



# Prairie Roots, Big Dreams

Briarpatch's Strategic Plan | 2024 - 2027



Illustration by Paterson Hodgson

Prepared by



## About the Strategic Plan

This Strategic Plan was developed by Ivy + Dean Consulting throughout 2023 and early 2024 with the Briarpatch team.

This Strategic Plan was written by Risa Payant at Ivy + Dean Consulting.

This Strategic Plan was informed by a community engagement cohort. Thank you to those people who made this possible:

- Tanya Andrusieczko
- David Camfield
- Su Deranger
- Jenn Harris
- Aina Kagis
- Daniel Sarah Karasik
- Sharmeen Khan
- Andrew Loewen
- Nickita Longman
- Shayna Stock
- Florence Stratton

## Briarpatch Funders

Briarpatch Magazine acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF) for our publishing activities.

## About Ivy + Dean Consulting

i+d was founded by Jacq Brasseur in July 2021. i+d is a bilingual consulting firm designed to bring equity focused, community-informed, and accessible approaches to governance, leadership, and programming for small and medium-sized non-profits. At the time of writing, i+d currently has offices in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories and Regina, Saskatchewan, places that are close to i+d's heart and inform our values of priority service for those living and working in non-metropolitan Canada.

# Who We Are

“Briarpatch is an award-winning magazine of politics and culture. Fiercely independent and proudly polemical, Briarpatch offers original reporting, insight, and analysis from a grassroots perspective. As a reader-supported publication, Briarpatch is not just devoted to reporting on social movements—it’s committed to building them.

Since 1973, Briarpatch has been publishing committed journalism and critical commentary from its home in Regina, Saskatchewan. Beholden only to its readers, Briarpatch defies the false consensus of the corporate media, adhering, as Avi Lewis says, to “independence and ferocity in equal measure.”

Briarpatch is published bimonthly by Briarpatch Incorporated, an independent non-profit organization overseen by a volunteer Board of Directors. Briarpatch is a member of the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association and the staff are members of SJB-RWDSU Local 568.”<sup>1</sup>

1 Briarpatch Incorporated (n.d.). About Briarpatch. Briarpatch Magazine. Retrieved May 15, 2024, from <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/about>

## Covers from May/June 2024 to March/April 2023



## Our Strategic Plan

Briarpatch Magazine was pleased to work with Ivy + Dean Consulting (i+d) to complete a comprehensive Strategic Plan to guide our work from 2024 through 2027. Of note, i+d Chief Executive Officer & Principal Consultant, Jacq Brasseur, and Chief Operations Officer & Principal Consultant, Risa Payant, served as Directors and Officers (in the roles of Chair and Treasurer, respectively) of Briarpatch Magazine from December 2020 to October 2023. During this time, Jacq and Risa provided ongoing support in planning for strategic planning. When it was determined they would be departing from the Board of Directors in late-2023 to focus on the growth of their consulting firm, they offered ongoing support for strategic planning in a pro-bono capacity on behalf of i+d in an attempt to see their commitments through to fruition.

In determining an approach to this work, we aimed to prioritize the engagement of current and former employees, board members, contributors, sustainers, and “leftists-about-town”—a crucial cohort of those who make up the broader Briarpatch Magazine community—then provide findings to the Board of Directors in aid of developing an actionable strategic plan. To establish a foundation for community engagement, the strategic planning working group completed an informal SWOT analysis and determined four priority areas of focus with support from i+d in September 2023.

In October 2023, i+d confirmed community engagement participants. Virtual community consultations took place in November 2023 and were facilitated by i+d. This plan would not have been possible without the crucial contributions of the community engagement cohort. Thank you Tanya Andrusieczko, David Camfield, Su Deranger, Jenn Harris, Aina Kagis, Daniel Sarah Karasik, Sharmeen Khan, Andrew Loewen, Nickita Longman, Shayna Stock, and Florence Stratton. Findings resulting from community engagement were captured in a brief that was distributed internally and set the foundation for strategic planning sessions.

March 2024, Briarpatch Magazine staff and board members participated in intensive virtual strategic planning sessions facilitated by i+d. These sessions included a review of the community engagement brief, and opportunities to brainstorming tactics and establish SMART goals within the four priority areas. Following these sessions, Briarpatch Magazine Board Chair Connor Spencer, Editor Sophie Jin, and Publisher John Cameron, with the support of Ivy + Dean Consulting, refined draft goals in a virtual strategic work planning session on April 16, 2024. This final step in the strategic planning process ensured the Briarpatch Magazine team was confident in implementing their strategic plan and meeting the goals outlined within.

## A Message from the Chair

It is my great pleasure to represent the Board of Directors with this letter of support for the Briarpatch strategic plan.

We are so grateful to the many generations of Briarpatch community members who have already participated in the consultation process so far by sharing their expertise, and we hope that the work we partake together as this process continues will serve with Briarpatch readers and community members to come.

Embarking on this project to ensure the future of this scrappy magazine we all love within the context of the attack on Canadian media feels necessary and generative. We know we on the Board are but a few people within the large network of movers and shakers within Briarpatch's orbit across Canada and particularly within the prairies. We look forward to continuing to meet and work with many of you as we move this plan forward in its various stages.

We are deeply grateful to Ivy & Dean for their work supporting us through this work, the staff for their immense dedication, and to the readers for their loyalty.

### **Towards a sustainable Briarpatch!**

**Connor Lea Spencer**  
Board Chair

## A Message from Staff

Everything we do at Briarpatch is built on the work of people who come before us. Today, we're a longstanding national left media institution, but our upstart beginnings were as a newsletter for low-income people. What we are now has been the product of hard work, organizing, and community-building among people hungry to motivate change and spur action they could see in their own lives. Putting this strategic plan together was a process of figuring out how to move forward with that history in mind while continuing to build a resilient media institution. We want the Briarpatch legacy of fiercely independent journalism to continue challenging power and growing movements for years to come. We're so excited to start working on it and so honoured to be able to share this vision with you.

As staff, and current stewards of the magazine's legacy, we're grateful for the feedback, direction, and wisdom provided to us by community members, former staff, and other supporters with a vested interest in keeping Briarpatch a standard-bearer for grassroots reporting and radical political analysis in so-called Canada. We're also tremendously grateful for the time and energy of our volunteer board throughout this process, as well as the thoughtful and generous efforts of Ivy & Dean to bring this to fruition.

Thanks to everyone who helped put this together, and to everyone who'll be involved with carrying it out in the months and years to come. **And thanks to you, the reader, for supporting Briarpatch – a magazine we've all built, over time, together.**

**Sophie Jin**  
Interim Editor

**Meera Eragoda**  
Editor

**John Cameron**  
Publisher



## A Message from Ivy + Dean Consulting

There have been times where we've described Briarpatch as our origin story.

As two leftist, progressive people who love the prairies, both of us made a decision to join the Board of Directors of Briarpatch in 2020. We had already been in love with the work of the magazine and it was only a matter of time before we discovered a similar respect for each other. While serving on the Board together for almost three years, we became close friends and eventually business partners.

When we left the organization, we felt a responsibility to support the magazine moving forward. If you're a part of the Briarpatch community, this is probably unsurprising to hear. It is clear from the immense contributions from across the country in putting this plan together that many people who've been connected to Briarpatch over the past five decades feel a similar affinity as we do to the magazine.

We are so honoured to have been able to support the Briarpatch team on building a strategic plan that, we hope, will see Briarpatch develop a more equitable, engaged, sustainable, and balanced future for the organization.

**Jacq Brasseur**  
Strategic Planner  
CEO & Principal Consultant

**Risa Payant**  
Strategic Planner  
COO & Principal Consultant

# Our Priorities

## Working Conditions

Challenges we want to address:

### • Strained Staff Capacity

For decades staff have reported being overworked. Evidence of this can be seen when staff are frequently unable to take paid vacation and/or sick time.

This was seen as an issue of capacity, specifically, and not an issue of policy to support a healthy personal/professional balance as the Briarpatch Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) is robust.

The culture of independent media (and journalism in general) is that of overwork. Briarpatch staff may feel pressure to work to an unsustainable standard in order to compete with other publications.

Consider which parts of the Briarpatch Editor and Publisher positions are the most unsustainable. Could they be reduced, outsourced, or streamlined?

### • Low Staff Wages

Briarpatch wages are increasingly falling behind industry standards.

In the past, the Briarpatch staff has advocated for increasing contributor fees instead of addressing low staff wages.

Consider what it could look like to strike a balance that ensures Briarpatch staff and sustainers are fairly compensated.

### • High Staff Turnover

Staff do not often stay in their roles beyond three years given strained capacity (as outlined above) and the resulting burnout.

In the past, it has been standard for BP to require staff to be located in Regina. It can be challenging to attract a diversity of highly-skilled staff to a small Canadian centre.

Consider what allowing for a workforce living and working outside of Regina could look like.

## Board Engagement

Challenges we want to address:

### • Board Members Unable to Contribute as Much as They Would Like

Board members often join with a lot of enthusiasm but for various reasons are not able to accomplish what they originally wanted to.

This can be seen in things as simple as consistent attendance at and/or being prepared for board meetings, as well as issues like consistent support for staff in the areas of communications, fundraising, and Officer and committee work.

### • High Board Turnover

Briarpatch has consistently high board turnover, with little understanding of why.

In the past, it has been standard for Briarpatch to require the board to be located in Regina. The leftist community in Regina is small and may already be overburdened with organizing work.

Consider what allowing for board members from outside of the province could look like.

## Financial Sustainability

Challenges we want to address:

### • Alignment with Funders

It can be challenging to find a strong fit in funders and major donors as Briarpatch's radical politics can alienate those with money (such as local unions and local, provincial, and national non-profit funders).

Funding programs for independent media are not prevalent and those that do exist are already being accessed by Briarpatch.

### • Stewardship (Online Readers, Subscribers, Sustainers, and Donors)

Briarpatch lacks a stewardship strategy.

This results in a lack of understanding related to converting our large audience of online readers into revenue-generating subscribers and/or sustainers or donors.

## Provincial/National Balance

Challenges we want to address:

- ❖ Briarpatch's Responsibility to Saskatchewan

Briarpatch has a long history of community support in Regina and many people here feel some level of ownership over the magazine.

Briarpatch is rooted in prairie leftist politics. Consider what unintended consequences there may be to expanding beyond Saskatchewan.

Briarpatch staff are often involved in local organizing. How might Regina's radical leftist activist community change without this support?

- ❖ Saskatchewan Content in Briarpatch vs. The Dispatch

What is the balance of content between Briarpatch and The Dispatch?

- ❖ Residency of Board and Staff

How much of Briarpatch's staff and board need to be located in Saskatchewan (as outlined above)?

- ❖ Provincial vs. National Opportunities

What relevant opportunities exist within Saskatchewan? Is Briarpatch accessing them at present?

Would Briarpatch have more opportunity if their operations were to expand nationally?





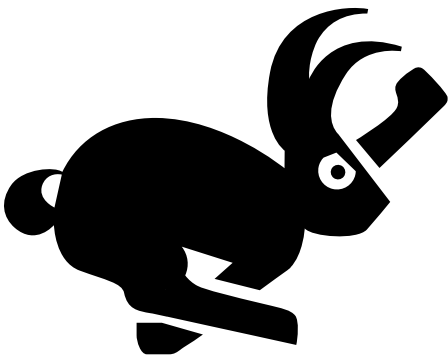
# Our Goals

## Working Conditions

- By April 2026, implement a staff restructuring process that takes into consideration wage and rate increases, and establishes a plan for ongoing review.
- By April 2026, Briarpatch staff report improved experiences in terms of skill development, professional growth, and room to progress at the organization.
- Reduce workload of existing permanent staff as soon as possible to allow a strengthened foundation for continued growth and:
  - see a 50% reduction of overtime carried forward by permanent staff by March 2025;
  - no overtime carried forward by permanent staff by March 2026;
  - no overtime and no vacation leave April 2027 carried forward by permanent staff by March 2027.



## Board Engagement



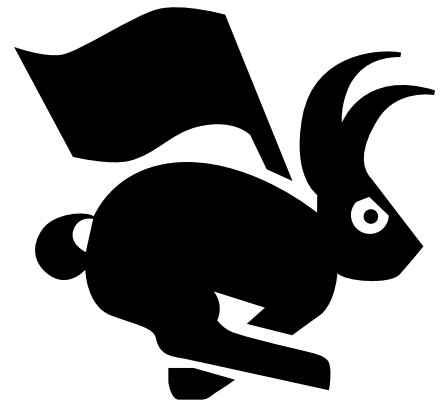
- By January 2025, Board members report confidence in acting as a champion for Briarpatch.
- By March 2025, improve board members' understandings of their governance duties and responsibilities and ensure board members are confident in fulfilling their roles.
- By March 2025, Briarpatch staff express satisfaction with the level of support and engagement from board portfolios.
- By March 2026, board members report improved board stability, continuity, and satisfaction in their roles.

# Our Team

- Alex Birrell, Director
- Greer Brabazon, Director
- Deidre Brandt, Director
- John Cameron, Publisher
- Saima Desai, Former Editor
- Meena Eragoda, Editor
- Batul Gulamhusein, Director
- Sophie Jin, Interim Editor
- Shama Rangwala, Director
- Connor Spencer, Director
- Nazanin Zarepour, Director

## Financial Sustainability

- By March 2025, 100% of board members rate themselves as at least a 3/5 in terms of their understanding of Briarpatch's finances.
- By March 2026, implement a strategy that successfully converts 10% of email newsletter subscribers to new magazine subscribers.
- Increase unrestricted revenue via:
  - individual contributions to Briarpatch by 10% annually from 2024/25 to 2026/27;
  - grant funding by 10%, overall, by March 2027 (as compared to March 2024).



## Provincial/National Balance



- By April 2025, institutionalize Briarpatch's commitment to the prairies and to non-metropolitan Canada.
- By March 2026, establish a shared understanding of the contributions made by Briarpatch staff to progressive and leftist organizing in Regina/Saskatchewan, and implement practices that communicate these contributions to readers, sustainers, subscribers, and leftist communities across Canada.
- By March 2027, Ensure that prairies and non-metropolitan readers and subscribers can recognize and feel affirmed by Briarpatch's commitment to geographically underserved communities.

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