

Burlington Writers Workshop Strategic Planning Summary

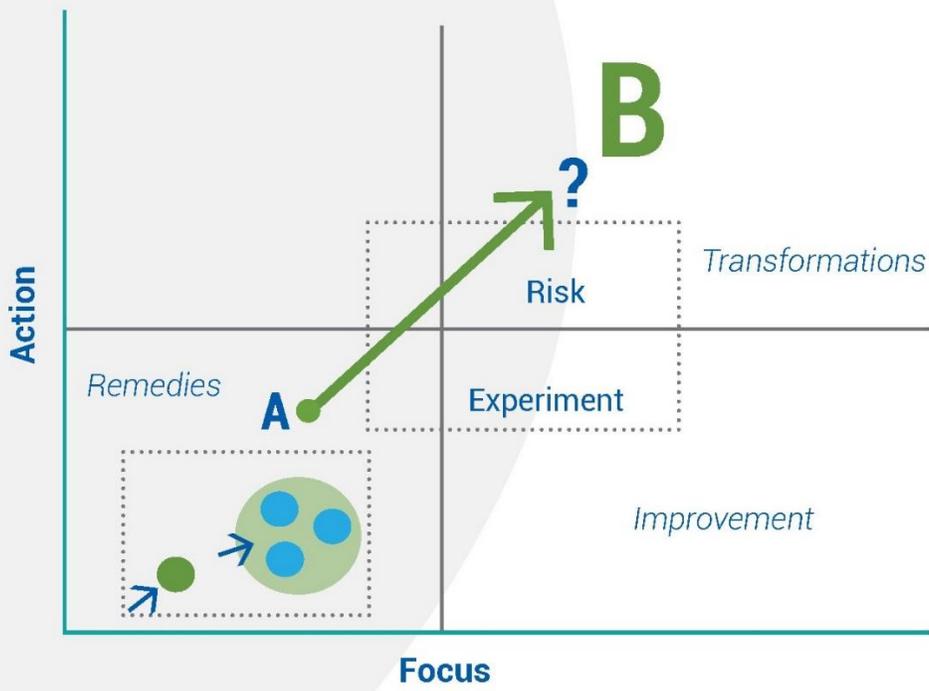
On a bitter cold January 6, 2018, morning, about 26 active Burlington Writers Workshop members gathered at the Fletcher Free Library to kick off a strategic planning process with a three-hour retreat. The session was facilitated by Liz Dallas, owner of Vital Leadership Coaching and the Coaching Center of Vermont, who donated her time to the BWW.

Ideas and passion flew constantly, and the results helped to define and refine directions for our energy in the coming year(s). This was a first step. The board of directors will use some of this work in decision making, and, in other areas, such as the further refinement of our mission, vision and values statements, the collective work will continue.

In the meantime, the notes below summarize the January 6 discussion. The approach Liz used in facilitating the conversation is shown in the graphic below, the “A-to-B model.”

Visionary Thinking

Instead of moving away from pain and solving individual problems reactively, an inspiring Vision spurs us on with the excitement of new possibilities that exist outside of our familiar problem-solving paradigms.



“A” State: The honest [ugly and beautiful] truth of now

In this exercise, participants were asked to identify “the pain of now” so, as we talked about the future, we would be clear about what motivated our vision of the future...what we wanted instead of the pain of now.

- On the cusp of “everything is possible”
- Web platform is dysfunctional; digital tools are a patchwork with limited helpfulness, misinformation, too complex; Meet Up is used in ways it wasn’t intended, for everything

- People are disoriented, confused, frustrated about the process and content of workshop tools
- People slip through the cracks
- Unserved member needs
- It takes too much work to manage the group for the current management model
- People give up
- Identity issue: rigor & excellence vs open & inclusive, judged vs supported
- Divergent view of “excellence,” subject to personal interpretation
- BWW’s usefulness is limited in the long run for some; one (or a few) level of service for many levels of skill; people have different needs
- Board is acting as staff
- In spite of uncertainties, change and tensions, we have the flexibility to create new workshops and willingness to try new things at the drop of a hat
- We keep trying to do more with the same resources
- Many volunteers, but volunteers may wane in their availability/energy
- Low awareness of our niche/place in the larger cultural and educational community
- Varying sensitivity to stakeholders

“B” State: The visionary place of possible success

- People move to Burlington because of BWW
- All find a “home” that nurtures, fosters, challenges the writers’ voice in all
- BWW is a vital contributor to the community (world) at large
- We exhibit kinship in working together and concern for each other. We express compassion for one another.
- BWW serves as an alternative to the academic path of MFA. Undercuts the need for college tuition to be a writer.
- The writing “go to” community. A model that inspires other writing communities.
- Shared understanding of vision, values, mission
- Trust in the good that’s created together
- BWW is a “place” and an “environment” that attracts inspiring colleagues, masterful teachers, and profession-defining moments.
- We intuitively know the needs of our stakeholders, adapting our programs to meet newly articulated needs.
- High impact with endless resources, valuing above all else each other as people, our time and energy.
- Generous community of gifted contributors...for the world.
- Diversity is key to our success. We have an ever expanding “we.”
- Celebrate all that is... MSR for the rebirth and new insight that it brings and the interaction with the wider writing world. Beginners for fresh eyes. Elders for wisdom.
- We are an environment that exponentially bumps up our creativity.

Initiatives Flowing from the “B” state discussion

- Cultivate kinship
- The concept of “workshop” is the focus of innovation and reimagination
- Create/make BWW a “home”

A	?	B
Now	PROBABLE	POSSIBLE
Free	Contribute	Wildly,
	Blood	widely
	Sweat	accessible
	Tears	
	\$	

Some elements of what we seek to be/do (to help us with our mission/vision/values definition)

To help people:

- in personal growth through writing
- achieve their own goals for their writing
- find ways to share outside the workshops
- be important to the larger community
- and to encourage unheard voices to be heard

Key words to define

- Service
- Free: open, welcoming, accessible (should not necessarily be about admission charge)
- Community: internal and external stakeholders
- Excellence