

# DOBAMA THEATRE

STRATEGIC PLAN  
FY24 - FY27

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*This Strategic Plan was made with consultation from Evolution Management Consultants, led by facilitator Leandro Zaneti. Dobama proudly recommends Evolution to other nonprofits.*

*Graphic design by:*

*Colin Anderson, Director of Production*

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# ART PRODUCTION

Dobama Theatre was founded in 1959 by Donald and Marilyn Bianchi, Barry Silverman and Mark Silverberg to produce important new plays for the Northeast Ohio community with a culture of “**love and respect.**” Over the past 60 years, Dobama has developed a reputation as Cleveland’s “Off-Broadway Theatre,” programming high-quality, boundary-pushing, and thought-provoking contemporary plays that offer new and challenging perspectives and topics. In its intimate space in the basement of the Lee Road Branch of the Cleveland Heights Public Library, **Dobama has nurtured a community of artists and audiences that have an appetite for risky, daring, and cutting-edge work while fostering a culture of support and care.**

In 2014, Dobama became the third Equity theatre in the Cleveland area. Though the theatre had always produced professional-quality shows, this change signaled a commitment to paying theatre professionals a more livable wage, allowed actors and stage managers the opportunity to work in an acceptable standard of professional working conditions, and was a visible and outward sign of the consistent level of theatre that Dobama Theatre produces. Dobama has always been known and respected for its cutting edge work, but **the theatre also became known, respected, and appreciated for its commitment to fair wages, fair treatment, and equity.** The organization has been a promoter of documents such as the CLEAN House Standards, advocating for improved working conditions for all theatre artists in the Cleveland area. In 2019, Dobama was awarded the Kathryn V. Lamkey Award by the Actors’ Equity Association for making representation in hiring a priority and providing ongoing opportunities for underrepresented artists.

By 2019, Dobama had enjoyed a steady growth and had reached a budget size of \$750,000. This upward trajectory was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The theatre was dark for 18 months and as it reopened, like all other theatres, faced challenges in getting audiences back into the theatre. By 2022, however, the organization had rebounded to a budget size of \$650,000.

In the summer of 2020, Dobama Theatre, like so many other organizations, found itself in a unique time. With the convergence of a global pandemic and shutdown, important activism work from artists such as We See You White American Theater, and the ongoing police violence against Black people, Dobama found it essential to intensely examine its practices and those of the American theatre. The Board of Directors unanimously adopted the Love & Respect Document on March 8, 2021. **The Love and Respect Document is a living document for anti-racism action and the next steps in creating a culture of authentic inclusivity at Dobama.** It has become a foundational document for Dobama and has impacted every aspect of the organization, including this strategic plan.

In 2023, Dobama had 22 board members, 3 full-time employees, and 3 part-time employees. The theatre produced 5 shows while nurturing new work through the Playwrights’ GYM, growing its education program, and continuing to engage its community at events such as the Heights Halloween Festival.

# MISSION

*Dobama Theatre engaged in work examining its mission, vision and values during the pandemic with its full board and staff. This work, along with the Love and Respect Document, aligned the board and staff around the mission. The board approved the changes to the mission in 2021, and reaffirmed it during this process.*

**DOBAMA THEATRE IS DEDICATED TO PREMIERING IMPORTANT NEW PLAYS BY ESTABLISHED AND EMERGING PLAYWRIGHTS IN PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTIONS OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY. THROUGH THEATRICAL PRODUCTION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND EDUCATION PROGRAMMING, DOBAMA NURTURES THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEATRE ARTISTS AND BUILDS NEW AUDIENCES FOR THE ARTS WHILE PROVOKING AN EXAMINATION OF OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD.**

# VISION

*In revisiting the vision for Dobama, the board and staff felt that the existing vision statement could be reworked to be more aspirational and future thinking. The proposed new vision below aims to address this feedback.*

**DOBAMA THEATRE PROFESSIONALLY PRODUCES URGENT, ENGAGING, EXCEPTIONAL THEATRE IN AN ENVIRONMENT THAT IS INCREASINGLY EQUITABLE, SAFE, AND NURTURING TO THE COMMUNITY WE SHARE.**

# CORE VALUES

## COMMUNITY

Dobama nurtures personal and professional relationships in and outside of the theatre community by supporting the growth of local theatre artists and by reaching out, giving back, and embracing our neighbors in the Northeast Ohio region.

## ARTISTRY

Dobama creates extraordinary theatre through dynamic, provocative productions and fearless programming that asks burning questions about the human experience.

## JUSTICE

Dobama humbly serves each person, honoring the dignity of all. Dobama puts love into action in the ongoing pursuit of justice.

## (R)EVOLUTION

Dobama makes bold change by putting people first and ensuring that everyone has a voice in that change. We consistently, audaciously adapt and hold ourselves accountable in our commitment to lead with integrity, grit, and radical kindness.

# SUMMARY

Dobama's decision to become an Equity theater in 2014 signaled its long-term commitment to further professionalizing its operations and improving the working standards for artists in Cleveland. The first phase of this work focused on improving the quality of the process and product of the mainstage productions. Dobama has had incredible success in these efforts. Its work continues to be considered high-quality and professional by artists and audiences alike.

This strategic plan focuses on the next phase in two ways. First, Dobama is working to **bring community and education programming to the center of the organization** to further align with its mission. In the past, Dobama's education and community engagement programming was considered auxiliary programming. With the adoption of the revised mission statement, it is critical to grow the education and community engagement programs.

Second, the strategy focuses on **increasing staff capacity and organizational infrastructure** to support the long-term sustainability of the organization. Dobama has historically had a small staff of dedicated individuals who consistently produced exceptional theatre. In the past, this allowed Dobama to remain nimble by keeping overhead costs low, but it was not a sustainable practice. This resulted in staff feeling overworked and exhausted. In order to put Dobama on a path toward growth, it first had to address the fact that current staff levels could not maintain current programming levels, much less grow them. Luckily, Dobama has fostered a loyal staff and a reputation as an excellent place to work by being a company that prioritizes people first. This is Dobama's competitive advantage and its staff culture supports this competitive advantage. This strategic plan expands the number of staff, improves staff compensation, and develops the circular management practices of the organization as a way to retain the exceptional individuals currently on staff and attract the best administrative talent in Cleveland for new roles. Retention will help with Dobama's growth and overall sustainability.

The growth detailed in the plan will help Dobama connect to new communities, new donors, and increase its brand awareness in the Cleveland community. This strategy will set up Dobama for what it sees as the next phase of its growth: **exploring expanded dedicated facilities for the theatre.**

## EXPAND AND DEEPEN EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### BENCHMARKS

**YEAR 1** (1) Increase the number of teaching artists by 50% from current levels  
(2) Increase the number of children served by 20% from current levels  
(3) Convert three workshop schools to residency programs

**YEAR 2** (1) Complete and assess the first pilot of YPP Summer Camp  
(2) Expand in-school education programming into two districts Dobama has not previously served  
(3) Develop & implement a branding strategy for Dobama at the Heights Halloween Festival

**YEAR 3** (1) Pilot and assess two adult education offerings  
(2) Increase summer camp registration by 30% year over year  
(3) Cultivate one new sponsorship for The Heights Halloween Festival by leveraging new signage and branding opportunities

**YEAR 4** (1) Increase adult education programming by 30% year over year  
(2) Achieve profitability with Summer Camp Programming  
(3) Add one additional yearly community engagement event

### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- # of individuals (youth and adults) reached with education programming
- # of teaching artists trained by Dobama
- Rate of returning schools/partners for in-school residencies and workshops
- # of attendees at the Heights Halloween Festival
- # of participating homes/partners at the Heights Halloween Festival
- # of sponsors for the Heights Halloween Festival

## BUILD A SUSTAINABLE STAFFING PLAN WITH 8 FULL-TIME STAFF MEMBERS

### BENCHMARKS

- YEAR 1**
- (1) Employ a full-time staff of 6 employees
  - (2) Create contracts and job descriptions that clarify staff roles and responsibilities
  - (3) Increase staff compensation packages to be competitive with similar organizations in Cleveland
  - (4) Increase opportunities for collaboration between board and staff
- YEAR 2**
- (1) Increase staff confidence and empowerment in their individual roles while maintaining a culture of support and collaboration
  - (2) Complete an annual review process designed around reflections and future goals
  - (3) Increase the number of professional development engagement to one training per staff member
- YEAR 3**
- (1) Increase full-time staff to 7 employees
  - (2) Increase staff satisfaction, particularly around support for individual professional development
  - (3) Implement at least one new tool or software to help efficiency and communication
- YEAR 4**
- (1) Increase full-time staff to 8 employees in a circular management model while maintaining employee satisfaction and engagement
  - (2) Ensure that staff is taking at least 75% of PTO offered yearly
  - (3) Accomplish redundancy for all organizational tasks that are considered critical

### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- # of full-time staff
- Average length of employment for all current employees
- Employee and board engagement survey results
- Average staff salary
- # of roles that have job descriptions
- # of roles that have a manual for critical tasks
- # and diversity of applicants for new positions



# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

## RESPONSIBLY GROW ORGANIZATIONAL BUDGET TO A BREAK-EVEN BUDGET OF \$1 MILLION

### BENCHMARKS

- YEAR 1**
- (1) Increase operational expenses to \$820K
  - (2) Increase institutional contributions by 20%
  - (3) Increase ticket sales by 10%
  - (4) End FY24 with a deficit no more than \$70K

- YEAR 2**
- (1) Increase operational expenses to \$875K
  - (2) Increase individual donations by 10%
  - (3) Host one additional board-led fundraising event
  - (4) Secure one additional show sponsorship
  - (5) End FY25 with a deficit no more than \$50K

- YEAR 3**
- (1) Increase operational expenses to \$950K
  - (2) Increase season memberships by 10%
  - (3) Increase foundation income by 10%
  - (4) Launch a planned giving program
  - (5) End FY26 with a deficit no more than \$25K

- YEAR 4**
- (1) Increase operational expenses to \$1M
  - (2) Increase education program income by \$25,000
  - (3) Launch a signature event to be held annually
  - (4) Increase ticket sales by 10%
  - (5) End FY27 with a balanced budget

### KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Total expenses
- Total income
- Contributed revenue
- Staff compensation expenses
- Education programming expenses
- Community programming expenses

# ACTION PLAN

*In collaborative task forces, the Dobama board and staff created an action plan detailing the steps to reaching each benchmark and achieving each goal. This action plan will continue to shift and evolve as Dobama executes the strategic plan. This is meant to serve as a roadmap to success that can shift and change while our priorities stay the same. Click the following icons to see the full plans.*

COMMUNITY

+

EDUCATION

STAFF

+

SUSTAINABILITY

BUDGET

+

GROWTH

## NEXT STEPS

Now that the board has approved the strategic plan, the board and staff will develop and agree on a RACI chart for each benchmark with individual names. This chart will detail who is Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed in pursuit of each benchmark. This breakdown will help individuals and small task forces work independently and will help clarify who needs to be communicated with and when. Individuals and small groups who are Responsible or Accountable for each benchmark should work together to set clear expectations for the pace of the progress to each benchmark.

**Recommendation from Evolution Management Consultants:** *Because the breakout groups worked on the action plan together and already began working together, these breakout groups should continue as the board task forces or action committees for each of the strategic priorities. This group will be responsible for continuing to advance the goals and priorities in the plan. These groups can include staff, but the decision is up to the organization. Given the current staff workload, the board should be prepared to work independently in these committees.*

# BOARD

**MARIAN FAIRMAN**  
president

**MATTHEW R. EIBEN**  
treasurer

**TAMEKA BRADLEY**

**VINCENT BRILEY**

**CHRISTAL CONTINI**

**HEDY MILGROM**

**DONNA KORN**

**MARISSA GLYNIAS MOORE**

**DAISHA OLMEDA**

**JAMIE OWEN**

**DEBRA ROSENTHAL**

**CAROLINE JACKSON SMITH**

**JOSEPH P. SMITH**

**TRINIDAD SNIDER**

**KATE VLASEK**

**BRITTANY WATKINS**

**EUGENE SUMLIN**

**RACHEL ZAKE**  
vice president

**KILLEEN VOGEL**  
secretary

# STAFF

**NATHAN MOTTA**  
artistic director

**COLIN ANDERSON**  
director of production

**MARIAH BURKS**  
director of engagement

**ERIN E. DOLAN**  
director of programs

**ELISE KUKLINCA**  
connectivity director

**CARRIE WILLIAMS**  
director of education

**ESMA EDEB**  
dobama intern

**LISA LANGFORD**  
cleveland artist

**CALI PAREY**  
dobama intern

**YESENIA REAL-RIVERA**  
cleveland artist

**LEANDRO ZANETI**  
consultant

# COMMITTEE

*This strategic plan is a living document that is meant to guide the decision-making and day-to-day operations of Dobama. In order to serve its full function, the strategy should be incorporated into all areas of operations at all levels within the organization. Below are a few recommendations for reviewing and operationalizing the strategic plan.*

**1. for staff, progress on benchmarks should be reported at all-staff meetings on a monthly basis. a portion of the all-staff meeting can be dedicated to helping collaboratively brainstorm solutions to challenges or to celebrating progress.**

**2. the board should dedicate a portion of each meeting to assessing progress on each yearly benchmark, as well as progress to the overall strategic priority. a portion of each meeting can be dedicated to brainstorming ways the board can be engaged to help further each strategic priority.**

**3. once per year the board and staff should have a retreat-style convening. Individuals who were listed as “accountable” in the RACI chart should report on whether or not they have hit the benchmarks set, detailing challenges they faced and lessons they learned throughout the year. based on these reports, the board and staff should work together to adjust the action plan and benchmarks (if needed) for the following year. this practice will help the board and staff stay committed to the goals in the strategic plan while consistently adapting the plan to incorporate progress and new information.**

# WITH LOVE & RESPECT



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