

Strategic Planning Public Session Info Compilation

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Presented to

Connecticut Office of the Arts

Presented by

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Connecticut[®]

Department of Economic and
Community Development

Office Of The Arts



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PUBLIC SESSION OVERVIEW

Sessions occurred June 8, 2022 to June 22, 2022

In preparation for completing a strategic plan for 2022-2027, COA facilitated four info sessions with DRSOs: Cultural Coalition, Greater Hartford Arts Council, Northwest Connecticut Arts Council, Cultural Alliance of Western Connecticut and Cultural Alliance of Fairfield County.

Each session lasted up to two hours, and created a space for organization leaders and local artists to give feedback and reflect on their arts experience in Connecticut.

This compilation amplifies the key takeaways, direct quotes and ideas shared in response to COA's six intentional questions; and serves as insight that can be used to further shape a strategic plan that proactively and reactively supports the needs of CT's arts infrastructure.



QUESTION #1

In your opinion, what needs to happen to make the state a place that better supports artists, creative entrepreneurs and arts organizations?

- a. What does support for artists look like?
- b. What does support for arts organizations look like?
- c. Who else in our creative ecosystem should be supported?

Key Takeaways

ARTIST Support Looks Like:

- Providing access to resources
- Funding & government lobbying
- Supporting collaborations (particularly among independent artists vs. artists being integrated into organizations)
- Providing a place to showcase their work (esp. visual & performing artists) without pay to play
- Providing professional development that increases understanding of business practices (i.e. marketing and communications)
- Providing aid that allows artists to continue being artists (i.e. healthcare, housing, work, etc)



The COA should offer low fee or free development workshops and also have various partners hold networking events.

...professional development for artists many do not understand the business...

...funding for high school artists, professional artists and novices...

General operating support and more funding opportunities for individual artists have been invaluable these past two years.



Create a CT arts school

Create a signature art show to empower artists, and the sales support the livelihood of artists

QUESTION #1 (CONT'D)

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Key Takeaways

ORGANIZATION Support Looks Like:

- Funding for maintenance, restoring storefronts and improving functionality of parks
- Being considered in all conversations (i.e. neighborhood revitalization, labor, etc) vs. being perceived as "an other"
- Looking at the arts as entrepreneurship in order to align with funding that supports businesses

Key Takeaways

CREATIVE ECOSYSTEM Support Looks Like:

- Routine check-ins with communities to assess their needs and barriers
- Information sources for artists familiar *and* non-familiar with programs
- Pushing art disciplines to be taught in schools
- Marketing and communications to broaden reach of programs, events, artist projects, etc

“ *We are challenged in creating awareness about the opportunities we have for artists and the exhibits and performances that are free to the public.*

Value the artist and the work and the profession... these are careers not hobbies for most Artists...

...demonstrate how the arts have the power to improve education...funding for high school artists, professional artists and novices...

I'd like to see the Dept of Tourism do more to highlight the amazing spectrum of arts available here in Connecticut!



Funding through CT Next

Facilitate a partnership with OEC

QUESTION #2

The office of the arts would like to make its activities more transparent to constituents. We've begun to share more data, to partner with other organizations to provide more direct and indirect services, do you have suggestions about other ways we can do this?

Key Takeaways

- Provide a rubric for the grant submission process
- Remove the ideal of "gatekeeping" and create transparency around how marginalized populations are served and *what's* being funded
- Gather visitor data per organization that isn't intrusive to privacy, but gives insight to the organization about whether or not they're accomplishing their goals
- Increase awareness of statewide arts agency in order to encourage collaborations, and broadcast organization happenings--which will build momentum and grab the attention for funding (i.e. implement efforts to ensure media narratives are inclusive - esp. in marginalized communities)
- Get artists in front of decision makers and influential business platforms so they can recognize artists as small businesses; and these platforms can amplify artists with resources and sponsorship (i.e. Chamber of Commerce)



Many artists don't know how to write for a grant and get continually denied, which is frustrating and discouraging for them.

Totally agree, we need stronger relations with our media outlets. So tired, too, of hearing the sensationally highlighted crime news of our cities.

...like the Oprah network but the CT Artist Network...

I still want "nuts and bolts" from the state tax people - a table that displays the amount an artists may deduct from their taxes for a donation of their art outright....



Grant writing workshops

State Database/Directory/Calendar

Partnerships with women's business support groups

"Lunch with an artist"

QUESTION #3

COA is limited in the types of funding it can provide because of the stipulations of the federal funding we receive. For example, we cannot provide basic operating support to artists. During the pandemic, we've refocused our funding so that our Operating Support grants (SAP) are our biggest pool of funding. What other kinds of grant programs would be useful?

Key Takeaways

- Grant program that incubates high school/college students into the workforce
- Grant program that funds a space for visual and performing artists to display their work
- Grant program for the "unsexy" maintenance and facility updates that are required to keep an organization up to code; technologically advanced; and not restricted to capacity limitations (i.e. theater seats; workspace/offices; housing/transportation/travel for artists) etc
- Grants geared towards international collaborations
- Grants that support the ability to showcase arts and culture opportunities virtually/through live streaming
- A multi-use grant where a portion of it is allocated to operations, and the rest is used elsewhere (i.e. hiring a consultant to help with data collection)



...connecting organizations with potential corporate donors who are looking for arts organizations to support....

I have spoken with potential corporate sponsors who wanted to have some kind of vetting process they could use to find organizations that would be a good fit for their guidelines for support.

Capacity building grants would be very helpful.



A grant similar to Cultural Facilities fund

A grant similar to Virginia Woolf's 'Room of Her Own' Grant

QUESTION #4

COA wants to do better at supporting teachers, teaching artists and the students they serve. Earlier this year, our long-term staff member Bonnie Koba retired and we will be hiring her replacement in the next few months. How can COA best assist teachers, teaching artists and arts education in general?

Key Takeaways

- Provide general operating support so that teachers can be hired
- Advocate for arts education in schools (esp. in under resourced areas)
- Improve messaging and communication about arts education; and be mindful as well as intentional about how the messaging is received by able and disabled communities
- Encourage arts therapy to help children overcome trauma
- Support artists by considering READI and safety in the classroom (i.e. school shooting readiness, security, etc)
- Housing for teaching artists
- Professional development that includes diversity training
- Facilitate/Incentivize schools to prioritize show attendance



As for teaching - all our artists could use marketing classes and as you said, money for available gallery space for affordable events and artist sharing...

Teachers are overwhelmed in classrooms and while coordinating things. Perhaps involving enrichment coordinators, someone connected to the school but not an in-classroom teacher- can help with communications and planning. I want to plan with teachers but have trouble getting a reply because they're (understandably) prioritizing parents and kids.

We need more training for teaching artists to align workshops with learning objectives.

There should also be a focus on adult arts education.

QUESTION #5

READI – Relevance, Equity, Access, Diversity and Inclusion is our fundamental value, and we have been working for five years exploring how we can incorporate those values in what we do internally, and how we promote these values externally.

- a. How are we doing?
- b. What could we be doing better?
- c. Has your organization or artistic practice changed because of our READI vision for the arts work in the state?

Key Takeaways

COA's READI progress:

- Public info sessions are important as they can empower artists with knowledge, reassure them that synergy exist in the artist space, and therefore boost their confidence

Key Takeaways

Elements That Can Be Done Better:

- Stay mindful of the support/resources accessible to start-up artists (i.e. \$500 could mean a lot)
- Design mentorship programs or grants that promote partnership across towns, and that particularly amplify the voices and needs of marginalized communities, to less diverse towns
- Provide READI resources (i.e. workshops for employees, teaching artists, and board members; and a list of consultants that can work with organizations)
- Continue to convene with key stakeholders throughout the year
- Provide grant support, because for artists, the process isn't straightforward

Key Takeaways

READI's Impact on Organization:



We struggle with the requests at an exhaustive level, but it would be helpful to explore what we can do and provide. We all want to comply, do the best that we can, and reach as many people but when you're working with kids/youth sometimes it's hard to ask the questions.

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We may not all have the same definition but we can align on practices that focus on equity in our programs and opportunities that we present.

We need a structure of accountability.

I love the READI framework - it is helpful! I have found it challenging to describe our organization's reach/impact because is our office is based in an affluent town, however we broadly serve constituents in distressed municipalities AND the rural-underserved communities with a regional impact. It is one of our goals to bring disparate groups together in a central hub.

I don't feel well versed in what READI actually implies. Maybe some more hands on guidance is needed in exactly how it is manifested in an organization, besides just writing a DEI statement.

I struggle...I'm not going to ask someone's ethnicity when they're purchasing a ticket.

QUESTION #6

We often talk about the “Arts Infrastructure” in the state – or the lack of an arts infrastructure. What does that phrase mean to you? Do you have ideas about how to strengthen that infrastructure?

a. How can we support municipalities to work with creatives to build stronger communities?

Key Takeaways

"Arts Infrastructure" Means:

- “brick and mortar” as well as the less identifiable qualities like festivals, arts in the park, etc.
- Cooperation and collaboration (how do we all win?)
- Supporting the arts as a contributor to economic impact and the quality of life

Key Takeaways

Supporting Municipalities to Work with Creatives Looks Like:

- Considering the nuances of art and supporting the artists themselves (vs. using them because it will bring in tourists)
- Supporting independent artists monetarily (vs. having them work for free)
- Having a tool/resource that informs the community about what's going on in the arts



...certain art categories are prioritized over others (i.e. visual arts over music organizations)...

I think we need to think about arts infrastructure the way we think about Parks & Recreation. For example, we know that people sometimes choose communities based on what P&R programs and facilities they have, what their schools are, etc. Arts Infrastructure should be planned for and desired in the same way and should be available for use the way that P&R infrastructure is. When residents of communities begin to see art infrastructure as an amenity and political leaders begin to support and fund it that way, we will have come a long way.



"CT Visit" but for the arts community Create a Arts Making Space for all

Interactive incentives that invite the community into the existing infrastructure (i.e. arts trails, community passports, etc)

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER



- When folks say “artists”, who do you have in mind?
- “In theater, it’s a challenge to find diverse actors. We’ve had some local conversations about how information can be managed -- a listing or database, etc. (i.e Grand Directory of the Arts - CT)”
- “Also affordable performing venues, available to rent for rehearsal and/or performance are hard to come by, at least locally.”
- "Promote collaborative endeavors among orgs"
- "Google the Tunisian Collaborative Method bY David Black. One of the best collaborative art practices I have seen!"

“Many who work in arts with skill and stature - but happen to be senior - could use a state-wide promotion. They think they are dabbling and they are hopefully earning money to improve their quality of life in the golden years and to maintain their self-esteem in their honored work. A promotion that shines a lovely light on Seniors who are Artists would be GOLD and so right to do!”