

## 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 refresh its implementation. Then they surveyed 90 of their colleagues on the “theme team,” including 60 artists, to gain feedback and forge consensus on the drafts. Results of the survey have been heartening – 32 have responded to date and have expressed strong agreement with the outlined objectives and strategies.

In offering what follows for further consideration, the Working Group acknowledges that greater participation by artists is still needed, and that work must be done to clarify what is meant by the term “artist.” As a first step, they adopted the definition offered by *Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure for U. S. Artists*, published in 2003 by the Urban Institute’s Culture, Creativity, and Communities (CCC) Program. It describes artists as individuals “who have expert artistic skills; have received artistic education or training (formal or informal); [who] attempt to derive income from those skills; and [who] are or have been actively engaged in creating artwork and presenting it to the public.” The Working Group outlined the disciplines of visual, literary, performing, folk and media arts as further clarification.

The Urban Institute definition embraces the diversity of individuals who call themselves “artists,” but as the Working Group points out, it excludes “weekend warriors” – people who have artistic fervor and talent, but who have chosen to dedicate their time to another profession. These individuals satisfy their artistic passions via a “hobby,” or by participating in a community-based project, like singing in a local church choir. Still, at some point they may shift the balance to favor creative activity. If artists are to be recognized and validated, the training and dedication it takes to attain a certain level of professionalism must be acknowledged. However, as Arts Plan NJ endeavors to build support for New Jersey arts and artists, the Working Group believes it imprudent to exclude “weekend warriors” – or any artistic endeavor, for that matter. They therefore urge conference participants to discuss how “artist” should be defined as they move Arts Plan NJ to completion.

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

## **The Top Five Objectives**

- 1. Attract and retain artists in New Jersey by building a statewide infrastructure comparable to what is available to other professions, including health insurance, retirement and unemployment benefits.**

### Strategies:

- a. Health Insurance: Inform artists of opportunities to buy into existing group health plans and create new affordable health plans, where needed.
  - b. Retirement Benefits: Create an affordable state retirement plan for artists.
  - c. Unemployment Benefits: Examine the pros and cons of paying artists as part-time employees, rather than as independent contractors.
  - d. Financial and career counseling: Support Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts and establish Volunteer Accountants for the Arts.
- 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.**

### Strategies:

- a. Work, presentation and living spaces: Expand the NJSCA Space Bank Project to include all twenty-one counties, and establish a work-rehearsal space rent subsidy program.
  - b. Materials and equipment: Establish a warehouse of low cost art materials and equipment.
  - c. Technologies: Identify schools, colleges, libraries, and corporations that can provide artists with access to technological resources.
  - d. Communication: Establish a statewide artist resource website.
- 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.**

### Strategies:

- a. Professional development: Expand NJSCA's program of funded fellowships, showcases, exhibitions, traveling opportunities, and development workshops. Enlist college and university arts departments to establish postgraduate professional development workshops.
- b. Residencies: Work with the League of Municipalities and county cultural and heritage commissions to increase the number of artist residencies.

- c. Commissions: Work with public and private agencies to increase the commissioning of art works.
  - d. Social services and civic projects: Work with the League of Municipalities and other organizations to increase performance and exhibition opportunities in non-traditional spaces.
- 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.**

Strategies:

- a. Education: Work with state, county, and municipal governments to ensure that artists are invited to participate in planning educational policy that makes the arts come alive for citizens of all ages.
  - b. Planning and design: Work with state, county, and municipal governments to ensure that artists are invited to participate in the planning and design of public projects.
  - c. Involvement as citizens: Work with state, county, and municipal governments to ensure that artists are invited to serve on committees and task forces addressing all areas of community life.
- 5. Recognize artists as an asset to the state of New Jersey through programs that provide recognition for artists and *not* just their work.**

Strategies:

- a. Creative capital: Establish residencies in local communities in which artists perform, exhibit, or teach. Involve artists with non-art institutions through residencies, performances, exhibitions, and workshops.
- b. Valued citizens: Encourage the media to present profiles of artists, portraying them as valued members of the community, rather than just reporting on their works. Establish "Artist of the Month" programs. Develop high profile awards that showcase artist initiatives and their impact in communities.
- c. Quality of life: Build on the state's "Discover Jersey Arts" program to expand recognition of artists as a state resource.

**Resources Needed to Achieve Objectives**

For the Arts Plan NJ to be successful, all stakeholders will need to feel a sense of empowerment – to be invested in the belief that they can make a difference in the quality of their own lives, and in the lives of their communities, through the arts.

Convincing the general public of what artists and arts supporters already know will be the trick. It will take the effort of many, and the marshaling of significant resources. Among resources the Artist Services Working Group pointed to:

- A service organization to represent artists. Artists' needs are far-reaching. Currently unions representing artists from specific disciplines, NJSCA, numerous nonprofit organizations, and even several commercial organizations attempt to meet some of these needs, but no single organization in New Jersey is dedicated to artists' concerns. The Artist Services Working Group recommends that a new service/advocacy organization be created, or that a dedicated staff be added to an established organization (one with adequate resources and strong affiliations with other artist-related associations) to represent artists' interests.
- Artist Website. To support the independent work of artists on their own behalf, adequate technology should be available to assist them with marketing, and with locating employment opportunities and living/working/performing spaces, as well as opportunities for continuing education, fellowship and awards.
- Broad participation. Foremost in what it will take to achieve the objectives outlined above are artists themselves from all disciplines, including commercial and independent artists and those affiliated with nonprofit and non-cultural organizations. Participation must come from artists at all career stages – emerging, mid-career, and established. Teachers, administrators, and school officials; state, county and locally elected and appointed officials; arts organizations; artist services organizations; corporations and small businesses; media services and the press; nonprofit community service organizations: schools, libraries, hospitals, YMCA's, boys & girls clubs, and funders are all potential stakeholders as well.
- Partner organizations. Organizations must be encouraged to become authentic partners in supporting artists and their work. They might include such groups as the College Art Association, whose membership benefits include affordable group health insurance; service professionals, who could create a program with accountants modeled after Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (which offers pro bono sessions with an attorney and legal information services to its members); NJSCA, which might expand current artist services programs and web-based data like the space bank survey; and the League of Municipalities, which should be encouraged to collaborate on public art projects and residencies in communities.

More generally, other partners might include universities and community colleges; established service organizations like ArtPRIDE, the NJ Theatre Alliance, the South Jersey Cultural Alliance and Dance NJ; and other organizations that are dedicated to artists, such as Transcultural New Jersey, the Perkins Center for the Arts, and Wheaton Village. National organizations like the New York Foundation for the Arts and Art Space Projects in Minneapolis, who work to support artists and have developed successful programs and technology tools, should be studied for useful prototypes.

Above all, there should be a concerted effort to build collaboration between artists and these cultural, educational and community service organizations. Organizations that work closely with and depend on artists should be encouraged to infuse the concept of artist support into their daily institutional functions. For example, cultural organizations – especially medium to large, well-established companies – have stronger connections and access to the media than the individual artist can ever enjoy. These organizations could use their marketing opportunities not only to sell their events, but also to bring attention to the artists and the art-making process. Many arts organizations do not have the resources to provide artists with a living wage or health benefits; they are focusing on their own survival. Yet if arts organizations can't make a basic standard of living for artists a priority, how can the public be expected to do so?

## **Readiness to Address Objectives**

In building a statewide infrastructure of services to support artists, the first practical challenge will be to identify and verify viable insurance and benefit plans for artists, similar to those available to members of the College Art Association. Then it will be necessary to determine a means to advocate for artists' coverage and to disseminate information to artists. Most likely there will need to be an organization that can serve as a "broker." At the Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, broker fees provided enough funds to pay for a staff person to serve as liaison between the artists and the insurance companies.

Arts organizations and municipalities should be encouraged to offer subsidized work and presentation spaces for artists. The Space Bank Project, currently under development by Atlantic Cape Community College and NJSCA, will provide a searchable online database of available work and presenting spaces for artists and arts organizations in southern New Jersey. This service should be replicated throughout the state and could list the availability of subsidized spaces as well.

To create professional development opportunities, artists, in collaboration with arts organizations and municipalities, should take advantage of existing funding programs like NJSCA's Artists and Communities to create artist residencies that address local needs. The NJ Artist Slide Registry can provide municipalities and arts organizations with access to over 6,500 visual artists and their work. Some of these projects could be partially funded through NJSCA's Projects Serving Artists grants program.

Integrating artists into all facets of community life will require sensitivity, as artists are not always comfortable engaging officials from municipal, civic, educational and corporate systems. Workshops on developing healthy partnerships and civic participation should be offered by the state, county cultural commissions, artist service organizations and/or universities to help bridge this gap. Another approach would be to encourage Leadership NJ to invite artists to participate in their program or have their alumni tutor artists and encourage them to participate in a leadership role in some facet of community life.

To move toward greater recognition of artists and the value they and their work add to contemporary life, foundations and corporations should be asked to consider funding artist award programs; a practical system and protocol for engaging artists in community work should be established; and means to encourage community leaders to invite artists to come and work in their communities should be developed and tested.

## **Promoting the Plan**

The first buy-in to the Arts Plan NJ must come from artists; if they become invested, it will succeed. Forming an effective artist database so that communication with them can be ongoing is crucial. Until such a database is built, it will be necessary to ask nonprofit and commercial arts institutions, unions and service organizations to reach out to their artist constituents. Artists need to be inspired by the potential impact of these strategies on their lives. They also must understand that they need to take an active part in advocating for the recommended services and programs.

Once support from artists is substantial, there must be top down buy-in from state, county and local governments, and ultimately, the general public. All of these stakeholders must be given "experiences and evidence" at the same time, and by people they respect and trust. When politicians, educators and leaders of industry and the community promote the profound value of the arts, people listen. When

children value the arts, their parents listen. When people are engaged and welcomed into the arts, they listen.

Many forums should be used to get this word out – newspapers, in both their arts and non-arts sections; radio; community gatherings; educational meetings; town events; performances; and children’s events. All can serve as platforms to inform and involve government officials and the general public.

Elevating artists’ roles in the community, removing stereotypes and reinforcing the need for creative perspectives in contemporary life will ultimately inform New Jersey citizens of the significance of the arts, and the value of a cultural focus in life. This is particularly important as the world changes ever more rapidly. People who create tend to be sensitive and responsive to changes in the world, and they can ultimately become leaders in the community as they create dialog and interaction among community members. By stimulating creative thinking, artists can facilitate change in how people think. It is imperative that the public understands that this plan isn’t just about artists being honored and recognized, but also about how each citizen can ultimately connect with his or her own creative thought. There is no greater public value than that!

The artist must also be considered part of the public or community for whom value is created. Investing in artists’ lives can lead New Jersey to become a model state for its recognition of the impact artist interactions can have on the greater public. As examples of success are realized, they should be documented, studied and replicated in other communities throughout the state, and incorporated into the Discover Jersey Arts marketing plan.