



Crowden

Music changes everything

Crowden Strategic Plan (2020–2023)

Draft 11/12/20

Introduction

Organizational Overview

Context

Process and Key Findings

Vision, Mission and Values

Key Goals and Strategies

A. Expansion of Offerings	6
B. Facilities	6
C. School Environment	7
D. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion	7
E. Student Recruitment.....	8
F. Faculty and Staff.....	9
G. Financial Sustainability.....	9
H. Leadership Succession.....	10

Introduction

Crowden Music Center in Berkeley is a nonprofit organization serving more than 12,000 individuals each year with innovative programs that combine music and education to nurture, develop, and inspire music lovers of all ages. In fall 2019, Crowden embarked on a strategic planning process to further strengthen and clarify our mission, vision, and values, and to identify key goals to guide Crowden's direction in the next several years.

Organization Overview

The Crowden School was founded in 1983 by Scottish violinist Anne Crowden, who envisioned a day school that would provide a supportive environment for young musicians by incorporating music into the daily curriculum. It was the first school of its kind in the nation. Crowden quickly expanded its programming to offer music instruction to the broader community. By 1998 Crowden had become a Berkeley institution, and moved into our current location, the historic Jefferson School building in North Berkeley. In 2003, the organization was officially renamed "Crowden Music Center" in recognition of the breadth of our activities in the community. Today, Crowden brings Anne's dedication and passion for music, and the distinctive Crowden educational experience, to an ever-expanding audience. The Crowden School, a private school for grades 3–8, offers a transformative academic curriculum with chamber music at its core. Our community education offerings include after-school, weekend, and summer music lessons and classes for all ages and levels of ability. Bay Area audiences treasure Crowden's engaging and affordable programming for the general public, including our Sundays @ Four chamber music series (always free for children) and Community Music Day, an annual free musical carnival that exposes thousands of Bay Area children to classical music and instruments for the first time. Additionally, Crowden provides access to music education and support to local public schools and teachers through our public school outreach program. Our facility rental program provides essential rehearsal and performance space to local music teachers and organizations. At Crowden, we believe that music is an inherent part of being human, and we believe in the power of music to change lives—indeed, to change *everything*.

Context

When Crowden launched this strategic planning process in the fall of 2019, our campus brimmed with music from morning till night, seven days a week—Crowden was serving more individuals than ever before. The road to this point in our organizational maturation was filled with both triumphs and adversity. Like most independent schools, The Crowden School experienced a significant decrease in student enrollment in the recession of 2008. To maintain financial sustainability, our staff and faculty took voluntary salary cuts. Facility improvements were put on hold, and other measures were taken to decrease expenses. In this tumultuous context, Crowden embarked on its first formal strategic planning process in 2008-9, underwritten by a grant from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The results identified very high-level goals to plan strategically for organizational health, sustainability, and thoughtful future growth. Since those hard days, Crowden has gradually increased both our enrollment and our contributed income. We have incrementally increased staff/faculty salaries and financial aid, and addressed pressing facility issues. By 2019, with these achievements and after years

of relative stability, the time was right for Crowden to take a broader view, addressing issues that would strengthen our institution farther into the future.

In March 2020, in the middle of our strategic planning, the Bay Area instituted shelter-in-place guidelines in response to the COVID pandemic. Crowden, like other institutions around the world, went silent onsite and pivoted to virtual classrooms. Despite this dramatic change, strategic planning continued in earnest, and the initial recommendations that were developed in the strategic planning process prior to COVID continued to hold true. Although our situation has changed significantly as the pandemic continues, the goals and strategies of this strategic planning process will provide direction for Crowden over the next several years.

Process and Key Findings

Crowden's strategic planning process involved extensive information gathering, including surveys, interviews, and large and small group discussions of Crowden School and community programs faculty, staff, board, parents, alumni, and community members.

From our community, we learned that Crowden is deeply beloved for our strong, passionate, and dedicated leadership, faculty, and staff; our great academics, music fundamentals, and teaching of chamber music; our vibrant community; and our role as an important music hub in the East Bay. Many noted the profound importance of chamber music in teaching numerous invaluable skills and values that have lasted long past students' time at Crowden.

The following were the most noted areas to improve:

- **Expand Socio-Economic and Racial Diversity** beyond the Asian/White racial diversity that currently exists at The Crowden School.
- **Increase number of staff/faculty and greatly increase staff/faculty salaries and benefits.** It was noted that staff/faculty are paid significantly lower than their counterparts in similar-sized institutions.
- **Address the Crowden School environment that can sometimes be competitive and stressful,** despite the Crowden values of collaboration and teamwork that are stated and instilled in its students.
- **Expand offerings at The Crowden School and Crowden's community programs,** although there were divergent opinions of what those offerings might include, such as expansion of Crowden grades or musical genres.
- **Expand the facility,** as Crowden is "bursting at the seams;" some cautioned that this should not entail taking on debt.
- **Plan for leadership succession;** the current Executive and Artistic Director and other senior leadership have been a key element to Crowden stability and success for many years.
- **Improve communication,** including better articulation of what Crowden is and the value of a Crowden education, conducting more community outreach with outside student ensembles, and improving internal communications.
- **Increase financial stability** by maximizing student enrollment and building the endowment.

Based on these areas to improve, as well as other information, Crowden’s Board of Trustees and senior staff developed the key areas for the strategic planning process at a retreat in January 2020. These areas were honed by the Strategic Planning Design Team, composed of board, staff, and faculty members, including parents. Strategies and goals were then further developed by staff, faculty, and board taskforces. Crowden’s Board of Trustees officially approved the strategic plan in November 2020.

The following goals are the heart of Crowden’s new strategic plan:

1. **Expand Crowden Music Center offerings** to better serve the community and increase revenue.
2. **Develop a short-term and long-term plan to address Crowden facility needs**
3. **Instill the values of Crowden among all stakeholders, including faculty, staff, parents, students, and board members** to build a more collaborative school environment
4. **Increase the number of Latinx and Black Crowden School students and faculty**, and build more inclusive classrooms
5. **Maximize enrollment at The Crowden School**
6. **Attract and retain faculty and staff**, including significantly increasing staff/faculty salaries and benefits
7. **Achieve greater financial stability** by developing and increasing more reliable earned and contributed revenue sources
8. **Develop a Leadership Succession Plan** for the Executive Artistic Director and senior leadership

Strategies to accomplish these goals are outlined in this strategic plan.

Crowden's Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision: Where students come to receive a world-class education with music at its core.

Crowden Music Center

MISSION: Crowden Music Center is committed to excellence in education, performance, and creative endeavor, and to the cultural enrichment of the larger community.

VALUES:

1. We believe that the understanding, practice, and study of music enriches the quality of life, nourishes the human spirit, and fosters the growth of intellect, creativity, and character.
2. We believe that the drive to learn is an innate human quality. We encourage curiosity, discovery, and engagement through an active learning process.
3. We believe in the power of interpersonal communications, and actively practice and teach skills of listening, empathy, and collaborative effort.
4. We value an inclusive community of students, parents, faculty, and supporters, celebrating differences of race, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

The Crowden School

MISSION: The Crowden School provides students in their foundational stages with excellent musical and academic teaching within a supportive school environment.

VALUES:

1. We instill students with self-confidence, adaptability, maturity, critical thinking, and perspective to sustain their continued development and personal fulfillment throughout their lives.
2. We value quality musical training and performance in balance with scholarly education as a core educational development of a whole person.
3. We foster creative, problem-solving, compassionate young people with integrity and a sense of responsibility, who enrich their communities.
4. We develop collaborative classrooms and school community where each staff member, student, and family takes responsibility for the collective success and well-being of all.

A. Expansion of Offerings

GOAL: Expand Crowden Music Center offerings to better serve the community and increase revenue.

As Crowden teaches music so well, there is demand from the community to expand offerings both in The Crowden School and Crowden’s community programs; requests for expansion were greatly varied both in terms of ages served to types of music offered. In the next three years, Crowden will focus on expanding offerings for teens, including exploring the potential for a high school experience for Crowden School graduates, as well as additional classes for younger children. Other community program offerings which generate revenue will also be explored.

STRATEGIES:

1. Offer more robust offerings for teens, possibly partnering with charter or other schools to provide a high school experience for a small number of Crowden students, and/or expanding offerings for teens through Crowden’s community programs.
2. Consider expansion of community program offerings that could help develop a pipeline of students for The Crowden School, including classes and lessons for children K–2, and early childhood programs.
3. Add new classes that are most likely to generate revenue.
4. Increase enrollment in existing community programs.

B. Facilities

GOAL: Develop a short-term and a long-term plan to address Crowden facility needs.

Crowden is literally “bursting at the seams:” The Crowden School music classrooms are quickly transformed to academic ones, which can be a burden to faculty/staff, and there is inadequate space for music studios, faculty lounge, administrative offices, place for parents to wait for their children, etc. And Crowden could be offering more if there was more space. Therefore, facility expansion is a priority, ideally without taking on debt.

STRATEGIES:

1. Determine space needed for The Crowden School and Crowden’s community programs, both short-term and long-term.
2. Develop a short-term plan to address immediate needs.
3. Develop a long-term plan, including timeline, to address needs that require greater funds. Consider building out the Hut.
4. Conduct a feasibility study for raising capital funds to address facility needs, ideally without a mortgage.

C. The Crowden School Environment

GOAL: Instill the values of Crowden among all stakeholders, including faculty, staff, parents, students, and Board members.

While many parents, alumni, faculty, and staff praised Crowden’s environment and the values it embodies and instills in its students, some parents and alumni said the Crowden School environment was competitive and stressful, creating a negative experience for students. As part of the strategic planning process, Crowden spent significant time developing and clarifying its values. These values will provide the basis for addressing the issues of competitiveness, and engaging the entire Crowden community—faculty/staff, students, parents/caregivers, and board members—to create a more collaborative environment.

STRATEGIES:

1. Review the values with all faculty and develop a plan for how these values will be integrated in Crowden School curriculum, events, etc., throughout Crowden School culture.
2. Provide professional development for all faculty on how to create a cooperative and inclusive classroom environment, including increasing “status” of students who may be marginalized due to racial/cultural/economic/ability differences.
3. Thoroughly communicate Crowden values with all parents and students, including the role of parents and students to further a cooperative environment at The Crowden School.
4. Develop ongoing parent resources, including articles, etc. on issues re: children’s well-being, cooperation, etc.; use parent resources developed by Crowden Music Center.
5. Evaluate this area annually through parent surveys; address issues identified. Include in faculty annual evaluation.

D. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

GOAL: Increase the number of Latinx and Black students, faculty, staff and trustees in The Crowden School.

The Crowden School student body and leadership includes a significant percentage of students and adults of Asian descent, in addition to white students and adults, yet there is a small number of students, faculty, staff and leadership who identify as Black, Latinx, or mixed race that includes Black and/or Latinx. A major priority in the next several years is to substantially diversify the student body and faculty/staff, and to create an inclusive, welcoming environment for all by addressing conditions that may unintentionally exclude students. This includes antibias training, greater inclusion of Black, Latinx, and other under-represented cultures in the curriculum, mentoring and increased financial aid, and other strategies.

STRATEGIES:

1. Reach out to Crowden community members who identify as Black, Latinx, and/or Indigenous to better understand Crowden’s past successes and failures to provide an antibias, inclusive, and supportive environment as a classical music institution.

2. Provide paths of participation in the planning and implementation of Crowden’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion plan to Crowden community members who identify as Black, Latinx, and/or Indigenous, and amplify their voices throughout the process.
3. Develop process for recruitment and retention of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous faculty, including providing mentors and funds committed for this purpose.
4. Refine process for recruitment and retention of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, including providing mentors and increasing financial assistance for those who need it.
5. Increase musical and academic support for students who need it.
6. Prioritize recruitment of trustees of Latinx and Black identities, with a goal of reflecting the demographics of the Bay Area.
7. Strengthen classroom inclusiveness by incorporating under-represented cultures and races into Crowden School academic and musical curriculum, and increasing visibility of commitment to inclusive classrooms (e.g. students with different learning styles/spectrum, LGBTQ+ students, etc.).

E. Student Recruitment

GOAL: Maximize enrollment at The Crowden School

In surveys and group discussions, parents noted that the most frequent reason they chose The Crowden School was their child’s response when they toured the school. Additionally, the only way parents said they discovered The Crowden School was through their child’s music teacher, or through other parents. In the next several years, student recruitment efforts will focus on building a culture within The Crowden School of everyone as a TCS “ambassador,” and providing resources for these efforts to be successful. Crowden will also work directly with private music teachers, including those teaching in Crowden’s community programs, to address any disincentives and develop new incentives to recommend students for The Crowden School.

STRATEGIES:

1. Create a culture where all Crowden School parents, faculty/staff, board members, alums, etc. are actively promoting Crowden, including trainings, materials that can easily be disseminated, referral incentives, etc.
2. Support a more robust pipeline from Crowden’s community programs to The Crowden School by addressing issues/concerns, and increasing knowledge and benefits for Crowden’s community education faculty; and developing K–2 “feeder” program and strategies for prospective sixth grade students.
3. Create incentives and address disincentives for the community at large to enrolling at The Crowden School, including financial aid and transportation, and develop incentives for private music teachers.
4. Identify a staffing structure to adequately support these efforts, such as a recruitment team including staff/faculty, parents, and alums from all Crowden programs

F. Faculty and Staff

GOAL: Compensate employees competitively, and create and sustain a positive work environment and culture

Crowden staff and Crowden School faculty salaries and benefits lag significantly behind those in peer institutions, although there have been gradual pay increases since the 2008 Great Recession. Despite this, faculty and staff are extremely dedicated to Crowden, most with long tenures at Crowden. Additionally, because the school day is divided between music and academic studies, many faculty members are not full-time, further decreasing their salary. The Crowden community of board, parents, and alumni recognize the sacrifices made by faculty and staff to sustain the school, and feel an urgency to address this situation by increasing pay and benefits to competitive rates, and, when possible, providing full-time employment.

STRATEGIES:

1. Substantially raise salaries and improve benefits.
2. Improve employee investment by providing full-time employment when possible.
3. Provide increased professional development opportunities.
4. Provide greater opportunities to meet and collaborate, improving equipment and materials, etc.
5. Identify and provide needed equipment and materials.

G. Financial Sustainability

GOAL: Achieve greater financial stability by developing and increasing more reliable earned and contributed revenue sources.

Thanks to strong financial planning, generous donors, a fully-owned building, and keeping expenses low, Crowden has maintained financial solvency throughout the decades. As described earlier in this plan, however, some areas of the organization require significant investments at this time, including increased staffing, salaries and benefits; expanded and improved facilities, and other areas. Additionally, in some years, budgets were balanced thanks to a one-time gift from a bequest or other planned giving. To build financial sustainability, more reliable and diversified sources of income were identified in the planning process. These strategies require investments in new staffing and other resources that will increase revenue by Year Three, with greater payoffs in subsequent years.

STRATEGIES:

1. Increase revenue from community programs by adding new classes that are most likely to generate revenue, and increasing enrollment in existing programs.
2. Increase enrollment in The Crowden School to 70 students by the end of three years, and 75 students in the subsequent year (see Student Recruitment section).
3. Increase contributed income efforts to grow foundation and individual donors, and minimize efforts on events.
4. Continue to cultivate new Legacy Society members.

H. Leadership Succession

GOAL: Develop a Leadership Succession Plan for the Executive and Artistic Director and senior leadership

The current Executive and Artistic Director, as well as senior staff and faculty leaders, have served in their positions for several years; this strong leadership team is a primary driver for Crowden's success. Although there are no immediate plans for leadership turnover, succession planning is critical for Crowden's future, and in the instance of an emergency.

STRATEGIES:

1. Develop an emergency leadership succession plan, including who would assume role of Executive and Artistic Director, documentation of job descriptions, key aspects of all senior staff positions required for transitions, including passwords, contact information, etc.
2. Revise organizational chart and address any areas that may need strengthening.
3. Develop and implement a plan for key external relationships, such as donors, to be held by more than one person in the organization, including Board and/or staff members.
4. Develop process and timeline for leadership transition of the Executive and Artistic Director, including recruitment strategies, definition of roles, etc.
5. Address issues for potential Executive and Artistic Director candidates including determining which stated organizational values are non-negotiable, a plan to address salary requirements, and list of potential candidates and process/timeline for selection and training.