Strategic Plan

2020 – 2023

NEBRASKA ARTS COUNCIL

Every three years, the Nebraska Arts Council (NAC) engages in a strategic planning process to create a dialogue with Nebraska's cultural community and to align our efforts with the needs and priorities of the arts in our state.

We believe three-year plans work best for us. Additionally, we endorse the philosophy that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" regarding our mission statement, core values and agency priorities. Our focus is to determine strategies and improvements to meet the expectations of stakeholders by examining the topics in the survey and assessment process. This is possible since our framework says who we are at the most basic level.

Six agency priorities serve as the heart of our three-year plan. Our annual agency Top Ten List identifies specific activities to implement the agency's priorities and build on the strategies for the next year. These are measurable items, assigned to a specific team of staff members, with a timeline for completion. The staff develops a similar list for the second and third years of the plan. Staff reports periodically to the council and to constituents on accomplishments and outcomes related to this work plan.

Input from NAC constituents, elected officials, council members and staff was vital to the development of this plan. Data and information came from a comprehensive constituent survey, two geographically diverse arts conferences, a forum on creative communities and follow-up Art Chats that included community leaders and citizens outside of the cultural circle.

We are a large state geographically with a small population. Our cultural community of artists, arts organization professionals, volunteers and arts educators is dedicated, passionate about what they do and admirably collaborative. It is our pleasure and responsibility to serve them to the best of our ability.

Mission Statement

The Nebraska Arts Council promotes, cultivates and sustains the arts for the people of Nebraska.

Core Beliefs

- All Nebraskans deserve access to the arts.
- The arts are a catalyst for promoting understanding among cultures.
- Arts education is basic to lifelong learning.
- The arts are essential to imagination, creativity and innovation.
- The arts drive creativity in its purest form.
- Engagement in the arts enriches quality of life.
- The arts are an integral part of a vital economy.
- Human, financial and technological resources sustain creative communities.

Agency Priorities

- Model Leadership and Visibility
- Elevate Artistry and Creativity
- Expand Education and Understanding
- Ensure Access and Inclusion
- Advance Diversity and Equity
- Build Resources and Capacity

Program Priorities

The categories of emphasis that guide our grants, programs, services and budget.

RESEARCH
What we learned
What are the needs, trends, challenges and opportunities we see in pursuit of our priorities?

ACTION
What we need to do
How will we structure our work and where will we focus our effort to address our findings?

OUTCOMES
The results we want
What is the end-of-the-day vision of the consequences of our work and of our effort?

ASSESSMENT
How we monitor and evaluate progress
What indicators and measurements will we use to keep us on track?

Strategic Plan Framework

The Nebraska Arts Council (NAC) strives to create a plan that is *authentic* and *useful*, and uses a strategic planning model that emerges from a set of cascading, interrelated questions. These questions flow from six program priorities that stem logically from our mission and core beliefs.

The agency's mission, core beliefs and goals are evergreen; in other words, they do not change. What changes is the shifting needs and priorities of Nebraska's cultural community and how the NAC responds to them. It is our hope that together, the arts continue to enrich the lives of all Nebraskans.

Use of the Plan

The NAC believes in strategic planning that is short-term, flexible and easy for staff and board members to use on a continuing basis. Therefore, the plan that follows is a summary, meant to guide our work over the next three years.

The NAC tracks progress in addressing our priorities in the following ways:

- The agency compiles an annual Top Ten List of projects that function as our annual work plan. These projects include measurable objectives presented to the NAC board at the beginning of the fiscal year.
- NAC staff presents the previous year's Top Ten List to the Board, with each project designated as completed, in progress or not accomplished.
- NAC staff analyzes uncompleted projects from the Top Ten List, and identifies a remedial or revised plan for that project, or eliminates the goal from the agency plan.
- NAC leadership assigns staff and budgets for each Top Ten List project as needed.
- The work of each staff member correlates to the six agency priorities and to the Top Ten List. Staff members also compile a quarterly report that lists their accomplishments according to this plan, including constituent contacts, project involvement and grant administration.

1004 FARNAM STREET • OMAHA, NE 68102 • 402.595.2122
WWW.ARTSCOUNCIL.NEBRASKA.GOV

NEBRASKA ARTS COUNCIL

Process and Timeline

Summer 2018

Constituent Listening Forums/Office on Wheels: Co-hosted small, informal group meetings with partner organizations in 11 locations to hear from constituents, paying close attention to include culturally specific neighborhoods and ensure the accessibility of rural, isolated communities.

August 2018

Strategic Planning Retreat: Staff meeting focused on analysis of our planning process, examination of external forces/issues, NAC mission, core values, goals and objectives. Assessed previous strategic plan with analysis of achievements and remaining challenges to incorporate into the new plan.

Fall/Winter 2018-2019

Develop Constituent Survey: NAC staff compiled data from listening forums and Office on Wheels and then constructed a survey designed for artists, arts organizations and arts educators. In addition to asking "How're we doing," NAC staff composed questions about diversity, equity and inclusion, and attitudes and thoughts regarding future needs.

February 4, 2019

Review Draft of Constituent Survey with Board: NAC staff listened to and considered Council input in the drafting of the Constituent Survey.

February 15, 2019

Constituent Survey: Survey posted on NAC website with accompanying marketing blitz.

June 11, 2019

Strategic Plan Progress Report: NAC shared raw data at Board meetings for comment, presented an evaluation of the previous year's Top Ten List, discussed new action items, and allocated resources with a timeline for completion.

June 12, 2019

Strategic Planning Survey Review Retreat: NAC staff examined key issues brought forth in the survey and categorized them using a SWOT analysis. Staff prioritized issues brought forth in SWOT analysis for further exploration with constituencies.

Summer 2019

NAC Arts Conferences: NAC hosted two arts conferences, on the eastern side of the state (Omaha) and in the Panhandle (Scottsbluff), to ensure an adequate cross-section of perspectives. The agenda provided time for additional comment and discussion of survey results. NAC facilitated a session to assist in prioritizing issues and ways that the NAC can address them. Input from these sessions refined 2020–23 goals, objectives and work plan.

Legislative Survey of Elected Officials: In partnership with Nebraskans for the Arts, the NAC surveyed state senators new to the Nebraska Legislature to assess their awareness, appreciation and understanding of the NAC.

Fall 2019

Plan Writing Sessions: Staff met for several sessions to draft a new plan, based on all information gathered, plus the results of the elected official survey.

December 2019

Draft Plan available for public comment on NAC website.

February 2020

Final draft assembled for approval to the NAC board.

March 2020

Final draft printed for public distribution.

Model Leadership & Visibility

What we learned

In our constituent survey, 89% of respondents believe the NAC is effectively fulfilling its mission to promote, cultivate and sustain the arts for the people of Nebraska. 94% believe that the NAC is an important resource for arts information. Over half find our email, website, and e-newsletter most effective, with 48% finding our social media most effective. In addition to providing information about arts events and funding opportunities, respondents cited their top priorities as general news about the arts, arts advocacy, artist opportunities and engaging diverse communities.

What we need to do

- Provide relevant content in communications
- Promote the importance of the arts as a driver of economic development
- Identify and foster new leadership in the arts community
- Embrace and expand upon our role as a convener
- Cultivate interagency partnerships that incorporate the arts in many settings
- Empower artists and arts organizations to communicate with each other

The results we want

- The NAC will be recognized as a statewide leader in the arts
- The NAC will be a key source for connecting Nebraska's creative community
- The NAC will be a partner with other agencies and organizations to develop Nebraska's cultural infrastructure
- The arts sector will become an integral part of the community's asset base and contribute to economic development

How we will monitor and evaluate our progress

- Monitor participation in NAC programs, events, workshops and conferences
- Monitor distribution of grant funds across Nebraska's three Congressional districts, 49 state legislative districts and 93 counties
- Set goals to include emerging arts professionals on NAC grant review panels and advisory committees
- Track the number of visits to the NAC social media sites and website to determine the extent of our visibility
- Track participation and impact of activities and initiatives with key partners such as Nebraskans for the Arts

Elevate Artistry & Creativity

What we learned

60% of respondents identify as artists. 73% of all artist respondents said that their opportunities to create, practice and/or perform their art either stayed the same or increased. Awareness of NAC programs for individual artists ranged from 59% to 46%. NAC's artist roster continues to be a well-known outlet for artists, and awareness of exhibiting opportunities increased substantially from the previous survey. Artists did not hesitate to make their concerns known, including comments like "We need more support for artists. Individual grants are helpful but they come and go." and "I have always felt that there is no real opportunities or encouragement for Nebraska artists in their own state." The top three challenges artists face are financial resources, exhibition/performance opportunities and benefits such as health care. Over 80% of respondents would like to see the NAC do a better job of promoting artist opportunities and over 70% would like to see project grants for artists.

What we need to do

- Be a voice in support of the value of artists as vital contributors to community life and well-being
- Provide support for professional artists through fellowships and research alternative artist funding opportunities
- Increase visibility for artists through the NAC website, social media and special events
- Create employment opportunities for artists through NAC artist residency and touring programs
- Promote the concept of creativity as integral to industry and economic development
- Provide informational resources and professional development opportunities for artists

The results we want

- The arts will be a recognized economic force in community development
- Artists will have access to resources that will enhance their creative practice
- Artists and their creative work will be recognized and celebrated
- Communities will benefit from efforts to embrace and foster creativity

How we will monitor and evaluate our progress

- Determine targets to provide training, marketing, exhibition and performance opportunities for artists
- Track artist participation in NAC programs to determine the range and scope of artists reached
- Monitor the use of the public art database
- Analyze attendance at NAC workshops and webinars designed for artists

Expand Education & Understanding

What we learned

In the five years since Nebraska established curriculum standards in the fine arts, the NAC used the survey and conversations to track their perceived impact on schools. 49% said the standards affect arts education favorably and 57% say they use the state, national or district standards in their lessons. Only 9% indicated they are unsure of how to utilize standards. 71% said that student enrollment in art classes and workshops have remained level or increased. 52% say that the number of arts instructors remained stable or increased, although 15% reported a decrease. "Advocating for the importance of arts in schools" was the overwhelming priority of respondents for the NAC, followed by funding for artists in residence and professional development for teachers and teaching artists. In addition to their schools, constituents voiced the aspiration to see the arts infused throughout their communities, including arts learning opportunities for all ages in other settings.

What we need to do

- Partner with national and statewide leadership to support fine arts standards and other arts education initiatives
- Increase the scope of professional development opportunities for educators and teaching artists
- Expand arts learning opportunities in community settings
- Support arts organizations in their efforts to provide quality educational programming
- Collaborate with the Nebraska Department of Education to promote arts education in hiring arts specialists where needed and integrate the arts into school curricula
- Research and publicize the impact of arts education on students in Nebraska

The results we want

- The arts will be a core component of every child's education
- Arts learning opportunities will be widely available to all citizens in a variety of settings
- Arts education will be recognized as an essential workforce skill
- Nebraska's next generation will deeply appreciate the arts, having had the benefit of arts education
- All Nebraska schools will have a complete faculty of arts education specialists

How we will monitor and evaluate our progress

- Monitor artist residencies for effectiveness through site visits, final reports, artist evaluations and participation numbers
- Evaluate organizations that receive general operational support based on their demonstrated commitment to arts education
- Evaluate school-based project grants based on their understanding and use of Nebraska fine arts curriculum standards
- Monitor arts education grant recipients to ensure broad geographic reach and in-depth programming
- Determine targets to provide professional development opportunities for teachers and teaching artists
- Monitor Nebraska's educational landscape through regular communication with key stakeholders

Ensure Access & Inclusion

What we learned

The NAC defines "access" broadly to include all populations that encounter barriers to participation in the arts. Due to geographic limitations, rural areas often lack resources, from volunteers to monetary support. These populations are one of our highest areas of opportunity for growth. We also learned that all organizations, both rural and urban, are continuously seeking opportunities for collaboration and means of making the arts a front-runner in efforts to keep communities vibrant. In terms of access for persons with disabilities, the survey revealed that 100% of the respondents who are persons with disabilities were satisfied with ease of access in applying for NAC grants on the new software. The survey revealed that learning more about accessibility was not a high priority. Regardless, the NAC recognizes its responsibility to help all Nebraskans, including aging, disabled and economically disadvantaged populations. Access to arts facilities and events is vital for all, whether as visitors, patrons, artists, educators, performers, employees or volunteers.

What we need to do

- Connect under-resourced and isolated arts organizations and schools with NAC grants and services
- Emphasize geographic diversity in grant distribution and programs
- Empower rural arts practitioners to sustain and grow the arts in their communities
- Identify organizations that actively support individuals with disabilities and assist them in their efforts
- Make accessibility practices relevant and important in presenting the arts in Nebraska
- Promote and fund activities that ensure aging, disabled and economically disadvantaged populations have access to the arts

The results we want

- The arts will be celebrated and supported in all parts of the state
- Isolated arts organizations will be connected to a larger statewide network of colleagues
- The NAC will be considered a partner in sustaining rural arts activities
- Connections to new audiences, including aging, disabled and economically disadvantaged populations will be developed
- Barriers to active participation in the arts will be mitigated

How we will monitor and evaluate our progress

- Track funding patterns and communications with rural constituents and monitor their participation through Office on Wheels and targeted technical assistance programs
- Assess arts participation and grant distribution across Nebraska's 93 counties via our database
- Distribute data-rich reports to elected officials that demonstrate NAC outreach and statewide impact
- Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of accessibility grants and make changes as needed

Advance Diversity & Equity

What we learned

NAC constituents are very aware of the state's shifting demographics. The survey received the largest volume of comments regarding people's desire for culturally diverse programs, including "Increase the amount of productions and visual arts representing people of color, LGBT and other groups who are not in the majority." Others commented on the lack of Native American presence: "More arts in its various forms from Native American/First Peoples of Nebraska. This is lacking now. More connections about Nebraska's earlier waves of immigrants and then connecting those experiences with today's immigrants." Respondents believe their community needs assistance in expanding diverse cultural offerings, but the survey also shows progress. The number of respondents that see this need has dropped 7% since the 2017 survey. Exactly half of respondents believe their community is making efforts to be inclusive in gender diversity.

What we need to do

- Actively seek out diverse organizations that represent underserved populations and provide them with support and develop relationships that broaden understanding
- Develop organizational capacity for culturally-specific communities and organizations through targeted technical assistance
- Offer grant programs that identify and actively engage underserved audiences
- Make our work in folk and traditional arts align more closely with other NAC programs
- Cultivate arts leadership in diverse communities
- Be proactive in outreach to immigrant communities

The results we want

- The NAC will exercise leadership in ensuring diverse representation in grant review panels, committees, artist rosters, programs and initiatives
- Distinctive cultural traditions will be honored and preserved
- Diverse organizations and artists will be well represented in the state's cultural leadership
- Barriers to completing successful grant applications from emerging organizations will be addressed

How we will monitor and evaluate our progress

- Service to, and engagement with, diverse audiences and underserved communities is part of the evaluation criteria for all grant programs
- Track representation of artists with diverse backgrounds in NAC's programs
- Monitor and evaluate participation by representatives from diverse organizations in NAC professional development opportunities and grant programs
- Conduct a thorough evaluation of NAC program materials for implicit bias

Build Resources & Capacity

What we learned

Financial support for the arts remains a priority for Nebraska's arts and cultural communities. 77% of respondents say attendance and participation in their organizations has increased or remained the same and 73% believe that NAC funding and services are critical to this success. The top three most helpful services that the NAC can provide are audience development, educational outreach and facilitating networking between organizations. Over one-third anticipate a change in leadership in the next few years, with roughly the same amount feeling strategic planning is an important NAC service. Over 70% are aware that Nebraska has an advocacy organization that works on their behalf to maintain public funding for the arts and arts education.

What we need to do

- Provide financial support and technical assistance to Nebraska's cultural infrastructure
- Assist the Nebraska Cultural Endowment in the cultivation of donors and resources to increase funds
- Forge partnerships with funders to expand community initiatives
- Assist in the development of the next generation of philanthropists and arts leaders
- Advocate for increased resources from federal and state partners
- Recognize demographic shifts in arts participation and adjust programs accordingly

The results we want

- Organizations will have increased opportunities for growth
- The NAC will be recognized as a source for providing networking and professional development
- Financial resources will be responsive to demand and sensitive to changing conditions
- Federal and state partners will provide consistent, reliable funding
- Young arts professionals, philanthropists and volunteers will be engaged, recognized and encouraged

How we will monitor and evaluate our progress

- Track disbursement of funds across legislative districts to ensure that underserved areas receive an equitable share of NAC resources
- Document success stories in each legislative district in partnership with Nebraskans for the Arts
- Work in tandem with the Nebraska Cultural Endowment to meet fundraising goals that leverage public funds
- Review final reports for evidence of grantee communication with elected officials
- Assess targets for providing a variety of training including marketing, strategic planning and organizational development to arts organizations statewide
- Monitor constituent concerns through NAC attendance at community meetings, workshops, presentations and other events