

## Access and Participation

The Access and Participation Working Group met five times following the meeting at Drumthwacket in July 2004. Those who participated in the two face-to-face and three “spider phone” meetings felt that the objectives and strategies for increasing access and participation in the arts identified several years ago still hold true. They thus focused their efforts on adding new strategies, fleshing out others, and determining which should be considered essential to achieve the objectives.

The Working Group used the following value statement as a foundation and guide:

***We believe the arts define us as a culture, and that participation in the arts is vital to an individual’s growth, and should be accessible to all New Jersey residents.*** To this end, it is essential to have government leaders take a leadership role in the arts; to broaden people’s definition of the arts; to provide full access to, and participation in, the arts; and to encourage acknowledgment of the arts’ value by recognizing and celebrating diverse forms of expression, tradition and culture. In addition, it is vital to promote appreciation for the many different ways the arts are practiced, and for how artists create/work in a variety of community settings.

***The Goal: To increase access to, and participation in, arts activity throughout New Jersey.***

### **The Top Five Objectives**

1. Ensure that the arts and artists are integral to lifelong learning.
2. Explore the impact of location, affordability, time constraints, technology, perceptions, and physical limitations on how people access and utilize the arts.
3. Promote local arts development, community support, and financing for the arts.
4. Design marketing and communications strategies that are based on current research and technology.
5. Enlighten arts professionals about the importance of research and advancing technologies.

## Achieving These Objectives

Because increasing access and participation in the arts is essential to the success of ArtsPlan and the overall health of New Jersey's arts community, it is imperative to have the commitment and leadership of a governmental official to advocate the vital importance of the arts to all sectors of community life. In addition, it is crucial to understand how the arts are viewed by those *outside* the arts community. A sense of how the arts are part of a larger context – one facet in a multi-faceted, layered community – will lead to a broader definition of the arts, one that provides clear connections (or the potential to connect) to other sectors, and that envisions how those partnerships can help move the Arts Plan forward.

The Working Group recognizes the multitude of partnerships and collaborations that currently exist and sees expanding the number and diversity of partnerships as perhaps *the* central strategy that can issue from a consideration of context. Partnerships can simultaneously engage the public as participants, even as they connect the arts to other sectors, increasing access.

As for promoting the plan, the Working Group recommends that a Leadership Committee be developed to guide promotion at the highest levels. It should be recognized by the Governor, and charged with meeting twice a year to address one or more issues that the Plan highlights. In this way, the Plan can serve as a practical guide, even as it is kept “fresh” by the infusion of new information and the perspectives of other sectors. A new working group should guide the Committee's development. Members could review candidates drawn from many sectors, as well as the arts community; solicit their involvement; and articulate not only their specific roles and responsibilities but also the benefits of serving.

In promoting the Plan the focus should be on the *difference* the arts make in our lives and communities, and how they make that difference – how, when the arts are involved in health programs, healing is faster. How better planned and designed communities attract businesses and an enhanced quality of life for their citizens. How the arts help educate our children and cultivate creative thinkers. Even how the arts can leverage richer participation in other sectors, as when those not interested in sports may nevertheless be drawn to recreation centers by arts activities, or when public transportation enjoys greater patronage because it showcases compelling destinations. Ultimately, embracing the goal to increase access and participation in the arts will not only improve the health and capacity of arts groups, but also increase the capacity of other sectors to reach their goals.