

Technology and the Arts

Sophisticated, high-end technology, whether direct or indirect, is an everyday fact of life for every American. Digital cameras, DVD-burners, and cell phones are indicators of a sea change in the way we live, work, and play. An ever-growing number of people are online; in fact, of the 98% of US households that have a phone line¹, nearly three out of four also have internet access.² But the arts have been behind the technological curve. According to one survey, approximately 13% of arts organizations were without websites of any type as recently as 2003, and an astounding 75% had no strategic plan for the role of technology in their organizations.³

Individual artists seeking to create and distribute their work have much to gain from technology, as well. Yet anecdotal evidence suggests that a “digital divide” exists along economic, educational, genre-based, age, ethnic, and/or geographic lines. Likewise, an “organizational divide” appears to exist among arts organizations, based in part on size, finances, sophistication, and/or artistic genre. As a first step toward addressing the goal below, the Technology and the Arts Working Group recommends that a statewide assessment and survey of best practices be undertaken to establish a baseline for New Jersey artists and arts organizations.

Technology is omnipresent and expanding daily. It can be a valuable tool for arts creation as well as for organizational administration and development. It is in the individual artists’ and arts organizations’ best interests to stay current and to understand the capabilities and benefits that technology can bring them. The objectives and strategies outlined below have been developed with one mission in mind: *to expand the capacities of creative people*. The strategies under each objective are intended to serve as signposts pointing to actions that can positively affect the availability and accessibility of, and training for, technology. All support the creation and presentation of art by artists for growing audiences.

The Goal: *To achieve technological competence and access for artists and arts organizations.*

The Top Three Objectives

- 1. Provide a technological framework for individual artists that supports both their creative work and distribution of that work.**

- Provide education, specialized training, and access through workshops, a help desk, and/or peer groups, to encourage website development and the utilization of multi-media.
- Create an online database to promote communication with and between artists, and to promote the general use of technology.
- Identify best practices in the use of technology by artists.
- Establish a prize for the creation of innovative new works using technology.

2. Increase the technical capacity of arts organizations.

- Work toward the development or modification of technology tools to support organizations' presentation, marketing, development of resources, and ability to serve the disabled community.
- Promote the use of technology as a means of achieving organizational goals, identifying best practices currently employed by and for arts organizations, and advocating for grant support to underwrite the development and/or use of technology in arts organizations' operations.

3. Develop technological resources for artists and arts organizations.

- Clarify the needs of artists and arts organizations by means of a statewide assessment to create a baseline from which to work.
- Identify existing technological resources.
- Develop a clearinghouse to make sources of training and support available, including reports that apply to technology and the arts.
- Identify current best practices for artists and arts organizations both within New Jersey and throughout the nation.
- Partner with corporations and foundations to spur the use of technology.
- Establish a "Help Desk" (a person, persons, or company), drawing in-kind staff and resources from business partners.
- Develop venues wherein advances in arts technology can be shared, including conferences on the topic, e-newsletters, and online chat rooms for artists and arts organizations.

Readiness to Address Objectives

In addition to conducting a baseline assessment, an important first step will be to establish the "Help Desk" – i.e., hire a person or company or identify a corporate partner who will staff a statewide "Advocacy/Help" technology center. This

“Help Desk” has the potential to become an invaluable resource for information sharing and training.

A second step is to establish an Advisory Council that includes artists, arts organizations, corporations, businesses, foundations, staff to coordinate the technology and the arts efforts (i.e., a “Help Desk”), a liaison with the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and technology experts. The Council will provide invaluable information about how to develop the technological capacity for individual artists and arts organizations. It can also serve as a key advocate for this technology initiative throughout the State.

Promoting the Plan

Advocacy will be crucial to meet the goal. Arts Plan NJ should recognize and promote the value of technology both for individual artists and for arts organizations, recognizing that advocating for technology in the arts is the first step in raising the level of technological literacy for all.

¹ US Census, 2000

² Neilsons/NetRatings survey, 2004

³ Arts and Business Council of Greater Philadelphia survey, 2003