

Why a New Arts Plan NJ?

How do we as New Jerseyans value the arts? What do they mean to our lives and our communities? How do we collectively make sensible investments in them to improve the quality of life in New Jersey? These and other fundamental questions were first posed in 1995 at the Governor's Conference on the Arts, and three years later led to the adoption of a bold and powerful statewide plan for a better New Jersey through and for the arts called Arts Plan NJ. Crafted in collaboration with a wide array of other fields including education, business and industry, philanthropy, civic organizations and other governmental agencies, Arts Plan NJ laid out in broad brushstrokes goals and strategic objectives we could all jointly undertake. It inspired legions of people from various sectors to join forces to explore all the ways the arts can help our communities grow and prosper and how the arts can achieve their very best for the benefit of all of us. And the plan was an unqualified success. From it came the following:

- The New Jersey Cultural Trust: a dedicated new source of significant funding to stabilize the arts, history and humanities communities and help them become even greater resources to our communities;
- The Discover Jersey Arts Marketing campaign: a dynamic, multifaceted initiative that has bolstered attendance and participation statewide, which in turn spurs greater spending and economic activity in our cities and towns;
- Advances in education reform that increasingly place the arts at the center of quality education, makes arts and cultural organizations vital resources to local school systems and prepares our children for the 21st century workplace;
- Intensified arts advocacy resulting in a new high water mark for state arts support and a dedicated source of revenue for the arts, history and tourism;
- Dozens of cities, towns, counties and regions that have engaged in community cultural planning for downtown and neighborhood revitalization projects and improved service to residents of all ages;
- Tourism initiatives that recognize the power of the arts to bolster our state's third largest industry;
- Public and private funding programs that have helped the community of artists and organizations achieve unparalleled artistic excellence, celebrated the diversity of our people, and built New Jersey pride.

Still, with all the progress made under the original plan, by 2004 the world had changed greatly. The events of 9/11 altered consumer behaviors and shifted priorities in philanthropy, as have corporate mergers and acquisitions. We have come through another destabilizing recession, and nonprofit groups remain woefully undercapitalized and thus vulnerable. In this climate, competition for leisure time and disposable income has never been greater. Moreover, the continued diversification in our state challenges us all to better understand how we relate to each other and be inclusive in our work. Technological advancement presses on at a dizzying rate. It tantalizes us with possibilities, but distances many with inaccessibility. The array of challenges facing those who pursue the arts as a profession remains as daunting as ever; and for all that has been accomplished in arts education, it is not carried out well across the board and this area is still the first place cuts are made.

It was time to reexamine our plans, perhaps not so much as to revisit the original questions, as to ask ourselves, "What have we learned? Who have we not included? Where do we go next? How will the arts create even greater public value?" For all these reasons and more on July 22, 2004 we began the journey to create the next Arts Plan NJ.

New Jersey has tremendous arts "assets," from world-class venues to hundreds of community based arts and cultural institutions. It is in all our best interest to promote and invest in the arts for better schools, more vibrant downtowns, more opportunities for youth, stronger local economies, greater inter-cultural understanding, increased citizen involvement, and more beautiful and stimulating environments. I applaud Arts Plan NJ's efforts in creating public/private partnerships among all vital sectors of our state to create a better New Jersey through the arts.

— GOVERNOR JON S. CORZINE