



ARTS &

A CREATIVE VISION FOR ST. LOUIS

Next Steps

Working Groups Report



REGIONAL ARTS COMMISSION OF ST. LOUIS



INTRODUCTION

In September 2018, the Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis (RAC) published **ARTS &: A Creative Vision for St. Louis**. **ARTS &** was the outcome of several months of engagement with the St. Louis community about its vision for the arts. The report identified six community priorities:

- Establish arts education for all as a community-wide commitment
- Amplify arts and culture as an economic engine
- Position the arts and culture sector as a leader in advancing equity
- Encourage active participation in the arts
- Attract and retain a high performing community of professional artists and creative entrepreneurs
- Forge new partnerships, collaborations, and alliances

RAC engaged The Rome Group, a consulting firm specializing in work with nonprofits, to work with representatives from St Louis's individual artist and nonprofit arts sector around the question of what strategies would best move the priorities from concept to action.

Beginning in February 2019, The Rome Group team had three meetings each with three working groups to focus on Arts Education, the Arts & the Economy, and Working Artists. In addition to these three priority areas, equity and partnerships were considered by each working group as connecting themes and threaded throughout all their discussions.

The goals of the process were to:

- **Define how RAC and the sector should prioritize arts education, the creative economy, and individual artists.** In other words, leaders and administrators would consider how our region would be different as a result of concerted efforts to prioritize the three areas.
- **Make the **ARTS &** priorities actionable.** In order to ensure that the result of this process would be a roadmap for implementation, the working groups focused on developing concrete solutions for each priority area.
- **Inform RAC's concurrent strategic planning process.** RAC is currently developing its strategic plan for the years 2020–2025 and as part of the process conducted a study of St. Louis's arts ecology. The findings of that study, and the results of the working groups' input, will both provide valuable insight as RAC's plan is developed.

The following is a summary of the discussions that took place among the invited working group participants. On behalf of RAC, we thank everyone who participated and contributed to the process of sharing and learning.

Felicia W. Shaw
Executive Director
Regional Arts Commission of St. Louis

FINDINGS

What's working in the St. Louis region?

In the first set of meetings, working group participants were asked to consider what is working well in the region in their specific area. An important foundation for the process was to recognize that St. Louis is a region with many strengths when it comes to the arts and culture sector and that the solutions the groups brainstormed would build on those strengths.

Participants highlighted the following strengths in the art and culture sector:

ARTS EDUCATION

- **Arts education is mandated by the state in school districts.** While the quality of programs may vary from district to district, school districts across the state are required to provide arts education to their students.
- **There is local public and private funding for arts education programs.** Arts education programs benefit from a region that is among the most philanthropic in the country. In general, programs receive both public and private support.
- **A significant number of arts education programs are available to audiences at no cost.** Arts and culture organizations raise philanthropic dollars in order to eliminate cost as a barrier to participation, whether they are visual or performing arts educational opportunities.
- **Quality instructors are delivering arts education programming across the region.** Many teachers, including teaching artists, have received training to build their skills to deliver educational content to audiences.
- **Organizations develop partnerships to reach youth who most need access to arts education.** Arts organizations are partnering with each other and organizations outside of the sector, including corporations and educational institutions, to deliver arts education.



ART HILL

ARTS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Organizations are successfully generating earned income.** Despite providing many offerings for free, some organizations are generating income to support artists, organizational operations, and community art fairs.
- **St. Louis has many thriving arts districts.** From Grand Center to Cherokee Street, leaders have invested in many areas that have helped the region build an accessible arts “scene,” driving the economy and promoting the artists whose work populates these neighborhoods.
- **The region is focused on innovation.** St. Louis has a dynamic landscape of start-ups and other groups focused on innovation. This has benefits for the arts sector in terms of potential partnerships as well as opportunities to be creative as part of a culture of innovation.



MISSOURI HISTORY MUSEUM:
CIVIL RIGHTS EXHIBIT

WORKING ARTISTS

- **Opportunities for working artists have increased over the years.** Because there are more artists choosing to live and work in St. Louis, the number of organizations that provide support to artists has increased and are more accessible through groups such as Volunteer Lawyers and Accountants for the Arts.
- **St. Louis is more affordable for artists compared to other markets.** This makes the region an attractive choice for artists who want to live and work in the area.
- **Connectivity to a community of artists is possible.** List-serves, social media, and artist events make it possible for working artists to learn about opportunities and connect to other artists.
- **St. Louis exports talent to other markets.** Many artists who reside in the region find work in other markets – a necessary part of making a living as an artist.

THEMES

Several themes and suggestions emerged from all three groups related to what is working well in the St. Louis region for the arts:

- **The community landscape allows for opportunities to engage in artistic endeavor in many ways.** St. Louis should continue to develop a competitive advantage as an affordable artistic and culturally creative hub that supports the arts as part of everything: in schools, in communities, in business and industry, and in civic life.
- **St. Louis has “pockets” of excellence.** Individual artists, organizations, and programs that are succeeding should be recognized and celebrated and built upon to strengthen the artistic and cultural environment.
- **The region has made a case for the arts as necessary for quality of life.** Organizations, leaders, and the community understand the intrinsic value of the arts for everyday citizens and as part of the fabric of civic life. They also understand its contributions to the economy. This provides a solid foundation on which to build further engagement and support.
- **Artists and arts organizations are connected to the community.** St. Louis’ size and “familiarity” often means that encountering the right person with the right information, whether a list serve or a referral, helps artists and organizations be connected.

What challenges does the arts sector face in the St. Louis region?

ARTS EDUCATION

- **Equitable implementation of arts education in schools.** Arts programming in districts with few resources, and where administrators may have high levels of stress related to managing complex needs of students, may be less of a priority than increasing test scores.
- **Awareness of all available resources.** In a region rich with resources, it still can be difficult to track the myriad programs and opportunities that are available to all ages, whether through schools, arts and cultural organizations, youth serving groups that offer arts camps or art offerings through groups that serve seniors.
- **Shortage of artists trained in teaching pedagogy.** The region has no shortage of artists who are looking for work and would like to teach. At the same time, many artists need to be better trained in classroom teaching and pedagogy so they can be more effective with students and more competitive in the job market.
- **Providing programs in an equitable, accessible manner.** Communities that have the least access to the arts are often those that could benefit most from participating in programs. There are still large swaths of the city that arts organizations are not reaching with quality arts education programming.

ARTS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Messaging regarding arts' importance and impact.** The arts sector needs engaging and compelling content to use to talk about itself, its work, and its individual and collective benefits.
- **A stronger Infrastructure on which to build capacity.** Efforts that could support and enhance the sector broadly – public policy, advocacy, marketing – would benefit from an institutional home and leadership to advance shared priorities.



ST. LOUIS CANVASS PROJECT

- **Bridging the arts–entertainment divide.** Historically, the arts and culture sector are separated from the “entertainment” sector, despite the latter’s recognition as an engine for the arts and artists and a major contributor to the economy. Bridging this divide would strengthen the region’s reputation as an art and culture hub.

WORKING ARTISTS

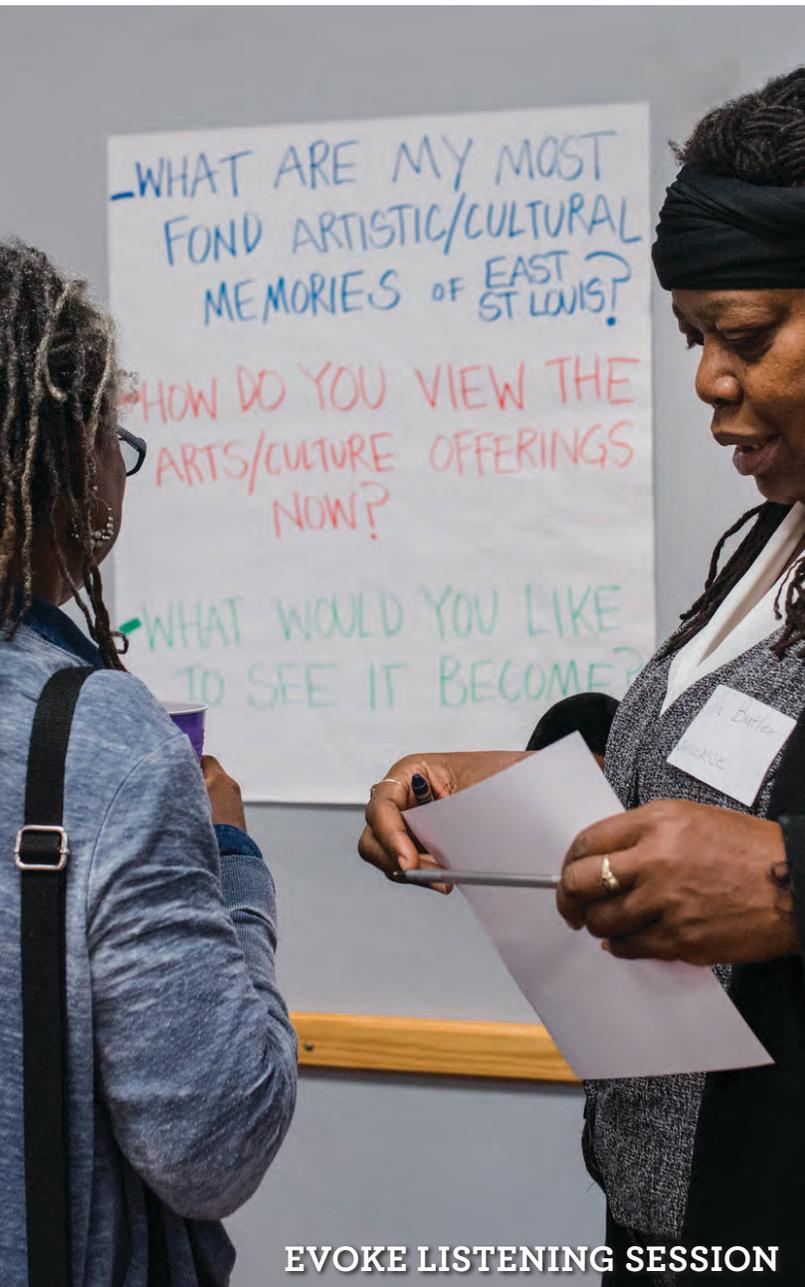
- **Smaller markets have limitations.** While the benefits of working in St. Louis — including a low cost of living — are important, they do not outweigh the difficulty of attracting artists to this region. Artists also need more opportunities for work and connecting to other markets.
- **Lack of recognition for their work.** Many St. Louis-based artists lament the lack of recognition they receive for their contributions, especially for work in other cities. Recognition makes artists feel valued and more likely to stay in the region.

- **Storytelling about the arts is scarce.** Fewer reporters, writers, critics and journalists are dedicated to covering the arts and culture sector than in the past. This leaves the perception that support for the sector also is scarce.
- **Lack of a Central Hub.** Individual artists and those who support them lament the lack of a central resource or database for working artists to learn about opportunities, access artists/arts services supportive services, and provide information about events in the region.

THEMES

Several themes and suggestions also emerged from the three groups related to challenges for the arts in the region:

- **Arts education across the lifespan.** As arts education in schools continues to be marginalized, there is a need for education about the arts so people of all ages can be creative, engaged and develop an appreciation for the arts. Adults need opportunities to patronize the arts as well as opportunities to create art themselves.
- **Storytelling and marketing the arts.** Leaders in the sector need to collectively prioritize “selling” arts and culture as an asset to our region.
- **Strong leadership for the arts.** There is a need to recognize the importance of existing intermediary organizations/institutions, such as RAC and Arts and Education Council, and to encourage them to use their influence to play leadership roles in addressing gaps in resources for artists and organizations.
- **Integration of the arts into all aspects of the region.** In order to achieve the goal of ensuring that the arts are valued and celebrated, investment in other sectors or with nontraditional partners may be necessary. Some examples include partnering with the state department of education on arts integration, media outlets and journalists to ensure quality coverage of the arts, and credentialing and professional development bodies for training of teaching artists.



EVOKE LISTENING SESSION

What strategies will lead to progress?

Based on the identified strengths and challenges, each working group brainstormed solutions to move the sector forward in their respective priority areas. The solutions are high-level strategies presented with the assumption that RAC, individual organizations and individuals, as well as other funders interested in the sector, will develop the necessary tactics and/or programs to implement them.

ARTS EDUCATION

■ Systemic support for teaching artists.

Teaching artists need the tools and resources to be effective educators, delivering high-quality education to youth and adults alike. This includes skills-based training on pedagogy as well as access to teaching opportunities in school- and community-based settings.

- **Advocacy.** In order to help ensure that school districts, lawmakers and communities prioritize arts education, we must continue to make the case for its impact on both academic outcomes, career preparation, and social and emotional development.
- **Centralized resources.** Arts education is being offered across the region, but it is hard to know what organizations are offering what programs and, consequently, access can be a challenge. A community hub, which should include a calendar of programs, will help those working in the sector, as well the public, know the full complement of opportunities.
- **Fully fund the arts.** While school districts require arts education, it is of varying quality. One remedy is to ensure that the legislature fully appropriates public funds designated for the arts so districts have additional resources to use to improve/add arts education.



KIENER PLAZA



- **Equitable community- and school-based arts education programs.** Schools are an important vehicle for delivering arts education but ensuring that youth can access arts education outside of school settings is an important equity issue. Arts administrators need to ensure that they are reaching all youth and delivering services in ways that youth can access them in their communities. Regardless of geographic location, race, socioeconomic status, etc., Administrators need to be thoughtful about where and when they deliver programs.

ARTS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Leadership and infrastructure.** The arts sector would benefit from a well-positioned leader (or entity) responsible for advocacy, policy, marketing, and ensuring that organizations in the region have the support and infrastructure to operate efficiently and achieve their missions.

- **Information and data.** Data exists to make the case for the arts and the contribution of the sector to the economy. The region would benefit from a concerted effort — perhaps through a central hub — to provide that information across the arts and entertainment sectors but also to the larger community.
- **Marketing and public relations.** There is a need to tell the stories of local artists and arts organizations, especially as it relates to the impact of the sector on various aspects of life in the region.
- **Connecting to regional government.** Arts leaders should be working to influence regional government to prioritize the arts — in economic development as well as programs.

ARTS & WORKING ARTISTS

- **Capacity building.** Artists need information and resources that support their ability to earn a living making art. This includes services to effectively run small businesses/nonprofits and advice on agents as well as more “mundane” things like paying taxes.
- **Storytelling and messaging.** Framing our region as one with a thriving arts “scene” that is a good place for artists to live and make a living requires effective marketing as well as critical journalism about the arts.
- **Support the work/fund me.** Supporting working artists requires creating paid opportunities for artists to work and exhibit, including opportunities outside of the St. Louis region (“exporting” talent to other markets). This can take many forms, from commissioning work, to fellowships, to relatively low-dollar grants that would allow artists to attend conferences or cover the costs associated with exhibiting their work (e.g. U-Hauls, frames).
- **Housing (work and life).** In order to create, artists not only need affordable studio space, they also need to earn a living wage, including through work outside of the sector, so that they can meet their basic needs such as housing and food.
- **Promote our work.** Working artists are more likely to stay in the region when they feel valued and their work is celebrated. This translates to visibility, which can help artists secure additional opportunities to exhibit here in St. Louis and in other markets.
- **Resources and connection.** Artists need connection with other artists – for camaraderie, to share lessons learned and to learn about resources. While this happens in an organic way for some, a more systematic way of connecting artists to resources and opportunities, such as a central database, convener or calendar, would increase opportunity in an equitable way.

CONCLUSION

The St. Louis region has a strong arts and culture sector that can be even stronger with the implementation of strategies that address:

- **Building a stronger foundation for arts education** through support for teaching artists; equitable school and community-based programs; centralized resources for the public; and advocacy for funding to help ensure equity.
- **Engaging the arts with other sectors of the community**, including government, to collectively develop a more creative economy by providing leadership and marketing, including data dissemination on the benefits of the arts, as well as support for organizations.
- **Developing a more robust environment for working artists** by connecting, promoting and supporting them in a variety of ways as well as promoting St. Louis as the thriving arts environment it is.

A collective effort to accomplish these strategies will benefit the entire region and help ensure a creative future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Rome Group greatly appreciated the involvement of the many arts organization representatives and artists who spent their valuable time discussing how to improve our region's art and culture landscape. Participants are listed in alphabetical order.

David Alexander

Adam Flores

DeAnna Massie

Pacia Elaine Anderson

Jacqui Germain

James McAnally

Kayia Baker

Joe Gfaller

Diane McCullough

Terry Barber

Andrew Gibson

Meridith McKinley

Merlin Bell

Bryce Goodloe

Laura Miller,

Kathryn Bentley

Robert Green

David Nischwitz

Alice Bloch

Sue Greenberg

Marie Oberkirsch

Dwayne Bosman

Karin Hagaman

Kelly Pollock

Chandler Branch

Chris Hansen

Erin Quick

Glynis Brooks

Cathy Hartmann

Lauren Ross

Chris Clark

Margie Hollins

Tonina Saputo

Zlatko Ćosić

Steve Housewright

Audrey Simes

Liz Deichmann

Jessica Ingraham

Sheila Suderwalla

Sheena Duncan

De'Joneiro Jones

Jacqueline Thompson

Phil Dunlap

Gonz Jove

Annetta Vickers-Bentil

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Emily Kohring

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