



RI
CITIZENS
FOR
THE ARTS

Sustaining
the Arts in RI:
A 5-Year Strategy

March 2009

Introduction

Most citizens would agree that the arts and cultural community is an integral component in defining Rhode Island. Over time, that presence has come to distinguish our state as a uniquely creative place. Beyond our borders, we are seen as a model for our nurturing of this creativity, and as a destination based on this vibrant and visceral quality that shows itself throughout the Ocean State.

Yet, while we have taken significant steps, there lacks cohesiveness to the support system that will ensure this economically viable industry sector continues to thrive and further, bring benefits to the citizens of Rhode Island for years to come.

In 2008, RI Citizens for the Arts embarked on creating the first ever multi-year policy and visionary strategy toward a sustainable arts sector. Over the course of a year, we analyzed the sector and gathered the collective thoughts from a broad range of artists, business and civic leaders, education officials and legislators. The result is the vision and strategy presented in this piece.

A Vision for the Arts in Rhode Island

Rhode Island, in all its uniqueness, demonstrates a model for incubation of the arts, in that significant investment in the creative sector is made that reflects the sector's positive relationship to the health, viability, and success - economically, culturally, and civically - of our State and our citizens.

2009-2014 Strategy Towards Sustainability

This plan is built around the following four strategies:

1. Recognize and strengthen the arts as a significant industry sector and natural resource in the State of Rhode Island that adds qualitative and quantitative value.
2. Demonstrate the arts' role in improving communities.
3. Create a sustainable funding model for investment in the state's creative sector.
4. Strengthen the ability of artists and arts organizations to fulfill their missions.

The 'Arts' Defined: For the purpose of this strategy document, we felt it necessary to define the term 'arts' as it relates to the people and creative industry we are referring to throughout this document. Thus, this term includes individual artists of all mediums, non-profit and for-profit arts organizations, and creative businesses, such as architects, graphic designers, product designers, and the info-tech/digital media community.



Recognize and strengthen the arts as a significant industry sector and natural resource in the State of Rhode Island that adds qualitative and quantitative value.

Over the years, arts-centric businesses have shown steady growth. Between 2007 and 2008, employment at arts-centric businesses in Rhode Island increased by 5.1% amidst a growing decline in employment overall throughout the State. Further, Rhode Island's arts-centric businesses themselves increased by 10.9%. Nationwide, arts-centric businesses grew 12% compared to 10.7% for all U.S. businesses.

These figures, released by Americans for the Arts and based on Dun & Bradstreet data, are conservative at best. The study largely misses the many individual artists, creative businesses and non-profit arts organizations that do not register with Dun & Bradstreet. Regardless, they show proven economic development in our State.

The Arts & Economic Prosperity III: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences in the City of Providence (Americans for the Arts 2007) report found non-profit arts and cultural organizations in Providence alone generate \$111.8 million annually in local economic activity, that supports 2,759 full-time equivalent jobs, \$55.56 million in household income to local residents, and delivers \$11.08 million in local and state government revenue.

Like our coast line, arts and design are a natural resource in Rhode Island, largely due to the presence of our State's higher education institutions. This offers the State an opportunity to aggressively tap into the budding workforce graduating from these institutions, continuing to seed a needed knowledge-based economy. While our leaders and lawmakers recognize this in part, it is imperative a clear broad-based plan is adopted in the coming years that recognizes and strengthens this resource for the benefit of all Rhode Island.

Tactics and Recommendations:

- Appoint arts and design industry professionals to legislative commissions.

Background: The arts and design community are uniquely trained in the art and science of problem-solving. This group also intersects with numerous issues and growth initiatives, from social services (i.e., at-risk youth, elderly, and disabled adult programs) to economic development (tourism, re-energizing and rebuilding cities and towns, furthering marketplace initiatives). This is an incredibly important asset to have for a State and RI has it in abundance. Yet, we have not fully harnessed this energy, enthusiasm and unique approach to solving challenges we face. Doing so would ensure a well-rounded perspective that broadens the conversation, expands problem solving capabilities, and properly represents the issue at hand.

- Establish recognition awards for the industry sector, such as a Governor's Award for the Arts / EDC Award for Creative Business Success / Legislative Leadership Award for the Arts.
- Establish a senior-level administration official within the Executive Branch or the RI Economic Development Corporation that acts as an ambassador for the arts industry sector.
- Require Comprehensive Plans from municipalities to detail how cities and towns will improve cultural assets and utilize existing cultural assets to increase economic development and other community goals.

Background: Currently, municipalities are required to list cultural assets. This new mandate will require a strategic assessment of the value of those assets and the way these cultural assets can be and will be strengthened. Such a requirement recognizes cultural organizations as a resource in long-range community planning that can further the development and strengthening of cities and towns across Rhode Island.

- Establish a Senate and House Arts Caucus.



Demonstrate the arts' role in improving communities

The arts integrate in social, economic and cultural ways. They are a tool to learning, bridging and positively affecting our communities. Creativity is a means to approaching problems with unique and innovative perspective, often showing an answer otherwise unfound. This can be an incredibly valuable perspective in civic life.

Not only does creativity contribute to our quality of life, it prepares our children and citizens for global competitiveness in a changing workforce. The arts uniquely boost learning and achievement for children, helping to retain middle and high school student engagement, and further expanding our capabilities to meet the challenges of the future. It has been said that human imagination is the main source of value in the new economy.

According to the Conference Board, there is overwhelming consensus from superintendents (98%) and corporate leaders (96%) that “creativity is of increasing importance to the U.S. workforce”. Of those corporate respondents, 85% said they were having difficulty finding qualified applicants with the creative characteristics they desired. Businesses want employees with creative thinking, innovation and problem solving skills.

The arts teach imagination and innovation. Almost nine in ten of the U.S. voters surveyed (89%) in a Lake Research poll said that using the imagination is important to innovation and one's success in a global knowledge-based economy and the 21st century. 88% indicated an education in and through the arts is essential to cultivating the imagination.

Rhode Island has one of the most progressive stands on arts education – that every child will show proficiency in the arts upon high school graduation. We also have some of the nation's most prominent higher education facilities in innovation and design – a budding work force for incoming businesses.

Yet, communities are struggling under the weight of the state budget difficulties and ongoing cuts to city and town aid. There continue to be cuts in arts teachers, and sometimes whole arts programs, along with other areas of education. While legislation exists, holding communities accountable for the legislation and building the resources for communities to meet their mandated obligations is essential.

Tactics and Recommendations:

- Enact strategic communication efforts with opinion leaders that speak of the sector as an industry, show the sector's contributions to the larger community, and provide examples where creative process is integral in problem solving. These efforts aim to build the awareness needed to gain support to strengthen the arts sector.
- Work with superintendents, corporate leaders and entrepreneurs seeking to increase creative learning process within education.
- Increase the number of artists, arts administrators, creative entrepreneurs included in local commissions, task forces, planning initiatives, etc. that shape community developments by 20% by 2014.
- Partner with organizations such as Industrial Design Society of Rhode Island to increase opportunities for creative process learning inside schools.
- Dedicate educational funds from the state to the arts and creative process learning in public schools.



Create a sustainable funding model for investment in the state's creative sector.

The arts are one of the strongest attractions for businesses, jobs and tourism – and in Rhode Island it costs very little at .074% of the entire state budget.

In Sovereign Bank's 2008 Economic Outlook Survey, conducted in conjunction with the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, arts and cultural attractions were rated second highest (at 61%) by business leaders as a top strength in Providence. Institutions of higher learning was rated highest at 66%, while other items such as quality of health care (25%), cost of living (9%) and economic development efforts (6%) trailed far behind. The Survey found similar ratings from consumers.

The RI State Council for the Arts is a leading force in supporting the arts throughout our State with these public funds. And in fact, they are recognized nationally for successfully distributing and affecting Rhode Island with conservative means. For every \$1 invested into the arts through RISCA, \$21 more is generated in matching funds for grantee organizations to produce their works, hiring locally and buying locally.

Given the significant return on investment proven through the arts and the strength its' presence has throughout our state, the current amount of funding available for the arts is not enough to sustain the sector for the future.

Tactics and Recommendations:

- Educate the larger community on the return on investment and ways that the arts sector provides benefits to the State of Rhode Island.
- Investigate alternative models with legislative leaders for funding the arts, such as the following:
 - A scientific and cultural facilities district with a % of the sales/use tax going to the arts.
 - A matching program from a selected pool of funds.
 - A revolving loan fund program for start up arts businesses at the EDC, PEDP or other municipal equivalents. Consider duplicating short-term scratch ticket initiative to raise funds to seed loan program.
 - A State Cultural Economic Development Fund for projects that highlight 1) impact of arts on the economy (i.e increase jobs), 2) arts role in positioning the State as attractive in regional and national economies; 3) support for neighborhood revitalization.
 - Encourage funding initiatives for the arts that are spearheaded by private corporations.
 - % of project budget for corporations/private developers that are given a tax break to go towards arts education in their immediate communities.
 - Establish a cultural facilities fund.
- Increase state funding for the arts through RISCA to \$1.5 million by 2014.
- Protect 1% for the Arts Public Art investment.
- Enact alternative funding models for the arts sector.



Strengthen the ability of artists and arts organizations to fulfill their mission.

The arts help Rhode Island stand out in the crowd. We are not alone in economic issues and high taxes, but we are certainly among a small group in the quality of life that we offer. Other states take note of our arts and cultural environment, look to us for our knowledge in nurturing the creative economy, and respect our policy decisions around the arts. This can only be sustained and grown through support for the organizations and creative individuals making it all happen.

Tactics and Recommendations:

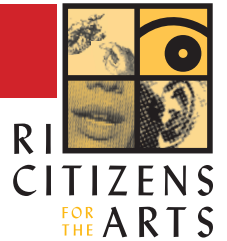
- Establish a position acting as ambassador for the arts within each city/town municipality throughout the State.

These ambassadors would be leaders in:

Encouraging appropriate zoning in municipal city plans that make sure artists and creative industries can thrive in communities.

Streamlining city license and permit application process; advocate in the process.

- Adopt a state income tax exemption for out of state/private matching individual artist grants.



National Advocacy Agenda

As State Captain for Rhode Island and active member of Americans for the Arts, the national arts advocacy organization leading the efforts at the federal level, we will continue to advocate on a national level for those issues most important to Rhode Island. We will continue to attend National Arts Advocacy Day in Washington, DC and meet with our Congressional and Senate leaders on behalf of the citizens of Rhode Island. We will further continue to partner with Americans for the Arts in bringing timely and valuable information to Rhode Island constituents on national efforts and other state issues as they relate to us.