

Artist Services

Over the course of five sessions, the Artist Services Working Group reviewed Goal Two of Arts Plan NJ and drafted new objectives and strategies to bring it up to date. Then they surveyed 90 of their colleagues on the “theme team,” including 60 artists, to get feedback and forge consensus on the drafts. Results of the survey have been heartening – 32 have responded to date and were supportive of the revised goals and strategies. With the caveat that more work needs to be done to clarify what is meant by the term “artist” (so as to be inclusive of all artists), the Artist Services Working Group offers the following as possibilities for refreshing the portion of Arts Plan NJ that addresses Artist Services.

The Goal: *To build recognition and a strong network of support for New Jersey artists and their work.*

Five Principal Objectives

1. Attract and retain artists in New Jersey by building a statewide infrastructure of services comparable to those available to other professions, including health insurance, retirement and unemployment benefits.
2. Sustain artists and artist service organizations in New Jersey by providing appropriate resources, such as available work, presentation and living spaces, low-cost materials and access to technology.
3. Create a climate of professionalism by increasing self-development opportunities for artists, including expanded fellowships, locally sponsored artist residencies, and increased public and private commissions.
4. Incorporate artists into all facets of community life by championing their roles as citizens who participate in educational programs, civic planning, and local governance.
5. Recognize artists as an asset to the state of New Jersey through programs that provide recognition for artists themselves, and not just their work.

Achieving These Objectives

It will take the effort of many to address these ambitious objectives. Currently artists' needs are a concern of NJSCA, unions that represent specific disciplines, and an array of nonprofit organizations, among others, but no single entity focuses exclusively on them. To bring coherence to this landscape, the Artists Services group recommends that:

- A service/advocacy organization be created to coordinate efforts and activity on behalf of artists, or failing that, dedicated staff be added to an existing organization to focus exclusively on services to meet their needs; and
- A website be provided with the technology to assist artists with marketing and locating employment opportunities, work/performance/live spaces, and opportunities for continuing education, fellowships and awards.

The many that currently assist artists should be energized to address the five objectives. They should be encouraged, for example, to build collaborations between artists and cultural, educational, and community service organizations. As the Artist Services Working Group notes, if members of the arts community don't deem a basic standard of living for artists a priority, how can we expect the public to do so?

Illuminating the role artists play in the community by offering examples of the creative perspectives, energies, and fresh approaches they bring to the problems and opportunities of contemporary life will ultimately inform New Jersey citizens of the significance of the arts, and the value of a cultural focus. As successes are realized, they should be documented, studied and replicated in other communities throughout the state, and incorporated into the Discover Jersey Arts marketing plan. As the Working Group points out, supporting New Jersey artists is not just about recognizing and honoring artists, but about supporting the creative thought and life of *all* the state's citizens.