



North Carolina Arts Council
Fifty years of leadership

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STRATEGIC ARTS PLAN for NORTH CAROLINA: FY2022-2024

INTRODUCTION

Just a few months ago, I became the executive director of the North Carolina Arts Council, and I have been overwhelmed by the support I've received from the staff and the arts community. As a visual artist and someone who has worked in the arts in North Carolina for 25 years, I'm constantly amazed by the strength and variety of arts in the state and the many talented artists and arts leaders who are doing important work. In my previous jobs, I've relied on support and resources provided by the North Carolina Arts Council, and have been in awe of the skills, knowledge, and dedication of its staff.

I'm the third director in a half-century, and I stepped into the role when the state has been rebounding from the unprecedented events and upheavals of the past few years. During that time, most of the agency's veteran arts leaders and managers retired or left for other opportunities. But as it has always done, the Arts Council, under extreme duress—understaffed and with reduced access to the office—rose to the challenges of the pandemic and reprioritized its programs so that every available resource could be used to help arts organizations and artists survive and recover. While being charged with distributing the most money in its history, the staff took time to respond to the needs of the field, recognizing inequities in funding practices and barriers to accessing grants. They streamlined application processes and guidelines and made efforts to engage with communities and organizations that hadn't received funding in the past. These efforts increased the number of arts organizations receiving money, including a higher percentage of organizations of color. The Arts Council also quickly and dramatically overhauled grants for artists and provided twice as much artist support grant funding per year than ever before. We were able to pivot and distribute nearly \$10 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to see artists and arts organizations through exceedingly difficult times. The Arts Council will grant \$15 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds over the next two fiscal years. This funding will stabilize our constituent organizations and create a foundation for their work going forward.

The Arts Council and its board began developing a new strategic plan in March 2021, holding many virtual focus groups with arts leaders and other stakeholders for feedback and input. In

December 2021, the Arts Council published a draft of the plan on our website and encouraged all citizens and constituents to weigh in on it.

The resulting strategic plan is a vision for the transition of the state's arts sector from crisis mode to a new period of sustainability. It focuses on developing relationships with new partners as well as maintaining our support for our core constituents. It prioritizes and deepens our commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion. To that end, we have recruited and hired the most diverse staff by race, culture, and age in the agency's history. Additionally, our board reflects Governor Roy Cooper's commitment to appointing more diverse members. The Arts Council has long been recognized for its strong statewide infrastructure, which reaches into all 100 counties, and for its innovative practices. We look forward to building on the work of the past as we continue to understand and respond to the needs of everyone in North Carolina. We make diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion a part of everything we do. Coming from a small arts nonprofit, I know how difficult it can be to create new programs and initiatives. In addition to providing grants, we will develop resources to help arts agencies and artists grow.

In crafting our vision moving forward, we embrace goals that have been part of our agency from its founding: deepening our work in arts education and communicating the public value of the arts to the residents of North Carolina and their elected leaders. Along the way, we will continue to strive to understand the needs of the field and to evaluate our progress. We approach the tasks ahead with confidence and excitement. Creativity and commitment are intrinsic to artmaking, and these two qualities will enable the North Carolina Arts Council and our partners in every county to create new models and practices that develop and sustain the arts. This strategic plan for 2022–2024 is both our guide and inspiration going forward.

Jeff Bell, executive director

CORE BELIEFS

The arts are creative expressions of ideas, values, and emotions that deepen our understanding of the world and of the human condition. The arts express accumulated cultural knowledge as well as spark innovations that empower us to realize our potential and meet challenges. Our society's shared experiences are expressed through the arts, connecting North Carolinians of diverse backgrounds and strengthening us in times of tribulation. A conviction that the arts are essential to the education, economic growth, and healing of our state's residents and their communities in all 100 counties inspires our programs and initiatives.

GOALS and STRATEGIES

GOAL 1: Demonstrate leadership to address the need for greater diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion (DEAI) within the state's nonprofit arts sector

1.1: Model best DEAI practices within the North Carolina Arts Council by engaging in inclusive hiring practices, providing ongoing DEAI training for staff and board, and continuing to seek advice and feedback from arts leaders in communities of color, in the disability community, and in rural counties. Enhance data collection to better understand equity advancement within the Arts Council and statewide arts sector. Establish equity benchmarks and update the field on progress through an annual report.

1.2: Redesign Arts Council grant-making policies and grant guidelines to allow for broader and more inclusive investment in the arts sector. Specifically, expand eligibility for arts organizations to receive operating support, reduce restrictions for using fiscal agents, and continue to provide strategic staff assistance, coaching, and other resources to arts organizations and artists in communities of color, in rural areas, and representing the disability community.

1.3: Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the multicultural requirement of the Grassroots Arts Program and recommend changes that will support the goal of strengthening a statewide infrastructure of diverse arts organizations.

1.4: Launch a technical assistance grant program to support arts organizations that desire to deepen DEAI through comprehensive examination of their programs, administrative systems, and culture. Build a roster of consulting firms and professionals specializing in DEAI efforts and establish a menu of training options available for individual organizations or cohorts.

1.5: Form an Accessibility Advisory Board that will advise the Arts Council on policy and programs that increase accessibility for people with disabilities within the arts sector. Encourage and sponsor participation in the national Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability (LEAD) Conference to be held in Raleigh in 2022 by offering scholarships for registration and facilitating a co-learning peer group among attendees.

1.6: Invite cultural leaders from the state's Historically Black Colleges and Universities to explore the feasibility of meaningful partnerships between the 10 institutions and the Arts Council that will elevate the arts programming currently happening, encourage more collaborations, and attract public and private investment.

1.7: Reinstigate the NC Heritage Awards program, which showcases the state's diverse arts heritage.

Goal 2: Revitalize North Carolina's arts sector to help the state recover from the pandemic.

2.1: Distribute \$15 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds that enable arts organizations and artists to plan and produce programs that encourage public re-engagement and participation coming out of the pandemic.

2.2: Provide quantitative and qualitative data to the North Carolina Pandemic Recovery Office (NCPRO) to document the impact of the pandemic on North Carolina's cultural sector and progress toward recovery. Work collaboratively with NCPRO to determine the best way to share information with the public, highlighting the arts sector's significance to the overall recovery of the state.

2.3: Design a rural development program that values the arts and cultural assets of rural counties and provides resources and tools to strengthen rural communities through the arts. In addition to supporting existing arts traditions, programs, organizations, and artists, this rural development program will build on the Arts Council's achievements in creative placemaking, cultural trails, creative aging, and the well-being of military veterans using the agency's Grassroots Arts Program and Folklife networks.

2.4: Continue the SPARK the Arts marketing campaign to ignite the resurgence of our state's arts sector from the pandemic by connecting residents and visitors to arts experiences and arts stories across our state. Build a peer network of marketing professionals across the state to amplify SPARK messaging.

2.5: Contract with state and national consultants with expertise in arts entrepreneurship to offer workshops that enable individual artists to strengthen business management skills and develop sustainable careers in the arts.

2.6: Support the Department of Natural and Cultural Resource's Hometown Strong rural development efforts by recommending creative placemaking projects worthy of investment and assisting in the management of these projects.

Goal 3: Provide students with arts experiences and resources that lead to success in school, career, and life.

3.1: Continue to sustain and nurture the schools in the A+ network as they adapt to the changes and stress brought by the pandemic. Promote the impact of A+ Schools through a statewide marketing campaign and conference celebrating the network's thirtieth anniversary.

3.2: Expand opportunities for schools throughout the state to benefit from the training and learning resources provided by A+ Schools of North Carolina.

3.3: Redesign cARTwheels to present artist residency programs that address timely and important issues facing schools, starting with the theme of resilience. Through a Request for Proposals process, develop a new roster of teaching artist performances and residencies every two years that will be funded with cARTwheels grants.

3.4: Partner with North Carolina Central University's Teaching Artist Certificate Program to promote more diversity in the field of teaching artistry, provide statewide access to training resources, and develop a more formal pipeline for mentorships through pre-service experiences in selected arts organizations and schools.

3.5: Strengthen our partnership with the state Department of Public Instruction to align arts in education practices, resources, and support with state education initiatives (social and emotional learning; equity; the science of reading) and to assess the Comprehensive Arts Education Plan as mandated by the legislature.

3.6: Expand the number of Traditional Arts Programs for Students (TAPS)/Junior Appalachian Musicians (JAM) programs, with a specific emphasis on the eastern part of the state. Support existing programs through cohort-building and professional development and help programs identify sources of additional local support.

Goal 4: Communicate the public value of the state's arts organizations and artists, and advocate the resources they need to meaningfully engage North Carolina's residents and their communities.

4.1: Document the accomplishments of the local arts council network and convene a committee to recommend strategies that strengthen partnerships and collaborations between this network and the N.C. Arts Council.

4.2: Increase capacity and build shared purpose with Statewide Service Organizations (SSOs). Meet with the leaders of each SSO annually to determine the collaborative work needed for them to provide essential services to the field.

4.3: Sponsor and facilitate North Carolina's statewide partnership with Americans for the Arts in the Arts and Economic Prosperity 6 study to document the economic impact of the arts in local communities. Assist with data collection efforts in support of the study, with an emphasis on ensuring that organizations of color are included. Promote the results of the study in a statewide marketing campaign to raise public awareness about the value of the arts.

4.4: Focus the agency's marketing efforts and media partnerships on highlighting arts programs that address some of the most pressing issues for our state, including climate change, equity and diversity, and the rural-urban divide.

4.5: Partner with the N.C. Arts Foundation to identify and support specific Arts Council programs and initiatives that require private-sector resources for stability and growth.

4.6: Collaborate with Arts North Carolina to inform elected leaders of the value to the state of artists and the nonprofit arts network in 100 counties.

4.7: Increase the reach of the N.C. poet laureate to foster wider public engagement in poetry, creative writing, and the arts.