



2023 - 2028

STRATEGIC PLAN





ABOUT

We believe the arts are central to every element we value most in a modern society,

including: human understanding; cultural and civic pride; strong communities; excellent schools; lifelong learning; creative expression; and economic opportunity.

In 1966, the legislature passed, and the Governor signed a law creating the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and directing us to do all that is necessary and appropriate to: support, encourage, and foster public interest in the arts; enlarge public and private resources devoted to the arts; promote freedom of expression in the arts; and facilitate the inclusion of art in every public building in New Jersey.

The New Jersey State Council on the Arts is a division in the New Jersey Department of State and consists of 17 Governor-appointed members, and three ex-officio members representing the New Jersey Secretary of State, the Senate, and the Assembly. The Council's volunteer members are supported by a professional staff who carry out the Council's programs and services from the State Capital in Trenton.

Funding is provided to the Council through direct appropriations that come from the State of New Jersey by way of a dedicated, renewable source - the Hotel/Motel Occupancy Fee, which was established in 2003 and is the sole source of the Council's appropriation from the State. Additionally, the Council receives an annual, competitive federal grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.



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INTRODUCTION

In summer 2022, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts began work on a new strategic plan. The Council sought to develop a plan that is both clear and specific, while also allowing room for responsive evolution and adaptability. The experience of the global COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 forced the Council to find new ways to communicate with, support, serve, and advocate for the arts community which was, and in some ways remains, in crisis.

Like so many of our peers across the country, we spent time listening, learning, and launching innovative programs to support the industry through unprecedented financial need and loss, and increased calls for racial and social justice propelled us to take action to better understand our role. It was clear to the Council that the strategic planning approach employed this time would need to build squarely on the lessons learned in recent years, to capitalize on the momentum of positive change, and prioritize flexibility, stability, and resiliency, both internally for the agency and in the field.

After a thorough and public Request for Quotes process, the Council engaged AMS Planning & Research - a national arts management consulting firm - to lead the board and staff in the development of a new five-year plan. The charge was to align the agency's mission, function, and strengths, with the realities and priorities of the diverse and growing constituency statewide; to integrate and operationalize our commitment to equity, diversity, and access, and to establish accountability measures for ourselves and our partners.

In all 21 counties, hundreds of nonprofit arts organizations, hundreds of thousands of artists and arts sector workers, millions of residents and visitors, and countless related industries rely on the State Arts Council to strategically, transparently, and equitably invest public resources - human and financial - to help build a better New Jersey for people of all ages, and all walks of life, through the arts.



WHERE WE BEGAN: **The Council Today**

As one of the most densely populated, diverse states in the nation, New Jersey is home to a dynamic arts industry that contributes to quality of life in indispensable ways.

From the smallest neighborhoods to the largest cities, artists and arts organizations keep people connected, offering inroads to address complex problems we all care about - high quality education, healthy aging, thriving economies, booming tourism, cross-cultural understanding, and overall quality of life.



As the largest funder of the arts in New Jersey, Council dollars provide critical grants and services to help this essential industry face challenges and capitalize on opportunities to positively impact those they serve - in all artistic disciplines and in every county.

Since the creation of the Council's last strategic plan, the board appointed a new Executive Director and welcomed five new board members. The agency staff also significantly changed with the retirement of longtime staffers, the arrival of six new individuals, and an internal restructure to better align operations for the staff of 15.

Much of the above-mentioned change happened while the agency contended with the devastating impact of the pandemic on New Jersey's arts industry. At the start of the pandemic in March 2020, the Council was operating with a \$16 million Cultural Projects State Appropriation - funds for grants and services. Recognizing the vital role the arts would play as part of a comprehensive economic recovery, the Governor and the Legislature appropriated the Council \$19.8 million in Cultural Projects funding for the following year (FY21), the first increase in more than a decade. That increase, combined with an additional roughly \$13 million in federal and state COVID recovery dollars, allowed the Council to rapidly respond to artists and organizations reeling under the weight of intertwining crises.

In Fiscal Year 2024 - year one of this plan - the Council will receive a Cultural Projects Appropriation of \$31.9 million for the third year in a row. This 99% increase over the level funded budget the Council received for so long, is the largest appropriation in the agency's 57-year history.

The Council and AMS worked to create a plan that is purposefully scalable - while the priorities are clear, the level of investment may change. With this in mind, the Council's highest priority is to build a strategy of grants and services that is responsive to the immediate needs, challenges, and opportunities in the field.



PLANNING APPROACH

The work to develop the strategic plan took place in three phases:

1. **Envisioning Success**
2. **Opportunities & Scenarios**
3. **Bridge to the Future**

In the first phase, **Envisioning Success**, AMS completed an extensive background review and operational analysis in order to establish a foundational understanding of the agency's programs and services, constituents, finances, and operating procedures. Internal stakeholder interviews and a broad public survey took place in this phase, which concluded with a staff success workshop utilizing the findings from the work done to date to articulate what future success can look like for the agency.

In the second phase of work, **Opportunities & Scenarios**, a series of community engagement opportunities were in place, and sector input was key. Virtual gatherings were convened in order to continue receiving input from the Council's constituencies, in addition to external stakeholder interviews, and an assets and opportunities workshop was held with the staff and Planning Committee.

During the third phase of work, **Bridge to the Future**, care was taken, keeping in mind the work and findings to date, to produce a coherent strategic plan with goals, objectives, and strategies that support the agency's vision for success, and that could be measured over time.



Strategic Planning Questions

At the start of the strategic planning process, and throughout, a number of key questions were considered:

- **How has the COVID pandemic and racial and social reckoning changed the landscape of the Council's constituency and partners over the last three years?**
- **What does success look like for the Council as it makes internal changes to support equity, diversity, inclusion, and access, as well as anti-racism work and initiatives within the framework of advancement of arts and culture in New Jersey?**
- **What is the status of current initiatives? How must we adapt to help ensure meaningful impact on the sector moving forward? What resources are required?**
- **What are the goals and strategies needed to get us from "here" to "there"? How should improvements and success be measured and assessed?**

Exploring these questions provided a focal point to ensure important agency issues and priorities were addressed.



Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion

Throughout the strategic planning process, the work the Council had done, and the efforts underway in the areas of Diversity, Equity, Access, and Inclusion were kept in mind and considered. The plan was designed with DEAI embedded throughout to ensure that the important elements of that work hold a prominent place in decision making and have an integral role as the agency moves forward.

Stakeholder Input

The planning process included a number of opportunities for input from the agency's various constituents and partners.

Two sets of interviews were conducted: internal and external.

The internal interviews with staff, Planning Committee members, and Council Members were conducted to understand perceptions of the Council, alignment with mission, viewpoints on future impact, and to seek input regarding what success looks like for the agency.

The external interviews included national, regional, and local arts and cultural organizations, as well as sector stakeholders, and provided the opportunity for those engaged to share perceptions of the agency, its peers, and the trends and issues that may impact the Council and its stakeholders in coming years.

Community Listening and Feedback

Sessions with both arts organizations and individual artists presented the chance to assess gaps and opportunities in the Council's programs and service areas. Over 100 people participated in this activity.

A Community Survey was distributed to understand individual and organizational perceptions of the Council as well as needs and priorities that the Council might address through its strategic plan. The survey included over 650 participants.

Additionally, in order to form a complete picture of trends and priorities among other state and regional arts agencies, as well as among funders and leaders in the field, research was conducted, which included an additional 20 in-depth interviews. Findings were summarized for the Council in a Trends and Issues in the Arts White Paper.

Another means of stakeholder engagement was to share the draft of the strategic plan broadly to receive feedback on the document's goals.

120 responses were received from all 21 counties in the state, with a nearly equal representation from the various geographic areas: 36% from North Jersey; 35% from Central Jersey; and 30% from South Jersey. The feedback received will remain top of mind as the plan is implemented.



Strategic Plan Priorities and Success

The strategic planning process was designed to synthesize numerous inputs toward a definition of success that:

- **advances the arts and culture sector in New Jersey,**
- **drives positive social, creative, and community impacts, and**
- **engages the diverse constituency that comprises New Jersey's arts sector.**

These factors were kept in mind throughout the strategic planning process. The resulting and carefully considered goals, with aligned objectives and strategies, create a pathway for the Council to build on its foundation and achieve future success in its longstanding commitment to strategically support the arts in New Jersey.

Tracking success of the strategic plan will be an important focus for the Council. Every year, the agency crafts a Program and Operations Plan (P&O Plan) based on available human and financial resources. The priorities in the P&O Plan will be brought forth in the context of the new strategic plan to aid in tracking success. A new P&O Plan will be prepared each year based - in part - upon an evaluation of the previous year's Plan, using the Strategic Plan's goals and objectives for reference.



GOALS, OBJECTIVES, and STRATEGIES: 2023 - 2028

GOAL 1

Maximize public resources through grants and services for artists and arts organizations to support statewide sector vitality.

GOAL 2

Identify and capitalize on opportunities to engage with, connect, and support networking and partnership opportunities both within the field and across sectors.

GOAL 3

Enhance public awareness of the value of the arts and the importance of the State Arts Council through effective communication.

GOAL 4

Further embrace principles of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (DEAI) in all aspects of our work.



Goal 1

Maximize public resources through grants and services for artists and arts organizations to support statewide sector vitality.

OBJECTIVES:

A. Provide responsive and responsible programs that meet the changing needs of the field, while fostering resiliency and innovation

- Strategy: Prioritize operating support for nonprofit arts organizations
- Strategy: Continue to identify opportunities to evolve grant guidelines, criteria, evaluation processes, and funding principles to align with needs in the field
- Strategy: Maintain robust grant support for individual artists and capitalize on new opportunities
- Strategy: Continue to provide field services and programs in addition to grant support

B. Build and strengthen pathways of support for organizations and individuals traditionally underserved by the Council

- Strategy: Develop web-based resources to provide additional transparency and assistance in navigating the application and reporting processes
- Strategy: Work in partnership with local, statewide, regional, and national service organizations to identify those not served and the barriers to services, and offer informed support opportunities

C. Streamline internal processes for increased public access and effective operations

- Strategy: Maximize technical tools for back-end and front-end effectiveness
- Strategy: Analyze and refine standard operating procedures for key internal functions for all staff to account for agency change, growth, and sustainability
- Strategy: Streamline internal communications to maximize efficiencies and creative collaborations

D. Capitalize on internal expertise to build models of best practices in equitable and accessible grantmaking and public services

- Strategy: Support ongoing professional learning for staff
- Strategy: Develop effective methods for gathering, synthesizing, and using the information captured through the various and ongoing modes of public feedback

Goal 2

Identify and capitalize on opportunities to engage with, connect, and support networking and partnership opportunities both within the field and across sectors.

OBJECTIVES:

A. Provide relevant professional development and opportunities for the field

- Strategy: Review field input relative to existing programs and services regularly
- Strategy: Develop and provide responsive and accessible services, grants, and opportunities for artists and organizations

B. Understand agency reach; identify, and address gaps in engagement

- Strategy: Use readily available quantitative data and qualitative information to establish current reach of Council programs, services, and engagement
- Strategy: Identify opportunities, partners, and/or resources with which to strengthen existing and expand Council reach

C. Foster cross-sector partnerships that strengthen impact and incentivize funding for the arts

- Strategy: Maintain and establish new agency relationships - both in government and out - that benefit the arts sector and New Jersey communities
- Strategy: Encourage and foster opportunities for collaboration between the artists, arts organizations, and those in other industries



Goal 3

Enhance public awareness of the value of the arts and the importance of the State Arts Council through clear and effective communication.

OBJECTIVES:

A. Commit to highlighting the impact of the arts with evidence-based tools and strategies

- Strategy: Develop effective methods for organizing and using the arts-impact data and information captured through various methods such as grant reports and field research
- Strategy: Maintain and grow multifaceted communications strategy with enhanced information

B. Activate conversations with diverse stakeholders about the value of public funding for the arts

- Strategy: Develop and standardize data collection related to agency services, outreach, and engagement
- Strategy: Share data/information about outreach efforts and engagement as well as outcomes for all Council programs and services publicly
- Strategy: Strengthen the Council's role as a resource for information on the arts
- Strategy: Prioritize high-quality constituent relations and assistance
- Strategy: Seek out and support opportunities for Council staff and board to network and/or engage publicly on the local, state, and national levels

C. Innovate in how we use communications tools and strategies to drive public awareness of the arts

- Strategy: Evaluate and adapt communications tools and practices as needed to better serve changing trends and needs in the field
- Strategy: Support effective promotion, education, and communications about diverse arts events, assets, and communities statewide

Goal 4

Further embrace principles of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (DEAI) in all aspects of our work.

OBJECTIVES:

A. Engage in authentic learning about issues and opportunities inherent to our work through the lenses of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion

- Strategy: Prioritize and support ongoing learning for staff and board and create opportunities to share knowledge with one another

B. Advance principles of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion within the Council

- Strategy: Establish internal timeline, indicators, and mode of assessment for staff and board in alignment with these principles

C. Affect positive change in our work and that of the field related to diversity, equity, access, and inclusion

- Strategy: Communicate broadly about the Council's goals, internal progress so far, and guiding mission in this work and do so on a regular basis
- Strategy: Provide responsive and accessible services, grants, and opportunities for artists, organizations, and arts workers that align with principles of DEAI
- Strategy: Foster learning opportunities for the field about systemic change to support the advancement of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion principles in the arts sector

D. Build and strengthen pathways of support for communities, organizations, and individuals traditionally under-resourced in the arts

- Strategy: Determine with specificity what communities, organizations, and individuals are served, served well, those that are not, and why
- Strategy: Identify existing and additional opportunities through which to catalyze new, diversified support and engagement



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Note: The Board and staff lists are current as of the adoption of this plan on July 25, 2023.

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THANK YOU

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