Well-equipped studio with all the necessary equipment and materials to pursue our mission
- Dedicated, experienced staff committed to the organization, its programs, and events
- Southwest Michigan Printmakers (SWMP) a group of 25+ professional printmakers hold their quarterly meetings at KBAC. Many of these artists teach and volunteer for KBAC.
- Strong partnership with WMU and Kalamazoo College to offer specialized programs and recruit talented interns
- Wide network of local, national, and international artists and writers who exhibit in the gallery, teach special workshops, participate in the Poets in Print program, and work in the studio as artist members
- Online workshops, exhibitions, and other programs that can be accessed remotely during current and ongoing stay-at-home orders due to the pandemic emergency.
- Annual *Illustrated Accordion*, a non-juried open call exhibition, receives entries from local, national, and international book artists
- KBAC has partnered with Smithsonian Associates to offer book arts and related art workshops
- Strong network of community partners who participate in KBAC education program, promote our activities, and collaborate on community events
- Strong support by MCACA and private foundations to fund operations and programming
- Endowment fund

#### Weaknesses

- Continue diversifying funding sources to include more earned income and donations from businesses and private individuals
- Need for board development to recruit new members, to increase diversity and to have access to a range of talent and experience
- Ongoing need to do more outreach in the community to promote the KBAC and raise awareness both locally and regionally

#### Opportunities

- Develop more partnerships with community organizations
- Develop more collaborative programs and exhibitions with national and international colleagues and organizations including the Hamilton Type Museum, the Morgan paper Conservatory, and our partners in Europe
- Member of the Alliance for Book Arts Centers, and association of Executive Directors of book arts centers across the US that meets online quarterly to collaborate and share information

#### Threats

- Loss of revenue due to the pandemic crisis, the inability to engage with the public or hold workshops, and a general economic downturn
- Financial insecurity and risk of exceeding annual budget due to lack of consistency and diversity of funding

### **Sustainable Competitive Advantage**

The KBAC is a unique nonprofit organization in Michigan and one of the largest book arts centers in the Midwest. Consequently, we have no competition in the area for our programming and services and people visit us from all over the region to see our exhibitions, attend our poetry

readings, participate in our workshops, and purchase products and book arts supplies from our store. Our goal is to continue expanding awareness of the KBAC throughout the region so we become the primary source of these goods and services for a larger audience.

## **On-going Objectives**

### Community Engagement

- Participate in monthly Art Hop events sponsored by the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo
- Host special receptions for exhibitions by guest artists on mid-month non-Art Hop Friday evenings to attract our specific audience
- Host Poets in Print readings in-person and online
- Offer workshops to the public both in the studio and online

### Education

- Expand the reach of our education program to include more schools and youth organizations throughout Kalamazoo County
- Develop a wider variety of educational programs and workshops—a standard menu of options—so that educators, youth group leaders, and the community members can more easily choose experiences in the studio suited to their needs
- Expand our list of instructors and develop more workshop options, targeted toward various levels of experience, to expand our audience and encourage returning customers

### Production

- Ongoing Poets in Print broadside production
- Produce new limited-edition books and broadside
- Increase and expand the variety of products produced for the store and website sales
- Seek out new commissioned projects

### Artists & Writers

- Expand our network of colleagues around the US, to attract professional artists to exhibit in the gallery, offer workshops, and produce new work at the KBAC
- Collaborate annually with WMU Waldo Library Special Collections and the Visiting Scholars and Artists Program to host guest artists
- Expand visiting artist program to include international guests, including colleagues from Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and elsewhere
- Work with graduate students in the WMU Creative Writing program to organize the Poets in Print reading series, as well as scheduling readings for our limited-edition book and chapbook publications
- Work with local artists to present group shows, including the Southwest Michigan Printmakers, the Pendragons Calligraphy Guild, and others

### Board

- Recruit new board members with more diversity and a variety of skills to assist the organization
- Plan fundraising events and initiatives, and approach donors, to generate more money for the KBAC

## Financial

- Continue diversify funding sources to include more earned income and donations from businesses, corporations, and private individuals

## Short-term Objectives

- Celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in fall 2025, with an exhibition featuring work by many of the artists who have visited and worked in the KBAC studio over the years
- Create a system of sustainable salary and compensation for employees (review salaries in spring 2023)
- Encourage and fund educational/training opportunities for staff through annual board organized fund-raising of \$2,500
- Continue to develop in-person and online workshops, exhibitions, and other programs to serve our audience and raise our profile in the arts community. Offer ongoing fee-based and grant funded workshops for schools, youth organizations, and the public
- Continue developing the internship program. Interns work with staff on production projects, exhibition installation, and education programs. The internship program can create a pipeline for future workshop instructors for KBAC education programs
- Create a promotional packet to use when approaching businesses and individuals to promote the KBAC and solicit support and donations.
- Work with visiting artists and writers to present high quality programming throughout the year
- Publish at least one new limited-edition book each year and six new Poets in Print broadsides
- Organize one annual fundraising drive each year, tied to a specific need or theme (i.e., Sweet 16), with a set financial goal
- Develop a fund, through grants or private donors, to provide several teens each year with a small salary to work as interns at the KBAC
- All board members must give a donation each year to the KBAC (unspecified amount) to allow us to claim 100% board participation
- Develop major gift acceptance policy.