



**RINO ART
DISTRICT**

STRATEGIC PLAN

2022-2027

TABLE OF CONTENTS

03

Executive Summary

05

Plan Visual

06

Introduction

07

Planning Approach & Engagement

Appendix:

a. RiNo Initiatives & Resources

b. Acknowledgements

09

History and Context

11

What We Learned: Major Themes

16

Where We Are Going: 2022-2027

23

Conclusion

PREPARED BY:



PURPOSE ALIGNED
CONSULTING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are proud to present the 2022-2027 strategic plan for the RiNo Art District. This plan is grounded in the organization's mission: **RiNo champions local artists, creatives, and businesses to support a vibrant, engaged, and inclusive art district.** The plan was developed with input and consultation from RiNo's diverse stakeholders: artists and creatives, local businesses, local residents, visitors, and civic stakeholders.

For nearly twenty years, the RiNo Art District has been home to creative businesses, impressive festivals, award-winning restaurants, innovative murals and public art, as well as a variety of arts experiences. The area enjoys recognition throughout the state and beyond. RiNo is a Colorado certified art district. This plan continues to advance RiNo's historical commitment to **creativity, supporting local businesses, and stewarding the physical conditions of the area.** It also takes into consideration the many ways **growth** has and will continue to impact the district.

The RiNo Art District is an organization with a small staff and a big vision. This plan capitalizes on its strengths in **convening and collaboration** to tackle complex challenges facing the area. It calls for a renewed and expanded focus on **advocacy, outreach, and communication.**

The plan works on issues important to key stakeholders including **affordability, safety, cleanliness, and green space.** It leverages RiNo's current work on **creative programming, RiNo ArtPark, and public realm improvements** including mobility. Woven throughout all activities is the understanding that building an equitable, representative art district is key to achieving RiNo's mission.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONTINUED

At the heart of this document are five objectives that will drive RiNo's work over the next several years.

These are to:

- Foster a healthy, welcoming, and inclusive art district
- Cultivate creative programming for all
- Increase affordable creative and small business space
- Nurture RiNo's public realm with art, infrastructure, mobility, and green initiatives
- Strengthen relationships and communication with RiNo's stakeholders

Thank you to the many people who engaged in the creation of this plan: the Strategic Planning Committee, led by Executive Director Tracy Weil; the many stakeholders who participated in interviews, focus groups, or surveys; RiNo boards and staff; and planning consultant Kerri Drumm of Purpose Aligned Consulting.

This plan calls on RiNo to engage deeply with its stakeholders and communities. It is also an invitation to join us in continuing to build a vibrant, engaged, and inclusive art district.

Executive Director, Tracy Weil - RiNo Art District

Executive Committee - Sonia Danielsen - RiNo Art District, Anne Hayes - Keep RiNo Wild, Bernard Hurley - RiNo General Improvement District, Diana Merkel - RiNo Business Improvement District

THE PLAN 2022-2027

Foster a healthy, welcoming, and inclusive art district

1

- 1.1 Cultivate community connections to enhance safety in RiNo
- 1.2 Engage stakeholders and implement a strategy to maintain a clean environment
- 1.3 Steward growth to help maintain RiNo's unique character
- 1.4 Foster an inclusive art district

Cultivate creative programming for all

2

- 2.1 Deliver a large-scale annual art event and support grassroots events held by others
- 2.2 Nurture ArtPark as a creative hub through programs, relationship building, and partnerships
- 2.3 Support and expand creative programming

Increase affordable creative and small business space

3

- 3.1 Advocate for affordable creative and small business space through policy and community organizing
- 3.2 Create and steward RiNo-operated affordable spaces
- 3.3 Partner with property owners, brokers, corporations, and developers to identify and create access to space

Nurture RiNo's public realm with art, infrastructure, mobility, and green initiatives

4

- 4.1 Improve mobility and accessibility
- 4.2 Ensure art is incorporated into all relevant infrastructure projects
- 4.3 Increase the tree canopy and support the delivery of sustainable urban landscaping practices

Strengthen relationships and communication with RiNo's stakeholders

5

- 5.1 Implement outreach and communication strategies to specific stakeholder groups
- 5.2 Use RiNo's marketing and communications platforms to support and inform

INTRODUCTION

In fall 2021, RiNo began work on a strategic plan. Still in the midst of the pandemic, RiNo's goal was to create a plan that was both focused but also adaptable. The plan was created over the last quarter of 2021 and the first quarter of 2022. While this continues to be a period of uncertainty, people are moving beyond pandemic-related restrictions and attaining a new sense of normalcy. Many of RiNo's stakeholders are ready to partner, attend events, and reconnect in person. RiNo has also recently achieved a major milestone with the RiNo ArtPark¹, which opened its doors in summer 2021.

This plan reflects the voices of RiNo's many communities. It recognizes the district has changed since its founding and will continue to do so. The plan advances RiNo's historical commitment to placemaking and supporting businesses while focusing more deeply on some of the new needs brought about by growth. It is paired with an internal implementation strategy that addresses considerations such as governance, finance, and staffing. Lastly, with ample opportunities for community participation, the plan is a call to action for all those committed to the district as well as the creative sector in RiNo and beyond.



PLANNING APPROACH

In fall 2021, RiNo Art District engaged Purpose Aligned Consulting to support the strategic planning process. Kerri Drumm and her team undertook qualitative and quantitative analysis. Internal RiNo documents were reviewed, including past and current plans, surveys, outcome reports, financials, and other materials. Purpose Aligned drew on a wide variety of external resources including research into the industry and local trends, city and state efforts, other local arts and nonprofit organizations, media coverage, and more.

Critical input from RiNo's stakeholders was collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and community input gathered at RiNo's ArtPark Festival. In total, perspectives were gathered from 404 stakeholders. Focused outreach ensured that representative voices were engaged. These voices included creatives and artists, small and large businesses, RiNo members, RiNo ratepayers, residents of the area including surrounding neighborhoods, and the general public. People from various identity groups and those with historic ties to the area were engaged as well. RiNo's boards and staff played a core role in the process. The plan was developed over five months via ongoing work with the Strategic Planning Committee, which is made up of board members and staff. The plan was reviewed and edited by staff and later by RiNo's boards at a facilitated retreat. It was approved by the RiNo Art District Boards of Directors in March 2022.



PROCESS

MODE	PEOPLE	NUMBER
Interviews	Staff, board members	10 People
Focus Groups	Staff, business owners, creatives, board members	39 People
Survey	Open to all; respondents included board members, creatives, business owners, residents, members, and the public	266 People
Community Info Gathering	ArtPark Opening Weekend attendees	75 People
Facilitated Meetings	Strategic planning committee, key staff	14 People
	TOTAL ENGAGED	404 PEOPLE

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

As a former industrial hub, the RiNo Art District is a part of the historic neighborhoods of Five Points, Cole, Globeville, and Elyria-Swansea in Denver, Colorado. During the turn of the last century, the area was home to foundries and factories that helped drive Denver's economic success. As industry moved out of the city's core in the late 80s and 90s, the corridor was left with several vacant warehouses. Artists soon began to move into these warehouses.

In 2004, local leaders and the City of Denver drafted the River North Plan to revitalize the area that is now RiNo. In 2005, local artists created the River North Art District with the desire to foster a creative community that would connect artists working and living in the area. In 2015, voters approved two special districts. The RiNo BID (Business Improvement District)² and the RiNo GID (General Improvement District)³ help to prioritize arts and culture, local business support, and public realm improvements as the area grows.

Today, the RiNo Art District is a nonprofit, a registered neighborhood organization, and a state-certified creative district. It is supported by the RiNo BID, the RiNo GID, as well as diverse fundraising sources including events, grants, and donations.

@tasteburns



HISTORY AND CONTEXT CONTINUED

RiNo enjoys wide recognition across Denver and beyond. The organization's many assets include dedicated staff; engaged artists, creatives, and small businesses; public art projects and murals; secure funding mechanisms; relationships with the City of Denver; a track record of successful infrastructure and physical character improvements; and well-known arts events and initiatives. The recently opened RiNo ArtPark is fast becoming a community hub for creativity and commerce.

For two decades, the district has experienced rapid and dramatic growth. This has been a boon, leading to increases in visitors, commerce, creativity, and opportunities. Growth, however, has also brought challenges. Some of these include affordability issues, mobility and transportation concerns, increased physical infrastructure needs, safety, cleanliness, and more. Because RiNo is viewed as both an organization and a physical area, the public does not always understand who RiNo is or what it does. RiNo is a small organization with just seven staff. Focusing and limiting RiNo's work is critical to achieving its goals.

@novacancyrino



WHAT WE LEARNED: MAJOR THEMES

As an organization serving a large and diverse group of stakeholders, there are many, sometimes conflicting ideas about what RiNo should do. Luckily, research for the strategic plan revealed shared values, needs, and aspirations. Research also highlighted RiNo's role in convening, collaborating, and advocating as primary mechanisms to enact change.

CONVENING & COLLABORATION:

One of RiNo's greatest strengths is its role as a convener. Stakeholders praised RiNo's efforts to bring the community together, and provide opportunities for people to connect and partner with each other. As we move out of the pandemic, there is an opportunity for RiNo to ramp up this role. Creatives, business owners, and the public want more opportunities to network, share resources, and work together.

As a small organization, RiNo's most successful efforts have been achieved through intentional collaboration. Instead of going it alone, RiNo's approach involves seeking and developing partnerships with other organizations, groups, or individuals. Ongoing, focused efforts to organize collaborations help RiNo increase its impact.

ADVOCACY:

Stakeholders praised RiNo's advocacy efforts at the city and local levels. They also agreed that solutions to complex problems like safety and affordability need government support. In the past, RiNo struggled to define what it meant by advocacy. The strategic planning committee developed the following statement to inform RiNo's approach to advocacy: "To identify the larger issues impacting RiNo and then mobilize RiNo's people to act on these issues." Advocacy in this definition includes first outreach and information gathering, and then activities such as legislative action, education, collaborations with the city and private sector, and more.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION (DEI):

Over the past several years, RiNo has made efforts to build a more inclusive organization. Stakeholders recognized RiNo's social impact grants, efforts to feature diverse artists, and internal DEI work. RiNo understands that DEI work is ongoing and requires sustained commitment. RiNo will continue to support, highlight, and invest in DEI throughout internal processes and external approaches.



RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITIES:

Communities are expansive and come with different needs and desires. RiNo's success is predicated on strong relationships with the many people and groups that make up and participate in the district. Because of this complexity, RiNo seeks a multifaceted approach to connecting with communities.

Intentional outreach has enabled strong relationships between many of RiNo's people. However, as RiNo has grown, inviting newcomers to understand and participate in the work of the district has become more challenging. The pandemic has exacerbated these difficulties. As new people come into the area, they may not be aware of RiNo or how to contribute to collective efforts.

RiNo also recognizes the importance of increasing outreach to its members, local neighborhoods (Five Points, Cole, Globeville, and Elyria-Swansea), historically marginalized groups, and youth. Outreach, paired with information gathering, will enable RiNo to understand communities more deeply and to develop programs that respond to their needs.

RiNo has been successful in branding the district as well as sharing activities and events happening in the area. RiNo also seeks a more targeted approach to communication, delivering messaging relevant to distinct stakeholder groups. RiNo will also leverage its platform for stakeholder communication and to share and highlight the work of its members and stakeholders.

AFFORDABILITY:

Affordability has been a concern since RiNo's early days. However, in the last several years, rising costs have made it difficult for creatives and small businesses to operate in the district. The loss of these groups has and will continue to impact the district's character. As an artist stated, "An art district without artists is just an entrainment district." Across all research, affordability arose as a top priority.

Affordability issues are not unique to RiNo, nor are they within the power of RiNo alone to impact. Instead of trying to solve all aspects of affordability, the organization will concentrate on affordable small business and creative spaces. This will include partnerships for a variety of short-term efforts and advocacy for larger solutions.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT:

Many of RiNo's key interventions relate to stewarding infrastructure and mobility within the district. Projects like the development of Brighton Boulevard, Walnut Street Improvements, and the mural program have helped the district to grow sustainability while ensuring art remains at its center.

However, growth and development also continue to put pressure on the area's physical environment. The most common concerns for stakeholders are safety, cleanliness, green space, and mobility and transportation issues. As crime has increased, safety has become a concern for residents, business owners, and the public. Cleanliness concerns relate to an increase in trash, graffiti, and dirty streets and sidewalks. As a former industrial area, RiNo does not have many trees or green space. Transportation and mobility issues are complex, many of which can only be solved via large-scale collaborative efforts. To solve transportation and mobility issues, RiNo will need to continue to work closely with the City of Denver.

ARTPARK & FESTIVAL

RiNo will be able to realize many of its creative and programming goals at the newly opened ArtPark. This creative hub provides accessible community space and green space, both of which the area has historically lacked. Through partnerships with local nonprofits and the Denver Public Library, the ArtPark also includes studio spaces, a food incubator, and classrooms. A second building is still in the works and is slated to open in 2024. The development of ArtPark will be a major focus in the upcoming years.

RiNo's past large-scale festivals enjoyed wide recognition across the Front Range. Many stakeholders view festivals as one of RiNo's core activities. Since the pandemic, these events have largely stopped. RiNo now has an exciting opportunity to develop a new annual event that brings people together to celebrate and connect through creativity.

[@greggandy](#)



WHERE WE ARE GOING: 2022-2027

Based on what was learned during the strategic planning process, RiNo revisited its mission. This mission, along with RiNo's values and recognition of its key constituents, are the guiding principles behind this plan. Through a facilitated process, the committee and staff created goals and objectives for 2022-2027. Each goal has associated objectives and tactics. RiNo staff continue to work on the internal aspects of the plan including specific actions, ownership, timelines. The Strategic Plan will guide decision-making, short-term work plans, and long-term efforts. RiNo will report annually on the plan's progress.

MISSION

RiNo champions local artists, creatives, and businesses to support a vibrant, engaged, and inclusive Art District.

VALUES

- **Community-driven:** A community-driven approach with art as a common thread.
- **Advocacy:** Advocacy for safety, inclusivity, affordability, and accessibility.
- **Creativity and culture:** Opportunities to bring people together through creativity and culture.
- **Collaboration and partnership:** True creative collaboration and partnership with stakeholders.

RINO'S STAKEHOLDERS

- **Artists and creatives**
- **Local businesses**
- **Local residents**
- **The broader Denver community**
- **Visitors**
- **Civic stakeholders**

KEY GOALS & TACTICS

1. Foster a healthy, welcoming, and inclusive art district

1.1. Cultivate community connections to enhance safety in RiNo

- 1.1.1. Convene a safety task force to develop and implement strategies to support safety in the district
- 1.1.2. Create stronger connections between local law enforcement and stakeholders

1.2. Engage stakeholders and implement a strategy to maintain a clean environment

- 1.2.1. Implement and support district and riverbank clean-up days
- 1.2.2. Expand RiNo's recycling and landfill program as necessary
- 1.2.3. Expand RiNo's relationship with organizations that support those affected by homelessness to deliver district-wide sanitation services
- 1.2.4. Communicate maintenance and upkeep priorities to property owners and tenants

1.3. Steward growth to help maintain RiNo's unique character

- 1.3.1. Continue to implement the RiNo Design Review⁴ for new construction
- 1.3.2. Provide education around RiNo's history and structure through collateral, public relations, and messaging
- 1.3.3. Ensure RiNo activities and actions incorporate creative/artistic approaches

1.4. Foster an inclusive art district

- 1.4.1. Ensure all RiNo-convened groups represent diverse voices through intentional recruitment and continued DEI training
- 1.4.2. Expand the social impact grant program focused upon BIPOC organizations and racial justice
- 1.4.3. Partner with organizations and initiatives that promote housing for the unhoused and creative solutions for those without permanent shelter

KEY GOALS & TACTICS

2. Cultivate creative programming for all

2.1. Deliver a large-scale annual art event and support grassroots events held by others

- 2.1.1. Develop and implement a free, annual arts event that expands Denver's creative scene and bolsters local artists and businesses
- 2.1.2. Support grassroots art events held by third parties through partnerships, calls for proposals, and funding

2.2. Nurture ArtPark as a creative hub through programs, relationship building, and partnerships

- 2.2.1. Create RiNo-led workshops, programs, and community events
- 2.2.2. Implement performing arts programming through RiNo-led initiatives and partnerships
- 2.2.3. Design environmental programming through RiNo-led initiatives and partnerships
- 2.2.4. Create a strategy to educate the public about ArtPark activities and to welcome park use

2.3. Support and expand creative programming

- 2.3.1. Develop relationships with schools and youth-serving partners to create opportunities for youth programming
- 2.3.2. Continue entrepreneurship activities for creatives such as Tools for the Creative Life⁵ and other workshops
- 2.3.3. Ensure new RiNo programs focus on a variety of art forms including visual, literary, culinary, and performing
- 2.3.4. Support First Friday and programs led by others
- 2.3.5. Identify and collaborate with groups to provide programs in partnership with RiNo

KEY GOALS & TACTICS

3. Increase affordable creative and small business space

3.1. Advocate for affordable creative and small business space through policy and community organizing

3.1.1. Create an affordability committee to lead this work

3.1.2. With the support of an advocacy expert(s) and the committee, design and implement an affordability strategy

3.2 Create and steward RiNo-operated affordable spaces

3.2.1. Manage and promote the RiNo Art District Studios on Blake to offer affordable creative space

3.2.2. Continue to build ArtPark to provide affordable space for creatives and the community

3.3. Partner with property owners, brokers, corporations, and developers to identify and create access to space

3.3.1. Work in partnership with developers and brokers to identify opportunities for affordable short-term creative and small business space

3.3.2. Seek opportunities to incorporate art, studio, performance, and gallery space in new development proposals

KEY GOALS & TACTICS

4. Nurture RiNo's public realm with art, infrastructure, mobility, and green initiatives

4.1. Improve mobility and accessibility

4.1.1. Create a committee that focuses on improving transit and mobility

4.1.2. Continue to bring partners together to develop a funding and delivery strategy for the North Denver Circulator

4.1.3. Partner with the City and County of Denver to develop the North Denver curbside-management plan to address parking, loading, scooters, cycles, electric charging points, and pedestrian access

4.2. Ensure art is incorporated into all relevant infrastructure projects

4.2.1. Continue to create paid opportunities for local artists and creatives

4.2.2. Work with developers to curate internal and external art to showcase the local creative community

4.2.3. Coordinate with the City and County of Denver to create art opportunities in public infrastructure projects

4.2.4. Create a public art committee to ensure local communities have a voice in the curation of public art throughout the district

4.3. Increase the tree canopy and support the delivery of sustainable urban⁸ landscaping practices

4.3.1. Plant and maintain more trees through RiNo's Urban Forest Initiative

4.3.2. Work with private landowners and the City to support the replacement of damaged or dead existing trees

4.3.3. Engage with the development community to promote high-quality and sustainable public realm design through the RiNo Design Standards⁹

KEY GOALS & TACTICS

5. Strengthen relationships and communication with RiNo's stakeholders

5.1. Implement outreach and communication strategies to specific stakeholder groups

- 5.1.1. Strengthen relationships with the following groups: RiNo members, historic partner neighborhoods (Globeville, Elyria Swansea, Cole, Five Points), BIPOC individuals and groups, and youth through targeted outreach and communication plans
- 5.1.2. Develop and implement an orientation process for groups and businesses new to RiNo
- 5.1.3. Complete an annual stakeholder survey to understand community needs

5.2. Use RiNo's marketing and communications platforms to support and inform

- 5.2.1. Develop and formalize a community neighborhood online communication platform
- 5.2.2. Restart in-person events for businesses and creatives to share resources and network
- 5.2.3. Expand emphasis on RiNo's members, small businesses, and creatives in RiNo's social media
- 5.2.4. Evaluate and modify, as needed, RiNo's messaging and communications efforts to ensure public understanding of RiNo and its activities

CONCLUSION

“The world always seems brighter when you’ve just made something that wasn’t there before.”

- Neil Gaiman

The RiNo Art District is a leader amongst creative districts. Thanks to the passion and dedication of RiNo staff, boards, creatives and stakeholders, the district has grown into a vibrant, creative center. The organization now has an opportunity to continue its successful trajectory, while focusing even more deeply on responding to the changing landscape and constituent needs.

As RiNo continues to grow, the organization will dedicate resources to helping ensure creatives and small businesses have a place in the district. RiNo will expand its efforts to deliver creative programming, with the ArtPark serving as a center for creativity and community. RiNo remains dedicated to public realm improvements. To achieve the plan, RiNo will double down on relationship building, outreach, advocacy, and collaboration. The work to be done is substantial. But RiNo will draw on its record of results and on the expertise of its communities to continue building a vibrant, engaged, and inclusive Art District.

APPENDIX A: RINO INITIATIVES & RESOURCES

Links to initiatives and projects referred to in the strategic plan.

1. [RiNo ArtPark](#)
2. [RiNo BID](#)
3. [RiNo GID](#)
4. [RiNo Design Review](#)
5. [Tools for the Creative Life](#)
6. [RiNo Art Studios on Blake](#)
7. [North Denver Circulator](#)
8. RiNo's Urban Forest (New for 2022)
9. [RiNo Design Standards](#)

APPENDIX B: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING PARTICIPANTS

Strategic Planning Committee

Sonia Danielsen
Andrew Feinstein
Anne Hayes
Gerald Horner
Bernard Hurley
Diana Merkel
John Deffenbaugh
Tracy Weil
Alye Sharp

RiNo Staff

John Deffenbaugh
Molly Paillet
Alex Pangburn
Marian Pulford
Alye Sharp
Adrienne Villa
Tracy Weil
Eva Zimmerman

Plan Focus Groups and Interview participants:

Tai Beldock
Sharon Brown
Susan Dillon
Chloé Duplessis
Kara Finkelstein
Robert Gray
Jonathan Kaplan

Becky Miller
Leah Podzimek
Yoshitomo Saito
Andi Todaro
Marla Yetka
Jason ZumBrunnen

RiNo BID Board

Obe Ariss
Levi Johnsen
Tom Kiler
Adam Larkey
Diana Merkel
Carla Mestas
Rachel Rabun
Jevon Taylor

RiNo GID Board

Edee Anesi
Councilwoman Candi CdeBaca
Dan Flaherty
Liam Girard
Karen Good, City of Denver
Kirsty Greer
Bernard Hurley
Andrew Katz
Teresa Ortiz
James Roupp

RiNo KRW Board

Jayne Buck
Sonia Danielsen
Brent Fedrizzi
Anne Hayes

RiNo RAD Board

Andrew Feinstein
Anne Hayes
Gerald Horner
Bernard Hurley
Jonathan Kaplan
Diana Merkel
Jonathan Power