

ASHEVILLE AREA ARTS COUNCIL

AAAC Strategic Plan UPDATE 2020

The Asheville Area Arts Council...

CREATES opportunities for public participation and appreciation of art

ADVOCATES for the value of art in our community and economy

COLLABORATES with partner organizations to offer and expand arts programming

SUPPORTS promising projects and artists in their exciting endeavors and professional success

BACKGROUND TO TODAY

The Asheville Area Arts Council's roots go back to 1952, making it one of the oldest of its type in the nation. Over subsequent years, the 501(c)3 nonprofit has had multiple, changing roles – arts program host and collaborator; exhibition gallery; property owner; fundraiser for arts organizations; trainer for educators; community convener; and financial and career development resource for artists. The organization also has occupied various locations – primarily in downtown Asheville, then helping to launch the River Arts District, and last year returning to help develop the South Slope on Coxe Avenue via The Refinery Creator Space.

In a larger sense, the AAAC is a keeper of the long tradition of art and craft in Asheville and the surrounding Appalachian region. This role has taken on increased importance and urgency as the area grows and changes. Asheville's appealing cultural vibe has helped make the community a top destination for visitors, retirees, and business relocation. At the same time, the fast-rising population of residents and tourists has spurred extensive development, which threatens the affordability that is essential for artists to live and work, and in turn may compromise the magnetic allure the arts have played in attracting and retaining tourists, residents and businesses alike.

The challenges and opportunities created by Asheville's considerable growth and success have emerged as a central focus of the AAAC's future work. In addition to continuing to build on the organization's impressive track record for arts offerings and convening, the current leadership of the AAAC recognizes it must step up to the role of lead advocate for maintaining a vibrant artist community – and the vitally important role it plays in our economic health and stability.

The AAAC has itself grown and changed in recent years to adapt to the evolving environment. Following a period of probation due to financial instability, AAAC has renewed its responsibility for running local grants programs in partnership with the NC Arts Council. Most notably, the AAAC is the primary tenant in the 15,000-square-foot Refinery Creator Space, which is owned by a local real estate venture. The Refinery provides a dynamic presence for the AAAC in an up-and-coming area of downtown, and also has added landlord-type responsibilities for AAAC staff related to the other nonprofits housed in the space. The AAAC's lease at the Refinery has recently been renewed through XXXX, which allows some organizational stability. As this plan sets out, in the years ahead the AAAC leadership aims to build infrastructure and increase its advocacy role while continuing to fulfill the other significant roles it plays in making Asheville and Buncombe County a beloved arts community for all who live, work, and visit here.

PLAN UPDATE PROCESS

The board and staff committed to this abbreviated Strategic Plan Update process with the purpose of reviewing the internal/organization and external/community changes that have occurred in recent years, and of charting a realistic and inspired course for the coming two years.

- The existing AAAC Strategic Plan was created in 2013 for the period 2014-2018. Completely different leadership was in place when that plan was developed. About half of the priorities/goals established in that plan were foregone in place of new initiatives embraced by the more recent board and staff – most notably the move to The Refinery Creator Space, which occurred in 2017. For guidance, the organization developed and followed a Dashboard document that articulated top programming and organizational development activities.
- Kim McGuire was hired in December 2017 for the planning task. She reviewed key documents (2014-18 Plan, current Dashboard and Organizational Budget). She met with the AAAC staff and board leaders to review the past plan and develop initial ideas to discuss related to the Plan Update.
- A Board/Staff Retreat was held January 21, 2018. McGuire facilitated the discussion to gather input on key priorities, goals and strategies in the areas of program, board, development, and communications. It was agreed that separate discussions would be held to identify goals and strategies regarding the facility and operations.
- A draft of the Plan Update was shared with board and staff for comment and changes were made accordingly.
- This final Plan Update was adopted by the board **March 21, 2018.**

It is important to note that this is an abbreviated process that did not include stakeholder input but rather tapped the experience and perspective of existing organizational board and staff leadership. It is the opinion of the board that this focused approach is appropriate at this time in the organization's trajectory. This is based largely on the sense that much of what the organization is currently doing is working well, much progress has been made in recent years, and it is most important to focus on building internal infrastructure and an external advocacy role versus taking on major new directions or initiatives.

SUMMARY OF CURRENT POSITION

Strengths

- Committed and skilled staff.
- More diverse and engaged board that wants to move the organization forward.
- The AAAC has gained wide respect in recent years, in part due to the Refinery Creator Space providing excellent visibility and positive identity in the community.
- Expanded, untapped financial support is available to the AAAC via new residents and businesses and the new trust the AAAC has earned with them.
- New partnership/endowment with the Community Foundation of WNC.
- Asheville is recognized nationally and internationally for high quality arts of all types.

Challenges

- The staff is stretched and may be too small to achieve the goals set. It would be helpful to review the staff structure and job descriptions in light of future plans. Are they being deployed most effectively? Would an investment in additional or redeployed staff pay off?
- The board needs to be strengthened in its knowledge, committee structure, and follow-through on roles and responsibilities.
- Funding instability is a real threat (and not only for AAAC!). It will be essential to get a professionally prepared Development Plan in place that includes specific strategies that can realistically be carried out by trained staff and board, and likely with the assistance of additional paid (contract?) staff.
- **The Development Plan, the Budget, and the Annual Plan/Dashboard must match with regards to “scope” – ie how much can the AAAC do well with the resources it can realistically raise?**
- Planning must be done for facility needs. What are the implications, costs and benefits of being in The Refinery? How long will that relationship last? What are alternatives, for what timeframe, and how do they pencil out financially?

CUSTOMERS: Artists, arts organizations, civic and business leadership, residents and visitors -- all who care about and benefit from a vital arts community – including

GEOGRAPHY: Buncombe County, along with broader influence in the western NC region and beyond – given Asheville’s standing as one of the nation’s top arts destinations.

OVERVIEW AND DEFINITIONS

This **Strategic Plan Update 2020** will guide the work of the Asheville Area Arts Council over a two-year period, beginning in July 2018 through June 2020.

Key Definitions

Mission – Why the organization exists; its purpose

Vision – Desired end state, 10-30 years out (if AAAC carries out its mission)

Priorities – The most important areas of focus for AAAC in the next two years, internally and externally

Goals – What the organization wants to achieve; aspirational and realistic objective for the plan period

Strategies – Action-oriented programs, activities, initiatives; how the board, staff, and allies will reach the goals

Companion documents

Annual Plan/Dashboard – Implementation; what will be carried out in the next 12 months;
to use at staff and board meetings for ongoing tracking of responsibilities and implementation

One-page Strategic Plan – To use for promotion among donors and the public

Additional data

These items were generated during the Update 2020 retreat discussion and informed the development of this plan:
Matters of Pride – AAAC 2017; Wishes and Worries; Most Excited About Going Forward.

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AAAC Strategic Plan UPDATE 2020

MISSION AND VISION - working language, to be finalized

MISSION: Promoting the arts as a defining and essential feature of Asheville and Buncombe County

VISION: A thriving arts community, enriching the lives of all who live, work and visit here

PRIORITIES EXTERNAL – WITH THE COMMUNITY

#1 – ASHEVILLE/BUNCOMBE HAS A SUSTAINABLE ARTS COMMUNITY AND ECONOMY

GOAL – Be a leading advocate for the key role arts play in the future success of our community and economy

STRATEGIES

- Advocacy Role
- Leadership Voice
- Creative Sector Summit
- Creative Vitality Suite
- Facility/Host to Individual Artists/Groups

#2 – ARTISTS THRIVE AS CREATIVE PROFESSIONALS

GOAL – Be a resource for project support, professional development, and related elements essential to ensuring artists continue to live and thrive in our community.

STRATEGIES

- Regional Artist Project Grants
- Artist Professional Development and Business Training
- Exhibitions
- Promote Opportunities for Artists (including Vendor Markets)

#3 – COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS COLLABORATE AROUND HIGH QUALITY ARTS OFFERINGS

GOAL – Be a catalyst for cooperative, well-funded environment for local arts, culture and entertainment.

STRATEGIES

- Collaborative Programs and Relationships
- Convener Role
- Grassroots Art Program Grant
- Be a Clearinghouse/Resource to Link and Support Organizations (Info & Referral)

#4 – ARTS ACCESS IS AVAILABLE TO ALL

GOAL: Be a host and initiator of arts programming that reaches untapped audiences and underrepresented people.

STRATEGIES

- Cultural Equity Lens
- Reach Underserved Audiences and Neighborhoods
- Young Audience Development/Kids Tixx/School Visits to AAAC
- Veterans Focus
- Arts Build Community and Grassroots Art Program Grant

PRIORITIES INTERNAL – WITHIN AAAC

#5 – OUR BOARD LEADS EFFECTIVELY AND BUILDS NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL: Provide stewardship and support – through newly acquired knowledge and skills – to ensure organizational success.

STRATEGIES

- Overall Board Work
 - Board Operations Calendar (move to every other month meetings?)
 - Dashboard to Track Strategic Plan Implementation
 - Leadership Succession (officers, etc), likely via Governance Committee process
- Committee Structure and Effectiveness
 - Executive Committee includes officers and chairs of each standing committee (Governance, Finance, Development, Events)
 - Each standing committee has an annual Work Plan and meets in between every board meeting, with assigned staff support (example: Executive Committee meets with Executive Director)
 - Strengthen Committee Structure –
 - Committees each have active chair (who sits on Executive Committee) and Annual Work Plan
 - Staff Committees
 - Non-board Members on Committees
 - Add Governance Committee
- Build Board Member Knowledge and Engagement -- Create Governance Committee
 - Create Board Recruitment and Retention Cycle (terms, etc)
 - Requirements for Board Members (job description/expectations) Board Orientation
 - Roles/Responsibilities Matrix

#6 – AAAC IS FINANCIALLY STABLE AND ACCOUNTABLE TO ITS CONSTITUENTS

GOAL: Steward and expand the AAAC funding base, and achieve greater financial security.

STRATEGIES

Finance

- In budgeting process, build in Update 2020 activities for FY 19 and FY 20
- Separate out Refinery budget; analyze operations independent of non-AAAC related facility income/expense
- Use financial tracking mechanisms to keep staff and board apprised of cash flow/funding requirements/status

Development

Development Plan –

Experienced consultant assists with creating the plan, which is implemented via clear monetary targets and monthly tracking

- Events – signature and others
- Grant Support for AAAC
- Business Support/Sponsorships
- Membership Program – individual and organization
- Individual Donor Support (current and planned giving)
- Board and staff trained in fundraising
- Contractor hired to help with development work, based on plan (grant writing?)
- Development Committee work is coordinated with Events Committee and Finance Committee; all three committees have non-board member strength and experience

Evaluation and Accountability

- Use UPDATE 2020, Annual Plan/Dashboard and other planning documents to create simple Evaluation Plan that defines “What is success?” for each

#7 – AAAC INSPIRES RESPECT AND SUPPORT THROUGH ITS COMMUNICATIONS

GOAL: Increase awareness of AAAC’s activities, role, and value

STRATEGIES

- Communications Plan –
 - Analyze what is working/not working with current communications approaches and channels (via analytics); look at \$ cost/benefit
 - Continue building the AAAC brand
 - Define key messages and update periodically
 - Identify target audiences, and utilize audience segmented communications
 - Transform target audiences into donors and members
- Be an amplified voice for target audiences (underserved populations, artists, arts orgs, public officials, business community)

TO BE DETERMINED:

The following two priority areas demand focused attention, each by a small group that reports to the board – first with its recommendations and then by adding agreed-upon strategies to the Annual Plan/Dashboard for tracking, including who will be responsible and deadlines.

FACILITY –

- Identity tied to location
- What are the implications of the current location? What are the implications, costs and benefits of being in The Refinery?
How long will that relationship last? What are alternatives, for what timeframe, and how do they pencil out financially?

Refinery

- Tenant Management
- Event Rental
- Media Lab

OPERATIONS/CAPACITY – What are the key areas that need to be covered in this priority area?